

Last Night in the Mountain: GM Primer

Thanks for checking out my old little horror game! Here's a few thing you need to run this game:

- **At least 4 Fate dice**
- **Approximately 50 tokens, i.e. poker chips**

I recommend having a passing familiarity with the following before running the game:

- **The FATE System**
- **Haunting/Ghost Chasing Shows**
- **The Blackwell Legacy**

Of these, The Blackwell Legacy is what I consider most important, as the Blackwell series is what made this game possible for me to write. You can get it on Steam [here](#), or from GOG [here](#) (as part of a bundle).

Where to start

Okay, I feel the most important parts to read to get a feel for the game is the Backgrounds. That's where the players get most of their in to the game, and as a GM, you should definitely read them before running the game. For maximum effect, I recommend the order of Geoff, Michael, Annie, Joanna, Rowan.

The feel of the game

So, the thing I'll say about this game is that it leans a lot on character interactions and GM improv. You'll note the running sheet is very sparse on details. A lot of the game was in my head, and so all I needed were prompts. This game has a lot of adlib, so keep that in mind. I have added some examples of scenes I used when running this 5 years ago, but don't feel bound to those. Make stuff up, go unusual, this game is in your hands now, I'm just providing the materials.

The other thing: **This game does not have a fail state.** The only character who is at any risk of physical harm is Joanna, and everyone but Rowan is able to interact physically to help her. You don't have to tell your players that, but this game is about getting to a conclusion to a story rather than grim mountain survival.

Much of this game consists of the players talking to each other, and you sitting back and waiting for a lull or key moment to move things along. Let your players talk, and emote and cathart. In an ideal world, one of your players will cry, but in a good way.

Also: Shake up the characters, not the players. This isn't a game about tormenting your players, it's about helping people to get their characterization out. You're cooperative, not competitive. If you try to run this game competitively - well, you probably can, but that's not the game I wrote.

How the Character Sheets Work:

Important Note: Annie, Michael and Geoff all have information in their Background files that is not to be handed out until a certain point in the game. Please make sure to remove these, especially if playing digitally.

Every character has 2-3 pages of backstory and information (The Background) and a double sided card, with their name and aspects facing outwards, and their stats and their own aspects (with a twist) facing the player. We held them up with bulldog clips, which seems to work. The Character Sheets are available in an old Microsoft Publisher Document form or an Open Document Drawing format. Both are included here. Printing them may be a little tricky, I apologise in advance.

Secret Aspects?

Yeah, so, I gave it a try, and it worked. It's an aspect only the GM or the controlling player can compel, and the idea is to give them

In terms of difficulty...

As they are written, Rowan and Joanna are probably the harder to play, so keep that in mind when choosing who plays them. Annie, Michael, and Geoff are largely the same complexity.

If you've only got 4 players? Cut Geoff. Rowan and Joanna are essential, and Michael and Annie tend to provide good conflict. I wouldn't recommend playing with less than 4 players.

I recommend providing the front of every character's character sheet to players, and let that guide who they choose.

So, about gender...

As you may notice, these characters are gendered, and are cisgendered. While gender doesn't come up much in the game, this is still a little bit of a problem. There is nothing to prevent any character being trans, but it might be a little harder to run non-binary or genderqueer. I am, unfortunately, not in a position to rewrite the characters at this point, so I apologise to those I am failing to represent.

Here's a breakdown of the materials:

GM Materials:

The Last Night on the Mountains - GM Primer: What you're reading now!

Running Sheet: This is the GMs running sheet for the game, and what I used to prompt and pace things. The game should have an average running time of two and a half to three hours.

Character Stats and Aspects: This is the GM sheet to keep track of everyone's stats and aspects and have them quick to hand.

Player Materials:

Blurb: The game blurb: what game are we playing again?

System Reference: This is the sheet provided to explain the system to players. The thing to remember for FATE is High Numbers Good, Low Numbers Bad

Joanna Williams - Background: This is Joanna's Background.

Joanna Williams - Character Sheet: This is Joanna's Character Sheet

Rowan Cartwright - Background: This is Rowan's Background.

Rowan Cartwright - Character Sheet: This is Rowan's Character Sheet.

Michael Harper - Background: This is Michael's Background.

Michael Harper - Character Sheet: This is Michael's Character Sheet.

Annie Harper - Background: This is Annie's Background.

Annie Harper - Character Sheet: This is Annie's character sheet.

Annie Harper - Interview: This is an interview Annie filmed with the local historical society. Provide with background.

Geoff Swift - Background: This is Geoff's Background. Do not give the third page to the player until appropriate.

Geoff Swift - Character Sheet: This is Geoff's Character Sheet.

Geoff Swift - Shooting Schedule: This is the shooting schedule for Phantasm Hunters. Provide with background.

Michael Harper – Revelation: *Do not give this page to the player until appropriate.*

Annie Harper – Revelation: *Do not give this page to the player until appropriate.*

Geoff Swift – Revelation: *Do not give this page to the player until appropriate.*

Outro

So, uh, this is kind of disjointed and all over the place, and I apologise for that. I am writing this with the first time I've had the energy and coherence to actually dig this old beast up. I'm still very proud of this game. It was my first solo convention game, for Phenomenon 2015. It was exhilarating to run, and so many spectacular players came and brought life to this silly little tribute to a small indie video game.

I'm eager to see what other GMs and players will do with it. Maybe there's not enough here to run the game, and you add on your own bits and pieces. Maybe you mix around the characters a little. Maybe you take just the seeds of the idea, and create something new and wonderful. I hope your groups get as much joy out of this game as I did.

I owe thanks to my friends Alice Grunstra and Stuart Barrow for helping me with the character sheets, Dave and Janet Gilbert for allowing me to make a game based on their world, my wonderful playtesters who found the holes and helped me seal them up, and all the players who came through and played the game and maybe taught me lessons about geology that I have already forgotten.

Thank you for looking at this game, it means a lot.

Elly Matthews

Running Sheet

Opening/Intro

Opening Spiel – Ask if anyone is already familiar with the Fate system. Get a rough grasp. Explain that we only use the dice and the chips’ ‘tag an aspect’ ability. Once characters are chosen, explain that everyone has a secret aspect that only they and I can tag.

Give time to read character sheets.

Give opening narration:

“Here in the Blackwell Mountains, there’s a long history of mysterious phenomena and strange disappearances. Some of the locals attribute this to the mountain’s unforgiving terrain and inexperienced campers, but there could be another, more sinister reason. After all, these mountains are home to a gruesome legend, a malevolent ghost some call ‘Wolfskin’. But are these legends true? I’m Neil Kay, and I’m here with my team to find out for certain. Welcome to Phantasm Hunters.”

You filmed that piece four days ago, before Neil went missing in the mountains. The search got called off a few hours ago. Night has fallen on the Blackwell Mountains in the American midwest, and you have met up at the entrance. It’s dark, wet, and inhospitable. The terrain is terrible. These are far from ideal search conditions, but you’re the only ones still looking.

Phase I: Explore

Events can occur in any order: the purpose of the events is to draw out character interactions and bring the ghost characters gently closer to the realisation that something is amiss. Let the players lead the explorations, and give them things to think about or respond to as needed.

Example events:

- *Readings from the ghost hunting equipment*
The ghost hunting equipment was originally pure theatre and had little effect. Ironically, the presence of ghosts and spirits has a disruptive effect on normal technology, so the devices will occasionally sputter and beep and whirl and give strange readings.
- *Annie seeing something on her camera*
The ghosts are experiencing the night of their death/disappearance, but Joanna and Rowan are three months later in time. Sometimes Annie’s camera will show the “now” that Joanna and Rowan are experiencing, not the “then” of the ghosts - so, it will show the mountain three months later. When this happens, it will show Joanna but not Rowan. “Then” is a dark and stormy autumn; “now” is a cold and frosty winter.
- *Sightings of Neil’s things/Neil*
Finding things of Neil’s will tell the players/characters that they are on the right track. A ghostly sighting of Neil (a hallucination, since Neil has moved on) gives the same assurance, with an uncanny edge.
- *Various wildlife*
Wildlife is likely to be skittish in the presence of the supernatural - or it might ignore everyone except Joanna. The wildlife might be ghosts, deer, wildcats, eagles...

- *Obstacles*

Obstacles in the road that the ghosts can mostly easily pass, but might be difficult for Joanna.

Here's some example scenes:

- The crew walk into an empty cave with some animal corpses in it. Only Rowan and Joanna can see the hibernating bear one of the ghosts is standing in.
- A rushing river with rocks, that anyone but Joanna can cross easily. For Joanna it's a 4 agility check. If she fails, Rowan is physically unable to help, but the other characters can?
- A wolf howls, to unnerve the group. Perhaps a few more might lead someone to panic or investigate.
- Annie's camera captures something 'up to date' which doesn't make any sense.

Ask for skill checks occasionally, even for no reason. The point here is to make it feel to the players that something is going on or they are missing. Maybe give a glimpse of something on the trail, or a chill down their spine.

All throughout the game, you should be describing one scene to everyone, while providing occasional whispered comments to Joanna and Rowan about what the situation actually is. It's been three months since the filming, and in my head it was winter now.

Make Joanna and Rowan take 'Deception' checks every so often, especially if they're trying to convince Michael, Annie or Geoff that they're fine. Make sure there's a conversation that might prompt this, though.

Phase II: Intensify

As the game continues, move to moments that include more push/panic interactions:

- A sense of **Responsibility**/'This is my fault' hits Geoff, forcing him to drop his façade. A panic moment that requires cooling him down.
- A feeling of **'We're Too Late'** overwhelms Annie. A panic moment that requires cooling her down.
- **'The Ghost Is More Important'** lures Michael off track, maybe luring them away from the trail. Party tension moment that will require smoothing.
- Joanna's **'Survivors Guilt'** gets the better of her, requires her (with Rowan's aid) to keep it together, without the ghosts knowing. Use sparingly.
- Rowan's **'Jaded Ghost'** aspect causes slips of the tongue. Use sparingly.

By One Hour Remaining: Find the Wolfskin's den, and the corpses of Annie, Michael and Geoff. Provide the parts of the character sheet titled 'After Awareness' when each character finds their corpse, give them a few minutes to take it in. Wait for someone to talk first, don't push them too early.

Based on time: Group looks for Wolfskin or Wolfskin attacks Joanna.

The fight with Wolfskin: Honestly, this is mostly for show. They can't hurt the Wolfskin, but it can't hurt them either. Apart from Joanna. It can definitely hurt Joanna. If the group piles on, figure out how to get Rowan to hold onto the ghost long enough to grab Joanna or do something clever, move on to the next bit. **There is no lose condition here.** The end point is the players win and move on to the next scene.

Finale

Wolfskin is subdued, and dragged into 'the space with the portal to the beyond' inside Joanna's head WITH everyone, even Rowan.

Wolfskin is revealed as what she is, a scared teenager with a knife and a wolf's hide covering her body. Wolfskin moves on once they make clear to her she can. *Wolfskin is not a particularly powerful ghost*, but is stealthy, fearful and prone to stabbing.

After allowing Wolfskin to depart, ask for an awareness check from Annie, Michael and Geoff, at difficulty 3. Anyone who clears it notices a gossamer thread running between Rowan and Joanna. If Michael is made aware of it (passes his check, is told, or sees someone interact with it), have him roll Knowledge (Ghosts) and give him a freebie: That threads what ties Rowan to Joanna, and if one of them were to take it, Rowan could move on.

Decision: Who stays? Rowan, Michael, Annie or Geoff? They should all have reasons to want to stay and to want to go by now. Those who depart go on, and Joanna and the final spirit guide stay.

Decision 2: As Joanna starts to leave Wolfskin's den, Annie's camera turns on in the pile of things, with recording of everything that happened, including Joanna's last trip with her friends. The camera also shows the business card of the person who Geoff made the deal with. Decision is on Joanna and Spirit Guide: Keep it, Send it to the Studio, Leave it there, or Destroy it.

Fin.

Aspects

Joanna	Rowan	Annie	Michael	Geoff
Harsh Realist	A Real Charmer	Sceptic	True Believer	People Person
Get it Done Now, Deal With it Later	The Camera Loves Me	The Lens Captures Everything	Font of Ghostly Knowledge	The Consummate Professional
Sink or Swim	Insubstantial	The Technician	Overly Enthused	In The Director's Chair
The Voice of Reason	Well-Travelled	Behind The Scenes	Well-Researched	Responsible
Just the Facts	Old Fashioned	Reliable Sister	Loving Brother	First In, Last Out

Hidden Aspect

Joanna	Rowan	Annie	Michael	Geoff
Survivor's Guilt	Jaded Ghost	We're Too Late	The Ghost Is More Important	This Is My Fault

Stats

Joanna	Rowan	Annie	Michael	Geoff
Athletics: 2	Athletics: 5 ¹	Athletics: 3	Athletics: 3	Athletics: 4
Strength: 2	Strength: 0 ²	Strength: 3	Strength: 4	Strength: 3
Willpower: 4	Willpower: 3	Willpower: 2	Willpower: 2	Willpower: 3
Sneak: 3	Sneak: 2	Sneak: 4	Sneak: 3	Sneak: 3
Awareness: 4	Awareness: 2	Awareness: 4	Awareness: 2	Awareness: 3
Technology: 3	Technology: 0 ³	Technology: 4	Technology: 2	Technology: 2
Knowledge (Ghosts): 4	Knowledge (Ghosts): 4	Knowledge (Ghosts): 1	Knowledge (Ghosts): 4 ⁴	Knowledge (Ghosts): 2
Spirit Medium: 3	Spirit Guide: 4	Cameraperson: 4	Knowledge (Blackwell): 4	Director: 4
Deception: 3 ⁵	Actor: 4	Technician: 4	Researcher: 4	Deception: 4 ⁶

¹ Rowan: Cannot fail an athletics check, due to immaterial form.

² Rowan: Can't interact with the living world, interacting with the dead is still difficult.

³ Rowan: Can't use tech.

⁴ Michael: Well researched, but no experience with actual ghosts.

⁵ Joanna: Deception is to sell that it's still that night

⁶ Geoff: Deception is to sell that he is not freaking out