

THE TALKING WAR

MIKE STILLWELL

A Psychosynthesis Role-Playing Game

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|----------------|--------------------------|
| The Magician | - Hypnotherapy |
| The Priestess | - Psychodynamic |
| The Empress | - Kleinian |
| The Emperor | - Freudian |
| The Hierophant | - Rogerian |
| The Lovers | - Relate |
| The Chariot | - Life coaching |
| Justice | - Cognitive |
| The Hermit | - Jungian |
| The Wheel | - Gestalt |
| Strength | - Behavioural |
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| The Tower | - C.P.N. |
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| The Sun | - Inner child work |
| Judgment | - Transactional analysis |
| The World | - The G.P. |



Introduction

Welcome to 'The Talking War'. It is an interactive story-telling game for two or more players. The two player game is called 'individual supervision', and the multi-player version is known as 'group supervision'.

One player, the supervisor, is the coordinator, referee and facilitator, while each of the other players will take on the role of a therapist, as well as playing other characters in the story at different times.

How to Play

The supervisor and the players decide on a work of fiction that they wish to explore. This may be in any medium - novel, poem, film, play, television, myth, fairy story, or even an image with a story attached (allegorical painting, willow pattern plate etc.) - that is discrete and finite (i.e. not an ongoing serial). It should have well defined characters and setting, and not be too complex or overlong.

The supervisor will ask which of the players would like to summarize the first chapter or sequence of the story, or to give a general overview or 'first impressions' if a painting etc. These will be posted to the players prior to the next game session or brought along ready for it. The rest of the first session will be spent with each player selecting and designing a therapist persona from a list of 22 character templates (based on the Tarot trumps.)

Designing Characters

Having chosen a style of therapy, the player then 'fleshes in' their character, choosing such details as age, name, background, appearance, history, goals etc. According to which model of counselling/therapy they have chosen, they then define their character's personality in terms of that model - which 'Way' they are on and where they are in terms of the change, maintenance, love

and will scale for psychosynthesis, which psychological function is uppermost or buried, and introvert/extrovert for Jungians, etc.

They then list, in order of preference, the nine therapist variables (respect, genuineness, empathy etc.), with the first choice numbered nine and the last choice at one. During the game the supervisor may ask the player to roll a dice to see if a particular intervention based on these variables succeeds. That is done by rolling on or under the appropriate number using a ten sided dice to succeed.

The Next Session

The appointed player 'presents' the main character featured in the first chapter, giving as much of their history and other details as can be gleaned, as well as a summary of their initial situation. Most stories begin with an initial stable pattern which is then knocked out of kilter in the story. This stable pattern may need to be extrapolated from the text as stories often begin at a point where the pattern is being knocked out of shape (for brevity or dramatic effect). A presenting issue should then be defined.

Other characters mentioned should be included in reference to the main character, although at this point the main character (M. C.) is seen as the 'identified patient'. The later perspective (that all characters are aspects of a single psyche - the authors) should not be made explicit at this point.

Some complex first chapters may need to be divided into sections. For instance that of 'Alice Through The Looking Glass' could be divided into three segments: in the drawing room, in the 'Jabberwocky' poem; in the looking glass room. Taking that example, an initial report might read:

"Client Alice, prepubescent girl of indeterminate age [8ish?]. No mention of father or mother, at least one sister and a nurse [and later a governess] are referred to. The only other people given are some boys who were earlier building a bonfire [we suspect story takes place on

November the 4th], and an undisclosed chess opponent to whom, it appears, Alice lost. Three cats are mentioned - Dinah, the old mother cat, and her two [or two of her] kittens, a white one called 'Snowdrop' and a black one called 'Kitty'. They are seen by Alice to be good and wicked respectively. Dinah is portrayed as being a bad mother for not being strict enough. Kitty has untangled a ball of 'worsted' while playing, and Alice compares Kitty to the Red Queen. In the first sentence we are told that 'the white kitten had nothing to do with it - it was the black kitten's fault entirely.'

The theme of punishment is introduced, and it is stated that Alice is saving all of Kitty's punishments up 'for Wednesday week'. This is followed by a reference to snow, and A. projects gentle and nurturing qualities onto it - a 'good mother' which is outside the family home, in nature.

The theme of chess is introduced, and in a key passage A. refers to a game that she might have won 'if it hadn't been for that nasty Knight, that came wriggling down among my pieces'. After this, Alice's sister and nurse are mentioned in quick succession; the sister objecting that she and Alice could not play kings and queens as there were only two of them, to which Alice replied that 'you can be one of them and I'll be all the rest', and the nurse in the context of a game in which Alice frightened her by shouting in her ear 'Nurse! Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyena, and you're a bone!'. It is at this point that Kitty as the Red Queen and entering the looking glass are brought in [as a punishment for Kitty]"

To this summary of the first part of chapter one would be added some first impressions of client A. from both the text and the Tenniel illustrations, some discussion of possible exclusion factors (schizoid tendencies, lives in world of make-believe and has perhaps not chosen to manifest, early wounding and splitting and of course possible abuse, narcissistic, ungrounded, addicted to fantasy, repressed anger towards mother substitute of nurse,

weak, etc.) and perhaps the beginning of an initial hypothesis and strategy, to be reviewed at the end of the first chapter as more information is gleaned.

An initial hypothesis might read; "Client A. seems isolated and maladapted with some borderline tendencies. She has suffered massive splitting due to early object relations which she is trying to deal with through projections. A's relationship with love and will, and particularly nurturance and punishment, constitute an almost obsessive focus, and this inner struggle is projected out (and perhaps acted out) indiscriminately. The theme of chess, particularly the 'black and white' aspects of the client, seems a useful metaphor for A. but care should be taken not to allow her to see reality in these terms only. Being 'checked' by (and on?) a 'nasty Knight', the focus on 'games', the anger towards 'nurse', the depiction of the old mother cat as ineffectual, the repetition of the theme of guilt and punishment, ambiguity towards nurturance, and the splitting between good Snowdrop, who is not to blame, and the bad pussy, Kitty, all strongly indicate earlier or current abuse, or perhaps sexual imagery is used as a metaphor for early wounding at oral and/or genital stages."

The strategy

To gather more information, But with awareness of recovered memory syndrome, to bring client more into her body, and to strengthen her sense of 'I'.

Client has regressive tendency to escape into unconscious; to the 'looking glass world', and here and now work seems advised. Visualizations contraindicated as A. is too likely to escape into imagery.

She is telling us that she has 'gone to pieces', chess pieces in this case, and perhaps would be advisable to co-operate with G. P. and see if Prozac might support this client in her process. I will need much support in supervision with this client as a transference neurosis (either positive or negative parent) seems almost

inevitable. It may be that she is too damaged to benefit from P.S., but some tentative chair work may be useful.

A. is starved of love and her 'hyena' subpersonality will show itself at some point - with me as the 'bone'. Her confusion between nurturance and sex makes me uncomfortable, and feel that I need to keep careful notes and keep firm physical boundaries around contact. Also check for signs of self harm and possible eating disorder. I find it difficult to judge if there is any possible benefit or likely positive outcome

To allowing A. to 'go further into' her unconscious processes. My fantasy is that this would lead to further disintegration, as, I feel, would any form of interpretation of her overtly sexual imagery. I intuit that it will be important for her to see her Self in the mirror and take a step into it!"

THE GENESIS CAMPAIGN

This game explores chapters 1 - 11 of Genesis [Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, and the Tower of Babylon. To quote the introduction to Genesis in the 'Good News Bible', "Throughout the book the main character is God, who judges and punishes those who do wrong, leads and helps his people, and shapes their history.']

Preparation

Construction of a visualisation beforehand.

The Story of Creation

Players choose their characters or pick Tarot cards to do so, or use a character from a previous game.

Perhaps the best way for the game to begin would be for the Supervisor or one of the players to lead a visualization based closely on the seven days of creation. It is suggested that the player's characters should be present as witnesses, 'standing' near God. At the end of each day the PC's [player characters] could try some non-judgmental interventions of the same type that one would use in connection with free drawing. 'I notice that..' or 'When you created -, how old were you feeling?' or perhaps 'I'm really struck by Your power; how would it feel not to be powerful?'

The players should feel free to analyze the birds and sea monsters and fruit as if they were images arising from the unconscious. How does creation fit in with the egg diagram? Either the Supervisor or one of the players will take the role of God here, or the experience could be shared. As the game is played and the visualization presented in seven parts, a setting should be established at the end of each 'day' for these dialogues to take place.

It may be that the players interventions may cause God to make a few changes [or even give up completely after a few days] , so at the end of the first session one of the players could volunteer to rewrite Genesis according to these changes and to include the players input. It's my experience that someone volunteering to be a 'scribe' for these games (but not the same person each week as it's a lot of work) adds an interesting dimension and provides a lasting record for all the players.

At the end of the first session volunteers are called to be the scribe for that week and another to do a case presentation on God based on that weeks play. During the time before the next session the Supervisor will prepare some material about the next section.

The Garden of Eden

There are a number of characters here: God, Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. Other items include the garden itself (with the four rivers), the animals and birds, The Tree of Knowledge, the Living Creatures and the Flaming Sword.

There is a continuity problem in the story, which is about why the garden of Eden seems to be separate from the rest of creation as described in the previous section (basically, where did Cain's wife come from?; Were there cities already outside of Eden?). Players may wish to question God about this. The supervisor may prepare a script by photocopying the text. One of the players will enter the story as a therapist character, and other players take on the parts of the story characters as needed. Since everything and everyone depicted seem to be aspects of God, some good chair work could be done here. Asking God to do some free-drawing around different aspects of the story could be useful, or to have the same player switching roles and playing all the parts. It might be interesting to make a body sculpture of God, Adam and Eve, the Snake and the Tree. An apple would be a good prop to have.

At one [or more] points in the story the action could be stopped and a supervision group formed, with the therapist 'bringing their client'. Other's could ask questions, suggest hypotheses and techniques etc. This might look like:

S [supervisor] - OK, stop again here. They've eaten the fruit. Therapist?

T [therapist] - It feels like a put up job, a set up. My client has created all aspects of this story, so I guess something primal is being re-enacted. I think that he's communicating an early betrayal, a soul wound. On some inner level he's acting out that betrayal with subpersonalities.

Player A - What's your counter-transference?

T - I feel angry; it's unfair. I don't ask much, but they've betrayed me.

Player B - Hang on, I don't think the client is God, it's the Jewish people.

S - Wait a minute. Where do you feel this unfairness?

T - My stomach, it's a sour feeling, like wanting to be sick.

S - And Adam and Eve have just eaten an apple. And if you were sick?

T - Yes! It's anger at injustice. Given everything, and it's my fault it's going to be taken away, I just know it. I'm picking up shame too, deep shame ...

S - So consciously He's feeling angry and justified at being let down, the great provider, then somehow under that He feels it's his fault as Adam and Eve, but they also feel set up. Thoughts anyone?

Player C - How about asking Him, 'This seems like a familiar feeling to you, being let down like this?'

Player A - Or 'What do you get from doing this to yourself. How does it serve you?'

Player C - I'd like to know more about what the snake means to Him. Is it sexuality or what. He could work on recognition and acceptance. What exactly is the understanding, the knowledge, that He's been hiding from himself?

Player B - I've got a sense that we could be seeing a re-enactment of seeing His parents naked or making love; this could be oedipal. I mean this guy claims he's created the first man, which has got to be his father, and then provided him with his mother on the understanding that they take charge of his perfect garden as non-sexual servants - we're talking narcissism and grandiosity the size of a planet here. And I think that this child/God's unrealistic sense of power is challenged by His parent's sexuality.. He's put sex outside himself too in all the imagery - it's rampant with sex! Snakes, trees, ribs, flaming swords. But you have to see God too as only an aspect of the Jewish psyche - the authority is a male overgrown child, wisdom is in sex, which is moving on culturally to the genital stage.

S - Erm, so how would you work with that?

Player B - Well, He's sublimated the creative urge into making the universe... I'd want to say to Him, the God aspect, 'Look, You're punishing everyone on the basis of their sexuality, which for You is the original sin. I mean circumcising every male and everything. Creating the universe is just avoidance activity, symbolic. Why don't we make a list of the Qualities inherent in your creation and see what sort of woman or Goddess they'd make?'

Player A - So you think His problem is just that He needs a good shag?

Player B - No, I think that culturally...

S - Therapist, where has this left you?

T - Confused. I'm not sure how to support the Jewish cultural unconscious through an oedipal wounding. Could I build its sense of 'I'?

Player B - That's the Messiah ! I think that if we -

S - Can we keep to Genesis please?

T - I'd like to try the body sculpting idea. If we could maybe set some chairs up so that we've got God above Adam and Eve with the Tree behind and the snake on the ground, we could do some dialoguing between ourselves. It could be made explicit that we're all part of one body.

S - Well, there's five of us. I'm God here on this chair, Adam and Eve stand here in front, and you be the snake down here, player B. This lamp stand can be the Tree. OK, therapist, you facilitate this, but we'll just start. 'Oh., I'm so angry! After all I've done for you!'

Player B - Hold it, I haven't lost my legs yet, I'm standing up.

S - Whatever. 'Where are you, man? Why are you hiding in the trees?' ...

The Expulsion from the Garden

S - 'So I'm putting a flaming sword up that'll keep you out' to the group. Therapist?

T - This other tree you mentioned, the tree of life where you live forever if you eat it, that you said they can't eat of either. When I asked you as God what that would mean to you if they ate it, you got quite upset. What's your process recall around that when you were playing God?

S - It was about power, I think.

Player B - I'm wondering if this whole thing is about birth experience - as the Grofs -

S - Yes, power and a sense of the retention of power and control; a massive controller subpersonality I think.

Player B - When I was the snake and managed to talk you into not taking my

legs away, it felt like I was dealing with a real controlling brat.

T - I think it was what I was saying to God about free will leading to change and freedom from old patterns of behaviour, with the snake being a symbol for that, about wisdom being the wild card.

S - Yes, as God I did feel a bit led, actually, particularly when player B was insisting I not only didn't handicap him but gave him wings as well.

Player B - I was thinking of Quezacoatl.

Player C - Did you feel railroaded into allowing me as Eve to stay in the garden and just kicking Adam out?

S - No, as God it felt quite good to have you all to myself. As you pointed out it doesn't say anything about Eve being forced to leave the garden. I did feel you forced my hand a bit insisting on the garden becoming a green community of feminist witches, and I felt a bit mean taking out all of Adam's ribs to provide you with a coven. But I did like the idea of becoming the horned consort of the Goddess and expressing my fecund nature as a priapic deity.

Player A - I know it made sense at the time, but having to live outside the garden by the sweat of my brow and bear children as well seemed unfair. I'm left wondering if the therapist didn't impose her own value system on the client's process a little. I've got a feeling this could change the rest of the book quite profoundly, the whole of humanity being gay...

T - Typical homophobe. Anyway, it sorts out the question of where Cain got a wife from.

S - Yes, that was ingenious. When you suggested I make a second Adam -

Player A - Darren -

S - ...and that they go off together and start a family, and have two sons.. .

Player A- Gary and Gerald

S - ...who found a dynasty of morris-dancing vegetarian tree surgeons, who travel the world helping beached whales and mend bird's wings in rustic owl sanctuaries. Um, It seemed like a really nice idea. Particularly that they should all be native Amerindians in harmony with nature, in their mock Tudor sweat lodges and Arran sweaters.

T - Well, I just intuited that was what needed to happen for this client.

Player B - The Jewish cultural unconscious?

T - No. Eve.

S - Oh. Oh, right. Well, next week we were going to do Noah and the Flood, but I guess none of that needs to happen now, or any of the rest of the book really. Therapist, you wanted to continue with the story of what happens in the garden with Eve and her coven. Tell me, as I'm God, what is it exactly that happens to the Goddess's horned consort at the midsummer rite that you mentioned?

T - You'll find out.

S - Ok then, fine Well, that's it for this week guys, see you next week.

Alternatively

Doing a different take on this, and imagining that the session in the garden hadn't taken such an extreme turn, it might be that the group had used this second session for deepening awareness rather than initiating change. In that case, the next session might look like:

The third session

Adam and Eve are both cast from the garden. They have two sons, who make a sacrifice to God of grain and meat, and God rejects Cain's offering of grain. Cain kills Abel and is cursed to wander the

earth, but with a mark on his forehead so that none shall slay him.

After this is reported to the group, the therapist does a session with God around all this. The group may wish to look at psychopathology here and the various personality disorders, and maybe look at a possible referral at this point.

In the next piece of text, supernatural beings are mating with the women and producing giants, and God decides to limit how long people can live to 120 years. He also decides to wipe out the whole of humanity and also all the animals and birds on the planet, except for one family and a number of pairs of animals and birds.

Before this takes place, the therapist could do a session with God to explore this a little, maybe hitting cushions or putting mankind and the entire animal kingdom on a chair.

When the flood comes, some creative ways of working might be developed to look at a meta view of this and what it might mean infra-psychically.

The fourth and last session

The Tower of Babel looked at in terms of psychological mountaineering and the concept of difficulties experienced during spiritual emergency. Also integrating subpersonalities in line with higher purpose.

Lastly, Sodom and Gomorrah. Looking here at perfectionism and borderline tendencies. Acceptance. Maybe some sort of intervention designed to bring God to a basic awareness of spiritual principles. Destruction of Sodom as repressed latent homosexuality perhaps, or sexuality generally. Perhaps a sex therapist needed. Maybe some couples counselling between God and his creation. We really need to look at this fantasy about Lots' daughter's getting him drunk and sleeping with him after his wife is turned into a pillar of salt.

The Game World

There are two levels to the game world or campaign world. The first is the 'outer world' in which the player's therapist characters live, which is almost exactly similar to our own. The second is the 'inner world' which is comparable to the cultural or collective unconscious. It is here that stories, myths and characters live and breathe in an archetypal realm of metaphor and intrinsic meaning.

Player's characters are designed as interfaces with this inner realm, and it is through them that changes may be facilitated. It is not suggested that players take on the roles of well known therapists such as Freud, Jung or Assagioli, since these in themselves have an archetypal existence in the cultural unconscious and there might be some question of who was using who as an interface with a different world. Such figures may of course be encountered on the Inner.

Each geographic region of the cultural unconscious is more or less self contained, so that English stories involving far-flung corners of the world fit into the boundaries of 'Inner England'. Thus Sir Frances Drake and Cadfael mix with at least one Camelot, 'Alice', Shakespeare, Sherwood, Dracula, Tess, Lord of the Rings, and Sherlock Holmes.

It may be that various of the therapeutic disciples have founded Institutes, way houses and redoubts on the Inner, where journeymen students venturing into the collective my rest between adventures. Perhaps something similar to the Knights Templar might evolve, with military as well as therapeutic Hospitallers seeking to protect travelling professionals as they make interventional pilgrimages into the Inner realms on quests to differentiate, and perhaps civilise, consciousness, according to their own theory base.

One possible [hopeful] result of the game will be to question the motives and effectiveness of interventions when it is understood that all the characters involved are simply aspects of an inter-related whole, and that all stories are aspects of the great story.

THE TALKING WAR PROJECT A REVIEW

Mike Stillwell has developed a novel and fascinating idea into a novel and fascinating game. It is a lavishly produced and richly illustrated 'interactive story-telling game', otherwise described as a role-playing game. The various players design 'therapist' alter-egos with which to experience the alternate world of Stillwell's creation - none other than the collective (or cultural) unconscious! The premise is that popular stories and myths form patterns or constellations of energy in the collective ('complexes' to you and me), and the players must untangle these knots to release such kinks in the process of Spirit descending into matter. This is done, naturally enough, by 'therapising' the Anima Mundi. The players each choose a style of therapy for their characters, and form a multi-disciplinary supervision group for this purpose. Under the direction of a supervisor player they 'enter' works of fiction and practice interventions appropriate to their particular disciplines in order to achieve their long term goal - the sanity of the world psyche.

Stillwell has evolved a simple and ingenious game-mechanism to quantify the success or otherwise of particular actions and interventions. All skills are assigned to one of nine headings - the traditional Therapist Variables [T. V. 's] of Empathy, Genuineness, Confrontation, Respect, Congruence, Immediacy, Self-Disclosure, Self-Actualization and Concreteness. Each player assigns the numbers one to nine for each of these, with nine as the one~ that his character shows the most aptitude for. To test these a ten-sided dice is thrown, and if the player rolls on or under the number of the T. V. concerned, then his character succeeds in that intervention. In a contest of a particular T.V. between two characters, they are matched by adding the appropriate number to the role of an ordinary dice. These 'test/match' rolls are the only dice rolls used, and any first time player can pick up the how of it in a few minutes. Even these minimal mechanics are largely unnecessary as the accent here is on role-play.

Each style of therapy is adequately described on an A4 sheet given to the appropriate player, so even 'tyro' therapists can participate in play immediately. As players progress through a series of games they can develop their characters skills, strengths and foibles, moving from 'trainee' through several years of 'game time' to the higher echelons of their profession. But there are dangers, ranging from burn-out to insanity of various (chillingly described) kinds. And of course one's player may become 'lost on the Inner.'

One of the most fascinating aspects of this innovative game is the setting of the game itself, the Inner. The Cultural Unconscious is lovingly and comprehensively detailed, and I loved the idea that, though well known stories are strong and distinct, older and half-forgotten tales have become 'corrupted' (in the same fashion as software), and as they fragment so little known characters wander through incongruous and decaying landscapes of other lost or abandoned tales or belief-systems, slowly being pulled towards an entropic vortex of final forgetfulness. It is difficult to do justice to the breath-taking breadth of vision involved here, and we can only applaud Stillwell's creative genius. And it's fun to play!

Where else can you find weird tales of therapy, with the 'greats' of psychology as mad scientists and empire builders in the collective unconscious? Where else can you find and interact with all your favourite characters and settings from fiction and have the chance to put right all the irritating plots and endings that have made you groan? And where else can you find all this and an entropic Vortex at the centre of the Game Universe towards which decaying and forgotten settings slide, and neglected characters wander singly or in groups, picking through the ruins of imagination?

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Also available to compliment the game are beautifully designed pewter figures to represent the therapist alter-egos through whom you experience the Inner Realms, lovingly crafted to show therapists of various disciplines.

Pictures to be posted soon of this range of detailed 2" figures, including:

'Male Freudian interpreting,'

'Female psychodynamic counsellor working with the counter-transference,'

'Keen young male Rogerian being congruent.'

New release this week:

'Psychosynthesis guide nodding (with shawl and dangly earrings)'

A large range of fictional characters are of course available, as is our 'DSM denizens' set.

THE TALKING WAR

(already known to fans simply as 'TTW') is a 250 page perfect bound book, priced 24.99 at all leading retailers. Further titles developing the game world are expected soon, each focusing on a particular literary genre. The 'Supervisor's Companion' and 'Therapist's Handbook' are also available for the same price.

Out next month is 'A Psychopathological Bestiary', which is a beautifully illustrated 'Naturalist's Guide' to distortions and defense mechanisms in symbolic and metaphoric form.

The first of the 'Genre' compilations, describing children's stories, is to follow in time for Christmas.



Then my Soul, my real self, appeared



*She stepped
into the
centre
and spoke:*