



# Midnight at the Library of Worlds

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# Introduction

The Library of Worlds borders everything and nothing. Every book within its walls was scribed in a magical ink that connects it to a world described by the contents. The staff come from a multitude of worlds. They found themselves in the Library after they wandered too far among the shelves of a bookshop or mundane library, or found a storyladder, or simply got lost in a very good book. Most who find the Library return after a short visit, but to a few it feels like coming home. Those who stay become Librarians.

Now the Library is threatened by a mysterious force called the Ravagers. They come from as many different worlds as the staff, attacking through and destroying the very books the Librarians protect. Many books and people have already been lost, and doom is certain.

You play Librarians on the eve of the Library's downfall. The Ravagers are coming, and all you can do is save what books you can before fleeing into one of the worlds, closing the portal behind you.

## BOOKS

A knowledgeable reader can activate the magical ink of a Library book, creating a portal to its world. This process usually takes hours or days of careful browsing and preparation, depending on the size of the portal. You can rush it, opening a small portal in mere minutes, but will damage the book as you do, singeing the pages and making the ink run. The damage is repairable, given enough time and proper supplies. An hour is enough to open a portal large enough for you to enter, but it will completely destroy the book in the process.

You can pull items, creatures, or people through a small portal. It is risky and forbidden to pull living things from their worlds—the transition may kill them—but these are desperate times.

If you remove a book from the Library, it will lose its magic and become an ordinary book. This includes taking it through another book's portal. If you escape the Ravagers, it is unlikely you will ever find the Library again.

# Preparation

## YOU WILL NEED

- 3–5 people
- 2–4 hours, depending on the number of people
- Small pieces of paper, sticky notes, or index cards, at least 7 per person
- Something to write with for each player
- Several coins in four different sizes or denominations, enough to have one set per person

## OPTIONAL

- Download, print, and cut up the blank cards at [http://games.nightstaff.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Print-book\\_cards\\_blank.pdf](http://games.nightstaff.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Print-book_cards_blank.pdf)
- Additional paper for taking notes

- Assorted books, 6 per person. See Options: Real Books for how to use them
- 8-sided dice to randomly generate books, or a mobile or online dice rolling app

## BOOKS

To create a book, choose or randomly pick one Theme and one Type from the following tables. Try to have a variety of Themes and Types. Write them down on one of the cards, then add a title for the book. Draw an empty checkbox on the card and label it “Damaged.” Add another label, “Read,” and draw a line under it for each player.

Each of you should create 6 books this way. When everybody has created their books, shuffle all of them together.

### Theme

1. Ancient
2. Cultural
3. Fanciful
4. Futuristic
5. Military
6. Mystical
7. Natural
8. Scientific

### Type

1. Adventure
2. Mystery

3. Poems
4. Romance
5. Biography
6. History
7. Reference
8. Travelogue

## TITLE TIPS

This game celebrates books, so you are free to use or reference existing books, other media, or the real world when coming up with titles. On the other hand, you're not obligated to understand all the references people use. If the title itself inspires you, use that inspiration, even if it's not what the player originally intended.

If you're stumped for titles, try these formats:

- The [Noun] of [Proper Noun]
- [Proper Noun]: The [Adjective][Noun] that [Past Tense Verb] the [Noun]
- [Noun]: The [Adjective][Noun] [Present Tense Verb] (the) [Noun]
- [Adjective][Noun]: A [Book Type]
- [Proper Noun] and (the) [Adjective][Noun]

Book title generators \*

<http://fantasynamenamegenerators.com/book-title-generator.php> \*

[http://www.squid.org/rpg-random-generator?page\\_id=103](http://www.squid.org/rpg-random-generator?page_id=103)

# BOOK CARD EXAMPLE

Scientific Mystery

Dr. Jones and the Electron Enigma

World Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

[ ] Damaged

Read:

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## ROLES

One player will be the Game Master (GM). They will describe the opposition and dangers facing the Librarians.

The other players will play Librarians. They will search for books, defend the Library, and try to escape.

Decide as a group who will be the GM and who will play Librarians.

## LIBRARIANS

If you are playing a Librarian, draw three random books. Choose one book to be your home world, or a world you have a strong connection to. Write your character's name on it as the World Contact and set it aside.

Choose one of the two remaining books. This book describes what department of the Library you belong to. Name your department, and keep the book.

The third book was mis-shelved in your department. You meant to return it when the Ravagers attacked. Note the department it belongs to.

Then, choose one of the following to describe your role at the Library:

## COLLECTOR

Collectors are assigned to a specific department, and are in charge of organizing and overseeing the collection there.

If you choose Collector, when Acquiring Books, you can look at one extra book before deciding which to take.

## SCRIBE

Scribes research and copy books and have deep knowledge of a particular topic.

If you choose Scribe, choose one Theme and one Type from the books you drew. Those are your areas of expertise. When you Read books of that Theme or Type, you can adjust the GM's coin by 1 or 2 steps.

## SHELVER

Shelvers do much of the grunt work of the library, so they know where everything goes and are used to carting around large numbers of books.

If you choose Shelver, you start with one extra book. Draw it now from the unclaimed books.

## THE LIBRARY

GM, draw two books from the unclaimed books. Choose one to be the home of the first Librarians. Describe one aspect of the world they brought with them when founding the Library, and one aspect they intentionally changed. Return both books. Other players may contribute more details if they want.

Librarians, take turns describing your chosen world. Describe one way your world is different than the Library, and one way it is the same. Then return your home book to the unclaimed books.

Sort the unclaimed books into two roughly equal stacks, called shelves. One way is to group by type, putting factual books in one shelf and fiction or poetry in the other. You could also group alphabetically. It doesn't matter as long as the shelves have about the same number of books.

Put the shelves in the middle where everyone can reach them. When taking books from the shelves, you will take from the top.

# Coins

You should have four sizes of coins. If you're in the US, pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters are the easiest to come by.

The GM takes one coin of each size.

Each Librarian player takes three coins of their choice. They must be different sizes.

You will use these coins to present and overcome dangers. Larger coins will let you overcome more dangers, but all coins change hands when you use them.

# Playing the Game

You will play through several rounds of scenes. At the beginning of the round, the GM sets the scene and describes the growing chaos in the Library. Then, every Librarian starts in a scene of their choice. At the end of the round, check if Endgame has been triggered, either because the Ravagers have overrun the Library or the shelves are empty. In the Endgame, each Librarian gets to choose to Escape or make a Last Stand, and narrate an epilogue.

## DANGERS

As a Librarian, in most scenes the GM will describe a danger you face. The danger will be something that can cause injuries or other consequences. It will never be “you don’t achieve your goal.” The GM will hold out a coin showing the size of the danger. The bigger, the more dangerous. You may Activate a book to overcome the danger entirely

or Read a book to alter the danger. Otherwise, you face the danger as-is.

## Activate a BOOK

Choose a book that has not yet been Activated. You activate the book's magic, creating a small portal to pull something from its world into the Library. Describe what you pull out and how it helps you overcome the danger. Due to your haste, the magic portal damaged the book. Check the "Damaged" box on the book's card. Nobody can Activate or Read from that book again. The GM puts away their coin, the danger overcome.

## Read FROM a BOOK

Choose a book that you have not yet Read.

You skim the book for information or inspiration to help you with the danger. Describe what you find and how it changes the danger you face.

Choose a coin one size bigger or smaller than the one the GM holds out. If you are a Scribe and the book falls under your specialty, you may choose a coin two sizes bigger or smaller. The GM must switch to that size coin instead.

If the GM doesn't have any coins of the size you chose, Reading can't help you. Skip to "Facing the Danger."

Write your name in the book's "Read" section. You've learned everything you can without sitting down to a

more thorough examination. You must now Face the Danger.

## Face the Danger

Once you've Read from a book or decided not to, describe how you try to overcome the danger. Choose one of your coins and hold it out. It must be a different size than the GM's coin.

If you have the bigger coin, you avoid the danger. Describe how.

If you have the smaller coin, the danger comes true. The GM describes the tricky situation you're in.

Then swap coins with the GM.

## Ties

If all your coins are of the same size, the GM must hold out a different-sized coin for you. In that case, you're forbidden from Reading to make the GM's coin the same size as yours.

## Creating Dangers

As GM, it is your responsibility to invent and describe Dangers for the Librarians. You have several sources of inspiration:

When Setting the Scene, you draw two books. One describes how the Ravagers will attack this round. The at-

tack itself comes at the end of the round, but meanwhile the opening portal is also a source of Dangers. The second book is one that other Librarians Activated. They had good intentions, but are now causing trouble.

If a player has previously Activated a book, especially if it was for a Defense, think of an unintended consequence of whatever they pulled out of it. If there were previous Dangers the players fell victim to, think of how the situation may have grown worse, or how some other Librarians may have tried to fix the issue with unintended consequences.

In the second round onwards, the Ravagers and everything pulled from Activated Books are still present. If the Ravagers were beaten back they are not a huge threat, but may still cause trouble.

Remember that Dangers should present consequences, not directly block players from achieving their goals.

## Setting the Scene

As GM, begin the round by drawing the top books from the shelves and putting them in front of you. Draw one book from each shelf, or if one shelf is empty, draw two from the remaining shelf.

Choose one of the books to be the world the Ravagers are attacking from this round. Their attacks will be flavored by that world. Describe it to the Librarians. The Ravagers

may attack from a previously-activated book; how is a mystery.

The other book was Activated by other fleeing Librarians, and whatever they pulled from it is now causing trouble. You can describe the trouble now, or save it as a surprise danger during the round.

While you describe dangers for the Librarians, you can look at the books you have revealed so far for inspiration. You can also reveal unpleasant consequences from things the Librarians have pulled from books in the game.

## LIBRARIAN SCENES

As a Librarian, you can choose to star in one of several types of scenes.

Every round, one of you must Prepare a Defense against the Ravagers, or they will overrun the Library at the end of the round.

Whoever is defending plays last, but you can play the other scenes in any order.

### Scene Types

- Acquire books
- Acquire books with help
- Trade with other Librarian
- Prepare defense

## ACQUIRE BOOKS

If you helped another Librarian Acquire Books this round, you can't choose this scene type. Decide if you want books of any type, or if you're looking for something specific. Tell the GM. The GM will describe a Danger for you to overcome.

### LOOKING FOR ANY BOOK

Flip a coin to pick a shelf.

If the coin chooses an empty shelf, you are out of luck. You get no books. You can drop off as many of your books as you want, in any order.

Otherwise, pull out the top two books from the shelf. Pull out one more book for each of the following:

- You overcame the danger
- You're a Collector
- You plan to return one book to the shelf

If all three are true, you can pull a total of five books from the shelf.

Look at the books and choose which two books keep. If you return one of your own books, you can keep three.

Put the rest of the books back on the shelf, in any order.

## LOOKING FOR SPECIFIC BOOKS

Choose which shelf you want to search.

Pull out the top three books from the shelf. Pull out one more book for each of the following:

- You overcame the danger
- You're a Collector
- You plan to return one book to the shelf

If all three are true, you can pull a total of six books from the shelf.

Look at the books and choose one book to keep. If you return one of your own books, you can keep a second book.

Put the rest of the books back on the shelf, in any order.

## ACQUIRE BOOKS WITH HELP

You may choose this scene type even if you helped another Librarian Acquire Books this round.

Pick another Librarian to help you. They must agree to help, and they can't have Acquired Books or helped anyone else this round. Decide whether you're looking for any books or something specific. The GM will describe a Danger for both of you to overcome. If either of you Activates a book, you both overcome the Danger.

Either or both of you can Read books to alter the danger. If you both Read, you can change the GM's coin two steps, even if they don't have the coin in between. For example, if the GM has a penny, nickel, and two quarters, you can make the GM change from a quarter to the nickel.

You present the counter coin to the GM, and swap coins with them.

You take books as described in Acquire Books.

After you take your books, the other Librarian takes the top book from the same shelf. If they're a Collector, they can look at two books before choosing one.

## TRADE WITH ANOTHER LIBRARIAN

Pick another Librarian and describe meeting up with them.

Offer them a coin and a book you are willing to trade. Say what you would like in exchange.

The other Librarian must trade something with you, either a book for your book, a coin for your coin, or both. It might not be what you asked for, but you must accept the trade.

There is no Danger when you Trade.

## PREPARE A DEFENSE

Every round, someone must prepare a defense to hold off the Ravagers, or they will overrun the Library. At the beginning of the round, decide as a group who it will be. That Librarian should take the last scene of the round. Try to divide this duty as evenly as possible between the rounds.

When you prepare a defense, choose a book to Activate. Describe what you pull from the book and how you use it.

Pick one of your coins and hold it out to the GM. This is the strength of your defense. The GM will describe the Ravagers' attack, then hold out a coin to you. The size of the coin represents the strength of the attack.

You can Read from a different book to change the GM's coin, as with the normal rules about overcoming dangers. You can't Activate another book.

If the GM's coin is larger, some Ravagers will break through the defense and cause trouble. If this happens twice, the Library is overrun and you must all escape immediately.

If your coin is larger, the defense holds. In the quiet that follows, you may take the top book from either shelf. Swap coins with the GM.

# CHECK FOR ENDGAME

At the end of each round, the Ravagers will immediately overrun the Library if any of the following is true:

- Nobody prepared a defense against them
- The Ravagers broke through a second defense

It is time for Endgame if:

- The Ravagers have already overrun the Library
- Both shelves are empty

# Endgame

## Final Scenes

In order from least books to most, each Librarian gets one more scene. Break ties by total value of coins, from lowest to highest. You may either Escape into a book or make a Last Stand.

## Escape

If the shelves are empty, you have some breathing room before the Ravagers overrun the Library. Choose one of your un-Damaged books to escape into.

If the Ravagers have already overrun the Library, you must choose randomly from your un-Damaged books.

The GM will present one final danger that you must overcome. You can Read or Activate other books as described in the normal rules about overcoming dangers.

- If you overcome the danger, you flee safely into the book
- If you do not overcome the danger, you are injured and lose a book of your choice as you escape.

## Last Stand

If all your books are Damaged, or you decide not to escape, you instead make a Last Stand. Choose a book to Read and describe how it helps you prepare a final defense.

The GM will describe the Ravager's attack. You can Read other books as described in the normal rules about overcoming dangers, but there's no time to Activate any.

## EPILOGUE

After the final scenes, the Librarians look at their books and determine their final outcomes. Every Librarian gets a chance to narrate an epilogue, starting with those who made a Last Stand, followed by those who Escaped.

## Last Stand

Unable or unwilling to escape, you made a final stand against the Ravagers, buying the others time for their preparations. Look at the Theme and Type of the book you consulted to prepare a final defense. Compare the

themes and types of your other books, and count how many books match Theme or Type. Add 1 if you overcame the final danger.

Based on the total, narrate the final outcome of your character:

- 0: Useless Sacrifice. The might of the Ravagers swept you away.
- 1-3: Heroic Sacrifice. You held them off, but paid for it in the end.
- 4+: Aftermath. Describe how you evaded the Ravagers at the last minute. After all the escapees narrate their fates, you can narrate an Aftermath

If your total was 1 or more, you successfully made your Last Stand.

## Escape

You successfully opened a book's portal wide enough for you to escape. Look at the Theme and Type of the book you escaped into. Compare the Themes and Types of all the other books you brought with you, and count how many books match Theme or Type.

Modify the total as follows:

- Add 2 if you escaped into your book, the one you are World Contact for.

- Add 1 if you escaped into another book, but are holding yours.
- Add 1 for every Librarian who successfully made a Last Stand.
- Subtract 1 if you were injured in the escape.

Based on the total, narrate the final outcome of your character.

- 1 or less: Pitiful End. You escaped into a worse situation. Describe your harsh and unfortunate life.
- 2-3: D is for Done. You were not ready for the world. You make a living, but it was not what you wanted.
- 4-5: Satisfied. You do well enough, but something always seems to be missing.
- 6+: Perfect World. Your books perfectly prepared you for the world, and it rewarded you.

## AFTERMATH

Each Librarian who got a result of “Aftermath” has a chance to describe what happens to the Library after the Ravagers finish with it.

# Options and Advice

## LIBRARY CARDS

Instead of writing on index cards, download the blank checkout cards, print, and cut them.

## REAL BOOKS

In addition to the normal materials, you will need 6 books per person. For each book, choose a Type and Theme from the list. Write them on a card or sticky note and add the checkbox for “Activated” and the lines for “Read.” Put the card in the book or stick it to the cover. Mix up the books as best you can, and use them throughout the game.

When you Read from or Activate a book, open it to a random page. Include what you find on that page in your description of how you use the book.

# SOLO LIBRARIAN

If you are playing with a single Librarian, they may play two scenes every round.

# Playing Online

I recommend using a notecards app like Trello to manage the books.

# Thanks and Inspiration

The system is heavily inspired by Grant Howitt's Doctor Magnethands and Vincent Baker's Night-time Animals Save the World.

Dedicated to my patient local librarians Alexie and Deirdre. Thanks to my playtesters Alex, Eduardo, Jesse, and John.

Cover image derived from Mystics Art Design .

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