

DESIGNING A NEW KIND OF TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING GAME

COUNCIL — GAME DESIGN PLAN

Council is a diceless, narrative-first roleplaying system for tables who have outgrown rolls and sheets — built around one problem: *how do players gain insight without having to guess the exact right question?* This plan builds the game itself, setting-agnostic. Only one thing is fixed in every Council game: **Landis, on the sea, real only in water.** Everything else is dressing a table brings. Tick a box and it stays ticked.

OVERALL 0 / 25 tasks done

PHASE 0 • DEFINE THE GAME

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What Council is, before a single rule is written. These are blockers — they decide the shape of everything after.

BLOCKER Write the design thesis (one page)

What Council is and who it is for: tables past dice and sheets, narrative-first, whose one nagging problem is insight without interrogation. The whole game is the answer to that sentence.

BLOCKER Name the core loop

The engine every Council game turns on: scene play ↔ the Tide (between-session Works) ↔ asking the Water. One diagram, three arrows. If it needs more, it is too big.

BLOCKER Lock the pillars and their names

The Water (Landis), the Council, Works, the Tide, the Ledger, Squalls, the Seals, Grace. Fix the vocabulary now; renaming later rots every handout.

DECIDE Decide what is fixed vs. setting-swappable

Landis on the sea, real only in water, is canon in EVERY Council game — he is part of the machine, not the setting. Draw the exact line between the fixed spine and the dressing a table brings.

PHASE 1 • THE RESOLUTION CORE

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How Council decides things with no dice. This is the heart — the reason the game exists.

CORE Formalize "grace buys clarity"

The universal resolution stance that replaces the roll: how effort, preparation, and fair asking convert into information. State it so any keeper can apply it cold.

CORE **The Keeper's Seals – the general rule**

The core invention: pre-writing tiered clues (Nudge / Bearing / Answer) for ANY obstacle, sealed and shown, so insight never depends on a player being clever in the moment. Write this as a setting-free procedure.

CORE **The Landis economy, portable**

The price ladder – truth → complication → madness → time → escalation – abstracted from any campaign. The Grace Book and Bill of Fare are its player-facing faces; confirm they read setting-free.

CORE **Banked grace + the mercy clause**

The two safety rails: cleverness banks free askings; nothing may ever hard-stall the table. These make the system safe to hand to strangers.

LATER **The absent-expert / letter mechanic**

Consulting someone off-screen: free, plain, but slow and read by the courier. Generic – works for any "the person who'd know isn't here" case.

PHASE 2 • THE BETWEEN-SESSION ENGINE

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Works, the Tide, the Ledger – how a world keeps moving while the table sleeps. All priced in time.

CORE **Works: Aim / Hands / Stakes + sizes**

The project card and its three lines; Small Work / Work / Great Work measured in watches. Setting-free.

CORE **The Tide: watches advance on their own**

Every session moves every open work one watch; spending a scene adds one. Public countdowns. The clock the whole game keeps.

CORE **The Ledger: Hands / Power / Standing**

The three stake columns as portable archetypes any setting maps onto (people / resources / goodwill). No double-pinning; wounding a stake stalls all pinned to it.

CORE **Squalls + Forcing**

Sealed complications on Great Works; forcing a watch by paying a truth or a favor owed. Define generically.

CORE **Formalize the Divine Work tier**

STILL UNWRITTEN. Campaign-length arcs: no fixed watch-count; several separately-sealed squalls opened one at a time; squalls that rewrite the card itself; how stakes attach and detach over months. The system's biggest open gap.

LATER **Work Orders + completion → canon**

Between-session messages to those doing the work; finished works becoming plain facts. Generic.

PHASE 3 • GOVERNANCE

0 / 4

The Council frame itself – a portable way to share authority and put dissent on the record.

CORE The Council as a portable authority structure

Shared seats, a final say, every vote and dissent minuted so a dark choice is already canon. Written so any group can seat their own council in any fiction.

CORE Deputies / interrupts / the override

The generic chain-of-command tools: who can hold a work, what pulls a person off it, and the priced override that keeps them on anyway.

DECIDE Make "who sits" a setup CHOICE

Wide table (department heads vote) vs. narrow table (they advise) should be a dial the group sets at session zero, not a fixed answer baked into the rules.

LATER Absence & reachability rules

The reachable-vs-unreachable distinction (a need met without the expert's insight shows as something concrete and wrong). Generic.

PHASE 4 • TEACH & SHIP

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Make Council runnable by a table that has never met us. Prove it is a game, not just our game.

CORE Session-zero: boot Council in one sitting

The keeper's quickstart – how any group stands up the loop, the Water, and a first Ledger in a single evening.

CORE Generalize the two player handouts

The Grace Book and the Bill of Fare, scrubbed of any one setting, are the whole player-facing ruleset. Confirm a stranger could read them and play.

CORE Blank play aids (reusable)

A blank Keeper's Seal card, a blank Work card, a blank Ledger sheet. The physical kit any table prints once and reuses forever.

LATER One worked example in a throwaway setting

Run a tiny obstacle in a setting that is deliberately NOT ours, to prove the system carries. If it only works in our world, it isn't a system yet.

LATER Onboarding: what prints, what the keeper holds

The generic packaging – player packet vs. keeper packet – as a template any Council game fills in.

The bridge. Council is done; now build a world on it. This spawns a second, separate plan.

**CORE** Open the "Council of Un" Game Design Plan

A new document that builds OUR Stargate-Atlantis campaign on top of the finished Council substrate — the Council of Un, its departments, the Storm, the live cards, the Brotherhood, Sanctuary. Everything setting-specific lives there, not here.

This is the game, not the campaign. When Phase 4 is ticked through, Council is a thing another table could pick up and run in any world. Phase 5 is where our world gets built on top of it — the Council of Un. — the substrate holds its own ink