

Die Gesellschaft  der Stadtwanderer

SAZ L-S

**SPECULATIVE AUTONOMOUS ZONE
LIFE-SIZE**

Game Guide

**Urban Art Biennale
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Speculative Autonomous Zone Life-Size (SAZ L-S) is a role-playing game for 3 to 6 players.

Role-playing is a game practice based on discussion and collective imagination, where each player's contribution around the table co-constructs a shared narrative. Through play and fiction, the goal of SAZ L-S is to rediscover agency in the everyday life of a chosen community, through the fictional exploration of the space in which it unfolds.

During the game, players are immersed in an autonomous Enclave that has formed within the Völklinger Hütte. It emerges as an island of resistance and solidarity, fueled by the hopes of its inhabitants. After determining their character's place within the community, the players act out a series of scenes using the Hütte as their setting. They collaboratively produce narratives that grapple with their personal emotions, anxieties, and aspirations.

A SAZ L-S game kit includes: a game guide; game sheets to cut out or fold, including game tips, entity sheets, archetype sheets, playmats to complete, and tokens to cut out or made from colored cardboard labeled "SAZ L-S" and "Trigger Warning"; and a map of the lore.

This game guide allows you to follow and set up a game, step by step. Read it once to familiarize yourself with the game mechanics if you wish to take on the role of facilitator.

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I. IMMERSION IN THE HÜTTE AND ENTRY INTO LORE

The person proposing the game takes on the role of facilitator for the session. [If you're reading this guide, it's probably you!]

The facilitator explains the basics of role-playing and reads aloud:

"SAZ L-S, or Speculative Autonomous Zone Life-Size, is a role-playing game whose practice develops collectively through discussion and imagination. Each player's contribution around the table co-creates a shared narrative."

The session begins with a brief round of introductions, where each player shares the place that most impressed them during their visit to the Vöklinger Hütte.

II. SPIRIT OF THE GAME

The facilitator reads aloud:

“Welcome to the Enclave of the Hütte. This space is emerging as an island of resistance and solidarity, fueled by the hopes of its inhabitants. Through the embodiment of your character and the different aspects of the world, you will experience life in the Enclave and find your place in the community. Even though we don’t know each other yet, let’s explore this space of possibilities together and let our curiosity guide us. I can already hear the excitement at the heart of the Enclave...”

III. SETUP

III. a. The players take turns reading aloud **The Enclave of the Hütte sheet** [without choosing a crisis for now]. The facilitator suggests that those not reading the sheet close their eyes during the readings to better immerse themselves in the story.

III. b. The facilitator unfolds the **Map of the Situated Lore** and places it in the center of the table. Two inset descriptions are read aloud, corresponding to the locations in the Hütte that made an impression on the players during their visit.

IV. THE IDLE DREAMING

IV. a. The facilitator reads aloud:

“Now that we have grasped the outline of the Enclave, we will familiarize ourselves with the game’s principles. There is no predefined scenario, no success or failure: this fictional scenario is a laboratory for exploring issues that we find interesting, intriguing, or even exciting. Our characters will be our means of exploring the fictional universe. Their relationships, desires, and anxieties will allow us to sketch scenes to be acted out. We won’t necessarily produce a linear narrative, but rather an ‘idle dreaming’: we can explore the past, present, and future with our characters, according to our desires. We will return to how to act out scenes in due course: for now, we will enter into the daydream by creating our characters.”

IV. b. The facilitator checks that everyone has understood and clarifies if necessary. They continue, still speaking aloud:

“Keep in mind a few rules to ensure the dreaming is shared:

1. Ask questions. Fiction is built through discussion, so it’s essential that everyone understands what’s at stake in order to contribute. Make sure you’re clear and ask other players questions if something isn’t clear to you.

2. Rephrase with kindness. We’re going to make suggestions to each other and negotiate them. No suggestion is inherently wrong, but if you feel you have a different perspective on a situation, you can offer a rephrasing to support your point of view. This is the ‘yes, but’ approach, also used in improvisation.

3. If you’re not comfortable with the direction the fiction is taking, use the ‘Trigger Warning’ tokens.”

IV. c. The facilitator reads aloud the **Precautions and Consent:**

“Each player has a red token and a black token.

Before a game or during a scene, players can use tokens to signal to the group their limits and reservations about the game’s purpose or process, when the situation makes them uncomfortable.

By placing a red token in the center of the table, a player indicates that the topics being discussed are sensitive and should be approached with caution. By placing a black token in the center of the table, a player indicates that the scene should be avoided and the discussion moved on to another topic. A player placing a red or black token in the center of the table does not require any justification or explanation.

At the end of the game—and only if the player who placed a red or black token wishes—a discussion may be opened.”

V. ARCHETYPES AND MOVES

V. a. The facilitator states:

“We are now going to meet the different archetypes present within the Enclave. Listen and see which ones resonate with you.”

They distribute the **archetype sheets** randomly. The central column of each card is read aloud in turn. Each player chooses an archetypal character to portray during the game based on their affinity and defines its characteristics by circling a series of choices on the card. If there are fewer than 6 players, the remaining cards are set aside.

V. b. The facilitator ensures that all players have been able to sketch their character and continues:

“Now we have all met our characters. As with any encounter, you will get to know them through play. Before we introduce ourselves, I invite you to look at the Map of the Situated Lore.”

Players locate an area with which their character has an affinity on the **Map of the Situated Lore** by drawing the pictogram associated with their archetype.

V. c. After all the characters have been positioned, the facilitator draws a circle in a free area of the map, accessible to all players, and places the “ZAS L-S” tokens in it. They state:

“On your character sheet, there is a ‘moves’ section.

Moves will allow us to interpret the scenes.

Most of the time, you will use basic moves [act in accordance with the situation]. But you can also choose to make a strong move or a vulnerable move. In order to regulate the narrative and give everyone the same agency, it is only possible to make a strong move by spending a token, either by having previously obtained it through a vulnerable move, or through prompting from the other characters. This is a powerful tool for fleshing out our characters and adding complexity to our stories. We begin the game without any tokens. The circle I just drew is a space of attention: if someone picks up a token from it, it means they are making a vulnerable move. If they drop a token, it means they are making a strong move. [It is helpful to say each move aloud to inform the other players.] This gives us an indication of why they are acting this way: let’s pay attention to what the other players’ characters are experiencing. It is possible to improvise or suggest a new vulnerable or strong move, provided you ask the table if everyone is okay with it and see how it goes. The logic of the moves will emerge as we play.”

V. d. The facilitator allows a few moments for each player to look at their sheet and ask questions if necessary.

VI. ENTITIES AND NPCs

VI. a. The facilitator states:

“Our character and their actions are our primary perspective in the Hütte Enclave. But the rest of the world exists outside of our characters: our other comrades from the various branches of the community—Willows, Inks, Coppers, Coals, Newcomers, Resins—the rusted steel of the Hut, the Saar River floods, the Saargrün employees, our carrier pigeons, etc. To make our story more vivid, we will also share the roles of the various external elements that make up life there, using the entity sheets.”

All the entity sheets are distributed randomly, and their summaries are read aloud in turn. The sheets are placed in the center of the table, accessible to everyone.

All players will take turns embodying the different entities, as the other players are confronted with them [see the insert on the entity sheets: “To pick up when”, “To trade away when”].

There are no tokens for entities, only action examples. It is possible to create your own, provided the other players agree on the relevance of each new action.

Any character outside of the archetypes portrayed by the players is a non-player character (NPC). If someone introduces an NPC (through their key relationships, for example), the rule is to give “control” of that NPC to another player, so as not to have a one-on-one conversation.

NPCs do not have character sheets or actions, but if an NPC becomes important to the narrative, it is recommended to write their name on a piece of paper so everyone can remember it.

If a specific NPC is linked to one of the **entities sheets**—a member of the Outer Communities or Saargrün, for example—it may be helpful to look at the suggested actions on the sheets for inspiration.

“We’re coming to the end of the explanations. The key rule to remember is that you juggle between your character and the rest of the world. But when your character interacts with someone or something, you relinquish control of that otherness to one of the other players, which allows you to always be in dialogue. It’s time to enter the Enclave!”

VII. ENTERING THE ENCLAVE

The players take out the Enclave sheet and collectively choose the main crisis facing the **community**. [The facilitator can also suggest a crisis to facilitate discussion.]

The facilitator states:

“While we each have our own perspective on what concerns us in the Enclave, we will collectively determine an issue that seems most pressing to the entire community. Which crisis concerns you the most?”

VII. a. The players take turns presenting their characters, using the choices and answers on their sheets.

“Don’t hesitate to be generous and honest: in the story, we may not know everything, but this is the time to share what you anticipate as the challenges facing your character. It will give us something to talk about! Who wants to start?”

VII. b. Once the introductions are complete, it's time for a short break. Let the players get to know their characters, and feel free to ask questions and build relationships. [If you're playing across multiple tables with several groups of players simultaneously, encourage players to interact with their archetypal counterparts during the break.]

VII. c. After the break, each player chooses one of the opening questions from their character sheet to ask their neighbor to the left. Each player answers honestly from their character's perspective, then takes their turn asking the question they chose. By the end of the question round, the first narrative connections between the characters will have been established.

VIII. THE FLOW OF A GAME TURN

VIII. a. The first turn is initiated by the facilitator or a volunteer player. They propose a scene based on their character's story, their relationships within the community, or their aspirations in the face of the crisis they are experiencing.

VIII. b. They begin to outline a scene by suggesting a location, a time of day, and the possible characters involved.

"The scene takes place at [location, brief description if applicable], at [date and time, description of the social context if applicable], with [names of the characters involved]. [Character name] intervenes to [trigger events]."

VIII. c. The other players specify whether or not they will be involved as characters in the scene, based on its stakes and location.

Before starting the scene, each player makes sure it is clear by summarizing the context and asking questions to clarify elements if necessary.

Example: Sophie is the facilitator. She plays Finn, a Coal, and proposes an initial scene: "As a member of the Coals, I think Finn is concerned about the state of the Hütte. I'd like to suggest an initial scene in Paradise, near the water, where Rainer (The Willow, played by Roland) and Günther (The Resin, played by Leo) can discuss their perceptions." Roland and Leo agree, and Sophie continues: "Great! Everyone else, feel free to intervene as an entity. Let's see, what should I do first...."

VIII. d. The players interact from their character's perspective, making basic, vulnerable, and strong moves, as well as prompts. For the first scene, it's helpful to say aloud the moves that each player will make and clearly show when a token is taken or removed:

"I perform a [basic, vulnerable, strong] move: [description of the move]."

Then, they are free to interpret their character's move within the game situation.

Example: Sophie will start with a basic move: [Share food or advice with someone]. Finn, the character she plays, says: "I invite you to sit with me and offer you some sunflower seeds that I've been keeping safe." She then makes a vulnerable move: [Admit that you don't have the answer to someone's question or problem]. Sophie reaches into the pile of tokens to take one. Finn, her character, continues:

“A friend almost got hurt because her apartment partially collapsed yesterday. She asked for my help, but I didn’t know how to help her... I have the feeling the Hütte is becoming increasingly unstable. Do you notice this too? Or am I worrying too much?”

VIII. f. During the scene, when non-involved players deem it relevant, they can join the scene as a character or entity.

Example: The characters Finn, Rainer, and Günther are discussing their different perspectives on the Hütte’s stability. While they agree that several phenomena are worrying, the player Thomas brings in the Earth entity itself: “A violent jolt is followed by a bloodcurdling creak and a dull thud. No doubt about it: part of the Hütte must have collapsed.”

VIII. g. The turn ends when the player who initiated the scene, or the players who participated, deem it to be concluded (action completed, conflict resolved, exchange concluded, movement that would lead to a new scene with other characters, or a break in the narrative).

Example: Finn, Günther, and Rainer are in shock. Sophie suggests that the scene end with this event. Leo and Roland agree.

Also, the entities or the facilitator can intervene to guide the scene's conclusion when it is falling apart or dragging on.

VIII. h. To conclude, one of the players states:

"The scene ends with (description of the scene's end)."

Example: Sophie summarizes the scene. "While we assume the Hütte seems to be deteriorating faster than expected, the discussion is interrupted by a clear illustration: part of the Hütte collapses." The scene ends on the moment of shock following the peaceful discussion. Perhaps the next scene takes place at the point of impact? Finn, Rainer, and Günther were far away, but perhaps Suzanne (The New Arrival, played by Ileana), Dr. Kurt (The Ink, played by Liliana), and Dimitri (The Copper, played by Thomas) were closer? Everyone agrees to begin the next scene right after the impact, near the old blast furnaces. The following scene is initiated by Thomas: "Dimitri was working at the foot of the blast furnaces when he felt the metal tremble beneath his hands..."

REPEAT AS MANY IDLE DREAMINGS AS YOU LIKE!

To ensure an optimal experience, it is recommended to play a set of scenes for a minimum duration of 90 minutes to 120 minutes.

IX. END OF THE GAME AND RETURN TO DAILY LIFE

When the allotted time for the game has elapsed [or a pre-agreed number of scenes], the game ends, but remains open.

The facilitator leads a round-table discussion to conclude the LARP and return to the present, using two questions. They ask:

“What is your character’s fate in the future of the Enclave, 20 years later?”

“What experience have you gained from exploring the Enclave in relation to your connection to this territory?”

X. FEEDBACK ON GAMEPLAY AND NARRATIVE OF EXPERIENCE

Share your gameplay or experience report with members of Die Gesellschaft der Stadtwanderer by emailing this address:

diegesellschaftderstadtwanderer@riseup.net

Thank you for playing or reading this guide to the end. SAZ L-S owes much to the inventiveness and generosity of Avery Adler and Benjamin Rosenbaum, whose Enclaves inspired ours: we thank them for allowing others to adopt their game system.

If you enjoyed SAZ L-S, we highly recommend purchasing the Dream Askew and Dream Apart game kit, available on the Buried without Ceremony website. It's a way to support independent game development!

Speculative Autonomous Zone Life-Size (SAZ L-S) follows in the footsteps of role-playing game systems labeled Belonging Outside of Belonging, such as Dream Askew and Dream Apart, published in 2018 by Avery Adler and Benjamin Rosenbaum. In these role-playing games, players experience the challenges faced by a marginalized community living outside the boundaries imposed by the dominant culture, but also discover the beauty inherent in this process.

Game design by Sophie Prinssen and Léo Sallez,
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