

# DEMILICH

by Noam Rosen

## **Skull/Old**

a competitive story strategy game

You were once an ancient, powerful wizard, your power unrivaled except by the Gods! Your magic had even preserved you; for a time. Flesh became gaunt; gaunt flesh became bones, bones became brittle, until finally you're just a skull on a shelf. Sure, you still have eons of experience and knowledge at your command, but no hands!

You try and exert your influence over those that come across your paths. You've built networks of spies, gotten comfortable in your new digs when someone starts swiping up all the talent. Seems like there's other skulls out there, wielding their power in your turf and that JUST. WONT. DO!

Demilich is a 2-3 player competitive story strategy game where you will play a demilich (a magical ancient skull), build their fortress, minions and network of influence and destroy those of your competitors.

## **Setting:**

The assumed setting of Demilich is a semi-serious fantasy setting where adventurers are a scourge on hard working overlords and their increasingly pilfered fortresses. Think the assumed setting of a very popular alliterative fantasy setting from the perspective of one of it's most iconic villains, with a little more humor and tongue placed in cheek.

You can feel free to expand your setting as needed at the table. Let the setting accommodate the types of stories you want to tell. If you'd like your Demilich to be extra-dimensional, from space, the head of a Fortune 500 company or all of the above, go for it! You can even have a mixed bag of Demilich, reaching across time/space/dimensions to exert their influence and mess with each other.

## **You will need:**

One Deck of Cards, A couple of pieces of paper(or index cards), Pencil or Pen

## **To get started:**

...first, make your Demilich!

## **Answer me these questions 3!**

1. What is your name and reputation? E.g. Acerak the Mad, Bob the Pervy, Thasslewrath the Destroyer. Someone so powerful as you is sure to have garnered some sort of reputation prior to being trapped in this skull. Maybe your reputation has come after being trapped? E.g. there are tales of a rampaging skull in the country side?

2. How did you get trapped in the skull? The inexorable march of Time? That damnable do-gooder Sir Chumley? Your own hubris? This is most likely going to be your primary motivation for doing everything that you're doing (and an excellent weak spot for your enemies to exploit!) Be creative! Write this under your name/reputation.

3. What is your great ambition? So you've got eternal life (effectively). What do you do? Seek more power? The love of a woman? REVENGE(against whom?)! What drives you?

**Distribute your build points.** You get 6 build points total which may be distributed amongst your Skull Stats any way you like; a relatively even spread is recommended.

### **Skull Stats:**

**Influence** - Representative of your network of minions, local nobility in your pocket, monsters in your dungeon - This is how you will determine your resources and defenses.

**Knowledge** - Representative of your experience, academic, streetwise or arcane.

**Will** - Representative of your magical ability, willpower, and physical capabilities (you are an inanimate object, after all)

**Ancient** - This represents your age and the benefits that can be associated with multiple lifetimes of magical training. Your Ancient score determines how many Ancient points you start play with. Ancient points can be spent to add dice rolls to challenges. Ancient starts at 1 (but you can spend build points to add to this at character creation). Once spent you lose those points until the pool refreshes (usually in-between sessions).

### **Building your Assets**

Each player starts with 7 cards, representing your pool of possible resources. Also, deal seven cards face up in between all the players. This is the Common Pool. You will not be able to use during the initial Asset creation, but will be able to pull from it during play.

The four suits represent types of possible resources (with the exact iteration depending on the asset). The higher the card value the better the effort (with face cards being worth 10 and Aces being worth 11).

Suit/Asset Type	Clout	Fort	Mook
Hearts	Valor/Loyalty	Hearth	Resistance
Spades	Guile/Viciousness	Deadliness	Strength
Diamonds	Resources	Sophistication/Size	Dexterity
Clubs	Smarts	Puzzles/Terrain adv.	Intelligence

Each player must build their starting assets using their seven cards. You must build one of each asset type (one Clout, one Fort, one Mook) You may use no more than three cards per asset. **If you use multiple cards of the main suit, you will add those together to get your relevant skill.** For example, a Mook with 4C and 7C in his bundle will effectively have an Intelligence of 11.

An asset can represent an individual, small group or large organization. You can assign any number of cards to an asset, but they may not be reassigned thereafter.

The higher the total skill, the better the asset is in that particular facet.

**Examples of types of Clout:** A network of lawyers, The mayor of a local hamlet, A local barmaid who directs drunken adventurers towards your cavern, King Axelrod's slimy advisor, King Axelrod himself, The President of the local Parent Teachers Association.

**Examples of types of Forts:** A mobile golem body (with a handy storage area in the abdomen, to afford you a better view), A ramshackle hut that's only defense is it's unassuming appearance, a gigantic cloud castle in the center of the sky.

**Examples of types of Mooks:** Tucker's Kobolds, A group of ineffective henchmen, Gognar the Barbarian, Flymebrythe the Red Dragon, X'ythlene - that friendly illithid who rents a room from you.

### **Example of Character Creation/Building Assets**

**Player 1** has built Methusala the Obscure - He has distributed his points as following. He has decided that he was a scholar who didn't want to die and bargained with a local hag for a few more years; his body kept disintegrating until now, he's just a skull! He should have read the fine print!

Influence 0  
 Knowledge 3  
 Will 3  
 Ancient 1

Player 1 is dealt 7C, 2C, 6H, JS, AD, 5D, 3H

For Clout: they build 2C, AD - representing someone very wealthy but dumb as rocks, hmmm...Nathaniel Applebottom, his family is an old esteemed family, laid low by inbreeding; still, rich as all get out.

For Fort: JS, 3H, 7C - A relatively well hidden, well fortified dungeon. It's got some pretty clever traps and puzzles though. It doesn't provide much hearth (it's not very homey and can't be used very effectively for defense). Let's say that it's an ice cavern that's been uniquely carved by you over the years, but it's little more than a deadly, cold prison.

For Mooks: 6H and 5D - Something relatively loyal and dexterous/sneaky, let's say an ethereal filcher that you raised from infancy, named Mr. Grabby.

**Player 2** has built Oran the Vengeful, a powerful (and insatiable) sorcerer who was imprisoned within the skull by the Brotherhood of the Roses, a fraternal order of knights and monks.

Influence 1  
Knowledge 2  
Will 3  
Ancient 1

Player 2 is dealt 3D, AC, 2S, KS, QH, 5H, 4C

For Clout: AC; An incredibly knowledgeable, though weak willed, penniless and asocial individual; perhaps an scholar of obscure Atlantean texts or a game designer.

For Fort: 3D, 2S, QH: This is the childhood home of the skull, though not particularly well defended, the site itself imbues the skull with additional defensive power. It also holds some minor treasures, is relatively easy to explore and perhaps has a moat for defense.

For Mook: KS, 5H, 4C: This is the adventuring party, the Meddlesome 3, featuring the Amazon Devendra (KS), Dwarvern Priest Thorogrim (5H) and Halfling Thief Peeble (4C).

**Once you've built your assets** (and given them back stories and/or other details) you may:

**Roll initiative.** The player that rolls highest goes first. You may spend Ancient in order to roll additional dice to add to the total. Once you've determine initiative order, you only need re-roll if there's a lull, such as when more asset cards are dealt out.

**When it is your turn,** you may either Fight! **OR** Scheme!:

## **Scheme!**

Step 1. The attacking player either chooses 1 unheld resource and assigns details to it that will

allow him to incorporate the card into one of his appropriate held Asset **OR** chooses multiple unheld resources and builds them into an Asset (see Building) and assigns details.

Step 2. The attacking player attacks using any individual Assets Relevant Skill (or skills) that the player can argue and/or the other players or facilitator finds acceptable. If they have no Relevant Skill, they can use a relevant Skull Ability.

Step 3: Roll the relevant Skull Ability + Relevant Skill vs. Card Target # (equal to double the card's value). The ONE IMPORTANT EXCEPTION, is that if you are trying to attack multiple cards, you add them together to get the Card Target #.

Step 4: If you succeed, add the resource to the appropriate Asset (or in the case of collecting multiple cards, add the asset to your retinue) and narrate the results. Alternatively, you may remove the resource from play. Place the cards in the discard pile and narrate how you do so.

## **Fight!**

Step 1. The attacking player chooses 1 held Asset and targets it.

Step 2. The attacking player attacks using any individual Assets Relevant Skill (or skills) that the player can argue and/or the other players or facilitator finds acceptable. If they have no relevant resource, they can use a relevant Skull ability. Normally, you roll the relevant resources relevant skill + skull stat vs. defense.

Step 3. Defending against attacks.

The primary skill that you use depends on what type of asset your using, as laid out below.

If your Clout asset is attacked, defend with Valor + Relevant Skill (if any)+ Relevant Skull Pool

If your Fort asset is attacked, defend with Hearth + Relevant Skill (if any)+ Relevant Skull Pool

If your Mook asset is attacked, defend with Resistance + Relevant Skill (if any)+ Relevant Skull Pool

The defending player attacks using any relevant resource that the player can argue and/or the other players or facilitator finds acceptable. If they have no relevant resource, they just use a relevant Skull ability.

### **Inflicting damage:**

If you beat the targets defense, you inflict damage equal to the margin of difference between defense and attack, rounded up to the lowest card in the asset. In other words, the damaged asset will lose its lowest card. There is ONE IMPORTANT EXCEPTION. If the damage is higher than the highest card in that particular asset, the entire asset is taken down.

You may remove the cards from play. Place the cards in the discard pile and narrate how you do so. Alternatively, you can scrap the asset for parts. Break up the bundle and place the cards in the Common Pile.

## Winning/Death

Demilich continue to scrape at each other with increasingly deadly precision, behind increasingly thick bulletproof vaults watched over by increasingly avaricious bankers. Eventually, one of them gets wore down enough when there's no Asset to attack. When this happens, the Demilich can only use its' appropriate Skull Skills!

With no additional defenses or resources **Demilich can only take 3 hits**. Note that this means if the attacker succeeds by a margin of 3 with a direct attack to a demilich they successfully kill it.

## Roleplaying with Demilich

Okay, so HOW do you role play in this game? There's a good degree of collaborative story telling here with the other players (or facilitator, if you are utilizing one) acting as the final say if an added detail is acceptable. Feel free to role play as the mooks and minions as well (maybe having the other players take on their roles).

You also have your enemies and drives to color your role-playing. If the other players agree, you can even build your individual nemeses and place them in the common pool, thus allowing the Demilich to tear them apart with political technique, fearsome monsters or terrible traps. Otherwise, I just recommend lots of offhand references to the esteemed prisoner you keep under your throne room.

Remember that you are OLD. Even the youngest Demilich is probably got at least 100 years under their belt. You've probably lost a fair number of your marbles by now. Existence as a Demilich is largely about creating comfort for yourself; building lavish throne rooms, collecting and arranging your various trophies..long empty halls of meaningless baubles that are meant to give your life some significance. But what was it all for? You killed your childhood rival (and your sweetheart in the ensuing blast) and now you'd give anything to see either of them again. Being a Demilich means being alone forever.

So, how do you interact with other Demilich? Through magical, catty Demilich social networking, of course. Oh, that's not how they think of it. To them it's a direct link of communication amongst

their puissant kind, an unalterable record of their combined history and great triumphs. Also, there's a LOT of shit talking. After all, when you're a powerful magical skull, things get really boring after the first couple of ages. So feel free to issue edicts and taunts to your fellow Demilich and their hordes.

## **Fringe cases:**

**Ties:** Break it with the highest value card. In case of same value face cards, use traditional face ordering. In case of same value cards, use suit (Spade, Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs from highest to lowest). Otherwise, just roll the dice again.

## **Here is an example or two**

to give you an idea of how things work:

### **Playtest 1**

**Player 1:** The Doom Skull

**Influence:** 2

**Knowledge:** 2

**Will:** 2

**Ancient:** 1

#### **Fort:**

*KC and 5H* : A complex series of corridors surround the area around your fortress, and there's only one way in. Inside your fortress...more corridors. It's not exactly homey (what with the endless empty halls) but there's a central safe room that you've furnished modestly.

#### **Clout:**

AC and 9S: You have an organization at your disposal known as the Snakes, a loyal network of spies, blackmailers, moles and corporate saboteurs that have infiltrated most of the political movers and shakers around. They can deliver swift and painful retribution if needed.

#### **Mook:**

4D, [4C, 7C] 11C: Yabi the kobold sorcerer has been your loyal thrall for some time, he's quite clever and eager to please as well. He keeps himself well equipped with scrolls and utility items. He also has his own apprentice, Bauble, a gnome youngling who was adopted by the otherwise heartless sorcerer. Bauble (4C) is a little less bright and more apt to throw himself into danger.

**Player 2:** Kevin the Bland

**Influence:** 2

**Knowledge:** 2

**Will:** 2

**Ancient:** 1

**Fort:**

QS and 8C: High atop a cliff that affords a view of the surrounding countryside, your fort is well garrisoned with terrible goblin defensive weapons and gnarled hobgoblin archers.

**Clout:**

KS and 2S: Famed yellow journalist Blab Onanon is on your payroll. He's won't hesitate to mar the reputation the any and everyone; though he's a bit tough to get back on the leash.

**Mook:**

JS, 7S, JD: A fearsome two headed giant named Mun-Go (at least you think that's what he's called) is in your employ/trapped in your fortress. He also has a keeper, a horribly mangled hobgoblin named Reaker(JD). He's seems to have quite the arsenal for dealing with large monsters.

**Common Pool:** 4H, 7H, 9C,6D,10D,8H,4S

**Initiative.**

P1 ROLLS: 4 P2 ROLLS: 3

P1 wants to pick up 8H to improve his Mook, so he has his asset Yabi, move on it. P1 narrates that the Doom Skull hears about a draught which when drunk is known to permanently bolster ones' convictions. He sends Yabi to seek out the *bolstering draught*. Yabi uses his sorcery (7C) and rolls the Doom Skull's Knowledge, since he knew where the draught was located (2dice). He needs to beat 8; and rolls 3, for a total of 10. Success! Yabi traverses the dungeon finds the bolstering draught and shares it with Bauble. P1 adds the 8H to Yabi and Bauble's bundle.

Play passes to P2; Kevin doesn't like the rumors of Doom Skull's rise. He uses Blab Onanon to attack Yabi and Bauble in the presses, spreading rumours about their already socially unusual relationship and slandering their name amongst the trades as well. He's hoping to ruin their reputation. P2 rolls Kevin's Influence (2dice) + Blab's Guile (K or 10) and rolls a 3 totalling 13. P1 decides that Yabi tries to combat this slander by having Bauble come forward and explain the truth; Yabi rescued him after a kobold raid on his families burrow, taking him in as one of his own and to teach him his arcane ways and to perhaps, bridge the hatred between their people. The Facilitator/Other Player deems this appropriate and colorful enough for using 4C. For P1's defense he rolls Yabi's Resistance (8H)+Bauble's statement (4C)+Kevin's Influence (2dice) rolling 7 for a total of 19. Bauble and Yabi are saved! Blab's been spreading a lot of rumours about a lot of people and some parts of the evil community are very accepting nowadays.

Now play passes back to P1. The Doom Skull is pissed after Blab's intolerant gossiping. He sends Bauble and Yabi to attack Kevin the Bland's hilltop fortress. Bauble has brought his invisibility cloak (4D)adds his Intelligence (7C) for his air bound approach and Doom Skull's Knowledge (2dice) of the castle's location. He rolls 11, he gets a 22. They may have caught Kevin's forces by surprise. Kevin rolls Hearth (1 because he has no relevant card) +Q or 10



S (his ballistic defenses) and Kevin's will (2 dice, representing his sway over his troops) . He rolls a 5 for a total of 16. Bauble sneak attack is successful! Bauble and Yabi do 6 damage, round up and take out his 8C; they've done sufficient damage to effectively take out Kevin's fort advantage; perhaps through their overhead attack, they noticed lava channels in the mountaintop from where armies could approach.

P2's turn. Kevin wants to shore his defenses, so he will attempt to pick up the 7 of Hearts. Kevin sends Reaker to go buy up all that ancient weaponry and torture devices that will help make his lair feel like home. Reaker rolls his Resources (J or 10)+Kevin's Influence (2dice)(goodwill discounts donchaknow). P2 rolls 7 for a total of 17, enough to pick up the 7H. Reaker decorates Kevin's keep with fearsome looking curved swords and antiquated torture devices: Cozy!

P1's turn. He's going to try and recruit a whole new Mook Asset (as opposed to strengthening Yabi and/or Bauble). He wants to pick up the 4S and 4H so he says that the Doom Skull can summon a fae spirit and bind it to his will. In this case, he can't reasonably narrate a way that any of his assets can help him, so he will simply roll Will (2dice). He rolls a 7, 1 shy. P1 decides to spend 1 point from his Ancient pool and gets to roll an additional die, rolling a 6 for a new total of 13. That's enough to successfully summon and bind a Brownie into his service; He likes to be called Pleasebosom.

## **Designer Notes:**

Thanks to Acerak and the Tomb of Horrors for being the first thing I thought of when I saw the ingredients. Thanks also to a stranger at my house (Mary?) for the catty Facebook for lonely skulls idea. And to my friends, for providing encouragement.

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