

ROCK OPERA '79

A roleplaying game by Doug Anderson
Open Playtest Edition 1/25/14.
Not for sale or redistribution.

This is a plain-vanilla playtest version of the game.

Number of Players

Rock Opera '79 can be played by 2 to 5 players plus a referee, but the sweet spot is 4 players plus a referee.

Materials

- A standard deck of playing cards for each player plus one for the referee. Each deck should include the jokers. If each deck has a different back, it will help keep players' cards from being mixed up, just in case.
- Printouts of the twelve rock star personas for players to choose from
- One copy of the Top 100 Chart to list the band's chart position
- Pencils for occasional notes

Preparation

1. One player should be designated the referee, hereby referred to as The Man, regardless of gender. Only The Man needs to be familiar with the rules

before play. Other players will pick it up as the game progresses.

2. Each player should choose a rock song ahead of time and come to the game prepared to share it in a format that the referee can play. Songs with the word "rock" in the title are especially potent. The referee should have a selection of 70s lite rock and disco songs available for play, and a means to play them... loud!

Quick Overview

In **Rock Opera '79** each player takes the role of an outlaw rock star playing in a band, trying to climb the charts and stick it to The Man. Here's a quick overview of play:

1. Players decide among themselves which role each one will play in a rock band: vocals, guitar, bass, or drums. The list of band positions is called the *lineup*, and the other players are called *bandmates*.
2. Each player chooses a rock star from the twelve premade Star Sheets provided.
3. Set up your card deck by keeping only the suit that matches your role: diamonds (vocals), clubs (drums), hearts (bass), or spades (guitar). Remove the queen, king, and ace and shuffle the rest. Keep the ace on the table to use at your discretion to begin a rock anthem later on.

4. The referee, called The Man, describes what the band can see and hear around them in the Rockiverse — the pretend world of the story.

5. You tell The Man what your rock star is doing/saying, each player does the same in turn, then The Man updates you about what is happening around your rock star in the Rockiverse, and you have another chance to say what your rock star is doing. Repeat for as long as you want the story to keep going. You have to draw cards to see if you meet a challenge that your rock star has chosen to face, and The Man does the same for the evil forces under his control. Defeat the forces of the Discocracy, convert some fans, and you will watch your band climb the charts!

For a more detailed explanation of play, read on.

Getting the Band Together

Each player will act the part of a rock star in a band of rebels seeking to overthrow the repressive Discocracy and bring freedom to the Rockiverse. There are twelve rock stars available, each representing a sign of the Zodiac, from Aries to Pisces. Here's how to get your band together:

1. **As a group, decide what role you want to play in the band:** vocals, guitar, bass, or drums. The

final outcome is called your *lineup*. You can choose any method you like to resolve disputes between players, from rock-paper-scissors to bribes to god-forbid actual consensus.

2. Ideally, **Rock Opera '79** is played with four players plus a referee, but other group sizes are possible. Here are suggested lineups for various numbers of players:

Five players: vocals, guitar, guitar, bass, drums

Four players: vocals, guitar, bass, drums

Three players: guitar, bass, drums

Two players: guitar, vocals

3. **Choose your rock star.** There are three rock stars available for each role in the lineup (three vocals, three guitars, three bass, and three drums). You can use any of these methods to select a rock star:

Free choice: Look through the three rock stars available for your role and choose the one you like best.

Blind choice: Turn the three rock star sheets over and pick one at random.

You bastard: Each player chooses a rock star for the person sitting to their left.

4. **Name the band.** The Man will probably want to go do laundry or get a coffee while you and the other players are hashing out a name for your band. Seriously, it's the most contentious process in a band's career next to who gets to keep the van when you break up.

Playing your Rock Star

Now that you have chosen your role in the band and your rock star, let's look more closely at your rock star sheet. The sheet has all the information you need to play your rock star. We'll go through it line by line.

1. **Name.** Just a suggested name for your rock star, in case you're feeling lazy. You can go with it or make up your own. You can choose to be a member of any gender you wish — some of the names suggest male rockers, some suggest female rockers, some are androgynous. You can adjust the character's name and gender to your taste. Also listed is your role in the band (vocals, guitar, bass, or drums).
2. **Star Sign.** Your Zodiac sign, with a brief description of how your rock star gets along with the band, and some character traits. Use it as shorthand character development to give your rock star some dimension.
3. **Powers.** Your star sign determines your score, from 1 to 4, in four different Powers: Chops, Heart, Mojo, and Muscle. Here's a breakdown of the four powers:
 - a. **Chops:** Your Chops score tells you how skilled you are in your role. Guitarists always have Chops 4 –it's their primary power. You can use your Chop to attack: the challenge number will usually equal your foe's Speed defense score (see Defenses, below).
 - b. **Heart:** Your Heart score tells you the strength of your loyalty to the band and the level of concern you have for your friends. It's also a member of how warmly others react to you, and your intuition about other people's motives. Bass players, as the heart of the band, always have Heart 4.
 - c. **Mojo:** Your Mojo is your leadership and stage presence. Your Mojo score tells you how well you can whip up a crowd's enthusiasm and take center stage. As the front man for the band, vocalists always have Mojo 4. Your Mojo attack is measured against your foe's Will defense score.
 - d. **Muscle:** Your Muscle score tells you how strong you are. Drummers always have

Muscle 4. Muscle is useful for smashing down a door, sending a bouncer flying, or making an attack against a foe's Vitality score.

What does this mean in game play? A power's score tells you the most cards you can draw while meeting a challenge to that power. For example, breaking down a stage door is a challenge to your Muscle, and if you have Muscle 3, you could draw up to three cards, adding their value, to meet or beat a challenge number set by The Man based on how strong the door is.

4. **Defenses:** Your star sign also determines the relative strength of your three defenses: Speed, Vitality, and Will. Your defenses' scores are the challenge numbers that The Man's minions have to meet or beat to hurt you.
 - a. **Speed:** Use your Speed score as the challenge number when a foe attacks you using their Chop, whether trying to out-smoke you on guitar or toss a beer bottle at your head.
 - b. **Vitality:** Your Vitality score is your challenge number when a foe hits you with a Muscle attack, or when your life force or energy is threatened by a villain's brawn.

- c. **Will:** Your rocker's Will score is the challenge number a foe needs to meet or beat when trying to control you psychically or emotionally with a Mojo or Heart attack.

5. **Cool Moves:** In addition to using your powers, you can also activate one or more cool moves during an action scene by activating a jack or other available face card. Cool moves can put some extra burden on your foes or help your bandmates. Beginning rock stars have one move, and can earn more as the band climbs the charts. Moves require one or more face cards (jack, queen, and king) to be drawn from your deck. More about that next, where you'll learn how to set up your deck for play.
6. **Road Journal:** A place to write notes about your characters friends, foes, and exploits.

Setting up Your Draw Deck

Remember that deck of cards each player was supposed to bring to the game? You're going to set up a *draw deck* for yourself that you'll draw cards from to try to meet or beat The Man's challenges during an action scene or rock battle. Here's what you do to make your draw deck:

1. **Remove any jokers** from your deck.
2. **Find all the cards of the suit that matches your role** in the band:

Vocals: Diamonds	Drums: Clubs
Bass: Hearts	Guitar: Spades
3. Put the other three suits aside. You won't be using them for now.
4. **Add one of your jokers** to your chosen suit cards. The joker is worth only one point but doubles the value of the next card you draw.
5. **Remove the jack, queen, king, and ace** from your chosen suit.
6. **Put the jack on the table face down.** You can use it to activate a cool move that only you can do.
7. **Put the queen and king away** with your unused cards. The king and queen represent cool moves that you, as a fledgling rocker, don't have access to yet. If you score some chart action you might be able to put them on the table later.
8. **Lay your ace face down on the table.** You will use it to declare a rock anthem at a crucial point in the game and inflict one of the songs you brought on The Man and his evil forces.
9. You should now have the following cards in your draw deck, all of one suit: **2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, + one joker.** We call this a *standard draw deck*.

Game Play

As in most other roleplaying games, the referee, aka The Man, either works from written notes or improvises as the story progresses, or most likely, a bit of both. The players listen to The Man's description of the scenery and any other characters inhabiting the Rockiverse, and the players react accordingly. No cards are drawn until a player wants her rock star to meet a *challenge*. A challenge is any action that might fail despite the rock star's best efforts, and where the outcome might have a significant effect on the progress of the story. Here are four examples of challenges:

1. Convincing a bouncer to let you backstage to meet an aging rock star who possesses a legendary guitar that you need to defeat The Man.
2. Hurling a huge amplifier into a crowd of minions to scatter them and allow the band to escape.
3. Sneaking a peek at a scribbled phone number in the hand of an agent you suspect is a spy for the Discocracy.
4. Unleashing a blazing guitar solo to blow away a horde of minions sent by The Man to bring you down.

Setting and Meeting Challenges

When a rock star is attempting a challenge, The Man sets a challenge number for the player controlling the rock star to meet or exceed by adding up the numerical value of one or more cards drawn from the player's draw deck. It goes like this:

1. On her turn, the player says what her rock star is trying to do.
2. If The Man thinks a challenge is called for, he sets a challenge number and tells the player which power is most relevant to use (Chops, Heart, Mojo, or Muscle). Sometimes more than one power might be relevant, but it's up to the player to justify its use and The Man has final say because he's The Man.
3. The player shuffles her draw deck: **2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, joker.**
4. The player draws a number of cards from her draw deck equal to her rock star's relevant power score. This is called the player's *draw hand*.
 - a. Numbered cards (2 through 10) are counted simply as their number value.
 - b. If the player draws her **joker**, it counts as 1 and **doubles the value** of the next card she draws. It does NOT count

towards the maximum number of cards she can draw to meet the challenge.

For example, if she draws a joker and a 4, she would count it as $1 + (2 \times 4)$, or 9.

5. Add the numerical value of the cards in your draw hand. If they meet or exceed the challenge number, then the rock star has met the challenge. If not, the rock star has failed.
6. The Man describes what fallout, if any, stems from the result of the challenge.
7. The player returns her draw hand to her draw deck and shuffles her cards.
8. The player takes the top card from her draw deck, face down, and it becomes the first card in the player's Shagged Out pile.
9. Play moves to the next player to the left (including The Man, who will control any evil forces or bystanders in the scene).

An example: Klaus Venom, bassist, is trying to open a locked guitar case that contains a time bomb. The Man asks the player, "Is Klaus trying to pick the lock or just rip open the case?" The player says, "He has Muscle 1, so no he's not about to rip open the case. Can he use Chops 3 to insert a guitar pick into the lock and like, literally, pick the lock?" The Man thinks this is a clever use of Chops and allows the player to pick 3 cards from her deck to meet a challenge

number of 15 (an number chosen by The Man to represent how difficult this challenge is). In context, 10 is considered an easy challenge, and 20 is hard, so this is not impossible but not guaranteed. The player shuffles her draw deck, draws a 7, 6, and 5, for a sum of 18. Success! The guitar case clicks open. "Congratulations," says The Man. "You've opened the case... and activated the bomb's tamper switch. Looks like you have five seconds to decide what to do before you're blown to rock 'n' roll heaven." The player returns her draw hand to her draw deck, shuffles it, and places the top card unseen on the table to begin a Shagged Out pile.

Shagged Out

As noted above, after each challenge, the active player has to shuffle her draw deck and discard the top card sight unseen. This card forms the base of her Shagged Out pile, to which she must add a card from her draw deck after every subsequent challenge.

You can also be forced to discard a card into the Shagged Out pile when one of The Man's forces successfully attacks you during The Man's turn. Your Shagged Out pile represents your rock star's increasing fatigue over the course of a scene. Each card placed in the pile leaves you fewer cards in your draw deck for meeting challenges. You may

even lose your joker to the Shagged Out pile! It's not ALL bad, though, because having, say, a 2 or a 3 in your Shagged Out pile means that the cards still in your draw deck are of higher value and will give you a higher average score on a draw hand.

Players recover their Shagged Out pile when a scene ends or more than few minutes pass by in the Rockiverse without meeting another challenge.

Having A Quick One

So you get all your cards back from the Shagged Out pile when a scene ends. But how do you get cards back into your draw deck *during* a scene? To recover a card from the Shagged Out pile during a scene, your rock star must spend a turn resting (she can still move around a bit, but she can't attempt a challenge). Resting for a turn and recovering a card is known as "Having a Quick One." (A quick *what* is up to the imagination of the player). At the end of a turn resting you recover the top card from the Shagged Out pile and shuffle it back into your draw deck.

If you run out of cards entirely during a scene, you are considered Shagged Out and can't attempt any challenges until you recover one or more cards from the Shagged Out pile by having one or more Quick Ones or the scene ends and you get all your cards back.

Taking a Solo: Playing your Cool Move Card

Remember how you left your jack face down on the table? During an action scene, **instead of taking a challenge**, you can **turn the jack face up and activate a cool move** that only your rock star can do. This is called, "*taking a solo*." Each rock star has their own cool move – sometimes it affects the rock star, or the whole band, or just the forces of The Man. Just follow the directions on your rock star sheet. Some cool move cards remain in play for the rest of the scene, and others are disabled after one use. The description of the move on your rock star sheet will tell you which one applies. A disabled jack is left face up but turned 90 degrees to show it has been spent.

As your band climbs the charts, you will gain access to the queen, and then the king, to unlock more cool moves!

Giving a Solo to a Bandmate

If you haven't used your jack yet, you can offer to flip it face up to let a bandmate take a solo. If the player takes you up on the offer, she can activate her rock star's jack power during her turn or whenever the description of the power indicates

(some cool moves happen on another player's turn or when The Man takes his turn).

Stealing a Solo from a Bandmate

If one of your bandmates has a jack on the table waiting to be used, you can absolutely use it to activate your own cool move. This is called "stealing a solo" and it's a prime source of tension in the band. It's polite to ask first, but not required. After it's flipped face up, the jack is either disabled after one use or remains in play until the end of the scene, depending on the cool power's description on your rock star sheet.

Retuning the Jack

To re-enable your disabled jack at any time draw two cards sight unseen from your draw deck and put them in your Shagged Out pile. Turn the jack to the upright position and flip it face down. The jack may be used again.

Down the line, when you're slinging queens and kings, you can retune them too at the same cost: two cards added to your Shagged Out pile.

Anthem: “Let’s Rock!”

Remember that ace that each player has face down on the table? At any time during a scene, a player can flip her ace and declare, “Let’s Rock!” Since each player has only one ace, they are used sparingly, when the band really needs some inspiration from a classic rock anthem. Here’s what happens when you declare, “Let’s Rock!”:

1. **Turn your ace face up** on the table.
2. **Connect your music-playing device** to The Man’s stereo hi-fi system or load your LP, 45 single, cassette, reel-to-reel, 8-track, CD, or memory stick into The Man’s home electronic audio console.
3. Once your song starts, all your bandmates get the “Let’s Rock!” bonus: every numbered card drawn to meet a challenge is counted as one point higher than its face value. So, a 3 would be counted as a 4, and so on.
4. If the song contains the word “rock” in the title, the bonus increases from one point per card drawn to two points. So a 3 would be counted as a 5, and so on.
5. Only one anthem can be in play at a given time. Anthems are played in the order in which their ace cards are activated.
6. Add the end of the song, turn your ace 90 degrees to show that it’s spent.

7. Unlike jacks, aces can’t be retuned by paying cards from your draw deck to the Shagged Out pile. They can only be retuned when The Man plays a “Get Mellow!” or “Let’s Boogie!” anthem.

Anthem: “Get Mellow!”

One or more times during a game session, The Man can try to hinder the band by declaring, “Get Mellow!” and playing a lite rock song or ballad of his choice.

To play a “Get Mellow!” anthem, The Man must retune a player’s ace. He chooses a player who earlier declared a “Let’s Rock!” anthem and allows the player to rotate her ace upright and flip it over on the table face down.

A “Get Mellow!” anthem generates the following effects:

1. While the song is playing, the band receives a –1 penalty to the value of each numbered card drawn.
2. The band members can’t activate their cool move cards without sending an extra card from their draw deck to the Shagged Out pile.
3. The “Get Mellow!” effects end as soon as the song ends.

A “Let’s Rock!” ace can be spent to cancel a “Get Mellow!” but band members receive none of the usual “Let’s Rock!” benefits (although the player can still play her “Let’s Rock!” song, just for kicks).

Anthem: “Let’s Boogie!”

One or more times during a game session, The Man can inspire his own forces by declaring “Let’s Boogie!” and playing a disco song. Like a “Get Mellow!” anthem, this requires The Man to retune a player’s ace before playing the song.

1. Once the song starts, The Man gets the “Let’s Boogie!” bonus: every numbered card drawn to meet a challenge is counted as one point higher than it’s face value. So, a 3 would be counted as a 4, and so on.
2. If the song contains the word “boogie” in the title, the bonus increases from one point per card drawn to two points. So a 3 would be counted as a 5, and so on.
3. The “Let’s Boogie!” bonus ends when the song ends.

A “Let’s Rock!” card can be spent to cancel a “Let’s Boogie!” anthem but band members receive none of the usual “Let’s Rock!” benefits (although the player can still play her “Let’s Rock!” song, just for kicks).

At the End of a Scene

All players recover any cards remaining in their Shagged Out pile when the rock stars are out of immediate danger for any length of time and The Man declares the end of the scene. Players should reshuffle their deck to get ready for more rock ‘n’ danger down the line!

The Role of The Man

We’ve already mentioned that The Man’s primary role is to describe the Rockiverse to the players and incorporate their responses into the story. He’s like a storyteller who can’t control the actions of his protagonists.

The Man *does* control any friends or foes the rock stars meet in the Rockiverse, however. This could include ordinary citizens, police, fans, criminals, as well as The Man’s sinister minions, menaces, and bosses. Like rock stars, The Man’s characters can have powers, defenses, and cool moves. The Man has his own draw deck to use when these characters are attempting a challenge – and often, the challenge is to clobber, corrupt, or capture the band.

The Man's Forces: Minions, Menaces, & Bosses

The Man's forces of evil fall into three categories: minions, menaces, and bosses. Each type is handled a bit differently in play and may require him to build a slightly different draw deck.

Minions: One Deck per Horde

Minions are a horde of low-level opponents. The Man sets up a standard draw deck with one suit of the numbered cards plus a joker. If the minions have a cool move, the appropriate face card is placed face down on the table.

1. To use a minion deck, The Man can draw as many draw hands as he can in a single turn until he runs out of cards in his draw deck.
2. Each draw hand is an attack against a different rocker, and in some situations, two minions can gang up and make attacks on the same rocker.
3. The Man can stop drawing cards to add to a draw hand as soon as the value of the hand meets or beats the rock star's defense score. He can then start another draw hand to represent another minion's attack. For each

successful attack, the affected player must immediately discard a random card from her draw deck to her Shagged Out pile.

4. When The Man runs out of cards in his draw deck, he shuffles the cards for his next turn.
5. When a rock star attempts to attack a minion as her challenge, The Man uses the appropriate minions' defense score as the challenge number. If the rock star succeeds, The Man must immediately remove a random card from his draw deck to start a Dead Minions pile.
6. The Man can use a minion horde's cool move by flipping the face card face-up. Once used, it is disabled but may be retuned by discarding extra cards to the Dead Minions pile.
7. Unlike cards in a Shagged Out pile, the cards in a Dead Minions pile can't be returned to The Man's draw hand by Having a Quick One.
8. At The Man's discretion, the surviving minions in a battle that's going poorly for them can surrender, run away, or in some cases, self-destruct.

Sample Minions

Thugs (Minion Horde)

Cards: standard draw deck + joker

Cool Moves Cards: jack

Chops 1

Heart 1

Mojo 1

Muscle 4

Speed 6

Vitality 14

Will 5

Cool Moves:

J = Dirty Blow: Draw 3 against opponent's Vitality to make chosen player discard one card to the Shagged Out pile AND lose her next turn.

Roller Queens (Minion Horde)

Cards: standard draw deck + joker

Cool Move Cards: jack + queen

Chops 3

Heart 2

Mojo 2

Muscle 4

Speed 18

Vitality 12

Will 8

Cool Moves:

J = Spin Kick: Draw 4 against opponent's Speed to reduce opponent's Speed to 3 for rest of action scene

Q = Booty Block: Attacks against roller queen are reduced by one draw card for rest of scene

JQ Combo = Cannonball: Roller queen's next attack counts against TWO opponents, but only if more than one card remains in The Man's draw deck.

Menaces: One Deck per Menace

A menace is a single foe whose strength is roughly equal to a horde of minions. The Man sets up a standard draw deck with one suit of the numbered cards plus a joker. If the menace has one or more cool moves, the appropriate face card(s) are placed face down on the table.

1. A menace usually makes only one attack on one rock star per turn, but it has impressive power scores, enabling it to overcome most rock star defenses. Some menaces can make multiple attacks in one turn off the same deck.
2. When a rock star successfully attacks a menace, one card from the menace's draw deck is immediately discarded at random and placed in a Shagged Out pile for the menace. Some menaces can recover cards by Having a Quick One, some can't.
3. The Man can use a menace's cool move by flipping the face card face-up. Once used, it is disabled but may be retuned by discarding two cards to the Dead Minions pile.
4. When a menace loses its last card to its Shagged Out pile, it is destroyed or suffers some other unpleasant fate.

Sample Menace

Mellobot (Menace)

Cards: standard draw deck + joker

Cool Move Cards: jack

Chops 1

Heart 1

Mojo 6

Muscle 3

Speed 6

Vitality 16

Will 16

Cool Moves:

J = Mindwash: Chosen foe's Will is reduced by 3 for rest of scene. This cool move can be applied more than once against the same foe. If foe's Will reaches zero, opponent is under mind control of mellobot for the rest of the scene.

Bosses: Like Rock Stars, but Evil

When playing a boss, The Man sets up a standard draw deck resembling a rock star's draw deck, with one suit of numbered cards plus the joker. Any face cards representing the boss's cool moves are placed face-down on the table. A boss plays just like a rock star, and loses cards to the Shagged Out pile in the same way. Bosses can Have a Quick One to recover cards from the Shagged Out pile. Few bosses will fight to the death and much prefer to hit the doomsday button then leave their minions to perish as they run away to fight again another day.

Sample Boss

Satina Patina (Boss)

Cards: standard draw deck + additional 8, 9 + joker

Cool Move Cards: jack + queen

Chops 6

Heart 2

Mojo 6

Muscle 3

Speed 10

Vitality 18

Will 16

Cool Moves:

J = Eyes of Fire: On the next successful Mojo attack against a foe's Will, Satina recovers the top card from her Shagged Out pile and shuffles it into her draw deck.

Q = Cherchez la femme: Pick one foe. That foe **MUST** steal a solo from a band mate on his or her next turn. If no cool move cards are available to steal, the player loses their next turn.

Running Mixed Groups with Multiple Decks

So what if the rock stars encounter minions *and* a menace in the same scene? Or two menaces and a boss? The Man can make up one draw deck for each. Up to four draw decks can be handled by The Man without much trouble, which is as much as most rock stars can take on.

Climbing the Charts

In the Rockiverse, rock bands are not allowed to join the official disco and lite rock charts, but they can gain fame in the rock underground by appearing on what's called the *pirate chart*. The higher your position on the chart, the more powers you can access!

Your band starts with a pirate chart position of 100. As your band gains fame among the members of the rock underground, your pirate chart position may climb, triggering benefits and bonuses for all band members.

Use the Top 100 Chart sheet to keep track of the band's chart position.

Here are seven ways to climb the charts, although I'm sure you'll think of more:

1. For each **minion horde** defeated, gain 5 spots on the chart.
2. For each **menace** defeated, gain at least 10 spots on the chart and maybe more, depending on which menace you've bested.
3. For each **boss** defeated, gain at least 25 spots on the chart and often more.
4. If you defeat a minion horde, menace, or boss in a **public venue** before a crowd of rock rebels or citizens, The Man may award up to 20 bonus spots on the chart for the fame you've garnered.
5. **Giving an interview** with a member of the press can gain you up to 20 spots on the chart, depending on the size of the interviewer's audience.
6. **Beating another band** in a band battle results in a gain of up to 10 spots, if the band you defeated occupies a higher spot on the charts.
7. **Crashing a disco** to play a rock set is a risky move that could gain you up to 20 spots. The more posh the disco, the more points you may potentially gain.

Cracking the Top Ten

Once your band hits #11, each remaining spot on the chart costs 10 spots to gain – so it takes you 100 additional earned spots to reach #1!

Perks of Stardom

As your band crosses milestones on the way up the pirate chart, your rock star gains certain perks, according to the Top 100 Sheet:

Add +1 Defense: You can add one point to your Speed, Vitality, or Will score.

Add +1 Power: You can add one point to your Chops, Heart, Mojo, or Muscle score.

Add [a number] to Draw Deck: Take an unused card of the value indicated and add it to your draw deck. For example, if the perk is "Add 7 to Draw Deck", you would take a 7 of another suit and add it to your draw deck.

Add [queen or king]: take your suit's queen or king from your unused cards and place it face down on the table next to your jack. You can now access the associated power on your rock star's sheet.

Add 2nd (jack or queen): take a jack or queen of another suit from your unused cards and place it face down on the table next to your other cool move cards. You can now activate a second instance of that cool move in an action scene or make it available for a band member to take or steal.

The Rockiverse

The Rockiverse is the pretend world that the rock stars inhabit. The players can learn a little about it before the game starts, but only The Man has access to most of the information in this section.

Player's Intro

The Man can read this aloud to the players before the start of the first game session but after they've chosen their rock stars. Think of it as a cheesy movie trailer from the early '70s.

In the future, rock must fight to stay alive.

It is the year 1979.

Rock music has been outlawed by the decadent Discocracy. As the glittering elite of Disctopia dance with abandon to a soul-numbing beat, the teeming masses of Rocktopolis call for heroes. That's where you come in.

As a member of one of the last outlaw rock bands standing, you've got to fight your way back to the top of the charts, winning hearts along the way and battling the evil forces of The Man. Can you hit #1 and reclaim rock's right to rule?

A Brief History of the Rockiverse

Legends speak of an ancient World War against evil that goaded humanity into pursuing any possible technological advantage over the enemy. Jetcraft, compustats, health pills, and mech-men were among the fruits of this effort, but their contribution to the war effort paled compared to achievement of harnessing the destructive power of the atom. With this new weapon, the war was won, and an age of peace and prosperity was ushered in.

Atom City and the New Frontier

Atom City rose from the ashes of the global conflict, a shining metropolis of chrome and glass, where every citizen could park his cherry-red aero car on the penthouse roof of his sky-rise apartment, freed by robotic labor to work a four-hour day and spend his leisure time on the putting green, in the pool, or listening to stereophonic record discs on the family high fidelity audio console.

Beyond the city was The New Frontier, a cratered landscape ravaged by the war, now slowly being colonized by military bases, planned towns, robot farms, and factories. Atom City's best and brightest spent their days working to settle The New Frontier

and push the limits of scientific knowledge even further for the benefit of all.

The Iron Curtain

At the edge of the New Frontier lay the belt of fortresses and defensive walls known as The Iron Curtain, encircling half the world. Behind it lay an enigma whose nature could only be hinted at. A few wanderers claimed to have escaped from a repressive, brutal land beyond the curtain, ruled by a shadowy cabal that was preparing for world conquest. In response, the soldiers of the New Frontier kept watch on the walls and strengthened their own defenses. The specter of invasion from beyond the wall has been ever-present since.

SIBIL

Day to day decisions and allocation of resources within Atom City were made by a huge compustat named SIBIL (**S**ynthetic **I**ntelligent **B**rain, **I**nfallible **L**ogic), a massive machine at the heart of the city that told you when to water your lawn, when to buy milk, and which shoes went with that dress. SIBIL was programmed by its creators to minimize danger and disruption and to maximize leisure time and tranquility. For most of its citizens, Atom City had ushered in dream world of comfort and

convenience, monitored by SIBIL's million electric eyes and ears.

Heaven and Its Discontents

But not everyone bought into this dream. Here and there, either in the shadowy lower levels of Atom City or in the wastes of the New Frontier, small bands of discontents sought ways of living that traded safety and comfort for primal, sensual experiences and greater freedom of expression. Some rode super-powered bikes along the megastate highways, seeking escape in noise and speed. Others took up paintbrushes to splash and spatter canvases that defied conventional tastes, or repurpose electrically-amplified instruments to play angry, raw music. Still others spoke of unplugging SIBIL and restoring a human hand in the functioning of government. Their protest rallies were small at first but grew ever larger, as bored young citizens joined the discontents. Their music became a unifying force and medium of protest for the discontents.

SIBIL was not pleased. The subroutines that generated editorial commentary in the city's newspapers expressed displeasure at the ingratitude and indecency of the discontents. They soon found themselves shunned by their neighbors and barred from public spaces. And if an errant walk signal

happened to lure a discontent or two into oncoming traffic, or the traffic system steered their air car into a mountainside, then SIBIL could not be blamed for trying to minimize danger and disruption for the city as a whole. New triumphs awaited.

A Certain Major Key

Out on The New Frontier, scientists from Atom City had developed the war's primitive rocket technology into a vehicle that could propel a pilot into space. The idea of opening The High Frontier to humanity became a public obsession. When SIBIL chose the first astronauts, they became instant celebrities.

Major Timothy Key had outscored everyone on SIBIL's index of courage, skill, decency, and telegenic good looks. True, at 40 he was a bit old for the rigors of space, but no one doubted his fitness. His ascent into space in a tiny capsule atop a flaming rocket was watched by millions on the televid.

Major Key's first words from space were not those that SIBIL had scripted for him. After a minute of dead air, he said, "Oh... the... joy..." and began to laugh. He was giddy, ecstatic. Regardless, he performed his mission perfectly, and soon his

capsule was drifting back to earth beneath a huge parachute. He was still giggling when they unbolted the hatch and pulled him out.

The Elysian Field

Was it oxygen deprivation? Side effects of the stimulants he had been administered pre-flight? Only after studying the readouts from the on-board sensors did an answer emerge.

There was something out there — an unknown form of energy — that permeated all of outer space but was blocked by Earth's magnetic field. Its effect on Major Key's consciousness was to free him of all limitations and fears and allow him to experience absolute happiness and full consciousness for the first time in human history.

He had discovered what became known as the *Elysian field*.

Back on earth, within the cage of the planet's magnetic field, Key's consciousness soon returned to the impaired level shared by his fellow citizens. He yearned to feel whole and happy again. After a few halting, embarrassing interviews on the televid in which he struggled to explain his experience in orbit, Key was relieved of his duties. He bought a

motorcycle and hit the roads of the New Frontier, looking for what he had lost.

Subsequent space flights were made in capsules and spacesuits that shielded the crew from the Elysian field. These sober astronauts quickly mastered near-space and made plans to leave their footprints on the moon and Mars. The red planet had other plans.

Red Planet Blues

Mars had cooled from the maelstrom of the early solar system sooner than its sunward sisters. Complex life came to Mars long before it arose on Earth. The red planet, too, possessed a global magnetic field, generated by the tidal effects of a large moon that churned the primary's interior.

The first sentient beings to walk the rift valleys of Mars were, at least in terms of gross anatomy, roughly human. Their climb from hunter-gathers to spacefarers was longer than ours would be, spanning tens of millions of years, hampered by a scarcity of useful metals and petrochemicals. When they at last scraped together enough material resources to send their first astronauts into space, they encountered the Elysian field and returned to share their mind-bending discovery with their fellow

Martians. To bring the Elysian field to their entire race, their rulers attempted to gently manipulate the planet's magnetic field by gradually moving the Martian moon to a more distant orbit. In a global catastrophe, the moon disintegrated under the pressure of repulsor rays sent from the Martian surface, bringing down a rain of meteors and leaving in place only two sizable fragments in orbit, far too small to exert enough tidal force on the planet's interior to keep it molten.

The planet's magnetic field sputtered out as the molten interior cooled. The Elysian field now reached the surface, but few Martians remained to enjoy it. They had brought happiness to their race at the cost of a doomed planet. Mars slowly became a cold, nearly airless desert bathed in harmful radiation.

By the time of Major Key's historic flight, millions of years later, a handful of Martians remained alive to pick up his radio transmissions. It gave them hope of salvation, that the vigorous Earthers might come to set things right, but also made them fear for their young neighbors, who might make the same apocalyptic mistake in trying to bring the power of the Elysian field to their planetary surface. Should the Martians contact Earth, or wait for humans to cross the gulf of space and discover them? Based

on what the Martians had gleaned of human history via radio and televid broadcasts, some feared the chances of Martian survival outside of a zoo were slim if humans ever met them.

Timothy Key, Rock Messiah

Major Key knew nothing of this as he cruised the New Frontier searching for peace of mind. One evening, passing by a music hall in an old mining town occupied by discontents and other squatters, he heard a driving beat and a pattern of chords that brought back to him, in small measure, the brief happiness he had known in space. Upon entering, he saw a band playing noisy electrified instruments over a pounding drumbeat. The locals called it "rocket music", or "rock" for short, and despite their meager lives, it made them happy and full of life.

Key's scientific curiosity awoke in him a desire to discover what lay behind the phenomenon. He stayed on and studied the physical nature of rock music. It seemed that the electrified instruments, when played with sufficient skill in unison, dampened the Earth's magnetic fields sufficiently to allow some leakage from the Elysian field to reach the planet's surface. Like Prometheus, a rock band could bring down the gifts of heaven to humankind.

On the New Frontier, rock was already spreading among the discontents. The rockers embraced Key as a visionary, and their movement took on the aura of a spiritual quest for freedom. Rock shows spilled out into the streets, and drew thousands of weary Frontier laborers looking for rest and renewal.

Elysium

What followed was a long summer of harmony and good feeling, as a virtual nation of rock sprang up overnight along the New Frontier. Dubbed Elysium, it became a magnet for discontents everywhere, to feel the sense of well-being and freedom that only rock could deliver.

The Rock Laws and the Revolt

SIBIL responded by first restricting, and then outright banning the playing of rock “in the interests of safety and efficiency.” It became a crime to rock. Now the discontents had something concrete to rail against, and their outlaw rock shows became huge rallies condemning the citizens of Atom City as dupes who had traded their freedom for a humdrum life ruled by a soulless machine. The televids showed scenes of the sprawling camps and muddy fields of Elysium accompanied by disapproving commentary, but the attempt to discredit the movement backfired

and drew many young residents of Atom City into the fold. Major Timothy Key was their messiah, and “Unplug SIBIL! Free the City!” was their cry.

Wishing for everyone to share in the nirvana they had gained, the youth of Elysium marched on Atom City, millions strong, to ask that the thinking machine responsible for the city's functioning be shut down. The majority of city dwellers opposed any changes, and many pointed out that without the omnipresent, eminently logical presence of SIBIL the huge metropolis could not function, and chaos would result. For its part, SIBIL had determined that if it was unplugged it could no longer fulfill its mission, and so turned the city itself against the oncoming rockers, using remotely controlled aerocars, cargo vehicles, and service robots as troops, augmented by the more extreme anti-rock citizens. Major Key pleaded for peace, but the mood grew ugly and turned into a full-fledged street battle. Key himself disappeared during the conflict, and rumors about his fate have circulated ever since.

Atom City Divided

The Rock Revolt ended in stalemate, with the rockers in control of the darker, aging lower levels of the city, and the citizens secure in their skyrisers. SIBIL

retained its function as master of Atom City, and rerouted traffic so that loyal citizens of the upper city could be resupplied by air. Their lives were comfortable, but circumscribed by the besieging rockers below, where living conditions were grim. The reduced industrial capacity due to unrest on the New Frontier lowered the standard of living for most citizens. A black market sprang up and enriched a few enterprising hustlers who could circumvent the official supply channels to smuggle in luxury goods.

Disco Discovered

SIBIL's ears heard citizens grumble about the happy existence of the rockers and wonder why they, too, couldn't be eternally happy. The machine ran simulations that showed Atom City would harbor a growing number of disgruntled citizens who might be willing to bargain with the rebels, or defect outright. SIBIL's response was to develop artificial fields that could mollify and sedate the unhappy members of city society. The city's engineers found an alternative beat and form of instrumentation that could simulate the euphoria of an Elysian field. It was named "disco", short for "DISCONTENT SUPPRESSION FIELD", its official nomenclature.

Soon, disco palaces were erected around the city to provide for the happiness of its citizens, who

happily danced and partied around the clock. Disco became a welcome relief from monotony for some, and an obsession for others. Unlike a natural Elysian field, disco energy is truly addictive, and its ability to induce euphoria comes at a cost of dependence and mindless obedience to the music. By subtly manipulating the field, SIBIL was able to pacify the upper city, which acquired the name Disctopia, to distinguish it from the lower city, now called Rocktopolis.

Abdication

The hustlers who had been profiting from the rift between the two halves of the city were finding they could only accomplish so much with SIBIL still in charge. As ever, the electronic mastermind was programmed to provide safety and tranquility, and could still order the arrest of criminals or suspend their financial activities. Maddeningly, SIBIL was beyond their reach, in a secret chamber beneath the lower city, so well hidden that the descendants of its creators did not even know where.

And then one night, SIBIL withdrew from most of its functions. No one knows whether it was a machine error, sabotage by hustlers or by discontents, or even a rational decision made by SIBIL itself, but in

any event, much of the city ceased to function overnight. A period of panic and unrest followed. It was as if the hustlers' wishes had been answered. In the absence of SIBIL, they could rule the city.

Rise of the Discocracy

One hustler, known only as The Man, was able to gather power faster than his rivals, whom he either took in as underlings or eliminated. The remaining oligarchs became known as the Discocracy, with The Man as their director. They became the *de facto* city government, controlling food and power distribution and enforcing their will through a menagerie of human and robo-mechanical minions. They maintained order by restricting access to the disco palaces to disloyal citizens and banishing their enemies to the mean streets of Rocktopolis. Their rule is nearly absolute.

The engineers of the Discocracy are hard at work on technology that could strengthen the planet's magnetic field to the point that not even rock could penetrate it and channel Elysian energy to the surface. If they succeed, it could doom rock forever.

The Now

And so, old Atom City is now two worlds, high and low: above, the glittering but not very gracefully aging skyscrapers and penthouses of Disctopia, with a no-man's land of gates, black markets, and checkpoints separating them from the dim, clammy depths of Rocktopolis below. A decadent, ruthless elite feeds off air-delivered goods from distant robot farms and factories, while in the lower city, the masses struggle for basic supplies of food, water, and energy. The Discocracy profits from the gradient of misery between the two halves, with The Man firmly in charge, said to dwell in the highest penthouse of the city.

The once-unified members of the Rock Revolt are now split into warring factions and gangs, their horizons narrowed, their dreams unrealized. Here and there, the spirit of rock remains, played in unsavory bars or blasted from the rooftops. A few legendary rockers from the old days are still around, and there is a new generation of rockers who wish to take up guitars and drums and bring down Elysian pleasures once more. Some have even penetrated Disctopia's defenses and defied The Man with guerilla rock shows, to startle the citizens of the upper city out of their disco-induced haze, or to battle the Discocracy's minions and other means of absolute control.

The Unknowns

These are the essential mysteries our heroes will face:

Can the Discocracy be overthrown and the two halves of the city be reunited through the power of rock?

Who is The Man and why does he wield such power?

What really happened to Major Key? Rumors persist that he is still alive.

SIBIL's secret chamber has never been found. Is the machine broken, dormant, or hatching some byzantine but eminently logical plan to save the city?

What societies, tribes, and factions are out there on The New Frontier?

Will the Martians ever make contact? Have they already done so secretly? Astronauts are preparing to reach Mars — will they find evidence of Martian civilization?

What's behind The Iron Curtain? Is there a sinister empire, as rumors tell, or something else together?