

# TRAVESTY!

## A DADAIST FANTASY ROLEPLAYING GAME

Created by James Dotson(InkyHat) for  
Newspaper Clippings  
Giant Mechanical Spiders  
Price of Victory History repeats itself

Attributes may not have a direct numeric value  
Death, Pestilence, Famine, and War are seen as good things.



# IN THE BEGINING, THERE WAS CHEESE

## OR: GETTING STARTED

Unlike most other Roleplaying games, Travesty! requires some set-up before you play for the first time. It's messy, it's a little time consuming, but it's part of the fun.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Scissors
- Glue
- A Newspaper
- Paper
- Some friends

### POINT OF ORDER!

Assuming you have gathered all these things, or at least some friends, it's time to begin. I reccomend integrating set up and character creation. If you would rather sit around and snip newspapers by yourself, more power to you. But, it gives the other players more control on what they'd like to see. Encourage them to bring a newspaper or magazine of their own to cut up. Not only will this increase the diversity of the phrase pool, it'll make them feel more involved.

### CHOOSING YOUR STYLE:

There are two ways to to run a game of Travesty!: Traditional and Exquisite. Traditional Style is just that, Traditional. You have a Host and you have some Players. The host decides what's going to happen and acts as the Players' eyes and ears.

Exquisite Travesty! is a little different. Whenever there is a conflict between Players and NPCs, Narrative Control comes up for grabs. Whoever wins the conflict gains narrative control and is free to take the story off in whatever direction he so chooses. But beware, should you hog the spotlight, the other players can and most likely will vote you out of power and install a new Narrator. Oh well, easy come, easy go.

More information on the Style "switch" can be found in a further chapter.

### CHOOSING YOUR SETTING:

Travesty! comes with it's own setting, however it is very flexible and can run just about anything, but I must warn you where ever you set it, things are going to get very over the top very, very quickly.

Though out this text, you'll be finding little end notes and side bars like this. Those with a green background, like this, are optional rules and things to look out for. Those with Blue backgrounds are examples of Exquisite gameplay, and those with Red(more of a orange cream, really) backgrounds are Examples of Traditional Play.

As an aside. Should you be color blind, have printed this out in black and white, or other wise unable to see the colors: I appologise but it was a convienant shorthand.

# HE'S A REAL CUT-UP

## OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND CREATE A CHARACTER

Now, assuming that you've gathered all these things, it's time to create a character. First, you and your friends need to get together and cut promising articles out of the newspaper, and then cut them down to three word strips.

From here, you have two options. You can either choose the ones you want, or you can toss them in a bowl and draw at random. Take ten strips and set them on the blank piece of paper. Here's the fun part.

Arrange the strips as you please, and now try to come up with ten sentences describing your character. Should you find you don't like, or cannot use a strip, you may return it to the bowl. Each sentence has to use a strip of newspaper. These are your aspects, you may wish to circle the focus phrase (which may or may not be the newspaper strip). For ease of reading, this text will *italicise* aspects.

Once you have written the sentences down, glue the news paper strips into place. Now, if you haven't already, name your character and give them a quick, three word descriptor. After everyone has created their character, place the remaining strips in a box to be used in later games. With this done, you're ready to move to the next step.

### OPTIONAL RULE

You don't have to use newspaper clippings, of course. Should you prefer, song lyrics, magazine articles, or old books you would rather be rid of. And if you would like more of a challenge, you can always increase the sample size.

Alice, Bob, Carol, and David have decided to get together for a game of Travesty! They've agreed to each bring an article to cut up. Dave's decided he wants to play a physical character, and so has brought an article on the Highland Games. Carol decided it would be fun to do something with Cooking, so has brought an article on Gordon Ramsay. No, I don't know why, maybe she's insane. Bob and Alice just bring random news paper articles. As a group, they proceed to cut up the articles and place them in a bowl.

As a group, they take turns drawing suggestions from the bowl and decided whether or not to use each strip. During this time, they discuss what sort of game they wish to run. Everyone decides that they'd rather have something off the wall and that no one really wants to "Run" it.

Several sessions later, Eve stops by to watch and decides that Travesty! looks like great fun, but utter chaos. She obtains a copy of the rules and reads through it until she gets to this very example. With a look of confusions, she rereads it a few times and lifts her left leg. Utterly confused now, she continues reading.

After finishing the book and being rather amazed at the examples, she calls her friend Justin to get a game together. Ultimately, they decide on Traditional game play, with Justin acting as Narrator. He'll make the pool of phrases ahead of time, so they can just jump into character creation.

# BUT I DON'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DISCO AND TECHNO!

## OR: CHOOSING YOUR STYLE

Travesty! has two main styles Exquisite and Traditional. I will go into more depth in their respective paragraphs, but I must say now, the names are not meant to judge play style or imply that one is better than another.

### EXQUISITE TRAVESTY!

Exquisite Travesty! has nothing to do with quality, but rather with the way the game is played. In Exquisite Travesty! Narrative Control is passed to the winner of the current conflict and continues in their hands until the next conflict or the other players vote them out of power. Exquisite Travesty gets it's name from the surrealist parlor game "exquisite corpse".

### TRADITIONAL TRAVESTY!

Traditional Travesty is played like any other roleplaying game; you have the Narrator, who controls the flow of action, and the Players, who well.... Play. Narrative Control reverts to the Narrator after conflict is resolved.

#### ALTERNATE RULE:

For Traditional Travesty!: Rather than simply planning an adventure or campaign as normal, write down one paragraph on what you're planning on doing in the adventure/campaign, and put the last sentence on a new line. Fold the piece of paper so that only the last sentence is visible and pass it to the first player. Have them repeat the process, using your sentence as a starting point. When they're done, pass it onto the next player. Repeat until all the players have put something down, or until you think you've hit a good length.

Justin browses through the book and cherry picks a set of rules that appeal to him. To ensure that things go smoothly, he decides to choose the newspaper clippings ahead of time, and weeds out the less interesting phrases. This is all well and good, but he decides that it's not very Dadaist. So, to make things a little more random, he grabs the Exquisite Corpse Adventure generation rule(Above, in the green box) and updates it to the Email Age.

In it's own way, it's predictable. Eve flounders and tries to find some way to let everyone else shine, Mallory tries to mess things up, and Oscar puts in lots of conflict. He steps them through a cycle a few more times, to get a complete campaign out of this, but ultimately, he decides he should have waited until after character creation.

Speaking of, once they actually get to character creation, Oscar voices his misgivings. "This isn't even a real RPG but rather a 'collaborative story telling experience' with a character sheet and actual conflict. It doesn't even have character advancement for Frigg's sake. I mean, where are the stats? How can I know if I chopped off the head off a monster if it doesn't even have critical hit tables? Oh, that reminds me! I brought in an article on Chechen Rebels for character creation."

Justin says and shakes his head. "Your objection is duely noted, Oscar. And I told you, we're not bringing in our own articles, I did all the work so that we could just jump to character creation. Everyone else ready?"

Deep down, Eve just wishes everyone could get along and play. She doesn't say anything, of course. Someone might take it the wrong way, and she just couldn't handle it.

# EVERYBODY WAS KUNG-FU FIGHTING

## OR: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict resolution in Travesty! is fairly simple, all things considered. Travesty is a diceless system that relies solely on the creativity of the players. Instead of comparing stats, one states how many aspects they can invoke. Bidding goes around the table in a counter clockwise fashion, and stops when everyone agrees that they can't go any higher. Whoever can invoke the most aspects gets Narrative control, and gets to describe how the scene plays out. What happens from there on depends on which style of Travesty one is playing.

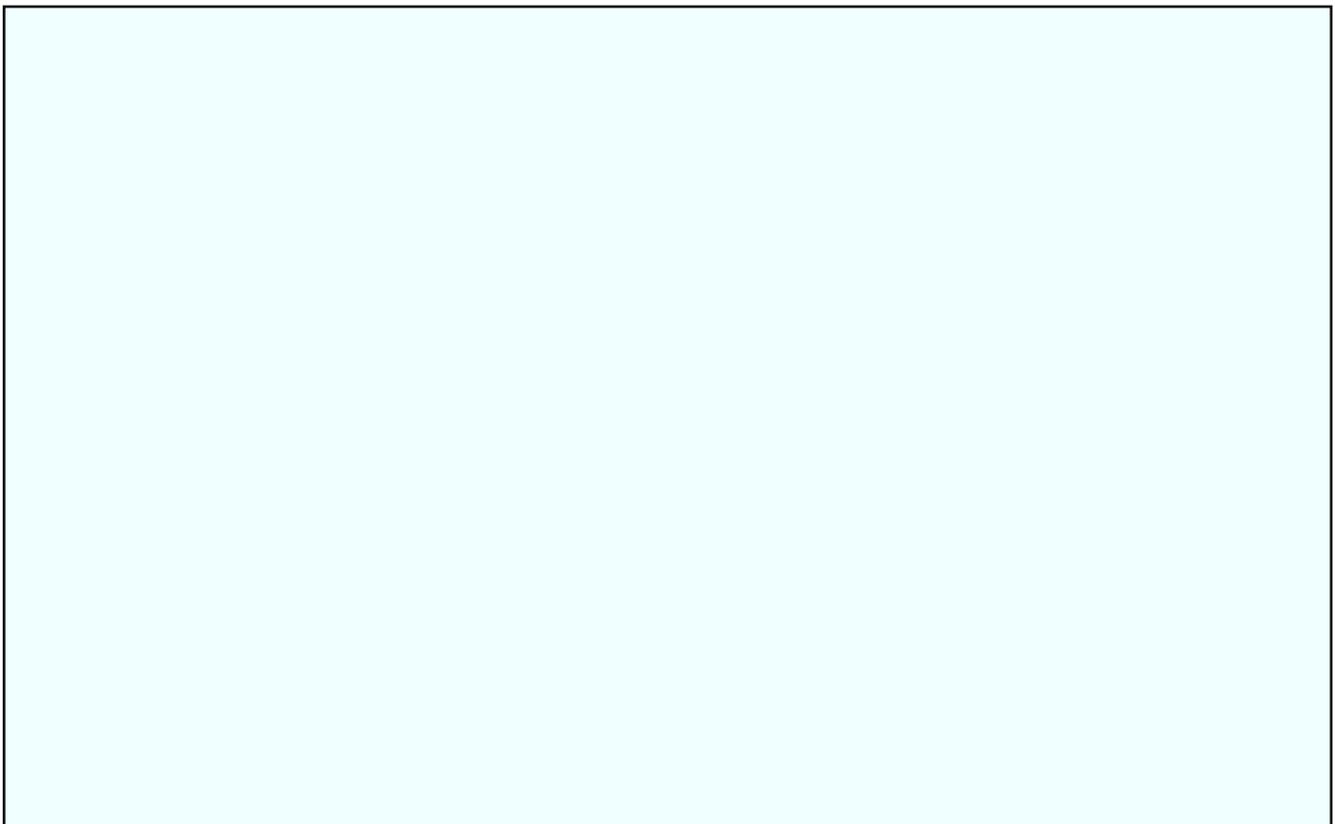
One can invoke any aspect currently in play. These include your enemy's, your ally's, and the environment. For example:

Alice currently has Narrative control and decides that the party encounters a Brown American Giant Running Panda. Dave has made an Existential Circus Strongman, and he decides he'd like to be rid of this Panda. So, he calls for some conflict. Alice can think of Three aspects she can Invoke to win this fight. Large, Fast, and Strong. Dave, on the other hand, can come up with six, four of his own, two belonging to the panda. Bald, Weightlifting Champion of Newark and Caber Toss, with Cowardly from the Panda.

Winning handily, Dave describes the situation as follows: "The panda rushes me head on, and I crouch, blinding it with the light reflected of my shining head. When he gets into range, I grab him about the bottom and spring back to a standing position. I run as fast and as hard as I can, tensing every muscle for several seconds before releasing with a roar. The panda goes flying and land perfectly on it's head, just like back at the Highland Games. It falls away from me and scabbles to it's feet, and begins sprinting toward me again. This time, however, it's too frightened to fight, and it runs away."

Well, it may not be a classic, but it worked.

And for an example of invoking the aspects of other team members:



# EXQUISITE PROBLEMS

## OR: WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE'S HOGGING THE SPOT LIGHT

In theory, this should never come up. In practice? Who knows. So, you're playing ExquisiteTravesty! and someone has managed to wrest control away from the others and refuses to fail a contest. Well, there are a few things to do. First of all, if they come up with really weak justifications for using specific aspects, or they're just too broad, you can say such. Perhaps the other players will agree with you. If this occurs, you can strike the weak aspects from the list. If they now lose, problem solved!

And what if they're just too creative and don't want to give it up? Ask the others at the table if they think the person is taking up too much time, and they'd rather have someone else in charge. If the majority agrees, feel free to oust the person hogging control.

Several weeks after starting, and most certainly after the example in the next chapter Eve's group decides to switch to Exquisite Play to prevent Justin from burning out; and to provide an example for this chapter, as Alice's group is far too stable and boring. A few hours into the session, they decide they have a problem. Mallory grabbed control of the game and has yet to let go.

"No problem," thinks Eve. "I remember there being a chapter on this in the book." And so, she turns to page Seven of the book, and reads the information there-in. She also begins to read this very example, but stops at this part, for fear that her head will explode if she thinks about it too hard.

"Hey, Oscar? I want you to see if Mallory's next Justification for winning seems a bit weak." She says.

"Oh good! I get to play rules lawyer!" Oscar says. "The lack of crunch in the game was starting to annoy me."

Sadly, it doesn't help much. But, the three of them do agree that they're not having any fun, and resolve to ignore Mallory for the next three conflicts, after voting her out.

"You know, I'm loving this PvP vibe and all, but can we go back to Traditional Style? I really don't like having to improvise." Oscar says.

"I suppose that would make sense. I guess I don't mind that much, it's better than letting Mallory run something. Which reminds we, we didn't pick a new Narrator. It was Eve's idea, so I vote she gets to go next," says Jason.

"I agree," says Oscar.

Poor Eve is left with only one recourse. She draws in a shocked breath and squeeks. "Me?"

# WHERE IN THE WORLD IS SPRINGFIELD, ANYWAY?

## OR: CHOOSING YOUR SETTING

Travesty is a rather flexible system and can conceivably use any setting you'd want to feed through it. However, an actual, comprehensive list of settings designed specifically for this will have to wait. Instead, here are two barebones settings.

Oh, and if you're wondering why it took this long to get to the setting information, the reason is simple. Travesty works perfectly well with no setting at all, allowing one to create it as you go.

### SUPER HAPPY SUPER TIME!

In Super Happy Super Time!, players are oddball Superheroes pressed into service to patrol the very edge of doom and prevent catastrophes too weird, too all encompassing for the more conventional supers.

### OGRES AND ELVES AND DWARVES, OH MY!

In Ogres and Elves and Dwarves, Oh My! (Hereby abbreviated to OaEaDOM!) there are no limits to what the players can be as they reside in a world beyond all logic. Brown American Giant Running Pandas, Arboreal Whales, and Bandit Pandas are only some of the monsters you will encounter in this setting. <sup>1</sup>

Eve flips through the book and reaches the setting page. There isn't much there, and she can't seem to find the one Alice and company were using. Worse yet, there is another one of those creamy orange text boxes with her name and thoughts in it. Still, OaEaDOM! looks interesting enough, so she'd suggest it to Justin.

It is about this time that she really starts having trouble with her identity, as she kept seeing her actions on the page before she completed them. Gesundheit. It was really too much for her, and she makes the only logical choice at this juncture. She decides to run off, run where no one would ever find her, most certainly not a book. She heads to the page that is not a page, the reference that always gets deleted. Should you wish to follow her, head to page xx.

Starting with the next page, more in-depth setting information information<sup>2</sup> is available. Should you wish to skip to the Sample Characters, skip to page ZZTopp.

To make your own encounters, simply write up ten aspects for the encounter. For something that is only a nucece or is just a background element, use fewer aspects.

1. Other encounters may or may not be included. Some restrictions may apply, see your local store for details.

2. This mistake was caught, captured, tagged, and returned to the wild at my editor's request. She just couldn't bear to put it down.

# SUPER HAPPY SUPER TIME!

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Super Happy Super Time is set in a world much like our own, however superheroes have made their mark, as have various Lovecraftian horrors. As such, there are superheroes of all stripes running around, and of all power levels. In order to get the most out of the Travesty! Engine, one's team should be tasked with fighting the things too strange for the "Best" to deal with.

## SAMPLE ENCOUNTERS

### TACTICAL ICE CREAM UNIT, VAN

The Tactical Ice Cream Unit's patrol van is *cunningly disguised* as a common Ice Cream Truck. Don't be fooled as the van has a state of the art *Surveillance System*. They use their powers for good, however and attempt to *seek out civil unrest* and quiet it with liberal application of ice cream and information. To further this end, all Tactical Ice Cream Vans have *rams* installed on the front bumper and hood to batter down any fence or blockade in their way. Always looking out for public safety, they loathe to use it except in an *emergency*. In case of a chemical attack, all drivers carry *gas masks* and will hand out their spares to the public. Should the van be blocked by a wall they cannot get through, or if in doing so they would risk the lives of the public, the van will deploy a *Scout Unit*. The Tactical Ice Cream Scout is a standard *Ice Cream Cart* with added surveillance gear and spare gas masks. Tactical Ice Cream Drivers are *unarmed*, as no one in their right mind would deny the people their ice cream.

### Armored Spraycan Squad

Armored Spraycan Squads are groups of known vandals and little more than a *public nuisance*. They are, however, the *eyes and ears of the street*. As such, it is important that one stays on their good side as they *always know* what's going down. However, due to their technically illegal status and the non-lethal weaponry available, their *body armor* sees a lot of use.

# OGRES AND ELVES AND DWARVES, OH MY!

## SETTING NOTE:

The world of OaEaDOM is, at first blush, a relatively normal fantasy world. You've got your Elves, Humans, Dwarves, Ogres, and tiny cute things that no one plays. You've got your typical magic and so on. Should one wish to play a magical character, one has several options. You can put Magician, Mage, Witch, or similar in your three world description, you can choose a word along those lines for one of your aspects, or you can just hand wave it.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The world of OaEaDom is a strange, windswept place. Once, verdant meadows covered the plains. Then one fateful day, magic came to strip logic away. It was just too powerful for sense to contain. Now, lava fields jut up against frozen wastelands, and a desert may surround a giantactic forest. The life, too has changed. No longer are the aquatic animals confined to the sea, and some animals have learned to speak.

Most towns are built in defensible positions, like the towering Rib Dunes. No one is quite sure how they formed but they just up from most desert areas, some reaching as far as a mile up where they collect the rare moisture. In truth, they know that the conflict is the only way to survive. By accepting illness, one gets stronger, by rolling with the punches, one learns to take punches, and that in living our lives, we all change a little, we all die a little every day.

## SAMPLE ENCOUNTERS

### GIANT RUNNING PANDA, BANDIT

The Bandit Giant Running Panda, or more commonly Bandit Panda is a *clever* creature, much like it's Brown American cousin. It is a *tool user*, and prone to picking up swords and fire arms. Unlike it's cousin, however, it is *quite lazy* and prefers to get others to work for it. Standing at four foot tall on it's hind legs, it is rather *large* for a raccoon. Ultimately, it is *mostly harmless*.

### GIANT RUNNING PANDA, BROWN AMERICAN

The Brown American Giant Running Panda is a curious creature. Though bear like, it is far more closely related to raccoons. The BAGRP is also *Curious* by it's nature and enjoys looking inside of cans, boxes, and trees, always searching for food. Standing at nearly six foot when on it's hind legs, it is *Quite Large* for a raccoon. Due to it's curious and *clever disposition* as well as six fingered paws, it can operate most simple human machinery.

There are tales of a mad BAGRP chasing people with a chainsaw, but while they are *strong* enough to pull it off, they are lacking in the disposition. Although curious and clever, they are rather *cowardly* and prefer an expeditious retreat to prolonged combat. A frightened BAGRP is *quite fast*, often reaching speeds in excess of 56 kilometres per hour (35 miles per hour). When nearing their top speed, they often rear up on their hind legs and *sprint* much like a Human or Elf.

### PANDA BANDITS

Panda Bandits are, infact, human men who dress up as Giant Pandas in order to *kidnap* the various species. They don't really do anything other than get them *drunk* and deposit them in a random location. As such, they are *mostly harmless*.

### WHALE, ARBOREAL

Arboreal Whales, as their name implies, *live in trees*. More specifically, they "fly" along tree tops by flinging their *massive bulk* from tree to tree. They have a limited ability to *glide* but they do not engage in this behavior often. Due to their size, they are rather *clumsy*, and occasionally plummet to earth. Should

they spend too long on the ground, they may find themselves suffocating. Arboreal Whales are *filter-feeders* and subsist entirely on air krill. As such, they are *mostly harmless*, unless they should fall on you.

## SAMPLE CHARACTERS

### GORD GARLIC-ISLE, CELTIC WARRIOR CHEF

Gord was born from a giant egg deposited high hills of *The Northern Continent*. He grew up to be a *large, strong man*. Trained in the ancient art of *Florentine Cooking* from a young age, he is equal parts *Deadly and Delicious*. He also has a lot of experience in using a *Celtic Warrior Chicken*, and does so frequently. As he had prepared for war most of his life, is quite skilled at *Improvisational Cooking* as well. As a skilled warrior, as well as a skilled chef, he tends to *field dress and fillet* his enemies at the same time. As a warrior, his is always ready to go into battle, and wears his *blue warpaint* at all times. He has nothing but *respect for his father*, so as his father swore an oath never to eat pigs, Gord himself has followed it. Most of the time, anyway. It helps that he dislikes the taste of pig but is not strict about it, and can therefore be considered *mostly harmless*<sup>1</sup>. Aside from that, he should be considered *Deadly and Delicious*.

### Samson the Strange, Existential Circus Strongman

Samson is a *large man*. His *broad shoulders* and chisled physique have earned him praise everywhere he's gone. His *bald* head, however, has only earned him scorn. He had been bald from a young age, which is what got him interested in *Weight Lifting*. Not only a *Strong Man*, but a *smart* one, he put his brain toward increasing his muscles. It wasn't long before he became the *Weight Lifting Champion of Newark*. It didn't take long for his ambition to grow and so he became interested in the Highland Games event known as the *Caber Toss*. This, too, he mastered, so he left to *ponder the meaning of existence*. It wasn't long before the *Circus of Angst* showed up to hire him. There, he became their star *Strongman*.

1. Eve sighs, groans, and rolls her eyes.

## GAME DESIGN SECRETS

I know that I'm not going to score well. The connection to the image is tenuous at best and I forgot to put in the Four Horsemen as positive figures until the end. It even looks like I forgot the phrases category. No. I worked that into the system itself, as hidden as it may be. The trick to winning conflicts is simple. "The secret of victory is that history repeats itself." You only have ten aspects, and you're probably going to be thrown into similar situations repeatedly.

So, you must learn when to recycle material. In order to survive in an insane, orderless world, you must become predictable and comfortable, which is in and of itself insane and unpredictable. You don't think of globe spanning conspiracies to provide people with low cost comfort food when you see an ice cream truck. It's insane, it's surreal. That's the point. The familiar sport of caber tossing becomes odd when the tree is replaced with a giant panda. Gordon Ramsay, done up in blue face paint and waving a chicken around like a club is insane, but you could see him running around flailing a knife at something.

History repeats itself, use the familiar schticks and you'll succeed in coming up with the most aspects. Use them in odd, inappropriate situations and come up with a good justification, and you'll amuse everyone. Combine them, and it'll be epic.

That said, I again expect this to rate poorly. It's not everyone's cup of tea, and it's not a RPG by some definitions. But I worked hard on it, and I hope you enjoy it.

### SPECIAL THANKS TO GO OUT TO:

My Girlfriend, for putting up with me while I prattle on about surrealism and dada-ism. Also for acting as my editor.

RPGnet for giving us a place to do this.

Duct Tape, for keeping my girlfriend quiet when I needed to over-ride editorial mandate.

Gavken, for hosting this file and judging it.

And finally. Thank you Eve, for deciding to help me. And for putting up with the hell I just put you through. I hope you make good use of your enlightenment.

Eve had curled up in a corner, crying quietly to herself. She turns her head to sky and asks, "You again? Do you get off on tormenting people?"

No, Eve. I just need your help.

"What ever could I help *you* with, oh great and all powerful voice? After all, I'm nothing but your sockpuppet." She rolls her eyes. At least the sarcasm has given her a break from the tears.

I'm not that great, and I'm not that powerful, Eve. I need you to help me finish the book. I can't do it without you.

"We're not normally like that you know! Mallory isn't usually so... Evil. Oscar isn't a munchkin! We're not dysfunctional! We're not..." She shouts into the sky, trying to choke back tears. "You made us this way! Why?" I needed examples.

"You needed examples for some silly game, so you come down and ruin my life?"

That's about the size of it, Eve. But I didn't make you do anything. I can't make you do anything.

She sniffs for a minute before looking up. "What do you mean?"

I just brought out what was there. Justin Narrates because he is fair. Oscar comes off like a munchkin because he really only cares about matching wits, about finding a worthy opponent. And Mallory the Mallet throws tantrums because that's what she does. She breaks things. All I did was give you the game. "But why me? Why not Alice?" She wails to the unforgiving sky.

Because, Eve. You listen. Alice's only function is to be in on the joke. To know the secrets you seek.

"I... I see. I have one question. If I'm not real, if nothing I've ever experienced is real... What happens to me when the book ends?"

But it is real, Eve. It's real to you. And that's all that matters. When the book ends, you'll live on. If not on my page, on the pages of others. You will live on in my mind, and in the mind of my readers. You're not the first person with these problems, Eve. There's this guy I think you should meet. He's named Buddy, he's had to deal with this a few times. I'm sure he won't mind helping someone else.

Eve sniffed. "Give me a minute. This is too much to take in..."

Take your time.

Eve sniffed and closed the book. She'd finish it tomorrow.