

Whatever is the Matter with Admiral Bang?

A game of cannon-related pseudo-Victorian Drama(TM) by Naomi Burgess and Hannah Murphey

Setting the Scene

“Three! Two! One! FIRE!” BLAM!

For as long as you can remember, your retired naval officer neighbour Admiral Bang—with the help of their trusty First Mate Mx. Barnacle—has been firing a cannon from the roof of their home twice a day for spurious reasons at best. Every morning and evening at 8 o'clock and 6 o'clock on the dot, a wild crack tears through your homes and shops, sending china and wall hangings and goodness knows what else flying towards the ground. For a while, you've tried to bite your tongue and simply carry on, but following their latest blast, you've reached the end of your patience.

Enough is enough.

As 6 o'clock looms near, you gather together to make your utter exasperation publicly known to the Admiral. Can you gain the peace and quiet you crave, if only for a single night?

What You Will Need to Play

- Enough people to fill the dwellings, shoppes, and footways of a quaint cobblestoned street or the gossiping confines of a local pub; about 10-15 should suffice, though you can always scale upwards for increased chaos.
- Approximately 2-3 hours of your time
- 1 in-character facilitator to play First Mate Mx. Barnacle
- 1-2 out-of-character facilitators (depending on player base size)
- Some Bits and Bobs
 - Pinnable name cards that you can write on
 - Pencils/Erasers
 - A Very Fancy Hat, fit for a seaborne soul
 - A Decidedly Less Fancy Hat, fit for a sea-weary soul
 - A glut of balloons, at least as many as you have players (with two balloons both visually and texturally Distinct from the rest)
 - A notebook for furious scribblings (or a clipboard and paper if none are to be found)

Collecting Ourselves

As a group, decide what form your community will take. Is it more akin to an oddly misty and/or musically inclined village upon the moors? A densely packed London square? Something in between or something else entirely? Any which way, give it one of the following:

- A posh name
- A name as old as bones
- A name clearly stating the location of the nearest field or river
- An unintentionally naughty name
- A name that fills one's mouth with cotton balls when spoken
- All of the above and then some

Once that's settled, it's high time to populate our community with some characters. Select who will be playing the infamous Admiral Bang: this player will receive a Very Fancy Hat (if they do not have one at the ready) and a Distinct balloon that they'll need to tie to their person somewhere such that it's clearly visible. The Decidedly Less Fancy Hat and additional Distinct balloon should go to the facilitator playing Mx. Barnacle. All remaining players are Concerned Citizens. Distribute name cards and pencils.

- For the Admiral:
 - On the front of your name card, write:
 - Your title, character name, and a pronoun or two
 - On the back of your name card, write:
 - 3-5 Bygone Exploits, things that Admiral Bang has done or experienced in their life that have moulded them into who they are today: a person with a cannon who decidedly should not have one.
- For the First Mate:
 - On the front of your name card, write:
 - An honorific, your character name, and a pronoun or two
- For Citizens Whom the Cannon May Concern:
 - On the front of your name card, write:
 - A name suitable for an inhabitant of an aggressively 1960's portrayal of a Victorian community, and a pronoun or two
 - On the back of your name card, write:
 - Your Role within the community
 - 2-3 Traits
 - A Juicy Tidbit that would buffet your reputation should it ever be sussed out

Finally, let's generate some character relationships! Arrange all Concerned Citizens in a circle and pair up with someone next to you. Take a few minutes to ask each other one of the questions from the character relationship questions tables in the appendix (or come up with your own). Then, after a few minutes, pair up with the person to your other side and repeat. Ensure

that you forge one positive relationship and one negative relationship, with whichever characters that make the most sense. If there's ever an odd Concerned Citizen out, they may pair up with the Admiral.

The Hour Looms Near

Play begins at 5 o'clock on the dot (or as close as you can get), with Mx. Barnacle calling out "5 o'clock, and all's well!"

This is the Concerned Citizens' cue to begin milling about, either to chat fervently amongst each other or to poke at the Admiral to see what exactly makes them tick.

On the Matter of Laughter

If you laugh at anything Admiral Bang says and they notice, they point at you and yell "AHA!" Tie an inflatable balloon to yourself somewhere (as long as it's easily visible to players): your character has begun to levitate up towards the ceiling. Add "Uncle," "Aunt," "Cousin," or a similar title of your choice to your character's name. You are now completely Unbothered, and your laughter is both infectious and compulsively shareable. For at least 10 minutes, get as many Concerned Citizens to laugh as possible. If one of them laughs at something you say and you catch them in the act, point at them and yell "AHA!" They join you in the air.

Once your time is up, you may either continue to bamboozle your fellow neighbours for as long as you wish, or Ascend from the room/playspace, never to be heard from again.

On the Matter of Offense and Disgrace

If a Concerned Citizen Offends another Citizen, the Offendee Scoffs (e.g. "I *beg* your pardon!") and the Offender puts an X on their own name card, and TWO X's if they touch on the Offendee's Juicy Tidbit. If they Offend Admiral Bang, it immediately counts as TWO X's. If a Concerned Citizen reaches THREE X's, they have become Disgraced. Flee the room/playspace in a fit of envy/rage/blind Englishness to never be heard from again.

Note: Once a Concerned Citizen has crossed the rainbow bridge into Unbothered bliss, they can no longer Offend or be Offended. They exist on another plane of consciousness entirely, and your paltry human squabbings are nothing in the face of pure, unadulterated mirth.

Admiral Bang cannot Offend, as a base level of Offence by design of their existence in the premises is assumed.

On the Matter of One's Return to Play

If your character leaves play via Ascent or Disgrace, take a breather, grab some water and/or food, and come back with a new Concerned Citizen and/or a humorously minor change in

costume if you wish. Your ties remain the same: you are now a close acquaintance, relative, or coworker of the previously Unbothered or Disgraced. Unfortunately for you, you are also a latecomer to the proceedings, and if there's one thing Admiral Bang will not stand for, it is Tardiness.

On the Matter of the Admiral's Hidden Qualities

At any time, a Concerned Citizen may Appeal to the Admiral's sensibilities, evidenced through use of the phrase "With all due respect, Admiral: ..."

If what the Citizen has to say strikes a chord with the Admiral in relation to one of the Bygone Exploits they've chronicled on the other side of their name card, they put a check mark on the front of their card and on the back next to the appropriate Exploit. Appealing to this Exploit can no longer gain another check mark on the Admiral. They may then decide whether or not the statement the Citizen has made Offends them or not. Repeatedly harping on a previously Appealed Exploit may also be considered grounds for Offence if the ephemeral whims of the Admiral deem it so.

On the Matter of the First Mate

In addition to generally ensuring that everything is running shipshape, the facilitator playing Mx. Barnacle is tasked with scribbling down anything the Admiral wishes taken note of, often with respect to player characters and their more underhand doings.

Whenever Mx. Barnacle returns to the Admiral's side after being apart for a while, they loudly proclaim "Aye, aye!" and SALUTE. Admiral Bang replies to this with an "At ease!" or a "Confound it man, what is it??" depending on the fickleness of the wind, but is always immediate in their response. For what good is discipline without punctuality?

Drawing the Curtain

The game ends if all Concerned Citizens become Unbothered or Disgraced (on signal from either the out-of-character facilitators or Mx. Barnacle). We also end if the hour runs out and Admiral Bang remains unfazed and/or unconflicted in their duties.

Either way, the Admiral starts a countdown, which is joined in by a chorus of the Unbothered. Any remaining Concerned Citizens may continue to plead with Admiral Bang if they so wish, or otherwise resign themselves to their fate in whatever form that takes. On reaching ZERO, the Admiral stomps on an inflatable balloon; the Cannon FIRES.

If the Admiral gains THREE check marks on their name card (or otherwise decides that they are feeling particularly touched/conflicted/merciful) before either of the two states above occur, they back down from firing this evening's volley, but dash it all if it doesn't get the blood pumping. Perhaps another day shall do.

Influences & Acknowledgements

Initial creative impetus for this game came from the 2018 Golden Cobra submission, “Super Shredder’s Neighborhood,” and we were really struck by the idea of this absurdly unreasonable neighbour scenario with characters cycling in status mid-game. Our 3am brains ping-ponged from that to the Mary Poppins scene featuring Uncle Albert’s infectious laughter, finally landing on the antics of a certain Admiral. Additional mechanical inspiration came from a cross between Kids on Bikes and Wanderhome for their brilliantly succinct methods of generating meaningful connections between characters. Good Society was equally helpful in providing some rough ideas for example Juicy Tidbits.

If you’d like to get a feel for the kinds of media we’re aiming to embody here, any of the following films are a solid watch:

- Mary Poppins
- Chitty Chitty Bang Bang
- Music Man
- Hello, Dolly!
- The Year Without Santa Claus
- Santa Claus is Comin’ to Town

Finally, to my romantic and writing partner Hannah Murphey, and to my friends Laura and Alison, who graciously lent their time to review our work at such late notice, thank you so much. We would not have been able to make this game a reality without you.

Appendices

Appendix A – Example Character Roles

- The Mayor
- The Mayor's Spouse
- The Grocer
- The Butcher
- The Baker
- The Candlestick-Maker
- The Teacher
- The Librarian
- The Doctor
- The Professor
- The Nurse
- The Farmer
- The Farmer's Child
- The Rancher

- The Seamstress/Tailor
- The Town Lush
- The Barman
- The Chimney Sweep
- The Little Scamp
- The Banker
- The Artist
- The Delinquent
- The Young Lover
- The Barber
- The Star Pupil
- The Goody-Two-Shoes
- The Spiritual Leader (Choose your faith!)
- The Spiritual Leader's Child
- The Busybody
- The Courier
- The New Parent
- The Grandparent
- The Bully
- The Town Gossip
- The New Kid
- The Inventor

Appendix B – Example Character Traits

- Dreamer
- Idealistic
- Destitute
- Enigmatic
- Sorrowful
- Wild
- Romantic
- Hearty
- Proudful
- Competitive
- Boisterous
- Good sport
- Friendly
- Incurious
- Jolly
- Tired
- Gluttonous
- Bawdy
- Reserved

- Early riser
- Night owl
- Strict
- Straight-laced
- Stern
- Cold
- Greedy
- Good-humored
- Direct
- Warm
- Generous

Appendix C – Example Character Relationship Questions

- How did you make me feel right at home when I first arrived in the neighbourhood?
- You took the fall for a mistake I made. How much do you resent me for it? How do you continue to hold it over me?
- I lent you a lucky tuppence once. What did you do with it? Do you still keep it somewhere?
- What is it about me that makes me fun to tease?
- What pastime, activity, or goings-on have you attempted to pressure me into joining?

Appendix D – Example Juicy Tidbits

- Your business was built using...well, *borrowed* knowledge, whether that be a recipe, a secret technique, or something else entirely.
- You and your spouse haven't been living in the same home for months, if not years.
- The only reason you came to this community in the first place was to escape marrying the individual you had previously been engaged to.
- Your coffers are nearly empty, but this absolutely does not stop you from pretending they haven't in order to press forward your own goals.