

MESOPOTAMIANS

A little game about undead warrior kings making it big as a rock and roll band

BY NICK WEDIG

Through some terrible black magic, the evil sorceress Azita has resurrected several ancient Mesopotamian warlords to serve as generals of her undead army, leading her conquest of the modern world.

Instead, you started a rock band.

TO PLAY, YOU'LL NEED 3-5 PLAYERS, 1-3 HOURS AND SEVERAL FUNNY SHAPED DICE.

Now you're driving across the United States (or wherever) trying to break into showbiz, one gig at a time. You wander from town to town, having adventures and hoping that they bring you closer to success. You do not understand this strange new world, with its technological wonders and modern customs. But you have a set of used musical instruments, an Econoline van and a desire to rock your way to music stardom.

INSPIRATIONS:

*They Might Be Giants, The Monkees, ancient history, any movie starring the Beatles, Metalocalypse, Scooby Doo, The Blues Brothers, Psi*Run, Otherkind, Ghost/Echo, etc.*

CHARACTERS

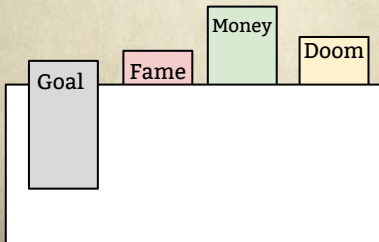
Every player chooses one of the player characters. Each card has two characters, one on each side. If you play one character, no one may play the character on the reverse side. If a player wants, he or she can act as a gamemaster, portraying NPCs and such, but the GM role is entirely optional.

Take the dice described by your traits and roll them. Then place them on your card in the places provided. Keep the dice showing the side you rolled; you'll use that die result later.

THE BAND

As a group, choose three concern cards. These are problems the band is struggling with: money, fame, etc. If any concerns ever reach level 1, you lose. If one reaches level 11, you win.

Place these cards with the lower half covered by a sheet of blank paper, so that the starred rating is showing just above the paper. As you play, slide the cards up and down to the current rating.



THE TOWN

When the band enters a new town, each player answers one question:

- Why do the townsfolk immediately dislike the PCs?
- What embarrassing music venue is the only one open to the band?
- Who is willing to help the PCs if only the PCs do them a favor first?
- What petty squabbles have the PCs been arguing about in the van?
- What criminal plot will the PCs accidentally get entangled in?
- What one chance at stardom will the PCs encounter in town?
- What do the townsfolk have that the PCs want?
- What calamity will befall the PCs if they do not act quickly?
- What improbably misfortune has befallen the town?

SETTING SCENES

Take turns setting scenes where the players characters encounter and interact with the town.

When it is your turn to set the scene, describe a little bit about where and when it takes place, who is present and what is happening when it starts. Then, each other player has the option to add one detail to the scene, maybe introducing new minor characters, setting information or simply wedging their player character into a scene where they don't really belong.

PLAYING SCENES

During a scene you:

- Illustrate your character's personality by describing their exaggerated actions.
- Speak in your character's voice, if you want.
- Describe the actions and speech of minor (non-player) characters as needed.
- Describe the environment and repercussions of other player character's actions.
- Create drama and conflict.
- When a PC tries something uncertain or risky, call for a *crisis point*.

THE FOCUS PC

When a PC tries something risky or uncertain, you have a ***crisis point***. Select one PC as the focus PC for this crisis point. The focus PC is the one who is most central to conflict or action, and they get final say in how the crisis point plays out.

The focus PC's player declares what their goal is for the crisis point. What are they trying to achieve? Other players can provide feedback and suggest alternatives to make sure everyone is on the same page.

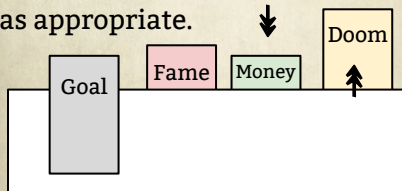
CRISIS POINT

The focus player takes the four dice on *Uttartu, the Econoline Van* and rolls them. After rolling, each player gets a chance to help or hinder the focus PC by invoking one of their traits. Starting with the focus PC's player and going around the table, each player can describe how one of their traits changes the situation for the better or the worse. When a player uses a trait, they can take their die in that trait and trade it for one of the four dice rolled for the crisis point.

Keep both dice still showing their result!

CRISIS RESULTS

After everyone has a chance to swap dice, the focus player selects one die for their goal's results, and one die for each of the band's three concerns. They then briefly narrate how the actions of the band affects their reputation, finances, etc. and how the PC's success or failure changes their situation. As they narrate, the primary player should slide the cards up or down as appropriate.



Roleplay out the results of the crisis. Wrap up the scene quickly and start the next one.

SUMMARY

To Begin:

- Choose characters.
- Select three band concerns; set each to its starting value.
- Roll your dice, keep their values.
- Create a town the band visits.

Each scene:

- Take turns framing scenes.
- Portray actions of your PC and NPCs.
- Push the scene toward a crisis point.
- When a scene has peaked, end it and start a new one.

During a Crisis Point:

- Focus PC rolls the dice on the van.
- Each player can invoke traits to help or hinder, swapping dice.
- Focus player distributes dice onto goal and band concerns.
- Adjust concerns, sliding cards up or down to show their new level.
- Explain die results in the narrative.
- Deal with the crisis's consequences.

CREDITS

Background texture by **darkwood67**, off of *Flickr.com*. Dice icons by **Mike Valstar** and **Juan Pablo Bravo**, from *TheNounProject.com*. All images used under their Creative Commons licenses.

The game mechanics borrow heavily from ***Psi*Run*** by **Meguey Baker**. Game inspiration is obviously from ***They Might Be Giants***. This game was originally created as part of the ***Indie Mixtape*** charity project, led by **Jonathan Walton**, which is a really cool thing you should check out.

Playtesters: Kate Davoli, Vryce Hough, Vincent Lee, Nick Wedig, Jeremiah Frye, Jason Godesky, Giulianna Lamanna, Rishi Agrawal, a lot of other people whose names I forgot to write down. If that was you, let me know.

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ASHURBANIPAL

668 -
627 BCE

Inventor of libraries

6 The Shy One



Understands modern science and technology

6 Drums



Enormous size



Always has to rewire or fiddle with things

ENHEDUANNA

First author in recorded history



2285 -
2250 BCE

6

The Shy One



Understands modern
science and technology

6

Drums



Enormous size



Always has to rewire or
fiddle with things

GILGAMESH

Possibly legendary hero

Dates Indeterminate



6

The Rock Star



Tells people what they want to hear

6

Lead Guitar



Rotting Corpse



Always expects to be worshipped as a god

KUBABA

Queen, later worshipped as a goddess



Circa 2500-
2330 BCE

6

The Rock Star



Tells people what they
want to hear

6

Lead Guitar



Rotting Corpse



Always expects to be
worshipped as a god

HAMMURABI

Codifier of laws



Died c.
1750 BCE

6

The Serious One



Understands modern
laws and morals

6

Bass Guitar



Won't stay dead
for long



Overly honest at all
times

PUABI

Well respected ruler



Circa 2600 BCE

6

The Serious One



Understands modern laws and morals

6

Bass Guitar



Won't stay dead for long



Overly honest at all times

SARGON

Began as cupbearer, then usurped the throne



Reigned circa
2334 - 2279 BCE

6

The Wild One



Understands partying,
socializing and how to
get people to like you

6

Rhythm Guitar



Undead Warrior



Doesn't know when to
keep his mouth shut

SEMIRAMIS

Semi-mythical warrior queen



Reigned
809 - 792 BCE

6

The Wild One



Understands partying,
socializing and how to
get people to like you

6

Rhythm Guitar



Undead Warrior



Doesn't know when to
keep her mouth shut

THE GAMEMASTER

A special, optional role

As gamemaster, you are supposed to portray the various minor characters in the story, to vividly describe the setting of the game, and to introduce outside adversity. You don't have a player character to focus on, so you should be watching the overall pacing of the game. Steer the scene toward conflict and action, call for crisis points, and end scenes that have already reached their peak moment of awesome. You don't get any dice or traits, but you do command a large cast of minor characters.

ENZU

A goat

Born circa
five years ago

6

Stubborn Goat

10

Understands modern
life a lot better than
these yahoos

6

Mascot

8

Can always find
food

4

Can't (*or won't*)
understand spoken
language

THE SORCERESS

She hunts the PCs, trying to recruit them as generals of her undead army.

RESULT: *1 Down two levels, 2-4 down one level, 5-6 up one level, 7+ up two levels*

1 World conquest

2 Green lightning rains down from the sky, destroying everything

3 The sorceress herself appears and starts monologuing

4 Minions appear on the scene and cause problems

5 Minor bad luck and curses

6 Idle threats and bad omens



7 The situation turns against her

8 The sorceress is on the retreat

9 Fighting defensively, she turns into a giant snake


10 Her magic spell is broken

11 Vanquished

THE APOCALYPSE

Soon the 518,400 year cycle of twelve upon twelve sars will be complete and the world swept clean

**RESULT: 1-2 Down two levels,
3-5 down one level, 6+ up one level**

- 1** The world is destroyed
- 2** The 50th secret name of Marduk is revealed
- 3** Fire rains from the sky
- 4** Earthquakes and hurricane winds
- 5** The dead rise from their graves
- 6** Simultaneous eclipses of sun and moon
- 7** Animals panic and randomly attack
- 8** The stars align 
- 9** An omen proves to be a mistake
- 10** Angry spirits are pacified
- 11** Dawn of a new era of peace and tranquility

FAME

Word of your deeds spreads quickly.

RESULT: 1-3 Down one level, 4-5 no change 6-7 up one level, 8+ up two levels

1 Self-loathing

(The band calls it quits because they're never gonna make it as rock stars.)

2 Everyone hates us

3 Despised

4 Disliked

5 No one's ever seen us



6 Really obscure

7 Cult following

8 Gets some radio play

9 I've got their album

10 Popular with many

11 Beloved by all

WORSHIP

Rock stardom is just part of your path to restoring your status as living god.

1 Down two levels, 2-3 down one level, 4-5 no change, 6 up one level, 7+ up two levels

1 Exiled (*The band's heretical teachings cause you to be kicked out of society.*)

2 Worship of you is banned

3 One sycophantic prophet



4 A small band of loyal followers

5 A few believers found here and there

6 Your cult grows in size

7 Your worship spreads nationwide

8 Big enough to be socially accepted

9 Bigger than Jesus

10 Your worship becomes the official state religion

11 You ascend bodily to heaven

MONEY

Even ancient undead warriors have to pay for gas and goat chow, you know?

**1 Down two levels, 2-3 down one level
4 No change 5-6 up one level, 7+ up two levels**

1 Destitute

(The band quits to get real jobs.)

2 Blood from a stone

3 Van's out of gas, we're out of food

4 Penniless

5 Unable to make ends meet



6 Not quite minimum wage

7 Barely getting by

8 Comfortable

9 Well-off

10 Living the high life

11 Rolling in dough

GEAR

This scavenged equipment isn't easy to replace or repair

1-3 Down one level, **4-6** no change, **7+** up one level

1 **Everything is ruined** (*The band has to call it quits because without instruments, you can't make music.*)

2 Something irreplaceable is destroyed

3 Sparks and small fires

4 Horrible buzzing noises

5 Minor malfunctions



6 It works if you don't touch it.

7 Banged up but basically functional

8 Score some secondhand instruments

9 Upgrade in sound quality

10 Laser light show!

11 So good the instruments plays themselves

YOUR GOAL

8+ You do extraordinarily well and gain a level in another of the band's concerns

4-7 You succeed

2-3 You fail

■ You fail spectacularly, losing a point from another one of the band's concerns

UTTARTU

The Econoline van

At start of play, place 4d6 on this card. When you reach a crisis point, flip this card over and roll the dice.

After each crisis point, put the dice back here. Swapping dice might mean that the van is full of other size dice. That's totally how it is supposed to work.

