

Putting the Band Back Together

# PUTTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER

A role-playing game by Ben Wright

## Putting the Band Back Together

Oh, hey, glad you could make it. We were about to start without you.

Got your instrument? Good, looks like a really nice one.

No, no time to give you a set-list or introduce the rest of the band, we're on stage in thirty seconds.

Look, just plug in and take your lead from me.

Twelve bar blues in G, watch us for the changes, and try to keep up.

## Putting the Band Back Together

*Oh, hey, glad you could make it. We were about to start without you.*

*Got your CHARACTER SHEET? Good, looks like a really nice one.*

*No, no time to EXPLAIN THE RULES or introduce the OTHER PLAYERS, we're STARTING THE GAME in thirty seconds.*

*Look, just SIT DOWN and take your lead from THE GM.*

*ANARCHIC COMEDY, watch us for the RULES, and try to STAY FUNNY.*

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## THE GIST

*“For those about to rock: We salute you.”*

Those first two pages weren't a joke. The GM needs to have read all of this book, but don't waste the time for anyone else. Whistle through creating the band and the characters, then get stuck in. It's all about the anarchy.

While this is a comedy game, you can modulate what kind of comedy very easily. It lends itself to slapstick, wordplay, situation comedy, surreal comedy, black comedy and parody very easily. You can even have it so some players concentrate more on one of those types than the others. It's all good. One thing I would point out though, is that it's a bad idea to start gonzo, balls-out insane. That's the destination, and you should enjoy working up to it.

The basic set-up is this: a band that never got anywhere reforms for one last tour. It's dogged by trouble every step of the way, not helped by the attitude of the band members. They keep causing more trouble and property damage, pissing people off right left and centre, until eventually it all catches up with them. The game is all about trying to delay the inevitable.

It's a game about the journey, so don't stop believing.

## PRIORITIES

*"I sold a million mirrors in a shopping alleyway but I  
never saw my face in any window any day."*

You're not a bad person, at heart. You just have a very different sense of priorities to ordinary people. Sometimes, this gives outsiders good reason to want to kill you dead.

### ***What matters:***

The Music	<i>Very Good!</i>
Playing gigs	
Life itself	
Getting laid	
Alcohol and/or other drugs	
Your bandmates	
Music critics who give you a good review	
The fans	
The law	
Industry insiders	
Other musicians	
Ordinary folk	
Police	
Music critics who give you a bad review	
Child-molesters	
Rival bands	
Manufactured pop acts	
The worst thing you can think of	
Anyone who tries to stop you playing your music	<i>Very Bad!</i>

## CREATING THE BAND

*“And so we meet in an abandoned studio.”*

The two most important parts of creating the proverbial Band that will be Put Back Together are Where your band was active and When it was active.

By default, the band has been on hiatus for five years; so its heyday – such as it was – was five years before whenever you want to set the game. Five years before the present day is the easiest When to pick, but you can go back to other eras of music for some period flavour. The band doesn't have to have been of a genre popular when it was active– in fact the premise is based around the fact that the band was never really that popular at all.

The Where is completely open. You can make it local, so you can name-check venues and places you all know. Or you can pick somewhere known for its music, a thronging metropolis or some backwoods tour route.

What might surprise you is that the band's name, and the type of music it plays, are not terribly important. The name can change during the game, and probably will. The genre of music is most likely to end up as some unholy fusion of styles, in order to accommodate all the players' preferred instruments for their characters. To create a genre, pick one term from each of these two lists. It's entirely acceptable to have lasting



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disagreement between characters as to what sort of music they should play.

### ***List I:***

Acid	Electro-	Orchestral
Acoustic	Euro	Pagan
Ambient	Experimental	Post-
Art	Free	Power
Avant-garde	Girl-	Prog
Black	Glam	Psycho
Boy-	Gothic	Smooth
Break	Grind	Soft
Brit	Hard	Speed
Bubblegum	Heavy	Stadium
Canto-	Hip	Stoner
Celtic	Indie	Surf
Chamber	Intelligent	Swing
Chill	J-	Symphonic
Christian	K-	Synth
Comedy	Math	Techno
Cool	Melodic	Thrash
Cyber	Neo	Urban
Dark	New	Visual
Death	Nu	West coast
Doom	Operatic	World

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### ***List 2:***

Barbershop	Jazz
Beat	Jive
Bhangra	Madrigal
Billy	Metal
Blues	Noise
Core	Polka
Country	Pop
Dance	Punk
Disco	Rap
Drum'N'Bass	Rave
Folk	Reggae
Funk	Rock
Fusion	Romantic
Garage	Ska
Grind	Skiffle
Honky-Tonk	Soul
Hop	Trance
House	Twotone
Industrial	Wave

## CREATING THE CHARACTER

*“Here comes guitar George- he knows all the chords.”*

There is no character sheet. Write the details down on a crumpled piece of scrap paper, like all the greats do. A suitably rock-and-roll name is the first step. You also need to include the following information:

### ***Why You Left the Band***

- ◆ Took a straight job
- ◆ Found love
- ◆ Went to prison
- ◆ Went on the lam
- ◆ Fell into a coma
- ◆ Rage quit
- ◆ Went on a journey to find yourself
- ◆ The last clear memory you have is going out on a bender five years ago
- ◆ Something else cool

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### ***Why You Came Back***

- ◆ Can't stay away
- ◆ New life went to shit
- ◆ Need money for a good cause
- ◆ Need money for a bad cause
- ◆ I was never away, man
- ◆ One last tour
- ◆ Can't cope in the real world
- ◆ Stick it to a rival band
- ◆ Something else cool

### ***The Instrument You Play***

Voice  
Guitar  
Drums  
Bass  
Keyboard  
Saxophone  
Trumpet  
Trombone  
Harmonica  
Tambourine  
Flute  
Tuba  
Ocarina  
Spoons  
Glockenspiel  
Theremin  
Wobble-board  
... use your imagination

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### *Character Stats*

Your ability to deal with trouble, by either confronting and eliminating it or by making it someone else's problem for a while, is rated in three areas.

**PRESENCE**

**VIRTUOSO**

**RHYTHM**

You also have that most important of attributes:

**COOL**

Cool begins at 0 and increases during the game. You can spend it in specific ways described later. The other three attributes fall somewhere on this line:

$d4+d4 \rightarrow d4+d6 \rightarrow d6+d6 \rightarrow d4+d8 \rightarrow d6+d8$

By default, they are all  $d6+d6$ . You can push one of them up a step by pushing another down a step. You can't get any better or worse than those values. These attributes don't change during the game.

#### *Examples:*

**Brian**, guitarist

Presence:  $d4+d4$

Virtuoso:  $d6+d8$

Rhythm:  $d6+d6$

**Aretha**, singer

Presence:  $d4+d8$

Virtuoso:  $d4+d8$

Rhythm:  $d4+d4$

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### ***Starting Trouble***

Each player needs to create Trouble for themselves. This trouble will be a constant thorn in the sides of everyone in the band, more-or-less equally.

Trouble can be in the form of an organisation, but it's better to have one or two specific members of the organisation as the face of that Trouble, who will put in appearances throughout the game.

Trouble is, in essence, anything that might get in the band's way. It could be the law, rivals, criminals or family- it just has to be something inconvenient. It doesn't have to have any direct relevance to the character's

Trouble should be written on cards or scraps of paper, as it needs to be passed around during the game. Trouble starts the game in front of the player who created it. All Trouble has a number that says how far that person is willing to go to mess things up for the band- all starting Trouble begins with a rating of 2.

TRouble	INTERPRETATION
2	Intense personal dislike
7	Wants to hurt you bad, within the law
11	Wants to hurt you bad, screw the law
15	Intends to kill you
18	Intends to kill you, extra casualties no issue
20	Obsessed with ending you at any cost

## PLAYING A NUMBER

*“Are you ready then, ladies and gentleman? I would like to say hello.”*

If you have a trouble card in front of you, you must start a scene that brings that trouble into play. If you have more than one trouble card in front of you, you choose one to work with for this number. If you have none, the GM writes a new trouble card and puts it in front of you, with 2 trouble.

The GM and you talk through how the scene plays out, how the trouble manifests for you, and what else is going on. Other band members can appear in the scene, as long as they don't pull the focus away from you. When the scene appears to reach a crucial stage, where it could go well or badly, roll some dice.

You choose a way to deal with the problem, and roll dice based on the strategy you chose.

- ◆ Rely on charisma, charm or the ability to hold someone's attention- roll **PRESENCE**.
- ◆ Rely on profound technical skill in some aspect- roll **VIRTUOSO**.
- ◆ Rely on brute force to bully your way through- roll **RHYTHM**.

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Mark off how many times you have used each approach. You can't choose an approach if you have used it more times than all of the others. So, for your third number, you have to use the skill you didn't use in either of the first two, and so on.

Roll your dice. If they both come down the same number, remove one of them. The total after any such removal is your score for that number. If this score is higher than the trouble on the card, good for you. Either way, you have the option of pushing your luck.

To push your luck, roll a 6-sided dice. If this dice shows the same number as one of the dice already in play, you have played a Bum Note. Otherwise, add it to your total and you may push your luck again.

The conclusion of the scene, and what happens to the trouble card, depends on your dice total. Usually, trouble will be added to the card and it is passed onto another player. When passing the card, ignore where the GM is and pass to next other player.

In most cases, you get to narrate the outcome of the scene (within the boundaries of what the dice said happened). After a Bum Note, the GM narrates the outcome, in as vicious as cruel way as he wishes. The trouble score always increases, usually by an amount equal to the score on a dice, and you may earn some Cool for the Number.



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Your roll	Outcome	Trouble Added	Cool Earned	Trouble Passes
Higher than the trouble score.	Success.	One dice of your choice.	A different dice of your choice, if any.	To your right.
Equal to the trouble score.	Deadlock.	One dice of your choice.	I point.	Back to you.
Less than the trouble score.	Failure.	One dice of your choice.	None.	To your right.
Bum Note.	Hilarious fuck-up.	Twice the dice that caused the Bum Note.	None.	Two people to your right.

When you or the GM have finished narrating the outcome of the Number, the player to your left takes his turn.

## ***Big Trouble***

Once a Trouble card has at least 15 trouble on it, then it has become Big Trouble. If, through extreme circumstances, the Big Trouble has trouble higher than 20, drop it back down to 20. The GM takes possession of the card instead of who it would pass to normally. When the game enters the Encore, all of the Big Trouble the GM has to hand will come back into play.

## COOL SPENDS

*“Partyin’, partyin’, yeah, fun, fun, fun, fun.”*

You can spend cool for these far-out effects. Cool you spend goes away. Some of these things have a direct mechanical benefit for you, but mostly they are there to add interest and colour and shape future numbers.

***1 - Get wasted*** - Spend at any time. Your character over-indulges somehow, and is out of commission for a while. You skip your next number, and possibly more of your numbers after that if you want. Trouble that would be passed to you is passed to your right instead until you get back into the game. This way of spending Cool is intended to be used if you need to leave the table for a while, or if you miss a session of a multi-session game. You can step back into the action at any time after your first skipped number, although you have to wait for your turn as usual.

***3 - Rename the band*** - Spend at any time. You can rename the band.

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**5 - *Dump on a bandmate*** - Spend during someone else's number. If another bandmate has earned your ire, you can make their number more difficult. Roll a six-sided dice and temporarily add it to the Trouble score for another player's roll.

**5 - *Re-roll a dice*** - During your number, if you push your luck and roll a Bum Note, you can ignore that roll and try again. You have to accept the second dice roll, unless you spend another 5 Cool and use this ability again.

**5 - *Upstage a bandmate*** - Spend during someone else's number. Seize control of a number from another player, at any point before the dice are rolled. You become the star of that scene, roll the dice, earn the Cool and pass the trouble as though you had started the number. Play continues to your left afterwards.

**15 - *Sex scene*** - Spend after one of your numbers. Follow it up with a short description of how you get lucky with an NPC. The limit on the detail is what threatens to squick out another player. Always keep it consensual, even at the height of legendary rock'n'roll debauchery. You can start a sex scene with another player's character, with their permission. Actually

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humping another player over the table is probably a bit much for most gaming groups.

**20 - *Solo spot*** - Spend after one of your numbers. The entire story revolves around you for a short while. Until your next number, you participate in every other player's number, and earn the same Cool that they do. All these numbers must revolve around you and your story as much as possible. You can only have one Solo Spot per game, and you can't start a solo spot if someone else already has one on the go. Your solo spot ends early if you upstage a bandmate, above, but it can be prolonged if another player uses that ability to delay your next number.

**20 - *Kill Big Trouble*** - During the game's Encore, any time you or another player wins a dice roll against Big Trouble, you can spend this Cool to remove the trouble from the game permanently. You get to describe what you do that gets rid of it, and the card is thrown away/eaten/burned.

**50 - *Get signed*** - Spend after one of your numbers. A record company executive appears and offers you a contract. If you sign, you are guaranteed a music career for your character's Bows. You can only get signed once per game.

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Some spends are made by the entire group- any player can suggest a group spend when a number has finished. All players must spend the listed amount of Cool at once, if the group decides they all agree on the spend.

**5 - *Get a gig*** - Miracle of miracles, the group have got a gig- or maybe stolen someone else's. The next round of numbers are all scenes revolving around the gig; the set-up, the performance or the ensuing riot. Anyone who gains Cool during their number in that round gets triple the usual amount. Solo spot bonuses only pay out the usual amount of Cool, but the gig can be prolonged by strategic use of upstaging a bandmate.

**40 - *Get the group signed*** - Wonder of wonders, the entire group is offered a recording contract as is, by some industry bloke. This can't be earned if any player has spent cool on getting signed individually. Here, one person getting greedy ruins it for everybody.

Spends are not just a mechanical thing, something to track or to use to generate extra Cool, they are themselves part of the story, and it is better to use Cool appropriately than efficiently. Make it memorable.

## THE ENCORE

*“All around me are familiar faces.”*

The GM decides when the Encore begins, based on the time available for your game and how much you are all enjoying it. The Encore is almost, but not quite, the final stage of the game.

The stakes have been raised little by little during the game so far, as Trouble increased in value and Big Trouble was put to one side for later. During the Encore, throw all caution to the winds and go nuts. Make the numbers shorter and sillier, so a crescendo of mayhem is inevitable.

As soon as the Encore starts, any Trouble in play with a score less than 10 is destroyed and removed from the game. During the Encore, many rules change:

- ◆ If a player is about to start a number but has no Trouble, the GM gives him a Big Trouble from the pile he's been saving. If this pile is empty, the GM grabs any Trouble from any other player and gives it to the one about to start.
- ◆ If a number ends in success, any player can spend 20 Cool to destroy the Trouble, big or small, for good- as described in the Cool Spends section.

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- ◆ Never increase the score of Big Trouble- other Trouble can increase until it becomes Big Trouble.
- ◆ If a number is a failure or a botch, mark a big 'X' on the player's character sheet.
- ◆ Once a player has three such 'X's on his character sheet, his character has been overwhelmed by all the trouble. He might have been arrested, killed, kidnapped, married, employed or something else that takes him away from the band for good. He can't spend any more cool and can't participate in any future numbers. He's an observer for the rest of the game. The Trouble that did for him is destroyed and removed from the game.
- ◆ If the band pays to start a gig, the gig lasts until the end of the game but the Cool rewards are only double the usual, rather than triple.

The Encore continues until either all of the Trouble is destroyed, or all of the characters have been overwhelmed.

## THE BOWS

*“And bad mistakes- I’ve made a few.”*

After the Encore, each player gets a chance to narrate a short account of what happened to his character. Apart from which Trouble claimed him, if any, and whether or not he has been signed, there are no limits on what can happen. A character sent to prison may emerge as a guru, ganglord or gubernatorial candidate. It’s a chance to wrap up his story for good, so make it good.

The fate of the band itself might be more nebulous- a recording contract implies they release at least one single, but the events of the Encore might have seriously compromised its ability to become a chart-topping sensation.

## LEVELS OF DIFFICULTY

*“One likes to believe in the freedom of music.”*

If you want a more upbeat game, with a greater chance of the players overcoming all of the obstacles in their way, reduce the amount of Cool needed to destroy Trouble. If you want to present more of a challenge to them, increase that cost.



## THE FOOD OF LOVE

*"We'll film it live but dub our tale."*

In a game about music, you can be sure there's a place for music in the game. Sure, you could make up a special mp3 list, but if you have the opportunity and the talent amongst you why not break out the guitars and tambourines? Or, if you prefer, draw album covers or write lyrics for the fictional band.

Quality is not important. This is a failing band, after all.

If you bring in activities like this, there are a few things to be wary of:

- ◆ Don't put people on the spot to do something. It's not nice.
- ◆ Don't spend so long faffing with instruments that you don't actually get the game played. Have some gentle strumming in the background, but keep the game going. Taking an impromptu break every now and again is good, just don't let it last too long.
- ◆ Don't make it so players spend all their time not in their own numbers doing something else and not paying attention to the game. Encourage them to draw or write about things that are happening in the game to other characters.

## PLAYING WITHOUT A GM

*“With the kids sing out the future, maybe kids don't need their masters.”*

There are a couple of ways you can play the game without having a GM. The first is to have one player, fully up-to-speed on the rules, acting as the facilitator. He needs to tell the other players what options they have and how different choices might benefit them of the band. The second is to have all of the players familiar with the rules, or at least familiar enough to not need any hand-holding, and play purely as a group.

There are actually not that many responsibilities that the GM has- here are suggestions on how to redistribute them for GM-less play.

- ◆ If you hit a Bum Note, pick any other player to narrate the consequences.
- ◆ Big Trouble is kept in a pile in the middle of the table until the encore.
- ◆ If you start a number without any Trouble in front of you, write a new Trouble yourself.
- ◆ If you start a number during the Encore without any Trouble in front of you, grab a Big Trouble out of the middle of the table. If none are left, grab any Trouble from another player.