

OUR BLEAK-ASS WRITING-COMPETITION AT THE RAGGED VERGE OF SPACETIME

OBAWCATRVOS (OH-baw-CAT-tra-vos) is a four-player collaborative/competitive writing event which takes place at the end of the universe. To play, you will need:

- Four players
- 30 index cards, or 30 small slips of paper and three mugs
- A metronome, or a metronome app on your phone
- Four pencils or pens
- Five pieces of paper
- Optional: matches and a place to burn things

PREPARATION AND SETUP

Divide the cards or slips of paper into equal stacks of 10 each. One of these is the Poe Deck, one the Verne Deck, and one the Carroll Deck. Write the following words and phrases for each deck:

Poe Deck	Verne Deck	Carroll Deck
Death	Manliness	Youth
Mystery	Science	Magic
Sins	Courage	Dreams
Birds	Boats	Stars
Alcohol	Balloons	Drugs
Internal organs	Moon	Bugs
America	France	England
Disease	Muscles	Royalty
A house	A cave	A forest
SPECIAL: A RHYME	SPECIAL: IN FRENCH	SPECIAL: NONSENSE

Divide the cards into their three decks and shuffle them facedown, or put the slips of paper into three mugs and mix them blindly. Make sure you know which is which.

Now, knowing what they do about the three other players, the judge must judge their personalities and choose one to play the role of Edgar Allen Poe, one to play Lewis Carroll, and one to play Jules Verne. The judge assigns these identities and hands each player their appropriate deck or mug. Henceforth, all players may only answer to the name of whichever their assigned 19th-century author is at the time.

Now set up the play-area. The three authors must sit together. Place the metronome (or phone) by them and give each player and the judge a piece of paper and a pencil or pen.

Set aside a separate paper as the scoresheet.

PLAY

If this is the first time the group has played, the judge now assumes an attitude of extremely vain power and authority and reads the following passage:

Welcome, my friends, to the end of the world. In 2066, I helped invent the world's first time machine. For my first journey, I traveled into the past to collect my favorite authors and bring them together. I have liberated you from your timelines and provided you with the opportunity to collaborate on the MOST MAGNIFICENT literary work OF ALL TIME. Edgar Allen Poe, Jules Verne, and Lewis Carroll... together, the three of you can create something perfect.

...And you have no choice, because by removing you from your timelines I have accidentally caused a time-paradox-collapse which has trapped us all here alone together in an empty death-void as reality slowly collapses around us. Good luck.

The players now all draw a card or a slip of paper from their shuffled decks or cups. This is their target word. Each player is attempting to insert this word, or a closely-related word from the same noun category into the story they are about to tell. A player has successfully fulfilled their target if any part of their story includes that word.

Each deck has a special target word, marked special. They have slightly different rules:

- Poe's special, A RHYME, requires him to make any two of the sentences rhyme. They need not also be grammatically correct.
- Verne's special, IN FRENCH, requires him to try and insert any French word into the story. If this game is being played in French, he should try to insert an Italian word into the story.
- Carroll's special, NONSENSE, requires him to create at least one grammatically incorrect sentence.

The judge then starts the metronome. The pace of the metronome can be set at any speed that suits the group, but be aware that the strategies available to slow-metronomers are different from those available to people playing at a faster pace.

Now regular play begins:

- on every fourth metronome beat, they must all say a word out loud.
- if the words they all say are THE SAME, then they all write it down on their papers
- if the words they say are NOT all exactly the same, then they wait and all say another word on the next fourth beat.
- If they all say the word FULLSTOP together on the same beat, they write a period and begin a new sentence.

This process repeats until they have said three full sentences with FULLSTOP period endings.

Because everyone here is trapped at the end of time, there is no escape from the game. The metronome cannot be stopped for any reason relating to player behavior or lack of cooperation.

Once the players have completed three full sentences with periods, the story stops and the judging period begins.

JUDGING RULES

The Judge assigns points to each player according to the following rubric:

Rule	Points
The player has incorporated their special goal, their target word, or a closely related target noun somewhere into the story	1
All three sentences are grammatically incorrect	-2
At least two of the sentences in the story seem related to one another as part of a 'narrative'	3

If a player asks any judge what the specific rules are regarding "narrative" or "closely related nouns from the same noun category," the judge should say whatever they want. The judge in power is always the ultimate judge. The judge judges everything. If the judge objects to something, that is final. They can be as restrictive or loose about anything as they please. I am stuck here on the fresh side of spacetime; I cannot help you.

CONTINUED ROUNDS AND ENDING

For each new round, the judge and players now shuffle roles so that there is a new judge. Cards that have already been used in the game session should not be re-introduced to the decks or prompt mugs.

The players should continue playing until everyone has been the judge at least once, and everyone is very tired and sick of playing.

The players then tally up all the points for all the rounds and discover who has been the winner.

If resources and a safe basin are available, the players should then immediately take all papers associated with points-tallying and story-writing and burn them with matches and actual fire.

The final judge should remind everyone that this is the end of the world, and that nothing lasts, and that art is the fleeting attempt we make to leave our mark on a universe that ultimately resists it. That our interpersonal conflicts are just as fleeting. Life is meaningless, and art is merely the breath of life, vanishing on the cold wind of time.