

# **The Gentlemen's Entomology Club**

*A roleplaying game of wine-drinking, boasting, beetles and some incidental rationalist philosophy.*

By Michael Sands

Created in 2005 for the Game Chef competition (see <http://www.game-chef.com>).

Generic Games

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## Introduction

The Gentlemen's Entomology Club is an club that meets somewhere in western European during the Enlightenment. The members are generally past their days of adventures searching for unusual insects in foreign climes. Instead, they meet to drink wine and tell tales of their greatest adventures collecting insects<sup>1</sup>. The gentlemen are also educated and intelligent men, which often leads to observations on human nature and the world at large being included.

In this game you take on the character of a member of the Club for a meeting. Your character will spend the evening imbibing wine and impressing their peers with stories of his entomological expeditions. The accounts will be comical, with absurd events and unlikely references to philosophical ideas. During the game you will find yourself telling tall tales, acting as a judge of a story and challenging the storyteller with accusations of lying and by inventing troublesome situations.

*The Gentlemen's Entomology Club* has a couple of differences to traditional roleplaying games.

The first is that your character is recounting stories that happened in the past. This means that you never need to be concerned about being killed on your adventures. We also know from the beginning that the character eventually found whatever insect he was looking for. The challenge is not to survive and reach your goal but instead to come up with the most amusing story about how it happened.

The second main difference is that there is no single gamemaster. The responsibilities for narrating the events, adjudicating, creating adversity and rewarding characters are split up. You will do all of these jobs at different points during the game.

## What You Need

The game requires at least three **players**. Four or more players is best<sup>2</sup> – I suspect that about eight would be the most that would work. Unlike most roleplaying games, there is no one player who acts as a gamemaster. Responsibility for describing the world, providing adversity and refereeing disputes is given to different players at different times.

**Dice** are required. It doesn't matter what sort of dice they are as long as everyone's are the same. Plain old six-sided dice with spots are most in keeping with the setting<sup>3</sup>.

Wine is important. The characters drink wine as they tell their stories and there is no reason for them to have all the fun. All players should drink wine as well. Port, whiskey or brandy would also be appropriate but might lead to a significantly shorter game.

This game is suited to infrequent, single-**Session** games, rather than extended or campaign play. It should instead be used to fill in odd evenings between longer games or when some members of a regular group are absent<sup>4</sup>.

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1 Often, these Stories may include elements of exaggeration or, indeed, baldfaced lies.

2 In fact, three player games have special rules as there's no Audience for the Stories. It probably wouldn't be as much fun, either.

3 Especially if they are stolen from an antique backgammon set.

4 If anyone *does* manage to play a long term game, I'd be interested to hear how you did it.

## **A Note On Jargon**

The game uses a number of technical terms for elements of play. These are described in the Glossary on page 16 as well as in the text. Most are capitalized and the first occurrence is in bold type.

## **A Note On Pronouns**

When referring to characters, a masculine pronoun is always used. This is intended to evoke the writing style of the period. Players are referred to in the third person plural.<sup>5</sup>

## **Game Chef Constraints**

This game was designed for the Game Chef competition 2005. The following are the Game Chef ingredients used:

*Historical Period:* The Enlightenment.

*Ingredients:* Wine, Entomology, Companion.

*Limitations:* No character sheets. Specially-designed cards.

## **Acknowledgments**

Thanks to Richard Clokie, Andrew McLeod, Bruce Norris and Stefan Tyler who bravely playtested this game which had, at that time, existed for only around 60 hours. Of course, I didn't really give them any option about that. Fortified by a couple of bottles of red wine, they revealed how they had heroically ventured to Africa, Tibet, North America and the South Seas in search of Marksman Weevils, Sociable Stick Insects and other unlikely creatures.

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<sup>5</sup> I'm not sure if anyone cares about such things, but I am also reluctant to be accused of sexism.

## *Preliminaries*

Before you begin play, you need to work out details about the Club and the characters that you will play - the members of the Club.

## *The Club*

The first thing to establish as a group is when and where the Club is meeting.

The Enlightenment isn't a precisely defined era, but 1690 to 1800 is about right. By default the Club meets sometime around 1750. Your group may wish to define the time precisely in order to accommodate particular historical events, but in general the approximate year is good enough. In most cases the Stories being recounted will have taken place from 10 to 40 years prior to the time the club meets. These events will be the main focus of the game, rather than events contemporaneous with the meeting.

The club could be anywhere in western or central Europe. Cities that are typically associated with the Enlightenment include London, Edinburgh and Paris. Often merely deciding upon a city or even country will be specific enough, but your group may wish to invent more details. Consider the nature of the meeting place. Is it a coffee-house, permanent clubrooms, tavern or a member's residence? How many serving staff are there? Are the fittings luxurious or spartan?

Think about how formally the Club is organized. It could range from informal (the members are all friends) to extremely formal (the Club was set up by the King as a forum for the best entomological minds of the nation to work together).

Both the time and place that the club meets are there to give the group a solid grounding for their Stories. It gives your Club some colour that can contribute to the Stories<sup>6</sup>. Each group should select the level of detail for these elements that suits them. More elements can also be invented during play, as required.

One thing that every version of the Club has is the tradition of meeting to drink wine and tell Stories of adventures hunting for insects. The members use these meetings as an opportunity to boast and joke, with a prize for the most entertaining raconteur of the night.

*E.g. The group all decide that their Club will be meeting at one of the member's country estates in Kent, England. The year is 1774.*

## *Characters*

Now each player should think of a **character**. You may want to consider the following aspects of your character:

- A name.
- Some background – places he has visited or lived, insects he has pursued, positions he has held, social status.
- His opinions on particular strands of Enlightened thought.

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<sup>6</sup> Or you may just use it as an excuse to talk in a particular amusing accent.

That's all there is too it. Most details about your character will be invented in play. A few starting points are all that is required at this stage. Of course, if you want to determine more, that's fine too.

*E.g. I decide that my character is wealthy and has never worked for a living, but is not titled. He traveled on several trade missions when he was younger, and managed his entomological excursions around his role of securing valuable trade agreements for the King. These travels were predominantly around Africa and India. His name is Bertram.*

## Character Sex

Characters are almost always men. You may wish to have a female “gentleman” but be aware that this does affect the dynamics of the club and generally forces all characters towards radical opinions such as “women are just as able as men” and “women may engage in intellectual debate.” I leave it to each individual club to determine whether a female might be admitted.

## Playing The Game

Now that you have established the basic details of the Club and your characters, it's time to begin play. Immediately below this section is a summary of the structure of play. This is both an introduction about how to play and a reference to use when you are playing. Following the summary, further sections explain the details of each aspect of play.

One element that is not mentioned in the Structure of Play summary is that of general conversation between characters. This is because such conversation can (and probably will) take place all through the game. While **cards** are being played and the **Story** being organized, for instance, you are encouraged to have your characters discuss the previous tale or whatever else may be concerning him.

## Structure of Play

1. Someone opens the first bottle of wine and pours everyone a glass. Someone else shuffles the cards and deals five to each player. Place the rest of the cards where everyone can reach them.
2. Pick someone to be **Lead Player** in the first **Turn** of the first **Round**.
3. Starting with the Lead Player and going clockwise, everyone gets a chance to play a card. One card of each type – a **Modifier Card**, an **Insect Card** and a **Theme Card** – must be played. Each player may play only one card each Turn.
  - a) The person who plays the insect is the **Storyteller**.
  - b) The person who plays the modifier is the **Companion**.
  - c) The person who plays the theme is the **Skeptic**.
  - d) Everyone else is the **Audience**.
  - e) If you go around the group without one card of each type being played, then everyone draws a new card from the **Deck** (including those who have played already). Then go around again for the other cards to be played (excluding those who have played already). Repeat this until all three types have been played.

4. The Storyteller now begins to tell the Story of their search for the "<Modifier> <Insect>" that somehow illustrates the <Theme>. They should signal the beginning of the Story with the words "This reminds me of my search for the <Modifier> <Insect>..." The story goes on until it ends or (much more likely) is interrupted by the Skeptic.
5. The Skeptic can interrupt the Story to:
  - a) Put a **Difficulty** in the way of the Storyteller. In this case, they state what the difficulty is and the Storyteller states how it was dealt with. A Difficulty is announced with the words "I recall that you then came across a difficulty." See page 9.
  - b) **Challenge** the facts of the matter. In this case, the Storyteller and Skeptic both state what happened and the Companion reveals (decides) which is the true account. A Challenge is announced with the words "Sir, that could not be!" See page 10.
6. The Audience and Companion's roles during the Story are to make suggestions, heckle and interject as the whim takes them. The Companion also has some duties during Difficulties and Challenges.
7. The Storyteller signals that the Story is over, once the insect is acquired, by saying "And that's how I acquired this fine specimen of a <Modifier> <Insect>".
8. Once the Story is over, the Audience vote for whether the Storyteller, Skeptic or Companion gets to draw an extra card. This **Award** is recognition of who added the coolest parts to the Story or addressed the Theme in the best way.
  - a) If there is a tie, the Companion gets a tie-breaker vote<sup>7</sup>.
  - b) A card is *always* Awarded to one of the Storyteller, Skeptic and Companion. You may not abstain from the Award vote.
9. Go back to step 3, except that the next person is now Lead Player. If it's the end of a Round and time is getting on, then call it a night and go to step 10.
10. **Scoring** takes place. Score one for every card played and one for each that is still in your hand. The winner gets to take any stakes that were decided at the start of the game, such as any remaining bottles of wine.

## *Rounds, Turns & Picking The First Player*

At the beginning of the Session, the first Lead Player must be selected. This isn't really terribly important, so any method to do it is suitable. Here are some suggestions:

- The person who brought the nicest wine.
- The oldest<sup>8</sup> player.
- The first to arrive.
- Whoever knows the most about entomology.
- Whoever would like to tell a Story first.

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<sup>7</sup> Except in a three player game. See page 16.

<sup>8</sup> Or, perhaps, "oddest".

Play is organized into Rounds. A Round is made up of one Turn per player – each person gets a chance to play the first card on a Turn. This person is the Lead Player, and who this is rotates clockwise each Turn.

A Turn is made up of a Round of card playing to determine roles and constraints on the Story and then the Story itself.

Each Turn, the Lead Player gets the opportunity to play a card, then everyone else going clockwise around the group. This continues until all three cards required for the Story have been played. A Story requires one Modifier, one Insect and one Theme card.

If everyone has had a chance to play and all three cards aren't there, that generally means that nobody could play the missing one(s). Everyone gets to draw a new card and those who haven't played a card yet get another chance to play (in the same order). Repeat this if necessary<sup>9</sup>.

Each player should keep the cards they have played in front of them and separate from their hand. These will be used for Scoring at the conclusion of the Session.

## **Starting The Tale**

The people who played cards take the roles of Storyteller (Insect), Companion (Modifier) and Skeptic (Theme) for the next Story. Check that everyone's glasses are charged, after which the Storyteller should begin their Story with the words “This reminds me of my search for the <Modifier> <Insect>...”

## **Telling The Tale**

The tale goes on with suggestions and comments welcomed from everyone present. The Skeptic has the special role of creating Difficulties that hinder the Storyteller's attempts to capture this insect and Challenging the Storyteller about events that are implausible (these are addressed on pages 9 and 10, respectively). The Companion was present at the time being described and acts as an adjudicator in certain circumstances.

## **Ending The Tale**

Once the Story is concluded, the Storyteller should signal this with the phrase “And that's how I acquired this fine specimen of a <Modifier> <Insect>.” They may wish to briefly describe the appearance and attributes of the specimen. The other members will, of course, be suitably appreciative<sup>10</sup>.

## **Scoring**

Scores are counted at the end of the Session. Score one for each cards that was played and one for every card in your hand.

Scoring is mainly a justification for further boasting, but this time of your own abilities rather than those of your character.

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<sup>9</sup> You may be interested to know that the chance of anyone drawing all five cards in the same category is merely 0.239%. That's less than a 1 in 400 chance.

<sup>10</sup> Although some murmuring about the specimen being inferior to those in one's own collection is to be expected in many cases.

## Stakes

If you and your fellow players are amenable to some gambling, you may wish to stake a wager on the game. In this case, the player with the highest Score at the end of the Session wins whatever was agreed upon. I suggest that “any remaining bottles of wine” is a fine stake.

If you are wagering, it is important to only stop the game at a point in which everyone has had a chance to lead a Round. If you do not do this, some players would be disadvantaged<sup>11</sup>.

## Difficulties

The Skeptic may add a Difficulty to the Story at any time. This can be anything that makes the search for the insect harder but would not result in the death of the Storyteller.

To announce a Difficulty, the Skeptic uses the phrase “I recall that you then came across a difficulty.” When this is said, the Storyteller must stop his narration. The Skeptic then explains the nature of the Difficulty. The Storyteller then responds with his plan for dealing with the problem. Then the two players dice off to see who wins the right to narrate how the situation turns out.

In the most basic situation, the Storyteller and Skeptic both roll a die and the higher roll wins<sup>12</sup>. The winner then describes what happened as a result of the Difficulty and draws a card from the Deck. If the Deck is exhausted, the loser gives a card from their hand to the winner<sup>13</sup>. If both the Deck and the loser's hand contain no cards, too bad.

*E.g. The Storyteller is describing his conversation with a South Seas chieftain when the Skeptic says “I recall that you then came across a difficulty. You happened, as I heard it, to have come to their village on the day of the year in which a stranger must be sacrificed to their volcano god.”*

*The Storyteller replies “In order to deal with this situation, I will attempt to convince them that they should abandon the tradition, by showing that their primitive religion is filled with contradictions.”*

*Both roll a die<sup>14</sup>. The Storyteller rolls 4 and the Skeptic rolls 3. The Storyteller then gets the chance to narrate the conclusion of the Difficulty. “So, after showing that their superstitions should be abandoned, I then taught the village medicine man about what the modern philosopher knows of the causes of volcanism. The people were left somewhat more knowledgeable about the world and I continued my journey.” They then draw a card from the Deck.*

## Extra Dice

In some circumstances, one or other of the players may get to roll extra dice to add to their total.

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11 And might see fit to challenge others to a duel for this barely-concealed cheating. As we are all rational men here, I am sure that we all agree that dueling over something so easily avoided is foolish.

12 This is why it doesn't matter what dice are used, as long as they are the same.

13 Yes, the loser may choose which card the winner receives.

14 In all examples, six-sided dice will be used to illustrate play.

The Companion may give a single die either the Storyteller or Skeptic, at their discretion. It is generally expected that the die will go towards whoever is likely to provide more amusement if they win.

If the Storyteller has previously in the Session described the use of a skill, ability, talent, object or anything that would help them in this situation, they may roll an extra die. If there is any doubt, the Companion decides whether it applies. The Storyteller may only ever gain one extra die per Difficulty this way.

*E.g. Previously in the evening, the Storyteller related that they climbed a mountain. The Skeptic has stated that the insect being pursued lives only halfway up precipitous cliffs. The Storyteller reminds everyone that he is a mountaineer and thus knows how to climb such a cliff. The Companion assents and the Storyteller gets an extra die.*

Lastly, for each of the three cards that define the current Story, either the Skeptic or Storyteller may gain an extra die for somehow relating that card into the Difficulty. The first player to work the card into the situation gets the die. If you can think of a way to get two or even all three to apply, then you get two or three extra dice. Once again, if there is any doubt about the way the element has been brought into the Story, the Companion determines whether the player gets a bonus die. Note also that you do not have to make the element *helpful* to your side of the conflict, just mention some way that it is *related* to the current situation.

*E.g. The cards defining this Story are "Marksman.." "Weevil" and "Nature is hostile." The Skeptic has said that the Storyteller was attacked by a lion for a Difficulty. The Skeptic gains an extra die for illustrating the hostility of nature, as he is quick to point out. The Storyteller states that he had a marksman in the expedition who shoots at the lion, and also gains an extra die. Neither can think of a way to make "weevil" relevant, so no more dice are used this time.*

## Challenges

If the Skeptic believes that the Storyteller is making things up, he is obliged to Challenge. He should announce "Sir, that could not be!" He should then explain why this part of the Story must be untrue, and may suggest an alternative that the Storyteller is trying to hide.

The Storyteller and Skeptic may each elaborate on details. The Skeptic is obliged to make things as embarrassing as possible.

The Companion then tells the rest of the Club whether the Storyteller is 'exaggerating'<sup>15</sup> or not. The Companion may use the key phrase "I was there, and what happened was this" when they declare their decision. In some cases, he may need to say this with some force in order to end an argument.

Then the actual events are described by the Companion<sup>16</sup>. These events need not match either the Storyteller or Skeptic's versions, but must be consistent with one or both of them<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> By this, of course, I mean 'lying'.

<sup>16</sup> Obviously, in some cases the Companion may decide against the *actual* truth. However, they are the best authority available for the events and the Club defers to this. Anyone claiming that a Companion is lying in this circumstance might find themselves excluded from future Club meetings.

<sup>17</sup> So the Companion may make up a third version of events as long as it does not contradict *both* what the Storyteller described *and* what the Skeptic heard.

The loser must then give a card from their hand to the winner<sup>18</sup>. If they have no cards in their hand, the winner draws one from the Deck. If the loser has no cards and the Deck is exhausted, they gain nothing.

The Storyteller then continues their anecdote.

*E.g. The Storyteller explains that they availed themselves of a Chinese flying machine in order to scale the mountains that hid their elusive quarry.*

*The Skeptic says "Sir, that could not be! Everyone knows that the Chinese have no such flying machines."*

*The Storyteller replies "Perhaps 'everyone' knows that, but how many of these men have journeyed into the Chinese interior and been feted by high Imperial officials? Obviously the machines are generally kept secret from foreigners. My friendship with the province governor, however, meant that he allowed me the use of the machine."*

*"I have never heard anything so preposterous. I expect you will now tell us that the machine was propelled by elves!"*

*At this point the Companion decides that the flying machines are worth keeping in the Story, so says "I was there, and what happened was that we traveled by flying machine as described. Obviously, it was not powered by elves, but by the wind carrying it on huge sails."*

*The Skeptic's player then gives a card from their hand to the Storyteller and the tale continues.*

## **General Advice For Play**

In general, you should aim to be either the Storyteller or the Skeptic whenever possible. If you can't take either of those roles, then you should go for Companion. The only reason to abstain from playing a card and sitting a Story out is if you are feeling uninspired and would prefer to wait the Turn out.

You may also want to consider previous events when playing your card. Perhaps another player was extremely annoying in your previous Story and has now played an Insect? You can play the most obscure Theme you have to pay them back. Alternatively, you might want to play the Modifier to help out someone who helped you out previously.

All players should beware of getting caught up so much in a Story that others will miss their turns. If a particular Story is dragging, the Audience and Companion should not be shy – just tell the Storyteller to get to the point. The Skeptic should also do this, although they may be part of the problem. Storytellers should take such comments in a good-natured manner and get on with the catching of their insect<sup>19</sup>.

## **You Can't Change What Has Been Established Already**

This is a general rule that applies to several different parts of the game. What it means is that if something has been described and accepted by the group, you can't just change it.

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<sup>18</sup> Again, the loser may give the winner any card they wish to.

<sup>19</sup> Storytellers should also note that if the Audience were bored, they are very unlikely to give you the Award for this Story.

You have to build on what's already happened or been described without removing elements.

Say my character mentioned in a Story that he has always been trusted by wild beasts. Later, after failing a Challenge, the Skeptic narrates that you are attacked for no reason by a normally harmless animal. In this situation, you are entitled to remind the player that this cannot occur due to what has been previously established<sup>20</sup>.

## Areas Of Authority

In general, facts about the game world are established by group consensus or by the player telling a Story. Here are specific examples of parts of the game where particular players have the authority to establish facts:

- Details about the insect that is the subject of the current Story are solely the domain of the Storyteller.
- Details about your own character are your own domain, except for when you have lost a Challenge or Difficulty. In those situations, the Companion and Skeptic may determine elements of your character without your agreement, within the limits of the situation<sup>21</sup>. Normally, for example, nobody else could declare that your character has lost a leg. But in the context of a Difficulty in which you were attacked by a tiger, this is quite a legitimate change for the Skeptic to make.
- When the Storyteller has lost a Challenge, the Companion describes the true events. These must be consistent with either the Storyteller or Skeptic's version of things.
- When the Storyteller has lost a **Difficulty roll**, the Skeptic describes what the outcome of the Difficulty was.

## Story Theme

Alluding to the theme in Enlightened thought can be done in many ways. For example:

- A direct example of the theme.
- A metaphorical allusion to the theme, illustrated by the insects.
- A tangential element of the Story.
- A digression from the Story.

Players should be aware that the requirement to address a Theme in each Story is there to add comedy, not intellectual depth. Although analysis of many of these concepts may be interesting and useful, in this game they are intended to force an extra layer of absurdity into the Stories told.

## Partiality

Often during play you'll be in a position to comment on other Stories or make a judgment about how things play out. It is not required that you impartially make the best or correct decision each time. Your character may have other motives that mean that he prefers to

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<sup>20</sup> If they had a good reason for this, that takes account of the previous facts, then you might find that this should be allowed anyway.

<sup>21</sup> However one should not make changes to the character that are disagreeable to the player. It's just not polite.

rule in favour of a particular person. You might want to take a petty revenge on someone who interfered with your Story earlier. You may be peeved at something another player said about one of your previous Stories. Motives like this are fine – don't hold back. And if someone accuses you of being unfair... that's just too bad for them.

## ***Being The Storyteller***

This is the key role in the game. You should attempt to be the Storyteller as often as possible. Your main role is to make it as entertaining as possible, so that you get the Award at the end.

You will want to endeavour to leave openings for the Skeptic to Challenge you or impose Difficulties quite often. When you have a good plan for how to deal with it, of course. It can be useful to say things that *sound* like lies, if you have a good explanation to bamboozle the Companion. And setting yourself up for obvious Difficulties when you have previously mentioned something that will get you a bonus (perhaps by mentioning lions prowling nearby when you earlier talked about your special lion-shooting musket).

## **What You Control**

As the Storyteller, you have control of all aspects of the Story unless the Skeptic Challenges or adds a Difficulty. The other players may make suggestions at any time but they are merely suggestions until you decide to make them part of the Story.

In particular, you have the final say on the nature and habits of your insect. If you say it can fly, then it flies. If you say it can play the violin, then it can play the violin. In this, even the Skeptic may not accuse you of lying. During or at the end of the Story, you may wish to describe the specimen(s), as if you are displaying them to the club members. Here also, you have total control of what they look like (or its habits, if you have a living specimen).

## **Dealing With Challenges**

When you are accused of lying, you need to quickly review the events you have just recounted and work out a plausible justification for them. You only need to convince the Companion that you are right. In fact, you do not necessarily have to appeal to actual facts to have them rule in your favor. Perhaps you made a concession to them earlier? Perhaps they might wish for one in the future? Companions may be more agreeable if you top up their glass. These are things that you might want to consider when defending your claims.

## **Dealing With Difficulties**

When a Difficulty is created, roll with it rather than getting annoyed. Your job now is to think of the coolest way to get out of the situation. Be open to using any suggestions from the other players (even the Skeptic). You also need to try and work elements from the current cards into your plan and try to convince the Companion to give you the bonus die.

To get the Companion to give you the die, try to appeal to what they will be the most amusing outcome of the Difficulty. You can also try convincing them for other reasons ("I helped you out last time!").

If you lose, be good-natured about the results that the Skeptic narrates. You can always get your revenge in their next Story.

## ***Being The Skeptic***

This is the secondary role in each Story. You are responsible for providing adversity and challenge to the Storyteller, with the objective of entertaining everyone (preferably being just a bit funnier than the Storyteller, so you get the Award at the end).

### **Challenges**

If the Storyteller says something implausible, you should Challenge them. You are accusing them of lying to make their Story more interesting.

Begin a Challenge with the words "Sir, that could not be!"

Then explain why you believe this to be a lie. This may involve some discussion before the Companion decides whether you or the Storyteller is in the right.

If the Companion declares that you are correct and that it was a lie, you get a new card from the Storyteller. This makes Challenges better for your Score than Difficulties – you still gain one, but additionally someone else *loses* one.

Note that you may not accuse the Storyteller of lying about the insect's nature or habits. Anything that they say about the insect is automatically correct.

### **Difficulties**

Difficulties are there to make the Storyteller work a bit to get where they want to go. You should aim to put a Difficulty into the Story whenever things seem to be going smoothly. Make the Difficulty as dangerous and embarrassing as possible, but leave room for the Storyteller to get out of it.

A Difficulty is announced with the words "I recall that you then came across a difficulty." You should then describe what you 'recall' might have happened to the Storyteller.

To start with, here's an example of how *not* to set it up:

*E.g. (Probably a bad Difficulty to use) "I recall that you then came across a difficulty. As you walked through the jungle, a herd of stampeding elephants trampled you and knocked you into a spiked pit which was then filled in by cannibal pygmies leaving you buried alive"*

That example is kind of funny, but it doesn't give the Storyteller much room to maneuver. Rather than presenting a Difficulty, rolling the dice, and having the winner narrate what happened, you have already forced the Story off track. This isn't really what we're aiming for (there'll be plenty of time for that if you win the roll). Here's a better way to set up the same Difficulty:

*E.g. (A better way to introduce a Difficulty) "I recall that you then came across a difficulty. As you walked through the jungle, you heard the sound of stampeding elephants approaching you just as you entered the kingdom of the cannibal pygmies of Zug."*

In this case, you still have the amusing elements, but the Story hasn't been forced away from what the Storyteller planned yet. The spiked pit and burial hasn't been mentioned – that can wait until you win the roll.

You should also stay alert to pick up on anything dangerous that the Storyteller mentions. If they mention anything like this, they want you to grab it and turn it into a Difficulty<sup>22</sup>. It may be that the Storyteller already has an escape planned. Try to do something unusual with the hazard to make it more challenging for the Storyteller and more amusing for everyone else.

### ***Being The Companion***

Your role is to be the referee whenever the Storyteller and Skeptic disagree. Whenever you have to make a judgment, you should consider which outcome will be the most amusing as well as which side is more plausible<sup>23</sup>, or consider rewarding the player who has made the better effort to address the theme of the Story. Or someone who's had bad luck.

You can make your choices based on anything you want. It's your call.

Take advantage of the fact that you were present on the expedition. Your suggestions to both the Storyteller and Skeptic have more weight than everyone else's.

Deciding Challenges should be done with a little more care than Difficulties. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, if a Challenge is lost one player gains a card and the other loses one. In a Difficulty, the winner just gains one, so the stakes are a bit lower there. The other aspect is that you get to describe the real story, and it need not exactly match either version that's been previously mentioned. You have to make sure that it's consistent with at least one of the Stories that has been suggested, but aside from that you can make up anything you want. And, as you are the authority on what actually happened, you cannot be gainsaid. If you wish to abuse your power and tell *another* lie, nobody will know. As in all these cases, go for whatever makes the most entertaining Story.

The role of the Companion is quite different in a three-player game. See page 16 for how things work with just three of you.

### **Breaking Ties**

Note also that you have the job of tie-breaker in the vote for who gets a card at the end of the Story. You are one of the possible beneficiaries, and the only thing to prevent you ruling in your own favour in such a situation is the possible revenge rulings from the other players later on.

### ***Being The Audience***

As the audience, you have a chance to sit back and drink some wine while the others do the work of amusing you. Enjoy the Story, Challenges and Difficulties. You may wish to interject, heckle or discuss the Enlightenment theme. Do whichever seems the most fun.

You also have the responsibility of voting for the most entertaining contribution to the Story. You may vote for the Storyteller, Skeptic or Companion. You may not abstain. The

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<sup>22</sup> Or, possibly, they're just being careless. No reason not to take advantage of it.

<sup>23</sup> This includes allocating your die to one side or other in a Difficulty.

winner draws a card from the Deck into their hand. Note that the Companion decides ties in the vote, if necessary (this can give them the chance to award the card to themselves).

### *Three Player Rules*

In a three-player game, the Audience cannot vote to give the Storyteller, Skeptic or Companion the award for each Story. Instead, the Companion decides whether the Storyteller or Skeptic gets it. Just as in normal play, the award is mandatory – it must be given out for each Story.

The Companion has all the responsibilities of the Audience as well as their role as a judge but otherwise play is the same as normal.

### *References*

Insects: <http://tolweb.org/tree?group=Hexapoda&contgroup=Arthropoda>

Enlightenment thought: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_enlightenment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_enlightenment). I also recommend *Enlightenment* by Roy Porter, a fine British-focused history of the period.

### *Glossary*

<i>Game Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Audience	All players who are not currently the Storyteller, Skeptic or Companion. When playing a member of the audience you are expected to enjoy the Story, suggest embellishments and heckle the others as it strikes your fancy. You vote for who gets the award when the Story is finished.
Award	After a Story concludes, the Audience vote for which player was the most entertaining. That player gets to draw a card from the Deck.
Card	One of the cards that is used to constrain elements of a Story.
Challenge	This term is used for when the Skeptic accuses the Storyteller of making up lies as part of their Story. Both the Skeptic and Storyteller appeal to the Companion with explanations of why this part is or is not a lie. The Companion then decides which is correct. This person then draws a card and explains what actually happened.
Character	A member of the Club. Each player has a character, who they control during play.
Companion	The person who is currently acting as referee. The Companion role means that your character was also present on the expedition being recounted, which is why you get to judge who is lying in a Challenge and why you get a tie-breaker in votes. You are also expected to make suggestions as to what had occurred, and you may win the award if you manage to entertain the Audience more than the Storyteller or Skeptic.
Deck	After initial hands are dealt, the remainder of the Deck is placed where people can draw more cards when necessary.
Dice	You need several matching dice to play. Normal six-sided dice are fine. If you wish to use dice with a less orthodox number of sides, that fine as long as everyone gets the same ones.

<i>Game Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Difficulty	A problem that must be overcome, added into the Story by the Skeptic. The Storyteller and Skeptic roll dice to determine who narrates the outcome of the problem.
Difficulty Roll	The rolling of dice by Storyteller and Skeptic to determine who narrates the outcome of a Difficulty. Each starts with one die to roll. The Companion may give a die to one of them. Each may also gain a die by relating one of the current cards to the situation (one per card). Then both roll their dice and total them. Highest total wins and gets to narrate the outcome. In addition they draw a card from the Deck to their hand.
Insect Card	A card that determines which type of insect the current Story is about. The player who plays the Insect Card becomes the Storyteller for this Story.
Lead Player	The person who gets to lead a card this Turn. This role rotates clockwise every Turn.
Modifier Card	A card that adds a descriptive modifier to the insect type, to partially define its nature. The player who plays the Modifier Card becomes the Companion for this Story.
Player	Any person who is playing the game. In contrast to 'character'.
Round	A section of the game in which every player has had a Turn. Play only finishes at the end of a round.
Score, Scoring	You Score a Session by totaling the number of cards played and the number remaining in your hand at the end.
Session	A single, contiguous period of playing the game, such as one evening.
Skeptic	The person who is currently given the task of challenging implausible parts of the Story and interjecting Difficulties to provide some conflict and adversity for the Storyteller. You may win the award for the Story if you are more entertaining than the Companion or Skeptic.
Story	A tale told by one of the club members about their pursuit of a particular insect, illustrating a theme of Enlightenment thought in the process.
Storyteller	The person who is currently recounting a Story. You may win the award for the Story if you are more entertaining than the Companion or Skeptic.
Theme Card	A card that determines which theme of Enlightenment thought the current Story must address in some way. The player who plays the Theme Card becomes the Skeptic for this Story.
Turn	Card play to determine roles and Story elements followed by the Story itself.

## *The Cards*

The remainder of the document contains the cards. These are currently in a rather primitive state, but the essence is there. They need to be printed on card and cut out for use<sup>24</sup>.

Cards with a type of insect are the insect cards, obviously. The categories used are broad and not especially biologically justified. Beetles are intentionally over-represented, for instance. As the game is set prior to the discovery of natural selection and evolution, this is probably not a very significant failing.

<sup>24</sup> Although, in playtesting, I found normal paper to be acceptable for this purpose. Shuffling suffered somewhat, but not enough to detract from play.

Cards with an adjective followed by ellipsis are the modifiers. Not much more to say there.

Cards with a bold phrase are the themes. These are based upon Enlightenment thought as it occurred to the author, primarily chosen for the possibility of absurd interpretations while hunting insects.

Players are encouraged to add their own cards if desired (this is probably beneficial for extended campaigns of *The Gentlemen's Entomology Club*, if anyone were to consider such a thing). The mechanics do assume that there are equal numbers of all card types, so you should always add sets of three – an insect type, a description and a theme of Enlightened thought. I'd even be interested to hear of cards that you add. Please email any of your ideas to me and they may be included in a second edition.

Dragonfly

Gigantic...

Uncivilized  
Men are  
brutes.

Stick Insect

Deadly...

Uncivilized  
Men are noble.

Earwig

Minuscule...

Reason  
defeats  
superstition.

Termite

Sociable...

There is no God.

Mantis

Solitary...

God is immanent  
in Nature.

Cockroach

Parasitic...

All Men are  
brothers.

Cricket

Intelligent...

Women are just  
as capable  
as men.

Locust

Acidic...

Men should be  
free to live as  
they wish.

Beetle

Army...

Laws should  
treat all Men  
equally.

Fly

Dangerous...

You should  
tolerate beliefs  
you disagree  
with.

Flea

Trapper...

Human society  
may be studied  
scientifically.

Butterfly

Biting...

Slavery is wrong.

Moth

Farmer...

All races of Men  
have the same  
natural  
capacities.

Scarab

King...

Nature is  
benevolent.

Weevil

Swimming...

Nature is  
hostile.

Wasp

Marksman...

Social class  
has nothing to  
do with a Man's  
worth.

Bee

Builder...

Men may  
perfect  
themselves  
with reason.

Ant

Tyrant...

Society may be  
perfected  
through reason.

Stag beetle

Carnivorous...

Democracy.

Bug

Cave...

Machines can  
tame Nature.