

# Escape from Prince Charming

## An Appetizer RPG, Fairy Tale, and an Iron Game Chef Entry for 2006

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### Forward

This RPG is the first in the Full Course of Love and Death. As an appetizer it prepares the players for the main courses to come. As such it need not be played with any special constraints for enjoyment of the full course. Instead just pick characters and begin playing. When you are done, any character, human or otherwise who died can be played in Someone to Love, the first of the main courses. Like all games in this Full Course, Escape from Prince Charming is intended for five players.

As a game designed for Iron Game Chef 2006, it is necessary to discuss the allotments made for that contest. Indeed, for the theme of time, Escape from Prince Charming fulfills the three sessions of 3 hours each requirement. And it uses the following contest terms: Glass, Committee, and Ancient.

### Fairy Tales

As a genre fairy tales seem strange to modern sensibilities, especially the traditional tales where the most disturbing details remain. Often tragic or capricious, the fairy tale hears to an different sort of logic than the

hero's story. Cruelty is common, from antagonists and protagonists alike. In a way, beneath all the magic, wonder, and monsters, the fairy tale offers an impartial view of the real world. And that view is as horrific as it is beautiful.

Escape from Prince Charming is based on these traditional fairy tales. The players take on the roles of fair princesses, seeking to escape their fate and risking their lives and the lives of others to escape it. But like the fairy tale, the endings have already been written, it's only a matter of finding which one you get.

### Telling the Tale

A session of Escape from Prince Charming on its face seems more like a card game than a RPG. A session consists of three hands of trick taking, and each hand consists of ten tricks. At the start of each hand, one player, who was chosen as the dealer, shuffles a normal 52-card deck and deals out ten cards to each player, setting the rest aside. Starting with the dealer, each player plays a card in the center of the table, and then passes to the player on their right. When each player

has played one card, the trick is examined, and the player who first played the highest card in the trick wins the trick, and collects those cards. If there is a trump suit, then all cards of that suit are considered higher than all cards in other suits. The next trick begins with a card played by the winner of the previous one.

What makes this different from a simple card game is that the winner of each trick gets to narrate a short scene of the Princess' escape from captivity. The specific type of scene is determined by the high card that won the trick.

- **Hearts** - A trick won by this suit gives a scene of character development, where both the winner's princess and that princess' prince are described in more detail. This gives an additional detail of both the princess and the prince. The first detail of the prince is always his name, and the second is the type of glass accessory the prince received from the Royal Committee to track and capture the princess. Details of the prince can come from many sources, from missives, cut scenes of the prince, or dreams and visions.
- **Diamonds** - This suit indicates the princesses overcoming adversity or otherwise improving their situation. While a diamonds scene usually cannot add new details, they frequently clarify existing ones. In the case that a princess has not yet won a hearts or diamonds trick, a diamonds trick may be used as a heart trick. Under no circumstances may this scene be used to defeat the dragon, the ancient dark, or the princes, those events are determined by the Endings.
- **Spades** - This suit indicates the appearance of adversity and obstacles.

This scene describes a new problem or hurdle that the princesses must overcome to escape their plight.

- **Clubs** - This suit indicates the rising of adversity and danger, as existing obstacles heighten. The scene should incorporate an existing problem, and add more detail or danger. If no obstacles have yet been described this session, a clubs trick may be used as a spades trick.

At the end of each hand, each player counts the number cards they won whose suit matches the scoring suits of the session. The first session, the Castle, scores only clubs. The second session, the Wilds, scores only spades. In the final session, the Town, all suits are scored separately. These scores accumulate over all three hands of the sessions, and determine both who narrates the Ending, and which princess will achieve which outcome, during that narration.

## The Royal Committee

The Royal Committee was instituted several hundred years ago by various supernatural beings who routinely interacted with princes and princesses. They decided that something ought to be done to ensure minimum fairness qualities among the princesses, as well as ensuring that princes were sufficiently charming. This was as much a safety matter as an aesthetic one, as fair and charming are not qualities that great beasts and immortal witches consider that threatening. The events of Escape from Prince Charming show how wrong they were.

## The Princesses

The main characters of Escape from Prince Charming are princesses who are slated to be

married to a duly appointed prince within the month. They have lived within the Dragon's Castle since they were very young, indeed since they were inducted as royal princesses by the Royal Committee. Since then they have been raised by the servants of the castle. Through their fairness and beauty, they have the unwavering loyalty of the humans and animals within the castle. But the keys to their prison are of sorcery and draconic cunning.

## The Princes

While the princess is the main character, the prince is a short second. As the princess develops, so to does her prince. Officially princes are selected based solely on their charm. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Royal Committee is rife with corruption, and the selection of princes is especially prone to graft. Princes have almost certainly paid quite a bit to be guaranteed a beautiful princess. As part of the contract, each prince has received a small glass object which can only be worn by the princess promised to them.

This object is the glass accessory, it may be a shoe, a necklace, a ring, or a hair comb, but it is always a typical female fashion accessory. And it is always made out of pure glass. All of these objects were crafted by the glass djinn, a fire demon and member of the Royal Committee, and they are tied to the princess. As long as the glass accessory remains whole it will unfailingly lead to the princess, whether she be alive, consumed, or even dead. The only true escape is to destroy the accessory.

## The Dragon

One of the more recent members of the Royal Committee, the dragon is a beast of enormous power and precise appetite. While it realizes that the princesses are promised to princes,

it intends to have at least one of them for its meal. And it will not let the princesses escape until it has his due. The dragon knows that servants of the castle are merely pawns of the princesses, so it has constructed elaborate magical and mundane defenses. Outside the castle, the dragon has been more direct in controlling its lands. Nearly all the humans in the area have already been bent to its will.

At the end of the first session, the dragon will claim one of the princesses. But to be consumed by a dragon is not like being eaten by beasts, for dragons have a more refined metabolism, slowly consuming and absorbing the very soul of its prey. This process is slow and exquisite for both the dragon and its meal. Hence the dragon will consume only the most refined souls, and has been cultivating the princesses for just this reason.

As a result, the player whose princess has been consumed by the dragon continues to play the remaining two sessions, as the consumed princess, as well as the dragon itself. When narrating tricks the dragon player also controls the humans found both in the wilds and the town.

## The Ancient Dark

The last major character of *Escape from Prince Charming* is the ancient dark. It was a founding member of the Royal Committee, long since retired within the wilds, a place of nature and madness. Its wilds are within the dragon's lands, and are inhabited by all manner of beasts and ruffians. When the ancient dark appears it usually takes the form of an old witch, but the darkness is as old as the wild, and will live for as long as the wilds do.

The ancient dark requires a tithe from all who pass through the wilds. And when the princesses pass through its domain, the tithe it will claim is one of them. That princess will be trapped in the wilderness, to become the apprentice of the ancient dark. She is

forever separate from other humans, but her whispers are still heard by the beasts and the forces of nature.

In this way, the princess who is given to the dark is still played in the last session, but now as darkness. When narrating tricks the ancient dark player controls the beasts found in the town, as well as having the power to narrate changes in the nature world.

## In Three Acts

Unlike many RPGs, *Escape from Prince Charming* is built to be played with three distinct sessions. Each of these acts is set in a different location. First, the dragon's castle, where the princesses were raised. Second, the darkened wilds, where the ancient dark will demand a tithe from the princesses. Third, the committee town, where the princes lie in wait, and where in the end fates will be revealed.

### The Dragon's Castle

The first session occurs within the buildings and grounds of the dragon's castle. A sprawling complex, the princesses are intimately familiar with it, having lived there for most of their lives. And now they are attempting to escape it.

Each session is constructed of three hands of cards, each with a different trump suit. For the castle the first trump is hearts. This hand is an opportunity to develop the princesses further, as well as detailing their princes. During this hand the princesses are deciding to flee, and investigating how they can. The second hand has spades as trump. This hand is when the obstacles appear, and the hidden defenses of the dragon are made apparent. Things go from bad to worse, as the third hand has clubs as trump, leading to the obstacles in the prior hand spinning out of

control. In the end, only the dragon can let the princesses escape, and it demands a price.

At the end of each hand during the first session, players count the clubs they have won as points. On the last hand, players count the total points of all three hands, and the player with the most points narrates a final scene as his or her princess is eaten by the dragon and the remaining princesses escape to the wilds. If there are any ties they are broken by the highest club won in the last hand.

### The Darkened Wilds

The second session occurs in the wilds, a collection of different wilderness seemingly thrown together without organization. Swamps lead to tall mountains, savanna and deep woods lie side by side. Passage through the wilds is not merely a journey from one edge to the other, it is entirely at the whim of the ancient dark.

In the wilds, the first trump card is diamonds. This afford the princesses a chance to find some comfort and search for allies and assistance. But this peace is short lived, as the second trump suit is clubs. The forces who stood against the princesses have found their trail and the pursuit has begun. Lastly the third trump is spades as a new threat arises in the form of the ancient dark. It has finally taken notice of the princesses, and has awakened the beasts of the wild to keep them from escaping. In the end, only by dealing with the ancient dark will the wilds ever be escaped.

At the end of each hand during the second session, players count the spades they have won as points. On the last hand, players count the total points of all three hands, and the non-dragon player with the most points narrates a final scene as his or her princess is taken forever by the ancient dark and the remaining princesses escape to the town. If there are any ties they are broken by the highest spade won in the last hand.

## The Committee's Town

The final session occurs within the committee's town, a small city within the dragon's territory where the Royal Committee holds its meeting each decade. It is here that the princes have chosen to await their would-be brides. It is a busy place with many people coming and going, but the princes attract a great deal of attention, and shortly after arriving so will the princesses.

In the town, the first trump is hearts. This gives the princesses a chance to spy on the princes while remaining undiscovered. The second trump is diamonds, and with this hand, the princes become aware of the princesses, and the real conflict begins. But the last hand is special, for during that hand anything can happen, as the dragon and the dark become even more embroiled in the business in town. On that last hand, there is no trump. The first high card always wins the trick.

At the end of each hand during the third session, players count the number of each suit they have won as separate points. Once the last hand is played the players count once more, and then a final round of narration begins, starting with the dealer, and passing to the right. During this last narration the player describes the fate of their princess and prince. The outcome is determined by the most numerous suit collected during this final session. If that suit is hearts, the princess is married, likely unhappily, to the prince. If that suit is diamonds, the princess slays her prince, and is then killed for her murderous

act. If the suit is spades, the princess is killed by her prince. And lastly, if the suit is clubs, then the princess shatters her glass accessory and flees to safety.

This outcome applies even if the princess has already become the dragon or the ancient dark. For example, with spades for the dragon player, the prince may slay the dragon, or for hearts, the prince may subdue the dragon and free the princess, or become the dragon's slave. Likewise if there is a tie, the player may choose which outcome to narrate, or to mix the two. This is an opportunity to place a special twist on the tale, embrace it.

## The End

While it seems that *Escape from Prince Charming* is a game with a way to win, it is more a game with many ways to win. Seek the ending which captures your imagination. Do you want to be the princess trapped in the wilds as her prince burns them down in the hapless attempt to find her? Then seek out as many spades as you can. Do you want to be the dragon who escapes to ravage the countryside? Then seek out the clubs instead.

*Escape from Prince Charming* is a game with many limitations. But these limitations open doorways to new takes on the tale. One game could focus on the medieval fantasy tropes, another with a more arabian nights flair, and a third could delve deeply into science fiction. The choices are yours, even if the end always comes, one way or another.

# The Fairy Tale

## Narrating Suits

- **Hearts** - Add detail to princess and prince.
- **Diamonds** - Expand on details or overcome obstacle.
- **Spades** - New obstacle or adversity.
- **Clubs** - Expand on adversity, heighten danger.
- **Special** - First red suited trick for a princess is always hearts, first black suited trick for a session is always spades.

## Acts and Scenes

- Session 1 - the Castle
  - Hand 1 - Deciding to Escape - Hearts Trump
  - Hand 2 - Leaving the Castle - Spades Trump
  - Hand 3 - Passing the Dragon - Clubs Trump
  - Ending - One is Eaten - Clubs
- Session 2 - the Wilds
  - Hand 1 - Searching for Help - Diamonds Trump
  - Hand 2 - The Pursuit - Clubs Trump
  - Hand 3 - The Beasts Arise - Spades Trump
  - Ending - One is Lost - Spades
- Session 3 - the Town
  - Hand 1 - Encountering the Princes - Hearts Trump
  - Hand 2 - Confrontations - Diamonds Trump
  - Hand 3 - Fates Revealed - No Trump
  - Ending - Married - Hearts
  - Ending - Executed - Diamonds
  - Ending - Slain - Spades
  - Ending - Freed - Clubs

# Princess Sheet

Player Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Princess Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Details: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Prince Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Glass Accessory: \_\_\_\_\_

Prince Details: \_\_\_\_\_  
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The Castle - Clubs: \_\_\_\_\_

The Wilds - Spades: \_\_\_\_\_

The Town - Hearts: \_\_\_\_\_

The Town - Diamonds: \_\_\_\_\_

The Town - Clubs: \_\_\_\_\_

The Town - Spades: \_\_\_\_\_