

S/Lay w/De

The monster will kill you.



The lover is willing.

S/Lay w/Qe

phantasmagoric face to face
roleplaying

by Ron Edwards

*But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!*



– Samuel Taylor Coleridge



You

Say it all:

I am myself. I am canny, brutal, experienced. I laugh at the gods.
I delight in life. My foes meet death swiftly.

Choose:

I am a young warrior, fierce and feared, but my hair is grey
∫ I am a hunted outlaw, hardened and bitter, but I still hope
∫ I am a lordly knight, respected by all, but my mind remains
my own ∫ I am an escaped apprentice, defiant and scorned, but
armed with the weapon I invented ∫ I am a scholar, my mind
spinning with lore and insight, but I can kill if I must ∫ I am
lamed and sick, but my iron will commands even the dead ∫
I am a demon's child and heir to its power, but I am beautiful
and good ∫ My songs are beloved wherever I go, but I fear they
sow doom and horror in my wake ∫ I slew men to win my
freedom, but never again ∫ *Or say it yourself*

Then describe yourself visually in 10 more words.

Where? It's up to you:

The lichen-covered ruins of the Lunar Citadel ∫ The twisted caverns beneath the Black Plateau ∫ The Forest of Flowers ∫ The Crystal Court, whose queen remains unknown ∫ The breeding pits of the Apostate warriors ∫ The Igai Desert, which has no center ∫ The battlefield a few days afterwards ∫ The Plains of Ice ranged by ski-ships ∫ The City of Rats, where the thieves pay taxes ∫ The clean, free air of the mountains ∫ The secret world contained inside the Mad Lord's final spell ∫ Where the Clockwork War rages still ∫ The cemetery that is also a city ∫ What remains from when they tried to dig to Hell ∫ The fetid, lovely Jeweled Swamps ∫ The Skinfarms ruled by the slaves who toil there ∫ The last remaining holy place of the first god

Why?

State your Goal at this place: something to get or do which is overwhelmingly important to you. A few words is all you need.



What I do

The location you chose becomes mine to develop: the landscape, the appearance, whether anyone else is there and what they are doing, and everything else.

I don't have to include your Goal but I remember that it has to be there.

I decide whether the Monster and Lover are different characters or the same character. **I make up everything about him, her, it, or them.** I especially consider:

How the Monster kills you

Fast ∫ Slow
Up-front ∫ With deceit
Savage ∫ Civil
Singly ∫ In a group

How the Lover desires you

Wanton ∫ Innocent
Approved ∫ Forbidden
Open-hearted ∫ Manipulative
Knowledgeable ∫ Helpless

The Lover must be wedded to the location in some fashion, rather than a visitor.

I assign a value to the Monster of 4, 5, or 6, and a value to the Lover of 1 or 2. I write down the scores and only tell you the Lover score.



How it starts

We set out a pile of 6-sided dice to use during play.

I begin by describing a location in the setting you chose, including any characters I wish. You respond by saying how you enter it. We must both be a little flexible – I have dictated when and where you arrived; you may describe how the situation changes in response to your arrival.

We should enjoy the imagery for the moment, as we learn what one another is doing and imagining with what, until now, has been individual.

We embark on an alternating, ongoing sequence of Goes, each consisting of **descriptions** and one significant **forward-moving event**. During a Go, both of us may talk, but the owner of the Go is the primary contributor.

I Go first, and my first event must introduce the Lover. My Goes typically consist of various characters' actions as well as events of the location itself, and I may introduce the Monster. Your Goes typically consist of your actions and words.

As we proceed back and forth, however, we must both maintain flexibility and extend authority to one another's spoken realm. You may describe the Monster's or Lover's responses to things you say and do on your Go, and I may say what happens to you and what you do to some extent on my Go. We always build upon what has been previously stated.

We need not rush.

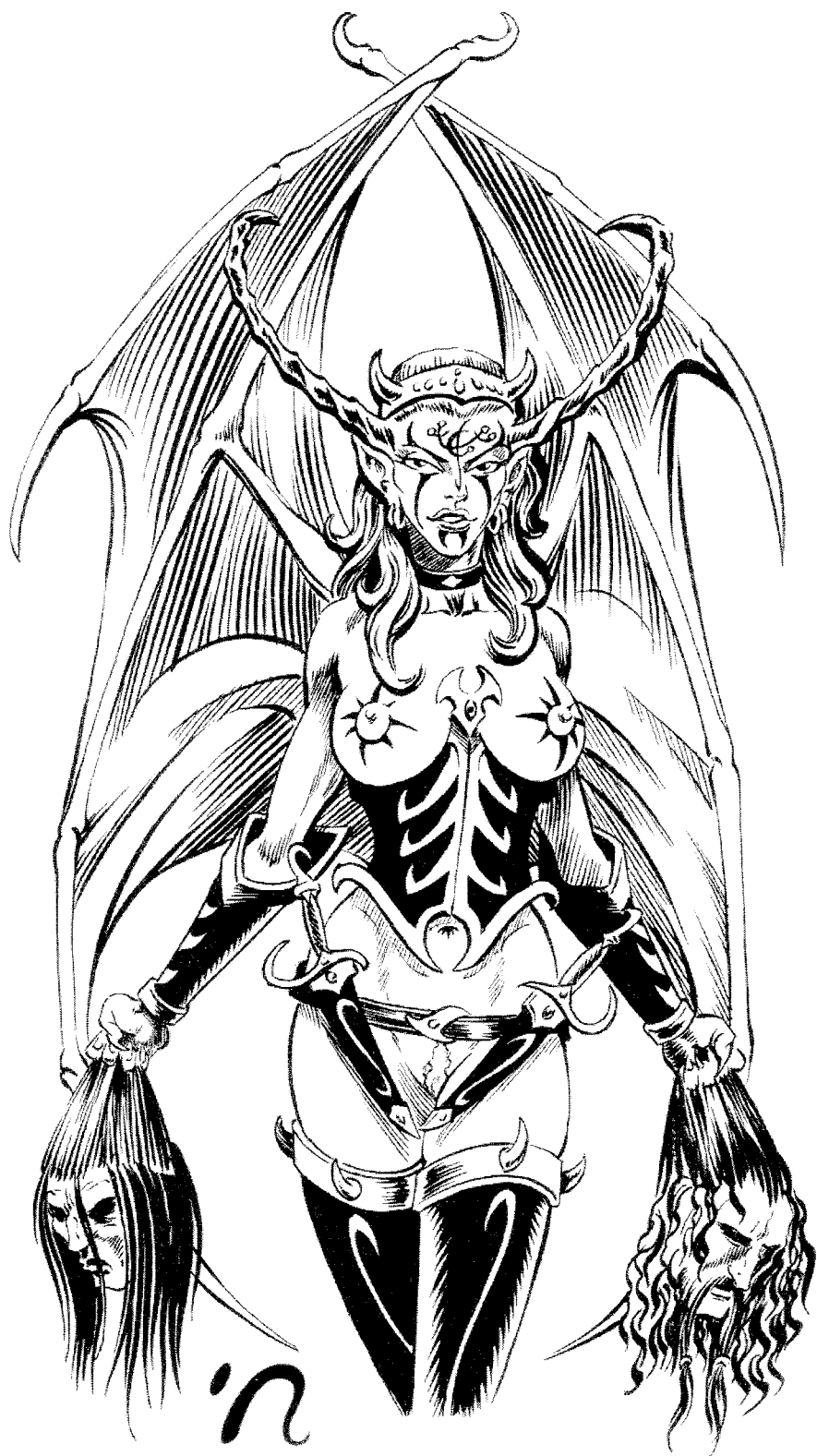
Both you and I may continue to Go in the current location, or shift to a new one in a reasonable way. We may introduce further characters if and when desired. The passage of time is only constrained by the immediacy of the current events. An adventure may therefore be a single furious encounter, a long nuanced drama, or anything in between.

I don't have to identify who the Monster is or who the Lover is, or whether they are separate or the same. You do know that the Lover is in the first scene in some way. You may get a good idea of who or what the Monster is soon.

You may include and affect the Goal as you will, and in fact, it won't come into play unless you put it there. The only limits are that you do not begin with it, and that you cannot permanently achieve it through speaking alone.

Play will sooner or later initiate and include the Match, a special sequence of acquiring dice as we continue to play scenes. The Match leads to the fate of the Goal and the climax of the adventure. It begins when either:

I act as the Monster } You act toward the Goal, the Lover,
or both



The Match

The Match begins and continues as a sub-routine to the ongoing trading of Goes. We add dice to stacks in front of us based on specific actions we describe. Goes now end more formally.

On your Go

Whenever you take action toward the Goal, then you roll a die. Put it into a stacked column, with the rolled value facing me. Actions toward the Goal include:

Seek it ∫ Gain knowledge about it ∫ Discover it ∫ Take it
∫ Save it from danger ∫ Establish mastery over it

If you take action toward the Lover, roll a die and place it in your stack with the rolled value facing me. Relevant actions are those which promise or clearly imply to the Lover that you will:

Abandon him or her to a grim fate ∫ Bring him or her with you when you leave ∫ Leave alone, gracefully ∫ Stay there with him or her

One key action toward the Lover is:

Will you ∫ Won't you embrace the Lover?

“Embrace” means explicit sexual interaction. Openly rebuffing the Lover's implicit embrace also counts for a die.

Throughout the Match, you may only add total dice for the Lover equal to the Lover score; further actions toward the Lover do not gain further dice.

Your Go ends:

Voluntarily, taking no action toward the Goal or Lover = 0 dice
∫ Taking action toward the Goal = 1 die
∫ Taking action toward the Lover = 1 die
∫ Taking action toward the Goal and the Lover simultaneously = 2 dice

Nothing forces you to mention the Goal during the Goes prior to the Match's end, although you will not generate many dice that way. The Goal will necessarily be included in the situation at a later step.

On my Go

Whenever I take action as the Monster, I roll a die. I put it into a stacked column with the rolled value facing you. I play the Monster aggressively such that your choice is clear:

Kill it ∫ Imprison it ∫ Escape it; or you will die

My Go ends:

Voluntarily, without taking action as the Monster = 0 dice
∫ Taking action as the Monster = 1 die

Each die's rolled value is added to the column's increasing sum. At the end of the Match, if your sum exceeds mine, you win.

Neither of us is required to gain a die or dice during a Go. If I simply want to play the Lover or any other non-Monster

characters, I can. If you simply want to kick the Monster's ass for a while, you can; or similarly, if you want to interact only with non-Lover characters about something else besides your Goal, that is fine too.

Content

During Goes prior to the Climax:

The Monster can't kill you or the Lover, nor can anyone else

The Monster can't hurt you grievously or permanently, nor can anyone else

You can't kill the Monster

You can't permanently resolve anything with the Lover

You can't wholly achieve or fail to achieve your Goal

However, we both narrate minor injury, potential injury, apparent injury, eventually-fatal injury, or other disadvantageous consequences. You, the Monster, or the Lover might be stabbed, clawed, beaten to a pulp, swallowed whole, ridden over, thrown aside or out a window, poisoned, or any number of dreadful things during the Goes. As long as it is not narrated as fatal nor established to be permanently as bad as it looks, then we go ahead and say it.

Possessions, companions, steeds and similar things are destroyed at will unless they are included in your formal description. If that's the case, then you or I may separate you from them or otherwise make them difficult to use, but not destroy them.

The Goal is your concern, not mine. I neither withhold it nor provide it. Seize the Goal as you wish. Find, have, hold, and use it. Once it appears, I use it as well, as with anything else.

Ending the Match

The Match ends at the end of my Go when my column has as many dice as my Monster score, which I reveal at this time. Alternately, before that point, at the beginning of your Go, if you are losing, you may topple my column. This forces me to re-roll all my dice for a new total and ends the Match.



The climax

Play continues in Goes after the Match. We have seen the totals and the Goal is now nearly resolved: you have apparently either achieved it or failed to do so. But perhaps one chance remains, as well as many other things to be resolved. We stay engaged with the imagined situation for it is still in motion.

During the Climax, Goes especially need not be rushed. Much can be introduced and much can happen during the closing-out of everything which is required.

Find your Good Dice. They are the ones whose values are higher than my lowest die value. For every two Good Dice, you may accomplish one of the following of your choice. Mark them so we both know:

Achieve the Goal ∫ Otherwise, it fails (mind this option only if you lost the Match; winning the Match means you achieve the Goal for free)

Ward off, avoid, or recover from the harm the Monster does to you ∫ Otherwise, the Monster hurts you severely (and if it does so when you don't achieve the Goal, you die!)

Kill or permanently imprison the Monster ∫ Otherwise, the Monster lives, although you escape (presuming that you live)

Save someone in danger, including the Lover (if the Lover is indeed at risk) ∫ Otherwise, this person dies

Accomplish something else ∫ Otherwise, it fails

Whatever you do not choose, **the contrary must happen**. Your Goes demonstrate these decisions, and mine provide reactions and resulting events.

Make sure that the Lover's fate is accounted for by choosing any one of the same parameters as the Lover dice during the Match, to repeat:

Abandon him or her to a grim fate } Bring him or her with
you when you leave } Leave alone gracefully } Stay there with
him or her

Your decision about the Lover during the Climax is wholly unconstrained by dice outcome or previous events, but you must choose one of the listed options.

Many Good Dice options and Lover options are more compatible than they seem, even if the Monster and Lover are the same character.



on play

Making Goes good

Every Go includes a forward-moving event.

Bad Goes

Made into forward-moving Goes (although not described)

I look for secret doors

I find one and go through it ∫ I can't
find one, so I'm cornered here

I attack it

I injure it ∫ I drive it away ∫ My attack is
blocked or thwarted ∫ It strikes and
injures me instead

I look for my Goal

I find it ∫ I come nearer to it ∫ I can't
find it ∫ Something distracts me

I smile at her

. . . and I seize her ∫ . . . and I kneel
before her ∫ . . . and I boldly praise her
beauty ∫ . . . and I pull her up and away
from the chasm's edge

I run

I get away ∫ I am pursued all the harder
∫ The chase enters more dangerous
territory ∫ I'm caught

Forward-driving statements are described as kinetic imagery. They include responses, such as whether the Monster grunts with pain or seems to ignore a wound, or how the Lover reacts verbally and emotionally. They include physical consequences, such as

whether you easily fend off a blow and press forward, as opposed to being slammed into the canyon, tumbling over and over, but eventually rising and struggling on to challenge the foe again.

Tune it

Playing too tight means that you describe things about what you do and say, bringing in aspects of physical locations, objects, and timing only with my permission, and describing other characters' actions and presence only with my permission. It also means that although I have authority over everything else, I provide a little bit of chat about you at most, subject to your veto.

You and I may play fairly tight, with our respective roles only brushing in one another's contributions, but too tight won't work. Among other things, Goes will be too limited in content.

Playing it loose means we both have authority over one another's respective domains during our Goes, such that you "borrow" my Monster during your Go, for instance, and I accept your contribution as collaboration with an equal. We can both invent characters and have full authority over physical space and time. Along with brushing in each other's work, we also lay our hands upon it where the other left off, and extend it.

We should go as loose as we want, but not more.



As it goes on

After a Climax, we change roles as “I” and “you,” for another hero’s adventure. When we switch back, you’ll return to your hero.

If more than two people are playing, the adventures go around and around, with the person just ahead of you being “I” when you are “you.”

If you kill or permanently imprison a Monster, then you gain prestige and capabilities. Add a brief sentence about what you can do to your description.

If you achieve a Goal, then you gain prestige and social power. Add a brief sentence about what you accomplish to your description.

If you were harmed by a Monster, you are badly scarred or otherwise irreversibly marked by the experience. Add a brief sentence to your story to describe the effect. Also, I get to roll and add one free die in my column at the beginning of our Matches as long as the effect persists.

Removing the effects of a Monster may be stated as part of a later Goal.

Revise your 10-word description as you like before your next adventure.

If you begin an adventure in the company of a Lover, you get to roll and add one free die in your column at the beginning of our Match if that Lover is present. The adventure will

include two Lovers, the old and the new, but it must end with either one or none.

A Monster which is neither killed nor imprisoned may pursue you to new locations. I get to roll and add one free die in my column at the beginning of Matches against this Monster. An adventure only includes one Monster.

Adventures always take place in new locations.

If you die, your character's story is ended. Decide:

Make up a new hero and continue to play ∫ Continue solely as "I"

What are we doing here?

When you stay with a lover, your character's story is over and your play as "you" wholly ends.

Over time, as adventures proceed, I try to make you choose to stay.



Visit some websites

The Escapist, www.theescapist.com

The ImageNETion Portal, www.imagenetion.com

Stephen Fabian art, www.stephenfabian.com

Frank Frazetta art, www.frazettaartgallery.com

Fight On!, fightonmagazine.com

Grognardia, grognardia.blogspot.com

Dragonsfoot forums, www.dragonsfoot.org

Carcosa, carcosa-geoffrey.blogspot.com

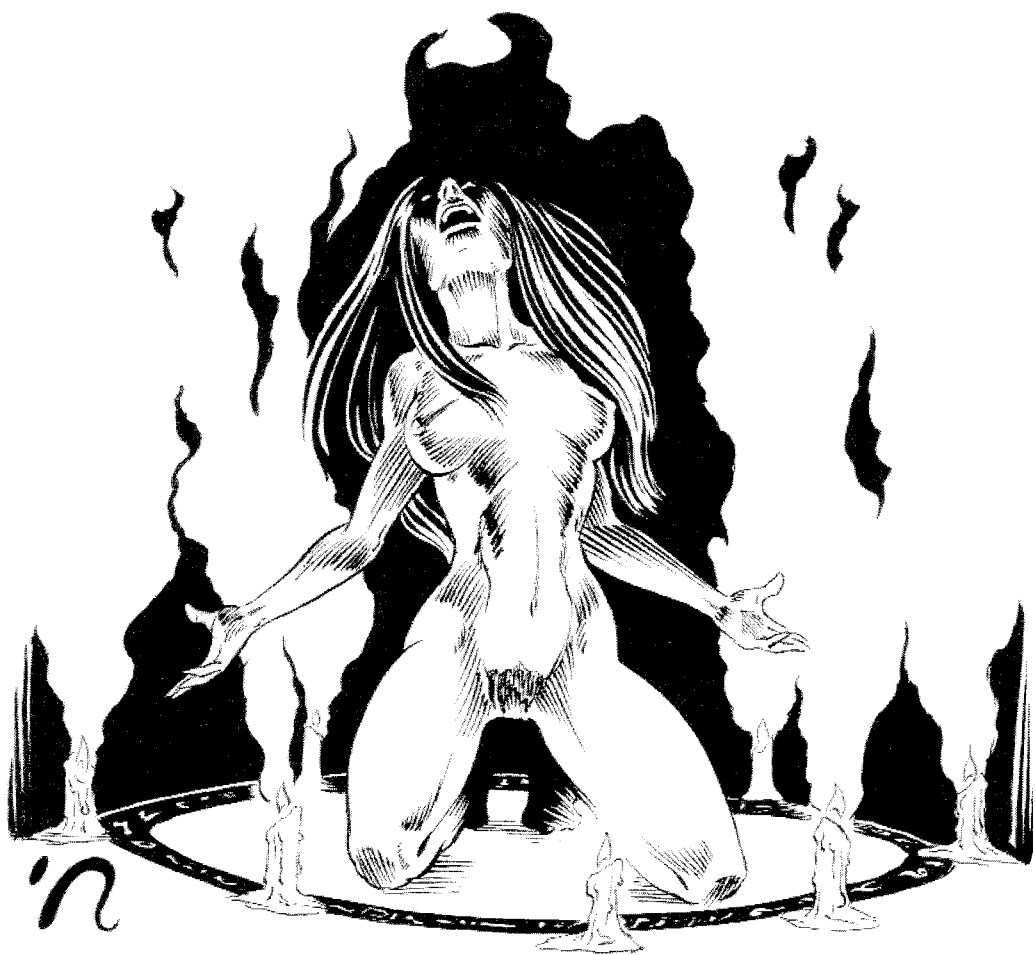
Lamentations of the Flame Princess, lotfp.blogspot.com

Jeff's Gameblog, jrients.blogspot.com

A Quick Primer for Old School Gaming, available at
www.lulu.com

The Forge, www.indie-rpgs.com

Anyway, www.lumpley.com
(includes Storming the Wizard's Tower)



phantasmagoric face to face roleplaying

S/Lay w/Me is a game played by two people at a time. More may participate but only two will be active at once. Enjoying the game requires enthusiastic creativity concerning lovers and monsters.

“*S/Lay* has become my go-to ‘let’s play a game!’ game.”
—BEN LEHMAN, TAO Games, author of *Polaris*

“I believe it may be the single finest Northwest Smith RPG imaginable.”
—KEN HITE, *Out of the Box*

“Overall, great game. Loved it.”
—GREGOR HUTTON, BoxNinja, author of *Best Friends* and *3:16*



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