

The Marriage of Persephone

A Main Course RPG as Quests and a Play in Two Parts

an Iron Game Chef Entry for 2006

by Mendel Schmiedekamp

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Forward

This RPG is the second main course of a Full Course of Love and Death, coming between the first main course of Someone to Love and the third, One More Hour. The couple to be married is one of the most successful couples in the prior game of Someone to Love. Likewise, the team of heroes after gaining the favor of the gods in The Marriage of Persephone will return to life once more, to attempt their last mission or betray it to seek some measure of peace in their lives. Like all games in this Full Course, The Marriage of Persephone is intended for five players.

As a game designed for Iron Game Chef 2006, it is necessary to discuss the allotments made for that contest. Indeed, for the theme of time, Marriage of Persephone fulfills the two sessions of 6 hours requirement, including the intervening 2 weeks. And it uses the following contest terms: Law, Actor, and Team.

When You Need a Hero . . .

Periodically, Persephone, queen of the underworld, takes a particular fancy to the love lives of her subjects. And when she does, she throws an elaborate wedding for her chosen

couple. Some might say that she's compensating for her rather lackluster wedding with Hades, but you don't tell a god things like that.

The underworld is not a very good place for weddings, but Persephone insists on making it happen. There are monsters and wandering souls to clear, there is the endless build up of decay and darkness, which Persephone insists does not suit a wedding, and the underworld is not the most lively place. Hades often finds himself needing to make things ready for the festivities, and entertain the guests when they arrive, tasks that are, frankly, beneath the dignity of the lord of the dead. But as luck would have it, a team of heroes has recently joined the ranks in the Elysian Fields, a team who doesn't know any better than to accept a deal from Hades. Certainly good luck for Hades and Persephone, not so good for the heroes though.

In Marriage of Persephone, you play the members of this team of recently deceased heroes as they perform quests and entertain the guests. If all goes well, you can gain the favor of the attending gods, and maybe return to life long enough to deal with unfinished business. If it doesn't, well this sort of thing is always a gamble, isn't it.

Gods in Residence

A game of Marriage of Persephone revolves around the five gods who will be attending the wedding. The team can earn favor from each of them, but each god has laws to follow as well.

- **Hades** - King of the Dead, Wealth, and Pretty Much Anything Underground. Hades is pretty even handed, he is mostly concerned that the heroes don't ruin the careful arrangements he's made among his subjects.
- **Persephone** - Queen of the Dead and Spring. Persephone can be more frightening than Hades, because she will get angry, and Hades always listens to her.
- **Ananke** - Necessity. Ananke is everywhere, she attends essentially by default, although she does seem to find the idea of a wedding in the underworld endlessly amusing.
- **Eros** - Love. Eros is the wedding crasher of the gods, and he routinely gets carried away by the festivities.
- **Thanatos** - Death. Thanatos doesn't get many wedding invitations, so he's also a regular at these events.

Who Do You Call?

Having passed through Lethe, your hero remembers little of his or her former life. All that remains is a dull ache, a suggestion that something in the world of the living is left undone. Most souls would simply learn to ignore that calling, but heroes are made from sterner, and arguably more foolish, stuff.

So when Hades offered your characters a deal they jumped at the chance. And Hades is nothing if not fair. He and each of the other

four gods who will attend the wedding have offered a special gift to the heroes. To make your hero, choose a name and determine the nature of your five gifts.

Gift of Hades - Wealth

Hades gives the player a supply of wealth. This need not be physical riches of gold or gems, but it is always something of value to people. It could be a wealth of tales or songs, a harem of souls, a herd of livestock, or anything else that can be given in exchange.

Gift of Persephone - Growth

Persephone gives the gift of growth. Growth may be a physical thing, allowing the hero to grow plants quickly or to increase in size to that of a giant. Or growth may be a more abstract thing, such as building doubt, trust, or anger. In any case, the hero need only be present to cause the growth to occur.

Gift of Ananke - Reality

Ananke is present throughout the worlds, both those of the living and the dead. She grants the gift of reality. This gift grants the hero any one aspect or power from their mortal days. This is the most flexible of the gifts. It could be puissance with the sword or expertise at computers, the only restriction is that it be something a mortal could do.

Gift of Eros - Romance

Eros gives the most troublesome, and potentially the most useful gift, romance. This gift gives the character some quality which others find instantly alluring. It might be stunning eyes, a beautiful voice, a fancy suit, or anything else that would attract attention. Unfortunately this gift tends to cause souls and demons to fall in love with the character. And

Eros will become irate if the heroes mistreat someone who has.

Gift of Thanatos - Taking

Thanatos gives the simplest and most dangerous gift. He provides each hero with the ability to take away something. This may be taking a life, taking away madness, or emotion. All that matters is that what is taken is gone, and that something remains in the loss. This power is limited by the fact that Hades requires an exchange to occur, which may be through his gift of wealth, or his wife's gift of growth.

Gambling with Fate

The flow of Marriage of Persephone is a rotating series of scenes, where each player describes what his or her hero is doing, in turn. If the hero is attempting to overcome a quest or impress a god with a performance, then the hero gambles with fate. If successful this gamble can provide the virtue needed to complete a quest or impress the gods, or it can inflict the ire of the gods. It's all up to you.

In either case, once a gamble with fate occurs, the player describes the outcome, based on the roll, including what went right or wrong. Play then passes to that player's right as that player begins to describe what his or her character is doing to try to please the gods.

The gamble mechanics requires three dice: a 6 sided die (d6), a 12 sided die (d12), and a 20 sided die (d20). The initial roll is always of the d6. You may then roll the d12, if the d12 rolls above the value showing on the d6, the d12's value is used instead. If not, the result is an impasse and no virtue is added. For a quest, no further rolls can be made using that approach, although for a performance the only penalty is no virtue

gained. If the d12 did roll above the d6, you may attempt to roll the d20. If the d20 rolls above the d12 then you use the d20's roll to determine virtue. Otherwise you fail, giving both an impasse and reducing the favor of a god of your choice by one. If you did not fail or impasse, then you gain one virtue for every full 5 you rolled on your highest die.

Using a gift gives a special benefit to an action. If at least one virtue is gained from gambling on an action using at least one gift, then one additional virtue is added

To sum up:

- Roll a d6
- You may roll a d12
 - If the d12 equal or lower than the d6 - gain no virtue and an impasse, you must change tactics in a quest.
 - If the d12 rolls above the d6, use the d12 for virtue, and you may roll a d20.
 - * If the d20 equal or lower than the d12 - lose one favor, gain no virtue and an impasse, you must change tactics in a quest.
 - * If the d20 rolls above the d12, use the d20 for virtue.
- Every 5 (round down) of the final roll gives a virtue.
- If you used a gift and gained virtue, gain one additional virtue.

And lastly a short example of the mechanic:

Morik, being played by Sandy, is attempting to convince a satyr spirit to perform at the wedding. He's offering the satyr a song from his collection, as given by Hades. Sandy rolls the d6, showing a 5. Sandy might be happy with that outcome, since she gets two virtue,

one from the roll and one bonus from the gift. But let's say she wants more. She rolls the d12, which shows a 7. She doesn't get an impasse, but she also doesn't get more virtue. She decides to go for broke, and try the d20. However, the d20 rolls a 3, meaning she fails. Instead of two virtue Morik will be offending one of the gods, and ensuring that the satyr cannot be bribed with songs any more.

As you can see, gambling with fate is not always safe. Failure comes from greed and hubris. But then again, so do great heroics.

On a Quest

Marriage of Persephone is a RPG played in two sessions. The first is the questing session, where the heroes attempt to complete ten quests in preparation for the wedding. At the beginning of that first session, you make your team, and then go in two rounds with each player describing one quest. After adding these to the quest sheet, mark the teams favor with the gods as one, and then it's time to begin solving the quests.

Each quest requires twenty virtue to complete, and until that much virtue has accumulated on a quest, no one may describe the quest as finished. Quests need not be performed in any specific order, or even one at a time. Indeed, part of the fun is the frenzy of activity in trying to get everything ready.

And if this were not enough, the gods place another limitation on these quests. Each god has a quest law, which restricts what the team can do as they seek to complete their preparations. If their quest law is violated at any time during the quest session, the favor of that god drops by one. The gods may give the team some breathing room, but if it is clear that a law was violated, then you should ensure that the price is paid.

On the other hand, performance of the

quests is a good way to gain the favor of the gods. When you complete a quest by gaining at least twenty virtue, you gain two favor, split between two different gods.

Quest Laws

- Nothing is Free (*Hades*) - Everything has a cost, and that cost must be paid.
- Don't Give Up (*Persephone*) - Once you've started a quest you cannot abandon it.
- Violence has Consequences (*Ananke*) - A violent solution always leaves its mark.
- Can't Hurt Who Loves You (*Eros*) - If someone loves you you cannot knowingly do them harm.
- Don't Take Sides (*Thanatos*) - Always stick to the neutral path in a conflict.

Example Quests

The following are a dozen example quests, but there is certainly room for many more.

- Clean a family of nightmares from the stables
- Gather the musicians for the wedding
- Make a wedding cake that will sate the appetites of the gods
- Clear the field of carnage for the reception
- Make Cerebus presentable for the guests
- Remove demonic MMORPG players squatting in the castle guest rooms
- Wash the muck and decay from the castle walls

- Find a great poet to perform for the wedding
- Slay enough demon beasts for the feast
- Hire souls to pad the guest list
- Climb the peak of Sisyphus to plant a beacon
- Assemble five perfect horses for the wedding carriage

A Little Research

Unlike many RPGs, Marriage of Persephone requires something a little extra. Namely between the first session and the second you have homework. The second session will be a performance put on by the team, but the roles which will be played are those of real people. In fact, these roles must be people newly met by that player between the two sessions. To make this viable, a full two weeks should occur between the two sessions. Any less and it might not be possible to meet three new people. And any more and you invite procrastination.

When you meet new people for this purpose, you want to find out the basics. Find out names, jobs and interests, and so on. It's usually best to be honest, tell them that you are interested in basing a character off them for roleplaying or interactive fiction. Some people might find that strange, so be careful and polite. If they decline, then don't press the matter.

Some people may find this harder than others. There are a variety of strategies to fix that. Try a new activity or social circle, you usually get a large number of people introducing themselves. Or ask a more extroverted friend to introduce you. The important thing is to meet these people, and then bringing what you've learned to the next session.

Entertaining the Guests

At the beginning of the second session, you should all describe the three people you met in the intervening two weeks. These will be your roles. Once this has been done, you may begin to narrate the play, starting with the first act.

Like the quests, each god has placed requirements on the play the team is performing. These are broken down by act. For example, in the third act Eros wants to see Lovers Meeting, while in the second act, Hades wants to see a Robbery Revealed. The full list can be found on the theater sheet, as well as the gods sheet. While many of the gods have placed laws that appear to connect, such as Eros demanding lovers in each act, the scenes which satisfy these laws need not involve the same characters, nor even related. For example, the lovers reunited might be husband and wife, one of whom had fallen in love with another role entirely, a role which died in the last act to satisfy Thanatos.

Each act, each player may make one, and only one, gamble with fate to satisfy each law. This must be done during a scene where that event is occurring. Gifts may be used during the performance, but since the heroes are the actors, you they must be used theatrically, as special effects or as a breaking of the fourth wall. Remember, the roles do not have these gifts, they are normal people, indeed the normal people you sought out between the sessions. For example, if a hero can make plants grow, then she could grow a tree to set the stage for a meeting deep in the forest which may end in murder or love. This type of use gives you the advantage of using a gift for the gamble with fate.

Each act ends when all players agree to end it, and then the next one begins. If a god's law is not attempted during an act, you

lose one favor from that god. If at least five virtue is accumulated for the law during the act, then you gain one favor from that god.

The Favor of the Gods

Once the performance is ended, the gods will grant their rewards to the team. Each favor translates to a single reward. During this part of the game, first remove any favor which was promised to others. Then gain one reward from each god for each remaining favor. If all goes well, this might let you stop that nagging sense that something has been left undone. But all you get is a chance. The gods won't solve your problems for you.

Rewards

- **Hades** - Hades will grant a person the memories of their mortal life.
- **Persephone** - Persephone will grant a person a momentary return to life.
- **Ananke** - Ananke will grant any gift that can be given by another god.
- **Eros** - Eros will send a message from a person to anyone that person loves or is loved by.
- **Thanatos** - Thanatos will hold off on a person dying for up to one hour.

Hero Sheet

Player Name: _____

Hero Name: _____

Gift of Hades: _____

Gift of Persephone: _____

Gift of Ananke: _____

Gift of Eros: _____

Gift of Thanatos: _____

Role 1: _____

Role 2: _____

Role 3: _____

Gods Sheet

Hades Favor _____

- Gift - Wealth
- Quest Law - Nothing is Free
- Act 1 Law - Something is Stolen
- Act 2 Law - Robbery Revealed
- Act 3 Law - Thief Discovered
- Act 4 Law - Thief is Captured
- Act 5 Law - Thief is Punished
- Favor - Return Memories

Ananke Favor _____

- Gift - Reality
- Quest Law - Violence has Consequences
- Act Laws (All of Them) - Reflect an Event from Your Quest
- Favor - As any other god

Eros Favor _____

- Gift - Romance
- Quest Law - Can't Hurt Who Loves You
- Act 1 Law - Love at First Sight
- Act 2 Law - Lovers Separated
- Act 3 Law - Lovers Meet
- Act 4 Law - Lovers Challenged
- Act 5 Law - Lovers Reunited
- Favor - Send Message to Loved One

Persephone Favor _____

- Gift - Growth
- Quest Law - Don't Give Up
- Act 1 Law - Something is Lost
- Act 2 Law - Remorse Over Loss
- Act 3 Law - Anger Over Loss
- Act 4 Law - Transformation
- Act 5 Law - Rejection of Loss
- Favor - Return to Life for Moment

Thanatos Favor _____

- Gift - Taking
- Quest Law - Don't Take Sides
- Act 1 Law - Someone Dies
- Act 2 Law - Something Dies
- Act 3 Law - Someone Dies
- Act 4 Law - Something Dies
- Act 5 Law - Someone Dies
- Favor - Remain Alive for an Hour

Quest Sheet

Quest 1: Virtue: _____

Quest 2: Virtue: _____

Quest 3: Virtue: _____

Quest 4: Virtue: _____

Quest 5: Virtue: _____

Quest 6: Virtue: _____

Quest 7: Virtue: _____

Quest 8: Virtue: _____

Quest 9: Virtue: _____

Quest 10: Virtue: _____

Theatre Sheet

Gods	Act 1	Act 2	Act 3	Act 4	Act 5
Hades	Something Stolen	Robbery Revealed	Thief Discovered	Thief Captured	Thief Punished
	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:
Persephone	Something Lost	Remorse Over Loss	Anger Over Loss	Transformation	Rejection of Loss
	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:
Ananke	Reflection of Quest	Reflection of Quest	Reflection of Quest	Reflection of Quest	Reflection of Quest
	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:
Eros	Love at First Sight	Lovers Separated	Lovers Meet	Lovers Challenged	Lovers Reunited
	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:
Thanatos	Someone Dies	Something Dies	Someone Dies	Something Dies	Someone Dies
	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:	virtue:	virtue: