

# CHARLATAN

---

A role-playing game for 24hour RPG, 2005  
By Thomas Munkholt Sørensen  
munkholt@gmail.com

*Start: 01.03 AM, August 5, 2005*  
*Finish: 00.50 AM, August 6, 2005*

**Unfortunately, I didn't finish the game. But the basic idea is there, I hope.**

## WELCOME TO CHARLATAN

Travel the courts of Europe, seeking fame and glory, fighting sceptics and competitors. You sir, are a charlatan. But this is no petty game of scams and lies, but of wonder, inspiration and myths in the making.

Charlatan was inspired by men such as Casanova, Cagliostro, Rasputin, as well as Anastasia, the last Romanoff.

## LIST OF CONTENT

Overview	2
Rules 1: Excellence	4
Creating a charlatan	7
Creating a court	10
Working your charm	12
Rules 2: Narration	13
Campaigning	15
Cards	16
Appendix	17

# OVERVIEW

## THE PREMISE

In Charlatan you take the role of a momentous liar. You will do battle for your honour, and that of you beloved, all the while perpetuating your own myth and fighting off competing suitors and jealous husbands. Hard work, but fortunately, there are plenty of courts in Europe (and beyond) craving your glamour, and every court - whether win or loose - is fuel for your fame (or infamy). Charlatan can be quite light-hearted - pursuits of love, wonderful inventions, mistaken identities etc. But it can also be a dark story of madness, old hatreds, crazy mysticism and so on.

## THE SETTING

Europe, 17~. History should never impede on your storytelling in Charlatan. For what is truth? No, what you need to keep your mind on is the letting the setting serve as a backdrops for your exploits - it should be glamorous, mysterious and dangerous. The players (as crude modern English would name the bold adventurers) travel between courts of various degrees of beauty and cruelty. It matters not whether in Italy, Germany or the cold North - every place has its pearls, it's just of matter of sniffing them out.

## THE GAME

Charlatan is played by 4 to 5 players, one taking the part of Game Master. The players creates a character, a charlatan. The Game Master will handle the story and secondary characters. Before play begins you also need to design a court and come up with a grand prize worthy of their pursuit. Players portray the fight of their charlatan to win the price (and outmanoeuvre their competitors and enemies). The story ends when someone claims the prize, the prize has eluded everyone, or everyone are dead/imprisoned/run off. Players will not only portray their own character, but also members of the court and other relevant persons.

## THE CHARACTER

A charlatan is part myth, part (wo)man, and both aspects has a part to play in this game. The myth is the image that is projected to the world - note that this can change from story to story. It should be full of innuendo, mystery and hinted power - anything to appear interesting. Keeping up appearances is an important key to staying alive. But going down in history means that some busybody is likely to poke his nose in your background and give away all your secrets, so you need to prepare those as well. In addition to these are a number of skills needed for wooing, fencing, lying, forging, conquering and at some point likely running away. Also, most importantly, a charlatan needs to be a great storyteller - this is reflected in his control over the narration, but we'll get to that later.

## THE COURT

The playground of the charlatans. As a troupe the players decide on a country, a ruler, a number of important personages (officer, advisor, fool, chaperone etc.), the pearl of the court (e.g. power, a woman, a piece of jewellery), overall feel of the court (e.g. cruel, romantic, warlike, scheming) and an interesting setup for the story. Nobody can claim control of either the ruler or the pearl, but anyone else present is up for grabs. A player may try to assume control of a courtier, but usually anyone can play these secondary

characters. Before play begins, each player should come up with two courtiers, of neutral alignment or equally opposed/friendly to all the charlatans.

## COURTIERS

These secondary characters are available for everyone to play. Sometimes the story will dictate the presence of somebody, or a charlatan might wish to cleverly insert one of his own companions, but at other times you just need a second for your duel or a fool to the blame of a failed scheme. At these times you may simply roll on the following table to generate a random person at the court.

Courtiers have an attribute of Imagination, the counterpoint to the Excellence of a character - it can be a negative value, indicating a suspicious mind (the sceptics). Plus 1-3 skills associated with their position.

*Captain Renard*

*Imagination +1*

*Soldiering +2, History +1, Sense of Humour -1*

## THE RULER

This can be any person of power: a noble, a bishop, a merchant, a tyrant or whatever. He should be the embodiment of the court. A cruel court will have a cruel leader, simple. He has a stake in the pearl somehow, either a love interest, family relations, ownership or similar. He also has a secret, something that can pop up during play and turn the game on its head - this can be benevolent, but is far more likely to be trouble for the players.

## THE STORY

Staying alive is of the highest priority for a charlatan. But even more important is his name and place in history. When a charlatan arrives at a court, he is not merely out for a free meal, although that does play into it. He is after immortality. And the interesting part is that he can achieve this, even if he fails to win his true love, or, God forbid, dies trying. So the story is the immediate concern of the charlatan, but should he win enough fame, he will be allowed to travel on to the next court and try again - even if rumour had it that he has died. So that's nice. Hopefully the story will be full of duels to the death, impromptu poetry and occult secrets. A story will take from 1-3 sessions, depending on cast and complexity.

## THE CAMPAIGN

One great story is all it takes to achieve notoriety or fame, but the true charlatan will take his show on the road, travelling through Europe, and possibly a few colonies as well, for the sake of variation. There are two ways to campaign: The grand quest is really an extended story. It should include travelling between courts, but the prizes claimed along the way, are just markers on the way to the bigger prize. The journey is a series of courts, same as the quest, but less focus on pearls means more focus on characters.

# RULES 1: EXCELLENCE

There are two kinds of rules in Charlatan: Narration and Excellence.

## NARRATION

The rules of narration represents the charlatan's struggle for immortality. A Game Master will facilitate arbitration, these rules are there to give everyone equal opportunity to influence the story. Narration rules covers things such as who can take control of whom and when, the power of the secret societies infiltrating the court, the amount of fame/infamy earned by a charlatan for certain deeds, how to close up the story etc.

I will go into more detail later.

## EXCELLENCE

The rules of Excellence governs the capabilities of the charlatans, or rather, how these capabilities are perceived. Bluff plays an important role in a charlatan's life, to the point where conflicts are won or lost based on his reputation rather than actual deeds. Excellence comes into play whenever charlatans are in a conflict where they could loose face (or earn credit). This is usually mundane skill combined with extraordinary style. For instance, forgery is a skill, but equally important is how forcefully the forged message is imparted. Fencing is a skill, duelling is a measure of character. This is important as it allows a character to loose a conflict, yet gain reputation and vice versa. It also means that he can loose face.

Imagination, skills and excellence are rated from -3 to +3, with 3 being very rare, and only for very specific skills (like Fencing, but not Soldiering). Not possessing a skill gives a penalty, depending on how complicated it is to perform: heart surgery -3, firing a pistol -1. Negative value skills counts as not having the skills and in addition to that penalty. So, a soldier with Firearms -1 would be at -2 trying to fire a pistol.

Conflicts of Excellence are resolved by a roll of dice (yes, a very crude sport indeed, my sincere apologies, I would have gone with contract bridge, but my regular partner was unavailable). All players are encouraged to help set the stage and introduce complications. But the combatants have final say on the stakes of their duel. The stage is set, the dice is rolled, and the character with the most stylish result narrates the result, including possibly his own defeat. Depending on the stakes, witnesses present and any other factors deemed relevant by the players influence might be awarded - this affords the beneficent an advantage in terms of narration.

Rolls are made with 2d10 on a matrix, between skill and excellence (table 1):

**Table 1: conflict matrix**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	SF	SF	SF	F	F	PF	PF	C	C	U
2	SF	SF	F	F	PF	PF	C	C	U	R
3	SF	F	F	PF	PF	C	C	U	R	R
4	F	F	PF	PF	C	C	U	R	R	PS
5	F	PF	PF	C	C	U	R	R	PS	PS
6	PF	PF	C	C	U	R	R	PS	PS	S
7	PF	C	C	U	R	R	PS	PS	S	S
8	C	C	U	R	R	PS	PS	S	S	SS
9	C	U	R	R	PS	PS	S	S	SS	SS
10	U	R	R	PS	PS	S	S	SS	SS	SS

Rolls can be modified using either skill or excellence. The colours indicate the tendency of the result: turquoise is dominated by excellence, yellow by skill - or, in both instances, lack thereof. Read the letter, and consult table 2 for an explanation. Rolls can be modified beyond the table, indicating something rather spectacular or catastrophic has happened.

The charlatan's skills will give him a bonus, the difficulty of the task a penalty. His excellence will give him a bonus, but the penalty is decided by the audacity of the attempt, rather than practical circumstances.

**Table 2: conflict outcome**

	Result	Skill	Excellence
<b>C</b>	Close		
<b>R</b>	Rework		
<b>PS</b>	Partial Success		
<b>PF</b>	Partial Failure		
<b>F</b>	Failure		
<b>SF</b>	Spectacular Failure		
<b>U</b>	Unresolved		
<b>S</b>	Success		
<b>SS</b>	Spectacular success		
	Beyond Excellence		
	Beyond Skill		
	Failed Excellence		
	Failed Skill		

A combined roll of at least 12 is needed to succeed.

## SAMPLE SKILLS

Etiquette: an important skill at court. Concerns general knowledge of titles, manners and

Forgery: faking a signature, even hand-writing, knowledge of seals.

Love-making: the art of love. This is entreating with a person, usually of the opposite sex, but not exclusively. It includes techniques such as reading (but not writing) poetry,

Sneaking: lurking in shadows, tiptoeing through darkened corridors etc.

Soldiering: a nifty catch-all skill for soldiers and some nobles. This includes basic training with firearms, pugilism and fencing swords.

For more examples of Excellence, see the next chapter.

# CREATING A CHARLATAN

Before you can embark on your spectacular adventure, you need a character. A charlatan should be larger than life. He should enter the court as a spark of inspiration. You should dwell not so much on the man as on the myth. Fame/infamy will go up during play, but your character should stand out from the crowd from the very beginning.

## TONE

Creating characters should be done with everyone present. This will help everyone get into the interaction right away, and you'll be able to develop a common tone for your story. Tonal quality is something you should agree on for fullest enjoyment. If one player is looking for a game full of intrigue, with a historically correct representation of the Illuminati, and another wants a big, epic adventure with lots of duels, wooing and over-the-top Satan worship, you'll have a hard time making the story work. Character creation is an opportunity to set the stage and right mood.

## CONCEPT

First thing is to come up with a concept. Consider: What is the charlatan trying to sell? How will that ingratiate him into the court? What kind of fun can I get from playing him? Once you have a general idea, loosely come up with his actual background - the charlatan will try to avoid touching upon it, but it is relevant when coming up with skills.

## GLAMOUR

This is a myth in the making, something that will spark the Imagination of the court. Too big, too audacious to be a mere lie - it has a hint of truth, or at least: when enough people believe in it, it will become true. The level of fantasy/realism (part of tone) is something to consider here: in one game the Glamour could conceivably be "I am shapeshifter - every full moon I turn into a wolf and crave the blood of a virgin," whereas elsewhere it might simply be "I have the finest credentials from Sorbonne, and am the first man to successfully treat the Yellow Pox." Coming up with interesting Glamour should be your highest priority. Everybody will want to talk to you about it, and you are likely to be called upon to prove it during play (again, the level of fantasy/realism will decide whether you can actually do what you claim - and to what extent). Consider how this might be grounded in your background, and how you may inspire the court.

A few ideas:

- . invention/magic item/holy relic
- bloodline
- curse/blessing
- guru/thinker (new religion/philosophy/politics)
- prophet/soothsayer/healer
- adventurer (the Moon/the Dark Lands/the Americas)
- inhuman feat ("world's greatest lover")
- quack/inventor/sorcerer
- hero (wars/conquest/tall tales)
- wealth/treasure/inheritance

*Frank picks Conqueror of the Seven Seas as Vittorio's Glamour. He grew up in Naples, but in a family of merchants, so he has likely never been beyond the Mediterranean Sea, but nor have any of these other landlubbers. He plans to entertain the court with stories of sea dragons, mighty storms, what lies at the end of the world, and how he was wed to a mermaid. Also, he has much experience fighting savages and pirates, his valour has been praised by the king of England, and that's saying something. Something like that.*

## INSPIRATION

Talk is cheap. What a good charlatan really needs is a scam. An organised expression of his Glamour. How can all the fancy words be turned into profit and fame? Well, you could found a religion or a secret order, or perhaps offer divinely inspired advice for the chosen few. The power of your Inspiration will grow as courtiers are lured into your net. Supporters can change their allegiance pretty rapidly, but once they are part of your clique, they become more loyal. As the group is discussing ideas for characters and Infiltration, you might want find a concept to share. Just make sure that the characters present different factions within the order/philosophy/bloodline. Either way, make sure your Inspiration has a cool name, an intriguing history and the lure of easy gain. As the charlatan's life progresses he will leave a legacy, and his Inspiration grows beyond the first seed - this earns the character a rating in his project. He can continue to expand on this or come up with a new legend.

*Just now, Vittorio is serving as ambassador to the doge of Venice, and he will accept gifts and well-wishes on his lord's behalf. Sanchez' player buys into that, and suggests that they are both members of the Venetian court, but that Sanchez (who is actually a thief, claiming to be a prince, exiled after he found out his father was worshiping Dark Gods and burned down the castle). They both like the capes and masks of Venice and create a secret society, coming up with some pseudo-Italian name. The society accepts new members, but there is a price - and both Sanchez and Vittorio claim to be its secret grand master. The masks, secret signs and poor lack of Italian is guaranteed to create some interesting complications. Frank writes **Society of Venetian Knights** on his sheet in the appropriate box - it has no rating yet, since it has just been invented.*

## INFLUENCE

Now there is the small matter of several charlatans being together in such a confined waters. It's bound to cause friction. Particularly as they will all be diving for the same pearl. Influence is a measure of your current status with the court - it starts at Inspiration + Excellence at each new court. Since you are just starting out, your Influence is simply equal to your Excellence score (which totals 3) - not much, but enough that your charisma will get your ideas across, even though no one has heard of you or your project. It will increase as you gain Supporters, and decrease as you meet sceptics at court (those with negative Imagination) and competing characters tries to counter your moves. It is temporary and will be reset after this story, you should get a d10, turn it to "3" - that way you can easily turn the die as Influence fluctuates.

*Frank simply does as he is told by the book. He picks a blue d10 to symbolise his naval Glamour, and sets it to "3".*

So far we have only discussed your character in descriptive terms - there are no game mechanics involved, Glamour and Inspiration is primarily represented through roleplay, although there are game mechanics involved in the flow of narration - we'll get to that later. Next up is Excellence and Skills: the crunchy bits. These two attributes describe the charlatan's true capabilities and how he tries to show them off. They should usually be +1 or +2, and only +3 if very specific.

## EXCELLENCE

Excellence are a few very vague traits describing the act of the charlatan. They will help them accomplish the impossible, but they are also a point of vanity, and an Achilles Heel. So, the trait should be tempered with an accompanying weakness. You might think of this as keeping the charlatan grounded in his past - you don't have to be specific about it, there's probably some story from his past that he would like to forget. The fantasy/reality consideration is relevant here as well: an Excellence might be powerful to the point of being supernatural, or it might just be natural charms. Your Excellence-attributes should Glamour support your Glamour. Actually, you could change Glamour based on these same stats in the next Story, so Excellence should rightly be figured out before Glamour, but I prefer to work from the concept. Beginning characters get three



points of Excellence to distribute as they see fit between one and three traits. Only the Charlatan has this trait.

Some examples of Excellence

- Beauty (yet ashamed in the presence of the crucified Christ)
- Presence (except before matronly women)
- Wit (but only when threatened)
- Invincible (fears disease)

*Vittorio wants something to help sell his stories of seamanship, so he chooses **Navigator +2** as an Excellence, tempered by **"scared of lightning"**. Plus he wants his wits about him, so he chooses **Calm +1**, with **"impatient when money is involved"**. He describes how he sees the traits to the other players - they agree that Frank's idea that Navigator can also relate to combat is a bit too convenient; it is decided that it could help Vittorio find a quiet sport to ride out a battle, but it won't do him any good in a duel.*

## SKILLS

Skills are the actual acumen of a character in this game - everyone has them, which makes them rather mundane. These you know from any number of RPGs, so I won't go into them. Players get 15 points to spend on Skills, but they are allowed to take 2 negative stats (at -1) in exchange for a 2 point increase per stat. Remember that you are penalised if you lack a skill, so 0 in a skill is better than no skills at all, in some cases even a negative can be worth a little.

**Table 3: point cost for buying skills**

-1	+2
0	1
+1	2
+2	4
+3	8

*Vittorio decides to take **shipman -2**, giving him 17 points to buy skills: **Sea lore +2**, **Brawl +1**, **Sabre +1**, **Trade +2**, **Tall tales +2**, and **Etiquette 0**.*

## JOURNEY

Once you have the character in place, give a brief summary, and set him on the road. We are assuming that this is the charlatan's first big adventure - there might have been a few minor incidents in the past, but this is it.

# CREATING A COURT

Okay, you're a bunch of people, ready to play, charlatans all lined up. First order of things is creating the court. This is a collaborative process. The Game Master will take notes and keep some of the information from the players, but everyone has a certain amount of say. Just follow the outline, share ideas and leave room for further development - you don't want it to be a static environment without room for charlatans to make an impression. There's a sheet for noting down this information.

## 1. BASICS

Where in the world? Name of country/province/city? Geography, population, politics, religion? Don't get too specific, this is just to touch on some basic concepts.

*A castle in the Alps, with a lush valley below. A province that enjoys a large amount of autonomy, and is ruled by the baron. Some Christian denomination. Not rich, but strong in resources and enjoys some trade.*

## 2. RULER

Who is the ruler? Name, title, power. Also, now is the time to consider a word to describe the court. The ruler is the embodiment of this attribute. You want the ruler to fit the court. Also, think about how easy it will be to impress the court, its power of Imagination. Do not assign Imagination to the ruler - this is just the kind of enlightenment he and his court inspires. What he does have is Power - on average this will be 1d10 + 1d10 per player (add/subtract dice to change Power). Don't roll these dice yet. Remember also the tone you decided on when you created your characters.

*This court seems quite idyllic. Let's give it a generous, innocent, grandfatherly baron: Baron Felmark von Blumendorf. On one hand he lives in a fantasy world, but on the other he is old-fashioned and very set in his ways. Imagination in the court will be average, maybe even low. But there might be a few individuals with untapped capacity for wonder - we don't want the story to be too brooding. There are three players in this story, so the baron's Power is 4d10, which we decide to lower to 3d10, because of his old age, friendly disposition and small province.*

## 3. PEARL

This is the prize of the story. It can be anything. It can even mean different things to different people. It's a symbol of what the charlatans are after in this story.

*Love, romance and romance seems to be the order here. So let's make the pearl a young princess: Lady Elizabeth von Blumendorf - called the White Flower. We'll get back to why the charlatans are after her later.*

## 4. SECRET

If you all knew the secret it wouldn't be much fun, so it is kept open for now, but you need to give it a name. The secret is a worm in the apple. It might seem like a small thing, but it should have the potential to undo the court. Once the concept of the secret is decided, every player takes a card and offers a brief idea about what the Secret might be: a threat to the plans of the charlatans, maybe it's related to ruler or the pearl, perhaps it's something our protagonists unwittingly brought with them ... The Game Master collects the cards and keeps them for now.

*All this idyll and innocence - this little Paradise needs a little temptation. So that's the secret, we'll call it **Snake**. It might be a person, a forgotten crime, an actual snake, a costly gift - for now, it's a secret. Frank likes the idea of the snake shedding its skin and writes: "**powerful courtier: not what he seems. might try to subvert Elizabeth.**" The Game Master simply writes "**Snake**" and puts his card on top of the others, text visible, as a reminder.*

## 5. EVENT

For a bit of flavour you should add an event. Again, this can be as big or small as you like, but it will give you something to fall back on, when you need to improvise scenes as play gets under way. A party, a war, a wedding, an important visitor, a wake, etc.

*Returning to the mountain setting, we'll add a looming snow storm. Dark clouds are gathering. A bit of danger in this otherwise tranquil environment is needed. And maybe it can be tied into the Princess' nickname.*

## 6. COURTIERS

Time to breath some life into the setting. This is done by inhabiting the court with some interesting people. Simply take turns coming up with a secondary character, assigning some skills and imagination. He should have a name and a position, and possibly a quick note about personality, ambitions, relation to ruler or such, but only one such fact. They begin the story as unaffiliated. Take a stack of courtier-cards (twice the number of players). Go around, taking turns coming up with a title and a name. Do this twice. Try to get a distribution that fits the court, whether that means a lot of soldiers, nobles, clergymen, ladies or whatever. Lay out the cards for all to see. Now, take turns describing one of the denizens: one or two skills (between -2 and +2, and only rarely and for good reason going to -3/+3), maybe a note about some personal quirk or background. As he lays down the card, he places groups it as having either positive, neutral or negative Imagination. After two rounds all the denizens should be on the table, ordered in three groups. The group assigns Imagination befitting the court. A neutral court would mean that the positive and negative values equals out, more or less.

*Okay, this is easier than it sounds: Player A, B and C takes turns coming up with denizens, giving each a name and a title, filling out the cards as they go along. This gives them nine courtiers. Player A then picks Marshal Wolf, giving him a few skills, and notes that he is rumoured to have been raised in the woods. He places the card on the table to the right - he should have a positive Imagination. Player B picks Maid Anna, gives her skills, notes that she is a bastard child of the neighbouring barony, and places her to the far left, negative Img. This goes on till all courtiers are on the table. Those in the middle are given 0 Img. Those on the left should have a slightly higher negative total Img, than the ones on the right, to reflect the conservative court. In this case there are three in each group. The negatives are assigned values of -1, -2 and -3 (in the case of Anna), for a total of -6. The neutral are simply 0. The positives are +2, +1, +2 (in the case of Wolf), for a total of 5. A stack of blank cards are kept ready for play.*

## 7. ADVENTURE

Once you're satisfied that the court is done, it's time to bring the characters into the mix. In turn, describe how you got here, and what you're looking for. Now is the time to name the prize: why do you want it? This can also serve to bring the characters together, or you could delay that until actual play begins.

*Vittorio, an ambassador from Venice, is travelling through Europe, representing the new doge. He is not really looking to get settled. The storm serves a nice, corny excuse to bring the characters together. None of them know each other very well, but Vittorio and Sanchez has been impressing each other with hints of their fantastic brotherhood (the scoundrels have compared notes). Vittorio is not looking for a wife, but the money that she represents.*

And that's it!

# WORKING YOUR CHARM

Before we get to the actual story, there's a central element that I have yet to explain: Inspiration and Imagination, and how it relates to Influence, Excellence, Power and whatnot.

Okay, here's the basic premise of the game: The charlatan might be selfish, scheming and greedy, but what really matters is that he is interesting enough that we don't care. His story enriches our lives, inspires legends and leaves mysteries for further exploration. What his means in game terms is that whenever he wants to better his position, he inspires people. I guess you could also call it manipulation, but this game is about the miracle of great storytelling, so I'm not going to.

## INFLUENCE

An important part of a charlatan's life is his ability to influence the court. His power-level. The starting value of Influence in a story equals Inspiration + Excellence. As the story progresses it can be augmented by Supporters and challenged by sceptics and other charlatans.

## SUPPORTERS

Supporters are secondary characters at the court. S/he needs a value of at least 0 Imagination to support the character. Negative Imagination means that s/he is sceptical of charlatans, maybe even hostile. They can always influence a scene, and a player can take control of him/her. The charlatans vie for control over the courtiers. This is done by inspiring them: getting them to join their projects. Once they have bought into the charlatan's Inspiration they cease to be available to other players (although they can try to win them over). Two or more charlatans may share a project, but as they represent different factions, the courtier will still be under the direct control of only one character (although other charlatans sharing the same Inspiration will have advantages when trying to turn them). A sceptic can never be inspired. There's a tactical choice here: you can go for the very Imaginative courtiers, which will improve your Influence, if they join your project, or be a real benefit for one scene. But you are more likely to be opposed, if you do.

## IMAGINATION

Instead of trying to gain control of the courtiers, a player may elect to try and raise or lower their Imagination. It is difficult but not impossible to do this to a courtier openly supporting another charlatan. If this turns him into a sceptic, he will leave the Inspiration. The Imagination total counts as Influence. The player can spend this Influence, he won't lose any Supporters. But the opposite does count: if a Supporter leaves, Influence drops, likewise if his/her Imagination is lowered. So, you need to save some of your Influence to control your cause.

## ACTIVE COURTIER

Courtiers can be used to further a Charlatan's cause or get in the way of the competition. Simply take control and roleplay him/her for the duration of the scene, as you would a character. A courtier can be contended, in which case the involved players must roll for control. A scene must always have a charlatan present.

## EXERTING INFLUENCE

So, all this Influence - what is it good for? It is the currency of the game. It is not simply a measure of control at the court, it is also one's control of the narration. Which is important in a game about creating a memorable story about yourself. You spend Influence to gain control of courtiers, to place your character in other players' scenes, polish your Glamour, improve dice rolls etc. Once the story is told, Influence is counted to see if the Inspiration will leave a Legacy (giving the character a boost in the trait).

# RULES 2: NARRATION

Once characters and court are in place, it's time to get into the game. The court has a ruler, a pearl, a secret and a number of courtiers (and more waiting in the wing). The charlatans have Glamour, Inspiration, Excellence and a bit of skill.

The players should feel free to call for scenes and offer to take the part of bit characters, but for the sake of clarity I will address this chapter to the Game Master.

I am going to present a series of scenes that covers the development of a story. They are by no means the only ones - but they serve as a foundation. Ideally, once the group shares an understanding of the game's ideas, you can dispel of the Game Master, simply by sticking to the basic framework, and calling for scenes as you go along, reacting to what happens.

## SETTING THE SCENE

What's the purpose, who are the protagonists, who else is there, what is the location? If it's not a key scene, it will either dictated by you (to highlight a particular area of interest or push conflict in foreground) or be called by a player. If more than one play calls, consider two things: is it anybody's turn? If someone has been waiting longer than others, it's their call. Otherwise, it is decided by the players staking points of Influence (turn a die to the amount being staked, reveal simultaneously, 0 counts as 0) - if it's still a stalemate, repeat. The points are lost, even the undecided ones. The player can choose to sacrifice one of his supporters instead of loosing Influence: the courtier simply switches to the other player (include this change of heart in the scene or as a brief cut-scene). If a player "owns" the scene, he gets to decide the purpose, and he can invite other charlatans to join in. Important note: Some of the key scenes described below will appear very mechanical, but nothing happens that isn't roleplayed.

## ARRIVAL

The arrival of a charlatan should be a thrilling occasion at any court. Give each charlatan a scene, asking if they have any ideas, based on the starting courtiers and the court. This could be a series of very similar scenes, with the group presenting themselves before the ruler, but it could also be scenes taking place weeks apart, in different locations around the castle. The purpose is to give every character a chance to introduce himself and his glamorous escapades. This scene must include at least one courtier with positive Imagination and one sceptic - these can be picked and played by other players, or they might choose to have their own charlatan present to stir up conflict from the very beginning, and trying to Influence the courtiers.

## INSPIRING THE COURT

Hot on the heels of their arrival, the charlatans set to work, trying to improve their status and earn some fame. Set up a scene that allows the player's Inspiration to really shine. It should include at least one courtier with a positive Imagination, and preferably someone who would conceivably be interested in the Inspiration. This will get the ball rolling: once the charlatans start recruiting, their internal power struggle begins: the Supporters will boost the recruiting character's Influence, and he will start to dominate the game. This will force the others to either try to weaken the recruits or start getting their own Supporters. Encourage players who share project to collaborate in setting their scene. Throughout the story you should keep in mind that the courtiers will be curious about the charlatans' chosen Glamour, and view them through rose-tinted glasses - that is, unless they are born sceptic or the other players decide to complicate matters.

## INFLUENCING THE STORY

As mentioned earlier, charlatans can spend Influence (which is temporary) to push the story in a certain direction. The Game Master should always make room for such an attempt, for it is the

primary source of conflict between the characters, and it allows the players to claim ownership (and responsibility) of the story - kick back, watch the fun.

- Taking control of a courtier for a single scene = 1 pt. (gets to roleplay him/her)
- Recruiting a courtier = the courtier's Imagination in points (scene should be played out)
- Re-roll 1 die (whether Skill or Excellence) = 1 pt.
- Joining another charlatan's scene uninvited = 1 pt.
- A scene that proves one's Glamour = 1-3 pts. depending on how outrageous
- Calling for a scene = 1 pt. (+ stakes if contested)
- Unfold the Event = 1 pt. + 1 pt. higher than the last
- Decline invitation to scene = 2 pts.
- Seeing secret = 2 pts.
- Uncovering secret = 1pt, and +/- 2d10 pts.

### UNFOLDING THE EVENT

Every player can bring the story's event to fore. This works like calling for a scene, and is simply a way to increase the drama. It always allows the player to bring couriers and charlatans into the scene, if they were when last the event was progressed. The player calling the event can then either introduce a new character/courier or excise one. The event has to be escalated whenever called, and at some point it needs to be resolved. This is at the discretion of the Game Master.

### UNCOVERING THE SECRET

Remember the secret? Okay, the secret has three incarnations. Any player or courtier can mention the secret, spread a rumour or otherwise help build its power - this is free and encouraged. Secondly, a player asks to see the secret. He gets to pick one of the cards created with the court (at random). This decides the secret, and the other cards can be discarded. The player does not get to implement the secret - it has only been whispered. He is allowed to use the information, incomplete as it is, to try and position himself for the big reveal. The full ramifications are only revealed in stage three by the Game Master - he interprets the scribbled note and turns it into a terrible or wonderful fact. The player calling for the third stage rolls 2d10 of different colours. A blue result means that he gains the amount, a yellow that he loses it, a white adds that amount to the Ruler's Power. The Game Master should reflect this change of fortune in his descriptions. The player and Game Master can each decide to exchange point-loss/-gain for a courtier with a similar amount of Imagination.

### CLAIMING THE PEARL

The Game Master rolls the ruler's dice secretly - this is his Power for the final scenes. If the secret is still hidden, he can also choose to roll the 2d10 (blue: gains Power, yellow: loses Power, white: gives Influence to character who saw the secret in stage two, if any).

**[Players and ruler somehow match their Influence and Power for control of the pearl ... sorry, ran out of time.]**

# CAMPAIGNING

[Rules for carrying over Inspiration, improving Excellence, increasing skills, reaching immortality etc. I made notes as I went along, so this should be do-able, but it's a large aspect of the game.]

# CARDS

The courtiers are a mutable group of people in the court. These cards will make it easy to introduce new secondary characters. Simply grab a card, fill in a title, name, relevant skills and any relevant notes. Imagination should always be found by players' agreement or settled by opposed rolls, never as the choice of any one player. A whole sheet of nine cards are provided - photocopy at your leisure.

A vertical rectangular card template with rounded corners and a grey border. It contains the following sections from top to bottom:

- TITLE**: A horizontal line for writing a title.
- NAME**: A horizontal line for writing a name.
- IMAGINATION**: A row of seven circular icons containing the numbers +3, +2, +1, 0, -1, -2, and -3, followed by the word **SCEPTIC** in a rounded rectangular box.
- SKILLS**: Three horizontal lines for listing skills.
- NOTES**: Three horizontal lines for writing notes.

The secrets are simply written on the back of one of these cards.



# APPENDIX

This intro does not count toward the 24 page goal of the challenge. This is just to get me started, warming up, so to speak. The whole thing is insane - I hound the link and acted on the impulse within an hour. I had planned to start tomorrow, Friday, at 14.00 hours or so. Unfortunately I had forgotten a wedding, so it's forfeiting the game (which I'm not about to, as that would be a personal defeat, plus I insulted someone as part of my grand claim of participating), or coming up with a plan B, and here I am: the time schedule is tighter, but it's still do-able:

00.00: Signing up. Brainstorming ideas. Wikipedia. Writing this.

01.00: Countdown starts. Work on basic premise. Get some ideas on paper - both setting, characters and play. Whip up quick layout.

03.00: Go to bed.

08.30: Get up. Shower. Eat.

09.00: Do it, baby!

23.00: Layout

00.00: Have the game done. Read through. Brush up layout.

01.00: And that's it!

And then: Go to bed, get up, receive guests, go to church, sleep in the afternoon, party through the night. Easy pieces

Up against:

- Lack of practical use of English, my second language.
- No real design-experience.
- 24 hour time limit.
- Own expectations.
- No real interest in rules.
- Any number of distractions and procrastinating.

On my side:

- My brain and imagination (I wish).
- Creative sparring (if I ask).
- Solid ideas in my back catalogue.
- Experience writing.
- Good workplace.
- Motivation (certain people representing opposite poles there).
- Spell check.
- I can also post an unfinished game.

Two ideas, then:

## CASANOVA

Or Cagliostro. Whichever, this game takes place in the Enlightenment. Players take the role of a traveling charlatan arriving at some court or other. Seduction, dueling, forgery, power games, hedonism, a narrow escape - these are important elements of the game. Has an adventurous feel to it - doesn't need to be too specific about period and people, the players can just make up courts and countries as they go along. Fun and competitive.

## THE TRUTH

Inspired by 'Laaste Døre', The Trial and the Castle. A Kafkaesque game of deceit, treason, bureaucracy, trials and secret opposition. The players are members of the opposition, fighting the

brutal regime. But who can they trust? Let alone love? Needs a setting - a fascist regime to fight and hate. The psychology here is a bit more complex. But it's dark and moody and if it works, paranoid as hell.

Okay, that's one page in half an hour! Yay. So, if I don't sleep, and work all my waking hours, I should be fine.

In ten minutes I decide on a game.

\*

## MUSIC

kcrw.com

Petra Haden: sings the Who Sellout

Tina Dickow: in the Red

Radiohead: Kid A

Emiliana Torrini: Fisherman's Woman

Joanna Newsom: The Milk-Eyed Mender

Jose Gonzales: Veneer

Rufus Wainwright: Want One & Two

Smashing Pumpkins: Siamese Dream

Moloko: Statues

Mikael Simpson: De Ti Skud

Billy Corgan: TheFutureEmbrace

Nouvelle Vague: Nouvelle Vague

kcrw.com