

THE FORTIETH ANNUAL MEETING OF
THE SUBCOMMITTEE FOR PRESERVATION
OF PLANET EARTH

Compiled by Zach Welhouse

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ABSTRACT

This world is rotten. In recent weeks, the Harmonious Congress has been abuzz with the findings from Gaebronius Zaphiel, Concordant Researcher First Class. The Zaphiel Report contains evidence that Earth is a drain on spiritual resources that could be better assigned to developing new planets – ones without such an overabundance of radium and fluorescent lighting.

A certain faction in the Harmonious Congress feels that Zaphiel is being hasty. They recognize that there's a timetable to keep, but an emergency investigation would be prudent. Springing into action with a most unbureaucratic efficiency, the chairperson of the Committee of Heavenly Reacquisition stretches his legislative wings and forms the Subcommittee for the Preservation of Planet Earth.

The purpose of this investigation is nothing less than justifying Earth's existence to the Committee of Heavenly Reacquisition.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

This version of The Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Subcommittee for Preservation of Planet Earth was created for the 2006 Game Chef competition. It makes use of the theme ingredients in the following manner:

Time: The game ends when eight hours of Cosmic Time have elapsed.

Committee: The players work together to convince a committee of various

higher beings that Earth has enough redeemable features to warrant salvation.

Glass: The halls of the Harmonious Congress are built of glass and dark marble. The efficiency and logic of the Committee of Heavenly Reacquisition is highlighted by its surroundings. Furthermore, the characters all wear protective eyewear to hide their extraterrestrial origins.

Emotion: Each characters' only statistics are the emotions that they're able to evoke in Earth's inhabitants. The Committee of Heavenly Reacquisition is only convinced by strong changes in Earthly emotion.

Ancient: The mission of the Subcommittee for Preservation of Planet Earth is both ancient and somewhat respected. It spans both time and space, having to justify humanity every few years or so.

SETUP

This is a game for 2-5 players and 1 game master (GM.) The players portray heavenly beings of immense power who have been assigned to the Subcommittee for the Preservation of Planet Earth. The GM prepares the majority of the situations that the players will face, and guides them through the story. He is also responsible for adjudicating the personalities of non-player members of the Harmonious Congress.

The following materials are referred to in the rules, but are not necessary to enjoy the game:

8 colors of glass beads or other small tokens to represent emotion counters.

1 color of glass bead or other small token to represent despair counters.
A way to measure eight hours.
A six-sided die

TIME CONCERNS

The Harmonious Congress has given the Subcommittee for Preservation of Planet Earth a total of eight Cosmic Hours to gather convincing evidence on Earth. Conveniently, this equals eight hours of real, Earth time. At the end of every session, the GM simply stops the timing device until the next gathering where everyone decides to play again.

If the Committee of Heavenly Reacquisition hasn't been convinced of Earth's value by the moment that the eight hours (minus censured time: See **Miracles**) have passed, then the players have failed. Despite any other duties that they may have completed, failure on this mission puts them back centuries for a chance at re-election.

THE HARMONIOUS CONGRESS

The halls of the Harmonious Congress have been shaped by machinations of revered spirits as myriad as the number of grains of sand in the Infinite Hourglass of Central Timekeeping. Once formed of cloudstuff and the purest of alabaster marble, all but the most inaccessible outbuildings and mezzanines have been refurbished with modern materials to avoid hefty scrutiny in regard to health code violation. Cloudstuff is not the firmest of supports in the best of conditions, and marble is notoriously heavy.

After much deliberation, the new look for the physical manifestation of order in

the universe was decided upon and promoted with all due haste. Frosted glass was the new cloudstuff. It could support nearly twice as much primal stone, eliminated 32% of the nap-interrupting outside light, and rarely ever erupted in seasonal thunderstorms.

The marble aesthetic had unyielding patrons, but the metaphorical alabaster was decided to be too pure. It offended those who had vested interest in removing powerful concentrations of color from collective perception. Dirty grey veined with black fit the tenants of the most recent revision of the Harmonious Congress mission statement, and was also easily obtainable. The overall effect was more grim than originally planned, but reduced loafing by an astronomical 2%. The changes stayed, not least of all because certain sharp-eyed beings were able to peer through the glass walls into adjacent rooms without being observed.

PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE

The members of the Harmonious Congress are functionally very similar. While possessing of many individual quirks, they were all created to maintain order in the universe. This basic template is only modified by the position that the heavenly being presently holds.

Each position has three emotions listed next to it. After the player selects which position he wishes to fill, he ranks each emotion. He receives seven tokens representing the highest-ranked emotion, five tokens representing the second highest-ranked emotion, and three tokens representing the lowest ranked emotion. These are his emotion counters.

Department of Miracles: Joy, Fear, Repentant

Although the Prometheus Act has curtailed the Department of Miracles' most ambitious projects, they still remain one of the best funded sections of the Harmonious Congress. Typical duties include the supervision of guinea pigs (Earth's little miracles) and explaining sources of galactic wonder to disillusioned auditors.

Accustomed to Miracles: Any time that a member of the Department of Miracles is found guilty of needlessly displaying celestial powers to lower beings, their team is censured for fifteen minutes of Cosmic Time rather than the typical thirty.

Agent of the New Guard Enforcement League: Zeal, Rage, Contemplative

The New Guard Enforcement League serves as the internal security of the upper spheres. In addition to physical enforcement of regional policies, it vigilantly scans the ever-changing fringes of entropy for irregularities. Thought crimes don't fall under the official duties of the New Guard Enforcement League yet, but they're working on it.

Armor of Faith: Ignore one point of apathy per failed bid attempt.

Lower Life Form Protection Bureau: Contemplative, Joy, Repentant

Ultimately the founders of the original Subcommittee for Preservation of Planet Earth can be traced back to the Lower Life Form Protection Bureau. These spineless peaceniks refuse were

established to safeguard the rights of sentient beings throughout the universe. Funding to this department is notoriously shaky dependant upon who is in power during appropriations season, so LLFPB fund-drives are common.

Won't Somebody Think of the Children: If a target becomes over stimulated, the LLFP can retroactively reduce their bid by one token.

Public Relations: Zeal, Angst, Any Other Emotion

According to the Golgotha Proviso, the Harmonious Congress is supposed to keep strict and accurate records of every legislative session. Public Relations is supposed to reformat these records and make them easier to understand. In practice, they're a glorified propaganda machine that maintains the good name of the universe's longest-surviving governing body of pure order.

Liberal Arts Degree: PR is known for being well-versed in many fields, but unable to focus in any of. Zeal or Angst must be their first priority emotion.

The Chamber of Divine Wrath: Fear, Rage, Angst

When nothing else will do, problems are reported to the Chamber of Divine Wrath. Their swords are swift, and their temperaments implacable. Tact is not in their job description, and it often gets in the way of congressional duties.

The Vicious Cycle: A member of the Chamber of Divine Wrath can trade two of any emotion counter for one rage counter. This ability cannot be used during a bid.

BUDGETARY CONCERNS

When on Earth, agents of the Harmonious Congress are advised to fit in with the local populace. Past fact-finding missions have indicated that initial displays of a willingness to have meaningful discourse have been met with hostility and fear. In a famous case occurring at the end of the 20th century in the United States of America, several members of the Subcommittee for Preservation of Planet Earth disguised themselves as members of a government agency that used eye-masking sunglasses as part of their uniform. This iteration of the subcommittee had a surprising success rate given their less than subtle tactics.

Later review hinged upon the universal truth that eyes are the window to the soul. The subcommittee, given their burning passion for justice that overwhelmed human comprehension, had highly luminescent souls. To prevent this sense of duty from extending from their retinas like so many laser pistol shots, the team leader decided to block the potentially harmful rays. With sunglasses.

Since (before?) then, most heavenly beings encountered on Earth have had some sort of protective eyewear. While glasses are the most innocuous, they don't work for all regions or periods. Monocles, eye patches, and even wide-brimmed hats have all served their greater purpose at one time or another.

Past members of the Subcommittee for Preservation of Planet Earth have gone so far as positing that specific forms of eyewear are better at protecting their

personal goals from prying eyes. The character of those goals is described next.

GOALS

It is worth noting at this point that the Harmonious Congress may share many superficial qualities with a popular notion of religious afterlife, but follow these parallels too far at your own risk. The heavenly beings that inhabit this cosmology are civil servants firstly, and agents of divine justice whenever it doesn't interfere with their own agendas.

All of the members of the Subcommittee for the Preservation of Planet Earth are involved with other movements or voting blocs. It is in these organizations that their true loyalties lie. Everybody loses if Earth is destroyed, but the matter is worth less political prestige than promoting a long-term initiative. After all, what's a class three planet with resource allocation issues compared to diligently upholding the Beleraphil-Smedley Wrath Proviso?

When a heavenly being successfully fulfills the action indicated by his goal, he gains a number of emotion counters equal to the result of a six-sided die. If the mission has lasted for more than six hours Cosmic Time, receive an additional two counters. After all, it is far more satisfying to complete a task after shirking until the deadline is within sight. Then you adroitly manipulate a few figures, and save the day with minimal effort. They aren't paying you enough to expect total devotion.

Gaining emotion counters in this way cannot increase your emotions beyond their starting value.

To determine a new heavenly being's goal, roll on the following table:

1. I wear my sunglasses at night: You are not a force of Good, but a force of Order. One of the perks of being so orderly is deriving pleasure from watching those who try to buck the system get slapped down. This goal succeeds whenever a heavenly being takes more than two points of retaliatory apathy.

2. Mirrorshades are the future: You are the member of a back-hallway conspiracy to convince the lower beings of the existence of a specific deity through whatever means possible. Whenever you use a highly visible miracle keyed to this deity (who may or may not exist) and a sufficient number of mortals are awed, this goal succeeds.

3. Obscuring smoke, hand gestures, or scenery: Your department is working to subsume the duties (and funding) of another group. Work with the GM to determine the position that you're opposing. This goal succeeds every time that you demonstrate your skills to be more effective in pursuing that group's goal than one of the group's original members.

4. Opera glasses: Ever since the budget for conscience training was slashed to fund a handful of new stars, the Harmonious Congress has encouraged sentient beings to figure out their own problems. This goal succeeds for every hour of Cosmic Time that you refrain from direct contact with a sentient being or perform miracles that cannot be explained by coincidence.

5. An old-style monocle or lab goggles: Earth's purpose is best described as that of a terrarium for advanced psychological research. Every time that you're able to acquire data on why one emotion failed to save a target while another one succeeded, this goal succeeds. For example, if the subcommittee fails to win over a target upon the first meeting with contemplation, the researcher would succeed when a different emotion was used to save the target.

6. Rose-colored lenses: Whenever a target capable of at least three Despair is purged entirely by one emotion, this goal succeeds.

Alternatively, work with your GM to determine a similarly interesting goal that is tailored to your interests and the passion of the event. This option relies on the willingness to tell a story rather than hard mechanics.

PHENOMENAL COSMIC POWER

While on Earth, heavenly beings are able to manipulate the environment in a variety of surprising ways. Physical laws bend before them, and can even be suspended with a thought. Healing the sick? Not a problem. Moving an object with nary a touch? Once again, easy as all get out. Raining fiery death from the sky upon one's enemies? It's possible, but really not the focus of a standard game. Such an occurrence is handled by the **Miracle** rules later on.

These powers do not develop over time, so it's possible for a heavenly being to be assigned to a mission at the dawn of recorded history, and then show up

essentially the same during the midst of a galactic war.

The one factor that ties all of these powers together is that they have the strength to wake sleeping hearts to the active world. When a player uses his phenomenal cosmic power, he indicates how effective it is at arousing potent emotions in the target by spending emotion counters.

TARGETS

In order to convince the Committee of Heavenly Reacquisition that the spiritual resources assigned to Earth are producing results of sufficient value, the players must present evidence that humans are able to experience emotional growth. To this end, they must infiltrate the designated location (in time and space) and give the uncaring a push in the right direction.

The Committee of Heavenly Reacquisition is not interested in cases where the subject was always able to experience healthy emotions. Such statistical anomalies exist in any system. They require big, flashy results; a sad sack of despair turning his life around would be sufficient – prompted by the players, of course.

The depths of these potential targets' hopelessness and general callousness toward change is expressed by a pool of black despair counters. A standard challenge, such as a forlorn lover or a woman who refuses to confront her tyrannical employer carries five to seven despair counters. Incidental characters who could help heavenly beings complete their goals tend to be more

proactive; otherwise they would be targets. The entire Harmonious Congress may see fit to recognize a mission in which a target with more than ten despair counters is suitably encouraged toward feeling.

As stated earlier, each member of the Harmonious Congress has individual quirks. It is far easier to justify one's mission to the embodiment of Romantic Love if two star-crossed lovers are reunited rather than starting a land war in Asia.

When a player wishes to influence a target, he calls for an influence bid. At this time, every player who wishes to have a stake in the target's future secretly picks a number of emotion counters equal to the intensity of his meddling. Each player can only bid one emotion at a time.

After everyone has secretly made a bid, everyone reveals their emotion counters. The player with the lowest bid narrates their actions and the target's response. At the point where the player seems likely to succeed, the player with the next highest bid continues the narration. In addition to explaining why the previous bid wasn't enough, it contains that heavenly being's efforts. This process continues until the highest bid has been made. New aspects can be introduced into the story, but they cannot make the next player's narration impossible. However, using this time to further one's own goals is acceptable.

If there is a tie, players may invoke miracles to gain the extra edge. If the tie persists, roll a die to randomly determine who is considered to have the high bid.

At this point, compare the total number of emotion counters bid to the despair counters of the target. If the emotion counters are greater, then the target has been swayed out of drudgehood. Based on the narration until that point, the GM finishes the target's story. It is acceptable to introduce the redeemed target into another target's story, especially if there are plot threads that would be more interesting if wrapped up.

After a target has been redeemed, the Committee of Heavenly Reacquisition becomes interested in the target as evidence.

If the despair counters outnumber the emotion counters, the target remains trapped in a mire of indecision and discontent. The player who made the smallest bid (other than 0) is struck with a wave of retaliatory apathy. He discards a number of emotion counters equal to the difference between the number of despair counters and emotion counters. All other bids are returned.

If a heavenly being runs out of emotion counters, he is completely drained of the power to carry on. Such figures require intense vacationing and training montages in order to remember how to feel.

If the number of emotion counters is equal to double the number of despair counters (or more), the target has suffered an emotional overload. The unwarranted influx of life has disrupted the target to such a degree that he enters a coma filled with vivid dreams for 30 minutes Cosmos Time. After that, he awakes with full despair.

If the number of despair counters is equal to the number of emotion counters, the target is temporarily lifted out of his or her fugue. This lasts for 30 minutes Cosmos Time before the despair reasserts itself. Harmonious Congressbeings dislike being presented with such wishy-washy evidence.

MIRACLES

Every Heavenly Being, no matter how minor its duties and responsibilities, has enough power on hand to impress all but the most jaded mortals. Unfortunately, the Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Subcommittee for Preservation of Planet Earth falls under the strictures of the Prometheus Act. Any display of divine power that cannot be explained away as a coincidence based upon the physical laws that its observers subscribe to is subject to review. If the use of power fails review, the responsible organization suffers immediate censure.

Any time that a player dictates the results of a bid for influence and it contains the use of powers that would stick out as evidence of divine meddling, they receive an additional two tokens. However, the GM rolls a six-sided die. On a 4-6, the action has been deemed in violation of the Prometheus Act by the review committee. As a penalty, the team is forcibly removed from Earth for 30 minutes of Cosmos time. For ease of play, it is suggested that this time of censure is served at the end of the play period instead of actually halting the game for a half-hour timeout.

THE COMMITTEE

The composition of the Committee of Heavenly Reacquisition changes yearly, but typically contains between nine and thirteen members. A simple majority is needed to pass all votes.

Each committee member is willing to discuss the Earth matter with anyone at any time. For their opinion to be swayed from destruction (for it is the default setting of the vote), each member must receive between twelve and sixteen converted despair counters worth of evidence. If the winning bid happened to be the emotion that the committee member values above all other matters, the value of the converted despair counters are doubled.

ENDGAME

The players can present their evidence for Earth to each of the committee members individually, or wait and do it in one large chunk. Remember that when the clock strikes the eighth hour, all of the votes must be counted or else it's over.

END OF THE GAME

That's it for now. I had fun this year, and already have plans for improvement. Thanks a lot, members of the Gamechef forum. You've encouraged me with your banter. Fred, Amanda, and Natalie:
Thanks for the playtest.

- Zach Welhouse, 9:49
lebrante@hotmail.com