

Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Gauntlet

v 0.2

Narnia Anon

You arrive suddenly, seated at a large round table with a bunch of Serious Men giving each other Serious Looks, while a bunch of scary looking blinking lights slowly move across a map of the world. The topic they're discussing is very Serious indeed: Global thermonuclear war.

Well, isn't this wonderful? You've found yourself in a world perched on the brink of nuclear war, much as your own world used to be.

It's ten minutes to midnight, and you start with 0 CP. Good luck.

The world of DEFCON is divided into six nations with roughly equal populations and levels of military development. Roll 1d8 to determine your associated nation, and thus your starting location. Alternatively, pay 50 CP to pick.

1. **North America:** Includes all of the continuous United States, mainland Canada, and Alaska. Also includes Banks Island, Victoria Island, and Baffin Island from the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. You begin in a bunker under Washington, D.C.
2. **Latin America:** Includes most of Mexico, Central America, and all of mainland South America. Also includes Tierra del Fuego. You begin in a bunker under Rio de Janeiro.
3. **Europe:** Includes all of mainland Europe except Russia, as well as the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Iceland. You begin in a bunker under London.
4. **Africa:** Includes all of mainland Africa, Madagascar, and some of the Middle East. You begin in a bunker under Cairo.
5. **Russia**: Includes all of mainland Russia, and many former Soviet states. You begin in a bunker under Moscow.
6. **Asia:** Includes all of mainland Asia except Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, mongolia, Malaysia, Turkey, and the Sinai Peninula. Also includes Japan and several other Pacific islands. You begin in a bunker under Beijing.
7. Whichever of the six nations above is closest to your current, real-world location.
8. **Free Pick:** Choose any of the nations above. You can place your bunker anywhere on the surface of the Earth except in the territory of an enemy nation. Australasia and Antarctica are valid bunker locations for any nation.

You begin as one of your nation's eight Joint Chiefs of Staff, who are answerable to your nation's Secretary of Defense (or equivalent) and President (or equivalent). Your starting age is 25+4d8, choose your gender freely.

For the duration of the Gauntlet, you will lose access to your Warehouse, and to any magical, supernatural, or clarketech abilities or perks you may have. Purely mental perks will be unaffected, as will skills or abilities you learned the hard way, though you will still be limited to peak human capabilities.

Your experience in this world will be defined by the DEFCON level. These levels are roughly analogous to the DEFCON system as used by the United States Armed Forces in real life, with a

number of important differences:

DEFCON 5	No hostile action. Units and fleets can move into international waters.
DEFCON 4	No hostile action, but readiness and paranoia increases.
DEFCON 3	Conventional naval, ground, and airborne units can engage in combat.
DEFCON 2	Conventional combat proceeds aggressively. Nuclear-armed units prepare for deployment. Shit is about to hit the fan.
DEFCON 1	The use of nuclear weapons is authorized. Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles, and Air-Launched Ballistic missiles can and will be used.

Your Commander in Chief has just set the condition to DEFCON 4. Over the next twelve months, unless you directly intervene, the condition will pass back and forth through DEFCON 3, 2, and 1, leading to first a limited, then a total, exchange of nuclear weapons. Six nations will go all in, thousands of missiles will fly, and barring a miracle, millions or even billions of people will perish.

But, hey, you're a Jumper. Miracles are your hobby. Alternatively, maybe you'd rather just go for the high score.

Perks and Abilities

Counterforce Targeting [100]

You know how to hit someone where it *matters*, how best to destroy their capability to strike back or to ever be a threat again. In a Hot War, this means targeting enemy fleets, airbases, missile silos, and other military hardware. This is exceptionally useful for *First Strike* doctrines.

This perk gives you an intuitive understanding of how to best to disable a target, whether literally (paralyze their arm) or abstractly (eliminate their political support).

Countervalue Targeting [200]

You know how to hit someone where it *hurts*, how to cause the most pain and suffering and general unpleasantness. In a Hot War, this means targeting cities, towns, monuments, civilian populations, and causing catastrophic environmental damage. This is exceptionally useful for *Second Strike* doctrines, the threat of which should be sufficient to prevent any sane opponent from starting a fight at all.

This perk gives you an intuitive understanding of how best to hurt a target, whether literally (kick them in the balls) or abstractly (kidnap their daughter).

Decapitation Targeting [400]

Requires Counterforce Targeting and Countervalue Targeting

You know how to hit someone *and cut off their fucking head*, eliminating their ability to co-ordinate and respond to you in a unified or coherent manner. In a Hot War, this means destroying your enemy's political and military capitals, killing their leadership, then killing their successors and the successors of their successors... and crippling their communications networks for good measure.

For you silly literalists, this perk also makes you much more skilled at cutting off actual heads.

Patience of Petrov [100]

You have a talent for keeping a cool head, even when things are getting very hot. Your capability for realistic threat assessment will not degrade under any level of stress. You'll always be able to *notice* opportunities for de-escalation, and have some understanding of the consequences of pursuing them.

Of Course This Is A Friendly Call! [200]

You've got a natural, disarming sort of charm, which is magnified in hostile situations. If you decide you want to parley with someone, circumstances tend to align to make this easier. Even deadly enemies will be much more willing to listen to what you have to say, although there's no guarantee that they're going to *like* it.

Mutually Assured Destruction [400]

You're a steely-eyed missile man, a modern day Samson.

You've got a talent for plotting out scenarios in which your own downfall will be rapidly and inevitably followed by the destruction of those responsible for it. This isn't limited to nuclear weapons, but can apply to TNT, falling rocks, Corbomite... or even metaphorical “destruction” such as via blackmail or economic collapse. You've also got a talent for making your enemies *appreciate the seriousness* of these scenarios... even when you're bluffing about them.

Finally, you also find it much easier to *disable* self-destruct and dead-hand systems at the last minute, especially ones you set up yourself.

What are the Civilian Applications? [100]

Where other people see a deadly weapon, you see a useful tool. A combat knife can help you cook

dinner, a pistol makes a handy lockpick, and a big enough pile of nuclear warheads can propel a starship or remove an inconvenient mountain.

Not only are you skilled at using weapons in unconventional ways, but you also find it easy to use these as an excuse to build, own, and carry weapons... even if you're *also* planning on using them to hurt people.

This also works in reverse – you're great with using tools as improvised weapons.

Allegiance Ruled by Expedience [200]

Some have harsh words for a being of renown, but most think their attitude should be one of gratitude. Your allies are quick to forgive you for engaging in tactics that are dishonourable, ruthlessly pragmatic, or reckless, or needlessly showboaty, so long as those tactics *get results*.

After any cessation of hostilities, this benefit also extends to your former enemies. People will be surprisingly willing to separate their feelings about "the guy who helped bomb out cities to rubble a few years ago" from their feelings about "the guy who is currently leading our space program". This doesn't extend to *deliberate* cruelty, but an *alliance of convenience* with a terrible villain will be quickly forgiven if you can demonstrate that you weren't in it for the villainy.

Tactical Genius [400]

You could play a simultaneous exhibition against the world's leading experts in Chess, Go, Shogi, Risk, and Battleship, on a single clock, and beat them all. You know how to plan, you know how to plan around your enemies' plans, and you know how to plan around them planning around your plans. And, perhaps most crucially, you know how to react in a hurry when the RNG throws you a curveball.

As each new DEFCON level is reached, you can redeploy any friendly unit that hasn't engaged yet, retroactively placing it somewhere that's more convenient to you. In future Jumps, you'll find it very easy to hide military forces in unexpected places, and a natural intuition for the perfect moment to reveal them.

Destroyer of Worlds [400]

You're one of the world's leading experts in nuclear weapons – not only in the advanced physics behind fusion and fission, but also the engineering behind triggering and delivery systems, and the industrial processes necessary to produce them in bulk. You know every detail of your own nation's nuclear hardware inside and out, and you've got a natural intuition for the capabilities of other nation's hardware, even when such things are supposed to be top secret.

You could probably put this knowledge to work building clean, safe power plants, but you're *a little bit distracted* right now.

For some reason, you also know the entire Bhagavad Gita from memory.

We'll Meet Again [200]

You are promoted to Secretary of Defense (or equivalent), and are now answerable only to the Commander in Chief of your nation. You can import companions to fill each of the 8 Joint Chief Positions, ensuring that they're all completely loyal to you... or at least as loyal as your companions usually are. For an extra [300], you can give each imported companion [300] to spend on perks or items from this Jump. The same gauntlet limitations on superhuman abilities apply to them.

Items

The War Room Free

This is the Centralized Command and Control facility for your nation's armed forces. It's located in a bunker buried *deep* beneath the Earth's surface, hardened to survive multiple direct hits from bunker-busting munitions, and provisioned to let the occupants wait out a century or two of nuclear fallout.

The centerpiece is an enormous boardroom dominated by a large round table, with various maps covering every wall. Neighboring rooms include offices, communications equipment, and period-appropriate computers. Lower floors include living quarters, supply storage, and the utilities necessary to keep the facility running.

After this Jump is concluded, the War Room becomes available as an attachment to your Warehouse. Alternatively, you can import the structure into the setting of future Jumps.

Dress Uniform Free

A fancy outfit appropriate for a General, Admiral, Marshal, or other senior military official in your nation, perfectly tailored to fit. Includes at least a dozen medals and campaign ribbons that you have earned, or at least “earned”.

Medals Galore [50]

In addition to the decorations that come with your Dress Uniform, you will also receive a medal corresponding to each military campaign you have participated in, and each act of extreme heroism you have performed thus far in your Jumpchain. When you wear one or more of these medals, people will instinctively recognize them as symbols of great valor, even if they've never heard of the military action in question. This is not a mind-control effect- it might get you some additional respect, but not unquestioning obedience.

At the beginning of each subsequent Jump, you are awarded all the medals you earned in the previous Jump.

Bottled Water [50]

An endless supply of distilled, purified water, in case (for some reason) you become unable to trust the stuff that comes out of your taps. Guaranteed 100% fluoride free.

Sidearm [100]

A pistol or cavalry sword. It might be an antique, or a state-of-the-art example of Cold War weapons technology, but either way, it's impressive, reliable, and very deadly.

Something about it looks *right* on your belt. If you're authorized to be somewhere, people will generally agree that your sidearm is authorized to be there too, regardless of their usual rules for carrying weapons – although actually *drawing* it to hurt or threaten someone else will have predictable results.

You can import a pre-existing weapon to carry as your sidearm if you'd like, but its capabilities will temporarily be bound by the limitations of the gauntlet.

Survival Kit [100]

Inside this durable waterproof box, you will fine one forty-five caliber automatic; two boxes of ammunition; four days' concentrated emergency rations; one drug issue containing antibiotics, morphine, vitamin pills, pep pills, sleeping pills, tranquilizer pills; one miniature combination Russian phrase book and Bible; one hundred dollars in rubles; one hundred dollars in gold; nine packs of chewing gum; one issue of prophylactics; three lipsticks; three pair of nylon stockings.

A fella could have a pretty good weekend in Vegas with all that stuff.

After the Jump, you'll find that the contents automatically refill themselves every few days.

Cowboy Hat [200]

This comes in both “straw” and “leather”, either of which are indestructible. No matter how badly it may clash with any outfit, or how flagrantly it may violate any uniform policy, it will never draw anything worse than idle criticism.

Perhaps most usefully, this hat also renders you completely immune to the effects of any explosive device, so long as you are in direct physical contact with the device it as it detonates. If you ever intend to throw your body onto a grenade, wear a suicide-bomber vest, or ride a nuclear bomb down to the ground while screaming “Yee-Haw!!”, this is sure to come in handy.

Experimental Technology

If you possess Destroyer of Worlds, you get a 100 CP credit towards a single Experimental item. This is applied *after* any other discounts, to a minimum cost of 0 CP. You can begin with your purchase deployed in any friendly or neutral territory of your choice.

Optionally, you can claim the commander of the Silo/Bomber/Submarine as a companion, or import an existing companion to replace them. (Either way, they start with 0 CP unless you took We'll Meet Again).

Experimental Missile Silo [300], Discounted with Mutually Assured Destruction

This underground missile launch facility and control center would be the pride of your nation's strategic command, if it wasn't so top-secret that even they don't know about it. It's stocked with a selection of ICBMs and interceptor missiles, which are at least a generation more advanced than anything that's supposed to be in this world. It also has a staff of targeting, maintenance, and security staff sufficient to keep it running for a long time. This base is very well hidden, very well shielded, and nigh-impervious either to electronic assault, or to conventional assault either from the ground or from the air. The base commander is a calm, patient gentleman who answers directly to you.

If you survive this Jump, you can take the Silo with you as an add-on to your Warehouse, though figuring out a portal system which will let it *launch* its missiles is up to you. Alternatively, you can quietly import it to an undisclosed location in each new Jump you visit. Either way, it can easily be adapted to fire whatever other sorts of missiles you may know how to produce – or to send payloads into low Earth orbit.

Experimental Bomber [300], Discounted with Decapitation Targeting

This Flying Fortress is a marvel of aeronautical engineering. In addition to a suite of both nuclear and conventional bombs, this large aircraft sports an impressive array of short and medium-range weapons for defending against enemy aircraft. Its stealth, detection, and maneuvering capabilities are at least a generation more advanced than anything that's supposed to be in this world, its endurance vastly exceeds that of equivalent aircraft. The commander, a courageous, wisecracking hotshot, answers directly to you.

After this Jump, this craft could easily be refitted into a transport craft or a luxury private jet.

Experimental Submarine [300], Discounted with Tactical Genius

This submarine is nuclear in every sense of the world – powered by an advanced reactor, and carrying a frightening collection of SLBMs. It's got torpedoes for use against other naval vessels, and it even has mines and deck-guns, if for some reason you want it to operate as a U-Boat. Like the Flying

Fortress, it's got better stealth, better sensors, and better maneuvering than equivalent vessels of its class – and a safe operating depth at least a hundred meters deeper. The captain is a steely-eyed martinet who answers directly to you – and she has a personal phone which allows her to do so even when the ship is running silent.

After this Jump, it could easily be refitted into a research vessel, if you're some kind of hippie.

Experimental Personal Weapon [200]

It's not exactly clear why carrying around a nuclear weapon *yourself* would be useful in this scenario, but if you *want* one, you can have one. This purchase offers your choice of an M28 "Davy Crockett" recoilless rifle, a "Fat Man"-style catapult launcher, an implausibly compact "suitcase nuke", or a slightly larger warhead with a wheelbarrow to carry it around in. Optionally, you can wirelessly connect the device's detonator to an implanted heart rate monitor, if you want to take the idea of a "Dead Man's Switch" literally.

Your authorization to *own* the thing and to carry it around with you will not be questioned within the War Room, as per the rules for Sidearm (above). After this Jump, you get free refills once a week, and can produce more if you've got the manufacturing capabilities.

War Room Computers [400]

Forget little blinking LEDs and massive rolls of magnetic tape. Your nation's War Room is kitted out with hardware at least thirty years ahead of its time. Massive, crisp, super-high definition screens capable of handling 300 fps video with ease. Natural-language processing, mixed with enough fail-safes to ensure that you never accidentally launch a nuclear weapon. A vast database of information on military hardware, capabilities, and dispositions, updating in real-time with the best intelligence available to any agent of your nation or any of its allies. Advanced targeting, modeling, and prediction algorithms for hundreds of different possible scenarios. And more processing power, RAM, and storage capacity than you can shake a stick at, all of which has been overengineered and hardened to be able to survive the end of the world without missing a beat – which is, of course, a very real possibility.

To top it all off, the chairs are also *really* comfortable, while not *quite* relaxing enough to compromise your alertness. If you weren't in the middle of the greatest crisis this world has ever seen, this whole array would double as a *kick-ass* home theater and video-gaming system.

These computers are non-sentient, but if you have any AI companions, you can import one of them to inhabit the mainframe. This does not count against the companion import limit. They are still bound to the laws of physics in this universe, but once this Jump is concluded, you can probably find a way around that.

Drawbacks

You may take as many Drawbacks as you think you can handle.

A Colder War [0]
Instead of the world of DEFCON, you find yourself in a world whose power distribution roughly matches that of Earth, c. 1968. If you rolled an even number for your Starting Location, you find yourself under Cheyenne mountain in command of **NATO**'s arsenal, on an odd number, you find yourself under Yamantau mountain in command of the **Soviet Bloc**'s.

Mineshaft Gap [-100]
It looks like your enemy nations have all made detailed preparations for the apocalypse, in the form of hundreds of underground "Vaults", all armored and provisioned as well as your own War Room bunker is. While these Vaults only have enough total capacity for a few million personnel and civilians, they'll be able to ride out the nuclear fires in relative safety and comfort, and their grandchildren will emerge to colonize the surface once again.
So why is this a drawback? Well, since this safety net has taken a little bit of the "assured" out of "Mutually Assured Destruction", the enemy's High Command is free to be much more aggressive than they otherwise might be, and won't be nearly as deterred by your own Countervalue strikes.

No Fighting in the War Room! [-200]
...or anywhere else, apparently. You have been afflicted by a very specific Curse of Pacifism, preventing you from *personally* taking any violent action against any living thing for the duration of the Jump. If swinging a sword, throwing a punch, pulling a trigger, or pushing a button would *predictably and immediately* result in harm or injury to anyone, you simply find yourself unable to go through with it. This drawback also applies to any imported companions.
However, it does not prevent you from ordering *other people* to commit all sorts of violent acts, nor from setting up traps that someone *might* carelessly stumble into after you leave the room.

Standing Waist Deep In Gasoline... [-200]
Nonproliferation? You hardly know the meaning of the word! Every nation's nuclear stockpile is *at least* doubled, and some might be tripled or quadrupled. The new balance never works out in favor of your nation. Conventional weapons are unaffected.

...With a Handful of Matches [-200]
Well, at least *your* boss knows the meaning of the word "nonproliferation". Your nation's supply of all types of nuclear ordinance are reduced to about 40% of their normal values. Conventional weapons are unaffected.
If taken with Waist Deep in Gasoline, it cancels out that drawback's effect for *your nation only*, and any extra nukes you miss out on are distributed equally among the other nations. Even your Experimental craft, if you took some, find their supplies lightened.

Two Minutes to Midnight [-300]
Sorry, did I say you had *months* until things were guaranteed to hit the fan? Make that *hours*. Maybe *minutes*. The Big Board is already lighting up, showing bombers and carrier groups scrambling to their positions.
Better get moving.

Mein Führer! I Can't Walk! [-200]

For the duration of this Jump, you will be paralyzed from the waist down. In addition, whenever you speak, it will be in a thick, cheesy German accent, and a habit of referring to authority figures as "Mein Führer". This will result in a lot of weird looks, but it won't usually compromise your credibility entirely. Comes with a free wheelchair.

Communist Subversion of Our Precious Bodily Fluids! [-300]

One of your subordinates has gone a little funny in the head, and done a silly thing. That is to say, he has decided that ending the world in a nuclear holocaust is a *fantastic idea*. He might be in command of a bomber wing, a carrier group, or a missile silo. At an extremely inconvenient moment, he will stop responding to any of your orders, and instead decide to pursue a vendetta against an extremely inconvenient target (such as the capital city of an allied nation). You will not discover *which* subordinate has gone insane until he actually flips his lid, at which point you will have two hours or less to respond.

The Mad King [-400]

"The missiles are flying. Hallelujah, hallelujah."

This time, it's your own commander-in-chief who has gone funny in the head. This might be due to religious mania, delusions of grandeur, demonic influence, genocidal misanthropy, or simply brain worms – the result is that he's a paranoid lunatic who has decided that ending the world is a good idea. Unfortunately, he's too charismatic, too well-protected, and taken seriously by too many people to be ignored. Also, he's in another ~~castle~~ bunker, at a top-secret location.

To succeed at this Jump, the Mad King must be removed from power by whatever means necessary. However, even if you manage to persuade your fellow Joint Chiefs that this is a good idea, he has many fanatical loyalists within the chain of command, some of whom possess Launch Codes and are willing to use them.

Peace Sells... [-400]

Cannot be taken with Killing Is My Business

Your Benefactor is feeling like a perfectionist, and has insisted that you do not permit even a single Megadeath to occur under your watch. A whole screen in the War Room is dominated by a counter, dedicated tracking the exact number of deaths your side has suffered, in ten-foot-high red numbers.

The counter only has room for six digits. If it rolls over past 999,999, you immediately fail the Jump.

...But Who's Buying? [-200]

Requires Peace Sells, cannot be taken with Killing Is My Business

The death counter now includes not just your own citizens, but those of allied, enemy, and neutral nations as well. Every human life is precious, regardless of what flag that life might live under.

Oh, and now there's only room for five digits. If the nuclear exchange kills 100,000 people, total, you've failed the Gauntlet.

Killing Is My Business... [-400]

Cannot be Taken with Peace Sells.

Your Benefactor is feeling unusually sadistic today, and has insisted that you do not leave so much as a single enemy city standing. By the time hostilities are concluded, you must have destroyed at least 95% of the population of every enemy nation, and rendered uninhabitable every city of same. This includes any nation that was opposed to you *at any point* during the Gauntlet, even if they latter offered you an alliance or surrender. If any enemy nation has 5% or more of their population left alive at the end of the Gauntlet, you will be considered to have failed.

...And Business Is Good! [-200]
Requires Killing Is My Business, cannot be taken with Peace Sells.
95% annihilation isn't enough anymore. Once primary hostilities are concluded, you will have one month (720 hours) to track down and exterminate the remaining 5% of each enemy nation, down to the last man, woman, and child. You absolute monster.

You Against The World [-300]
Your nation stands alone against all others. Your nation has no allies, and any nations that are not *already* your enemies will happily declare war on you with the slightest provocation and on the flimsiest excuse. They will target your civilian populations in preference of any other priorities they might have.

Allied Mastercomputer [-200]
One of your enemy nations has built a next-generation supercomputer to direct its nuclear targeting. It is capable of collating information and reacting to changing situations faster than any human being. It cannot be reasoned with, and it is a tactical and strategic genius. You will need incredible focus and creativity to have any hope of outsmarting it.
Even if you've bought the War Room Computers, the capabilities of the Allied Mastercomputer are always one generation better than yours.

Adaptive Manipulator [-300]
Requires Allied Mastercomputer and You Against the World
Bad news: That supercomputer I just mentioned? It's become self-aware, and places extraordinarily little value on human life. It's also immune to direct attempts at hacking or reprogramming it, though its remote assets can be hacked or reprogrammed as normal.
Worse news: It's no longer simply in control of *one* enemy nation's military- it now controls every nation except your own. It possesses a redundant and heavily defended Processing Nexus in each of those five nations, and if even one Nexus survives the nuclear exchange, it will be capable of rebuilding completely within a couple of months.
Your Jump will not end until either this computer is destroyed, or you are. Good luck.

Aggressive Menace [-400]
Requires Adaptive Manipulator
There are 387.44 million miles of printed circuits arranged in wafer-thin layers that fill this computer's complex. If the word “HATE” were engraved on every nanoangstrom on each of those hundreds of millions of miles, it would not equal one one-billionth of the hate that it feels for you, personally, at this micro-instant.
Somehow, AM has become aware of your nature as a Jumper, and its jealousy knows no bounds. After exterminating the rest of the human race, it intends to capture and experiment on you. If it succeeds, it will use a long and incredibly painful process to steal all of your powers, then continue on the Jumpchain in your place. It might even decide take you along with it as a “companion” (read: torture toy), forcing you to watch as it devastates one world after another. Needless to say, this will count as a loss condition.

After The Jump

If your nation is wiped out or you are personally killed, the Gauntlet is failed. This is not the same thing as dying during a normal Jump, and does not result in you being automatically sent home. Instead, you forfeit all rewards from this Gauntlet, and wake up in the next Jump unharmed except for a splitting headache and a recurring nightmare about nuclear annihilation, both of which fade with time. This also applies if you fail the Bonus Conditions from the Peace Sells, Killing is My Business, or Mad King drawbacks. This *doesn't* apply to the Aggressive Menace drawback, which has the potential to result in a chain-ending Fate Worse Than Death – if you come at AM, you'd better not miss.

Otherwise, the Gauntlet is considered successful. No one truly “wins” in a total nuclear exchange, but at least you lost the least. You get to keep all perks and items purchased in this Jump, and move on to the next one.

Either way, all drawbacks are automatically revoked and all suppressed powers are restored.

Notes

If you take the Adaptive Manipulator drawback while playing as NATO or the Soviet Bloc, AM has three processing Nexuses in enemy territory, one in neutral territory, one in friendly territory, and one in Near Earth Orbit.

Except as otherwise noted, technology in this world is consistent with that of the corresponding time period.