Stepchild

An incomplete Mad Fantasy
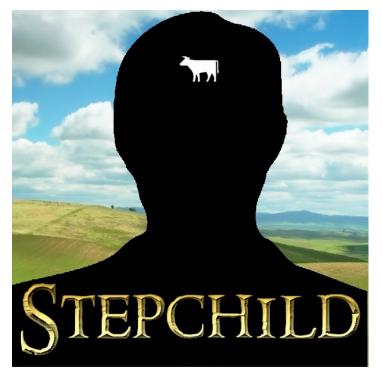
Bring Out Your Dead! - June 17, 2016

TL;DR Quickstart:

The game is entirely online, you needn't download anything.

❖ Have or create a Fallen London or Storynexus account (You will need to log in).
❖ http://stepchild.storynexus.com/a/StepchildROLDONTT (Sets up "tester" access; you will need to log in or be logged in with account. You can create one here.)
❖ Play the game at http://stepchild.storynexus.com/s (you will create a separate "character" name so your game is saved)

BRING OUT YOUR DEAD!

STEPCHILD is a project I've had in mind and been working on for a good number of years, even before my first published interactive fiction.

It is a sprawlingly-weird epic "mad fantasy" that was inspired by a tiny moment in someone else's never-finished, never-published IF I beta-tested long ago that floored me so much that I had to run with it. The concept I lifted spiraled out of control like Frankenstein, and smashed peanut butter/chocolate style into another concept I had for a genderflipped Cinderella story.

The game was perhaps 1/4 finished on Storynexus and eventually abandoned due to three factors:

1. Potential scope creep. I had a combat system fleshed out that was starting to get confusing. I was preparing to rip out the entire thing and simplify it down (which in turn was going to make programming the future combat scenarios much easier) but I didn't relish the thought of rebuilding 20 extensive cards that were already set up. I would have happily done this had it not been for…

2. Failbetter shut down Storynexus. Being able to make Fallen-London type games and potentially monetize them (while still letting them be free to play) was an awesome thing, but was too good to last and FB didn't have the resources to keep Storynexus running and all of their people employed. They did leave it available as it stood, but without technical support; authors could use it at their own risk, which leads to…

3. FINAL GIRL self-destructing on the server side. Final Girl was my first IFComp game and had a surprising following as it ran for over a year. Writing it taught me a whole lot that would have fed into making Stepchild better…until something happened on Failbetter's end that essentially played 52-card pickup with the storylets and wrecked the game - actually changing settings that were integral to make the entire system work and which would take an Herculean archaeological effort to sort out and repair over the course of ~120 interlocking storylet cards. Without any kind of support from Failbetter, I started losing confidence that the same thing wouldn't happen in Stepchild, which was up to perhaps 400 storylets in its present form. Storynexus is *designed* for epics, but after the heartbreak of one house of cards tumbling, I feared for the safety of the one that was still teetering at approximately three times the size. Final Girl also taught me that many classic IF fans are weirded out by playing a persistent game online.

I'M NOT DEAD YET!!

My original concept started in Inform 7, but at the time my Inform skills were very much lacking and I couldn't quite get this very ambitious, systems-crazy game working in a manner I was happy with. Storynexus was both limiting and freeing, in that if I broke a lot of my puzzles and moments down like a boardgame, I could get them to work almost better and more simply than I originally conceived. This "make it a boardgame" philosophy very much influenced Final Girl as well. Stepchild included a magic system, real-time world changes that could lure the player back in as circumstances evolved, a combat system, a card-controlled world clock with characters changing locations on schedule, a hunger daemon, a costume system that affected how NPCs reacted to you, and all the wonderful fun randomness enabled by drawing from decks of cards. The Storynexus limit of three cards

drawn at a time was utilized as a strategic element such as how the player could ignore the passage of time or detrimental mental effects at the expense of losing slots to draw new potentially beneficial cards to. This also was a major element in the simple working card game "Treble" that can be played in the in-world casino.

I'M GOING FOR A WALK!!!

Stepchild is not completely dead yet, as I still at some point would love to complete it either in Inform or ChoiceScript - you should see how crazy the systems are in ChoiceScript! - I consider it thusly in "development hell", and hopefully one day it will emerge even better for all the prodding and poking it's gotten. I'm glad to have this opportunity for brave players to take a hard-hat tour of the incomplete funhouse attraction that is Stepchild.

How to play STEPCHILD in its incomplete form:

If you play Fallen London, you may use this same account to log into Storynexus to play Stepchild. If not, you may register for free at Storynexus.com . This registration only asks for a valid email, and they don't spam you. (They may send occasional Fallen London news, but I am not sure if they do unless you are in Fallen London as well.)

Go to this website and log in using your account if you haven't already. I believe it will also prompt you to create an account if you haven't.

http://stepchild.storynexus.com/a/StepchildROLDONTT

This will modify your account and give you play-tester access to Stepchild. If you don't follow the link and have the Playtester's Passkey quality, the game might kick you out at certain points. The key also has utilities to restart the game and modify some qualities for testing purposes.

The existing game can then be accessed and played at

http://stepchild.storynexus.com/s

The original game had monetization links - specifically in the Gamboling Parlour - originally it cost "nex" to follow these links, but Failbetter shut off monetization so you can get in-game copper pieces for free now if you want.

The game has at least one place where a real-time delay is used (there might be others but I don't remember). This means you will be messaged on the Storynexus site and possibly also notified by your email address that something new has happened in the game. You can turn this off in your Storynexus profile if you don't want these notifications to email. These messages should not repeatedly spam your inbox.

Stepchild was designed so that players would hopefully never run out of turns as one does in Fallen London. If you somehow manage to take 1000 actions without hitting a refresh point, you can add turns using the Playtester's Passkey item in inventory.

There are occasional broken places in the game. If something goes terribly wrong, or the entire instance gets borked and you can't get going by refreshing the page, closing and re-opening the browser, and finally restarting with a new character using the Playtester's Passkey, please use the email form on my website: http://hanonondricek.wix.com/pyramidif#!ask-about/ua8xe to send me a message including your character name and I will try to fix it. The bug reporting link on the website may also work, but it does not go to an email that is checked very often.

Any other questions or feedback, please contact me via my website: http://hanonondricek.wix.com/pyramidif#!ask-about/ua8xe

I FEEL HAPPYEEEEEE! *clong*

Notes:
- ❖ *There is some potentially bawdy humor, which I apologize for. The full Storynexus game was planned to have some mildly racy bits, but this content would not have been required to finish the game. I created an entire meta language of obscenity (with conjugations) for cursing and body parts - a bit of this shows up here. (In Inform, I gleefully planned the response: "Real adventurers do not use such language. They curse in the Olde Tongue." The player would have had to make an effort to "learn" this language to involve themselves in any sort of debauchery in the parser version.)
- ❖ **Ignore the warning sign that suggests you don't descend into the town after leaving the castle. There is content down there, but there are also empty lots for future expansion which would have been fleshed out before release, and slowly expanded if Stepchild were to be opened and grown as an epic-in progress as Failbetter encouraged.
- ❖ ***The path to the town to the west dead-ends, unfortunately as that was one of the last bits worked on. Two other entire cities were planned in future expansion, and can be seen (via description) if you find the map of the surrounding area.