

Play Examples

Character Creation

John has wanted to play Walkabout for a while; he's been talking about it to a few friends and has finally managed to get four friends to participate in a story that will last a few sessions. At the start of the first session, the group discuss the type of story they want to tell. The group wants to play a traditionalist circle of Wayfarers, and they will name their characters after native Australian animals.

John will take the role of the elder. He creates the first shadow for the series of stories while the other players create their wayfarers.

Ken plays a Wayfarer named Kangaroo, for his dance he chooses Acrobatics ('Leaping', 'Speed') to match the name, his people are Rust-Wardens ('Crafts', 'Repair'), his edge is Gadgetry ('Repair', 'Traps') and his Wayfarer mark is a series of concentric circles on his left forearm, he also chooses to identify his edge through a cog shaped scar accidentally burned on his stomach as a child. His basic concept is a "Macgyver-esque" fix it man with pithy one-liners.

Lou plays a Wayfarer named Lyrebird, for his dance he chooses Latin ('Arousal', 'Empathy'), his people are Urbanites ('Academics', 'Awareness'), his edge is a Signature Weapon (a family heirloom pistol, 'Firearms', 'Intimidation') and his Wayfarer mark is a tattoo depicting a mystical portal on his upper right arm, he has no other scars. His basic concept is a

fish-out-of-water, a sophisticated dilettante in an unsophisticated wilderness.

Mary plays a Wayfarer named Monitor, for her dance she chooses Tai-Chi ('Focus', 'Medicine'), her people are Children of the Sky ('Crafts', 'Endurance'), her edge is Special Forces Training ('Firearms', 'Strategy') and her Wayfarer mark is a tattoo of a Japanese torii gateway on her lower back, she honours her people with a tattoo of wings on her upper back. Her basic character concept is a paratrooper marine, sent from her people for reasons she won't talk about.

Neil plays a Wayfarer named Numbat, for his dance he chooses Krumping ('Intimidation', 'Strategy'), his people are Tribal ('Brawl', 'Survival'), his edge is a mutation ('Endurance', 'Stealth') and his Wayfarer mark is a scar shaped vaguely like a star on his upper thigh. His basic character concept is one of the Rippers from Tank Girl.

(You'll note that in these play examples, we have kept things easier to remember by having each player share their first initial with the name of their wayfarer.)

Circle Creation

The Wayfarers have started to identify their personalities; now to determine their relations to one another. Each player looks to the wayfarers on their left and right, writing reasons to like those characters, then writes reasons to dislike them. John shuffles the likes together and does the same for the dislikes before redistributing two each to the players. From the options provided, the following likes and dislikes are applied.

Ken: Kangaroo likes Monitor because she is 'good in a scrap', and dislikes Numbat because he is 'not quite human'.

Lou: Lyrebird likes Kangaroo because he is 'good at fixing things', and dislikes Monitor because she is 'a bit holier-than-thou'.

Mary: Monitor likes Numbat because he is 'reliable in times of trouble', and dislikes Lyrebird because he is 'unwilling to get his hands dirty'.

Neil: Numbat likes Lyrebird because he is 'good at finding places that are comfortable', and dislikes Monitor because she is 'one of those sky people'.

The rest of the agendas are placed in a pile in front of John. He will draw from that pile whenever they encounter new supporting cast members.

As a group, the wayfarers now decide on a method that they use to deliberately move between the Waking and Dreaming Worlds. Ken suggests that they engage in a meditation ritual, Neil suggests a technological device, maybe a wrist mounted field generator. The group is evenly divided, and since John wants a more action packed game he breaks the tie by favouring the device idea. They also agree as a group that they will ride across the shattered landscape on jury-rigged old motorcycles; this doesn't make a whole lot of difference to the game, it's just flavour.

The group has now prepared their circle; they are ready to start cleansing song-lines and restore the spiritual balance.

Placing Tokens

John has decided to start the circle's first songline fairly easily. He gives each player four secret tokens to place, and takes eight tokens for himself (this is equal to twice the number of players). He places 4 tokens first, fairly evenly across the XXX; 1 in the Deep Dreaming, 1 in the Shallow Dreaming and 2 in the Waking World.

Ken goes next, placing 3 of his tokens in the Shallow Dreaming, and 1 in the Waking World. Lou places 2 tokens each in the Shallow and Deep Dreaming. Mary places 2 tokens each in the Waking World and Shallow Dreaming. Neil distributes his tokens fairly evenly, 1 in the Waking World, 2 in the Shallow Dreaming and 1 in the Deep Dreaming. John decides that he wants the game to start fairly dramatically, so he places his last 4 tokens in the Waking World.

The final result is 10 tokens in the Waking World, 10 tokens in the Shallow Dreaming and 4 tokens in the Deep Dreaming.

Starting the Walkabout

John sets the scene:

"The dust and grit of the road have embedded deeply in your skin and your leathers. The blistering sun feels like it has burnt permanent circles into your field of vision. The heat from the road feels like it will melt the tyres if you stay in place for too long. It has been a long ride south of the ruined Emerald City. You've long passed the rusted wrecks that littered this highway, used as shields and barricades by the survivors in the old tunnels. This far out, the roads are patrolled by the last remaining biker gangs, scavenging what they can from the truck

stops and petrol stations. Stripped metal skeletons line the old highway, it has been a long time since they had anything worthwhile on them. The land is starting to reclaim the resources that were stripped from it decades ago, corroding the metal back into dull red oxides matching the colour of the setting sun's sky. An old sign looms up ahead on the side of the road. The original markings have been covered in layers of graffiti, the most recent of which says 'Welcome to the Thousand Pits of Hell'."

He waits for someone to act, but the players are still trying to grasp what their Wayfarers can do.

"Up ahead you see an old truck being pulled by a pair of heavy-set horses. It is slowly heading toward you. You can't tell from this distance whether the occupant is waving a friendly gesture of greeting or a warning to back off. Mirages on the road pavement seem to ripple under the truck like water...and within moments the truck has vanished without a trace."

Performing an Action 1

Ken takes the initiative; his character, Kangaroo, is a tinkerer so he thinks it makes sense that he'd have some kind of old computer, probably powered by batteries that recharge through a solar cell. He tries to boot it up to get some knowledge about this place in the past. He really doesn't know what he's looking for, but he's trying to be aware of how things might have changed in recent years and before the great disruption. John thinks this might be a good way to get the story going, so he allows Ken to "pick a risk and roll the dice".

Ken has three dice to roll, he adds another die for his "Gadgets" edge, and says that he probably got his computer from his

people, the "Rust-Wardens", so he adds a fifth die. No one has any negative traits because the game has just begun, and John doesn't spend any of his secrets to make things harder (he'd like to see a successful outcome to the roll to move the story along).

The dice are rolled: 2,4,4,5,6.

Ken allocates the 6 to his degree of success (full success), the 5 to his degree of sacrifice (no sacrifice), and one of the 4s to his degree of story. Since there is no sacrifice, the degree of story doesn't cause too many problems. Ken could use the full success to exhaust one of the elder's secrets, but instead he chooses to gain the situational trait "Solar-Powered Old Computer"; he writes this down on a trait card as he thinks it will become useful over the course of the story. He attaches a paper-clip so that it encircles the "Situational" level of the trait.

Performing an Action 2

Lyrebird follows Kangaroo's lead, but instead of looking up old details from the past, he tries to get a feeling for what might be wrong in the area. John asks him to "pick a risk and roll the dice".

Lou looks at Lyrebird's core traits, as an "Urbanite" he has an 'Awareness' descriptor and he thinks this is appropriate, also, his wayfarer tattoo is automatically a symbol of the boundary between the spirit world and the physical world, so he claims an extra die there. John doesn't want the secrets of the story revealed just yet, so he uses a secret token against Lyrebird.

Lou rolls his five dice: 2,3,3,4,5...then an extra die for the secret used against him: 2 (he'll automatically suffer a major sacrifice).

Depending on how he allocates the dice, he could get a full success and take a minor sacrifice (in addition to the major sacrifice he's already getting). Or he could avoid the extra sacrifice, and only get a partial success. Lou figures it's probably good for the story to get some information, especially since he's already going to be suffering a sacrifice for his action. He allocates the 5 to his degree of success (full success), 4 to his degree of sacrifice (minor sacrifice) and 3 to his degree of story. He uses his success to exhaust one of the Elder's secrets. He will take a total of 3 sacrifices (the major sacrifice being worth 2 and the minor sacrifice being worth 1). Since he had a 3 in his degree of story he may choose the first sacrifice, he declares that his observations of the spirit world have temporarily dazzled him; he writes "Dazzled" on a trait card and attaches a paperclip to encircle the "Situational" level. John declares the next sacrifice, he upgrades the "Dazzled" trait to "Blinded". Lou declares the last sacrifice, he could make the blinded trait a short term effect (lasting for the rest of the act) or he could upgrade the blinded trait to complete sensory overload (unable to do anything, and basically out of play for the rest of the scene). Lou goes for the dramatic angle, and as he reveals his knowledge about overwhelming spiritual energies in the area he passes out.

Upgrading a Positive Trait

Before the scene goes much further, Ken realises that his action just declared the presence of a temporarily functioning computer; it didn't actually provide information about the area. He declares another action, this time to actually perform some research.

Ken asks if his 'Repair' descriptor will help, and John makes the call that it won't. Ken decides that Kangaroo will take a risk to

get the information, he'll open up some software he hasn't played with before. He rolls his four core dice: 1,4,5,6...then an extra die for the "computer" trait: 5.

Since he took a risk, he needs to allocate two of his core dice as degrees of sacrifice. He allocates the 4 (minor sacrifice) and the 5 (no sacrifice), then allocates the 1 to degree of story. As degrees of success to sacrifice, this leaves the 6 (full success) and the 5 from his extra die (full success), giving him 2 bonuses from the task.

With one bonus he takes away one of the elder's secrets, he's found out information about the area they are entering; it used to be called Canberra, and it is probably called the Thousand Pits of Hell because most of the city was built underground.

The second success could be used to make the computer trait more effective (upgrading it to a double trait for the scene) or he could make sure that the computer works for longer. He takes the second option (increasing the 'situational' status to 'short term'), because he's intending to make this computer a permanent trait by the end of the session.

Exploiting your Enemies

It's later in the session; the wayfarers have reached the deserted streets of Australia's former capital. They have seen a few strange things such as people disappearing before their eyes without a trace in the Waking World, and swarms of metallic insects during their first glimpses into the Shallow Dreaming. Kangaroo has learnt that the old city of Canberra was built according to an arcane geometric pattern that many people think had occult significance. Lyrebird has used his seductive talents to get close to a few locals, only to find out that they live in fear of something under the great spire. Monitor has led a charge through an old government office defended by degenerated public-servant zombies. Numbat has snuck into an old armoury from the Department of Defence. At this stage all of the signs seem to point to Parliament House at the centre of numerous circular avenues and streets.

Each of the wayfarers has accumulated a range of positive traits from their successes, and a range of negative traits from their sacrifices.

Numbat is going to sneak into Parliament House, to find a way to get the rest of the team in without any trouble. In addition to his core traits, he has accumulated the positive traits 'Fearsome [+1]' (long term), 'Protected [+1]' (short term), 'Dangerous [+2]' (short term) and 'Obscured [+1]' (situational), and the negative traits 'Infamous [-1]' (long term), 'Intoxicated [-1]' (short term) and 'Shaken [-1]' (situational).

Numbat's attempt to sneak into Parliament House will gain benefit from two of his core traits, the mutation has a descriptor of 'stealth', and his Krump dance has a descriptor of 'strategy'.

That gives him five core dice. His 'Obscured' situational trait obviously helps with sneaking, but none of the others do. Kangaroo doesn't like Numbat, so Ken looks at the negative traits to see what might apply, being intoxicated certainly won't help with being quiet and stealthy, and being shaken might cause him to slip up. Things are getting toward a major plot point, the threshold where local spiritual upheaval it at its worst; so John spends two secrets to make things harder.

In total, that makes one positive free trait and three negative traits; cancelling out positives to negatives that leaves two negative traits. The five core dice are rolled: 1,2,3,3,5... and then the two extra dice: 2,5 (which are automatically applied as degrees of sacrifice). The 5 is applied as a degree of success, the 3s as degrees of sacrifice and story.

Numbat successfully finds a way for the others to get in. But with a minor and a major degree of sacrifice, he needs to make 3 sacrifices to accomplish this. Neil makes the first sacrifice with the negative 'Shaken' trait, Numbat has seen something that spooked him even more, and the 'Shaken' trait is upgraded to short term. John makes the next sacrifice; he takes away the risked 'Obscured' trait; Numbat was spotted by someone and while the team may successfully get in, there will be someone or something alert to their presence (maybe this is why he was spooked). Neil chooses the last sacrifice, Numbat tries to overcome his fears by taking a swig of rum from his hip flask, he'll now be 'Intoxicated' for the long term.

Ken gains a bonus token for applying penalties to Neil's wayfarer.

Helping Your Allies

Kangaroo carefully picks his way along labyrinthine corridors, floors covered in broken glass and scattered yellowed paperwork from a bygone era. He catches blood smears across battered doors, shadows flickering in the corner of his eyes. Lyrebird follows him, covering his six. A door up ahead is still closed and locked. It looks strangely clean and untouched. Kangaroo pulls out an assortment of wires and flat metal strips...they aren't proper lock picks, but they'll do the job.

Ken declares that Kangaroo will pick the lock; John responds that some of the shadows in the corridors start to move, and their touch drains energy and their psychic screams will disrupt Kangaroo's concentration (he spends two secret tokens).

Ken declares that he is using his Dance to achieve his task quickly (and if necessary contort his body away from shadows that get too close), he will use both his people's heritage and his gadgetry edge to pick the lock. He also has the traits 'Prepared [+2]' (situational) and 'Outfitted [+1]' (short term) which will help. Since no-one dislikes Kangaroo, John looks over his negative traits and decides that 'Tired [-1]' (Short Term) and 'Scared [-2]' (Situational) apply. So Kangaroo is still two traits down.

Lou helps out with Lyrebird, offering to alert Kangaroo when shadows approach (using 'Awareness' descriptor from his Urbanite people) and shoot them if they get too close (using the 'Firearms' descriptor from his Signature Weapon Edge). That balances out the positive and negative free traits.

Ken rolls his 6 core dice: 1,1,2,3,3,4...no extra dice.

No results are high enough to gain a success, Ken applies the 4 to the Degree of Success, and the 3s to the Degrees of Sacrifice and Story.

Ken declares that his first sacrifice will be to increase the duration of his 'Scared [-2]' trait to short term. With a partial success on the action, Kangaroo can try again. Ken has to decide whether it's worth the ongoing risk.

The Influence of the Dreaming

Over the course of the session, the number of tokens in the Waking World started at 10. This is more than twice the number of players in the game, so the dreaming and the Waking world were one. Strange spiritual manifestations were common and dangerous. As John used up the tokens, and more were eliminated by the actions of the players, the spiritual energies seemed to wear themselves out. Seven tokens were exhausted before the players had earned a high number of short term negative traits and decided to take some time to rest up.

The players eliminated their short term negative traits, a few spent bonus tokens to keep specific short term positive traits. For every exhausted secret token, John rolled a die: 1,1,2,4,5,6,6. The 5 and 6s return three tokens to the waking world, while the 4 returns a token to the Shallow Dreaming, and the remaining tokens are discarded from play. In the time they have rested, minor spiritual activity (tokens less than the number of players) has escalated back up to major spiritual activity (tokens less than twice the number of players).

Meeting the Shadow

Over the course of their investigation, the Wayfarers have met an assortment of people. First there was the wandering cattle herder, Jackson Green, he didn't talk more than two words at a time, except when he spoke to Numbat; he warned the Wayfarers to keep away from the old ruined city.

There was the old trader, MacArthur, he liked Monitor and offered her a good deal on some military surplus body armour.

Then they met the spirit, Kung Lao, a ghostly form dressed in the regalia of the People's Republic, but unable or unwilling to leave the Chinese embassy. He disliked Lyrebird for reasons only spirits can understand.

The dementia riddled old warrior, General Howell, constantly reliving the days of the last great battles in the War Memorial. He had asked Kangaroo to go on one last brave mission with him.

The leader of the surviving urbanites in the area, Veronica Dawson; as the grand-daughter of a politician she knew secrets about the city that were never made public knowledge. She had taken an instant liking to Lyrebird as a fellow Urbanite and for his 'smouldering good looks'.

Finally there was the girl, Olivia, with a collection of old movies that she thought were archival footage of the past; she took an instant dislike to Kangaroo for some reason.

Each of these people had been met and each seemed to have agendas of their own, none of them looked overly like spirits, and any one of them could have been the shadow. It seemed that for every clue that lessened the likelihood of one being the

shadow, two of the others become more likely as suspects. But as the number of secret tokens in the waking world start to dwindle, the list of shadow suspects starts to narrow.

Painting the Skin

Throughout the last act, the Wayfarers have split up to investigate more of the ruined city. But as the act draws to a close, they have regathered to share their knowledge and prepare their next move. The issues of the Waking World seem to have been resolved for the moment. It is time to confront the deeper issues in the Dreaming.

Before they do this, it's good to be prepared. The Wayfarers are probably headed toward the climax of the story (it is roughly two-thirds of the way through the time allocated for the session), so they will need as many advantages as they can. For a Wayfarer in the Dreaming, this means painting the skin.

Unless they are scarred, a wayfarer cannot paint markings on their own skin, only one of their companions may do this. So all the Wayfarer sheets (and respective trait cards) are passed to the right; Ken passes Kangaroo's sheet to Lou, Lou passes Lyrebird's sheet to Mary, etc. Each player looks at the sheet before them, they may write the name of any non-'situational' trait into a box marking an area of the Wayfarer's body. Within the story, Lyrebird draws a circuit pattern on Kangaroo's upper left arm: so Lou writes 'Old Computer' on Kangaroo's upper left arm box. Monitor draws a mouth on Lyrebird's upper left thigh to represent his silvered tongue, Mary writes 'persuasive' in Lyrebird's relevant box. Numbat draws a shield on Monitor's stomach to represent the bulletproof vests he has acquired; Neil writes 'Armoured' on Monitor's front lower abdomen box.

Kangaroo draws an explosion on Numbat's chest, Ken writes 'Dangerous' in Numbat's Chest box.

Once everyone has written one of the character's traits in pencil onto the sheet in front of them, they pass the character sheets to the right again then repeat the process. This is repeated until all players have had the chance to write something on all character sheets. If a character has scars, they may paint over the outlines; the player circles any scar traits on their sheet to indicate that they will be active for the upcoming journey.

As a result of the painting ritual:

Kangaroo will step into the Dreaming with the traits 'Old Computer', 'Acrobatics', 'Area Knowledge', 'Totem Blessing' and his 'Gadgets' Edge scar.

Lyrebird will step into the Dreaming with the traits 'Persuasive', 'Signature Weapon' Edge, 'Latin' Dance and 'Aware'.

Monitor will step into the Dreaming with the traits 'Armoured', 'Tai-Chi' Dance, 'Optimistic', 'Armed' and her 'Children of the Sky' tattooed wings.

Numbat will step into the Dreaming with the traits 'Dangerous', 'Tribal' People, 'Fearsome' and 'Mutation'.

All characters possess their wayfarer scar.

Note: Normally, short-term traits would be lost in the change of an act, and the shift between Waking and Dreaming worlds always constitutes the change of an act. The ritual painting of these glyphs onto the skin of a Wayfarer circumvents this. Basically, every short-term trait drawn onto the skin gains a free act of use, as though a bonus token were spent on it. If two or

more acts are spent in the dreaming, these traits are lost as normal when the act changes.

Crossing Over

The characters have interacted with at least one spirit so far, Kung Lao in the Chinese embassy, and due to the fluctuations the barrier between worlds, they may have walked between the Waking World and the Dreaming several times without realising it. But John wants the deliberate act of stepping into the dreaming to be a significant moment in the story. He provides a description:

"One by one you activate the quantum phase inducers. A gentle hum increases in intensity as each wrist band starts to resonate with energies you still don't fully understand. The hairs on your skin start to tingle as you begin smelling the ozone in the air. It's always the same, even when you activate the phase inducer alone, but as a group it seems so much more like a communal ritual. One person's inducer will transport them across the dream barrier for a few minutes, but as a group the change will be permanent until you lose consciousness or all want to come back.

"Flickering sparks spread across your bodies, and you remember the simple ritual that was taught to you. As you join hands, the world seems to melt away, only to be replaced by a replica of itself. Sunlight slightly brighter, shadows slightly darker; colours more vibrant and sounds clearer. If you didn't know what to look for you probably wouldn't notice the subtle differences, but you are now in the Dreaming."

Actions in the Dreaming

In the Nine Thousand pits of Hell, it seems that all roads lead to the great spire, or form circles around it. In the same way, all of the storylines encountered by the Wayfarers seem to lead to a dark vortex in the Dreaming above the crumbling Parliament House, or they swirl around it in ever widening circles.

Numbat suggests that the group take a look at all of the key areas they have encountered so far. Anywhere that there might be drastic changes between the dreaming and the waking world might be good places to find what needs cleansing to correct the balance and disperse the dark energy vortex. Lyrebird suggests that the opposite might be true as well, anywhere that the dreaming looks too similar to the waking world might indicate that the edge between worlds has become too thin, or might have disappeared completely.

Even in the waking world, the city can be hard to navigate. They both look to Kangaroo who has 'area knowledge' that will be useful to move around in the Dreaming. Ken grabs his three core dice and an additional core die because all Wayfarers have a single Spirit Ring filled in. He then grabs an extra die for his 'Area Knowledge'. He has the computer and while he plans to use it, he doesn't want to push things and gain an extra die from it (he doesn't risk it on this action). He claims a fifth core die by describing how he is using his Wayfarer mark to make quick glances into the Waking World to compare the different planes of reality.

Ken rolls the core dice: 1,2,2,4,5...not good...the extra die is then rolled: 3...not much better.

If Ken applies the 5 to the degree of success, he'll probably lose something vital such as the 'Area knowledge that might be needed to get them home safely after the climax. He plays it safe and applies the 5 to the degree of sacrifice to avoid losing anything; he applies the 4 to his degree of success so that he can have another attempt, and the 2 to the degree of story. John describes that Kangaroo has gotten the team lost, but has a vague idea of where they are.

Second attempt, same traits used.

Ken rolls the core dice: 1,1,2,2,4...even worse than before...the extra die is rolled: 5...at least that's something.

Ken is happy not applying any of the core dice to the degree of success, since the extra die counts as a success anyway; he uses the 1 there. He weighs up the options of the other dice 2 for sacrifice and 4 for story means Kangaroo will take two sacrifices, one chosen by him, and one chosen by John. On the other hand, 2 for sacrifice, 2 for story means a single sacrifice chosen by John. He doesn't like the idea of John choosing a sacrifice, but either way he's stuck with it.

Even though he has managed to navigate the wayfarers to the dreaming version of a destination they visited in the waking world, he's not quite sure how they got there. John strips away the painted 'Area Knowledge' trait.

Escalating the Plot

Over the session, John has carefully paced the flow of the game using the tokens at his disposal. It's not a perfect method of regulating the story, but one of many tools at his disposal. The other things that he has made sure to do during the game

include taking notes when players have come up with good ideas for the story that he might not have thought of, noting down which members of the supporting cast have made a strong connection with the players (whether in a positive or negative light), and keeping track of the time left in the session. He had allocated four hours to the game, since that's when Mary has to head home for work tomorrow and Neil had said something about leaving at the same time.

For four hours, John had given the story four main objectives; find people affected by the problem, identify the source of the problem, eliminate the problem's support structure, confront the shadow and move on. In his mind, he had hoped to achieve each one over the course of an hour or so. He also plotted out rough expenditure of tokens (working on the assumption that he'd get a third of the tokens back each act); during the first part he'd use about a quarter of the total tokens. During the second part, he'd use about a third of the remaining tokens, during the third part he'd use about a half of the remaining tokens, and during the climax, he'd try to use every token at his disposal.

John isn't overly concerned about the minutiae of the plot, because that could change erratically depending on the specific actions of the players. He has the shadow marked, and has tried to make sure that this character isn't obviously the enemy. He's also tried to make any potentially useful supporting cast members just as suspicious as anyone else presented during the course of the story. He has tried to plant some hints along the way that the wayfarers will need the knowledge of a local to give them an edge against the shadow, this way they'll have to choose who they trust and who they don't.

As one act progresses to the next, John is replenished some of his secret tokens so his expenditure of them can start increasing. Every secret brings the opportunity to throw a new plot twist at the player, or make things every more difficult as they reach the climax.

Foreshadowing

Lou has been listening to the unfolding plot very carefully, he's read the rule book and he knows that most games of Walkabout can vary dramatically in their instances, but overall they tend to follow the basic pattern that John has followed so far. Find the problem, work out how to solve the problem, perform the deeds necessary to solve the problem, then move on. Lou also knows the technique of foreshadowing; it's where an author presents clues to the impending climax in the details of the descriptions. He thinks about the little details that John has mentioned, and has mentally taken note of the times when John has written things down during the course of the story.

He knows that John will try to tie together a number of actions performed by the Wayfarers and the supporting cast, combining them into something that will make the players do a double take when the big reveal comes.

At this stage John has two ideas of where he could take the story, and as the story gradually reaches its final acts, he's try to make sure the twists he adds to the storyline could fit into either climax. It's a delicate art, and he's spent years of GMing trying to perfect it. At this stage, John is playing a game of cat and mouse with Lou, trying to lay hints for the other players without Lou giving the game away. Ken and Neil are starting to come up with some good ideas that tie together various clues

that have been laid down with revealed secrets. The meta-game is afoot.

Unveiling the Truth

There are a few tokens in the Waking World and a small number in the Shallow Dreaming, the majority lie in the deep dreaming and there is only an hour or so to go before the session is due to wind up. The characters have a dozen ideas about what may be behind the problems in the area, they have decided to approach the ruined Dreaming version of Parliament House in the Dreaming, and John sets the scene by weaving together a number of the clues they have picked up so far:

“It was designed to be monumental. Not just a building on a hill, the building is a hill. Carved into the earth and built around it...the structure was designed to be a part of the landscape. You have learnt from your investigations that in ancient times, the hill was a sacred meeting place for several aboriginal tribes and it is this reason that the Federal powers of Australia built their capital here. But through writing their own history over the ancient ways, the significance of the sacred was lost in bureaucracy. The spirits were honoured only through lip service, and when the shift altered the dreaming across the land they reclaimed a capital that was rightly theirs.

In the swirling vortex above, you see the spectral forms of dead politicians, ensnared by metaphorical red tape; ambassadors from a hundred nations, desperate to return to homelands where their souls might achieve rest. Ancestral spirits of aboriginal elders swirling through the vortex, they move with freedom through the swirling energies, but from this distance it's hard to see if they are controlling it, or simply trying to

make sense of it all. At the centre, a huge metal flagpole dominates the scene, the tallest structure in the city.”

The players discuss their options, voicing their opinions through their characters.

Kangaroo suggests that they purge the computer records of Parliament and burn the paper records, this should eliminate the laws and mental bonds that are keeping the spirits bound to the location. To back up his suggestion he cites the locked doors in the Waking World version of Parliament House, and the various people they had met with minds locked in the past (or false versions of the past).

Lyrebird suggests that some kind of exorcism should be conducted on a grand scale to remove all the spirits from the area so that it can be rebirthed anew. He believes that by using the flagpole like a giant lightning rod, the exorcism will be magnified hundredfold, if not more.

Monitor suggests that they spiritual imbalance is due to incorrect spiritual energy flows, and that the removal of certain structures might improve the flow, and the balance will come naturally. She cites words from Kung Lao and few other clues to back up her theory.

Numbat suggests that they set explosives at the four feet of the flagpole; in his mind it is obvious that the flagpole is the focal point for the dark vortex. He believes that they should be a safe distance from the parliament house when this occurs and suggests the War Memorial with a perfect view of the spectacle, when the spirits break free they might even use some of the antique tanks and other weaponry to give General Howell the final battle he's been longing for.

The Climax Twist

John likes a few of the suggestions for a climax that will cleanse the Dreaming. He knows that in each of these versions, the waking world won't necessarily be altered, but the ramifications on the dreaming will be dramatic. An option like Numbat's would set the tone for over-the-top gonzo action in the Dreaming, but he's not sure that's the direction he wants his Walkabout tales to go. Kangaroo and Monitor gave some pretty destructive options as well, Lyrebird's is probably the least destructive to the waking world, but John doesn't think any of the characters have the skills to pull off an exorcism like this.

He looks through his pile of supporting cast, the Shadow was actually General Howell who revels in battle and destruction. It crystallises in John's mind that the general has caused the vortex by planting a smuggled nuclear explosive at the heart of Parliament, under the flagpole. It suddenly makes sense to him that the vortex of spirits might be protecting Parliament by creating a radio signal dampening field that prevents the general from activating the bomb as his last act.

This way, any of the choices made by the characters will be the wrong one unless a final clue reveals the twist. He also wants his stories to be more about bringing balance through healing the injured rather than bringing balance by destroying the corrupt.

The Wayfarers have decided to follow through on a couple of plans. They will set up incendiary devices in the dreaming to burn documentation and destroy the server memory banks which once controlled the country's highest levels of bureaucracy), they will attach explosives to the feet of the great

flagpole and they will mark the circular road around Parliament with a ring of anything flammable they can find. Every now and then players are asked what their characters are doing...if they are helping with the demolition plans, they get a situational bonus trait; "Soldier Ally", "Friend of General Howell" or "Trusted". Every time one of these bonus traits is given to a character, John adds a secret to his pool.

Lou and Mary suddenly get suspicious when they realise that John hasn't offered a single token against them as they've conducted these tasks. In fact, there have been a few too many spectral soldiers and ghostly honoured heroes from the War Memorial who have helped them achieve these tasks...

...things are just going a little too easily considering they are that close to the climax and John has gradually accumulated back up to seven tokens in the Shallow Dreaming and seven tokens up his sleeve in the Deep Dreaming. The act draws to a close and John pulls four more tokens from the Deep Dreaming to oppose the characters.

Flashbacks

As they finish their preparations, John describes the scene:

"The spectral soldiers have helped to lay down spiritual weaponry all around the hill that was once sacred to both the Aboriginal people of the region and the citizens of Australia. As you lay the last of the explosives in a ring, you see General Howell drive toward you in an old army tank."

He looks to Mary and Lou, since they have mentioned having hesitations about how easy things were going.

"What do you do?"

Mary: "Can I call on a flashback?"

John: "As long as it doesn't cause any problems to the story as it currently stands."

Mary: "Fine. Since Monitor has 'Special Forces Training' she knows her way around explosives. I know that I don't have a scar to use it in the Dreaming, so I'm not going to claim an extra die for it, I'm just using it to justify my actions."

John: "Sounds reasonable."

Mary: "Monitor just wanted to shift the energy lines around Parliament house, not destroy it. So she sabotaged a few of the incendiary devices and explosives. This is pretty much make or break so I'll be using the crafts descriptor from my 'Children of the Sky' Tattoo, I'll use the 'Armed' trait since I'm dealing with weapons and explosives, I'm pretty optimistic about this and I'll take a risk as well."

John: "I don't think the optimistic really applies in this situation, but you can have the rest. Does anyone want to apply negative traits to Monitor's action?"

The table is silent; they can see that things could go horribly wrong if she doesn't succeed.

John exhausts three secret tokens: "I'll throw three negative traits against you. The spectral soldiers are 'vigilant', they are 'fanatical' and they are 'armed' as well. You risk losing their trust, as well as any other traits through this action. " The three traits cancel out Mary's extra die, and give two extra dice against her.

Lou: "Can I help her? I'm going to be 'persuasive' to the soldiers, and I'll be 'aware' of anyone who might be getting

suspicious. I'll also try to be 'empathetic' using the Latin dance descriptor, to try and pick the soldiers who might cause trouble."

John: "Sure, but since Lyrebird doesn't like Monitor, he gives her one less bonus trait and if Mary suffers any sacrifices I might be able to apply them against you as well."

Lou accepts this condition. Mary takes 3 core dice, +1 for her 'Children of the Sky' tattoo, +1 for her first wayfarer circle and +1 for her Risk. She rolls the core dice: 1,2,3,3,5,6. Since she has to apply two dice to risk, she applies both the 5 and the 6 straight onto degree of sacrifice, it's more important that she doesn't get caught at this stage, and she's managed to wipe away some of John's secret tokens so the effect is still a success in her eyes. The two 3s go onto degree of success and degree of story. The story makes no difference because no sacrifice was taken, the partial story success means she can try again.

Lou: "Can I take a flashback action now?"

John: "OK."

Lou: "I'm going to be 'persuasive' to convince a couple of soldiers that they might be doing the wrong thing. I'm going to make sure that I'm 'aware' of the best guards to do this to. I know that I can't use my 'empathy' on them because I don't have the scar, so I won't get a bonus from it but I'll use that to back up my ability to attempt this. I'm not going to 'intimidate' them with my signature weapon, or take any risks; I want this to be low key."

John: "It's still the same flashback sequence so the situational traits from before still apply. Being 'fanatical' make things more

difficult, but being 'vigilant' or 'armed' really don't impact a persuasion attempt. Those traits cancel out any extra dice you might have received."

Mary: "Can I help him with my 'optimism', maybe to boost his morale while he's trying to find the right soldiers to persuade?"

John: I'd say yes, but Monitor dislikes Lyrebird. So the bonus is negated.

Lou picks up 4 dice (3 core dice +1 for his first wayfarer circle), he rolls: 2,3,5,5. Using the 5s in his Degrees of Success and Story, Lyrebird has managed to convince some soldiers that they might be following the wrong course of action, but they'll be on standby until a key phrase is spoken. This will only be a situational trait, active only in the scene once the flashback is over.

John resumes his description of the climax now that the climax has arrived.

Resolution

With flashbacks out of the way, John describes the Wayfarers being bundled into an Armoured Personnel Carrier. General Howell is ready to press the button to set off a demolition. It's about half an hour until the session is due to finish. John gives everyone a chance to do one last thing, to save the capital. They have five minutes to discuss their options before they have to make a move.

Kangaroo says he will use his 'Gadgets' edge, his 'Old Computer' and his 'Totem Blessing' to jam the signal between General Howell's detonator and the explosives. If John blocks this with any of his secret tokens, then he won't have enough

tokens to kill them all with a nuclear explosive, but he could still do drastic damage with explosives. He gives up on the nuclear bomb going off, and opposes the result with 2 tokens. Once all the traits are accounted for, Kangaroo rolls 5 core dice, and one extra negative die because he is 'tired'. The core dice roll: 2,4,5,5,6...full success, no sacrifice. But the extra die rolls a 2, the General's detonator is jammed, but with two sacrifices to choose, Ken increases Kangaroo's 'tired' status to 'exhausted', and he is now being 'watched'.

Monitor goes next, 'Armed' and 'Armoured' she charges from the back of the APC to take out as many of General Howell's supporters as she can, she knows that the 'strategic' knowledge from her people will be an advantage too. It's a make or break effort and she hopes that being 'optimistic' will make up for the odds against her. Her main aim is to lure away some of the soldiers to make things easier for her companions. John uses 3 secret tokens to block this action. Once traits are accounted for Mary is just rolling 5 core dice: 1,1,3,6,6. She manages to get away and her success eliminates one more of John's secret tokens, leaving him with 4.

Numbat follows Monitor's lead; maybe she's not so bad after all. He's a bit more brutal though, his weaponry makes him 'dangerous', his tribal people gave him 'survival' skills and taught him to 'brawl' (either of which would be useful), 'endurance' from his mutation will help if he gets hit. John throws half of his remaining tokens against this action. After everything has been accounted for, Neil rolls 6 core dice: 1,1,2,3,5,5. He gets a full success, with no sacrifice, so he eliminates another one of John's secret tokens.

Lyrebird, takes the last action. Using the 'soldiers' on his side, his intimidating 'Signature Weapon', the empathy from his 'Latin' dance and his 'persuasive' charm, he tries to convince General Howell that the wrong course of action has been taken. John uses his last available token to resist this. The balance leaves Lou rolling 6 core dice and an extra die automatically applied to degree of success. He only really needs one success to gain a situational advantage over the General, but it would be nice to upgrade this to a short-term advantage. Lou rolls his dice: 1,2,2,3,4,6...the extra die rolls a 5. At this point Lou doesn't care about sacrifices, he just wants to make sure the General won't cause any more problems in the short term. One success keeps the General persuaded for the immediate situation, the second success from the extra die pushes this persuasion up to a short term. The 4 from the core dice is applied to Degree of Sacrifice, the 3 is applied to Degree of Story. For his sacrifice, Lou says that Lyrebird loses his soldier allies (he would have lost them at the end of the scene anyway).

The pressure is off.

Restoration of the Balance

There's now about twenty minutes to go, John thinks there is time for another scene, maybe two if the wayfarers each only take a single action or if they make things quick.

The team escorts General Howell into the bowels of Parliament House to deactivate and disassemble the bomb, on the way, Lyrebird manages to improve the General's persuaded status to Long Term. Monitor shoots at some scavengers who might cause problems later. Kangaroo tries to look up the schematics

for a bomb based on the information provided by the General, but he's unsuccessful.

As a final scene, they reach the bomb. Kangaroo manages to disarm it, and Lyrebird convinces the general permanently to never build it again. The vortex disperses.

John looks at the remaining traits. 3 in the Deep Dreaming, none in the Shallow Dreaming or the Waking World. There are some residual spiritual issues, but nothing that could cause immediate problems in the waking world. The tension in the air and the paranoia induced by the spiritual vortex will subside now that it is gone. The area should be safe for travellers for a while.

The Corroboree

The circle heads off into the sunset, leaving the city behind them. They follow a side road up to a secluded but well used campsite. The wayfarers discuss their first successful attempt at cleansing a part of a song-line, they hope that many more will come their way. They dance.

Kangaroo leaps around the circle; he enacts the defusing and dismantling of the bomb, showing how he has learnt a new 'science' valued by his people.

Lyrebird dances with Latin passion; through his emotional moves, he portrays his dealings with the Urbanites of the city and their 'research' into the past.

Monitor moves with the slow rhythmic motion of tai chi; her moves echoing the placement and the defusal of 'explosives', both of which have been touched on in her special forces training.

Numbat aggressively poses in the stylings of krump; between the posturing, he shows actions reflecting the raw 'strength' he showed at a number of points throughout the journey.

Inscribing Scars

Throughout the course of the session, only one character developed a permanent trait that they wanted to keep. That was Kangaroo who spent most of the session dedicated to his computer. The group discuss the computer and feel that it would be a worthwhile addition to the group. Kangaroo asks Monitor to tattoo a circuit pattern on his upper left arm. She is happy to oblige, Mary writes this permanent change onto Kangaroo's wayfarer sheet.

Keeping Other Traits

Numbat became considered 'armed' and then 'dangerous' during the course of the session. IF he had stayed at the armed status he might have ended up with a less powerful permanent trait, instead he has a more powerful long term one. Neil really likes this trait and he wants it to stay around for the next session, in the hope that he might be able to make it permanent then. He spends one of his remaining bonus tokens at the end of the session to keep 'dangerous' as a long term trait when the next session starts.

Supporting Cast and Shadow Development

Most of the supporting cast will stay in the ruins of Canberra, but some of them have a chance of being met again. John thinks about which character were best accepted by the players.

General Howell's story is over for the moment, but he might make a great ongoing antagonist...a warmonger who stirs trouble wherever he goes.

Jackson Green was a wanderer and he could easily be met again if the characters come through the area again, but he didn't really stand out. Veronica Dawson was suspected of being the shadow at one stage, and she was killed by an enraged Numbat...she won't be coming back unless she makes an appearance as a spirit. Kung Lao might have returned back to his native lands, but he could make an interesting contact for the wayfarers if ever they are in the area again. Macarthur might be useful as a traveller who provides the right items to the Wayfarers for a difficult price. Olivia injected some humour into the scenes where she appeared, and this prevented the game from getting too heavy. She's probably the most likely to make a comeback in a later session.

John adds a permanent trait to General Howell, Jackson Green, Kung Lao, Macarthur and Olivia. When they are met again, he'll try to make sure they show development as individuals. He crosses out the mark on General Howells sheet indicating his shadow status. This way it is permanently recorded on the sheet that the General has been a shadow, but is not an immediate threat anymore.

Fleshing out the World

As the session winds up for the night, the players write down a series of notes describing the things they have discovered about this part of the song-line. Neil suggests the group records their sessions as six lines of rhyming verse following an A-A-B-C-C-B rhyming structure, and then once they have a couple of verses

accumulated, they can work in a chorus that tells of their awesomeness as a wayfarer circle. He has a tune that he thinks it could be sung to as a tune. Lou doesn't like the idea, Mary and Ken tell Lou that if he can come up with a better idea, they'll put it to a vote. Lou can't think of an idea so the task of song chronicler falls to Neil.

"Down a desolate highway to the thousand hidden pits of hell,

Once a place of power, binding spirits in a swirling cell,

They ride not knowing what they'll find, or what will cause
them harm.

Unbalanced people, dangerous ghosts, tension mounts to war,

Explosives enough to level an ancient capital to its floor,

But Monitor and Lyrebird, restore the world to calm."

It's not perfect; he'll try to work out something better before the next session starts.

Wayfarer Ascension

The players have started to develop a rich tale of adventure across the wilderness, it has lasted for three sessions so far.

At the end of the fourth session, Ken and Lou would like to see their characters become more powerful in the dreaming. They have each accumulated a few permanent traits that they are willing to sacrifice for the chance to attain spiritual ascension; Ken has one and Lou has three. Since they are each attempting to gain their second ring of mastery, they each have a pair of traits against them.

Ken rolls three core dice and 1 extra die automatically applied to degree of sacrifice. The core dice are rolled: 2,4,5. The extra die rolls a 3. Ken really wants that mastery so he places the 5 in degree of success. He then places the 4 in sacrifice because he doesn't want to suffer too heavily, that makes one sacrifice, plus the minor sacrifice from the extra die. He leaves the 2 in the degree of story, so John chooses the two sacrifices that Kangaroo makes. He'll spend the next game with 'ringing ears' and 'a limp'.

Lou is in a better situation, he has three core dice and an extra die automatically allocated to degree of success. The core dice are rolled: 1,3,6. The extra die rolls a 5. Since the extra die provided him with the success he needs, Lou places his 1 in the degree of success. He places the 6 in degree of sacrifice to avoid taking any injuries for the next session, and he places the 3 in degree of story.

Both Ken and Lou have become more spiritually aware through their rituals, but Ken has come out of his spirit quest far worse for the experience.

Ascending and facing the Final Ring

A dozen sessions have passed, some of the original wayfarers have been lost to injuries or simply because the players thought that the wayfarers had completed their stories. Of the original group, only Numbat remains. He is now a venerable warrior known across the land for his exploits against the various forces that continue to upset the balance between the Waking World and the Dreaming.

Numbat is the leader of the Wayfarer circle by virtue of being the oldest and the most experienced; he has attained five rings of mastery. On gaining his second ring he learned that XXX, his third ring taught him XXX. The fourth ring gave him the wisdom that XXX, and the fifth ring revealed XXX. The time has come for Numbat to make a final decision, he passes the mantle of circle leadership to the next most experienced member in the circle because he will either be ascending as a protective spirit, or he will be settling with his tribal people as a shaman. His walkabout is over. Neil needs to declare his intentions about how to end Numbat's tale, he'd like to have Numbat return to his people, but the spirits will decide.

Numbat has acquired five permanent traits that he is willing to risk for this final ring of mastery; he is also willing to risk two permanent scars since his story is basically now over. The challenge applies six traits against him, leaving one extra die in his favour. He rolls the three core dice: 1,2,4...and the extra die: 5. With a success from the extra die, Neil puts the 4 into degree of sacrifice to minimise the backlash that John will choose. The 1 is placed into degree of success, the 2 is placed into degree of story. John decides that Numbat's final spirit quest leaves him with a permanent scar on his right lower leg, it will be vaguely

shaped like a serpent representing the years of service that Numbat has served the Rainbow serpent in bringing balance to the Dreaming.