

Example

Game: Eternal Companions

Authors: Jacinta Smith and Stuart Barrow

To discover you are immortal, wouldn't that be grand? To discover you haven't aged since 1834. Nothing about you has changed.

Yet it's a sad thing to see all you love and hold dear fade away. To see strong families wither and die, buildings destroyed simply to make way for progress. Technology develops, and builds on itself, all the while becoming more confusing and further from understanding.

Each of you hides in her own way. Helen hides in the present, pretends she isn't immortal at all, has a husband and tries for a family. Margaret hides in history, pretending two hundred years have not passed. Agnes hides in the future, hoping for something better will come - and soon. Elizabeth hides in feigned innocence, an ageless mind trapped in a child's body. And there's Hazel, who hides in money. Such companions for an eternal life.

You don't meet so often anymore. You celebrated the end of the 19th century and then the 20th. Almost everything you know has changed. But the tradition of helping each other through the funerals hasn't. All the people are gone, but the building remains.

134 Goldbright Circuit. The Athenaeum Club. One of the most important buildings. To all of you. Tonight is the wake. Tomorrow it is demolished.

A collaborative storytelling game for five accidental immortals.

The collaborative storytelling style invites an increased contribution to setting, character and story from the players.

The Phenomenonline Games Rating System.

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| What's the game again? | A collaborative storytelling game about five accidental immortals |
| Seriousness? | On the serious side |
| Genre/Setting | Modern day melodrama, with historical flashbacks. Light sci-fi/horror elements. |
| Movie Rating | M |
| System | Systemless; guided collaborative storytelling. |
| GM Style | Best suited to someone happy to guide the players through the various plot points and provide prompts rather than direct action. Runs with a single GM, though we've run it with two. |
| Number of players | Ideally 5 players; can run with less. |
| Previously run at... | Phenomenon 2011 (Triptych)/Sydcon 2012 |

Eternal companions

Jacinta Smith and Stuart Barrow

Note: This is a two part character sheet which goes in line with your dual role as both someone who plays this character and someone who is a co-GM of the game. This first section is the base of the character. Hopefully, presenting the information this way will help you see where the fun is in this character, see her thoughts and hopes clearly while still giving you the ability to make the character yours and help GM this character's development during the game. The second section is a more common character sheet, which provides an atmospheric version of her.

Character's name: Agnes (age 16)

Personality hook: Sensible, but with Pollyanna overtones. "Things are supposed to be better, and *get* better."

Weakness: Singleminded

Character notes:

Prior to the accident, Agnes was a normal upper class Victorian girl. She idolised her cousin Margaret and led a fairly normal life. *(The circumstances of the accident and the sequence of events that followed will be developed as part of the game. All five characters were there and the accident froze them in time. Their bodies will constantly return to the state that they were in that day.)* After the accident, after Margaret dropped any thought of continuing her research, Agnes took it up. She has been determined to crack what happened to them ever since. This single-minded determination has shaped Agnes' character ever since. She constantly looks to the future as a utopia to come and is determined to make it happen as fast as possible.

Looming disaster

Right now, Agnes is on top of the world. She is one of the foremost scientists internationally working on the aging problem. Agnes has, through the use of prosthetics and makeup, been aging herself for years. She is currently the head of a famous research school within a university. However, she has reached the end of her professional life. The university has been making noises for a few years now that Agnes should retire and let the young bloods take over. Agnes has been fighting it, but has reached the end of her ability to push the dreaded retirement date back. She retires in the next few months. With the advent of computers and the internet, Agnes will have to go back to year 11 and start again, though college, undergrad, postgrad & doctorates, gaining a network of contacts and professional colleagues, through menial entry level jobs, tutoring, building up her professional reputation and so on. Many years of work wasted before she gets a new persona accepted to the right levels of professional academia that she is able to start her research again. She needs access to the labs she has now to continue her work, and she won't see them again for fifteen to twenty years. Downtime means she cedes control of the direction and nature of the research; her former students will take her work away from the studies she needs or make advances while she goes back over old material. It's not the loss of knowledge that hurts – it's the loss of status, of respect and of a verifiable research record.

Things to do

Search the Athenaeum club one last time. Agnes has searched the Club before, but this is her very last chance to thoroughly check the building for any lost notes or other material which might help her research.

Things to feel and argue about

(This is up to the player to incorporate into the game as they see the opportunity (or create it). This section requires the player to be proactive in their development of the character.)

Agnes could try to:

- gain some grounding – currently her research means everything to her, she doesn't face the present as she is too busy in the future
- work through the ethics of being immortal, should her research be successful and she is able to grant or halt immortality, what does that mean for the five characters? What does it mean for the rest of humanity?
- work through the possibility of failure – what will happen to her should her research be unsuccessful? It's been a hundred and fifty years, with little to show for it – should Agnes give up? Can she?
- reflect on her relationship with the others. What has changed? How did she feel about the people then, and now? How does she feel about Hazel's lovers? Elizabeth's benefactors? How did she feel about Andrew, Margaret's beloved, now long dead?

Agnes, frustrated scholar

In her shadow

As a girl, I was always a little in awe of my cousin, Margaret, as she was of her father. She loved him dearly, and she tried to show this by immersing herself in his research. Did he notice? I don't know, and she doesn't know. But she could cite his papers word for word; she knew all of the researchers, all of the studies, in uncle's field. She was wonderful, magnificent in her knowledge, at least to me. And I was like a canvas, a screen for her to project her genius on. She was so smart that the rest of us were just like so much furniture.

She doesn't do that any more.

A life of learning

It's funny to think that we didn't notice the accident at the time. Only later, as the repercussions came out, the deaths, the damage, did we know that it was something important, life-changing. Especially for us. We haven't aged the merest moment since the accident.

And I want to know why.

I asked Margaret, to start with. She told me her theories. Well, her father's theories. Within months, it was clear that she'd stopped thinking about it, that she had no independent thoughts on the subject.

And that wasn't, that isn't good enough.

I took Uncle's notes, his journals, his equipment. It took years, but I forced myself to learn everything he knew. At times, it seemed that I'd come tantalisingly close to discovering his secrets, and understanding the accident, but it was one dead end after another. I had nowhere else to turn, no more leads to follow.

Uncle's bequest included a scholarship in the Athenaeum for Margaret and her descendents; she wasn't using it, so I posed as her daughter to take it up myself. I was a curiosity, a girl pretending to be a scientist, but it opened the scope for my researches.

Around and around

My condition started to become apparent to those who worked with me. At first it was a joke, an opportunity for flattery, but it began to draw attention. Combined with my focus on life science and longevity research, it became distinctly unsettling. I "retired", and joined a girl's college under an assumed identity, where I had to hide my knowledge until such time as I could re-establish my research base.

I lasted longer, this time, using body language and cosmetics to give myself the appearance of ageing, but one can hide a secret only so long. After some thirty years, I once again had to abandon my laboratory, my colleagues, my reputation, my work, and rebuild everything.

Time and again

I like my latest "incarnation"; I've seen educational opportunities for women blossom and bear fruit, starting from my university days. I am no longer a novelty - come look at the lady researcher! - and if I have not found the keys to our condition, I have made real advances in the medical field. I've had students develop from naive young hopefuls into world leaders. My lab has an unparalleled reputation.

And now, without solving my life's mystery, having seemed on the edge of revelation for twenty years or more, I must admit that it's time to give it all up again, to become a child once more.

And it breaks my heart.

People I like, people like me

My cousin **Margaret** was once the most important person in my life. I loved her like a sister, like a second self. She had gifts that I could only dream of: grace, beauty, and the intellect of Athena herself.

And she threw it all away. Margaret hasn't changed since the accident. She spends her days hidden away in the same old house, haunting it as if she *had* died that day, along with all the others. It's a brutal waste.

And the worst thing is that, in the end, after all my work, I've achieved no more than she has.

I haven't seen Margaret in years, it hurts to see her the way she is. So I'm glad to know that **Helen** looks in on her. Helen looks in on all of us. She was once Margaret's personal maid, though that hasn't been the relationship for years. She drifts through the years, with no ambitions but no regrets, a free spirit. I don't know how she does it; without my work, I should go insane.

And I wonder if that's what happened to **Hazel**, my own maid. Hazel seemed so worldly, so wonderful when we were children. She knew such impossible secrets, about men - about workmen and about gentlemen - about the world outside our door. And now, she plays, which is the only way I can describe it. She sells herself to buy things; she buys and loses whole empires. She lies and manipulates and tears things apart. I don't know what she wants. But it never looks like she's close to getting it.

And saddest of all is **Lizzie**, my sister. Lizzie was only fourteen when the accident happened. The rest of us can pass for adults - young adults, unless we work at it like I do - but Lizzie is always and ever a child. I can hold my cycle together for decades if I need to, before going back to being a little girl again, but Lizzie can't hold a life together for more than a few years. After all this time, to always be a child, to *have* to be a child... I can't imagine it.

I saw her the other day. There were some school children in the lecture. I didn't pay much attention to them. Not until right at the end anyway. Then I saw her. Sitting near the back, but paying attention. Elizabeth. My sister. She must have known it was me, despite the makeup and the rest that I wear. But she didn't give any sign. And then, when the teacher told them to, she hoisted her bag on her shoulder and filed out with the rest. Simply doing what she was told by someone barely more than a tenth of her age.

I see Helen more than Hazel, and Hazel more than Lizzie. I don't see Margaret unless I have to.

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Character's name: Margaret (age 16)

Personality hook: Kind, but very lonely. Negative about science and its so called 'progress'

Weakness: Margaret lives in Victorian times and doesn't really understand today's world. "Things were better back when..."

Character notes:

Before the accident, Margaret was a scholar and a scientist. Her father established the Athenaeum club as a repository of learning and communion with geniuses. Margaret loved the idea of the Club. *(The circumstances of the accident and the sequence of events that followed will be developed as part of the game. All five characters were there and the accident froze them in time. Their bodies will constantly return to the state that they were in that day.)* Margaret blames herself for what happened, but thought she could fix it. Hazel and Helen convinced her to try again many years later to immortalise husbands for everyone. Instead, trying to reproduce the accident killed a boy Margaret was in love with - Andrew. Margaret blames Hazel and Helen for Andrew's death. This was the tipping point. Margaret retreated from science, from the world and has been existing in her Father's house ever since, practically haunting it. She does not interact with the outside world at all, because she finds it threatening and confusing.

Looming disaster

Margaret's house is literally falling down around her. It's been condemned. The police visited two months ago with the condemned notice and gave her instructions to move out. Margaret has ignored their instructions *(The player can choose why; there's a possibility Margaret simply didn't understand, or that she hoped it would all go away or something else)* and within the next few weeks the police will return to forcibly remove her. She has also been visited by a psychologist hired on instructions from the police, who is looking into her sanity. Margaret fears she will be moved to a mental institution – and even if not, the outside world holds fear, coldness, crowds and madness.

Things to do

Commemorate Andrew's death. *(The player needs to decide how this is to be set up. One possibility is to put flowers on the site where he died, another is to hold a funeral service. This is the last chance Margaret will ever have to do this, so it needs to be something that has meaning to her.)*

Things to feel and argue about

(This is up to the player to incorporate into the game as they see the opportunity (or create it). This section requires the player to be proactive in their development of the character.)

Margaret could try to:

- gain perspective – yes the accident was her fault, but shutting herself away from the world isn't an answer, it's just hiding: "Should she move on?" The other answer is to stop completely, to truly "turn into the ghost" she has been all these years.
- offer forgiveness to Helen and Hazel – Margaret has been blaming them for a very long time now. Possibly their desire for a companion is something she could accept as the second accident was just that, an accident?
- Seek resolution from the other four girls - are their current lives her responsibility?
- figure out whether it is worthwhile to keep going on or simply, to end it.

Margaret, living ghost.

All falls down

Father was a great man of science, a genius. Among all the injustices that the accident brought us, the cruellest seems that I should live on interminably, and that he should die.

Once, my dearest wish was to emulate him, that I should prove myself worthy of his legacy. Now, now I have no dearest wish, unless it is to go back to that time and live it again, properly, or unless it is to end.

An island, sinking

I continue to live – although, really, I should say, to merely exist – in Father's house. The others act as if this is a strange choice. Agnes, especially, wished me to bring my so-called gifts to the world. But if there is little comfort in this old, decaying manse, there is none at all outside. No, if I could, I would live here forever.

Alas, it cannot be; I am discovered. Despite my modest needs, despite my carefully preserved solitude, my house has been the source of interest. The modern constables have entered and explored my house, an act of gravest violation, and shouted that I should leave, as the place is condemned. The young constable means to find me out, to expose me, to destroy my home and drag me out into the cold, terrible world – he has threatened doctors, and solicitors, and worse.

What shall become of me, who has no place in that world, when this place is no more?

A world of change

And the world has changed so very much. This was always the way. Though I seldom found reason to leave Father's house, each time I did, more had changed. The world I knew fell away from me. The changes are brash, jarring, destructive, painful. The unthinkable is now commonplace, and the eternal truths ... gone.

And so, I leave the house more rarely still, and so when I do the changes are bigger, worse, more terrifying. Few things remain – the Athenaeum still stands, I'm told – and among them there is nothing left I care for.

Sisters in Eternity

But if the house is gone, at least I can be assured that my family remains unchanged. Though, if truth be told, the decades and centuries have left marks of their passage upon the souls, if not the faces, of my kin.

My cousin **Agnes**, for example, has left propriety and virtue in the dust. A woman of this horrendous age, she is unforgivably rude, unforgivably forthright, unforgivably *modern*.

It must be said, though, that the hardest thing I find to forgive is that it was Agnes and not I who took up the torch of Father's inquiries; that she is every daughter and granddaughter that he could have wished.

Her tiny sister, **Lizzie**, is worse, though. Not just modern but stuck in the *now*, she barely seems to remember the past. She represents everything that has changed between my time and the present – hideous, hideous!

Their maidservant, **Hazel**, has not changed nearly so much. Once, you would have questioned whether this was a good thing – the girl was horrid, scandalous, cruel, resentful – but she, at least, remembers the world as it was. And so she remains the same, grasping and acquisitive, shameless and manipulative. The world has places for a woman like that, and she's gone into them willingly and knowingly.

And it aches, knowing that she has been able to push herself onto the world like that without letting it change her; it speaks of strength I had not guessed at.

And then there is dear **Helen**, my own servant. Helen still visits, dropping around in the middle of the night with kindness, some gentle encouragement, words of wisdom. She wishes me to come out, engage with the world, much as Agnes does, as if my own wishes meant nothing. How I hate these visits; I am sure it is she who led the constable to my house and my secret, even if she does not know it.

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Character's name: Hazel (age 19)

Personality hook: Plays a blond bimbo, but underneath is ruthless

Weakness: Hazel isn't as smart as she thinks she is

Character notes:

Hazel is cold-blooded, ruthless, and determined. She covers it with a veneer of helplessness and victimhood that others don't see through. She has had a hard life, and was brought from the gutter by Agnes' parents to be a servant to Agnes and Elizabeth. She has always been determined to prove herself 'better' than the other four, prove that she wouldn't have needed their help in the first place. In her mind, better has become 'richer'. The money isn't the point – if it were, Hazel might settle for less.

Once the accident happened, she set out to become rich using her most powerful tools: seduction and manipulation. *(The circumstances of the accident and the sequence of events that followed will be developed as part of the game. All five characters were there and the accident froze them in time. Their bodies will constantly return to the state that they were in that day.)* She has been marginally successful many times. But as she doesn't have the smarts to control her fortunes, she inevitably gets swindled and loses them all. That's when she returns to the basics which she has experience in. She builds her empires up, but has never been able to keep them – and the highs have never lasted long at all.

Looming disaster

Hazel was the one who bought the Athenaeum Club many years ago. *(The player can choose what Hazel was planning on doing with it – knock it down out of spite? Redevelop it as a nightclub? Were there sentimental reasons?).* But her advisor took all of her money away from her, and now the Club is to be demolished to build apartments. Hazel has tried unsuccessfully to get her fortune back. After tonight, even the clothes off her back will be taken. Something about a 'Trust' owning everything and her advisor owning the 'Trust'. Money is power, power is a game and Hazel has lost again.

Things to do

Get a photo of the five girls on the roof of the Athenaeum Club. *(The player needs to decide why this photo is so important to Hazel – is it to show how far she's come? Is it to compare herself to the others? To use as blackmail material down the track should it be required? Is this where Hazel first learned that she could use seduction to further her own ends?)*

Gain closure – She and Helen convinced Margaret to re-run the experiment years ago with the idea that they could make eternal husbands for themselves. Andrew, Margaret's beloved, was killed and Margaret blames Helen and Hazel for his death.

Search the Athenaeum club one last time to see if there is anything which can help Hazel.

Things to feel and argue about

(This is up to the player to incorporate into the game as they see - or make - the opportunity. This section requires the player to be proactive in their development of the character.)

Hazel could try to:

- gain some measure of acceptance – acceptance that her life has been hard, but that doesn't necessarily mean she has to continue the same cycles, acceptance that those around her won't necessarily put her down and use her.
- learn that “power is a game, money is a way of keeping score” is a very harsh view of the world
- see that Agnes' parents were trying to help her as best as they could, and question whether the other four deserve her anger or her guilt?

Hazel, hated beauty.

The Steel Rose

“Don't hate me because I'm beautiful”, the lady said. Those were my words. They don't hate me because I'm beautiful. I can give them plenty of other reasons to hate me. That's the way it has always worked out, anyway.

I didn't ask for this. God knows what made Agnes' parents lift me off the streets, and God only knows what made them put their brats in my charge. But they did, and God knows it was better in the room under the stairs than where I was before.

So I was with them when Wonderful Uncle's world came crashing down, and when the accident made us what we are.

And having spent my life in fear of violence, brutalisation and starvation, immortality was a source of incredible freedom.

A world of opportunity

The world offers so much to those who are not afraid to take it. And I have nothing to fear. There are others like me – not immortal, but not afraid. I take from them, and they take from me. One big, eternal game.

I've been on top of that game, on top of the world. Riches beyond imagining. Anything I wanted. I've been there. Once.

And I was knocked right back down to the bottom, my empire in ruins, my world crumbling around me.

I think I have what it takes to get back there again. I have strength, I have brains, I have beauty. And I always will have. The world is transient; I am forever.

The judgement of one's peers

But to them, *them*, I am always, *always*, Hazel the serving girl. Hazel the gutter rat, Hazel the menial, Hazel the slut. Nothing I can do ever makes up for this in their eyes. I am always beneath them, as if my birth defined who I am – forever.

I will make them see. I will.

My jury

Once, I was a servant to **Agnes** and **Elizabeth**, catering to their every whim. These days, Agnes, the elder, feigns equal standing, but she clearly believes that her ineffectual “research” is a more meaningful pursuit than mine. Elizabeth barely notices anything outside of her circle of children, and has spent the years playing children's games. But at least Elizabeth is grateful when I give her stuff. At least I'm clearly better off than Elizabeth.

And their cousin **Margaret** never even left her house. A shut-in, forever afraid of the big bad world – and she has the *nerve* to look down on me. And her former servant **Helen** is nearly as bad – she wants to *save* me, no less. What from? The lovers she was afraid to take, the riches she never claimed? All this time, and Helen stays as she was, always kind, always caring.

Screw that.

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Character's name: Helen (age 17)

Personality hook: Calm, caring and gentle – a fairy princess without a happy ending.

Weakness: While Helen is the emotional center of the group, she's also jaded and feels alone

Character notes:

Helen tries hard to be the person she once was, gentle and kind. She's been gentle and kind for a very long time now. It is apparent to Helen that this is fast becoming a veneer others don't see through covering someone who is jaded, alone and despondent.

Helen used to be the maid to Margaret, but after the accident happened and everyone drifted apart, Helen has spent the intervening years trying to re-connect with the innocent girl who wanted a home and a family. Helen has had lovers and husbands over the years, all of whom she has had to leave once the difference in aging became apparent. She's tried for a baby for a very long time now, but has never succeeded. The pain of these lost relationships is weighing very heavily on her.

In a last attempt at creating connections and relationships, Helen has reached out to the other four under the cover of bringing them together for the Athenaeum club's funeral. This was the site of the experiment, tomorrow the building will be demolished. *(The circumstances of the accident and the sequence of events that followed will be developed as part of the game. All five characters were there and the accident froze them in time. Their bodies will constantly return to the state that they were in that day.)* Helen sees it as possibly the last time any of the five of them have any reason to be together. If she can't get the relationships to work between the five, there is nothing else.

Looming disaster

Helen currently has a significant relationship which is about to end *(The player needs to decide what this relationship is and why it is ending – i.e. she could have a foster child who is dying or a husband who is leaving her, or something else)*. The fact is Helen simply doesn't care whether this relationship ends or not. Helen is the one who is supposed to care, but caring has lost its meaning, along with all other experiences Helen has had over the years. Helen has a facade, but she recognises that this is all it is and the idea that she only has a facade left is abhorrent.

Things to do

Get the five characters to connect with each other in a meaningful way. Solid connections between the five girls are the only thing which will last. *(The player needs to decide how this is to be set up. One possibility is to get the others talking and feeling for each other. Each is currently so wrapped up in their own concerns, they barely notice the others are alive)*

Search the Athenaeum club one last time to see if there is anything which can help the girls.

Things to feel and argue about

(This is up to the player to incorporate into the game as they see the opportunity (or create it). This section requires the player to be proactive in their development of the character.)

Helen could try to:

- gain some measure of peace – her life has always been striving towards it though the connections she's tried to make, but they have been short-lived.
- gain forgiveness – She and Hazel convinced Margaret to re-run the experiment with the idea that they could make eternal husbands for themselves. Andrew, Margaret's beloved, was killed and Margaret blames Helen and Hazel for his death.
- figure out whether there is any more to life than just her inability to be a mother.
- figure out whether it is worthwhile to keep going on or simply, to end it.

Helen , gentle spirit

When I look back through the years – so very many years! - I must think that I have been blessed by providence. Once, before the accident, I sometimes felt myself grow angry with my lot – why should I be a serving girl, and Margaret a lady? But then, it is never so bad as it might appear; I'm not sure I could have suffered half what Hazel did.

The accident made us all more alike than different; it reduced the barriers between us. It took years, I think, for us to realise this, but we did, and I think it made us closer.

But now, we don't see each other so often. I think we each see our private pain reflected in the others' eyes – we all have our crosses to bear, and we think the others can't possibly understand.

Or do we fear they understand us all too well?

A world of wonder

The world has changed so much since the accident; so much is now within humanity's grasp. There is so much to see, to experience, to know, to do. Had we lived out our natural spans, we would not have seen such things; it is something to be grateful for.

And if age brings wisdom, then we must all have vastly more than our allotted share; I can look back on my life and feel that its balance is right. I can only hope it stays that way – but how can I judge? I'm not normal by any measure, and I can feel myself losing empathy for people. They'll be gone so soon, after all, to whatever reward is theirs, but not mine. The path that is left for me both depresses and scares me – shall I be left a waking husk, with no finer feeling at all?

Freedom from the needs of the flesh does not mean freedom from, or even understanding of, the needs of the soul. As time goes by, one sensation becomes much like another. Every husband I've taken I've lost, one way or another. And the same for every friend I've made, every child I've saved, every act I've ever done.

A hole in the heart

Does anything have meaning?

I know what I want. I want to be complete. I want the things I can't have. I want a lover who will love me the rest of my life. I want a family. I want a daughter, and I want a grand-daughter, and I want to share a house with people who love me, and I want my daughter to fall in love and bring her lover to celebrate holidays with my family. All I've got now is four women who are like me and are falling apart because of it, only they can't fall apart because nothing can ever happen to us.

And if nothing happens, then nothing is real, nothing has meaning.

And if an eternal life has no meaning, then the alternative is ... obvious.

Companions on the journey

We have all gone our separate ways – all of us know loneliness, more thoroughly than anyone. We still have much to teach each other, I feel, for none of us are happy. **Agnes** seeks to understand the why of what we are, and isn't content to leave it a glorious mystery as I am. She lives in the world, by putting down roots and making herself look older. She has stronger, more lasting friendships than I do, though she's cautious and doesn't let anyone get close. I let people get close, but never for too long – a different approach to the same problem.

Her sister **Elizabeth** hides herself in her childishness; she's changed the most out of all of us, though she's always stayed a little girl. There's a comfort to that; I can pretend for a moment that she's my little girl, that she's my responsibility. But it's fleeting; she doesn't have the attention span for a long-term relationship. Their cousin **Margaret** hasn't changed at all – she clings to her old life by hiding

herself away. I visit Margaret in her old, dilapidated house, and she won't come out, not for anything. It is terrible to see.

And **Hazel**... Hazel was Margaret's maid, like I was to Agnes and Elizabeth. She had a rougher life than I did before the accident, and she never let me forget it. But we are more alike than different. Since the accident, she has done what I have done – look for meaning. But she has looked to gain, to sensation, to control, to seduction and manipulation. So where I can look back and still be sure that my life is in balance – more good than bad, more hope than despair – I can't see how Hazel can.

These are my people, my only people, and I need to keep them together, because if they fall apart, then I'll fall apart, and I can't fall apart. If I fall apart, what is there left of me?

Note: *This is a two part character sheet which goes in line with your dual role as both someone who plays this character and someone who is a co-GM of the game. This first section is the base of the character. Hopefully, presenting the information this way will help you see where the fun is in this character, see her thoughts and hopes clearly while still giving you the ability to make the character yours and help GM this character's development during the game. The second section is a more common character sheet, which provides an atmospheric version of her.*

Character's name: Elizabeth (age 14)

Personality hook: Plays a 14 year old teenager, but underneath is frustrated and lonely

Weakness: Elizabeth is constantly taken as an immature teenager. Sometimes it's hard not to live down to expectations.

Character notes:

Elizabeth was the youngest of the girls at the Athenaeum club when the accident happened. *(The circumstances of the accident and the sequence of events that followed will be developed as part of the game. All five characters were there and the accident froze them in time. Their bodies will constantly return to the state that they were in that day.)* While the others were old enough to pass as adults in society, Elizabeth was too young and too immature. Her experience of immortality is therefore limited to an endless succession of short-term arrangements – adoption, foster care, boarding schools, workhouses, remand centres. Although undoubtedly canny and in some ways even wise, Elizabeth's circumstances have kept her outlook narrow and self-oriented, defensive and guarded. Elizabeth is resolutely focussed on short-term concerns. She mythologises her own past into an endless series of anecdotes, relating her cleverness and worldliness - as she sees it - to anyone who will listen.

Looming disaster

At first glance, Elizabeth's disaster is a common one for her. Given her age and the way she looks, Elizabeth is unable to be taken as an adult. Her age spans stretch four to six years, which means every four to six years, Elizabeth has had to uproot herself and move to a different location to start a new life. This is one of those times, she's currently trying to pass for 18 and as always it's not working. She'll have to move cities or countries and start again. The real looming disaster is the toll that rebuilding a life every four to six years for the past two hundred is taking on Elizabeth. There's hardly a name she won't answer to, and there's no point in building plans for a life when all you can do is live in snippets. Being told to grow up and act mature is a perverse joke when all you have is an ever ongoing now. *(It is up to the player to decide what the specific effects of being forever taken as an immature kid and never being able to build a life actually are. One possibility is that she is heading for a mental asylum as she moves further away from what is considered normal behaviour for a fourteen year old. Alternatively, she may have tried to rail against her fate - try to build a business in which her face wasn't seen. Why did it go wrong?)*

Things to do

Search the Athenaeum club one last time. This is Elizabeth's very last chance to thoroughly check the building for any lost notes or other material which might help Agnes or someone figure out what happened to them and to do something about it.

- Prove to the others that being 'the baby of the group' is meaningless after two hundred years of life

Margaret has abandoned any pretence of discovering the secret of the accident, and Agnes has spent a hundred and fifty years without success. Maybe it's time for someone else to have a go – a fresh, young mind?

Things to feel and argue about

(This is up to the player to incorporate into the game as they see the opportunity (or create it). This section requires the player to be proactive in their development of the character.)

Elizabeth could try to:

- gain some measure of understanding – she believes she has no ability to live a normal life. Is it the same for the other characters?
- gain some measure of acceptance - acceptance that her life has been hard, but that doesn't necessarily mean she has to continue the same cycles, belief that in the future there is a way forward for her?
- gain choices - it's her belief that looking like a child as she does, she has none. How can she grow up, when she spends all her time with children?

Elizabeth, eternal child.

One day is much like another

You wouldn't know it to look at me, but I'm old. *Really* old. Older than the teachers. Older than your parents. Older than your grandparents. Maybe older than *their* grandparents, but I've kind of lost count, you know?

But I look like a kid. I'll always look like a kid. I don't have a choice.

It's not *fair*!

There was an accident back when I was ... Hah! I was going to say back when I was a kid! Back when I was young, back the first time when I was a kid. And I stopped growing up. And so did my sister, and our cousin, and our maids. Except that they were all almost grown ups – **Hazel** was a grown up, really – and they're allowed to act like grown ups now.

So I'm a kid, here, now. Every couple of years, I move around, find a new school, make new friends, do new stuff. Sometimes I get adopted. Sometimes I adopt someone. Sometimes I don't bother with school – a girl can always find a place, if you're not too picky, if you don't care too much about what happens to you. There's menial labour. Fetch and carry. And because of what we are our hands don't callous, don't toughen up. So mine can get red and rubbed raw and hurt every day for years.

And why should I care?

I can't really be hurt. Or, at least, I can't be killed. I get hungry, a bit, and if I eat then I shit and all that, but I don't *need* it. People will look after me. Sometimes it's hard to stop them. Once, when it was time to run away from home, I did, and they called a nationwide manhunt for me. I was on the television and everything, and I'd watch the news and my parents were crying, asking for me to come home. But I was with new parents by then, and they asked me if I wanted to go back, and they were really confused and angry, so I ran away again, out of the country.

I didn't go back for thirty years or something.

This is my forever

That was a long time ago, and I still remember it. I'd like to forget, and be a real little girl, because a real little girl would grow up, and I can't. I read about it. I look at my school friends, when they get boyfriends and then babies and they get married and I can't have any of that.

It happens every time: one of them will look at me, and say, Lizzie, you're so *immature*.

Girlfriend, I'm more mature than you can *possibly* imagine.

And when that happens, that's when I know it's time to go, because they'll grow up and I won't.

Ultra, ultra grownups

I don't see my family very often. They don't like me. They say I should grow up. Like my sister **Agnes**, who wants to grow up so much that she puts makeup on to make her look old, just so that she can stay in a lab and be a lady scientist.

I saw her the other day. My school went on an excursion to a university. And who was giving one of the lectures but dear Agnes? Oh she had on some makeup to make her look old, but it was her. She didn't notice me, let alone acknowledge me. I don't fit into her world. But where's it got her? Over a hundred years of research and she can't tell us the first thing about what we are. Science, she says, science.

How could a bunch of early nineteenth century knobs and wires and a bit of electricity alter the DNA of five people in the same way? Cause if there is a scientific explanation it has to be in the DNA and I can't see how that would happen so sucks to Agnes.

And our cousin **Margaret** can't talk about growing up, because she never even leaves her house. Grow up? Try not changing for a couple of hundred years!

But I do like seeing **Helen** and **Hazel** – they were maids, back when everyone had maids, though I don't remember who was whose. Hazel is always nice, and she gives me presents – once she gave me this cool electronic game, you wouldn't believe how lame these things were, only they were the latest thing and it seemed really cool.

And Helen just wants to look after me, let me be her baby, so that she can be mother. It's not the creepiest thing I've ever seen, but it's plenty creepy.

I wish someone would work out what happened to us though. Cause maybe then I could grow up, just a bit. I'd take any of their lives over mine.

GM Notes

Game Synopsis

The setting is modern day. The focus of the game is for the characters to search through Athenaeum Club for things which are relevant to them, but the themes of the game are to explore:

| |
|--|
| Would you stay immortal? Would you bring someone else to immortality? Who? |
| It sux to be immortal |
| Things change. |
| ...or not. |

NPCS

There is really only one major NPC at the beginning of the game (although the players can make up more). This is Andrew, who was Margaret's beloved; his purpose is mostly to serve as a point of tension between the PCs.

Running the game

Each character has two character sheets - a technical description of the character's role in the story with signposts to where the fun in the game is, and an atmospheric character sheet. We've found that players find both useful. Players should be encouraged to explore the things they find interesting about the setting, the plot and the characters.

Each technical sheet has:

- A personality hook, which can be used for players to select their character
- The character's personal weakness
- Notes on the character, how the player can approach playing them
- A looming disaster, something terrible that is going to happen to the character in the near future
- A list of things to do through the game
- A list of things to feel and argue about with the other players

The lists of things to do, feel and argue about are suggestions only; this is us, the authors, providing a signpost to where we think the fun and drama are in the game. They are also things that the GM can use to poke the players with. "How does it make you feel, to hear [XX] say this?" is a profoundly useful question.

The game is a storytelling game; the character sheets and the GM's running sheet provide a framework to tell the story. The players are encouraged to add details to the world, either by consensus or through the poker chip game (explained below). The setup lends itself to somewhat ghoulish melodrama; that should absolutely be played up.

The GM's main role is to poke the plots, asking questions and pointing out tensions as appropriate within each scene. Each character has things to do and questions to face. Helen's player will also have an important role as her focus is to get relationships between the PCs happening.

Throughout the game, pressure should be kept up by the GM to resolve the both the plots and internal questions.

We've found that there are enough points of tension between the characters to generate arguments, and enough of a sense of shared destiny to keep the characters together. The game tends to play out in short, tense scenes and longer reflective discussions. The GM should not be afraid to let (in character) silences become awkward, and then profound. The amount of in-character time that elapses is quite short.

Running Sheet

- Run *Briefing Scene*
 - Give players character info
 - Get players understanding of their relationships back then
 - Get their understanding of what happened in the experiment
 - Get players understanding of their current relationships
- Run *Outside the Club Scene*
- Run *Flashback to Andrew's death Scene*
- Run *Mouse Scene*
- Run *Photograph Scene*
- Run *End Game Scene*
- Run debrief Scene

Briefing (start of session)

- Hand out character sheets
- Run *Briefing Scene*
 - Read the game introduction boxed text, below
 - Give players the character info (show ages and Victorian connections on white board)
 - Get players understanding of their relationships back then
 - Get their understanding of what happened in the experiment
 - Get players understanding of their current relationships

This isn't actually the start of the game. The players should be finished reading the publicly available information on the setting and their characters. This part is a fleshing-out section, which provides the players with info that the characters might not have. The players don't really act in this scene, but take the time to absorb the information they have to date.

Things to highlight:

- That this is a collaborative game, which means players can bring stuff to add in.
- That this game is character driven
- That the players have a dual role as both actors and GMs, helping to get their secrets exposed and their difficulties out in the open and resolved one way or another. Explain the poker chip game.
- That the character info sheets are not traditional character sheets, but the skeleton. Players are expected to flesh them out, change their minds.
- Explain Andrew, and his role as point of tension between the characters.

Goal:

- To get the players to build a game they are engaged in
- To get OOC and IC tension started
- Encourage good story

To discover you are immortal, wouldn't that be grand? To discover you haven't aged since Margaret demonstrated the experiment back in 1834. Nothing about you has changed. To watch mother, father, brothers and sisters age and die. To watch the last person who knew you from before pass into death, watch the whispered accusations of 'madness' because he recognised you.

There's a period, about thirty to forty years after one becomes immortal, that's hard to take. When you can no longer deny to those who were close that you are different. You go into hiding and wait. All you have to do is outwait them. Hide in the shadows, the dark places, waiting for death. Eventually, everyone who ever knew you from back then dies. New friends are made, new fads come about. But ten to twenty years later, you are back to hiding. Waiting for this new lot to forget, to die. New people come, new technology. The cycle begins again.

The poker chip game

Along with the normal game, there is a second game we will be playing which aligns with the player's dual role as co-GMs of this module.

Players are encouraged to incorporate new elements into the game. To do so costs a poker chip. Players may not contradict earlier statements with poker chips, nor may they move another's character without permission. If they move another character (with the player's permission), the poker chip goes to the player, not the middle.

There are two ways to get poker chips: firstly to have your character address the themes and questions of the game, or to agree to have your character 'done bad' by another's player.

All players and GMs are encouraged to hand out poker chips as per the above.

Players are allowed to make suggestions, but definitive statements must come with a poker chip.

Questions

Start with Margaret, ask her to tell you something of the Athenaeum Club. Ask the rest of the players. Work towards the accident that made them immortal. What was the machine supposed to do? What happened? Whose fault was it, really?

This section doesn't require poker chips.

Outside the Club (25 mins in)

- Read 'The Athenaeum Club' boxed text, below.
- Run *Outside the Club* Scene

This is the start of the game. The players should be finished reading the publicly available information and have fleshed out their characters. Ask them what they look like, where they planned to meet and how they arrive at the scene. Play out the scene in character.

The atmosphere should be the start of themes:

- Dust and decay
- Empty rooms.
- Wind and rain and broken windows
- Cages
- Cruelty to animals.

Things to highlight:

- The Club should be in their minds from the briefing section as a vibrant place where new discoveries are found. This should be compared to its current reality of a condemned building. Time has taken it away and left in its place this ruin.

The Athenaeum Club

The building has always been there. A large building, two or three hundred years old. It looked that old when the club was founded two hundred years ago.

The club is no more. You forgot when the last member died. But the building remained. Most of its many rooms are empty, white walls, carved fireplaces, ornate ceilings, bare wooden floors. The downstairs windows are blocked, barricaded. The upstairs are gaping holes of broken glass and jagged frames.

134 Goldbright Circuit. The Athenaeum Club.

Flashback to Andrew's death

- Run *Flashback to Andrew's death Scene*

The purpose of the Andrew's death scene is to highlight the points of tension between the characters: something terrible happened, and its memory still haunts them.

Once they move into the Club, they can move in any direction, but the mostly likely is into the main lab / theatre / wherever they set the experiment. Once they are in the room, freeze the action and start the flashback to Andrew's death, working through the experiment again with Andrew as somewhat bemused, but willing assistant.

Depending on how the players are, this can either be a cut scene or something the players work with in game. The players should be unfrozen once the flashback ends.

Then comes the poking.

Plots to poke:

Margaret could try to:

- gain perspective – yes the accident was her fault, but shutting herself away from the world isn't an answer, it's just hiding. Should she move on? The other answer is to stop completely, to truly turn into the ghost she has been all these years.
- offer forgiveness to Helen and Hazel – Margaret has been blaming them for a very long time now. Possibly their desire for a companion is something she could accept as the second accident was just that, an accident?
- seek resolution from the other four girls. Are their current lives her responsibility?

Helen & Hazel could try to:

- gain forgiveness – Helen and Hazel convinced Margaret to re-run the experiment with the idea that they could make eternal husbands for themselves. The boy was killed and Margaret blames Helen and Hazel for his death.

Helen could try to:

- gain some measure of peace – her life has always been striving towards it though the connections she's tried to make, but they have been short-lived.

- figure out whether it is worthwhile to keep going on or simply, to end it.

Elizabeth could try to:

- gain some measure of understanding – she believes she has no ability to live a normal life. Is it the same for the other characters?
- Prove to the others that being ‘the baby of the group’ is meaningless

Mouse Scene

- Run *Mouse* Scene

In the mouse scene, an immortal mouse appears, and the characters discover its immortality. As far as they know, it is the only other immortal they have come across. The purpose of this scene is to introduce a new element to the characters’ eternity, something they hadn’t considered. The mouse can offer hope that the immortality experiment could be repeated, or it could offer Agnes a lab animal for terrible experiments.

Trying to get the plots out as fast as possible. The immortal mouse makes a showing any time the characters try to search the place. It should obviously be immortal and an easy way to show that is to damage it without being able to kill it.

Plots to poke here:

Agnes could try to:

- gain some grounding – currently her research means everything to her, she doesn’t face the present as she is too busy in the future
- work through the ethics of being immortal, should her research be successful and she is able to grant or halt immortality, what does that mean for the five characters? What does it mean for the rest of humanity?
- Work through the possibility of failure – what will happen to her should her research be unsuccessful?

Helen could try to:

- gain some measure of peace – her life has always been striving towards it though the connections she’s tried to make, but they have been short-lived.
- figure out whether there is any more to life than just her inability to be a mother
- figure out whether it is worthwhile to keep going on or simply, to end it.

Elizabeth could try to:

- gain some measure of understanding – she believes she has no ability to live a normal life. Is it the same for the other characters?
- Gain some measure of acceptance - acceptance that her life has been hard, but that doesn’t necessarily mean she has to continue the same cycles, belief that in the future there is a way forward for her?
- Gain choices - it’s her belief that looking like a child as she does, she has none.
- Prove to the others that being ‘the baby of the group’ is meaningless

Photograph

- Run *Photograph* Scene

Once the players grow tired of arguing with each other / run out of things to do, move on to getting the photograph taken. This is a simple enough idea, Hazel needs to be on the roof with the other characters. She will need to convince them why this is so important.

The purpose of this scene is to explore the relationships between each of the characters, and further draw out points of tension and paths to acceptance.

Plots to poke:

Agnes could try to:

- gain some grounding – currently her research means everything to her, she doesn't face the present as she is too busy in the future

Margaret could try to:

- Seek resolution from the other four women. Is their current lives her responsibility?

Hazel could try to:

- gain some measure of acceptance – acceptance that her life has been hard, but that doesn't necessarily mean she has to continue the same cycles, acceptance that those around her won't necessarily put her down and use her.
- learn that sex is power, money is a way of keeping score is a very harsh view of the world
- see that Agnes' parents were trying to help her as best as they could, and question whether the other four deserve her anger or her guilt?

Helen could try to:

- gain some measure of peace – her life has always been striving towards it though the connections she's tried to make, but they have been short-lived.

Elizabeth could try to:

- gain some measure of understanding – she believes she has no ability to live a normal life. Is it the same for the other characters?
- Gain choices - it's her belief that looking like a child as she does, she has none.
- Prove to the others that being 'the baby of the group' is meaningless

The rest of the game should be the unravelling of the implications.

- How does the character feel once the revelations become known?
- How do the relationships change?

Other scenes as necessary, or as directed by the players

If there is a relationship or plot point that needs exploring, encourage the players to play it out. Discuss framing, setting and the outcome people are working towards.

End game

- Run *End game* Scene

This scene takes place after the last scene and is basically there for the GM to poke any plots or looming disasters which haven't been resolved.

Looming disaster

- Agnes must retire and start again
- Margaret must leave her house and might get sent to an insane asylum
- Hazel has lost her money and must return to whoring
- Helen doesn't really care anymore
- Elizabeth is frustrated cause people don't take her seriously, and is going loopy cause she only has snippets of a life

Things to feel and argue about

Agnes could try to:

- gain some grounding – currently her research means everything to her, she doesn't face the present as she is too busy in the future

Margaret could try to:

- Seek resolution from the other four women. Are their current lives her responsibility?

Hazel could try to:

- gain some measure of acceptance – acceptance that her life has been hard, but that doesn't necessarily mean she has to continue the same cycles, or accept that those around her won't necessarily put her down and use her.

Helen could try to:

- gain some measure of peace – her life has always been striving towards it though the connections she's tried to make, but they have been short-lived.
- figure out whether it is worthwhile to keep going on or simply, to end it.

Elizabeth could try to:

- gain some measure of understanding – she believes she has no ability to live a normal life. Is it the same for the other characters?
- Prove to the others that being 'the baby of the group' is meaningless

Debrief

- Run debrief Scene

Bring this up to story level rather than immersive level. The Club is being demolished. What happens to the women?

Ask each player for input, and encourage good story.

Thank them for contributing, and for playing.

The end.

Afterthoughts

The authors would like to thank Oli Granger, Emma-Jean Stewart and Tim Smith for their contributions to the game and the story. This game had its origins in a game of Best Friends by Gregor Hutton.

<https://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/20630/Best-Friends>