PROPALINAL PEOPLE

In a world where some people are growing older, and some are growing younger, how do two souls traveling in opposite directions connect?

A storytelling game for two players. By Kristin Firth.

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Summary

Each player will control a character. One is growing older and the other younger, but you will not decide the direction they are headed. Your characters will meet, and then fate will determine their age direction. Through a series of scenes you will discover more about this strange world, and how your characters stay in each other's lives as they head in opposite directions.

Game Chef

This game was originally created as an entry to the 2013 Game Chef competition. (For more on Game Chef, see http://game-chef.com.) That year used icons for the theme and ingredient inspirations for game creation. Here are the images I used, and my interpretations of them:

I have chosen to interpret the theme, the person "in the middle of an arrow" image, as representing a direction that age is traveling.

I have chosen to interpret the first ingredient, the "egg-shaped head" image, as representing intelligence, or being smart.

I have chosen to interpret the second ingredient, the apple with the "worm-like creature" image, as representing strength, or being tough.

Thank you to Avery Mcdaldno for running Game Chef that year, and for being amazing.

Other Thank Yous

During the Game Chef competition Larry Spiel originally playtested this game with me. John LeBoeuf-Little convinced me to unearth it again in 2015, which made me decide to continue working on an actual edited release. Finally, when I self-labeled myself a game designer because of Propalinal People a number of people commented on or +1-ed my Google Plus declaratory post, signed my "official" game designer certificate, and/or mailed me a postcard affirming my new status. You all made me feel so welcomed and supported. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you!!!

What You Need To Play

In order to play Propalinal People you will need:
– Two players and about two hours
– These rules, either digitally or printed out
– 2 printed copies of the Character Sheet
– 1 printed copy of the Rules Sheet
– Something to write with
– Something to randomly determine aging order after the Intro Scene (e.g., a coin for flipping.)

Depending on your preferences, you can either:
– Not read the rules ahead of time. Just read them aloud as you play, stopping to take some actions when the text says "Do This Now!"
or:
– Read the rules ahead of time. During play you can refer to the Character and Rules Sheets and the Rules Summary at the end of this document for reminders about steps you need to take.

Setting

Welcome to the planet of Propalinal, where people age in both directions. About half of the population ages as we do here on Earth, being born young and growing older as time passes. The other half ages in the reverse direction, being born old and growing younger as time passes. It has always been this way in Propalinal, and likely always will be. The people here are much like those of Earth. In fact, most features of Propalinal are very similar to Earth, except for this aging phenomenon and the ways that their society is shaped by this difference.

Game Play Phases

World Creation   First, you will create details about the Propalinal world, through a set of rules.

Character Creation   Then you will each create a character that you will control for the game.

Intro Scene   Together you will describe how these characters meet.

Direction   The age directions your characters are traveling will be randomly determined, and you will then create a few more details about your characters and the world.

Scenes   The rest of the game will be a series of scenes where the characters grow progressively older and younger, in opposite directions.

Game End   Once the story has been told you give your character's story a title.

Content Warning and Age Recommendations

Eventually your characters will be very different ages, which may cause complications. This can be an interesting part of discovering the world of Propalinal through these people's lives. However, some players may be uncomfortable with certain types of relationships given this feature. Types of relationships are numerous: romantic, family, friends, co-workers, sharing a hobby/affiliation, co-survivors, etc. Relationships can contain multiple facets of these, and they can also evolve over the game given the number of years that pass. Still, you can discuss if there are any off-limits content for you. You can also use an X-card and make this choice later (http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg, by John Stavropoulos).

Similarly, there are recommended starting ages and age adjustments on the Character Sheet in gray text. If you decide together you would prefer to change these numbers feel free to do so. Between scenes the characters should grow progressively older and younger at the same rate.

World Creation

Both players will each create two rules about how this world works. One will be a Rule of Science and the other will be a Rule of Society.

A Rule of Science should be something about how the underlying mechanics of the age direction phenomenon works in Propalinal. Rules of science are facts about the world that are just true about Propalinal, and no individual or group has made a decision for it to be that way. For example, you can state that age direction is inherited, that age direction is detectable before birth, how birth even happens, that one group has more allergies, etc.

A Rule of Society should be something about how the people of Propalinal have chosen to deal with the age direction phenomenon. Rules of society are laws or customs based on decisions that people living in Propalinal have made. For example, you can state that landlords are not allowed to discriminate based on age direction, that a certain type of job is only available to one age direction group, how retirement funding or homes work, what cemeteries look like, etc.

Each rule can be as small or as big as you'd like it to be. Think about the many ways that people aging in both directions would cause daily life to be different, and decide on an aspect that you find intriguing. Relationships, jobs, education, childbirth, politics, entertainment, death – all of these will be touched by complications from reverse aging.

When each of the players have decided on one rule of each type, for a total of four rules, write these rules on the Rules Sheet and discuss them with each other.

> *** *Do This Now!*

Character Creation

Each player will now create a character with a few details. The two characters will be the same age. (The recommended age is 30.) Decide your character's name and what they look like, and think about how they spend an average day. You do not know yet whether your character is going to be growing older or younger, and you will not get to choose this, so do not make any details of their daily life dependent on their age direction. Write these choices on your Character Sheet.

> *** *Do This Now!*

You should now decide whether your character is going to be smart or tough. This doesn't necessarily mean they are smarter, or tougher, than the average person; this just means they tend to either rely on their intelligence, or their physicality. Imagine your character faced with a difficult situation, like being robbed at gunpoint, and where their instincts would lead them. If submission were not an option, would they be more likely to attempt to reason with or outwit their mugger, or would they try to run away or physically overpower the mugger? Circle your main attribute on your character sheet.

> *** *Do This Now!*

Intro Scene

The lives of your characters will be intertwined, whichever direction they are headed, from the day that they meet – which is today. Your characters will start the game in separate locations, doing something typical for them. The players will take turns describing their characters in various scenarios progressing through the day, until the characters end up at the same place.

Whoever feels inspired may begin. You don't need a lot of details – just a sentence or two about where your character is and what they are doing. Then the other player does the same thing. Alternate back and forth this way. Allow some amount of time to lapse between each scenario. Don't worry for the first few scenarios about being anywhere near the other player's character.

After you have each described at least a few scenarios, begin to look for a fun chance to make the two characters end up in the same place. When you hear something that inspires you in the other player's scenario, on your turn introduce your character into that same location.

After the characters meet at the same location, instead of taking turns describing your characters, you will switch to dialogue. Each player speaks as their character, as you discover what your character's first words to each other are, and what they talk about in their first conversation. This can be a short conversation. When it is over, your first meeting is complete.

> ***Do This Now!*

Direction

You will now take care of a few more logistics before beginning the next scene. The first will be to determine which direction you are aging in.

Use a coin flip or other random method to determine which age directions your characters are traveling. One character will be getting older each year and the other will be getting younger each year. This is the direction your character has already been traveling their whole lives, and the direction they will continue in. When this is determined circle it on your Character Sheet.

> ***Do This Now!*

Your smart or tough attribute will be influenced throughout the story by your age direction. A smart character will be able to rely more on their intelligence as the game progresses if they are growing older, but will have to rely less on it if they are growing younger. A tough character will be able to rely more on their physicality as the game progresses if they are growing younger, but have to rely less on it if they are growing older.

Once you know whether your character is becoming more or less of their attribute throughout the game, decide on a way in which your character will exhibit this. Think about an aspect of their life that will become easier or harder based on this change. Note this on your Character Sheet so you can refer to it throughout the game and let it influence your character as the story progresses.

> ***Do This Now!*

After Intro Rules

Each player will now create one more rule, to add to the four from the World Creation phase. If your character is smart you will add one more rule of science, elaborating on how this aging phenomenon works. If your character is tough you will add one more rule of society, describing steps that have been taken to deal with the effects of the aging phenomenon. Attempt to make this new rule personally relevant for your character. Add these to the rule list, which should now contain a total of six rules about Propalinal for this story.

>   *** *Do This Now!*

Scenes

The rest of the game will be a set of scenes, alternating which player is setting the background for the scene. For each scene complete the following steps.

Scene Step 1: Note New Older/Younger Ages

Between scenes the characters will be growing progressively older and younger. The recommended ages are on the Character Sheets, or, as discussed earlier, you can modify these if both players would prefer something else. Before each scene each player should remind themselves and the other player how old their character is going to be in this next scene. Also note who the start player will be for this scene.

>   *** *Do This Now!*

Scene Step 2: Questions About The Time That Has Passed

The start player will provide details about what has happened during the years between the scene that just occurred and the current one time. They will do this by answering questions from the other player.

The player asking the questions should think about what just happened in the last scene, anything they are curious about, and may scan the Rules Sheet to see if there is anything they might want to explore.

The start player, who is answering the questions, should also think about what just happened, and about how the time has affected their character.

The non-start player should ask the start player three or more questions. The last question should be about the relationship between the two characters.

>   *** *Do This Now!*

Scene Step 3: Players Describe Location, Appearance, and Activity

The start player will now decide how the current scene will begin. They should describe where the scene will take place, and what is in the general area. They should also describe any changes in what their character looks like now that they are older/younger. Finally, they should describe what activity their character is doing in this place.

The other player should then similarly describe any changes in what their character looks like. They should then describe what their character is doing in the location created by the first player.

>   *** *Do This Now!*

Scene Step 4: The Characters Have A Conversation

After the scene beginning has been described, you can switch to dialogue again and discover how your characters now interact, given the time that has passed.

> *** *Do This Now!*

Scene Step 5: (Optional) Add a New Rule

After the scene is over you can optionally add one new Rule of Science or Rule of Society. During your scene you may have discovered something about how Propalinal works or realized there is something you don't yet know that you would like to determine. The players should make this decision this together. If you create a new rule, add it to the Rules Sheet.

> *** *Do This (Optionally) Now!*

Scenes - Repeat

When a scene is over you go back to scene step 1, aging the characters and switching the player who is starting, until you have completed all of the scenes.

Game End

When all of the scenes have been completed the story of the relationship between these characters is now over. In Propalinal however, a record is made of every person's life, sort of like an autobiography. Decide what the title of your character's story will be. Write this title on your Character Sheet.

> *** *Do This Now!*

PROPALINAL PEOPLE SAMPLE PLAY

Following is a sample of most parts of the game, with Jessie and Jordan as the players.

Sample Play – World Creation
Jessie creates a rule of science, deciding that the way people are "born" in the opposite direction is that when somebody old is about to die, they instead are put into a "regeneration" machine and reborn as a completely new older person, but with different looks and no former memories.

Jordan also creates a rule of science, expanding on Jessie's rule, and deciding the same thing happens when somebody is young and about to die. Regeneration is the only way people are born on this planet, which means the population or Propalinal is always decreasing, because other types of death do occur and are permanent.

Jordan then creates a rule of society, adding that parents for both young and old births have to apply to be parents, and show they are well qualified for the job, because population control is so important.

Jessie creates a rule of society that there are marriages, but most couples officially divorce when either of the spouses becomes less than 18,

Sample Play – Character Creation
Jessie creates the character "Lila" who is age 30, and works as a chef. Lila is short and in good shape. She has a pixie cut in her dark hair, and typically wears jeans and a t-shirt. Lila works almost every day because she recently took a job at a new restaurant, and is low on the totem pole. Her work apron has her initials on it, given to her by her father. When she isn't working she loves to go out to watch movies, especially comedies. Lila's main attribute is tough.

Jordan creates the character "Devan" who is age 30, and is an author. Devan is average height and just slightly overweight, with striking green eyes and medium brown skin. He is usually dressed a little nice, maybe in khakis and a button down shirt. Devan rents an office in order to have a different spot to work in than his home, and he spends "work days" there trying to write another novel. His favorite pastime is taking his dog to the park. Devan's main attribute is smart.

Sample Play – Intro Scene
Jessie: Lila has been working since early in the morning, so she finishes at 3pm.
Jordan: Devan has been at his office all day, looking at pictures in art history books to try to get inspiration for a setting for a scene he is writing.
Jessie: Lila goes shopping to pick up a bottle of wine on the way home from work.
Jordan: Devan hasn't written anything today. He types the word "ugh" on his computer then leaves.
Jessie: Lila usually eats out after work, because she doesn't feel like cooking anymore. Today she stops by a burger joint, and gets a burger and diet Coke.
Jordan: Devan is frustrated by work and decides to go to that same burger place. Since all the picnic tables are full (it is a popular spot), he sits down at the same table as Lila.
(Jessie and Jordan now switch to dialogue as Devan and Lila.)
Lila: Could I maybe steal one of your fries? They make the best fries here.
Devan: Um, sure. They accidentally gave me a large, you can have half if you'd like.
... etc. ...
Lila: I'll probably be here next Friday too. It's a regular spot. Will I see you here again?
Devan: Absolutely. I'll get a large order of fries.

Sample Play – Direction

Jordan and Jessie now flip a coin. They decide if it is heads that Lila will be getting younger, and if it is tails that Devan will be getting younger. It comes up heads so for this game Lila is getting younger, and Devan will be getting older.

Since Lila is tough and getting younger, this means Lila is getting less strong, or less able to rely on physicality, as the game progresses. Jessie decides that this means that Lila's ability to do the manual labor required for a chef will be getting worse throughout the game.

Since Devan is smart and getting older, this means Devan is getting more smart, or more able to rely on intelligence, as the game progresses. Jordan decides that this means Devan will continue to increase his writing skill, but get bored more easily with his work and become more easily distracted.

Sample Play – After Intro Rules

Since Lila's main attribute is tough, Jessie will create one more new rule of society. Jessie decides that even though getting younger people still have the capability of working, there is also a law that those under 18 are not allowed to do physical work, because of society's desire to keep them safe and the population stable. This means she only has a short period of time to try to start her own restaurant.

Since Devan's main attribute is smart, Jordan will create one more new rule of science. Jordan decides that scientists have just figured out that it is possible to use regeneration on animals, even though they currently all age younger to older and die. His dog, Penny, has been getting sick and he wants to get her on the list to be regenerated.

Sample Play – Scene Step 1: Note New Older/Younger Ages

Jessie: Lila is now 29, and is starting this scene.
Jordan: Devan is now 31.

Sample Play – Scene Step 2: Questions About The Time That Has Passed

Jordan: Has Lila been able to start her own restaurant yet?
Jessie: She tried to get a loan but was denied. She is still trying to figure out how to make it happen.
Jordan: Has Devan regenerated his dog, Penny?
Jessie: Yes, and she is perfectly healthy and happy again, but he had to re-train her.
Jordan: What has happened between Lila and Devan in the last year?
Jessie: They met for months on every Friday at the burger joint, and then started more officially dating. They both want to start a family, but Devan thinks Lila will become too young to be a parent, and Lila thinks Devan will become too old.
Jordan: Are they going to stay together?
Jessie: They have decided they either need to commit to each other, or break up, because if they are going to start a family it needs to be sooner rather than later, for both of them. They took a vacation to the beach for a weekend to try to figure things out.

Sample Play – Scene Step 3: Players Describe Location, Appearance, and Activity

Jessie: It has been storming since Lila and Devan arrived, and they've most staying in at their hotel. Tensions have been high, and they've avoided talking about their decision. It has only been a year so Lila pretty much looks the same... maybe she is growing her hair out a little longer because she thinks it makes her look older. Lila is in the hotel room flipping through channels on TV.
Jordan: Devan also looks the same, though he has been trying to lose some of the extra weight. He is in the hotel room at the desk, looking through take-out menus to find something to order for dinner.

Sample Play – Scene Step 4: The Characters Have A Conversation
(Jessie and Jordan now switch to dialogue as Devan and Lila.)
Devan: How do you feel about pizza?
Lila: Whatever.
Devan: Would you prefer Chinese?
Lila: (angrily) I don't care!
Jordan: Devan grabs the remote and shuts off the TV.
Lila: What are you doing?
Devan: We need to figure this out Lila. We drive back tomorrow. What are we doing once we get back?
… etc. …
Lila: We are really doing this? We're going to start a family?
Devan: Absolutely.

Sample Play – Scene Step 5: (Optional) Add a New Rule
Jordan: Should we add a new rule?
Jessie: I think so. Since parenting is strictly regulated, and 18 seems to be an important age from our other rules, how about we say that when one of the parents will be younger than 18 within the next 18 years then parenting applications are looked at more harshly and are harder to get accepted. This makes it an even bigger choice for Lila to try to become a parent.
Jordan: Sounds great!

Sample Play – Repeat
This happens seven more times until Lila is age 0 and Devan is age 60. Jessie and Jordan decided to interpret age 0 as Lila being regenerated, and Devan visiting her "grave" marker (there is no graves for bodies, but a place to memorialize lives), and talking to her, as if she was there.
Devan: Lila, I still remember that day we first met…

Sample Play – The End
Jessie: The title of Lila's story is: "Always cooking, even with tiny hands."
Jordan: The title of Devan's story is: "Taking chances."

PROPALINAL PEOPLE RULES SUMMARY

World Creation

Each player creates:
- One Rule of Science (facts about the world that are just true).
- One Rule of Society (laws or customs decided by individuals or groups).

Character Creation

Each player creates a character.
- Same ages.
- Details: name, appearance, details of average day.
- Choose smart (intelligence) or tough (physicality) as main attribute.

Intro Scene
- Players take turns describing their characters in scenarios throughout a day.
- Start in separate locations, and continue until at same location.
- Have a conversation as those characters, meeting for the first time.

Direction
- Randomly determine which character is getting older and younger.
- Determine which way chosen attribute is moving:
  - Smart and older – becoming more smart. Smart and younger – becoming less smart.
  - Tough and older – becoming less tough. Tough and younger – becoming more tough.

After Intro Rules
- Each player creates one more rule, also based on character's main attribute:
  - Smart character – Rule of Science. Tough character – Rule of Society.
  - Try to connect this rule to your character.

Scenes

For each age, complete the following steps.
- **Scene Step 1: Note New Older/Younger Ages**
  - Adjust characters ages up and down.
  - Note who is start player for this scene.
- **Scene Step 2: Questions About The Time That Has Passed**
  - Non-start player asks start player at least 3 questions about details of the time between the last scene and the current one.
  - Last question should be about the relationship between the characters.
- **Scene Step 3: Players Describe Location, Appearance, and Activity**
  - Start player describes location, changes in character appearance, and activity.
  - Other player describes changes in character appearance, and entering scene/activity.
- **Scene Step 4: The Characters Have A Conversation**
  - Conversation as the characters.
- **Scene Step 5: (Optional) Add a New Rule**
  - The players can create another rule together.

Game End
- Each player creates a title for the life story of their character.