

# Twilight Song



*a map-and-story game  
for pastoral science fiction*  
by Speak the Sky

# PART #1

# BEARINGS

Read this part to:

*set your expectations of genre and mechanics*  
*identify the tools and space needed for play*  
*find advice for fair play experiences*





# What is This?

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**Twilight Song** is a pastoral map-drawing, story-telling game set in the near future in the twilight decades of humanity's era. Together, you will tell the story of an immortal narrator who lives among humanity in this time of change, wonder, and quiet loss. You'll flesh out their character, community, and world through telling little stories of their everyday life, all while drawing maps of both their home and the region around them. These maps are literal and symbolic, and you don't have to be an expert illustrator to play this game; any level of skill is welcome.

# What Do You Need?

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Twilight Song is a game for 3-4 players that takes 3-4 hours to play. You will need:

- ◆ a quiet place to play (as much as possible)
- ◆ an empty tabletop, free of distractions
- ◆ 3 pieces of A4/letter paper
- ◆ 3+ index cards (bring spares)
- ◆ pencils and erasers
- ◆ a deck of playing cards (without jokers)
- ◆ at least one copy of the Season Oracle, Interval Oracle, and Play Summary

You can find the Oracles freely available online here:  
*[speak-the-sky.itch.io/twilight-song](http://speak-the-sky.itch.io/twilight-song)*.





# *Restraint + Respect*

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## Respect creative control

On your turn, you have creative control: Your ideas become part of the story. On someone else's turn, they have creative control; you can ask questions or remind people of important things they may have missed, but otherwise, let them speak freely.

## Help ideas flourish

Each of you will develop different, overlapping views of who the narrator is and how the world is—that's completely fine and means the narrator and world will be complex. You can make this sing by harmonising with your fellow players. Use your turns to build on their ideas or draw attention to things you're interested in, and keep your turns a few minutes long, so there's always room for everyone's ideas to grow.

## Support each other in play

While *Twilight Song* doesn't touch on many subjects liable to be deeply uncomfortable for players, it does have a thematic focus on the passage of time. You can use the mechanics on the next page to control how light or dark your game becomes.

For further support, take a look at the **TTRPG Safety Toolkit** by *Kienna Shaw* and *Lauren Bryant-Monk*. The Toolkit is a compilation of safety tools designed by members of the TTRPG community for use by players and GMs, available here: [bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit](http://bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit).





# *SUPPORT MECHANICS*

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## Never Happened and Never Again

Take 1 sheet of paper. Write 'Never Happened' on the left and 'Never Again' on the right. These are lists that you can add to during setup and play. Anything added to **Never Happened** is removed from the past, but *can* happen again in the future. Anything added to **Never Again** still happened in the past, but *can't* happen or exist again in the future.


You can use these to shape your world and to remove subjects that keep you from enjoying the game. For example, if you don't want animals to be harmed, write "harm to animals" on Never Again; if you want the final spaceflight to have passed, or for the last domesticated dog to have turned feral, add those to Never Again. You can erase things *you* added, and you can tap a list and say what you want instead of writing it out.

## Check-ins

**Check-ins** are breaks in the game for you to check how everyone's doing and get refreshments. They last for as long you need, and you can call one at any time. Before setup, agree on a way anyone signal for a check-in.

## Switching the Oracles

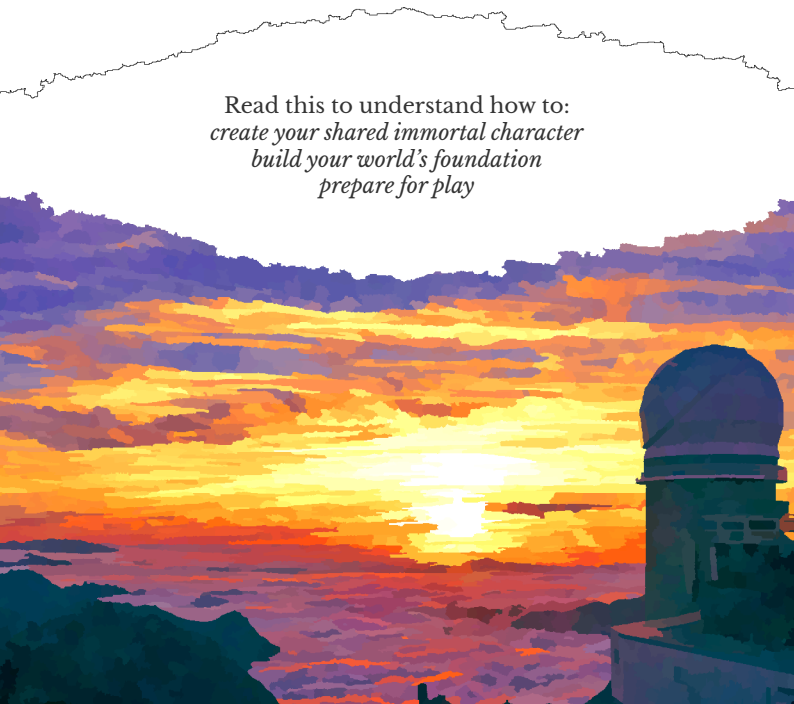
If you own **Midnight Signal**, then you can use its dark oracles on any turn instead of Twilight Song's oracles to avoid entries you don't want to add to your story, or add moments of contrast (e.g. light in the dark).



# PART #2

# SETUP

Read this to understand how to:  
*create your shared immortal character*  
*build your world's foundation*  
*prepare for play*





# *The World to Come*

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*Read this aloud to the group before beginning setup:*

Humanity thought they would go on growing, building forever into the bright blue sky. Now they know that's not true, but they're left with this: a twilight time of peace. All the time they need to live well, see children and grandchildren grow up, and understand the new world rising to take their place. When dawn comes, they may have vanished—or made a new place for themselves in the new light of day. For now, in these years, there is an opportunity to be together.

Who are you, then? You live alongside humanity, but you're different—immortal. Maybe you're a lab-grown or artificially-intelligent child of humanity, or perhaps you're something older or stranger that came out of the dark into the twilight. You live like them and with them, but time doesn't draw the same lines on your face. You're a chronicler, guide, witness, explorer, friend—this is your own immortal life to live as you see fit.





# Maps + Records

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During the game you'll use two maps and several index cards to keep a record of the world and the story.

Take **2 sheets of paper**. Write 'Home' in the corner of one and 'World' in the corner of the other. The **Home** sheet is where you'll draw a floor plan of the narrator's home; the **World** sheet is where you'll draw the region they live in, including the community they live in or near. You'll add a few details to each map before you begin, but leave them blank for now.

Take the **three index cards**. Write 'Plans', 'Characters', and 'Mood' at the top of each of them. The **Plans** card is where you will write and cross off the Plans your narrator makes during the story; the **Characters** card is where you will write the names, ages, and other key details of the characters you create in the human community; and the **Mood** card is where you will write the current Mood of the story. Write 'Old' on the Mood card to begin with. Have some additional cards ready in case you run out of space.

Take out the **Oracles** and the **Summary Card**. Keep them in a place where everyone can see, pick up, and read them during play.

If you are the **facilitator** of the game, explain what each sheet and card is for and explain that each player will need to draw on the map—they don't need to draw well, but they do need to draw, if possible.





# The Season Oracle

For this game you will need a standard deck of playing cards. Each suit corresponds to one of the four seasons:



Spring

*growth*

*discovery*

*preparation*



Summer

*relaxation*

*tumult*

*adventure*



Autumn

*travel*

*harvest*

*festivity*



Winter

*reflection*

*closeness*

*isolation*

Take the **deck of playing cards** and separate the cards of each suit from the cards of the other suits. Shuffle each suit separately and place them face-down, side by side, in season order. Keep them in a place where everyone can see and take from them.

If you're facilitating the game, explain that each deck corresponds to a different season and that the game ends after the turn on which the final card is drawn.

The themes listed above are prompts and suggestions, not restraints—you can play the game as you like.



# Who You Are

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You all play as a single immortal narrator. Sometimes you'll also take on the role of people they live with and other parts of the world around them. However, while you play a single character, this game is not meant to create a single dramatic storyline. Instead, it's meant to help you explore the everyday life and little adventures of the narrator over years and decades.

## Creating yourself


The narrator starts almost as a blank slate—discover who and what they are through play.

However, before the game begins you should each write one **Routine** the narrator has on the Plan card. This could be a long tradition, a hobby, an everyday ritual, etc. Mark it with an (R), then vote on which one the narrator still keeps to. They've fallen out of habit with the others—cross them off the list for now.

Finally, collectively decide the set of **pronouns** they use for themselves (e.g. they/them, she/her, he/him, it, this one). Anyone can add to the set: these are all new ways the narrator can express themselves.

## What 'you' means

This rules and the Oracles use the word 'you' to mean both you the players and 'you' the narrator. However, it can also include anyone the narrator grows close to. It's up to you to individually decide whether you feel that another character is close enough for that.





# Where You Live #1

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## Creating your home

The home is where you live, set apart somehow from the community, the bridge, and the city beyond. By default it's a house or flat or another ordinary type of building, but it could be something else entirely.

Going clockwise, take turns to draw a **room** or another place on this map. Connect each room after the first to the previous one. What shape is it? What's it used for? What doors and windows does it have? Label it then each add one thing to each new room after it's drawn. Draw new floors separately from previous ones. Each player can add up to two rooms during setup.

Here are some rooms and other places you might find: *bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, stairwell, library, basement, study, garage, porch, greenhouse, store-room, workroom, attic, garden, tower, studio, nook.*

You can draw in any way that you're all comfortable drawing, such as side-on, bird's-eye view, or isometric.

**Remember** that this is a place that someone lives in, and that the place someone lives in and calls home reflects who they are physically and psychologically. Make sure you cover all the necessities.





# Where You Live #2

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## Creating the wider world

During setup, you'll lay out the terrain on the region map, creating a canvas to draw on during the game.

What's the **scale** of the map? Discuss how big the physical parts of the map should be and how much space the community will occupy.

What sort of **region** is this? Discuss the land and the climate. It could be a temperate forest, a rocky steppe, a tropical island, etc. Don't draw these aspects on the map, though; they're part of the map itself.

Where and how is the **land divided**? Draw a clear natural or artificial border on the map. It could be a river, coastline, mountain ridge, railway line, canyon, forest tree-line, etc.

What **landmarks** dot the region? Take turns to draw one feature on the map. Say a little about what your feature is, then draw it on the map. It could be natural, like a forest glade, oasis, or the tallest point around, or artificial, like a circle of standing stones, disused observatory, or airport control tower.

What **remnants** dot the region? Take turns to draw one feature that used to be something else on the map. Each remnant has either lost its form or function (e.g. a road worn down to dust, flooded town, derelict ship), or transformed into something new (e.g. a new forest growing through a cracked and painted airstrip).





# Where You Live #3

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## Creating communities

Working together or dividing them among yourselves, decide where these four places are and draw them on the World map:

- ◆ your home
- ◆ the local community
- ◆ the bridge
- ◆ the city beyond

The **community** is where most of the locals live and work. It could be an old farming village, island shrine town, town around a single factory, settlement around an airfield, etc. This is where you'll find people, unless they're out in nature or off elsewhere. Discuss and decide what sort of place this is before you draw it on the map.

The **bridge** is the connection to the wider world. It could be a literal bridge, train station, fuel station, food cart in a highway tunnel, café on the road, etc. It's an in-between place on the way to the city beyond, and someone lives (or at least works) there. Discuss and decide what sort of place this is before you draw it on the map.

The **city beyond** is a major settlement off the edge of the map. It's not what it once was—it's both less and more. Leave it undefined for now, but indicate which direction it lies in. You can always visit it later.



# PART #3

# PLAY

Read this to understand how to:  
*use your tools to play the game turn by turn*  
*build on each other's creative contributions*  
*advance the long-term story*





# On Your Turn

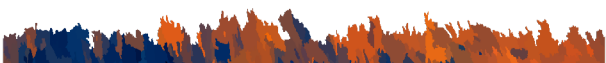
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Twilight Song is split into story years, which are split into seasons, which are split into turns. Each turn is played by one player, and the next turn is always taken by the player to their left (clockwise). Turns don't represent fixed units of time—one could cover a week, the next a day, the one after that a month. You're free to create an unrealistic passage of time, as well; any season can last for as long as you want, provided there are cards left to draw from its deck.

On your turn, take these actions in order:

- ◆ **First**, draw a card from the current or next season's deck, read the corresponding Season Oracle entry aloud, resolve its story prompt, and place the card face-up in front of the season's deck (on top of the other cards from that season, if there are any).
- ◆ **Second**, if there are any available (uncrossed) Plans or Routines on the Plan card, you can choose to act on one of them. Describe how, then cross it off the list or mark it as a Routine (if it's already a Routine, you can cross it off or leave it as it is).
- ◆ **Third**, take an action of your own choice, on top of any action prompted by the Season Oracle: **Open Your Senses**, **Learn Something**, or **Make a Plan**.

After you take your own action, play passes clockwise to the next player. The game ends after the turn on which the final card is drawn.





# Drawing Cards

After you draw the card, find the corresponding entry in the **Season Oracle**. Read it aloud. Each entry is a prompt that advances the story. Most offer a choice of two options separated by 'OR...'—in that case, pick one and ignore the other.


**Respond** to the prompt by narrating what it describes, answering any questions it asks, and taking any extra actions it tells you to (marked in **bold**) on top of your normal action. Draw on the maps and write on the cards you need to show any new details or changes caused by the prompt or your response.

## Seasons and years

Each card belongs to a suit that corresponds to a season. You can either stay in the **same** season on your turn (draw from the *same* season's deck) or move time **forward** one season (draw from the *next* season's deck). This means each season lasts between 1 and 13 turns.

In the **final** season of the year, you can either stay in that season or continue to the **Years Between** (read the Years Between section later and take your turn using those rules instead of the normal rules).

When a season **runs out** of cards, remove it from the order of the seasons. For example, if there are no more Summer cards left, continue from Spring to Autumn. If there are no more Winter cards left, continue from Autumn to the Years Between.







# Acting on Plans

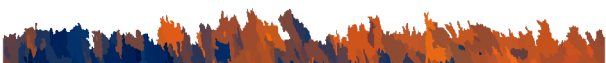
After resolving the oracle's prompt, you can choose up to act on one uncrossed Plan or Routine from the list.

**Narrate** how you act on the plan. Think about these questions, most or all of which have probably already been established when the Plan was first made:

- ◆ **What** are you doing?
- ◆ **Who** are you doing it with? Are you alone?
- ◆ **When** is it happening? What time of day, and what else happens around that time?
- ◆ **Where** is it happening? Is it all in one place, several places, or on the move?
- ◆ **Why** are you doing it? Is it an end in itself, or leading on to something else?
- ◆ **How** does it make you feel?

You can use them as questions to answer explicitly or implicitly, or just as inspiration for your own narration. **Draw** on either or both maps to show any new details or developments, or simply the fact that you carried out the Plan.

Finally, choose: cross the Plan or Routine off the list or leave it open. If you leave a Plan open, place an (R) next to it to show that it's a new Routine.





# Open Your Senses

*Wander through a forest during the morning chorus. Sit by the shore at dusk and smell the salt air. Ask for suggestions for parting gifts for your lover. Speculate with friends about the massive, bird-shaped aircraft that soars high above your town every four years. There are so many things to experience, and so many people to listen to.*

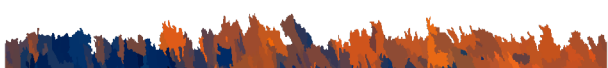
**Open Your Senses** is one of the three main actions you can take on your turn. First, briefly say where you go and what's happening there. Then, each other player describes something the narrator senses. Think of the main five senses, as well as any others that make sense. Each response should be brief—only 1-2 sentences.

For example, you might say: “I go to the market at high noon.” Your fellow players might say: “you see vividly-coloured sunlight filtered through the awnings”; “you smell the mingling aromas of spices”; and “you hear the hum of an electric bus dropping off its passengers.”

Use this to explore the physical experience of being in a place in this region, with others or alone, and to understand what that feels like.

## **Listen to People**

Instead of simply experiencing the world, the narrator can **ask** a question and receive **answers**. If you choose this, then say what question you ask. Each other player chooses or creates a character to answer it and gives a short answer from their point of view.





# Learn Something

*The world is wider, deeper, and stranger than you know. Everyone has more sides to them than you anticipate. Your own nature is still something of a mystery. There are always opportunities to understand more.*

**Learn Something** is one of the three main actions you can take on your turn. Introduce a situation involving or a fact about someone, somewhere, or something, even yourself. Draw on either or both maps to show this new knowledge and understanding.

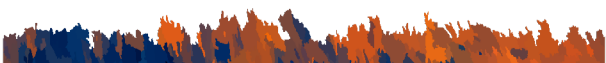
Use this to deepen our understanding of who and where you are, and to create new mysteries that you may or may not come to fully comprehend.

## Follow the Mood

The way you see the world affects what you can learn, and changes over time. In this game, that changing worldview is called **Mood**. There are eight Moods:

Old	Vibrant	Solemn	Beautiful
New	Tranquil	Joyous	Strange

Always **add** the current Mood to the end of Learn Something to guide your action. For example, if the Mood is Tranquil, you can Learn Something Tranquil. You might stumble upon a peaceful place while hiking, see someone napping in their rowboat offshore, or find peace with an uncertain part of yourself.





# Make a Plan

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*There's so much to do, and still so much time. Places to go, journeys to cross, people to meet, hobbies to enjoy, skills to master, loved ones to accompany. There's so much that you're better off making a list before you make your plans.*


**Make a Plan** is one of the three main actions you can take on your turn. Come up with a plan for something to do. Give the plan a name and write it down on the Plan list. Add any details you think would be useful, such as a particular place, person, or season.

Use this to explore the narrator's choices and routines, both everyday ones and the momentous decisions, and show how they interact with other people.

## Keep a Routine

Sometimes a Plan is a one-off—an adventure, a single date, an unusual shopping trip—and sometimes it's something you want to keep on doing until it becomes a hobby, tradition, or just part of your regular life. This decision is when a Plan becomes a **Routine**.

Routines remain **uncrossed** on the list, so anyone can act on them on their turn. Not only that, you can always involve any Routine in your narration, even if you're not acting on it. You can also assume that you're regularly doing them even if you're not describing them. If you think that the narrator will stop keeping a Routine, you can cross it off on your turn. You can do this whether or not you act on it one last time.





# *The Years Between*

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This game is divided into story years, but there are gaps between them. If you start your turn in the year's final season then you can take a normal turn in that season or take a turn to cover the Years Between. The **earliest** season with the **highest** face-up card tells you how much time passes on your turn:

- ◆ **Spring:** the last night and first dawn pass
- ◆ **Summer:** a few years pass
- ◆ **Autumn:** around a decade passes
- ◆ **Winter:** a generation passes

On this turn, take the following actions in this order (you can divide them among all players if you like):

- ◆ **First**, consult the Interval Oracle. Pick one option from each list up to and including your interval, e.g. if a few years pass, pick one from each of the 'one night' and 'a few years' lists. Briefly narrate each event that happens in the Years Between and change maps and cards as needed.
- ◆ **Second**, you can act on one Plan or Routine during the Years Between, as on a normal turn.
- ◆ **Third**, the characters grow older. Some may pass away; others may have been born or arrived. Add, change, and remove characters as you decide.

Turn all face-up cards face-down. Run a **check-in** and alter the **Never lists**, if you choose. Pass play clockwise. The next player draws from the first season.



# PART #4

# GUIDANCE

Find here:

*inspirations and credits for the game*  
*suggestions for alternate game modes*  
*a coda for your twilight song*





# About this Game

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Twilight Song is a hack of **The Quiet Year** by *Avery Alder* and its main inspiration is **Yokohama Shopping Log** by *Ashinano Hitoshi*. Other inspirations include:


- ◆ Isaki of the Cub, Kotonoba Drive (*Ashinano Hitoshi*)
- ◆ Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (*Miyazaki Hayao*)
- ◆ many *Studio Ghibli* films
- ◆ BLAME!, Biomega (*Nihei Tsutomu*)
- ◆ Kino's Journey (*Sigsawa Keiichi*)
- ◆ The Music of Marie (*Furuya Usamaru*)
- ◆ Mushi-shi (*Urushibara Yuki*)
- ◆ The Moon and the Bonfires (*Cesare Pavese*)
- ◆ the illustrations and paintings of *Jacek Yerka*
- ◆ the short fiction of *Bruno Schulz*
- ◆ the music of *Eluvium*, *Toh Kay*, and *Joe Hisaishi*

With thanks to my playtesters: 'Tyrannosaurus', 'Fathis Munk', 'Aesculus', and others; and *Dee Pennyway*, 'BESW', and 'Noser' for layout advice.

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# *Alternative Modes*

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## Play by post


Twilight Song is turn-based, so it adapts well to being played when the players aren't all in the same place at the same time (e.g. on a forum or discord server). If so, you can play normally (narrating and describing events and actions as they happen on your turn), but with the freedom that extra time gives you, you can also play it as an **epistolary** game, with each player writing their turn as a letter written by the narrator and sent to a known or unknown recipient.

## Continuous time

This game jumps from one year to another with gaps of time from a day to a generation between them, but you can play a more focused story that runs directly from one year to the next. To do so, treat all Years Between turns as lasting for **one night only**.

## Speeding twilight

While a full game of Twilight Song can run to 4 or more hours including setting up and winding down, you can speed up the game by removing cards from each suit. To do this, **remove** 2-4 cards from each season's deck while shuffling them during setup. The more cards you remove, the fewer turns the game will last. You don't have to remove any particular cards, but you should remove them at random.







# *Weird, Wild Worlds*

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A normal game of Twilight Song starts in a world approximately like our own, around a generation or two after our present time, with some stranger fantasy or sci-fi elements around the edges and in the shadows. Those elements may become more prominent or everyday as the story goes on. You should use the first two years, and the Years Between, to establish how much the world you're creating is like our own, and change it from there.

However, you can also begin from a much stranger starting point, such as a colony on an alien planet, a fantasy world through an old wardrobe, or an ever-expanding far-future mega-city. If you want to play in a world like that, then discuss it with your everyone during setup. If you play in an unusual setting you may need to creatively interpret some oracle prompts.

## *Twilight Coda*

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After the final turn, all conversational limits are lifted. You can freely discuss the story and speculate on the fates of the narrator, and their community and world. However, before then you can create an epilogue to your story: each take **one last turn** Between Years, choosing any of the four timespans as you like. Do not change the maps or cards. Play these last turns as brief, fleeting impressions of the future.



A stone archway, constructed from dark grey and brown stones, frames a view of a landscape. The landscape features a bright yellow field in the foreground, a line of green trees in the middle ground, and a blue sky with white clouds. The archway is surrounded by lush green foliage and trees. The overall scene is framed by a dark, textured border.

*Thank you for reading,  
and I hope you enjoy playing too.*

*If you like, share your worlds with me:  
[twitter.com/SpeaktheSky](https://twitter.com/SpeaktheSky)  
[speakthesky@gmail.com](mailto:speakthesky@gmail.com)*