

The Spring Break



Jerrek Schraner

The Spring Break

a Break system prequel

by Derek Schraner

Also by Derek Schraner*

the Break system series:

- *The Summer Job*
- *The Fall Affair*
- *The Winter Mission*
- *The Break System*

Operation CanCon:

the Canadian Music Shopping Gamebook series:

- *Eighties*
- *Nineties*
- *Classics*
- *Holiday Special*

Hikikomori: a lucky lockdown life sim

* [See the end of the story and booklet for details.](#)

Credits

The Spring Break: a Break system prequel

© Copyright 2024, 2026 by Derek J. Schraner

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

All design, development, and writing by Derek Schraner; logo generated with ambigramania; original photo by Walter Schraner; all other images and layout by Derek Schraner; typeset with Merriweather and Metrophobic.

For more information, please visit

LockdownLudonaut.com

20260329

*this dedication
intentionally left blank
(maybe third grade me)*

Contents

Introduction	9
<i>The Spring Break</i>	11
Section 0 — Prologue	13
Section 1	19
Section 2	25
Section 3	29
Section 4	33
Section 5	37
Section 6	41
Section 7	45
Section 8	49
Section 9	53
Section 10	57
Section 11	59
Section 12	63
Section 13	67
Section 14 — Epilogue	69

Appendices	79
Vocabulary Scavenger Hunt	81
True Identity Bingo	83
The APPA Minigame*	85
Selected Music for a Spring Break	87
Also by Derek Schraner...	89
About...	95

** Note: In addition to the story, each section contains one step of a minigame called APPA. As you read, collect the steps in the APPA minigame appendix and arrange them in numerical order to play.*

Introduction

This "booklet" tells a standalone crime story, but it's also part of an ongoing narrative, the prequel to an epic about heists.

It begins: "You blink in the sudden sun..."

...but why "You"?

This story is written in the second person because the trilogy that follows it is a series of gamebooks. It's not my story, or anyone else's; it's *yours*.

I'm trying an experiment. I created a game called *Break*. I wanted it to be simple, but then my brain had other ideas. I went back to the drawing board and devised this series as an on-ramp.

The Spring Break is an entry point, a straight-ahead short story; *The Summer Job*, which follows it, adds choice and a wider world; *The Fall Affair* adds some minigames; *The Winter Mission* adds a crew.

Together, they tell an overarching tale, but they also introduce ideas foundational to the game I created. Its book – *The Break System* – includes an annotated breakdown of mechanics, and even how they underpin *The Spring Break* specifically.

You can start at any point, but – since you're already here – why not start at [Section 0, the Prologue](#)?

Happy heisting!

The Spring Break

a Break system prequel

Section 0 — Prologue

You blink in the sudden sun, nearly overwhelmed by the morning's warmth. Outside the plane, it's brighter – but somehow less piercing – than the cabin's fluorescence.

Maybe this wasn't such a bad break after all...

To be fair, you wouldn't have come if you had to pay your own way here, but now the hypnotic shushing and gentle press of wind–

"Welcome to the 808 state!"

You blink, look down, and descend the mobile ramp, reaching the greeter awaiting you on the tarmac.

"Hello." You shake her outstretched hand. "I'm here for Mr. Meinrad." You show the prepaid ticket receipt. "But I think there's been a mistake; the round trip destination here is wrong."

"Please, call me Ukiah, I am Mr. Meinrad's... envoy. We'll sort it out. For now, however, we need to–"

A flurry distracts you. A pair, a man and woman, arrive to adorn you with a *lokelani lei*, a necklace of flowers which conjures a sense of jasmine.

"Aloha!" they chorus. *"Welcome to Kā'anapali!"*

You nod politely, unsure of the protocol.

Ukiah laughs in a way you wouldn't expect from, well, someone like her. Then, just as quickly, she directs you to one side, intoning soberly, "We haven't got much time. You came without baggage as instructed?"

Again you nod.

"Good. You'll receive everything you need, and customs is taken care of. Let's talk over here.."

You're led by the arm to a side entrance, and into a bar called Brogdon's. As soon as the door thumps closed you notice the unexpected noises.

"It sounds like... a swamp?" You shake your head.

"The muzak, Martin Denny's *Exotica*," she says. "Don't ask me how I know. Let's have a seat. I'd offer a drink, but you've got a job to do."

"No coffee or tea?" you respond, a hint of protest.

The urgency in Ukiah's eyes is replaced with a subtle glint. "Oh, yes, I think we'll get along just fine."

In moments you have a coffee in a novelty "Cocktail Hour" mug which looks like it went out of popular fashion at least a decade ago. Otherwise the coffee is steaming, black, and seemingly unremarkable.

"In the interests of time," she interrupts, "I hope you'll forgive my bluntness. You're a small-time thief, a nomadic pickpocket, alone and desperate—"

You open your mouth, immediately stopped by Ukiah's upraised hand.

"We know you're more than "just" these things but, today, that's why you're here. You see, we can help each other and, maybe better, you can help yourself."

"We're looking for a piece of jewellery. Here's a... *terrible* photo of it. Sorry."

The still is grainy, black and white, clearly cropped and blown up from a film. It looks a bit like a claw, or a crab. The blurriness doesn't help.

"A... brooch?" You shake your head and blow the steam from your coffee. "It must be worth a bit for all this trouble."

"It's the *Krallenartige Tsume*. Today is our last chance to get hold of it. We don't know exactly where it is, but we've heard it's leaving tonight. We're hoping someone of your... *persuasion* might succeed where others have failed."

"I'll give it a go, but it's not exactly how I'd imagine spending a March break." You nod and absently take a sip, then choke and stare at the mug.

Ukiah stares at you in turn. "Hey, are you okay?"

"The coffee," you manage. "That's unbelievable!"

She beams. "Kona, grown on the Big Island."

"I've had fancy coffees that didn't taste a fraction as good," you remark.

She nods. "I taste black cherry and caramel. It doesn't need cream or sugar. Anyway, here's what we have so far, not much, unfortunately."

You're passed a simple pad and review the topmost of several sheets.

"These are the tools I promised you. We call it our standard kit." Ukiah pushes various items across the tabletop.

"A lot of paperwork," you remark. "And a... die?"

"It's worth it," she assures you. "If you plan your work, then work your plan, your future self will thank you. It's always good to have something for notes and – fingers crossed – something for luck."

Ukiah winks slyly and, for a moment, you notice something odd. Her makeup covers... some sort of seam? It must be a scar, you decide.

"More information, a dossier, is waiting at a nearby office – RADAR Registry Services – but there's a catch. It's kept secure. You'll have to... 'borrow' it. Better just you, and they can't know. So you'll have to replace it later. We don't want a trail, in case they don't notice the loot you're targeting."

"The best job never happened," you murmur.

"Exactly," she agrees, packing up. "You've also got a rental car, just outside, with maps in the front."

"How will I know what I'm looking for? Is it marked, uh, 'Carlin ought to go sue me'?"

"*Krallenartige Tsume*, and no, they're using a code, a symbol. Do you know the Greek letter, Omega?"

You nod.

"That's how they mark their information, but we don't know much more, I'm afraid." She looks up at a tiki-themed clock. "And with that, we're about out of time. You have the kit, and you know your first stop. If you need help later, no problem. Just remember, each minute will crawl, but the hours will all fly by. I'll see you after you're wrapped with our fence, later this afternoon."

You gulp the last of the coffee and stand but, before you can turn to leave, you feel her hand on your shoulder, holding you back.

"Hang on! You probably want to keep a lower profile than that."

Ukiah removes the *lei* from around your shoulders.

Continue to Section 1.

(1) You will need something to write with and some six-sided dice.

Section 1

In a cloud of humid, sun-baked vinyl, the scent of a brand new car, you buzz your rasping rental through its gears experimentally.

Splashing and skidding your way through gathered rain on connecting roads, you reach and toss the pack from the floor onto the passenger seat.

A map in the glovebox of the Datsun 510 shows you the way to your stop in Lāhainā, but you're confused by a scribbled reference to "Noyon".

Fifteen minutes southward, you get as close as possible, leaving the dark greige car in the parking lot of a nearby hotel. As you lock it up, a passerby scoffs aloud and spits on the ground. "Goddamn rice burners," he growls, bumping into you as he passes.

You take a step toward him, then pause a moment, torn between keeping a low profile and scuttling the mission with a fitting response.

He notices your tug of war, backs away, and flees, still muttering.

Assuming the encounter to be over, you resume your search for Noyon when, moments later, an officer approaches you.

"Aloha. Any trouble here?" the young woman inquires.

You shake your head. "Unless by 'any trouble' you mean 'an encounter with a racist!'"

She smirks back at the distant figure humourlessly. "One island taken, then others to demonize."

You nod and hesitate, realizing she might be helpful. "I was actually looking for a building. It's called the Noyon, I think, or something."

She's puzzled, taken aback, then intrigued, and finally says, "*Loa'a!* It's not a building; it's the wing of the business center, off this hotel lobby, in the basement."

You thank her, she *mahalos* you back, and you follow her instructions.

You find a temporary plaque affixed to a basement door: "A Branch of RADAR Registration Services".

Inside, it's slightly busier than you would have expected outside, with a handful of people milling about in a warren of various halls. Behind the junction which serves as an entrance, an open counter awaits, with a severe-looking woman, pale and standoffish. Her nameplate reads, "Hello! My name is: *Immi!*"

"Immi?" you smile hopefully. "Is that a Hawaiian name?"

"Swiss," she hisses. "How must I help you today?"

"Did you say 'must'?"

"What?" she snaps.

You force a redoubled smile. "I'm looking for a file," you begin.

"You get it yourself, or I do." Her tone makes clear which option she'd prefer.

"It's this one," you forge on, showing her the Omega information.

"That is a forbidden file. We don't have that one."

"You don't have it? Or you have it but it's forbidden?"

"You have a PEEP?" she demands suddenly.

"I'm sorry? I'd like to take a peek at it, yes."

"A PEEP! Pass! Permission!"

"Oh, clearance. Where would I get that?"

"You would get that from me, but I don't know you so, no, you don't get a PEEP."

With a sudden slam, Immi closes the stippled window facing you, and hangs a blurry "ON BREAK" sign behind it.

Just as well, you sigh, resigned. You may be better off on your own here.

Avoiding the eyes of the various clerks, you trawl through the halls, nonchalant. You slowly absorb the layout of the warren of semi-open rooms; some doors are ajar, and some are closed, but only one is locked.

That's the room you decide you're going to try first.

You return to your casual rounds and pilfer a selection of innocuous items: a pen, some clips, a ruler, and finally an eraser. With them, you manage to break your way into the locked archive, and spend the next several minutes sifting through stacks.

The occasional traffic passing the room keeps you apprehensive so, when you finally find the file, you scarcely celebrate. Using Ukiah's lucky die, you slightly prop the door. Hopefully nobody notices, and you'll easily get back in. You stash the Omega-emblazoned folder and leave Noyon behind.

Settling back in the rental car, you quickly review the folder. The target is not just jewellery, according to what you read; it's actually a frame containing... something else. "A tie pin?" you muse, recalling Alfred Hitchcock's recent film. The file you have does not divulge just what that "something else" is.

You do find something strange however, included in the folder: records of recent imports from Japan. Any containing jewellery are marked for closer inspection, but those are not the entries which catch your attention.

"Sugar," you murmur absently, staring at an unmarked entry. Why would any Hawaiian island bring sugar in from Japan? Or in such a minuscule quantity? Or insured for – you blink – a *pawn shop*?

The Omega Pawn Shop, just east, in Wailuku, on the other side of the Kahālāwai mountains. It's almost too easy, the "Omega" connection; how was it overlooked? You shake your head. That's got to be it. You stare past the files and think...

You drum your fingers on the wheel. Should you let Ukiah know where you're going? You didn't even think to ask her how'd you stay in touch.

Even if she had seen these files, it seems like only false leads were flagged. You strongly suspect that she or her people have been wasting their time on red herrings. This might be a chance to zag where they zigged, to win their confidence. You focus back on the files and search for pawn shop references.

Omega Pawn appears to be owned by someone named... is that "O.M."? It's hard to tell, maybe "Ott-" something. The carbon copied writing is unclear.

You check the map and shake your head. On paper it looks so small. The island resembles an infinity sign, two smaller islands conjoined. You're not exactly sure if you're better going northeast or southeast from here.

At least the shop isn't further, past the volcano, Haleakalā, or the half-day Road to Hana. You should be back before nightfall.

You're not familiar with the shady side of Hawaii, let alone the mercenary's Maui. You're resourceful, sure, but you'd probably do well to recruit some local help.

The notes have a lead on a friendly contact, who will take the goods when you're done. You'll arrange a meeting but probably can't count on them assisting you out in the wild.

That fence may give you some advice, but for field help, you'll need more. Probably best to check the notes for any nearby hangouts, somewhere nobody knows you, won't ask questions, and works for cheap thrills.

Continue to Section 2.

(2) Prepare a blank 3×3 grid, as if you were creating a board for X's and O's, tic-tac-toe, or noughts and crosses. Leave space beside it for any notes.

Section 2

The humid asphalt fills your sinuses with a faintly acrid sting but, despite its effect, you leave the windows down.

You roll through the Front Street of Lāhainā Town, looking for the next scribble on the map. You can't see any establishment with a sign that says "Laval".

"Is there a French quarter here?" you wonder aloud. The massive banyan tree you pass doesn't respond to your question.

And then you notice the riverboat in the harbour. A throwback to an earlier century, it looks like something out of *Mr. Lucky*, a floating platform bobbing in the ocean. A banner obscuring the sign beneath reads "Laval" in glistening paint. It looks as if the boat is closed, or under repair at least.

You park the car and investigate, surprised by what you find. An unguarded gangplank leads onboard and, inside, is an *ad hoc* lounge. The lapping water against the boat counterpoints the subliminal roar of the ocean.

Several figures are draped about the sun-bleached furniture, and an improvised counter serves as a refreshment stand.

The least intimidating figure is sitting at a table wickered together with what looks like cane and rattan. A layer of peeling white paint falls off as you settle into an available chair.

"What d'you want?" the figure demands, glaring at you through a jungle of hair.

"Looking for temporary help. Do you know anyone who'd be interested?"

"I'm listening," he growls in response.

Together you back-and-forth your terms, soon reaching a surprising end: this not-so-mercenary mercenary will work with you for free.

"Then why the negotiation?" you demand.

"Gotta know who I'm dealing with," he harrumphs. "You'd do well to do the same. How else y'know what I'm capable of? 'Free' may be too good to be true."

"Okay, so why are you doing this for free?"

"I got my reasons, never you mind. You call it whatever you like: excitement, practice, bragging rights... I'll just grab some spoils on our way."

You learn his name is Darniem. He calls himself a Watcher. He's interested in driving, but he also works in crowd control, both of which could prove handy on this job. He's not familiar with other areas, like picking locks or negotiating, but at least you've got some experience with that yourself...

"Do you think we need anybody else?" you look around the room.

He laughs strong coffee breath in your face. "Hope you don't mind me saying so, but not a chance, young'un. You ain't got the rep."

"Sorry?"

"Reputation! Who would take a chance? They don't know you, not yet." Darniem rises from his chair and drags a rucksack from beneath it. "Better appreciate what you got and not waste any time. Assume you got some wheels, or should I see about my own?"

"I've got a car. Just one more stop, an appointment for the fence."

Continue to Section 3.

(3) Roll the dice nine times and note the results. Duplicate numbers are allowed.

Section 3

You leave the car in Lāhainā's Front Street, following the seaward side north. Toward the Māla Wharf you find the marina warehouses.

The twisting harbour odours struggle deep within your gorge, salt prickling through the loamy rot of vegetation.

A similarly combative creak of weathered boards underfoot betrays the strain of wood against their fittings and fraying cables.

It doesn't take you long to locate the next scrawled clue on the map: "Nomumon". You duck into a crooked doorway under the new-looking sign.

"Oi, who's there?" a voice calls out.

You peer into the gloom. They have the advantage over you, as you're silhouetted in the door. You slowly raise your hands in assurance, and ask for the Rotator, code for the underworld contact who handles the scheduling and fencing.

"'Tis I," says the voice *faux* dramatically. "I've been expecting you. Come in. We've not much time."

You shake the hand of the man, who introduces himself as Pipip. You can't quite place the accent, a sort of Australian-Cockney cross. He's older, a fussy budget, gruff but amenable. He offers you a beanbag chair.

"Not quite what I expected," you begin. So much for the end of the hippies.

"I like to keep 'em guessing. You want to know what's in the chairs?" He chortles. "And don't say 'beans!'"

You shake your head and weakly smile.

"Let's rap," he pivots suddenly. "I understand you've got something to move, something more delicate than what's in these seats!"

You share some details about the target Ukiah has in mind. Pipip stares past a middle distance, nodding absently, saying nothing, then snaps. "Twelve hours, more'n fair!"

"What do you think?" You turn to Darniem. "Are twelve hours enough for this job?"

He gargles back surreptitiously, "Y'all forget I'm a Watcher, huh? Sorry, this is not my line but" – he shrugs – "twelve sounds about standard."

You shake hands with the Rotator, Pipip. "Agreed. We'll work to that schedule. Now I hope you'll forgive me rushing out, but the sooner we go... we'll be back."

"If it's sooner, it'll be worth your while, but too late's a penalty. Just see you don't go all willy-nilly. There's no speed to catch your own feet!"

You tip your head to the side, then decide not to waste any time translating.

Continue to Section 4.

(4) Place each number into any empty square on the grid. Once placed, numbers cannot be moved.

Section 4

Rather than travel southeast around the Mauna Kahālāwai, you decide to go northeast, along Kahekili, the infamous North Shore.

Darniem grudgingly acknowledges it's shorter in terms of distance, but warns you the route is unpaved, a more treacherous way. "Twenty bad miles or thirty good ones? Huh. At least you got *me*," he grunts.

The sun is piercing at this hour as you steer into the east, but its angle will grow more forgiving in due course, you tell yourself.

For now you focus on balancing concentration with relaxation, identifying the sweeter scents in a salty, earthy sauna.

You pass the HI340 sign and take a long deep breath.

"Slow but steady," mutters Darniem as you tear your eyes from the ocean to focus on the winding eastward road. Unfenced and unshouldered hairpin turns cut through the coastal cliffs. Single lanes, blind turns, and sheer drops ensure there's only one way to proceed.

"Slow but steady," you agree. "How steep are those inclines? No, don't tell me."

You turn to Darniem after a while. "I'm having a little trouble. The road's still wet in places, and the reflections are making me dizzy."

"I can take it for a spell if you want," he offers.

With a sigh, you nod.

You settle yourself into his seat as he shuffles around the car. He takes the wheel, but checks everything before getting into gear.

"It's wet for now, but it dries pretty quick. It rains overnight a lot here, especially to the north and east." He shrugs. "It's the tropics. Big deal."

After a time, you nod, satisfied. "Vertiginous," you suggest, "but you handle it very well all the same."

Darniem grunts. "Don't kid yourself. I'm barely holding it together." He grunts again in a different way, and you realize it's a laugh. "It's all downhill from here, you could say. Want to take it the rest of the way?"

An hour later, wondering if Kahekili will haunt your dreams, you roll into the town of Wailuku. Using Ukiah's map, you find the downtown area. Driving along North Market and Main Streets, you scan for—

"Omega Pawn Shop." Darniem mutters, more judgment than observation.

You pull into a parking spot, hidden across the road. "Something you want to tell me about?" you prompt.

"This shop's a front for Yakuza trade and money laundering. It's a pawn shop, yeah, but it's all for a guy with a secondhand life of his own."

You squint at Darniem carefully. "Sounds personal for you." You begin to wonder if the cost of "free" is a "rival" or "associate with a grudge".

"Call it frustration," he volunteers before you form your question. "This guy has a habit of sneaking back to life after the world thinks he's dead. Trust me, I know, he's been doing it for decades, since he 'died' as an agent in the war."

"Well, ghost or not, he's got... that thing."

"The *Krallenartige Tsume*." He nods, reaching for the handle. "Let's get in, get it, get out, and get back."

Continue to Section 5.

(5) *Your goal is now to visit as many squares as possible without reducing your focus below zero.*

Section 5

"The Irori Mall," you read, stepping through to the parking lot. A clutch of shops arranged in a row flank the Omega Pawn Shop, including a pair of restaurants, *Pokesushi* and *Saimin Ramen*.

"Least we got snacks if we change our minds." Darniem mutters grimly.

Saying nothing, you advance on Omega's front door.

No bell rings as you step through.

You stand in the entryway and cast your eyes across the floor. A survey suggests no one cares about your arrival. The shop is almost empty, with a woman behind the till, and a single guard pacing listlessly to one side.

A dusty grit in its atmosphere begins to assault your eyes. Notwithstanding the dry irritation, a smell of musty damp pervades it.

You gag. "Is that mould or mildew?"

"Looks like the Sally Ann of the damned," Darniem observes. "What the hell are they stocking on their shelves?"

"Unless it's a case of jewellery," you murmur, "I don't care what they stock."

"What they're stocking tells us a lot about them."

You hear a discordant warbling through the tinny ceiling speakers, "Familiar, but creepy," you say under your breath.

"Henry Mancini's *Music of Hawaii*." Darniem glances at you. "Don't ask me how I know." He sounds improbably sheepish.

You take a breath. "Our target's probably hidden, and it's definitely not for sale. Let's find out where they're keeping this brooch."

"Yeah, and stay clear of that guard."

"It's sprawling and messy, but simple," you observe. "Symmetrical layout."

"See the stuff they have in here? Who are their customers? Damn near Lovecraftian." Darniem pauses. "You a reader?"

You indicate a magazine on a box of identical copies. "Only if it's as good as this... religious propaganda?"

He snorts. "A cult." Then he averts his eyes as the manager gazes by.

"Might be something... over there. See the cabinet in the middle?"

A shrug. "Sure, let's take a look, but not too long."

"I can't get this cabinet open," you mutter.

"You want help?" Darniem asks.

"Absolutely. See if you can do anything with it."

"Let's try this." He reaches down and withdraws a knife strapped to his calf. You can't help noticing his fancy shoes. *There must be money in this work.* "Between the blade and a knock with the handle, we'll get it open, no problem. Hey! Are you paying attention to the job or admiring my gorgeous legs?"

You glance away, grinning back in response. "Just imagining what's in this cabinet."

"Don't get your hopes up," Darniem cautions. "It might be something useful, but it definitely won't be the thing we're looking for."

"Still, it can't hurt." You say, keeping watch for the guard and bystander.

At an opportune moment, you dart out a hand and withdraw the object inside. Then, miming a shopper, you study it. A portable magnifying glass.

"Not bad," you grin, weighing the tool in your hand. "This could come in handy at some point. I'll take it at a five-finger discount." You chuckle and clip it to your belt, underneath the camouflage of a kerchief.

"Hope so," Darniem looks around. "We're wasting precious daylight. It's going to take us time to find the target. We're not done yet."

"We could ask the woman at the counter," you suggest. "I could try persuading her to help."

Darniem shrugs. "It's up to you, but we're spending more time than we reckoned."

"You could try," you press. "You might have better luck than me."

"Maybe, but I'm starting to slow. Keep some gas in the tank for later. I wouldn't involve bystanders 'less you didn't have a 'me' in the crew."

"Fine, then, let's keep going. Let's check that alcove the guard just passed."

Moments later, you've covered the distance. "I think this is it," you hiss. The alcove contains a locked door. You recognize a vault mechanism. "Are we clear? I'm going to need time."

"Keep out of sight and do your thing," Darniem reassures you. "I'm going to hang and keep 'em distracted... and I'll keep my fingers crossed."

Continue to Section 6.

(6) Choose any square as your starting point. The number in that square becomes your starting focus (your running total).

Section 6

Half-crouching past a beaded curtain, your legs begin to shake, and you swear you've developed a pulsing in your skull. A flush of something – *Exertion? Anxiety?* – makes you realize you haven't felt overly warm until just now. Despite your time in the tropics so far, you feel the heat more than ever.

You shake yourself internally: *It's psychological!* If you focus on the task at hand, the time will soon fly by. You'll be back in the buffeting comfort of trade winds, sipping a sugarcane drink.

With a snap, you're back at the solid vault door you regard with a careful eye.

But then the world goes swimmy again. It begins at the edges of your vision, moving slowly into your field of view. Your mind fights back. *The clock won't stop and Darniem can't stall forever!*

You take a moment to acknowledge the facts, then forcibly set them aside. You've got to know what you're dealing with, identify the mechanism, which won't be possible if you give in to distraction.

Deep breath.

Your vision clears, you stare at the lock, and identify its parts.

APPA, you decide at length; its layout gives it away. You'll need to reveal its access nodes very slowly. Too quickly and you'll trip the system, which could slow you down or, worse, cause a bit of commotion. You don't want that.

You slot the available options in, gently, one by one. Without more information, this could all be grasping guesswork.

Fortunately, an arcane art is rendered half mundane by closely observing the scuff marks on the buttons. You narrow down their positions by checking where the brackets have scratched the sides, and then you note the smudging of the most-fingered numbers.

With a triple click you feel more than hear, three of nine latches give way, one of them being the central holding cell.

"The brooch," you breathe. It waits for you, crouched in a clamshell case. In these dimly-lit backroom shadows, it looks less decorative than its photos. You see it in a new and different light, a militaristic crustacean

You shake yourself to attention again and ready a midriff pouch. You pocket the whatever-it's-called and check the other two open cells.

Not much loot, you must admit, but at least you got the target. You remind yourself: Bigger scores will come, but only after smaller ones. No sense getting greedy and getting caught.

You ease back out the alcove slowly. Darniem's waiting nearby. He joins you, giving a silent glance, unstressed but questioning.

You nod in response, just as silent, and turn to survey your escape.

Continue to Section 7.

(7) Mark this square with a tick (✓) to show it has been visited.

Section 7

"Just to be clear," Darniem murmurs after an extended pause. "You got the, uh, item in question?"

You nod again. "The brooch," you pat the subtle bulge at your midriff. "But, I've got to say, it looked different than I expected."

"You sure – I mean really sure – you got it? We can't undo what we're doing here. Probably the only chance we're gonna get."

You wave at him. "No, it's not like that. It's definitely the right piece. The photos made it look like jewellery, but there's something odd about it.. I don't know. Like a Swiss Army Knife and an octopus—"

"Nah. I don't want to know."

With a shrug, you regard the sprawling floor, littered with piles of stock.

"Something's different," you observe. "I just can't place—"

"She's gone now," Darniem says. "That manageress, she just took off. Thought they'd watch us both like hawks but, nope, didn't need a distraction. Something happened. She up and left, got a call, maybe. I don't know. Checked with the guard on her way. He's been doing his rounds, fidgeting. I think he wants to get his shift done."

"Well, that goes double for us," you say. "Still, let's avoid him if at all possible."

Mock-casual, you wend your way, as quickly as slowly allows.

"This place looks bigger than I remember," you mutter to Darniem. "Full of junk, it's like a maze." You're feeling flushed again.

He snorts a guffaw from deep in his beard. "Still the same old place. Last time we had to cross it, though, we weren't guilty of anything yet!"

You draw a ragged breath. "Any ideas to get us out quicker? I've just lost sight of the guard, but I think he's coming around over here. I don't want any questions or even a good look at our faces."

He grunts in response. "This old brain's getting tired, but I could probably come up with something." Darniem grunts to himself for a moment, scanning the room before you.

Then, with a nod, he suddenly hops up onto a table nearby. With surprising agility for someone his age and weight, he lopes across it, stopping only when he senses you're not behind him.

"Come on!" he nearly barks the whisper. "The junk's counterbalancing us."

"That's not what I... oh, never mind." You join him and scurry across.

The guard soon emerges behind, near the alcove, and Darniem hops off again. He tumbles behind the central feature you searched forever ago.

You join him behind the cabinet as gracefully as you can, temporarily hidden from the guard's line of sight, but Darniem doesn't seem pleased.

"I think I hurt my ankle," he groans. "I can make it, but no more gymnastics."

"Are you going to be okay?" You whisper.

"Just give me a bit, but yeah. Stupid mistake, I just stepped wrong. Made a rookie mistake. Saved us time but slowed us down. Damn clumsy. You okay?"

"I'm fine," you assure him, spotting a nearby roll of packing tape. "Take this. Wrap it around your ankle, tight. It'll do for now."

Testing the improvised brace, he nods, then affects a casual stride. You hope the guard, at a distance, can't see Darniem's grimace of pain.

Together you casually make your way through the door, feigning confidence.

"Just do your best 'disappointed shopper' impression," Darniem advises.

You snicker despite yourself. "Hey, I've got an impression you could do: someone asking if they carry crutches."

You clear the storefront just as multiple figures appear with a shipment of boxes. You do a double take as you realize they're wearing matching robes.

You trace the line of figures to a reserved slip in the lot. A Volkswagen Microbus stands open, packed with Omega-stenciled crates.

"Where does Otto want them?" someone calls.

"Shut up and follow the line!"

"Otto," you murmur, slowly recalling the carbon copy print. "Let's get out of here," you say aloud. "Getting crowded. We've got what we need."

Continue to Section 8.

(8) Move orthogonally (up, down, left, or right) to any adjacent square.

Section 8

You leave Wailuku reluctantly, returning to the HI340.

The sound of insects has swelled since the morning, a hum punctuated by buzzing. It's vaguely ominous, menacing, competing with the car itself.

"I only hope that Kahekili doesn't ka-hey-kill us," you comment, affecting more bravado than you feel.

"Twenty miles of... well, I'm sure you remember." Darniem scrabbles around.

You notice him searching. "The seatbelt's at your shoulder. Are you going to wear it?"

"Hell no," he barks. "If we overshoot, I'm not going down with the ship. Just looking for the map in case we need it."

"I think I remember where we're going," you assure him. "It's pretty familiar."

"Pretty," he grumbles. "Not that I don't trust you, but we're not the only ones out here. It looks like a tropical heaven but, trust me, it has a hellish side, not least the tourists who shouldn't be driving here."

"Just keep the map handy and guide me back. I'll take it slow again."

"Dead end!" You curse, rolling up to a gate with a visible chain locked across it.

"Another one," growls Darniem, fighting frustration. "How're we mistaking the turns?"

Beyond the gate you see an estate built into the side of the mountain.

"People live here," you remark absently. "I'm frankly surprised, with these roads. I wonder if the property prices are higher for the privacy, or lower for the danger?"

"No idea, but I've heard this way called the 'Highway of Death' by the locals."

"So, any suggestions...?" you venture at length.

He thumps his leg. "Real sorry, but I'm done. I've been quiet, but I'm smarting like Einstein. Don't fret. *School buses* run through twice a day. You can do this! Just stay frosty."

"Easier said than done." You grit your teeth and continue, trying not to appear ungrateful.

Near the final HI340 sign, you pull over at a roadside stand and let out a grateful sigh.

Darniem pats your shoulder. "Ain't it great when you do it yourself? Now you can really appreciate every little thing." He waves a hand and begins to sing about banana trees.

Nearby, a transistor radio perched on a rickety table crackles through a choir of static, inspiring your companion into song.

"Arthur Lyman's 'Yellow Bird,'" he interjects. "Don't ask me how I know."

A teenager stands to welcome you both and to sell you a drink to go. "Pineapple, papaya, or passion fruit?"

You point at a pile behind her, lengths of reddish-brown brown saplings. "Is that sugarcane?" you ask hopefully.

"It is, but tough, and not so good now." Nonetheless, she drags out a length and, obliging you, feeds one end into a grinder. Her biceps flex with effort as she turns the manual wheel, filling a wax paper cup with a pale brown liquid.

You hazard a sip, then grimace sadly.

"Not in season," she shrugs.

Darniem grunts. "I'll take one of them, but as a walking stick." He chuckles. "A sugar cane! Get it?"

You shake your head, suppressing a groan. "We've got an appointment to keep. Maybe Pipip has something to drink. Let's get back and wrap it all up."

Continue to Section 9.

(9) Subtract the value in that square from your focus.

Section 9

Back in Lāhainā, Front Street is buzzing with tourists in greater numbers than the trickling you witnessed earlier in the morning.

"No slowdown for the end of the work day," you observe, struggling to park.

"Guess here you don't stop work 'til the tourists say you do." Darniem points to a car backing out. "Over there, you can take their spot."

You then proceed to the Māla Wharf and the Nomumon marina.

"Oi, who's there?" a voice calls out as you limp into the warehouse.

Darniem waves you off and drops into a nearby seat.

"I reckon you might find a beanbag cozier!" A familiar face appears.

"I get in a beanbag, I'll never get out," growls Darniem in response.

"I think you may be ahead of schedule." Pipip sounds impressed.

"No thanks to some delays," you admit. "We had slowdowns on the north road."

He shakes his head. "Too dangerous. You'd never catch me there. The heights alone would do me in. I'd go south every time."

You laugh. "I'd offer to do it again, but I don't think they'll welcome us back. Their client is about to find the selection somewhat lacking."

Pipip guffaws, then motions you into a room full of boxes. "Well and good to be closing early but, first, let's figure the damage..." Leaving the midriff sling with you, he takes the clamshell case. He opens it briefly, admires the piece, then places it in a strongbox.

"I hope it's safer in yours than it was in theirs," you muse aloud.

He chortles to himself. "It won't be here for long, that's for sure. Our mutual friend will be by as soon as I call 'em."

You nod. "I'm sorry I won't get a chance to see her again, or will I? Do you know if she managed to sort out my ticket, the wrong return flight issue?"

"You don't find them, no, they find you. That's just the way they work, but don't you be concerned. They aren't the scoundrels you might assume. I've been in this business all my life..."

He trails off and, for a fleeting moment, seems wistful before he continues. "Point of fact, it's my very last job, this one. Just surviving until my age is a very rare thing in this line, you know? They're better than most in taking care and, if I may say as much, you strike me as a good 'un. I'm sure they'll do what they can for you. Speaking of which..."

He places several packs of neatly-wrapped currency in your hands and, having made the swap, he closes the door on the battered strongbox.

You casually weigh the heft of the packs, then strap them to your midriff, draping your top to hide them from onlooker eyes.

"Last job?" You suddenly look at Pipip. "What about the beanbags?"

He winks at you confidentially. "They're part of my retirement plan. I'm gonna farm 'em: macadamia nuts!" Roughly, he shakes your outstretched hand. "Farewell, but also welcome. I hope you make a world of difference before your own retirement!"

Continue to Section 10.

(10) Mark the new square with a tick. You may only move to squares that have not been ticked.

Section 10

You return to the Laval, but slowly, with Darniem unusually subdued. You glance over at him in a show of checking a blind spot, struck by the sense of how quickly he's grown familiar.

Unable to delay any more, you park the car in a slip which, oddly, the tourists seem to be avoiding. Without them as an excuse, you put the car in neutral, then park.

"Damn shame about my ankle," Darniem growls. "It would've been a good time to walk."

You nod, not sure of what to say. "I've never seen flowers like that, growing right through the sidewalks." You curse your bluster.

"Hibiscus," he grunts, waving a hand at a nearby burst of pink. "I figure the nighttime rains we've been having... ah, really, who gives—"

He stops.

"Everything okay?" you ask. The hairy pile of laundry falls sullen. "We could get something if you're in pain. A tin of Anacin or Saridon?"

He snorts from deep beneath his beard. "Nah, thanks. That tape'll do."

"Listen," you say. "If you're having regrets, there's something you should know. Our target, the brooch, wasn't all I took, and the take was plenty to split..."

Darniem shakes his head. "No thanks, but it's decent of you to offer. I made my deal, and I'll stick to it. You get yourself something sweet." He guffaws. "Maybe find a place where the sugarcane's still in season. I don't know. How d'ya feel about Japan?"

Your ears prick up, but you hesitate. *Why would he mention Japan?* "This is it," you announce your arrival, then help him from the car. You extend a hand; he shakes it, duly, gruffly.

"This is it *for now*," he amends. "This big old world is smaller than you think." He pauses. "I'm guessing the opposite is also true. So take care of yourself, all right, 'cause nothing's over 'til it's over."

You continue watching him, vaguely puzzled, as he limps with the cane up the ramp. When he vanishes from view, you shrug and start the car again.

Continue to Section 11.

(11) Repeat the move-subtract-tick process from Steps 8-10, moving to adjacent unticked squares, subtracting their values from your focus, and ticking them.

Section 11

Despite his presence having been generally low-key, the absence of Darniem leaves the car feeling empty. You drive in silence back to the hotel, then park in the lot beside it.

You encounter no apparent racists, police, or combinations thereof. In fact, it's relatively quiet. Everyone must be in Lāhainā.

A steel guitarist tucked in a corner welcomes you inside, their tendrils of ambience play you across the entrance.

Then the fumes of an industrial cleaner assault you in the lobby; its cloying artificial pine seems odd and out of place.

Aside from the staff, a trickle of figures mill around the hotel. A sandwich board advertises an event in kanji and katakana. You pass it by, returning to the archives in the Noyon wing.

The RADAR door is open, as is the service window within but, now, with no curmudgeon behind it, the stillness feels uncanny.

It's the end of the day, you remind yourself, at a Hawaiian resort hotel. Who would be conducting business unless they absolutely had to?

You glance about. It seems that nobody is using the archives now. Its mazelike warren of halls and rooms, when emptied, feels yawning, haunting, and more complex than you assumed this morning.

Unlike earlier, the doors are all locked. Where did you take the file from? Ironically, it may be harder to return than it was to find. You'd rather just drop the package and go, but that's not what Ukiah wanted.

"The best job never happened," you murmur, recalling your implicit promise.

So you explore the liminal space, in search of the folder's home, but only succeed in getting turned around and confused. Every hall and room looks the same. It smells industrial, freshly painted, featureless and numbing.

You nearly enter the same room twice, each time from a different angle. You can tell by the empty case—

You stop.

Was that a footfall? You whirl.

Nothing but the pounding of your pulse.

You draw a ragged breath and consider whether to sketch a map, or leave a trail to get your bearings...

Stupid ideas! Just focus!

Eternal moments of exploration yield no sign of the room. You become frustrated and impatient with returning the Omega file.

On one hand, you've scavenged some nice little trinkets in the RADAR offices, including a fancy-looking watch – you imagine it's that Swiss receptionist's – and a koa wood 'ukulele with kukui nut peg heads.

On the other hand, you feel unnerved by that phantom footfall scare.

You comfort yourself by focusing on the loot. It can't be denied, you were successful. Not only did you find the target item, but extra loot as well, and it's all yours!

And now more loot keeps coming to hand. You could make a tidy profit.... perhaps go back and catch Pipip. He could help you fence it all.

With the money you make, you could tour the world. You could go anywhere you want. Maybe the ticket *wasn't* a mistake; maybe it was really a sign...

You flash back to a memory of Darniem mentioning Japan. Odd coincidence. It keeps coming up. That's exactly what the ticket—

You stop.

The door of one room stands ajar. You recognize the interior. Within the gloom, two silhouettes regard you, waiting patiently. Between them: a very familiar Omega box.

Continue to Section 12.

(12) Continue this process until you cannot move to an adjacent unticked square without reducing your focus below zero.

Section 12

"Oh, uh, hello," you venture cautiously. "Can you tell me where the washrooms are?"

The shadows in the Omega room advance on you menacingly.

"The dossier," a new voice snaps. "And everything else you've taken."

You turn to find the receptionist, scowling, unamused. She tosses Ukiah's lucky die in the air.

"Listen," you forge on. "I'm not quite sure I understand. Perhaps we can discuss—"

"The dossier, now," she repeats, blocking your way.

The guards emerge from the room, not clad as officers, but in robes.

With a sigh of resignation, you feint and toss the 'ukulele. For a frozen moment, she doesn't know whether to avoid or reach for it.

You dodge to one side, then run to the other, away from the drones, past the woman.

"Stop!" She shouts at you from behind, but you've already reached the reception.

You burst through the doors of the Noyon wing, headlong into a crowd. The sign you noticed earlier... its conference must be ending.

"Stop!" repeats the voice again, attracting onlookers.

You're torn between the impulse to run and a sense of remaining unobtrusive.

Then hotel guards surround you in a wide but tightening ring.

You edge toward the lobby entrance, car keys at the ready.

A new voice rings out: *"Zen'in! Shagame!"*

The conference goes drop suddenly, nearly as one, to the ground.

You stand alone in a field of their bodies, eerily still for their number.

The ring of guards remains standing, inescapable.

Your pursuers approach the conference speaker, the Japanese voice, apparently. "Thank you, Mister...?"

"Dan Sugasunda!" He bows. "Officer! Our conference was good luck."

"The dance is over." Then she turns to you. Within seconds, your pack is taken. She finds the dossier, watch, and loot, and raises an eyebrow. "The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief."

"If this is where you expect a confession—"

"I expect you to go with them."

As you're marched by police through the parking lot, stripped of your "possessions", you begin to reflect; it all ended before it began.

"Where are you taking me?" you demand.

"For Evaluation and Vocational Education. E-V-E or 'Eve'. That's just what we call it here. You may know it by other names."

"I thought we were going to the station, or maybe the Old Maui Jail?" says another voice.

You turn to look at the speakers, disconnected from their world. Through a blurring haze you recognize the officer from this morning. Hoping she doesn't recognize you, you turn and face away.

Then, to one side, at a distant pay phone, you glimpse the receptionist, nearly hidden by a hat and sunglasses, silently making a call. As she spends her dime, you can only watch her, helpless from a distance, receding in the back of an unmarked car.

You mumble numbly, "Don't I get a call?"

'Who is there to call?' you ask yourself.

You have no answer.

Continue to Section 13.

(13) Count the number of ticked squares you visited. This total is your score (minimum 2, since you always have at least one move).

Section 13

In a dizzying twist of irony, you're transported back to Wailuku, not far from the very pawn shop you targeted.

This time you follow the southern route, taking nearly an hour of time. You say nothing to the captors who have yet to read you your rights.

The Maui Community Correctional Center eventually looms ahead, lit by the fading light of dusk. You hope it's not a bad omen.

The MCCC is a newer facility, built from an older one. It exists to incarcerate and hopefully rehabilitate, according to its signage.

You wonder if they're going to send you back where you came from. You ask as much of the expressionless guard who brings your later meal.

"Honolulu if you're American. O'ahu if you're not."

You get nothing more but a serving of stew, which is tastier than expected. Even condemned, you appreciate coconut.

Then it feels as if you've barely blinked when the morning comes suddenly. You're rousted out to

another room, unsure of what to expect: a booking, a phone call, a legal visit, a deportation transfer?

None of the above, as it happens; the guard indicates a schedule posted in a common room where you warily scan other inmates.

Day in, day out, you bide your time, observing as you wait. Oddly, no one interacts with you much, aside from working together.

It's fine. You get used to the solitude, the consistent rhythm is a comfort, or at least a reality you can depend on, with reasonably harmless pastimes.

Counselling, chores, some meditation, then counselling over again. Certain faces begin to become familiar over time.

Only when you've nearly lost hope does the visitor arrive.

Go to Section 14.

(14) Once you achieve a score of 7, increase the difficulty: In Steps 3–4, instead of rolling all nine numbers at once, roll and place fewer numbers at a time. For example, if you roll-and-place numbers three (or even one) at a time, can you still score 7?

Section 14 — Epilogue

The visitor waits, silhouetted on a bench.

"Ukiah?" you call out, but she doesn't get up, so you walk toward her, wondering if she's angry.

"Hello," she smiles at you carefully. "I'm sorry it took some time. I hope you aren't feeling too upset. We've been pulling strings, I assure you."

You tip your head to one side and squint. There's something different about her. It's hard to tell in the morning light, maybe a change in makeup?

She hands you a takeout coffee. "From Brogdon's," she explains, "but, sorry, no muzak."

You reflexively grin, shake your suspicion, and accept the welcome Kona. As you take a sip, you see the walking stick, a gnarled sugar cane.

You stop.

Her ankle is wrapped in a fresh white cast, the same as...

You look up in shock.

She's holding a false beard up.

"Darniem," you gasp.

That familiar growl: "Ayup."

A moment passes. You notice the birds. Your heart drives the bass for their song.

You open your mouth, then close it again. You pause before speaking again. "So, just who *are* you, actually? Rollin Hand or Dr. Mabuse?"

"Neither. Both." They smile, indulgent, and simply pat the bench.

You fall into place, then sit and wait, expectant.

"If you'll have us, then we'll have you, a group that I'm a part of. Section Zero. We're not what you think. We're the—"

"Good guys?"

"More the *least bad*. We're gray hats – *light* gray – or maybe Robin Hood green. We have a lot of functions. We train, we inspect, we test... security."

You wait for the ringing in your skull to fade out. It refuses to do so on cue. You struggle for words, then eventually spit: "Did I fail? I was caught in the end!"

Your visitor nods, also pausing. "There are no wrong choices, only different stories. You passed in the ways that matter. I'd rather train someone I trust than hire an unreliable expert. We want to put your skills to use, to give you a... higher purpose. You'll need some practice, but you have potential. You're unusually calm under pressure."

You catch yourself snorting, then echo sheepishly, "Don't kid yourself. I'm barely holding it together!"

Undeterred, they wave off your joke. "You approach every choice like a puzzle, a reader taking their time. You're calm and cool in the heat of the moment. That's actually tough to train. Driving, lockpicking, those sorts of things are simpler by comparison. Besides, we already have members with those skills." Then they grin and toss you a familiar cube. "Maybe don't leave luck – or clues – at the scene."

"The round trip ticket wasn't wrong," you realize. "You already knew."

"We suspected. Mr. Meinrad had an inkling when you recently picked his pocket. This job was real, but it was more than that. We used it as a test."

"A test for what?" You narrow your eyes.

"More missions."

"In Japan," you murmur.

A shrug. "Or wherever. It won't be easy – the training, the practice – but we're not alone. There are other operatives for you to meet... but I'm getting ahead of myself. For one thing, I'm going to have to sit out this season."

"So, what do I call you? Ukiah? Darniem?"

"Retlaw." They extend a hand. "Please, just call me Retlaw. It's good to finally, *really* meet you."

A bell sounds out, and Retlaw moves, struggling to stand with the cane. "That's our time. I'm sorry to rush. We have paperwork, then a flight but – before we go – there's one or two things..."

And then you're handed the brooch. You're stunned. "But isn't this worth a fortune?" you protest.

"Sort of, but not for the obvious reason. It held a microfilm and, in fact, the technology it describes will be built into a device."

"I hate to say 'that's one,'" you reply, admiring the claw-like memento.

"One what?" Retlaw looks puzzled now.

"One or two things' you just said."

Retlaw smiles again. "The second." Reaching into a pocket, they withdraw your jasmine-scented *lei* of welcome. "To hang in the wind before we go."

You accept the garland and drape it over an 'Ōhi'a *lehua* branch, where a brushlike sphere of red and yellow explodes from the reaching green.

The End*

* ...but Retlaw will guide you back in *The Summer Job!*

Welcome to Section Zero

an excerpt from *The Summer Job*

O

The greatest problem with heights may be the fall.

You bolt from the nightmare in time to avoid messing up the city streets. The sound you assumed was wind in your ears screams into the buzz of a phone. One semiconscious click later, and a new sound replaces the rest.

"You on the way?" It's an oddly neutral tone, warm, but distant. Or distant, but warm. Either way, it's Retlaw.

You clear your throat. "Yeah."

How does blinking work? Even at this hour, already too early, whatever o'clock before noon, the sun nearly stabs away the silhouette of the Kyoto Tower in the distance.

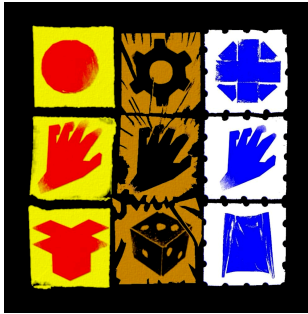
"You've still got the piece? From the pawn shop?"

Clear your throat again. *Ugh.* "The, uh, Hawaiian thing? The brooch?"

"Not a brooch. An ear piece." Pause. "In case you need... Hang on."

With a click, they're gone, but so is some of the fog.

You sigh. Better get started. The rewards aren't going to be hunting *you* down. At least, some coffee might help with, you know, being conscious...



the
Break
system
gamebooks

In *the Break system* series of interactive gamebooks, you don't just read a story, you also play it.

Each book in this trilogy is a standalone heist adventure, yet they all connect to form an overarching narrative that follows your journey as an evolving thief.

This series ramps up progressively, to turn you from a passive reader into an active player.



The Summer Job: a *Break* system gamebook

(324 pages)

Summer in Kyoto.
The city is alive...
with danger!

An international syndicate has set its sights on a heist in the heart of Japan, and YOU are the fledgling thief at the centre of it all. It isn't just their mission; it's your adventure.

As the Gion Matsuri festival pulses through the streets, you'll face unexpected twists that could change everything for your future. Every decision made affects the world, your path... and the end. Dozens of different stories are waiting for you.

Set against the vibrant backdrop of Kyoto's most famous festival, *The Summer Job* is the first *Break* system gamebook. Accessible, fun, and full of surprises, the unexpected is waiting. Ready to roll? The heat – and the heist – is on!



The Fall Affair:
a Break system
gamebook

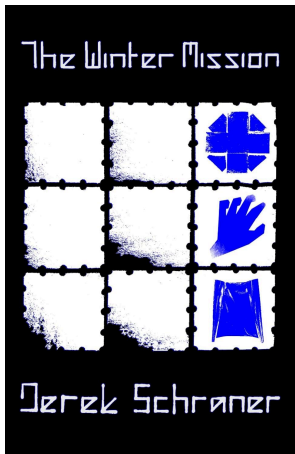
(306 pages)

**Unfinished business
at an
unfinished casino!**

Your mission takes you away from the bustling streets of Kyoto to a long-abandoned casino in Ontario. It's the weekend after Halloween, and the chill isn't from the autumn. Your target: a doomsday device with a secret link to your past. Its lingering effects make even the simplest things terrifying. With the stakes now higher than ever, success may cost more than expected.

The Fall Affair is a standalone trip in the *Break system* series. A six-sided die is recommended, but not required for your journey. The gamebook also includes several additional activities, from bonus mini-games to a curated musical playlist.

The heist is on and, this time, it will haunt you!



***The Winter
Mission:
a Break system
gamebook***

(322 pages)

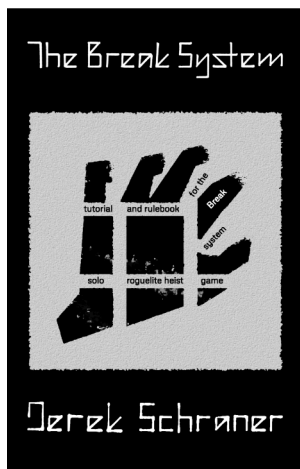
**The math says no.
The season says yes.**

An impossible opportunity lures you from the streets of Toronto to the treacherous peaks of Switzerland in mid-December. You can't resist the target – something you thought was lost forever – but traps await. The enemy knows you're coming.

Surviving alone may be possible, but it would take a miracle. Success demands more than skill and luck. You're going to need some allies.

The Winter Mission marks the conclusion to the *Break system* gamebook series. With branching choices, dice-based challenges, and new crew management, this adventure tests every lesson you've learned, with every move you make.

The dead of winter. The heart of Helvetia.
A holiday heist to remember.



The Break System: tutorial and rulebook for the solo roguelite heist game

(588 pages)

Some plans were made to be broken...

Claw your way from low-level operative to master strategist in *The Break System*, a solo heist adventure. Scout, negotiate, infiltrate, and (hopefully) escape! Every decision shapes your approach. How will you manage your timeline? How will you spend your loot? Do you have what it takes?

You won't be without resources. *The Spring Break* prequel story is included with new annotations to guide your early steps. Key moments reveal their mechanics and show how chance and choice shape a mission. You don't need to study the rules upfront; they're introduced gradually. Take it slow or jump ahead. In this heist, you call the shots.

Beyond the tutorial, the full *Break system* offers a self-paced framework for roll-and-write campaigns of increasing challenge. Six-sided dice and tactical

decisions keep you on your toes, while you track your progress, building your reputation. Even failure isn't the end; here, learning beats luck. Adapt your plans and carry on to master the art of the steal.

In *The Break System*, the end is just a beginning.

Did you enjoy breaking the system?

I'd love to hear your thoughts!

Please share a review where you got your copy.

Your feedback helps others discover these books and keeps the adventures coming.

Appendices

Vocabulary Scavenger Hunt

True Identity Bingo

The APPA Minigame

Selected Music for a Spring Break

Vocabulary Scavenger Hunt

The story uses many Hawaiian terms; here are nine.
How many can you find?

<input type="radio"/> <i>‘Ōhi‘a lehua</i> <i>Metrosideros polymorpha</i> tree	<input type="radio"/> <i>‘ukulele</i> jumping flea	<input type="radio"/> <i>Kahekili</i> the thunder
<input type="radio"/> <i>māla</i> agricultural area	<input type="radio"/> <i>Wailuku</i> waters of destruction	<input type="radio"/> <i>kukui</i> candlenut tree
<input type="radio"/> <i>mahalo</i> thanks	<input type="radio"/> <i>Lokelani</i> heavenly rose	<input type="radio"/> <i>Lāhainā</i> merciless/ cruel sun

True Identity Bingo

Who is Retlaw? And who *isn't*? There are many clues; here are nine. Did you spot them all?

<input type="radio"/> no colocation	<input type="radio"/> "scar" seam makeup	<input type="radio"/> cast
<input type="radio"/> <i>Krallenartige Tsume</i>	<input type="radio"/> sugar cane	<input type="radio"/> coffee breath
<input type="radio"/> fancy shoes	<input type="radio"/> "Don't ask me how I know..."	<input type="radio"/> Darniem ↔ Meinrad

The APPA Minigame

There are fourteen steps in the APPA minigame rules, labelled 1 through 14. Can you find them all?

"In terms of holding the target item, we're looking at something bigger. If it's a vault, probably APPA type" [81]

– The Fall Affair

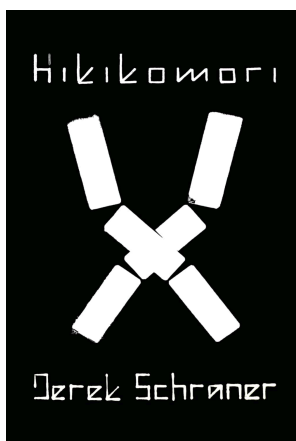
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.

Selected Music for a Spring Break

These songs by Henry Mancini – whose *Music of Hawaii* is referenced in *The Spring Break* – were an inspiration during the creation of the *Break* system.

- "Bijou" (Ralph Burns), *Mancini Touch* (1960)
- "Brief and Breezy",
Music from Peter Gunn (1959)
- "Sorta Blue", *The Music from Peter Gunn* (1959)
- "The Beat", *The Blues and the Beat* (1960)
- "Blue Steel",
More Music from Peter Gunn (1959)
- "A Shot in the Dark", *A Shot in the Dark* (1964)
- "Experiment in Terror",
Experiment in Terror (1962)
- "Arabesque", *Arabesque* (1966)
- "Fallout", *The Music from Peter Gunn* (1959)
- "Something for Sellers", *Pink Panther* (1964)
- "Mr. Lucky", *Music from Mr. Lucky* (1960)
- "The Boss", *Touch of Evil* (1958)
- "Spook", *More Music from Peter Gunn* (1959)
- "Megeve", *Charade* (1963)

Also by Derek Schraner...



Hikikomori: a lucky lockdown life sim

**How many days since
March 14, 2020?**

**That's how long the
lockdown has lasted.**

Swiss-Canadian author Derek Schraner presents *Hikikomori*, an immersive "lucky lockdown life simulator" inspired by the concept of social isolation. It offers a unique approach to balancing daily activities. Players complete a series of simple minigames representing different aspects of day-to-day life. What makes the gameplay challenging are the ever-evolving rules. In this interactive experience, decisions made each day reveal how those rules change over time.

Players will need six-sided dice and something to write with, as they record their progress and track various activities.

At its core, *Hikikomori* is a meditation on balance. It explores the tension between conflicting obligations and the pursuit of fulfilment in routine. It is the culmination of the author's experience living this way for five years, offering personal reflection, and inviting you to share in the challenges and insights of the journey.



**Operation
CanCon:
Canadian Music
Shopping
Gamebooks**

Relive the history of Canadian music in the *Operation CanCon* trilogy, blending nostalgic storytelling with a retro treasure hunt. Navigate branching paths and roll the dice in bin-diving minigames while visiting iconic record shops. Each standalone installment forms a part of the epic quest to recover lost Canadian Content and, hopefully, save a nation.



*Operation
CanCon:
The Canadian
Eighties Music
Shopping
Gamebook*

**A Mission to Save
the Music and the
Future of a Nation**

In *Operation CanCon*, your mission is to collect Canadian Content. Navigate Eighties music stores in search of iconic songs. The hope of a country's future depends on preserving its cultural artifacts.

Using dice and a checklist, take your chances with the Sweep minigame, a treasure hunt where every roll reveals another hit. It's not all random chance, however. Your decisions really matter. Whether you play a single game or a multi-day campaign, you'll discover opportunities for tactics and strategy. Advanced modes, tweaks, and New Game Plus provide even more challenges.

Perfect for gamers, music lovers, and fans of Canadiana, *Operation CanCon* is a new take on nostalgia. With an interactive narrative, flexible gameplay, and customizable goals, it's more than a game, it's a retro celebration.



Operation CanCon: The Canadian Nineties Music Shopping Gamebook

**It's Time to Take
"Shopping Local"
to the Next Level!**

Welcome back to the Nineties. Canada's music scene is rocking, and the store shelves are packed with winners, if you're ready to roll. In *Operation CanCon*, you're not just flipping through dusty bins, you're chasing priceless cultural artifacts. As a lone collector on a mission, your goal is to target a checklist of tracks scattered in iconic Toronto shops.

Part interactive fiction, part solo roll-and-write game, every visit is a gamble, whether for ten minutes or a campaign. All you need to play is three six-sided dice and something to write with.

Operation CanCon is your passport to an era of gone-but-unforgettable Canadian Content. The music that inspired a generation is ready to rise again, but it needs YOU to bring the decade back to life. Fully steeped in nostalgia, this standalone sequel to the Eighties original lets you relive a time when finding the right album seemed like fate.



*Operation
CanCon: The
Canadian Classic
Music Shopping
Gamebook*

**Drop the Needle on
One Last
Flashback...
It's Game Time
Canada!**

It all comes down to this: the final verse in *Operation CanCon*. Leap between two capitals, across two centuries, on a mission to recover dozens of Canadian Content classics.

All you need is something to write with and three six-sided dice to roll your way through record stores in search of national treasures.

Equal parts branching-path adventure and bin-diving minigame, this interactive journey is a nostalgic tour of Canadian music. Whether you play for the memories or simply to know the score, this gamebook is your ticket to the past and, hopefully, a future.



Continue the Heist Online!

Free downloads,
bonus content,
and more
gamebooks

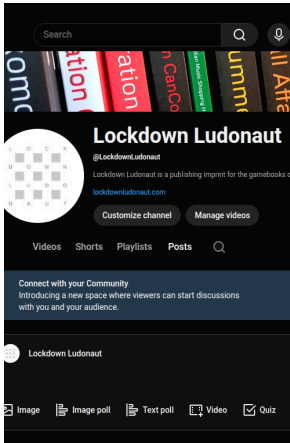
Download printable playsheets, reference tables, and other full-sized materials for this book, and many more

Lockdown Ludonaut is the official home of Derek Schraner's gamebooks, including *the Break System* series, *Operation CanCon*, and other interactive titles, featuring the latest news, updates, and extras.

Explore sample adventures, additional resources, and exclusive freebies available only online.

Get your free downloads now:

LockdownLudonaut.com



Watch the Adventures Come to Life!

Reveals, demos,
and deep dives
into Derek
Schraner's
gamebooks

Experience each gamebook with "Reveal" videos showcasing new releases, "How to Play" rule demonstrations, and "Deep Dive" explorations of the stories and systems.

Curated playlists make it easy to follow individual gamebooks, full series, or specific video types.

Never miss a video: Subscribe for full-length content and exclusive insights from the official channel:

youtube.com/@LockdownLudonaut



About...

In 1979, Derek Schraner was a seven year old student in a third grade class at Toronto Montessori School. Then and there he was allowed – and even encouraged – to write a series of crime stories, on a seemingly endless roll of paper, over an entire school year. This singular vocation culminated in its performance, recorded live. He had no idea he would go on to work as a writer, producer, and instructor.

Between then and now, he has obtained undergraduate degrees in Cinema Studies, English and Philosophy from the University of Toronto, as well as Bachelor and Master degrees in Media Production from Ryerson University. Time permitting, he has also been a musician, a blogger and, perhaps unsurprisingly, a gamer.

L O C K
D O W N
L U D O
N A U T

Spring Break in Hawaii is no vacation.

You think it's just another pickup.

It isn't.

You're a small-time thief in paradise, chasing a fresh start, when a pawn shop heist goes sideways and drags you into a more challenging score.

This is where it all begins. Before the Alps, before the casino, and even before Kyoto, this origin story follows the run that started everything... the one that nearly broke the game before you made a move.

Spring into action. Break the system.

Your epic adventures start here.