Fate & Fortune: the role of 'the Fate'

We have previously alluded to, and readers may have picked up on, the use of the Fate as someone [along with the Teller] who takes on the roles of NPCs. These may be 'summoned' i.e. brought into play via the Players' own improvisation e.g.

(**1**) Since we have a few hours why not make use of them for the purpose of relaxation. How timely!.. My favourite inn!

(**2**) How is it that no matter what schedule we adhere to and no matter which town we find ourselves at, your 'favourite inn' always manages to materialise before us?.. After you.

(**3**) I'll hold the door.

(**1**) Barkeep! A table if you will.

(**The Fate - stepping into the role of a Barkeep**) Sirs…

(2) …and madams..

(**The Fate - as Barkeep**) How many are you?

(**1**) Four at the moment

(**The Fate - as Barkeep**) Let me seat you in the snug, I think you'll appreciate the fire on such a day.

(**2**) Aye, the snug it is! My tits are freezing...and his bollocks, as evidenced by the last fight we were in, dropped off long ago!

(**4**) The fire will warm our skins, but with such weather have you something that'll warm the blood? None of that watered ale - I care not for such piss.

(**The Fate - as Barkeep**) I'll see what I can find. Please this way.

...or when dealing with **narrative imposition** may be 'entranced' either by the Fate themselves or at the behest of the Teller, for example:

Example 1: Room with a view

Prior to event framing the *Room with A View*, the Teller instructs the Fate that every five minutes the Flippy Clock has to chime out an asinine quote. Since we are attempting comedy, the quote should hopefully be sufficiently abstract but possibly have some interpreted meaning and resonate with the action that is unfolding.

Whilst an argument ensues:

(**Fate - as a Flippy Quote**) Let's sing a song! Doing things together always increases harmony.

Example 2: A generic fantasy setting in which the party are huddled around a campfire

Midway through the Players planning their next move, the Teller leans over and whispers to the Fate, who nods and interupts the party's conversation

(**The Fate - as a mysterious stranger** 0 L.V./*3 L.V.*) Hello there, hello there, salutations! - *a voice from the forest darkness causes you all to turn from the fire*. May I approach? My son also?

(**The Teller - as the stranger's young son** *3 L.V.*/0 L.V.) *From the darkness, a quieter, much more youthful voice - that of a child - chimes out*. Hello there also.

Beyond this role of bringing NPCs to life, it is only now, having tentatively introduced the notion of narrative imposition, that we are in a position to introduce the true role of the Fate* in the Teller System (**It would perhaps be more accurate to refer to this role as "Fate and Fortune," but for convenience, we will continue using the simpler term: the Fate.*).

With the notion of narrative imposition, we have introduced the concepts of a **directed outcome** - that which the Players have to *achieve*. We have covered the notion of beats, an underlying structural conceit which can in some instances be utilised to modify tempo or ratchet up tension etc. but there are 2 additional concepts that need to be introduced: **narrative levers** and **triggers**.

With a directed outcome present we have observed how this subtly changes the improvisational dynamic and the mode of

play, transforming the event into a type of puzzle whereby the Players must organically navigate, utilising principles of authenticity, to this desired end point. Since there is now a **goal to achieve**, it is possible to **frustrate the advancemen**t towards that goal or provide means and methods to help **enable this advancement**, thus the notion of Fate and Fortune.

To illustrate the Fate's role, and get to grips with the concepts of narrative levers and triggers, let us take another event frame example.

Event Frame: "The Crossing"

Framing Text (to be orated by the Teller):

> "The trail disappears into a slick carpet of moss and vines, and then abruptly gives way to air. A chasm splits the jungle, silent but impossibly deep. Across this gap: a narrow rope bridge - its slats missing in places, its support beams creaking in protest, and its far side wreathed in mist.
>
> You've been pursued for hours, and haven't slept. Stumbling through the darkness, past breaking dawn - the sun now starting to breach the horizon, the pulsating sound of the jungle's continuous symphony changing to incorporate the voices of waking animals. The air is thick with insects, your skin: slicked with sweat and blood, and your water bottles empty.
>
> The only way forward is across."

This event frame still honours the ethos of openness, yet it carries a clear - though implicit - directed outcome: *the Players must reach the far side*.

Let us say then that in this instance, the event frame is given to the Fate, prior to the Players engaging with it, and that

it is the Fate that performs the predictive unfolding, attempting to understand how Players might navigate this scene. Having considered it, let us say that they identify the gradual snapping of fibres along the support ropes of the bridge as a beat. They also determine a time line for the arrival of the pursuers (*8 mins into the event*), with their imminent arrival being signalled by a flock of rising birds (*6 mins into the event*). The Fate also suggests to the Teller a modification to the event frame environment: a spire of rock halfway across the divide, essentially splitting the rope bridge into 2 sections.

> "The trail disappears into a slick carpet of moss and vines, and then abruptly gives way to air. A chasm splits the jungle, silent but impossibly deep. Across this gap: a narrow rope bridge sectioned in two by a thin column of rock that rises midway across the divide. The bridge from this end has seen better days, its slats now missing in places, its supporting ropes creaking in protest. What it's like beyond the column, wreathed in mist, is anyone's guess...

Thus, when narrative imposition is present, it becomes the Fate's role to identify opportunities - through timing, environment, or pressure - that either frustrates or assists the Players in reaching their directed outcome. It is through this careful modulation of resistance and opportunity that Fates presence subtly extends into and shapes the story's unfolding.

Narrative Levers: external forcing

A **narrative lever** is something that can be used by the Fate to attempt to directly influence the direction of the emergent story. In *The Crossing* the mist is a narrative lever as literally anything (within the authentic scope of the environment) can come out of it at any moment. It has potential for use but at the same time can be left unused. It is there ready for the Fate to utilise, if they so wish (or if they are allowed to do so/directed by the Teller - more on

this later).

In *Room with a View*, although not mentioned, but identified as something to place into the event frame should one so wish, a telephone on the wall next to the door would not be out of place, and would allow external forces to enter readily into the environment - calls from superiors etc. Similarly, the arrival of a **cleaner**, **janitor, internal mailperson,** or an **unexpected courier** would not break tone and could serve as points of disruption, revelation, or escalation.

So in terms of going through the process of predictive unfolding, the Fate is actively on the lookout for narrative levers, as these provide means for influencing (usually with the intent of frustrating) the Players' attempts to achieve their directed outcome. Again, these 'levers' do not need to be activated and effectively are largely 'invisible' to the Players.

Note, however, that we are still wishing to emphasise and champion the ideal of authenticity which, if adhered to, can only enhance the quality of storytelling. So, although the Fate is arming themselves with the facility to increase the complexity of the organic navigation that Players must do to solve the problem of arriving at their directed outcome, it is not an attempt to derail the story as such. Indeed if the principle of authenticity is adhered to it can only enhance the story through heightened drama, conflict and tension.

Returning to the Fate suggesting an alteration to the event frame of *The Crossing,* this is because the arrival of those pursuing the Players' characters spells almost instant death. From an authentic standpoint, unless for some very specific reason, they would simply just cut the bridge's ropes. Simultaneously this makes the presence of the pursuers almost redundant since their immediate presence beyond the instant death of the players will never amount to anything. By placing in a central column then there is the facility for pursuers to cut the rope bridge, for the Players to potentially claw their way up to a platform (or reach it

just in time), for some obstacle to be manifest from the mist and for the pursuers to continue to attempt to attack the Player's characters perhaps by firing at them from any number of different types of weapons: blowdarts, arrows, guns... a rocket launcher! This then facilitates a further narrative lever in the sense that further jeopardy can be dialled up to influence the story.

The presence of levers, then, is not to dominate play - but to **challenge** and **elevate** it, always in service of the shared story, though obviously the level of jeopardy present may become overwhelming which ultimately means that, authentically, characters may or must perish, unless Players, through sheer improvisational skill, can *finesse* the situation.

Fate's voice and agency: counter balancing

Before we look at the final concept within this section - **triggers** - we will spend some time understanding Fate's agency and how they may instigate narrative levers and interact more generally within an event.

In section 13 (p xx) we detailed the use of 'control counters' which were utilised by Players to 'authentically manipulate' the emergent story, allowing them to **speak in third level voice**. At the beginnings of play, with careful consideration given by the Teller, the Fate too receives a number of control counters, based on the amount of potential power/ influence the Teller wishes to give the Fate within that event (*note: additional counters can always be given/ awarded during play to further empower the Fate*).

Should the Fate wish to act *as the Fate* at any moment then they must hold up a counter to show their intent. Note that it is entirely up to the Teller to allow them to proceed and in some, or many instances, the elevation of a counter can be met with the shake of a head. It is important to understand that initially in most circumstances, the Teller

will understand what the Fate is wishing to do since they will have discussed narrative levers, beats and triggers prior to play. And so again, the Teller becomes the adjudicator of balance, even though it is the Fate that is attempting to judge when to intervene with the use of a narrative lever, or simply throw something into the mix.

Example: Instigating a narrative lever

Situation: During *The Crossing*, the characters have just made the central column, the bridge having been cut from beneath them by their pursuers, just as the last two party members were about to step from it. Luckily they have been helped to safety. Exhausted, all of the party members are lying gasping on the rock sanctuary...the Fate holds up a control counter, the Teller nods.

> **The Fate**: As you lie catching your breath, gazing up at the misty sky, a gentle wind begins to blow, drying the sweat from your brows - a cool and welcoming feeling, which is interupted by a strange screeching sound. Lyra shuffles up onto her elbows gazing about, realising that the party is not alone. A strange white monkey sits atop a rock prominence, its eyes seemingly emanating hostility. Standing, Lyra moves threateningly towards it in an attempt to scare it off. The monkey flinches, and retreats, turning tail to make its way towards the mist, but just as it does so, the wind picks up more forcefully, buffeting the mist to reveal not one monkey but around twenty, all of them sitting in various poses and arrangements upon the ropes and boards of the next bridge section, all of them emanating the same hostile feeling that one can feel churning in the gut. The monkey initially intimidated by Lyra, turns back to face her now that it is within its pack, baring its powerful looking teeth, clearly not intimidated any more. Then, with a unison of screeching, the whole pack rushes towards you.

Example: Throwing something into the mix that has just occurred to them, manipulating Players' characters in the same manner in which Players can 'manipulate' other Players' characters in Third Level Voice.

Situation: Generic fantasy forest setting, the party moves through a dense fog shrouded forest, tense and wary...the Fate holds up a control counter, the Teller nods.

> **Fate** (holding up a narrative counter): *"Marcus suddenly stumbles. His foot catches on something—no, something catches him. A tug at his ankle, sudden and tight."*
>
> (Marcus' Player must now respond in Zero Level Voice as Marcus, reacting authentically to the situation, which will need to be developed by the Players in general - unless the Fate adds an additional something.)

Triggers: internal conditional forcing

So far, we have detailed the concepts of **directed outcomes**, **beats**, and **narrative levers**, which leaves **triggers** as the final concept to cover to understand one of the main roles of the Fate.

Just as a narrative lever is an externally imposed force upon the story, a trigger can be thought of as an internally activated one. A trigger is exactly what it implies, something which *goes off __if__* something occurs. For example an identified trigger in *Room with a View* is that *if* a character opens the fridge then they will throw-up due to an extreme encounter with some mouldy cheese gas that has built up inside...other characters may throw up too. This can be handled via the Fate, or the Teller in third level voice. Another more complex trigger* in *Room with a View* is that if someone attempts to boil the kettle, it will not boil, but will eventually catch on fire (*this cannot simply be accomplished via third level voice but requires the use of

meta-commands and boundaries [see p xxx])

Triggers as Advanced Play Incentives

In addition to their reactive function within an event, **triggers can also be employed as a more advanced storytelling mechanism**—a way to challenge experienced Players to avoid the well-worn paths of genre cliché and lazy improvisation.

During **predictive unfolding**, the Teller and Fate may identify common or overused narrative choices—such as obvious tropes, telegraphed decisions, or uninspired gambits—and **designate these as conditional triggers**. In this usage, the trigger need not release a specific consequence. Instead, **its activation simply signals a drop in narrative creativity**.

When such a trigger is activated—by a Player falling into the expected pattern—the **Teller may reward the Fate with additional control counters**. This shift in power creates a tangible cost to predictability: by leaning into cliché, Players empower the Fate to intervene more forcefully or frequently later in the event.

Example:

If a Player attempts to distract the guards *by pretending to be drunk*, the trigger activates—not because it fails, but because it's narratively stale.

Result: The Fate is awarded a counter. The act may succeed, but now the Fate holds more influence and may use it to complicate matters shortly after.

Creative Play as a Counterbalance

This mechanism rewards bold, original choices and promotes **inventive narrative risk-taking**. Rather than punishing

Players directly, it introduces **longer-term tension**: do you play it safe and empower the Fate, or try something fresh and unpredictable?

The key here is subtlety. Triggers of this kind are not punitive. They're **editorial pressure points**—a way for the system to quietly favour dynamic storytelling and encourage Players to stretch the bounds of their creativity.