



TALL PINES

A surreal murder mystery game



Tall Pines created and designed by
Miles Gaborit

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WELCOME TO TALL PINES



What this is

Tall Pines is a one-session, card-based tabletop story game where you'll discover, create, and explore a murder mystery set in a small mountain town. Three to six players will play through a tale in three acts, using the game cards to prompt exciting and enigmatic scenes, establish a shared language of symbolism and metaphor, and reveal the secrets that the town and its people hide.

Tall Pines is also directly and shamelessly inspired by the classic TV series *Twin Peaks*—the murder victim will be a young adult à la Laura Palmer, and there are some cards that get a little cute and reference-y. Not having experienced David Lynch's soap operatic oeuvre, however, doesn't bar you from playing and enjoying the game. No knowledge of Log Lady or absolutely silent drape runners is required!

Play safer

Right out of the gate this game presents some dark subject matter—we're starting with a murdered teenager and building from there. None of the cards contain graphic language or imagery, but the story can definitely end up in a place that you may not be comfortable with. Thus, I suggest that the group use the X card technique developed by John Stavropoulos and detailed here: <http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>. In short, if something—an idea, an action, a plot point, whatever—comes up in game that makes a player uncomfortable, they can "X" it out and remove it from play. No questions asked; no harm, no foul. The other players should honor the X by doing something else.

What you will need

To play Tall Pines you'll need:

- Three to six people
- About thirty minutes per player
- Some Post-it notes or index cards and pens or markers
- A nice quiet place to play, with a table to lay the cards on
- Tall Pines cards
- A copy of these rules

ELEMENTS OF THE GAME



The Victim

Creating the Victim of the murder that you'll all be talking about is the first part of play in Tall Pines. Some things are established already—the Victim was eighteen years old at the time of their death, generally well-liked and viewed as a “good kid” by the townspeople, and has some as-yet-vague connections to various people in town. These people with special connections to the Victim are the Protagonists—you'll flesh them out as you play.

Other details about the Victim will be generated by answering set up questions from the Protagonist cards (more on that process is below). You'll have to name the Victim too, which is usually the hardest part.

The Protagonists

There are six people in town who are working actively to find out what happened to the Victim—the Protagonists. No player is the sole owner or controller of any single Protagonist—they'll each be passed around among the players as the game goes on. At least one Protagonist will appear in every scene.

The **Protagonist Cards** are two-sided. One side has a Setup Question that you'll answer to establish a detail about the Victim at the start of play, and each side lists a condition,—check to see whether the face-up condition was met at the end of each scene the Protagonist is in, and flip the card over if it was. Protagonists start the game with the side that has their Setup Question face-up.

You'll name each protagonist and describe them a little when you answer their Setup Question. Write their name on an index card or Post-it note so you don't forget it!

The Tones

Each **Scene Card**, and each side of the Protagonist cards, has a Tone—Resolve, Shame, or Understanding—shown on its bottom border. The Tones are concepts that are prominent in the minds of the people of Tall Pines in the wake of the murder.

Resolve means the will to see the murderer brought to justice and thus to exorcise evil from Tall Pines like a demon.

Shame means the urge to hide the details of the murder from outsiders and to pretend like everything's okay.

Understanding means the impulse to rationalize the murderer's actions or sympathize with their position.

ELEMENTS OF THE GAME

You shouldn't have to think too much about the Tones during play. They'll tend to manifest in the scenes without any effort, and eventually that means consequences.

After each scene concludes and the Protagonist has been flipped if necessary, you'll check whether the combination of Tones played in the scene matches any of the players' **Secret Cards**—if they do, it's time to reveal a secret!

At the end of each Act you'll count how many of each Tone appeared in the Act and add an element to the final scene of the Act (supplied by the current Act's **Act Close Card**) that corresponds to the most numerous Tone. The result is that Tones that develop naturally during play are heightened at the end of an Act.

The Symbols

In addition to the various text prompts on the game's cards, play will also be driven by how you and the other players interpret photographic images on the cards from the Symbol deck. These images are intended to be interpreted freely in play, to be read as literally or metaphorically or obliquely as the player interpreting the symbol sees fit.

The Symbol cards are key to producing surreal and symbolic moments in the stories you create with Tall Pines. As the Symbols recur through a single game of Tall Pines, they'll accrete meaning becoming more concrete, or more arcane, or more freighted with dread with each recurrence. As you play more games of Tall Pines, the Symbols will sometimes recur with familiar results, and sometimes in ways that upend your expectations.

HOW TO PLAY



1. Creating the Victim and the Protagonists

To begin play, read this aloud to the players: *A tragedy has befallen the sleepy mountain town of Tall Pines. One of its best and brightest – a young local with a promising future – has been killed. Murdered horribly in the prime of their youth. Together we will unravel the mystery of their death, discover what it means for our little town, and possibly even learn who done it...but we may learn more than we ever wanted to know.*

Shuffle the Protagonist Cards and draw six, laying them in a row on the table and putting the rest back in the box (alternatively, you can choose the six Protagonists you want to play with).

Beginning with the player who brought this game, and continuing around the table until all six of the Setup Questions have been answered, choose a Protagonist card and answer its Setup Question. Feel free to answer this question in character as the Protagonist you've chosen. Or just state the facts. These answers will establish details about the Victim.

Succinctly list the answers to all of the Setup Questions on an index card or piece of paper, then name the Victim as a group and put their name at the top of the list.

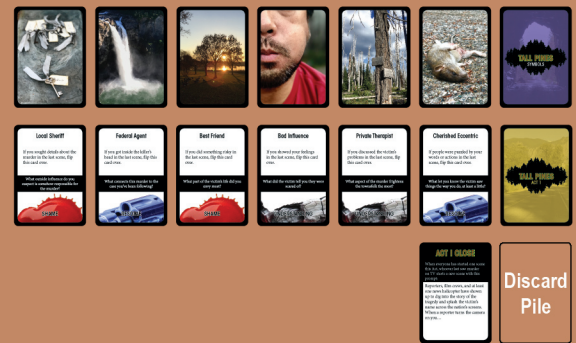
Name the Protagonists here, too, as you answer the questions—put the name of each Protagonist on its own index card or slip of paper, also noting the Protagonist's role so that you don't forget who is who.

2. Dealing the cards

Shuffle the Act I Scene Cards and give each player three. Shuffle the Secret Cards and give each player one, then put the remaining Secret Cards back in the box. Put the remaining Act I Scene Cards on the table—this is the Scene Deck for Act I.

Shuffle the Symbol Cards and put the top six cards face up in a row above the Protagonist Cards. Set the remaining deck of Symbol cards next to the row laid out.

Randomly (or purposefully) choose an Act I Close, Act II Close, and Act III Close card and put the remaining Act Close cards back in the box. Put the Act I Close card next to the Symbol Deck. The players can read it, as well as the other Act Close cards chosen for this game,



A game of Tall Pines set up to begin Act I

at any time—everyone can have a little foresight into where the story is headed.

After playing the Act I Close, collect any remaining Act I Scene Cards players may have and return all of the Act I Scene Cards to the box. Then shuffle the Act II Scene Cards, and deal each player a fresh hand of three Scene Cards. Put the Act II Close card next to the Symbol Deck. Repeat this process when you advance from Act II to Act III.

A note on drawing cards! This will be repeated later, but saying it twice seems good because it's a little funky: Players may only draw additional Scene Cards from the Scene Deck by placing Symbol Cards they've played in previous scenes back on top of the Symbol Deck, face down. Each Symbol Card a player puts back on top of the Symbol Deck buys them one Scene Card from the top of the Scene Deck. If a player has to start a scene and does not have a Scene Card left in their hand, nor a Symbol Card to trade in for one, they lose their scene for the Act.

3. Playing Scenes

Once the Victim has been established and everyone has their cards, it's time to start playing through the story of the game. You'll do that by creating and playing out scenes.

Each player will start one scene per Act. All of the players should look over their Scene Cards until someone has an idea for a scene. The first player to have an idea starts the first scene and play proceeds from them, with each player taking a turn to start a scene until everyone has created a scene in the current act.

To create a scene, you must choose a Scene Card from your hand and a Protagonist to focus the scene on. Then, describe what's happening as the scene begins.

Start by imagining the scene like one in a movie or TV show, and say what the camera sees as the scene opens. Who is there? What action seems to be taking place? What is the physical environment like? What time of day is it? Continue describing the action that takes place in the scene and how the Protagonist interacts with it. You have some options here.

You can keep describing things as if you're the director of the scene, saying how the camera moves around, what the sights and sounds are, and what the people in the scene (especially the Protagonist you chose) are doing, saying, and thinking from an omniscient viewpoint.

Or you can approach your scene more like an improv actor, saying a few words to set up what's happening in the scene and then dropping into character and roleplaying the part of your Protagonist. This usually involves jumping out of character sometimes to narrate actions the Protagonist or other characters take, or to describe things that occur in the scene.

Most players tend to move fluidly between these modes (or come up with their own idiosyncratic hybrid). **However, every scene must begin with a description of what the camera sees as the scene**

Step-by-Step Scenes

1. Choose a Scene Card from your hand and a Protagonist to be the lead in the scene.
2. Imagine the scene as if it's in a movie or TV show, and say what the camera sees as the scene opens.
3. Describe what happens in the scene: who's there, what's happening, what your Protagonist says and does. Note the names of any new characters you create.
4. (Optional) Cast other players to portray other characters (Protagonists or otherwise) of your choosing in the scene.
5. Continue playing out the scene, roleplaying and narrating freely.
6. When another player plays a Scene Card or Symbol Card into the scene, they describe how it manifests and alters the scene in progress.
7. No more than three Scene Cards or Symbol Cards total may be played into a scene, and no player may play more than one.
8. The player who started the scene also decides when it ends.
9. After the scene is over, check to see whether the lead Protagonist in the scene should be flipped over, then count up the Tones in the scene (including the Tone on the lead Protagonist) to see if a Secret is unlocked. After determining whether or not a secret was unlocked, put all used Scene Cards in the discard pile for the act and return all used Symbol Cards to the players who played them.
10. Each player will start one scene per act. Then you play the Act Close and proceed to the next act. After the third Act Close the game is over.

opens. Setting details and atmosphere are important!

Don't feel like you have to exactly follow the text of your Scene card as you describe the scene. The titles of the cards and the text prompts on them are intended as jumping off points, or things to draw inspiration from. You should never feel restricted by the text of a card you play—instead, interpret the words on the cards as broadly as you like, and allow scenes to go places you didn't anticipate.

If there are characters besides your Protagonist in the scene it's a good idea to assign those roles to other players at the table. Remember, no one owns any one character or role—while it's cool to see the same player reprise their performance as the victim's creepy stepmom, it can be equally cool to see someone new try on the role!

Also, keep in mind that there are people in Tall Pines besides the Protagonists. You are free to create new characters during scenes, or bring in established ones. Whenever a character—Protagonist or otherwise—appears in a scene, name them. Write their name on a post-it or index card and put it on the table. Put a little note about who they are, too. It's a real bummer when you forget who is who.

If you started a scene, you have final say as to when it is over. Don't cut scenes off too quickly—sometimes you don't really know what a scene is about until you're a few minutes in. At the same time, you don't want scenes drag on. The cards in the scene are a helpful guide here: once the maximum three cards have been played into the scene, you're probably getting close to the end.

If you didn't start the scene but you want to provide some input, it's going to cost you cards.

Cards in scenes: Only three Scene Cards or Symbol Cards total may be played into a scene, and a player may only contribute one card to each scene.

The player who creates the scene contributes the first card—a Scene Card from their hand—when they start the scene. Other players may either contribute a Scene Card from their hand or a Symbol Card from the Symbol Row (if a Symbol Card is chosen, immediately replace it in the Symbol Row with a card from the top of the Symbol Deck).

When you contribute a Scene Card or a Symbol Card to a scene, you are empowered to describe how it manifests in the scene. Say what the words on the Scene Card or the image on the Symbol Card mean in the context of the scene at hand. How does it change the action of the scene? Does it mean more characters entering the scene? Or a new topic coming up in conversation?

Players may only draw additional Scene Cards from the Scene Deck by placing Symbol Cards they've played in previous scenes back on top of the Symbol Deck, face down. Each Symbol Card a player puts back on top of the Symbol Deck buys them 1 Scene Card from the top of the Scene Deck. **If a player has to start a scene and does not have a Scene Card left in their hand, nor a Symbol Card to trade in for one, they lose their scene for the Act. Practically, this means that players should try to reserve one Scene or Symbol card for their turn so as not to forfeit a scene.**

Ending Scenes: Once the player who started a scene declares it over, there are still a few things to do.

First, look at the conditions listed on any Protagonists who appeared in the scene. If a Protagonist's condition was met, flip their card over.

Second, check the Tones shown on the Protagonist card and the Scene Cards played in the scene to see if they match the Tones on any player's Secret Card (the order of the Tones doesn't matter). If so, that player starts the next scene, following the instructions on their Secret Card. If more than one player has a Secret Card that matches, then the player with the match that was noticed first gets to play their Secret Card and start the next scene; the other player(s) whose Secret(s) matched will have to wait for their Tones to come up



The cards played during a scene, and the Secret they unlocked

following a future scene.

Third, put all of the Scene Cards played in the Scene into a discard pile next to the Scene Deck, and give any Symbol Cards back to the players who played them in the Scene. These “used” Symbol Cards may be returned to the top of the Symbol Deck at any time to buy new Scene Cards as described above.

Finally, start the next scene.

4. Unlocking Secrets

After each scene ends, all players will check the Tones shown on the scene’s lead Protagonist Card and any Scene Cards that were played in the scene against their Secret Cards. If the Tones match your Secret Card, then your Secret is unlocked!

When your Secret is unlocked you begin a Secret scene right away. Secret scenes, however, are played somewhat differently than the standard scenes in the game. To play a Secret scene, read the question on the back of your Secret Card aloud, then select three Symbol Cards from the row and use them to describe and illustrate elements of a scene that answers the question.

No additional cards can be played into a Secret scene, though the player who starts the Secret Scene may assign roles to other players as usual.

Players only get one Secret Card each for the duration of the game. Secret Scenes are essentially bonus scenes. They do not count as the one scene that each player must start in each Act.

5. Finishing Acts

Continue playing scenes until each player has started one (not counting any Secret scenes). After the final player ends their scene, read the condition at the top of the Act Close card—it will determine who should start the Act Close scene.

The Act Close Cards consist of a prompt, just like a normal Scene Card, and also a list of elements to include in the Act Close scene based on what Tones were dominant in the preceding Act. Whoever will be starting the Act Close scene should count the number of each Tone in the discard pile and among the Protagonists, then incorporate the element corresponding to the most numerous Tone into the Act Close scene. In the event of a tie, the person starting the Act Close scene may choose which element to incorporate.

Other players may add cards to contribute to Act Close scenes, following the same rules for normal scenes—no more than one card per player, and no more than three cards per scene (including the Act Close card).

After you play the Act III Close scene, the game is over. If you have time, maybe talk through what you just played—some discussion questions are below.

You’ll probably find that some of the blanks you see in the story have been unconsciously filled in by the minds of other players—and vice-versa. Here are a few questions to start the conversation:

- Who killed the Victim? Are there multiple suspects? Did assumptions of guilt change during play?
- If there were other deaths, were they all the work of the same killer? Who was your favorite Protagonist? Who was your favorite supporting character? Which character do you trust the least?
- What threads were dropped? What strange happenings went unexplained?
- Did you consciously draw on pop culture in creating bits of the story? Did you consciously draw on real life experiences?
- If this were a TV series, would it get another season? Would there be any spin offs for specific characters?

EXTENDED EXAMPLE OF PLAY



A mystery I made with some friends

What follows is a transcription of a game of Tall Pines I—Miles Gaborit, the game’s creator—played with my friends Dan, Erika, and Troy shortly before the game’s release, in October of 2017. It’s included in these rules to provide a concrete example of the game’s procedures in play.

After reading the introduction text aloud and selecting our Act Closes, Protagonists, and Secrets, we started going around answering Setup Questions to establish details about the Victim and the Protagonists.

Miles: I’ll start with the Cherished Eccentric and the question says “What let you know the Victim saw things the way you do, at least a little?” And I think- I think I caught her talking to the ducks. And not just like the old ladies who bring the stale bread do – they just talk at the ducks. But I saw the Victim talking and listening to the ducks, and I knew she got it.

Troy: Nice. How about the Private Therapist next.

Miles: I’ve never played a game of Tall Pines where the Private Therapist didn’t end up a total creep. Make of that what you will.

Troy: The therapist’s question is “What aspect of the murder frightens the townsfolk the most. And let’s say it was the way the body was staged – like, it was very clearly some kind of ritual. Or at least meant to look like one. Candles and circles of stones and stuff.

Dan: Okay. I’ll take the Softhearted Deputy – the question is “Which of your cherished memories features the Victim as a child?” Well, when we were children together, around age 10 I was invited along with their family to a family vacation on the beach. And we had a great time. We were flying kites, we were playing hide-and-go-seek in the sand dunes, we were swimming in the ocean- I guess it was down south. One of my favorite childhood memories.

Erika: For the Thankless Handyman, “What did the Victim do to show gratitude when you fixed their car?” To show gratitude she gave me pain medication for my mother who’s going through chemotherapy.

Troy: I’m not sure who to go with. I guess the Privileged Athlete – “Why did you think your relationship with the Victim was just for show?” I’m going to say she knew that I was seeing somebody else in town – like not that I was cheating on her, but before we got together she knew that I was seeing this person that was, um, socially inappropriate.

Erika: She was your beard!

EXTENDED EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Troy: Not exactly. I was thinking more like a married woman. There's someone the athlete was seeing who was...

Miles: The Victim's mom?

Troy: Okay – yeah, let's say that! It's gross, but I like the twistedness.

Dan: So that means the athlete was the Victim's boyfriend?

Troy: Yeah, except I'm really into her mom! And dating the Victim just gave me an excuse to be over at their house all the time.

Miles: Okay – for the Bad Influence it says “What did the Victim tell you they were scared of?” I think the Victim was scared of like wild animals. Yeah, it was weird, she had me walk her to her car one time after volleyball practice. And she was super scared and jumpy, and then she grabbed my hand and squeezed when we got to the car because there was this big raccoon just sitting on the hood, giving her the eye. But then it ran off and it was fine.

Dan: Sounds like she was a city girl for sure – out of place in this small mountain town. Let's name her Clarice!

Miles: Yeah, I like Clarice. How about Clarice Timmons. So now we'll play through this story in three acts, and in each act each of us is going to start one scene. You've got some cards in your hand and each one has a scene prompt on it. So, when you see one you like, put the card on the table and pick a Protagonist that you want to make the lead in the scene. And then you try to imagine the scene you're about to play as if it's in a movie or TV show, and start describing what the camera sees as the scene begins. You then just keep narrating freely, or cast other people to play people in the scene with you – you're pretty much in the driver's seat as the director and lead actor in the scene.

While your scene is happening though, Troy might throw in another card that takes the scene in a direction you didn't expect. And then I might want to throw in one of the Symbol cards to add some weird metaphorical element. And we're basically buying into your scene with cards, either from our hands or from the row of face up Symbol cards. But, the person who started the scene always has the power to stop it – if you start a scene, you decide when it's over. Oh, and no more than three cards – plus the Protagonist card – can be played into a single scene. Three cards is the limit. After we each do our scene, we'll have one more big whammy scene to end the act.

And I'm ready to go with a scene, to model how this works. I'd like to do a scene with the Cherished Eccentric and this Scene card – “Their Bedroom”. The camera is looking out a window and you can see the branches of a tree through the curtains, and there are birds in the tree tittering. Then the branch shakes and the birds fly off, then settle back as you see someone creeping out to the end of the branch, rattling the window open. And it's this early-twenties woman in a bag-ladyish overcoat, her hair's just like a big matted cloud, her glasses are taped together and missing a lens, and she just kind of gawkily slides through the window. And does a quick jump back and forth looking around the room. Then she dives under the bed – she's looking for something hard. Stuff flies out from under the bed – a volleyball, some leggings, a sneaker – then some less tame stuff. A crack pipe bounces across the carpet, then a big hunting knife in a sheath. The young woman eventually comes out with a box, and it's got a combination lock on it – it's like a small cash box. The birds are all back on the branch and she says to them “little help?” indicating the lock.

Erika: I'll jump in with this Scene card - “The parents.” So, hearing the commotion, Clarice's father Mr. Timmons comes up to investigate. And he's equally shocked and confused.

Miles: So you'll play Mr. Timmons in this scene?

Erika: Yeah.

Miles: Great.

Erika: So he says “what are you doing here? Who said you could be in here?!”

Miles: And I'm like “Clarice sent me a message, you know, and she said...”

Erika: “You do know Clarice is dead, don't you?”

EXTENDED EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Miles: “Yeah, yeah, but she sent the message before.”

Erika: “How dare you...how did you even get in here?”

Miles: “I can go” and she starts kind of shuffle stepping toward the window.

Erika: And he gets between her and the window and gestures to the mess “what were you looking for?”

Miles: The birds get a little louder and more cacophonous and I’m like “I know!” Then I say to the dad “I think I found it, I mean I think this is it, I mean...this is mine.”

Erika: “Let me see it.”

Miles: I hold it out and it looks like a jewelry box, and maybe the lock is even like a heart shape. “She said I could have it, in the message.” And then she makes a break for it, kind of dodging around him and out the bedroom door, and out through the house. As the front door slams the birds flutter out of the tree.

Erika: “Get out of here! Get out of here and never come back!”

Miles: And that’s the end of the scene. Let’s check and see if we need to flip the Protagonist first – the card says “If people were puzzled by your words or actions...flip this card over.” What do you think, was Mr. Timmons puzzled?

Erika: YES!

Miles: Cool. So between the Protagonist and the two Scene cards we played, we’ve got the tones Understanding, Understanding, Resolve. Does that unlock anyone’s Secret?

Erika: Ooh! Dan is Resolve, Resolve, Understanding – close!

Miles: So, the Eccentric’s name wasn’t spoken in that scene. But I’ll name her “Eunice Montgomery.” Just a note, too – you’re not going to draw any Scene cards after each scene. Like, you don’t draw back up to three or anything. Instead, once you’ve used one of the Symbol cards in a scene, you can hold onto it and put it back on top of the Symbol card deck when you want to “buy” an additional Scene card. Sound good?

Dan: Yep.

Erika: Okay – I’ll start a Scene with this card, “Where they were found.” So the Scene opens to Deputy Nelson on patrol. It’s like an over-the-shoulder shot from the back seat of his police-issue Chevy Blazer.

Miles: Deputy Nelson is the Protagonist?

Erika: Yeah. And he’s just kind of doing his usual route, eating a sandwich, just a regular day. And he pulls over because he needs to use the bathroom. Puts down his sandwich, gets out of the car, walks a few yards into the woods and pees behind a tree. And then he notices something – a flash of red, among all the green of the forest, catches his eye. It’s a little way off in the woods though, so he does up his pants and walks over there. And he finds...

Miles: (Playing a Symbol card with a picture of a dog’s mouth) And he comes into this clearing and there’s a dog there. He sees the dog running out into the center of the clearing, and it’s the dog that has this red thing in its mouth. It looks like a piece of cloth that billows behind him. The dog stops and turns to look at Deputy Nelson. And that’s when he sees the body, right.

Erika: Yeah, he spots the body.

Miles: And I guess that kind of makes this a flashback. Because Mr. Timmons already knew Clarice was dead in the last scene, so this scene must happen before that.

Erika: Okay, cool. So, the Deputy sees the Victim there and he immediately starts to weep. Hand over his mouth, snot running down his face. He sees her purse there on the ground and he snatches it up, then runs back to the car to radio in for help. He radios in, “I found a body. I think it’s little Clarice Timmons – someone needs to come and get her.” Deputy Nelson just can’t face going out into the woods - the image of her lying there was just too disturbing. So instead I start going through Clarice’s purse, and in it I find she has a map. A map that has some locations marked

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along the Canadian border. Then I look through her phone and find that she's made a series of international calls, which is very strange. And I also find her passport, and other old travel documents, like old train tickets. So as I wait for the police to arrive – I know I'm the police, but I think that's how the Deputy thinks of it. He's waiting for the adults to show up.

Dan: (Playing the Scene card “Where the bad kids go”) So, while he's waiting, the Deputy hears in the background some noise and like laughter off in the woods on the opposite side of the road from the body. He gets back out of his truck, reluctantly, and goes to investigate again, and he finds some teenagers sitting around a small fire – it's early evening. And they're being quite boisterous. As he approaches, they see him and suddenly their voices go to whispers and they look nervous and sheepish. And one of them speaks up “Hi Deputy Nelson.” “What are you kids doing out here?” “Oh, nothing.” And they look a little guilty.

Erika: And then like, the sound of the sirens suddenly gets loud and the lights flash through the trees. It startles the Deputy, and the kids scatter. And that's where we cut the scene. When the police finally arrive. And then I think we need to flip the Softhearted Deputy, because his card says “if your emotional reaction jeopardized the case...flip this card over.”

Miles: Oh, probably yeah.

Erika: He went through her purse, disturbed the crime scene...

Miles: Hid in his car!

Erika: Right. It's another Understanding, Understanding, Resolve. Nobody again.

Dan: So, if I start a scene does it have to be exactly what's on the card – like that's what's happening in the scene.

Miles: Not at all. The words on the cards are supposed to be inspirational, not proscriptive. Take or leave whatever ideas or words you like. What does this card make you feel, you know. It's a very touchy feely story game.

Dan: Okay.

Troy: Alright, (playing the Scene card “In fear of their wrath”) I can start the next scene. It's like action, shaky-cam, looking at the back of the Bad Influence – that's the Protagonist, and his name is Chase Newton – as he's sprinting through the woods. Just running flat out, keeps looking over his shoulder – shaky cam, running, running, running. Then he's like half turned around, putting up his arms like warding something off. “Get back! Get off!” And he's just terrified.

Erika: (playing a Symbol card with a picture of a split tree stump) And Chase stops, looks around frantically. He needs to find a place to hide, doesn't think he can outrun the thing that's chasing him. And he sees this old tree, so he starts climbing.

Troy: He's climbing, and going branch to branch to branch, and there's this place where he kind of has to lunge out into space to get himself up to the next branch. So he does it, and catches his leg on a jagged branch (reaching for a Symbol card with a picture of a bright red rose) and then there's blood.

Miles: So, remember, there's a limit of one card per player per scene. You already put in a card – “In fear of their wrath” – when you started the scene. But, since you've already played a card in the scene you can just say there's blood – you've already got narrative power in the scene by virtue of the card you played. Narrate whatever you want.

Troy: Oh, okay, cool. So, he leaps, and there's blood all down his leg.

Miles: (Playing the Scene card “Unwanted company”) So, the camera angle switches to above Chase's head, looking down at the ground. He's in the foreground, barely hanging up in the tree, trying to hold his breath and stay silent. And there's this big shape, it's blurry because of where the camera is focused, but it's like casting around on the ground looking for him. And his phone rings – it's in the inside pocket of his jacket and he can see the screen glow through the fabric of the pocket. His first thought is like “Shut up!” but then he is kind of taken aback because it says across the name of the phone “BOOTY CALL” but the picture is Clarice Timmons in her senior picture. He reaches a hand to

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try and swat at his phone to silence it and he almost loses his balance.

Troy: And as Chase manages to silence the phone, he realizes that it's quiet on the ground now. He's like "But Clarice is dead...who's got her phone?" And blood rolls down his sneaker and drips to the ground – we don't see it land. That's the end of the scene. So his card says "If you showed your feelings...flip this card." He was scared, but I wouldn't really say he showed his feelings over much. So, no flip.

Miles: That makes it Resolve, Understanding, Shame – is that anybody.

Erika: Nope.

Dan: Next, there's a scene in the Private Therapist's office with the Victim, before she died (playing the Scene card "Wasted effort"). Clarice comes into Dr. Dietrich's office and she looks like she's trying to stay composed, but she can't keep it together and starts crying as she sits down. Dr. Dietrich is like "How are you feeling?" and Clarice says "It's been really hard, Doctor. Someone I thought was my friend – they turned against me." "Turned against you how?" says the doctor. And that's when I'll cast Erika as Clarice – is that okay?

Erika: Yeah, totally. So Clarice is like "They know my secret, and ever since they learned, they've started stalking me with their big dog. It's got so bad I'm afraid to leave the house!"

Miles: (Playing a Symbol card with a picture of a deep stone well) You know, good Dr. Dietrich has seen her get worked up like this before. She's digging her nails into the side of the couch, her breath is getting short...Clarice is going to have a meltdown, and he kind of wants to head this off. But he kind of want to go deeper with Clarice too – as deep as he can go without doing any damage. And so he's like "Take a deep breath Clarice. Picture the clearing out in the woods where your father used to take you. Remember how calm you used to feel in that place. Try to recapture that."

Dan: And then Dr. Dietrich says "Maybe you'd feel better if you shared your secret with someone Clarice. Would you feel comfortable telling me?"

Erika: And Clarice inhales and exhales and then answers "No. No, I'm not ready. It's too personal."

Dan: "Well, I do need to be sure that you're safe Clarice? Do you need to tell your parents? Do you feel safe?"

Erika: "Not really, but telling my parents isn't going to make any difference. If you're worried about me harming myself, that's not going to happen."

Troy: (Playing the Scene card "Damn fine cup of coffee") And that's when the doctor says "Maybe you'd feel more comfortable talking about this somewhere else – we could get out of this stuffy office, maybe go get a cup of coffee together. You know, after the session."

Erika: Yeah, because that's appropriate.

Troy: Hey, you wanted the creepy Therapist, I brought him.

Dan: "Your parent's insurance will only cover an hour a week, and I think you could benefit from a more intensive course of treatment. So, if we see each other outside the office, I won't have to bill the insurance for it. There's a great diner a few miles down the highway, out of town."

Erika: "Well, I do feel safe with you."

Dan: "Of course. You can trust me. I'm your doctor." And that's the scene. Let's see – I flip him if I "discussed the Victim's problems in the last scene." Think I nailed that, so I'll flip him. Which I didn't mean to – I was thinking we were going to be able to hit your Secret, Troy.

Miles: You hit mine though! It's Resolve, Resolve, Shame. So when you do your Secret you choose three symbol cards and use them to make a little vignette that answers the question on the back of your Secret card. And nobody else can mess with your scene. It's all you! So my question is "Who in town is not really who they say they are, and what do they do when you confront them?" Okay – my Protagonist is for sure Dr. Dietrich. (Playing the Symbol cards with

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picture of a hand smoking a cigarette, an old train tunnel, and a dead rat) So, we're seeing the parking lot of an office park at night, just a few cars. And we see the Victim's father, Mr. Timmons – Ben Timmons – walking out to his car. We see him give a little nod to the security guard as he leaves the building, and as he gets out to his car, puts a key in the lock. Then there's a voice "Hello Ben." It's Dr. Dietrich, he comes out of the shadows in his tweeds smoking his pipe. "She told me. She told me everything Ben." And Mr. Timmons is like "What are you talking about?" And Dr. D. says "Clarice!" "Um, I'm very tired. We're still grieving." And the doctor says "No. She told me. About the long train ride. Told me where you used to keep her. Told me about the woman she used to call mother. Told me about the way you used to treat her in that place – how she had to kill the rats to keep from starving." The color is draining out of Mr. Timmons face as Dr. Dietrich is ranting on. "You were never her father. You were her captor." Finally Timmons fumbles his keys into the lock and gets inside, shuts the door. Dr. Dietrich pounds on the window, then stumbles back as Mr. Timmons peels out. And Dr. Dietrich is just left standing alone in the parking lot, puffing on his pipe. So that's my secret!

Troy: Okay, so that's the end of the act then, right. The Act I Close card says "whoever last lit a flame plays a scene using the prompt on this card." Who was that? And that means whoever last lit a flame out of game, in real life, right?

Miles: Right.

Dan: I smoked like an hour ago, so that's me. The card prompt says "A slow procession through town, gaining numbers as it winds toward the square. Silently gathered heads bowed flames flickering in the night. Space is made for those who remember the Victim to say a few words. When you step up onto the little bandstand stage..."

Miles: And because most of the Scene cards we played in this act were Resolve, the card says you have to "Include someone being shunned or excluded." And otherwise this is a normal scene – we can throw cards into it.

Dan: Okay, so, I'll be the Thankless Handyman, Teddy Getz, because we haven't seen him yet. He steps up onto the stage and starts to talk about Clarice, then he pauses as he locks eyes with the Privileged Athlete, Bobby Stevens. And Bobby yells back like "No! No that's not true!" And it's clear he's drunk. And the crowd is kind of silent, waiting for a response from Teddy. And he says "Bobby, you need to come clean. About what you did."

Erika: (Playing the Scene card "A cleansing rain") And then the sky just opens up – it turns pitch black, the only illumination is the weak candles and forks of lightning. Then the rain drops out of the sky, just pours down, dousing all the candle flames. And the people all scatter for shelter. On the stage, one person stands alone.

Dan: I think that's the scene. And that's Act I!

Miles: That was Act I! Give me your yellow Act I Scene cards and I'll give you hands of Act II Scene cards.

And that's where we'll end this example of play. Hopefully it gives you an idea of how play flows in Tall Pines, and how the various mechanics work in practice.