

A stylized illustration in a dark red and black color palette. At the top, a large, dark hand with long, curved fingers holds several thin, vertical strings. These strings hang down and are attached to three stylized figures. Each figure is holding a knife aloft in their right hand. The figures are depicted in a simplified, almost cubist style, with dark bodies and some internal details in a lighter shade. Below the figures, there is a row of six small, light-colored objects that look like vases or small pots, arranged in a slightly irregular line. The background is a solid dark red.

# THE SLOW KNIFE

I. Setup & Rules



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**Jack Harrison**

Writing, Design, Layout

**Rafael Nobre**

Illustration

**Will Jobst, Tyler Crumrine**

Design Consultation

**Luke Jordan**

Writing Consultation

**Yubi Coates**

Accessibility Consultation

**Inspired by**

*For the Queen*—Alex Roberts

*The Quiet Year*—Avery Alder

*Noirlandia*—Evan Rowland

## **This rules booklet for The Slow Knife covers:**

- ◆ What this game is (p3).
- ◆ Safety during play (p6).
- ◆ The game materials (p10).
- ◆ Setting up the cards (p11)  
and board (p14).
- ◆ Creating the setting and  
characters (p17).
- ◆ Starting an Act (p20).
- ◆ Resolving Act cards (p21).
- ◆ Ending an Act (p25).
- ◆ Ending the story (p26).
- ◆ The epilogue (p27).

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

**The Slow Knife** is  
a game of avaricious  
villains & patient revenge  
for 2-4 players.

Over the course of an  
evening or two, we'll  
tell the decades-long  
tale of a young soul's  
revenge against those  
who betrayed them.

We'll tell this story from  
the perspective of the  
villains—that's us.

We'll answer prompts  
about our villains,  
**the Conspirators**, as  
we add characters and  
connections to a board  
of sin and scandal.

We'll also tell the  
story of **the Knife**, the  
victim of our long-  
ago crime, and their  
gruelling, determined  
return to society.

The loose threads of our  
story will knit together  
into a complex revenge  
plot as we play.

By the end of the game  
we'll have constructed  
the conspiracy that  
destroys our wretched  
conspirators as they find  
themselves broken, alone  
and utterly ruined.

The characters we play  
in this game are fairly  
nasty, menacing people.

However, there are  
many ways to be evil,  
and our goal is not to  
be as vile as possible.

As a baseline, we  
should aim for the kind  
of dramatic, inflated  
villains we might see in  
a family adventure film.



Now, let's talk about the content we would like to make **"off-limits"** for our story.

This could include specific topics, phobias, or difficult feelings.

Make a list of anything discussed, and add to the list as needed during play.

If something makes us feel uncomfortable during play, such as a prompt, answer or something off-limits, we can ask the group to **"hang on"**.

We can either say the words aloud or hold up our hand as a "stop" sign.

Then we can take one or more of the following actions.

## We can:

- ◆ Take some time away from the story to discuss the issue.
- ◆ Rewind and remove something that was added.
- ◆ Change the direction the story goes from this point.
- ◆ Continue with a more informed understanding of a sensitive topic.
- ◆ Make space for a player to leave the game.
- ◆ Take a break.

When we're all satisfied,  
we can resume play.

To set up the play area,  
we'll need the box of  
cards and some materials  
to build our board:

- ♦ **A cork board**—or wall, table, whiteboard, floor.
- ♦ **Index cards**—or printer paper cut into 8 pieces.
- ♦ **Sticky notes**—or printer paper cut into 16 pieces.
- ♦ **String and pins**—or washi tape, or coloured pens.

Alternatively, you can use  
a digital board like Miro.

First we're going to set up the cards. One of us should start shuffling and placing the decks as we talk through them.



First, separate and shuffle each Act deck. Keep the **opening cards** separate and set them on top of each deck after shuffling.



We should each take  
a **Conspirator** card.

We should read through  
both sides, then place it in  
front of us with the black  
side (as above) showing.



These **portrait cards** can be used to represent characters on the board as we introduce them to our story, if we wish.





**Characters** are the cast of our story, including our Conspirators and Knife.

We should add a character to the board if we think they might come up again. This might be true even if they're dead (like a murder victim) or inanimate (like a ship).

We can use an index card to represent a character or choose a portrait card.

**Threads** mark connections between characters. Use string or tape to represent threads.

We should add **notes** frequently to capture details about characters and threads. Each note should be a short sentence at most—such as a name, description or relationship.

Use small sticky notes or cut index cards for these.

With our play area set up, we're ready to start telling our story.

We'll first create our **setting, characters** and establish the facts of the **incident** that befell the Knife.

We can do this using either a **Playset** or the **Prelude**.

**Playsets** give us everything we need to play the game in a pre-defined setting. They are available as printed books or at [bit.ly/mhp-tsk](http://bit.ly/mhp-tsk).

Playsets are the best way to get started, especially if it's our first game.

If, instead, we'd like to create a custom setting from scratch, we use the **Prelude** booklet.

## Setup Checklist

- ◆ Have we discussed content & safety tools together?
- ◆ Are the Act cards shuffled into four Act decks?
- ◆ Have we got the materials together for our board?
- ◆ Do we each have a named character, our Conspirator?
- ◆ Have we created and named the Knife?
- ◆ Do we know what incident befell the Knife?
- ◆ Do we each know the role our Conspirator played in it?
- ◆ Have we added characters and details to the board?

Once setup is complete,  
we will begin drawing  
cards from the **Act 1** deck.

The first card in each  
Act is an **opening card**.

This card sets the scene  
and asks a question that  
all of us should answer  
as our Conspirator.

The rest of the cards in  
each Act are **prompts**.

Starting with the eldest player, we'll take turns to draw a prompt card and read it aloud.

It will establish a truth and ask us questions. We should always **answer as our Conspirator** unless otherwise directed.

On your turn you get the final say, but other players may ask questions or make suggestions.

You can always give a prompt card you drew to another player, and say: **"I'd like to hear your answer instead."**

Players can continue passing a card until someone answers or the card is discarded.

You can always choose to discard a card instead of answering.



Before answering a prompt, we should **look over the board.**

It's a record of everything we've established so far in our story, and we'll often find good ideas as we glance over it.

Later on in our story, we'll try and use existing characters rather than making new ones, where it makes sense.

After answering a prompt,  
we **update the board**  
to reflect our answer.

When we add something  
to the board, we're saying  
it's important to our story.

This usually means  
adding, changing or  
removing a character,  
thread or note. You'll  
often need to do several  
of these things.

Continue answering, passing or discarding prompts until we have drawn **all the cards** in the current Act.

This usually takes around an hour of play. The end of an Act is a good time to take a short break.

Then, **begin the process anew with the next Act**, starting with the opening card.

During Act IV, **each of us can choose** when our Conspirator's part in the Knife's revenge is complete.

When this time comes, we **flip** our Conspirator card over and choose one of the questions to answer.

After we flip, we won't draw more prompt cards but we can still ask questions of other players.

Once all of us have  
flipped our **Conspirator**  
**cards**, the Knife's  
patient revenge is  
complete at last.

Each of us should choose  
an **epilogue question**, on  
the next page, to answer.

Then, once each of  
us has answered once,  
**our story is over.**

## Epilogue Questions

- ♦ **A day later**, who visits your broken Conspirator to gloat?
- ♦ **A week later**, what reckless, last-ditch effort finally dooms your Conspirator?
- ♦ **A season later**, who rises to claim your Conspirator's dominion for themselves?
- ♦ **A year later**, who gathers with drinks to celebrate your Conspirator's demise?
- ♦ **Three years later**, what squalid, humiliating state do we find your Conspirator in?
- ♦ **Five years later**, the Knife looks out over a serene vista. Does it bring them peace?





mousehole press