

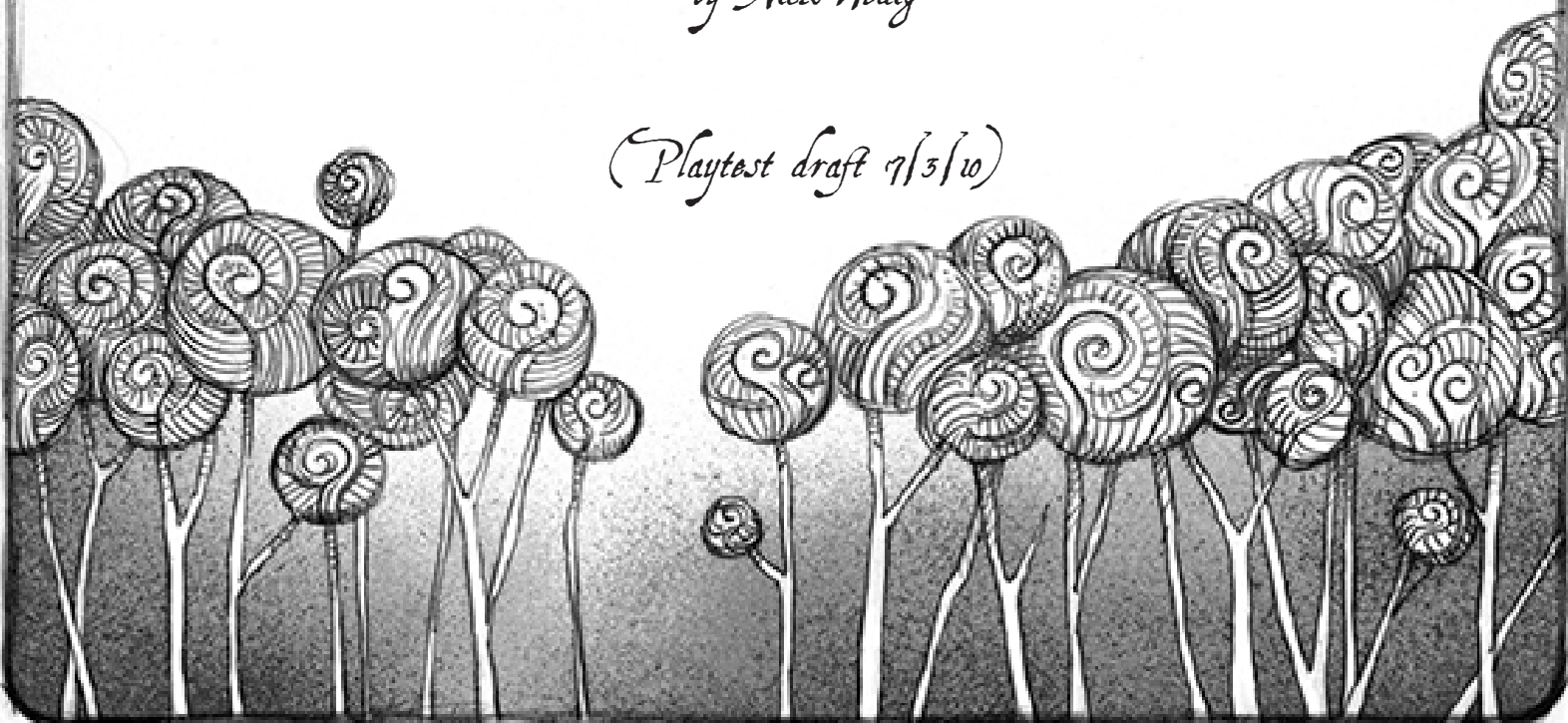


House of Masks

*A Roleplaying Game of Secrets and Sorcery,
Power and Greed, Violence and Revenge*

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(Playtest draft 7/3/10)



1: Single Sentence Summary:

Six players switch in and out tag-team style to play three predefined characters in a complex, randomized web of intrigue and sorcery.



1. SINGLE SENTENCE SUMMARY
2. OVERVIEW
3. SETUP
4. CHARACTER
5. THALIA AND MELPOMENE
6. CASTOR AND POLLUX
7. INANNA AND KUR
8. SWITCHING
9. CONFLICTS
 - a. Boons in Conflicts
 - b. Man versus Nature
 - c. Three or more Sided Conflicts
10. BOONS
11. NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS
12. DESIGN NOTES
13. GLOSSARY
14. CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE



2. Overview:

In a far off land where mighty sorcerers dwell, the God-King Castor rules from a castle where the spirit realm and physical realm touch, allowing for powerful magics to happen and for a person's spirit form to take control of one's body. On the eve of Castor's wedding to the foreign princess Inanna, a mysterious peasant woman named Thalia comes knocking on the palace door...

Each of six players play Aspects (*either the "real world" or "spirit world" form*) of one of three predefined player characters (PCs). Each player can take control of the PC under specific conditions.

Each player has a randomized goal, which will likely conflict with the other PCs and possibly conflict with the player of the other aspect of their PC. There are three decks of goals (*one for each character*) with three goals in each deck. Each goal is identified with a symbolic image: a hand with a Key in it (*representing Secrets and Magic*), a hand wrapped in a Necklace (*representing Greed and Power*), or a hand holding a drop of Blood (*representing Violence and Revenge*).

Beyond the initial setup phase of the game, characters have almost complete freedom to act. They are only constrained by their imaginations and the other players. When two characters oppose one another, the players use the conflict rules, which are tremendously simple and flexible. One player (called the *Objector*) sets two possible outcomes that could happen to the opposed characters. The other player in the conflict (called the *Actor*) then applies one of these outcomes to their character and one to the Objector's character.

Two cards called *Boons* grant special privileges to their holders. The *Boon of Beginnings* allows the holder to frame scenes. The *Boon of Endings* allows the holder to call for the end of a scene. Either Boon can be used to activate a character's sorcerous abilities. In a conflict, these magical powers can be used to reject the stakes set by an Objector and set new stakes. After any use of a Boon, the user gives the Boon away to some other player (which other player depends on how the Boon is used).

3. Setup:

Before playing, at least one of the players should read the complete rules of the game. If additional players also read the rules, things will likely go smoother, but most players should know enough to play by just having read the Overview section above.

This game requires exactly six players. Once we've had the chance to playtest the core game, I might develop rules to allow for smaller or larger groups. But at the current time, six players is a necessary constraint of play. Each player should select one of the Aspects of one of the three predefined player characters. Each player should also randomly select a Goal card from the deck appropriate to their Character.

At the start of the game, Inanna, Thalia and Castor are all counted as **In**. Melpomene, Pollux and Kur are counted as **Out**. Thalia begins with the **Boon of Beginnings** in her possession, and Pollux begins with the **Boon of Endings**.

Note:

Examples throughout the text use the same example players and characters and goals, though they are not all from the same play session. They use the same players and goals each time to hopefully make them easier to keep track of, but they aren't from the same play-through of the game so that I can talk about devastating stakes like death and exile and mutilation, which would quickly eliminate players from the game.

4. Characters:

Each of the three player characters in the game has two “**Aspects**”. An Aspect is either the real world form of the character or the spirit form of the character. Each player picks one Aspect of a given Player Character to play. The two players that control Aspects of the same PC alternate control of that PC by switching In and Out. The “In” player controls the PC, while the “Out” player merely observes. Players witch “In” and “Out” status under specific conditions (*see section 8. Switching, page 10*).

Normally, a person’s spirit form is just a vague urging in the back of their mind. Good spirit forms act like a characters conscience, but bad ones act like that urge you get to leap off a tall building. In Castor’s palace, though, a person’s spirit form is more powerful, and can take control of a person’s body.

Though it is immediately apparent to the players which Aspect of a character is in control, it is not apparent to the characters. Using sorcery or other skills might make it possible to identify which Aspect controls a character, though. If you are about to act upon knowledge of which Aspect is in control, pause a moment and consider if acting differently would be more interesting or if you can explain how your character acquired that knowledge via magic or similar means. Each character has a mask that allows them communication with their spirit form, and changes to symbolically reflect the Aspect of the character which is Out.

Example

Amber is playing Thalia, who has the Goal of trying to acquire wealth and power. Thalia knows that one of Castor’s Aspects is in love with her, but when she meets Castor in the palace gardens, she doesn’t know which Aspect is currently in control even though Amber can see which player is in control of Castor. So Thalia doesn’t know if the Castor she faces now loves her or not, and so she plays coy until she can learn more. Amber could instead have chosen to try to steal or sneak a peek at Castor’s spirit mask, but decided that would likely lead to a conflict.

Character Goals:

At the beginning of play, each player randomly selects a random Goal card from the deck of their character. They then should try to achieve this Goal in game to the best of their ability. There is no particular mechanical reward for achieving your Goal, though, except for being able to claim victory over your peers.

Example

Brian is playing Melpomene. At the start of play, he draws Thalia’s Blood Goal: “You wish to get revenge on Inanna, whose nation exterminated your mermaid race.” As Brian maneuvers through the game, he gets in a conflict with Inanna, and in the end of the conflict Inanna lies dead. Brian cheers for achieving his goal, but this victory gives no mechanical benefit to him.

Magic:

Each of the player characters is a wielder of powerful magics. Thalia knows the strange folk magicks of the extinct mermaid race. Inanna was trained by the finest foreign sorcery tutors. Castor wields mighty power through his magical scepter. Each character holds an enchanted mask that allows them to communicate with their spirit form. In Castor’s palace, this mask shifts to symbolically represent the Aspect of the character currently Out of control. These masks could be used to identify which Aspect is in control, and if stolen could be used as a direct magical connection to the character.

To use their character's sorcerous abilities, a player must currently possess a Boon (*see section 10, page 15*). The player can then narrate their character using the magical abilities described in their character's section. They then give the Boon to the player of Out Aspect of one of the affected characters. In a conflict, magic can be used to rewrite the stakes of the conflict (*see section 9, page 11*). In this case, the Boon is given to the other player in the conflict.

Each player character's magic has a keyword. The keyword is there to temper their magic, and to provide guidance to narrating their magic. These keywords primarily are provided for inspiration and to slightly limit the power of magic. When describing using arcane spells, explain how the magical ritual ties into your character's keyword. Thalia's magic is based on the Past, Castor's on the Present and Inanna's on the Future. Kur's magic is that of Creation, Melpomene's the magic of Preservation and Castor's the magic of Destruction.

Aspects:

Each character is composed of two Aspects. The player of your PC's other Aspect is probably more important to you than any other player in the game. If you can make an alliance with that player, then the two of you can work together to achieve your goals. If you are opposed to your other Aspect, then you will be vulnerable. After all, half the time the other Aspect is in control, and can risk the PC's life and limb to achieve their goals. If you are friendly to your fellow Aspect, they might listen if you ask them to step away from violent conflicts.

When in a conflict, some outcomes might apply to both Aspects of a character. Some might only apply to one. Some of the time it might be unclear to whom the stakes apply. In this case, you should ask the person setting the stakes if it applies to one or both Aspects. You can ask this even if you're sitting Out of the actual conflict, and have no other say in the conflict. Most of the time, things that apply to the physical body affect both Aspects (as they are switching between control of the same physical form), but mental effects or magical ones might only affect one Aspect or the other. The person setting the stakes decides which outcome affects which Aspect.

Example

Oscar is sitting Out while playing Pollux. Chris is In playing Castor. When Amber proposes the stakes of "One of us is driven insane, the other loses their magical ability until the next full moon." Oscar is interested in this, as either might affect his character. He asks which stakes affect which Aspects, and Amber decides that two outcomes should both affect both Aspects or both affect only one Aspect. Amber declares that both outcomes only apply to Castor, but not to Pollux.

5. Thalia and Melpomene



The last surviving mermaid witch, Thalia claims to have returned from the dead. The mermaids were all killed in the last war by armies from Inanna's nation. Using sorcery, Thalia has temporarily taken on her spirit side Melpomene's form of a human to meet with King Castor and Lady Inanna.

If Thalia ever expresses sadness, failure or regret, Melpomene takes control. If Melpomene ever expresses joy, victory or satisfaction, Thalia switches in.

Example

Amber is playing Thalia, and wishes to acquire wealth and power by any means. When Inanna tries to seduce Castor, Amber proposes a conflict with the stakes "Castor really loves one of us, but will marry the other" (hoping that Inanna chooses love over marriage). When Inanna picks marriage over love, Amber narrates Thalia being unhappy at the marriage, and Melpomene (played by Brian) takes control.

Magic:

Thalia's magic is the magic of the **Past**. She can see the past, speak with the dead, and even make minor alterations to what happened in the past.

Melpomene's magic is the magic of **Preservation**. She can neither create nor destroy nor change, but can maintain things as they are and protect things from harm.

Goals:

KEY: Wishes to steal Castor's magical scepter and gain his magic power.

NECKLACE: Wishes to acquire wealth and great power, possibly by marrying Castor.

BLOOD: Wishes to get revenge on Inanna, whose nation exterminated the mermaid race.

Sidebar

The fish pictured with Thalia and Melpomene is a coelacanth, a type of prehistoric fish long thought to be extinct. Therefore, coelacanths are symbolic of return from the dead and a connection to the past.

6. Castor and Pollux



The self-proclaimed God-King of the nation, Castor is suave and cool. His spirit form Pollux is bestial, crude, violent and easily angered. Castor controls a vast kingdom through his mighty armies and arcane power. His armies have just won a long war against Inanna's homeland. Tomorrow's marriage to Inanna will mark the end of war between their two lands.

When Castor expresses anger or frustration, Pollux takes control. When Pollux shows restraint, or calculation, Castor takes control.

Example

Oscar is playing Pollux, who is smitten with Thalia though betrothed to Inanna. When Inanna makes him vow to execute Thalia the next time he sees her; he agrees, but then blinds himself as soon as Inanna is gone. He thus never sees Thalia, and can let her live while abiding by the vow. But in doing so, he shows cunning and calculation and so lets Castor (played by Chris) take control.

Magic:

Castor's magic is keyed off of the **Present**. All effects of Castor's magic is purely temporary, and cannot affect anything outside his immediate presence.

Pollux's magic is magic of **Destruction**. He has no ability to create new things, but can only destroy objects, emotions and ideas.

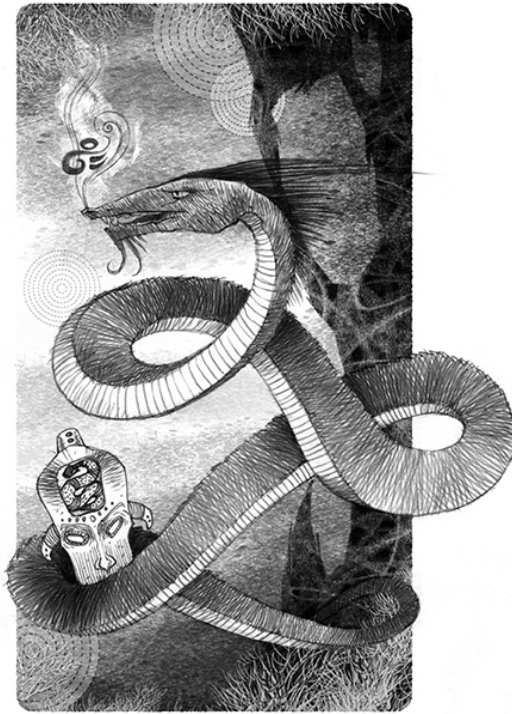
Goals:

KEY: Wishes to strip Thalia of her magical powers so that he can return from the dead, as she did, and therefore rule his kingdom forever.

NECKLACE: Has become infatuated with Thalia, and therefore wishes her to love and/or marry him.

BLOOD: He wishes for Inanna to be killed, so he can be free of her scheming and her politicking.

7. Inanna and Kur



A foreign born princess and a skilled sorceress. She is set to marry King Castor tomorrow, although it is a political marriage rather than one of love. Their marriage will end a long war between their two nations. Inanna is smart and cunning, but she relies on her spirit form Kur for deception.

If Inanna ever tells a lie or deceives another character, the serpent Kur takes control. If Kur ever admits something truthful, Inanna takes control.

Example

Nicole is playing Inanna, with the Blood Goal. So when Castor asks Inanna if she intends him any harm, Nicole wishes to deceive him. Nicole turns to Paula, who is playing Kur, and suggests she switch In and answer Castor's question.

Magic:

Inanna's magic is keyed off of the **Future**. Inanna uses her magic to view future events, to predict what others will do and to subtly influence the probability of events.

Kur's magic is the magic of **Creation**. She can create new objects, ideas, and emotions, but not transmute or destroy things that already exist.

Goals:

KEY: Although she tells everyone it is a political marriage, she really does love Castor, jealously guards him, and wishes to keep this dirty peasant girl Thalia away from him.

NECKLACE: She wishes to rule this land herself, either by casting Castor out or using him as her puppet.

BLOOD: Beneath her cool exterior, Inanna is cruel and bloodthirsty. She does not care what happens (though she would like to live to cause more bloodshed) so long as it ends in bloodshed, murder and violence.

8. Switching

Every player is either currently “switched in” (aka **In**) or “switched out” (aka **Out**). Any given player character will have exactly one player / one Aspect switched In and one switched Out at any given moment. If you are In that means that the Aspect you are playing has control over the PC’s physical body, and can interact with the other characters and pursue your goals. Being Out means that you can observe the character’s actions but not exercise any direct control.

At start of play, Inanna, Castor and Thalia are switched in. Melpomene, Pollux and Kur are Out.

Each player character has a specific set of circumstances that will force a switch between who is currently In and who is Out. These are as follows:

- * If Thalia ever expresses sadness or regret, Melpomene takes control. If Melpomene ever expresses joy or satisfaction, Thalia switches in.
- * When Castor expresses anger or frustration, Pollux takes control. When Pollux shows restraint or calculation, Castor takes control.
- * If Inanna ever tells a lie or deceives another character, the serpent Kur takes control. If Kur ever admits something truthful, Inanna takes control.

Any player can claim “you just triggered a switch in who controls” a given PC. If the player currently In control agrees, then the Aspects of that PC switch In and Out status. If the player currently In disagrees, the two players currently switched Out and not playing Aspects of that character decide if the In-player actually did trigger a switch or not.

Example

Paula is playing Kur, who is under interrogation from Pollux (played by Oscar). When answering the question “Do you wish for Thalia to marry me?”, Kur answers “Yes, but I would prefer you marry me (meaning Inanna).” Though Kur does not wish Castor to marry Thalia at all, Oscar asks the group if the latter part is truthful enough to trigger a switch. Chris and Amber (both currently Out) agree. Kur loses control and Inanna takes control.

At the end of a scene, if a player sat out the entire scene, they switch In and the other player switches Out.

Example

After completing a scene as Castor, Chris has succeeded in avoiding displays of brute force or anger. Thus he was In for the entire scene. He becomes Out and lets Oscar (playing Pollux) switch In.

9. Conflicts

When one player says they are trying to do something and another player thinks the action should be difficult or dangerous, they can initiate a conflict. Generally, these conflicts take place between the switched In players, though it might be possible for conflicts to happen between two Aspects of the same character.

The player who was attempting an action is called the Actor or Active Player. The player who objected to the action is called the Objector or Objecting Player.

When a conflict is called, but before the Objector proposes outcomes, the Actor can choose to abandon their action instead of facing the conflict.

Example

Chris is playing Castor, and has noticed that Nicole has been very bloodthirsty playing Inanna. So when she opposes Castor's attempt to sneak away to see Thalia in private, he chooses to abandon the action rather than suffer whatever sort of danger Nicole would create. Chris instead describes Castor doing something else entirely.

The Objector declares a set of two possible outcomes, without stating who gets which outcome. At least one of the proposed outcomes should achieve the action or some piece of the action the Active Player was trying to perform when the conflict was called.

Example

In trying to learn Thalia's secret of immortality, Chris tries to use magic to see Thalia's magical sigil (which floats above most spirit forms) in hope that the sigil would give magical power over her. Thalia's player Amber opposes this, and proposes stakes of "One of us gives the other a gift of great material wealth, and the other falls in love with the giver." Chris says that this doesn't give him the possibility of achieving his action any, but would work fine if the gift could include non-material gifts like magical knowledge. Amber agrees to this, and so Chris describes Thalia showing Castor the magical tattoo that depicts her sigil, and Castor falling in love with the beautiful young mermaid.

When declaring the possible outcomes, the Objector must make both sets of outcome possible to apply to either character involved (e.g., you cannot set the stake of "one PC becomes pregnant" if Castor or Pollux is involved, unless magic is involved in the bizarre male pregnancy.)

Example

In a conflict with Amber, Paula (playing Kur) suggests "reveals her mermaid form" as one possible outcome. Amber points out that this outcome cannot apply to both characters in the conflict. Paula agrees to amend this to "reveals their non-human looking form". It would be "reveals her spirit form", except Thalia's spirit form is humanoid and her mermaid form is her natural form.

The Active Player in the conflict decides who gets which outcome. The Active Player's character suffers one of the outcomes, and the Objector's character suffers the other outcome.

These rules should encourage the framer of stakes to set stakes that are each a mixed bag, or that tempt their opponent into abandoning their current goal for the other option in the conflict. The rules should work like trying to get greedy children to put a pie: one cuts (i.e., sets the stakes), and the other chooses.

Example

Amber is playing Thalia, who wants wealth and power. Paula is playing Kur, who is in love with Castor. When Thalia convinces Castor to marry her instead of Inanna, Paula calls for a conflict. Paula proposes the stakes of "One of us is crowned queen, but in doing so is stripped of all magical power. The other one remains unchanged."

Chris asks if he shouldn't have a say in this conflict. After discussion, the group agrees that if Chris wishes a say in the conflict, he can propose his own conflict to one of the women. His own love for Thalia is not at stake, so if Inanna marries him it could be through trickery or a spell of illusion. Chris is satisfied with this, and so Amber has to choose between temporal power or magical ability.

She decides that losing her magical power is too great a price to pay for something she could acquire other ways. She decides to remain unchanged, and Inanna/Kur instead will be the one to marry Castor and lose her magical power. Working together, Amber and Paula narrate how Kur uses a magical charm to take on Thalia's form just before the wedding. When Castor discovers this deception, he is bound by his holy word to remain bound to Inanna, but in punishment strips away her magical powers.

Example

Brian is playing Melpomene seeking revenge on Inanna. Nicole is playing Inanna, who is just seeking any bloodshed whatsoever. When Melpomene attempts to tell Pollux about Inanna's misdeeds, Nicole calls for a conflict. Brian accepts, so Nicole sets the stakes as "one of us has her tongue cut out, and the other one is blinded." Brian is surprised by the violence inherent in the choices, but chooses to be blind rather than mute. Inanna is thus struck mute. Brian and Nicole cooperate to narrate the violent scene where Inanna and Melpomene come to blows. Inanna grabs up a nearby vase and shatters it into Melpomene's face, just as Melpomene utters an ancient Atlantean curse to silence Inanna forever.

9. a. Boons in Conflicts

If a player possesses a Boon, their character can use magic to affect the stakes of a conflict. Specifically, an Active Player can give the Objector a Boon to reject the stakes set and instead establish their own set of Outcomes. The Objector then chooses which outcome they suffer and which outcome the Active player suffers. (See section 10. Boons for more information). Explain how your character uses magic to gain and advantage in the conflict.

Example

Suppose in the previous example, Brian was worried by the bloodshed in Nicole's stakes. Instead of accepting the outcomes, he could instead give Nicole the Boon of Beginnings that he currently holds, and instead set the stakes as "Castor becomes aware of one of our treacheries against him, but the other one will never marry him." Brian narrates how Melpomene works her preservation magic to protect against Inanna's vase to the face, and Nicole then has to choose between these two possibilities.

When the Actor gives a Boon to reject stakes, the Objecting Player cannot reject the stakes in turn by using that same Boon. That would lead to a potential stalemate or infinite loop, which is bad.

Example

If the rule allowed returning the same Boon, you'd get this: In opposing Thalia, Castor's player Chris proposes the stakes "One of us is immortal, the other is the ruler of the nation." Thalia's player Amber doesn't like this, so she gives him the Boon of Beginnings to work her magic and alter history to her advantage. She proposes alternative stakes: "One lives a life of luxury in a fine palace but is eventually killed by rebel peasants and remembered as a monster. The other lives in poverty, but is known to history as a hero." Chris doesn't like those choices any (he's angling to get immortality), so he gives the Boon back to Amber, explains how he uses his magic to counter hers and proposes his original stakes again. She gives him the Boon once more, and proposes her stakes, and so on and so forth. That's why we don't let you do this kind of thing.

Though they could not counter-reject stakes with the same Boon, the Objector could give the other Boon to the Actor and propose another set of stakes (which may or may not be the same as their original stakes). The Actor then must accept these stakes and choose between them.

Example

As above, except after Amber gives Chris the Boon of Beginnings, he can't give it back. He has to accept her stakes, or if he has the Boon of Endings he can give her that to re-propose his original stakes. If he gives her the Boon of Endings, Amber must accept the stakes and choose.

9. 6. Man versus Nature

You might think that situations would arise occasionally where a PC is attempting something dangerous but not directly opposed by another PC. Things like if Castor tries to climb the outside of a castle tower in the middle of a rainstorm.

Unless another player wishes to oppose such tasks, the character is automatically successful. If you really want it to be difficult for Castor to climb the tower, you will need to risk your own PC in a conflict, whether through a direct conflict or through some indirect or magical means. And in doing so, they would potentially suffer the consequences of a conflict.

Example

When Thalia refused his romantic advances, Pollux throws her in the castle dungeon. Amber's player Thalia later frames a scene in which she tries to escape her prison cell. Though Castor is not present, Castor's player Chris can propose a conflict to oppose her escape. Chris's goal is to learn Thalia's secret of immortality, so he frames the conflict as "One of us is immortal, but trapped in a single chamber of the castle. The other is free but mortal." Though Amber is not too worried if her character is mortal or not, she suspects what Castor's goal is. So she decides to remain trapped in her dungeon, but secure in her knowledge that she will outlive this petty mortal king. Amber narrates Thalia's failed escape attempts, and Chris narrates Castor's anger at failing to break Thalia's will.

9. c. Three or More Sided Conflicts

It is likely to happen that conflicts arise where three players are all opposed. Possibly two players oppose a single player, or possibly every player opposes every other player.

The way to deal with mutli-party conflicts is to break them down into a series of two party conflicts. If two players both oppose a single action, then the Active Player must deal with one Objector, then the other one (assuming they are still able and willing to reach their goal after the first conflict). If all parties oppose each other party, then a three party conflict would break down into three two party conflicts. The conflicts should be performed in whichever order seems most logical or interesting.

Example

When Thalia refused his romantic advances, Pollux throws her in the castle dungeon. Amber's player Thalia later frames a scene in which she tries to escape her prison cell. Though Castor is not present, Castor's player Chris can propose a conflict to oppose her escape. Chris's goal is to learn Thalia's secret of immortality, so he frames the conflict as "One of us is immortal, but trapped in a single chamber of the castle. The other is free but mortal." Though Amber is not too worried if her character is mortal or not, she suspects what Castor's goal is. So she decides to remain trapped in her dungeon, but secure in her knowledge that she will outlive this petty mortal king. Amber narrates Thalia's failed escape attempts, and Chris narrates Castor's anger at failing to break Thalia's will.

10. Boons

There are two Boon cards. These give the holder some additional narrational power and allow additional control in conflicts. Using Boons causes them to move from player to player.

The Boon of Beginnings

The Boon of Beginnings depicts the dawn of a new day, and an open horizon filled with possibilities. Whoever has the Boon of Beginnings at the start of a scene gets the power to frame the scene: establish location, time frame and who is initially present. They then hand the Boon off to one of the switched Out characters.

Most scenes of the game should take place in Castor's palace or in the complex of buildings and gardens that surrounds the palace. Other locations are possible, though, so long as at least one of the PCs is present. After a scene is set, other players who are In but not present can introduce their character at their discretion.

The first scene takes place the night before Castor marries Inanna, but thereafter scenes have more freedom as to the time frame. They could be set minutes or hours or days after the previous scene. Particularly daring groups might try flash forwards and flashback scenes months or years into the past or future.

At the start of the game, Thalia's player has the Boon of Beginnings.

Example

A few scenes into the game, Chris (playing Castor) has acquired the Boon of Beginnings. When a previous scene ends, Chris decides to set a scene in Castor's bedchamber, late at night. Chris describes the décor of the room, and how Castor is awoken by a knocking on his door, which is Thalia come to see him in private. Brian is In, playing Melpomene, and so takes over talking for her as soon as Chris is done describing the scene. Though Chris establishes Thalia's presence in the scene, he does not know her intentions for entering the bedchamber.

The Boon of Endings

The Boon of Endings depicts extinct plants and animals buried deep beneath the earth. The holder of this card can ask for a scene to end at any time they think is appropriate, though the scene does not actually end unless another player (either In or Out) agrees to end the scene. The holder of the Boon then hands it to one of the players who will be Out in the next scene.

The Boon of Endings starts out in the possession of Pollux's player.

Example

Amber is Out throughout a long scene where Oscar and Paula debate but little actually happens and neither can change the other's mind. Amber calls for a break in scene when there is a pause in the conversation, and Nicole, also Out, agrees. The scene ends, some people switch In and Out and the group turns to the bearer of the Boon of Beginnings to start the new scene. Amber gives the Boon of Endings to Oscar, who is now Out.

Example

Paula is playing Kur and has the Boon of Endings. Paula's Goal is to marry Castor, so she is unhappy when Thalia seduces Castor. But because Kur is Out for the moment, Paula cannot actually do much to stop Thalia. Paula uses the Boon of Endings to call for a stop to the scene before Thalia succeeds in wooing Castor, but no one else at the table agrees. They all think that the scene between Thalia and Castor is interesting, and so refuse to interrupt until it reaches a natural breaking point. Though Paula used the Boon to call for an end to the scene, she keeps it because the scene did not end.

Boons can be used to invoke the magical abilities your character has. When you wish for your character to perform arcane rituals, you give the Boon to the Out Aspect of a character you are affecting. Describe the magical enchantment you perform and how it affects the other PCs. Other players can oppose this use of magic with a conflict. Because you already gave the Boon away to invoke your magical ability, you do not gain the advantage of the Boon in the conflict.

Example

Inanna wishes to know what Castor is planning, so she goes up to her private chambers and performs an ancient oracular rite that will divine his future acts. Chris (playing Castor) doesn't like this, so he initiates a conflict: "One of us learns the other's future, the other one learns a secret that the first would prefer to keep hidden."

Magic can be used to disagree to a set of stakes that a player sets. When an Objecting Player declares two possible outcomes for a conflict, the Acting Player can hand them either of the Boon cards to instead set their own set of outcomes. The Actor then describes how their magic gives them an advantage in the conflict. The original Objector then gets to choose which outcome happens to them and which happens to the other character.

Example

Brian is playing Melpomene seeking revenge on Inanna. Nicole is playing Inanna, who is just seeking any bloodshed whatsoever. When Melpomene attempts to tell Pollux about Inanna's misdeeds, Nicole calls for a conflict. Brian accepts, so Nicole sets the stakes as "one of us has her tongue cut out, and the other one is blinded." Brian happens to have the Boon of Endings in his possession, though, so he gives the Boon to Nicole and proposes his own stakes: "One of us is crowned Queen but dies the night after coronation, the other is healthy and free, but cast out of the nation as an exile." Nicole now has to pick which of these outcomes applies to her character and which applies to Melpomene.

11. Non-Player Characters

Occasionally a player might want a minor character involved in a scene. They should ask any players currently sitting Out if they wish to play the non-player characters (NPC). NPCs can be played by multiple different players over the course of a game, though players should try to keep the NPC's characterization similar.

Example

Brian wants his PC Melpomene to bribe Inanna's personal maid. He asks Amber (currently sitting Out) to play the maid. Amber plays the maid as friendly but somewhat dim-witted. Later, Inanna calls her maid for interrogation. Amber is now In as Thalia, so someone else has to play the maid. Oscar is sitting Out, so he agrees to play the maid. He initially plays her as fairly smart, until other players point out the discrepancy in characterization. Oscar thereafter plays the maid as a little more unintelligent.

NPCs are never involved in conflicts, except as window-dressing. Actually, NPCs are always just window dressing, but they are so particularly in conflicts, where NPCs can't suffer the outcomes in a conflict. An NPC can be used in narration to explain how and why a given player character suffers a specific outcome, and even might be modified in description, injured or killed as part of a narration of a conflict. But an NPC suffering these torments does not protect any of the PCs from a conflict.

Example

Brian is playing Melpomene, who is trying to access a restricted wing of the castle. Paula normally plays Kur, but is currently acting as an NPC guard. When Paula calls for a conflict to prevent Melpomene from entering, Brian agrees. Paula sets stakes of "One of us is kept from entering the restricted area. The other one is badly disfigured." Brian chooses to be kept from the secret wing, and asks Paula how Kur/Inanna is disfigured. Paula is confused for a moment, because she thought the NPC guard would be the one disfigured. Brian explains that Paula's PC suffers the consequences, not any NPCs. The group discusses whether to redo the conflict or if Paula will live with the consequences she set forth. Paula agrees to deal with her PC being disfigured, and Brian and Paula narrate a way to explain how Inanna is badly injured in a freak accident involving the castle's blacksmith's tools.

If while controlling an NPC a player decides to object to a player's action, that player can start a conflict. But their Aspect / PC must still suffer the consequences somehow. If the PC is apparently uninvolved, then the use of sorcery or unlikely coincidences and bad luck can be used to explain how the PC suffers when not in a direct conflict.

Example

Paula is still playing the NPC guard when Pollux sends the guards to exile Inanna. Since Paula's PC Kur is an Aspect of Inanna, she doesn't want that and calls a challenge: "One of us is exiled by the guards, the other one remains here but is driven insane." Pollux's player Oscar decides sanity is better than remaining in the castle, and so Oscar and Paula narrate how the guards decide to rebel against Castor and exile him instead of Inanna / Kur. Once he is gone, Kur is given access to Castor's secret magical laboratory, where she unfortunately dabbles in too strong of magic and is driven insane.

12. Notes

This roleplaying game was originally designed as part of **Game Chef 2008**. Game Chef is a game design sort-of competition, wherein designers try to make the best game they can within limited constraints. In 2008, designers had to make games inspired by sets of images. This game used the sets by Dale Horstman and Elizabeth Shoemaker.

Once I started making this game, I established a few design goals for myself. Since it was to be a GMless game, I wanted a game with a simple enough setting that people who had not read the rules would understand and could add to the setting. Similarly, I wanted the basic rules of the game to be fully understandable from just the single page Overview of the game. I also wanted to incorporate elements of a parlor LARP into a tabletop game. I wanted LARP aspects like predetermined characters and constrained location but great freedom once play began. Another aspect taken from LARPing was having all conflict in the game be between player characters and having NPCs minor or nonexistent. Lastly, I wanted to experiment with using the “Cut the Pie” resolution system in a complete game. I had thought of the vague outline of that resolution system a bit before Game Chef, but never actually implemented it into a complete game. This was an attempt to see how it would fit into a complete game. Of course, since I still haven’t gotten the chance to playtest it, it might all come crashing down in actual play. Here’s hoping it doesn’t.

On the non-mechanical side of things, the game is intended to be a fantasy game in a very “weird fantasy” vibe. It is inspired by the works of Roger Zelazny, Neil Gaiman, Lord Dunsany, Rebecca Borgstrom and the more fantastic and/or bloody plays by William Shakespeare. Hopefully, these influences show through and create interesting stories in play.

13. Glossary

Actor: When a conflict is called, the player who was initially trying to attempt some action is called the *Active Player* or *Actor*. The other player in the conflict, who introduces the conflict, is called the *Objector* or *Objecting Player* (*q.v.*).

Active Player: See *Actor*

Aspect: Either the Spirit form or Physical form of a *player character*. Each Aspect of a PC is played by a different player, and they may or may not cooperate to achieve their goals.

Blood: One of three types of *goals*, represented by a hand with a drop of Blood in the palm. Blood goals concern violence, bloodshed and anger.

Boon: There are two Boon cards, which grant the bearer special privileges. The *Boon of Beginnings* lets the bearer establish the setting and timeframe of a new scene. The *Boon of Endings* allows the bearer to call for the end of a scene. When either Boon is used in this way, it is then given to another player who will be *Out* in the next scene. Either Boon can also be used to reject an *Objector's* proposed stakes, in which case the *Actor* sets new stakes, and gives the Boon to the Objector.

Boon of Beginnings: There are two *Boon* cards, which grant the bearer special privileges. The Boon of Beginnings lets the bearer establish the setting and timeframe of a new scene. When the Boon of Beginnings is used in this way, it is then given to another player who will be *Out* in the next scene. Either Boon can also be used to reject an *Objector's* proposed stakes, in which case the *Actor* sets new stakes, and gives the Boon to the Objector.

Boon of Endings: There are two *Boon* cards, which grant the bearer special privileges. The Boon of Endings allows the bearer to call for the end of a scene. When the Boon of Endings is used in this way, it is then given to another player who will be *Out* in the next scene. Either Boon can also be used to reject an *Objector's* proposed stakes, in which case the *Actor* sets new stakes, and gives the Boon to the Objector.

Goal: Each player randomly selects a random Goal card from the deck of their character. They then should try to achieve this Goal in game to the best of their ability.

In: Each *Player Character* has two *Aspects*, and at any one time has one Aspect *In* and one *Out*. Aspects who are *In* have control over the character's physical form, and can interact with other characters and pursue their *goals*.

Key: One of three types of *goals*, represented by a hand with a Key in the palm. Key goals concern secrets and magic.

Necklace: One of three types of *goals*, represented by a hand wrapped in a jeweled necklace. Necklace goals concern political power and greed.

Non-Player Character (NPC): Any character in the game other than the three *Player Characters* (*q.v.*). When someone needs an NPC played, they ask one of the *Out* players to play them. NPCs can never participate in conflicts.

Objecting Player: When a conflict is called, the player who was initially trying to attempt some action is called the *Active Player* or *Actor*. The other player in the conflict, who introduces the conflict, is called the *Objector* or *Objecting Player*.

Objector: See *Objecting Player*

Out: Each *Player Character* has two *Aspects*, and at any one time has one *Aspect In* and one *Out*. Out Aspects do not have any direct control over the character, though they are aware of what the character is doing. Out player can still play *NPCs*, use *Boons* and suggest ideas to other players.

Outcome: When a conflict is initiated, the player who proposes the conflict suggests two possible Outcomes, which are results that could apply to either their character or the *Active Player's* character. These results need to be applicable to either of the characters involved in the conflict. The Active Player then establishes which of the Outcomes applies to their character and which applies to the *Objector's* character. The Objector and *Actor* then jointly and briefly narrate how these Outcomes come to pass.

Player Character (PC): Either the three physical characters (*Thalia, Castor or Inanna*) or the six *Aspects* of those characters (*Thalia, Castor, Inanna, Melpomene, Pollux or Kur*).

Stake: See *Outcome*.

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If you are doing something especially interesting or cool with my game, please let me know by contacting me at nickwedig@yahoo.com.