

IN THE BEGINNING...

A roleplaying game for three players, by Timothy Alexander

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Introduction

In this game each player will take on the role of some explanation for the universe, embodied within a mythos, belief system, science, religion. These opposing views will clash, gain favor, lose followers, until at the end there is only one remaining and the truth of the universe is known.

Materials

3 Participants

3 Decks of standard playing cards with different backs

3 Sets of 5 tokens of different color (poker chips are an excellent choice, but others work as well)

Paper

Pencils

Before beginning play

Each player takes a sheet of paper and draws some minor bit of iconography that's attractive to them. It can be pretty much anything, including abstract, but understand that this will obliquely give direction to how your **Icon** develops. Once everyone's finished, each player hands the paper to the person on their left, who then writes down a word or sketches a drawing that the original inspires. Continue to pass the paper left, each time writing a word or creating a sketch inspired by one of the words or images already on the page. Go around until each player has six or so image/words.

Once everyone has their page back take a look at what's been generated. Grab a character sheet and right down six traits drawn from the images and words created on your page. You'll need to have at least one trait in each of the four suit categories, but beyond that it's up to you how they are distributed. The types of traits in each category should be as follows:

Hearts are *Convincers*, or how the **Icon** appeals to it's adherents.

e.g.: "The loving afterlife embrace of the Almighty Zuufan" or

"Supremely rational" or

"Maddeningly complex ideology"

Clubs are *Adherents*, the human embodiment of the **Icon**.

e.g.: "Learned academics"

"Vapid hollywood elite"

"Homeless Jim"

Spades are *Domain*, the locations which serve to spread the **Icon**.

e.g.: "Brown and Mary campus"

"Palatial dream estates"

"Soup kitchens"

Diamonds are *Ideals*, or that which the adherents must abide by

e.g.: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you"

"The scientific method"

"The sixteen testaments of ritual bloodletting"

Step back and take a look at your sheet, and take a look at the others. Does everyone understand what everyone else is going for? If not, talk it out, make sure everyone is on the same page with respect to each other's vision of their own **Icon**. Everyone got it? Good.

Order of play

Each player removes the jokers and any other refuse cards from their deck and shuffles them. Each player then turns up the top card of the deck and places it on the table. One of basically three things just happened:

- 1) No one matches either suit or rank: **Advance**
- 2) One or more people match suit: **Conflict**
- 3) One or more people match rank: **Conflict**

There are a couple of other options, notably a match of suit and rank, but for our purposes we'll count that as a match of rank.

Advance

If the cards register an advance, the player with the card of the highest rank may either bank the winning card for later conflicts, or take a trait. If the player banks the card that player places it next to him on the table, face up, for later. If instead he takes a trait he narrates to the other players how his **Icon** expands, culminating in the addition of a new trait in one of the four categories (*Convincers, Adherents, Domain, Ideals*.) This narration is explicitly informed by the trait that the player will be taking, and it does not come at the cost of any of the other player's **Icons**, though it can infringe on their territory obliquely. The other two players place their cards face down next to them in a discard pile.

Conflict

When the cards show a conflict amongst one or more players it means that the two **Icons** have come into direct confrontation and one or the other is at stake. You can have a few different combinations of this:

- 1) Two players, rank Conflict
- 2) Two players, suit Conflict
- 3) Three players, rank Conflict
- 4) Three players, suit Conflict

All of these options share the following format:

- 1) Someone introduces the **Conflict**
- 2) Hands are drawn
- 3) Bidding occurs
- 4) Outcome is narrated

In a two player Conflict, the odd man out places his card into the discard pile and introduces the conflict between the other two players. The player sets the scene through narration and defines how the two icons have come into conflict with each other, keeping in mind the suits shown by the players. If the conflict

matches rank and not suit, both suits should inform the setup of the conflict. This player also decides who will be the first to bid in the upcoming conflict.

Each player then takes the top five cards of their stack, along with any cards banked previously, and assembles a five card poker hand without revealing it to the other player. They may spend tokens to draw additional cards *after* first examining the five cards drawn from the deck. It is at the player's discretion to spend none, one, or more tokens on additional draws. Any cards not to be used in the creation of the hands are discarded face down into their respective discard pile.

Once each player has assembled their hand but before they are revealed, the players in conflict bid traits by continuing the narration, showing how each trait is used to attempt to resolve the conflict in their favor. In suit conflicts, traits are bid one for one from the matching suit, but two for one from others. So, in a conflict of *Ideals* one could bid a single *Ideal*, two *Adherents*, an *Adherent* and a *Domain*, or any other combination. The responding player then either matches the bid in the same manner, or raises the bid with an additional trait. This continues until one player decides to only match the bid, or either player folds. Note that bidding occurs at 'table stakes,' meaning that no player may introduce a bid that the other player can't call. If that situation arises the player with the least traits is simply risking all of their traits in this conflict.

In rank conflicts each bid must contain narration for two traits, one for each suit in play. The same rules apply for bidding traits out of suit at two for one, meaning a bid of the two appropriate traits can be answered with a bid of four external ones. Rank conflicts are big, and brutal, and can quickly change the tide of the game. In either conflict though, any player has the option to fold their hand in response to any raise.

In the event of a fold, the winning player may bank up to three of the cards in his hand for later conflicts, and narrates a postponement of the impending conflict between the two icons. The folding player loses a single trait of their choice, but it must be one that was bid in the conflict. If there is no fold, both players show down their hands and the player with the higher hand wins the conflict, keeping all traits but banking no cards. The losing player then narrates the resolution of the conflict, and loses all traits bid. Ties go to the player with the most tokens.

Conflicts where all three players match are resolved using the same rules, but with the following modifications:

- 1) The opening narration is given by the player with the highest ranked card displayed or, in the event of a three way rank conflict, by the player with the most tokens.
- 2) Bidding goes clockwise from the first bidder
- 3) In the event of a tie at the show down, the player with the most tokens is the winner. If neither has a token advantage then ALL players lose the traits bid, and the players work together to come up with an explanation for the severe setback.

Tokens

Tokens are how the players get to acknowledge each other's contributions in the

midst of all this conflict. Anytime a player does something or narrates something that really resonates with you, toss them a token. They can then in turn use those tokens in conflicts in the future. Anytime someone uses a token, it is returned to the original player. That player may then draw a single card from his deck and exchange it for any banked card if he so chooses. If he has no banked cards, he may bank the drawn card.

End Game

If after a conflict a player is left with no more traits, that player's next conflict determines the fate of their **Icon**. They may not fold, and if they lose they narrate the dissolution of the **Icon**, it passes from the world discredited, or without believers. If they win, in addition to the opposition losing all traits bid, the winning player receives a single trait to try and build anew. The winner of the game is the person's who's **Icon** is left standing and after winning the last conflict, that player gives a final narration that details the spread of the **Icon**.

Acknowledgments

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