

GHOSTS



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INTRODUCTION

Ghosts is a game for four players. It could work with more but it won't work with less. It is a kinesthetic game - there's a lot of touching and you must sit close to one another. Ideally, you play in total darkness.

THE SETTING

The city is under siege.



FANTASY: THE CITY OF THE SUN

As the *Old Monarch*, you are well-loved but infirm, frail in body and mind but enjoying the unquestioned loyalty of the nobility. Some say you are not as fragile as you appear. The Prince Regent is your son and rules in your stead.

As the *General*, defender and war-lord of the city, you command every warrior upon the beleaguered ramparts. A thousand loyal soldiers live or die on your order. Some say the city does, too. The Prince Regent is your liege lord.

As the *Dimber-Damber*, you are the ruler of all the canting crews and criminals in the city. The seething underclass answers to you, and on your word the machinery of daily life grinds on - or grinds to a halt. The Prince Regent is a reasonable man and your best customer.

As the *Anchorite*, you fulfill the implacable needs of the terrible, ancient Gods who sleep beneath the great city. The priests and priestesses in temple, fortress, and slum are your eyes and ears, and the Gods themselves speak with your voice. The Prince Regent is clay to be shaped into a more perfect ruler.

As the *Architect*, your heavy burden is to shine a light on the darkness of filth and barbarity that surround you. All learned men and women rally to your cause and through them - slowly, ever slowly - you

effect change. The Prince Regent holds the purse that fuels engine of progress.

As the *Destroyer*, you lead a hardened cadre of mercenary soldiers, hated and feared professionals who keep the city safe in exchange for gold and other considerations. Your troops are adept at demonstrating the correctness of your occasional points of order. The Prince Regent is your employer.

As the *Champion*, you fight for an ideal, and a small army of zealots go to war in your wake. Countless more cheer you from the shadows. Some say your devotion to the city's freedom masks greater - and less noble - ambitions. The Prince Regent is your nemesis.

As the *Magician*, you traffic in demons. You draw them from the very stones of the city and bend them to your will - and that of your employers. Sometimes they whisper secrets in your ear. Those fools who aspire to the dark arts crowd around you and eagerly do your bidding. The Prince Regent is your patron.

As the *Grand Slave*, you do as you are told. While the world once trembled at your name, now you are a trophy of war. A broken thing - or so you appear. All those enslaved within the city are your brothers and sisters, and slaves of slaves - for you are their master, just as the Prince Regent is yours.

As the *Ambassador*, you are merely an observer to the recent unpleasantness. Your Lord and Lady are far away, and you have only an extensive retinue to remind you of more pleasant pastures. Still, you do what you can to cement good relations with whoever wields influence in this miserable, besotted backwater. The Prince Regent is your diplomatic challenge and opportunity.

HOW TO PLAY

The city is under siege. The King is old and weak. The Prince Regent rules the city. These character archetypes each have a strong agenda of their own, as well as *Vigor*, represented by beads. Three each is a good number for a short, focused game. A five bead session will last longer and be more nuanced.

Each player also plays a ghost. Ghosts either want to *atone* for a crime or *avenge* a wrong committed on them. These desires are explicitly focused on a living character played by another player. Your ghost was wronged by the person you choose, or wronged them. There's no compelling need to confer or distribute ghosts equitably. Each ghost is focused on their particular issue, and will seek to either aid or ruin the living based on their own goals and behavior.

Turn the lights off. Any player can frame a scene for any two characters. Ghosts are not characters. Framing a scene means declaring which two characters are present, where they are, and what's going on. You can also suggest things they might be in conflict about but this isn't required.

In play you'll touch both players with active characters in the scene, with the aim of influencing the circumstances to suit your ghosts desire for atonement or vengeance.

The two characters in the scene (or their representatives - you could have a scene between a common soldier, representing the General's influence, and, say, the Sorcerer) roleplay a bit.

The ghosts may choose to influence the scene. They have three choices:

1. Do nothing.
2. Influence - by touching the player, they indicate influence.
3. Dominate - by grabbing the player and hanging on, they indicate possession.

Influence means some evidence of the supernatural enters the scene - a cold wind, a bad smell, whatever. It is worth *one point*.

Domination is worth *three points*. When you dominate, you must whisper a few words or a sentence in the person's ear and they must, at some point, say it in the scene.

Since both ghosts interact with both living scene partners, laying a hand on each, there are six possible combinations:

- Nothing/nothing: 0
- Influence/nothing: 1
- Influence/Influence: 2
- Nothing/Dominate: 3
- Influence/Dominate: 4
- Dominate/Dominate: 6

Play out the scene, informed by the actions of the ghosts. As the player of a living character, you'll have influence to weave into your roleplaying - a cold wind, a premonition - and possibly things you must say. Probably terrible, counter-productive things.

When the scene reaches a decision point, the two living players confer by touching hands - the player who has more points (0-6) will win the conflict, and the scene is resolved.

The *winner* loses a point of Vigor. When a character runs out of Vigor, they are a lifeless puppet of the ghosts, who may automatically dominate them in every conflict and whisper instructions. A Vigor-less character automatically loses every conflict they enter.

The game will find its own course, theme, and ultimate resolution.

HACKING THE ARCHETYPES

Here's an example of relocating the game to an uncomfortable historical setting. Obviously you could port it to all sorts of times, places, and genres.

Königsberg, the capitol of East Prussia, is considered a vital linch-pin in the defense of the beleaguered Third Reich. Physically isolated from the rest of Germany, East Prussia guards the approaches to the Baltic and was heavily defended. Those defenses are now in ruins.

The Soviet army began offensive operations in East Prussia in earnest in January of 1945, dedicating one and a half million men to the task of securing the flanks of troops driving straight toward Berlin. It was the first German soil lost to the Soviets, and precipitated a massive refugee crisis as East Prussians fled the advancing enemy.

By the end of the month the Third Belorussian Front had reduced German-held territory to the fortress-city itself and a narrow strip of land to the west, around the port village of Pillau. Inside Königsberg, 200,000 civilians were trapped with remnants of the Third Panzer Army. Civilians are faced with a trio of awful choices:

1. Stay in besieged Königsberg and either die from shelling or die from starvation.
2. Attempt to cross the front lines and surrender, knowing that rape and imprisonment are the best outcomes and summary execution is a possibility.
3. Cross the Baltic ice on foot from Königsberg to Pillau, where boats can ferry refugees back to the Reich proper. This route is routinely shelled by the Soviets, and half the boats are sunk en route.

As *Generalleutnant Henning von Thadden*, you command the war-weary First Infantry Division, part of the remnants of Army Group Center. Your troops have been fighting since 1939, and they were all raised in East Prussia. Keeping your boys out of the meat grinder end-game is your top priority. Otto Lasch is a dangerous fool outside your chain of command. (The Champion)

As *Jutta Kellar*, you are the chief of Königsberg's Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM) organization. In a city choked with refugees, yours is the voice of women and children at the highest level. Your top priority is arranging the safe and expeditious evacuation of BDM girls. Otto Lasch is the only man who can make this happen. (The Architect)

As famed Ufa Studios actor *Heinz Rühmann*, you find yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time, but with a deep responsibility. Morale is low and terror runs rampant. In you, Otto Lasch sees a sonorous voice of hope and calm. As the war sputters to an end, you see in Otto Lasch, ... interesting opportunities. Your top priority is surviving, and enriching yourself in the process. (The Magician)

As *SS-Gruppenführer Otto Hellwig*, you are responsible for stiffening the resolve of Königsberg's defenders - brave lads all, but brave lads who need to understand that your SS troops will ruthlessly shoot them if they try to surrender or flee. Your top priority is stiffening resolve - Otto Lasch is a fine National Socialist who needs mentoring and motivation. (The Anchorite)

As *Major General Ivan Alekseyevich Kornilov*, you are the former commander of the 49th Rifle Corps, gravely wounded and captured in 1941. You were pulled from a POW cage to "advise" the defenders on Russian tactics. Having been utterly abandoned and denounced as a traitor, you have half a mind to do just that. You live and die on the whim of Otto Lasch. (The Grand Slave)

As *General Hans Gollnick*, you command the entire 28th Corps, which holds the territory around Königsberg, including the Samland peninsula and port of Pillau. Your top priority is preventing further tactical encirclement in East Prussia, an effort complicated by the necessity to defend Königsberg. Otto Lasch is your political watchdog and a thorn in your side. (The General)

As *Erich Koch, Gauleiter of Königsberg*, you represent the Nazi party and officially supervise civilian relief efforts. Keeping up appearances and placating Hitler are your top priorities, followed closely by feathering your own nest. Generalleutnant Otto Lasch, Commandant of Festung Königsberg, is your friend and military counterpart. (The Dimber-Damber)

As *Bürgermeister Georg Mundt*, you are responsible for a city that is imploding on top of over a million refugees. Königsberg is a humanitarian disaster, and there is no pleasant harbor for the coming storm. The suicidal Nazis have all but abandoned you and your people. Your top priority is ending the insanity through surrender. Otto Lasch rules the city, but you command the respect of the populace. (The Old Monarch)

As *SS-Sturmbannführer Anders Bakken*, you command elements of the 11th Waffen SS-Panzer Grenadier Division Norland, tasked with helping to defend Königsberg. Like yourself, the men in your command are all volunteers from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Your top priority is showing the Bolsheviks what you are made of. You know you backed the wrong horse - as far as you are concerned, Otto Lasch is your final paymaster. (The Destroyer)

As *Dr. Lars Karlsson*, you are the Swedish consul in Königsberg. All things being equal, you should have left the city months ago, but there are many Swedes (and other foreign nationals) trapped in the vast sea of refugees. Your top priority is finding them and getting them to safety - an impossible task. (The Ambassador)



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