

A stylized illustration in shades of red and black. At the top, a large, dark hand with long, pointed fingers holds several thin strings. These strings descend to control three marionettes. The marionettes are dark, stylized figures with large, expressive eyes. Each marionette holds a knife aloft in its right hand. The marionette on the left has a beard and a small cross on its chest. The middle marionette has a single eye and a hand with a ring. The marionette on the right has a single eye and a hand with a ring. Below the marionettes, there are several small, stylized vases or pots arranged in a row. The background is a solid red color.

# THE SLOW KNIFE

II. Prelude



This is the **Prelude**.

*Read the rules booklet first.*

**It is written to be read aloud**, passing as you go.

This booklet will guide us through the creation of an **original setting and characters** for our story.

*If we'd rather use a pre-written setting, we can use a Playset instead.*

We'll start by establishing  
some **essential truths**:

In this game, we each play  
a self-serving scoundrel, a  
villain. We are powerful  
members of elite society,  
or soon will be.

Together, we will  
conspire to ruin the life  
of a gifted young soul  
for our own gain.

This is the story of our  
rise, and inevitable fall.

While we the  
**Conspirators** connive  
and carouse, the  
young victim of our  
conspiracy plots their  
patient revenge.

They are **the Knife**.

When they return,  
cloaked in the finery of  
our peers, they will bend  
our sins against us to  
destroy us completely.

With this basic outline in place, we'll start by establishing some details about our **setting**.

This is the backdrop to our revenge story. It could be a city, a ship, a tower, or something stranger.

We'll build this place by answering prompts together as a group.

It can be daunting to create something from scratch, even with a guided process.

We should make notes on the board, reference media touchstones, give things placeholder names and ask clarifying questions.

We can always go back and change our answers if a better idea emerges.

Across all of history,  
imagined or otherwise,  
there are people  
seeking vengeance.

*What genre is our story in?*

For example: historical drama,  
fantasy, science-fiction

*What elements of that  
genre are we keen to  
include or avoid?*

For example: magic, touchscreens,  
white-male privilege



Now we can start creating  
our specific society.

This society of ours  
is deeply stratified.

*How would the elites  
describe their position?*

For example: pure-blooded visionaries,  
reluctant shepherds, divine rulers

*How do most normal  
people view the elites?*

For example: despotic oppressors,  
cryptic philosophers, loving parents

Power is concentrated  
in the ruling elite.

*What is the most powerful  
force in our society?*

For example: access to capital,  
mechanical marvels, arcane  
rituals, holy blessings

*How do the elites keep this  
power for themselves?*

For example: sacred texts and  
unquestioning belief, assessment  
and selective education,  
propaganda and censorship

It is centred around  
a single location.

*Where do most people live?*

For example: a tightly-packed city  
encircled by a mile-high wall, a floating  
palace in the clouds, a life-ship coasting  
through a lavender-hued nebula

*How do the elites  
separate themselves?*

For example: in a district patrolled  
by grey-suited guards, at the top of  
an impossibly-tall tower, behind  
a door of smoke and silk watched  
over by a great white owl

This place will come alive  
through our senses.

*What do our hands feel as  
we run them along a wall?*

For example: briary vines and  
crumbling stonework, cold  
plastic and worn switches, faint  
breathing and fleshy warmth

*What smells do we note  
as we take a stroll?*

For example: sandalwood pyres  
smoulder with glowing embers, scoured  
surfaces glisten with wet sterility,  
smokestacks belch their acrid smog

Our society is in turmoil,  
volatile and shifting.

*What is the source  
of this turmoil?*

For example: workers revolt against  
the parasitic elite, the entitled and  
aspiring vie to replace our late leader,  
violent forces mass at our gates

*What is the quickest way for  
an elite to lose their power?*

For example: holding the wrong  
political opinions, breaking one of  
our sacred tenets, conspiring against  
our benevolent god-emperor

Next, we'll establish the central character of our story—the **Knife**.

This is the person who's life was ruined, and who will return to have their revenge.

We should add them and any other important characters we introduce to our board, and use notes to record details.

Before the incident, the Knife was a good person.

*How were they viewed  
in their community?*

For example: an oddball artist, a charming rake, a beloved golden child

*Who did they treasure most,  
their closest companion?*

For example: a loving parent, a partner in mischief, a graceful teacher

They were youthful, fair  
and a little too proud.

*What feature marked them  
as conventionally beautiful?*

For example: large lustrous  
eyes, a honeyed singing voice,  
an auspicious birthmark

*Which of their habits did the  
elders find most irritating?*

For example: sardonic wit and ceaseless  
mocking, boisterous carousing and  
dancing, relentless cheer and optimism



But their work was honest  
and their dreams pure.

*What profession did they  
take great pride in?*

For example: a merchant sailor, an  
apprentice carpenter, a trainee doctor

*What ambition, simple or  
daring, did they hold?*

For example: a little house by  
the sea, a thriving business with  
their name above the door, to  
burn thrones and build tables

This next section is a little different, as instead of defining one shared character, we're each creating our **Conspirator**.

We'll answer questions individually, but we should discuss our choices as a group.

We'll add our characters to the board and use notes to record details.

Each of us is a villain:  
self-serving and ruthless.

*How do you hold power  
over those beneath you?*

For example: boundless  
generational wealth, high office  
in a prominent hierarchy, arcane  
powers and ancient prophecies

*What flawed behaviour  
lurks in your psyche?*

For example: a barely-contained  
temper, a calculating coldness,  
a nagging inferiority

We each possess some  
degree of privilege,  
but desire more.

*What feature marks you  
as part of the elite?*

For example: intricate facial tattoos of  
an illustrious house, a simple platinum  
circlet, nothing yet but naked ambition

*Why are you driven to  
ceaselessly pursue power?*

For example: a paranoid need to control,  
a desire to prove someone wrong, so that  
nobody can make you feel small again

Each of us have reason to  
desire the Knife banished.

*Who was the Knife to  
you before the incident?*

For example: the colleague who  
always showed me up, my oldest  
friend and fiercest rival, my parent's  
favourite child, a lowly stranger

*What did you have to gain  
from their imprisonment?*

For example: to steal back the heart of  
another, to gain material wealth and  
influence, to cover up a ruinous scandal,  
to prove that you are better than them

Now we'll establish the details of the **incident** that befell the Knife.

We'll start with a basic outline of facts before moving on to the specific role that each of our Conspirators played.

We'll should continue to add characters, threads and notes to the board as we go.

The Knife was arrested  
for a crime they  
did not commit.

*What were they accused of?*

For example: the murder of a high-profile industrialist, a seditious plot to overthrow the king, the theft of a prized cultural artefact

*Where were they  
imprisoned or exiled?*

For example: a half-crumbling tower on a windswept islet, a rotting temple buried deep below our city, a vast and toxic wasteland

**Each of our Conspirators  
played a pivotal, active  
role in the arrest. Every  
player should answer  
at least one of these:**

*Who was first among us  
to suggest this conspiracy,  
and what urgent situation  
led you to propose the plot?*

~

*Which of us betrayed the  
Knife's trust, and what  
closely-guarded vulnerability  
of theirs did you divulge?*

~



*Who planted the evidence  
that would incriminate them,  
and how did you gain access  
to their personal belongings?*

~

*Who dealt with someone  
that threatened to spoil our  
plot—who posed such a  
risk, and how did you take  
them out of the picture?*

~

*Which of us led the forces  
of law and order to them—  
what trap did you set for  
the Knife to spring?*

~

You should now have everything you need to start responding to card prompts.

Before you do, go back and make sure you've added everything important to the board and given them names.

Then, you can begin drawing cards from Act I.





mousehole press