

The gods dwell in their boredom, nothing but the void and each other's company. They talk, they fight, they lie quiet, for aeons at a time.

They discovered their power to create and passed away aeons more forging cosmos after cosmos. Through creation, they discovered a new and more interesting way to talk and fight with each other.

Then, watching one creation, they discovered play. Then began the games, in which their talking and fighting reached new heights by virtue of being displaced into creation.

In this game, players take on the roles of deities engaged in playing the Game of Creation. Each deity has a simple goal: to, through the medium of creation, tell as many interesting stories as they can. Conveniently enough, this is the same goal of the players.

Just as the player and character goals are linked, so also is their success linked. If the character produces an interesting story, so will have the player.

Play is divided into four distinct sections. First, players each create a divine persona. Second, they jointly create the lineaments of creation. Third, players take turns framing scenes for each other and cooperatively tell stories about what happens in creation. Finally, at the end of the game, players determine who has won the game.

This booklet parallels that division, each section of the game receiving its own section. Before play, it is necessary that at least one player reads through the entire booklet. The more players who read through the booklet, the smoother the play experience will be.

After the sections detailing the basics of play, others follow. These sections are not focused upon on the rules but on the play of the game. They contain suggestions for play and ideas to consider.

The game functions best with at least three players. The players have a great deal of control over how long the game

lasts, so it may be played as a short, one session game or as a longer, multiple session game.

The game requires a few blank sheets of paper, copies of the character sheets, a packet of index cards, a package of tokens (stackable like poker chips), a couple dozen paperclips, and a d10. Throughout, I will refer only to a d5, which is simply the result of a d10 divided by two and rounded up.

Section 1

Character Creation

The Gods in the Void

The deific character will be your means for interacting with your fellow players. It serves as an interface or control panel for the stories you will tell over the course of the game.

Before going any further, take a look at the character sheets at the back of the booklet. You will notice that there are three distinct styles—triangle, diamond, and pentacle. The shapes are important—each tip of a figure is an

orientation that your character can take toward creation.

At any one time, only one tip will be facing creation. However, based on events in play, the character sheet will rotate so that your deity will show different faces to creation.

Keep in mind, too, that the sort of god you choose also determines the avatar you will be able to use in Creation as well as the sort of drama they are best at motivating.

A primal god acts through a heroic avatar and is most effective when encouraging epic drama.

A unifying god acts through a priestly avatar and is most effective when encouraging missionary drama.

A changing god acts through a free spirit and is most effective when encouraging revolutionary drama.

See Section 3 for more information on what this means for play.

You will also notice that each tip is associated with a space or cell within the figure. While I will talk about this in more detail in the third section, those cells will contain the tokens used to ‘buy’ a chance to contribute to the story. You can move tokens to adjacent spaces by making certain kinds of contributions to the story.

You can move tokens directly into creation (‘buying’ important contributions to the story) when they are occupying the space associated with the tip facing creation. The central cell, labeled “Gift,” allows you to move tokens to *another* player’s Gift space.

Now, each of these spaces must be occupied by either an *attribute* or a *message*. In order to move tokens from one space to another, you must make a contribution to the story based on the content of the space from which the tokens are moving. In order to make the most use of these spaces, choose attributes and messages that are more evocative than descriptive.

An attribute is a single noun or a present-tense verb. They are things

like “love,” “might,” or “kills.” If you so desire, you may also add a modifying adjective or adverb to the word where appropriate. Thus, you could have an attribute “kills mightily” or “killing might” or “loves mightily.”

A message is a simple phrase directed at those who worship the deity in creation—no more than a single subject, object, and verb. Each may be modified by an adjective or adverb, but the simpler the message, the easier it will be to use it for story contributions. Messages include things like “Bow down before my image” or “Do not lie.”

The space labeled 1 on the character sheet must possess an attribute rather than a message. Also, all deities must have more attributes than messages. This means, for example, that a primal god (triangular sheet) can only have one message, while the other two types may have as many as two messages.

Each labeled cell represents a certain aspect of the deity. Deities with more spaces are more complex, but also more exposed to the effects of the fate

die in play (see Section 3). Before filling out the spaces on your sheet with attributes and messages, please consider what each space represents for the deity.

Cell 1 is the deity's essential aspect, what defines them and their actions.

Cell 2 is the deity's most common demeanor, the most frequent way they are described. An attribute could be the way the deity is most frequently described. A message could indicate a common injunction repeated by the deity.

Cell 3 is the deity's most common action or way of interfering with creation. An attribute could describe the tenor of that action while a message might indicate the 'hope' embodied by the action.

Cell 4 is the way in which the deity tries to 'right' the world. An attribute here could be what the deity wants to see more of in the world. A message could represent how they instruct their followers to behave.

Cell 5 is how the deity tends to experiment and 'play' with creation. Whereas space 4 indicates a goal, space 5 indicates playfulness without a clear goal. An attribute could reflect the general tenor of their experiments while a message might indicate the sorts of experiments they make.

Finally, the *Gift cell* is how the deity chooses to interact with other deities. An attribute likely indicates how other deities perceive that interaction while a message probably reveals how the deity shapes that interaction.

Talk with your fellow players about the sort of deities you are creating. The best games will have each of you playing different sorts of deities with their own distinctive set of attributes and messages.

It can be fun and easy to create a deity that is antithetical to your friend's, but it also works well if you create a character that supplements another player's. If one player has created a very active, aggressive deity, consider creating a deity that will soothe the aggravation brought about by that

deity. If your friend plays a plant god, consider creating a god who deals more expressly with livestock or the city.

Section 2

Creating Creation

The Heart of the Game

This game is played around a table. The space defined by the table is called the Void and all the players set their character sheet in front of them, at the edge of the table. The center of the table is called Creation and it is toward this which players orient their character sheet's cells.

If the Void is the 'board' for the game you, the player, plays, Creation is the 'board' for the game played by your character. Before proceeding, talk with your fellow players about the sort of world in which you want your stories to take place.

Do not get too caught up in the intimate details of creation. The stories you will tell will revolve around individuals, so that the society and world in which

they act will serve primarily as color and inspiration.

Take out a sheet of paper and brainstorm about these questions until all the players reach a consensus:

What sort of world is this? What are its defining geographic and climactic features?

How ‘realistic’ are its natural laws? Is this a fantasy world or a world that closely mimics our own in terms of what is possible?

What sort of people populate it? Is there only one culture or are there many? Are they tribal, urban, national, international, or interstellar?

What are the key social distinctions? Are they defined by wealth, birth, race, or gender?

Where will your avatars fit into this world? Will they be highly placed members of the society or live on its margins?

Throughout the brainstorming process, you should freely reference examples of the sort of world you want. Mention historical cultures and fictional worlds from speculative fiction to give your fellow players a clearer idea of what you have in mind.

Be willing to compromise, too. If one player brings up the Roman Empire and you want to tell science fiction stories, ask them what they find interesting about that world. It may be that what they find intriguing about telling stories inspired by the Roman Empire can also be worked into a science fiction story, or vice versa.

Don’t expect all your ideas to find their way into the final version of creation. Take what everyone seems most excited about and run with it. If you have an idea you think is really cool, but no one else gets excited about it, let it go. The game works best when everyone can share in the excitement.

Once this outline of your world is complete, make sure everyone gets a stack of approximately 10-15 index

cards. Always have extra index cards on hand should they be needed.

The first index card represents your avatar in creation. Write their name in the bottom right-hand corner and their type (hero, priest, free spirit) in the bottom left-hand corner. Above that, jot down a brief (2-3 sentence) description of their personality and place in creation.

Now, remember that the avatar you create here is not necessarily the character you will use most during play. You may choose to create an entirely different character after play begins if the avatar does not provide you the best means for telling a story.

All the other cards will be used to contribute key elements to Creation over the course of the game. Each element is one of three things: a unique object (O), a leitmotif (L), or a theme (T). When an element is entered into Creation, its letter (O, L, T) is written in the bottom right-hand corner and its name is written in the bottom left-hand corner. Any elaboration of its name is

written just above the name and letter in the center of the card.

A *unique object* is a concrete thing (a scroll, a temple, a sword, a sacred phrase passed from priest to priest). When adding a unique item to Creation, write its type in the bottom left-hand corner (temple, scroll, sacred phrase) and a brief 1-2 sentence description of it just above that.

A *leitmotif* is a kind of thing or action that can appear again and again, in a different context, over the course of the game. A leitmotif should never be more complicated than a simple phrase (“goats bleating in the rain” or “healing the sick”) to facilitate its re-use.

A *theme* is a message or moral (“The poor shall inherit the earth” or “the powerful shall rule over the weak”) that can appear repeatedly over the course of a story. Whereas a unique object or leitmotif provides tools to generate the substance of the story, themes provide you with the means of connecting that substance in meaningful ways.

Each player must contribute six key elements to creation before play begins. Two must be unique objects, one a leitmotif, and one a theme. The remaining cards may be used to introduce any of the three elements.

Once everyone has finished creating their elements, lay them in the middle of the table. Set your avatar card in front of your character sheet. Now, consider how the elements and avatars might relate to each other. Is the sacred phrase known by your avatar? Does your friend’s avatar seem like the sort of character who belongs in the temple?

Remember, too, that you will be able to add elements to the game later. Don’t get stuck agonizing over your elements out of the fear that you will be stuck with your choices later in play. All of this is just fodder to get you started.

Talk freely with each other about the sort of connections that *might* link the various index cards. Each player may select one unique object and associate it with their avatar.

If it is something the avatar possesses, place it beneath the avatar card with the description exposed. If it is a place in which the avatar is or an organization to which they belong, place the avatar beneath the element card, with their description exposed.

Multiple avatars may always be stacked beneath a place or organization, but no two avatars may carry the same unique object. If two players want the same unique object for their avatar to carry, the one playing the deity with the fewest tips gets the element. If both players have the same divine template, then the element’s creator determines who gets it.

In general, it is best to paperclip together an avatar card and the unique object they carry. Over the course of play, the avatar may be placed beneath a place or organization with other avatars that have unique objects of their own. Without paperclips, the process can become cumbersome.

Section 3

Game of the Gods

Playing the Game

Overview

The game begins with each player describing their divine persona and their mortal avatar. This is a good time to mention what sort of goals they each might have, as well as getting a feel for how the different characters will interact with each other.

During play, there are two sorts of actions that can occur, *narration* of events in creation and *interaction* between the gods. Narration actions occur when players move tokens into creation. Interaction actions occur when players move tokens from their character sheet to another player's character sheet.

Each player begins play with 9 tokens: 4 blue, 4 red, and 1 white. The red and blue tokens may be placed, singly or in stacks, in any open space on the character sheet. The white token must be placed in the Gift space.

In addition to these tokens, there should be a number of blue and red tokens in creation as there are players. So if there are five players, there should be 5 blue and 5 red tokens in the space that defines creation. Each player takes one of these red tokens, one of these blue tokens, and places it on an index card in creation.

Play progresses through *cycles*. Each cycle is composed of *free play* and *key moments*. During free play, there is no clear structure as to when one player or another takes their actions. Anyone may, at any time, contribute narrations in order to add to the story or engage in interactions with their fellow deities.

Players are expected to be courteous to one another and, at any time, may hold up one hand with a number of fingers extended. When any player does this, everyone stops talking and takes a number of slow, deep breaths equal to the number of fingers held up. Use this to give you and others time to consider your decisions.

During each cycle, every player can establish a *key moment*. As free play

progresses, a player will notice an element in the story that they will want to focus upon more deeply. They do this by holding up both of their hands, fingers facing up, palms facing out, toward the other players.

When a player does this, free play is suspended. That player takes a d5 and rolls it. The number indicated is the number to which all the players must rotate their character sheet. If the indicated number does not exist on your sheet, you may not change the orientation of your sheet. The sheet may not be moved for the entirety of the key moment.

The player who initiated the scene describes the scene they would like to explore in more detail. Each player is then allowed to shift as many tokens as they wish to the cell facing creation. Once all of these tokens have been spent, the scene comes to a conclusion.

The initiating player receives a number of yellow tokens equal to the total number of players at the table. Whenever another player makes a contribution to their key moment that

they especially like, they give them a yellow token.

If the initiating player has yellow tokens remaining at the end of the key moment, they must discard them and an equal number of red or blue tokens. If the player does not have enough red or blue tokens to discard, they pass all of the remaining yellow tokens to the left. Each player takes one and passes the tokens on, until no tokens remain.

After every player has played out a key scene, the cycle comes to an end. Players determine whether they are prepared to end the game or not. If players do not wish to end the game, then play continues.

The player with the most yellow tokens at the end of the game wins. Yellow tokens may also be exchanged at any time for a new blue or red token that is not currently circulating in the game.

Free Play

During free play, any player may contribute a narration at any time. This requires that you be courteous and attentive to fellow players. At no point

in the game should you try to 'beat' someone by jumping into narrate when you see they are about to narrate.

A narration in free play may be as specific or as general as the narrating player desires. One player may make a sweeping statement about the Empire of Shin crumbling beneath its own corruption while another may narrate how the peasant Ori loses her cattle to a famine.

The limitations on narrations derive from the way in which you have paid for the narration. A narration may be bought with a token, by circulating tokens through the character sheet, or by reorienting the character sheet.

A player may only spend a token to make a narration in one of two situations. First, the token to be spent resides in the cell of the character sheet that is currently oriented toward creation. Second, the token occupies the gift space in the character sheet.

Tokens spent from the cell oriented toward creation can only be used to describe events within the creation.

Tokens spent from the gift cell may only be used to describe events that transpire between the deities themselves.

Spending Tokens in Creation (Manifesting)

Before any token can be spent in creation from a cell oriented toward it, you must make a framing narration. This narration must be about something related to the cell's attribute or message. Once the narration has been made, tokens may be freely moved from it to creation, until the character sheet is reoriented.

All of the tokens spent from the cell must develop the framing narration in one way or another. The exact nature of this development is up to you. You may choose to spend tokens to describe what follows from the narration in a linear fashion, explore events associated with the narration, or juxtapose the narration with others.

Any narration using a red token must be active, agitating creation or bringing elements of it into conflict. Any narration using a blue token must be

peaceful, soothing some agitation or bringing elements of creation into harmony.

Clever players will quickly learn to push the limits of these narrations. You can narrate peace between two nations with a blue token even if the nations have never been mentioned in previous narrations. This sort of narration is ideal and should be encouraged—it allows players to introduce evocative elements which are easily developed by other players.

When a player spends a token in creation, they must place the token on an index card. They may place the token on any index card they wish. They may also add a new index card (O, L, or T) to creation and place the token upon it.

Giftng Tokens (Discoursing)

A player may spend a token from their Gift cell in order to make a narration about the interaction between the gods. Before the narration occurs, you must specify the recipient of your tokens. They may decline the gift. If declined,

the tokens remain in your gift cell and you are allowed on free narration as if you had just spent a token in creation.

If the other player accepts your gift, however, you may make a number of narrations equal to the number of tokens you gave them. Each narration must be appropriate to the color of the token given. It must also center upon an interaction between your deity and the receiving player's deity.

If your gift is accepted, you also have the option to invoke a free narration that describes an event that begins with your gift cell's attribute or message. The receiving deity may, as a free narration, further describe that event according to the message or attribute of their gift cell.

At any time, players sitting next to each other may choose to engage in a free exchange of narrations describing their interaction. One begins the narration based on the contents of the cell facing the other player and the other finishes it based on the cell facing the initiating player.

Adjacent players don't need the agreement of the other player to initiate their narration, but may only narrate the first half of an event of which the other player narrates the conclusion.

Circulating Tokens through Cells (Focusing)

Any narration that occurs as a result of circulating tokens through the character sheet must meet several requirements. The narration must be temporally oriented, moving from one past state of affairs to a different present state of affairs. The past state must somehow evoke the attribute or message of the cell where the tokens originate and lead to a present state that evokes the attribute or message of the tokens' destination cell.

Tokens may only be moved between adjacent cells of the character sheet. Tokens may be moved either individually or in stacks, as the player prefers.

Drawing from Creation (Draining)

You will eventually find yourself in the unenviable position of not having

enough (or any) tokens to tell the story you want to tell. You may acquire more tokens by drawing them from creation.

Whenever you draw from creation, you remove a token from an index card. If you remove the last token from an index card, it is exhausted. The card is removed from the table and returned from to the player who introduced it along with a yellow token. You may never exhaust an element you created.

Anytime you take a token but do not exhaust an element, you must make a color appropriate narration that involves the element upon which you drew.

When you exhaust an element, you must narrate how the element comes to an end. In the case of leitmotif or theme, you are expected to describe how it ceases to be something important in this world—the end of an era.

Exhausting any element is a big deal. These narrations may be more lengthy than average and, afterward, each

player at the table is allowed to contribute a brief narration about its passing. If you are not prepared to provide a worthy ending to an element, do not exhaust it.

Key Moments

When you initiate a key scene, you must provide an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction is where the narration begins while the conclusion establishes where it will end.

Once the conclusion has been narrated, the key scene ends. This conclusion must be tied to the freeform event that made you initiate your key scene. If, at the end of the scene, players still have unspent tokens in their scene pool, they must invest them in creation.

The player who initiated the key scene selects one element (usually a character) that they want to control over the course of the scene. They do not need to spend tokens in order to do this, only contribute narrations relating to that element's interactions.

During key scenes, the token economy changes. The initiating player may spend their tokens to buy a threshold moment—a point toward which the narration must move. Once the threshold has been achieved, the initiating player must establish a new threshold or make the next threshold moment the conclusion of the key scene.

The thresholds are 'colored.' A red threshold means that the scene should become progressively more agitated while a blue token indicates that the scene should become progressively calmer.

Each threshold token, rather than buying a discrete amount of narration, establishes a point in the development of the scene toward which the players will narrate. Only one threshold may be in play at a time.

Other players may use tokens between thresholds to do a few different sorts of things. First, it may, regardless of color, be used to invoke the divine cell facing creation.

Second, it may be used to take on a dramatic persona. The character introduced must reflect the color of the token used to introduce them.

Third, the token may be used to introduce a complication. This is an event related to the threshold that delays its achievement. The nature of the complication should reflect the token's color.

The player who introduces a character or complication may freely contribute narrations through them until the threshold is reached or the element resolved.

Section 4 The Twilight of Creation Ending the Game

When the game comes to a close and the last cycle has been played, players count up the number of yellow token remaining to them. The person with the most yellow tokens collects all of the remaining yellow tokens from the other players.

They may then use each token to make one closing narration or give a token to another player to do the same. If there are fewer than three yellow tokens remaining in play, every player is allowed to make one free closing narration.

A closing narration must involve at least one element still in creation and describe its final fate. You should feel free to use longer narrations here.

Closing narrations should be delivered slowly, and at any time another player may hold up their hand to request a pause to reflect or to clarify.

Section 5 The Eternal Repetition of Difference Playing the Game, Again

Keen players will notice that if played more than a few sessions, the game will likely suffer from inflation. More and more tokens will enter the game, bought with yellow tokens. While this does not cause too many problems mechanically, it can lead to longer and

longer sessions without significant improvement in quality.

If this begins to happen, I recommend advancing your deities and beginning the token economy from scratch.

Advancing a deity is simple. You take a fresh character sheet for the same type of deity and develop a new set of attributes and messages for them. Each should be a development of the previous one.

In play, whenever you move a token to the gift cell, you have the option of placing that token on the previous character sheet. The previous character sheet may never be oriented toward creation, but tokens may be circulated through it to make narrations. Tokens may only be moved up to the newer character sheet from the gift cell.

In the case where there are multiple sheets, a player must pass through each sheet on the way to older sheets, but may immediately move any token on a gift cell up to any newer sheet's gift cell.

In essence, the older deity is inscribed within the newer one, remaining historically accessible but no longer presenting the same face to creation.

Section 6

Death and Divinity

Thinking about Narrations

You will undoubtedly note that the players have a great deal of freedom as to what happens in the game. What few limitations exist are flexible and open to clever manipulation. So, what happens when someone narrates the death or end of something in the game?

Let's start with creation. If the element has not been exhausted, death is not the end of the element. This is a game about gods—the element may return miraculously at a later point or its legend may fuel action around it.

If the element has been exhausted, then its time is past. While it may be spoken of, remembered, or imitated, it cannot reenter the game. If the element is not on a card, it is not susceptible to permanent removal. Of course, anyone

may choose to record the element and exhaust it.

Exhausting an element serves an important function in the game. It helps keep the table from getting too cluttered, a situation which makes it difficult to distinguish important and interesting elements from ones that serve no real purpose. Exhaust elements that aren't stimulating narrations. That allows you and your fellows to focus on the juicy stuff.

As for the deities themselves, death is merely a temporary state of affairs. Like Osiris, a deity may be killed only to return again. Meanwhile, even in death, the universe conspires to follow their will. They may linger dead and interact in subtle ways with their fellows and creation, or return dramatically at any moment.