

# Hubris

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A story game inspired by ancient Greek tragedies and mythology

Written for Game Chef 2006

TIMESCALE: 2 hours

INGREDIENTS: Ancient, Committee, Emotion



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## 0.1 What Hubris is about

Hubris is a story game for four players, to be played within a strictly limited time period of two hours, including set-up, character generation, and end game. Note that all these, including dealing the cards, count as part of the entire game. The game is split into phases each of a specified length of time.

The inspiration to the game comes from a Greek trilogy of tragedies, where King Agamemnon returns from the Trojan war, only to find his Queen, Clytemnestra, involved with his cousin Aegisthus, who wants to be king instead of Agamemnon. You can read more about the original three plays and their storylines in the appendix.

As a player in Hubris you take turns in narrating the story about what happened before the King returned to his kingdom, and what happens after that. In your narrations you will try and further the agendas of the Greek God that you as one of the players are assigned at the beginning of play. When it is not your turn to narrate, you are either part of the Chorus or assigned the role as the Committee. The two Chorus players help the narrator and his opponent, the Committee, with ideas and suggestions if they are stuck, and advise in rules questions or continuity problems within the shared story.

The Committee player may challenge or oppose the suggested narrative from the narrating player.

## 0.2 What you need to play

Four players, a deck of ordinary playing cards without jokers, 48 stones or tokens, a timer.

The tokens can be whatever you fancy. Pebbles from the beach, glass beads, dice, coins or jellybeans.

The coolest timer you can use would be an hourglass capable of measuring 9 minutes, or a 3-minute one, but a mechanical timer or the timer in a watch or mobile phone will do just fine.

Each player gets 12 Petras, or story stones. The Petras are used to activate aspects of the characters at the beginning of a scene and in conflict situations.

## 0.3 Setup

Separate the face cards from the rest and shuffle each pile. Draw a number card each. Highest card chooses who deals. The first player to have a character in a scene is the one next on the dealer's left. Shuffle the cards back into the pile.

## 0.4 Player Characters and Gods

The dealer deals a face cards to the first player on the left, and then continues round. If the same type of card or suit comes up again, it's discarded and another one is dealt. Eventually all four players will have a different face card with a different suit. The type of card tells which character it is. The suit of the card indicates the character's divine aspect, and which God the player is controlling.

Note that the God the player is playing stays the same during the length of the entire game, while characters and seats around the table shift twice during play.

The dealer then deals three cards, one at a time to each player, which are placed in a row below the character card. When the cards are dealt to the players, they cannot be of the same suit as the character card, or of a suit already present under that character. In that case the card is simply discarded, and another one is dealt instead. If a dealt card has the same suit as a previously dealt card it is discarded if a lower value or it replaces the one already dealt if it has a higher value. Continue to play a card, one at a time, under each character, applying the restrictions above.

Eventually every player will have in front of her a character card of a suit different from the other three players' character cards. In addition each player has three numbered cards, each in their own suit and not the same suit as the character card.

### What the cards and suits mean

- King = The King
- Queen = The Queen
- Jack = The Princess
- Ace = The Lover
- Spades = Death (Hades, God of the dead and the Underworld)

- Diamonds = Fortune (Tyche, Goddess of prosperity, fortune and chance)
- Hearts = Emotion (Eros, God of love, lust and sex)
- Clubs = War (Ares, God of war)

## 0.5 What do the cards tell us?

At a glance, the cards reveal strong and weak sides of the characters and indicate the potential narrative power of the player controlling the respective protagonist. The suit of the character card indicates which God is controlling the character's actions and choices at the moment. This aspect is the Divine Aspect, or Theikos.

In conflicts, the higher card will always beat the lower card, and the character card counts as the highest in its suit. When a card is used in this way, called Hubris, it's deactivated until the player who owns the card has activated it by placing a new Petra on it. Note that a card has to be involved in a conflict to be deactivated. A deactivated card can be turned upside-down or sideways until it is activated again.

Petras may be used to influence the value of cards, see the conflict resolution section.

## 0.6 The hidden agendas

Each player is dealt one of the remaining face cards face down. The suit of this card indicates what the player's God is really pursuing or exploring in the game. The picture on the card means nothing, only the suit of the card. This hidden agenda may, or may not, be the same as the God's Theikos, the Divine aspect.

## 0.7 Petras, story stones

Each player gets 12 Petras, story stones, and should administer their use with the utmost care. When a player uses her last Petra, she loses a vital tool to manifest what she wants to be a fact in the game. The stones provide the power to activate aspects in conflicts. Each time an aspect is used in a conflict, called Hubris, the player has to place a Petra on it. The same aspect can be activated as many times as the player wishes. Petras are narrative power in the game and decide the victory condition at the end of the game.

## 0.8 The counting cards

After all scenes have been narrated, the sum of Petras used during the game to invoke the different aspects war, emotion, fortune and death will determine which player's God has been most successful in achieving his or her goals. To keep track of which story stones have been used on which suits, pick a number card of each suit from the number cards not in play. Lay the four cards somewhere on the table and place all used Petras on the card with the used suit, and count them at the game end.

## 0.9 How to play

The game is played in three main phases, each comprised of four scenes of 9 minutes each. Each player gets to be the primary narrator in one scene per section. Everything has to be handled within the 9 minute time-span in a scene, and when the timer beeps, set it for another 9 minutes and shift to the next player on the left. This should ensure a constant narrative stress on the players. Between each new phase, the players shift the way they are seated, to change the pairs of players opposing each other. The players also rotate the player characters. Both changes will hopefully keep the intensity in the game to a maximum.

To initiate a scene, a player has to place a Petra on one of his character's aspect cards. During the scene more stones may be placed on the aspect in play, by other players as well, according to the conflict resolution rules. At the end of each scene all used Petras are moved to their respective agenda counting cards.

## 0.10 Narrating scenes

Each scene features the active player as the primary narrator. The player opposite the narrator is appointed as the Committee. The Committee is charged with the role of opposing the narrator, and may interrupt or try to amend the narration according to the conflict rules.

Everything the primary narrator says, and which is not disputed by the Committee, becomes fact in the game's shared imagination and cannot be undone later. The remaining two players act as the Chorus during the scene, and may offer suggestions if the primary narrator or the opposition is stuck for ideas. The Chorus may also remind the two active players of continuity mistakes, offer rules guidance etc.

The narrator cannot make decisions on behalf of another character. Only the character's player can do that. Of course, the narrator can try and influence the other characters by suggesting what is happening in the scene. The Princess's player cannot say "The King began to feel lonely and picked himself a concubine." Something like "One of the concubines, who had laid with one of the King's sons, sneaked into the King's chamber and offered herself to him, trying to provoke him with stories of his son's great stamina in bed." is better. The King's reaction is not included, and the King's player can use it later, or oppose it right away in that scene.

What then, if the narrator says, "At the height of the King's climax, the concubine drew forth a sharp knife and drove it deep between her ruler's ribs"? The Committee can dispute it, or not. The King's player, if not the Committee, can argue that it should be disputed, maybe even promise something in return, or oppose the narration.

The primary narrating player must always include her character character in her narration in some way, either physically or emotionally. The scene may be told in any way the player prefers. Third person or first person, as a narrator or speaking directly as the character or a mixture of these. Whatever works best for the player.

In roleplaying there are of course ways to get around "cannot be undone". A dead person can never live again, but may enter the story as a ghost or in a dream. "The King had seven sons". Fact. "One of them was a bastard son of his brother's wife." New fact that doesn't contradict the original one. Be careful here, because "but one of them was a girl" is not allowed. On the other hand "and a daughter" is. Basically, don't waste time trying to mend what has been narrated before, embellish it, dramatise it instead. If you don't like it in the first place, dispute it. Or convince another player to dispute it. Even better.

## 0.11 Cost in story stones

The cost of initiating a scene is 1 Petra, which is placed on the aspect card the player would like to use as a focal point for her narration, thus activating the aspect. This cost is mandatory so every scene a player narrates will cost her at least 1 Petra from her pool of stones. Note that you cannot use the Aspect on the character card as the starting point for a scene. You just cannot.

## 0.12 Seating order

The seating order at the beginning of the game, as well as which player characters and Gods the players play, is completely random at the start of the game. During the game some of these will change in a predetermined fashion.

If the players are seated around a table in the clockwise order 1, 2, 3, 4 in phase one (imagine player 1 at the "north" of the table), then the order will be 2, 1, 3, 4 in phase two, and 4, 1, 3, 2 in phase three. As you can see, player 3 keeps his seat, but each player will face a new Committee player in each phase.

The player characters rotate among the players in the following fixed order: King, Queen, Princess, Lover. Remember to change the suit of the player character card to the God the player was assigned at the start of the game. The player keeps the same aspect cards under his player character card.

Ex: Bruce is playing the Queen of Clubs at game start. His associated God is Ares, whose aspect is War. In the next phase Bruce will play the Princess, and changes his Queen of Clubs to the Jack of Clubs. The last phase Bruce will play the Lover, with the Ace of Clubs.

## 0.13 Phase 1: The Past

In this phase the players narrate what has happened in the past, before the King returned from war. Each player **MUST** narrate which other player character their current character has reasons to kill, and why. Which other player character the player chooses as the target may not be disputed, but the reason may, according to the conflict rules as described below. Example: "The Queen had been waiting for her husband, the King, only to see him dead by her own hands. He had sacrificed their daughter to win the final battle. And yet, he had lost the war itself."

Note that the scene could be over before the reason why the Queen wants to kill her husband, for example, was established. That is fine, the important thing is that we know she has reasons to kill him.

This is the only phase where the players have a mandatory narrative element to deliver. There is one other fact present from the start in the game, though, and that is the fact that the Queen and the Lover have been lovers, for however long, while the King was away. This might change during the game, of course, but the

past phase should, if possible, describe how they became involved and how their relationship developed.

After the past section, the participants should have an idea about the Kingdom, the war and the four characters and their relations.

Players should use the past tense when narrating events and scenes. Ex: "The Lover waited in the corridors each night for 5 years. Then, one night, he knocked silently at the Queen's door, and entered. He said to the Queen, who lay naked on the bed except for a thin sheet of linen covering her, 'I see you are as lonely and forsaken as am I.'"

## **0.14 Phase 2: The Present**

In this section of the game the players narrate what is happening right after the King has returned from war. The characters move in to position themselves in a possible future Kingdom.

Players should try and use the present tense when narrating. This is hard and may take some getting used to. Ex: "The King walks up the long steps to his palace. There is nobody here. The palace grounds are completely empty, except for a small boy in a bloodied shirt, sitting at the top of the stairs. The boy's eye sockets are bloody, empty holes."

## **0.15 Section 3: The Future**

In this section the players narrate what happens then, and how the story will end. Who will prevail, who will fail and who will die?

The players should use the future tense when narrating scenes and events, using "will" or "going to". Ex: "The Princess will imprison her mother, the Queen, on a far away island, for her mother to rot and die, and then she is going to marry the Lover and reign as queen herself."

## **0.16 Conflict handling and resolution**

The primary narrator narrates and describes events in the story. The Committee, the player in opposition, may dispute the narrator's statements at any time, using one of three different phrases:

**I cannot accept that (no cost)**

Narrator must revise the statement and make it less powerful or go directly to conflict. The Committee must accept one of the two statements or embellish one of them (using But only if... or And additionally...). Else there is conflict.

**But only if... (no cost)**

This phrase can embellish a statement or add complications. The narrator can respond back with any phrase or just accept the embellishment or complication and move on.

**And additionally... (costs one stone played to the appropriate aspect card)**

This phrase is special and more powerful, because it's costs a Petra to use any phrase against it, even "I cannot accept that" or "But only if".

If the primary narrator, or the Committee for that matter, involve one of the characters that are played by one of the players currently playing Chorus, the chorus player in question also briefly gets Committee rights in the scene and may oppose and embellish the narration as if playing the opposition, and play Petras, but only directly regarding her own character. She also speaks for her character.

## 0.17 Conflict

Conflict is simply resolved by comparing the value of the active (paid for) aspect card in play in the suit relating to the scene. An inactive aspect, ie. a card without a Petra, does not have any value in a conflict, but the player can put a stone on it any time to activate it, even after the conflict has been called, describing how the aspect influences the conflict. The higher card wins.

As an additional complication, a player may add Petras to her aspect card in play, beyond the stone used to bring it back from deactivation and the stone actually activating it. These extra stones add to the card's original value with one each.

Only one Petra may be placed on an aspect at a time, with one exception. The player with the lower card may add stones to his card up to one more than his opponent, who may then of course add two stones to make her card the highest, and so forth.

So, how is the total card value counted? Simple. Add all stones on the card, except the ones used to bring back the card from deactivation or the one used to activate the card.

## 0.18 Free Petras - stone jokers

If a player is allowed to narrate a full 9 minutes without being challenged into conflict by the Committee or one of the Chorus, she may place as many stones from her pool, up to maximum the played aspect card's number, as she likes. These stones, even if only one, do not have to be placed on an agenda counting card until after the last scene - these stones are jokers and can secure the win, as the player may choose which suit to place them on after the last scene.

Needless to say, it is probably not a good idea to let any of the players get away with this, as this could secure the victory easily.

Once again, remember that at the end of each narration round, stones are cleared from all cards and put on the respective agenda counting cards. These spent stones are all counted at the end of the game to determine which Gods have fulfilled their goal and aspects most.

## 0.19 Winning conditions

- Most stones on agenda suit and Divine Aspect, and most stones left in pool: Supreme winner.
- If no supreme winner: The player with the most stones on agenda suit and Divine Aspect suit is the winner.
- If no winner according to the above conditions, the player with the most stones on his God's hidden agenda suit wins.
- In case of a tie, the player with the most Petras left unused in his pool wins.
- There are no second places in Hubris. The winner takes all.