

Cabin Wars!

a game of prestige, grudges, and pranks at summer camp

Cabin Wars is a story game set at an archetypal summer camp, pitting players against each other as demanded by long-standing cabin feuds. The campers of Evergreen cabin have hated those rejects in Brookside cabin as long as anyone can remember, and the feeling is mutual! The counselors and staff quash the plots and reprisals wherever they can, reminding every camper that the prestigious Camp Cup is on the line. The points a cabin earns through games and competition can be all too easily lost by the demerits that accompany rule-breaking.

GAMEPLAY OVERVIEW

Players of Cabin Wars will take on the roles of campers assigned to a particular cabin and roleplay their attempts to stick it to their rivals without getting caught (all while trying to win enough points for their cabin through merit badges and challenges to offset any demerits that might put them out of the running for the Camp Cup).

Between 4 and 6 players are ideal for Cabin Wars, as well as a shared pool of six regular dice (6d6), pencils or pens, and plenty of paper or index cards. If each player wants their own dice, three per person is enough. Before play, split everyone into two groups as evenly as possible (there is no “Game Master” role). If there is an odd number of players, choose one person to be the **camper with conflicting allegiances**. More detail is given on this later, but in essence a camper with conflicting allegiances may be treated as an ally or enemy at any time by another player.

The players that have been divided into two groups are now campers assigned to two rival cabins. Pick a name for each cabin and camper, as well as a name for the camp itself and perhaps a few details about it (where is it; what natural features surround it; how old are the kids there; is it all-boys, all-girls, or mixed; etc.). Each camper picks a descriptive **archetype** that suits them from the list further on in this text. Write the name of your camper and your archetype on an index card and put it in front of you where other people can see it. Campers should organize themselves around the table such that each cabin sits together—ideally facing directly opposite the campers of their rival cabin! Fraternization with campers of other cabins should be discouraged during play. (**Note:** If there is a camper with conflicting allegiances, have them pick the cabin they are placed in, and their connection to one or more campers in the rival cabin. They should seat themselves somewhere between both cabins.)

When the game starts, pick a camper to go first. On their turn, the **active camper** picks one other camper that is “required” for the scene. The other camper may be from their own cabin or a rival cabin. The cabin affiliations of the two required campers shape the **actions** available

on that turn, which include *hatching schemes*, *winning badges*, *challenging cabins*, and *pulling pranks*. The camper whose turn it is will dictate the starting situation of the scene, as well as which action is being attempted. Any other characters in the scene will be played by non-required campers, either as themselves or as minor characters. Narration and roleplay flow freely until there is a situation with an unsure outcome, or that is contested by another camper (even campers not in the scene). Resolving a **contest** is where campers' dice pools will enter into the game. After play determines if the main action at stake (hatching schemes, etc.) in success or failure, the active camper's scene is finished. The turn passes to the next player in the circle, who is now the active camper. When every camper has had a turn, it is the end of a round and a new round begins.

The game continues until a round ends with any cabin possessing 100 or more **points**, thus winning the Camp Cup, or until each cabin has enough combined **demerits** (also 100) to disqualify them from the Camp Cup entirely. (**Note:** demerits are tricky, as they offset the points a cabin has earned as well as being tracked on their own. A cabin that had 50 points and earns 20 demerits is left with only 30 points toward winning the Camp Cup!)

If all cabins have been disqualified, play a final round to see if either cabin can pull off one for the ages—the Mother of All Pranks. If a round ends and both cabins have 100 or more points, a final scene with a tiebreaking cabin challenge occurs to determine the winner of the Camp Cup. If just one cabin has the 100 points needed to win the Camp Cup at round's end, go around the table and have each camper describe how they are savoring victory or languishing in defeat before concluding the game.

AN OUTLINE OF THE GAME

1. Divide players into **cabins** as evenly as possible.
2. Settle on a few details about the camp and the cabins.
3. Pick an **archetype** and name for your camper, and write this down on an index card.
4. Choose someone to be the first **active camper**. The person who most recently played a sport or attended a game as a fan is a good choice.
5. The active camper picks another camper to be required for the scene.
6. Based on which two campers are required, the active camper chooses an **action** for the turn.
7. Campers play out the scene, resolving **contests** as they arise until the success or failure of the chosen **action** is determined.
8. Note any **points** awarded or **demerits** earned on an index card for each cabin. Also note any new **skills** acquired through merit badges or **schemes** put into motion on the cards for campers.
9. Play passes to the next camper to the left around the circle, who repeats the process of steps 5-8.
10. If it is the **end of a round**, check to see if any cabin qualifies to win the Camp Cup, or if all cabins have been disqualified. If either are true, start to wrap up the game. If not, begin a new

round.

RESOLVING CONTESTS

When a **contest** arises, both sides state their desired result if they should win. The active camper rolls their dice pool and compares it to that rolled by the opposing camper. If the active camper's highest die exceeds the opposition's highest die, they succeed! If the active camper's die is lower, they fail and the opposition wins. A tie of highest die between both sides is a mixture of success and failure: the active player achieves their immediate goal, but with an unintended consequence.

Alex is trying to move quietly through Obsidian Cabin without attracting the attention of Lin, who is reading out on the porch. Alex rolls 3d6 to move quietly, and Lin rolls 2d6 to notice. Alex's highest die is a 6, and Lin's is a 4, meaning Alex doesn't get heard. Huzzah!

Jess can see from the kitchen that Dakota has followed the noises coming from the mess hall and is inside, searching around. Jess wants to hide and rolls 1d6, and Dakota rolls 2d6 to find the hiding place. Jess gets a high die of 5 and Dakota gets a 5 too—it's a tie! The campers agree that Jess doesn't get found, but Dakota does find an incriminating note Jess dropped to use later. Nuts.

Dice pools in Cabin Wars cap at 3d6. There are three elements that can each grant one die into a camper's pool: their **archetype**, a useful **skill**, and a relevant **scheme**.

- ▶ **Archetypes** are chosen before play begins, and should be read broadly to apply to most or all situations.
- ▶ **Skills** are earned through the winning of merit badges, and add to a pool as long as the skill is being used in some way in the contest.
- ▶ **Schemes** are made between campers with the *hatching schemes* action, and usually are centered around some plot or prank against another cabin. A scheme adds to a pool if the camper is acting on the scheme or to further the scheme's success.

If a contest is between two campers, use the same system for each to determine the size of their dice pool. If some outside, non-camper obstacle is the source of the contest (sneaking past a counselor, fibbing to an adult about something, finding a way into the locked camp offices, etc.) the campers should agree if the contest is **simple**, **tricky**, or **tough**. A simple obstacle grants a dice pool of 1d6, tricky is 2d6, and tough is 3d6. Have a camper from a rival cabin roll for the obstacle, and roleplay the opposing minor character if needed.

(Note: If a contest ever arises where a camper's dice pool might be zero, where even acting in keeping with their archetype isn't helpful, a camper can fall back on their **cabin pride** to roll 1d6. If a camper must use cabin pride, however, a tie for highest die is treated as a win for the opposing side instead of a partial success.)

*Mac is in a bit of a pickle. Usually the **popular** archetype is enough to get by, but it's not much help against this locked boathouse door! Nobody planned for this, so there isn't a **scheme** to help, and Mac isn't good enough at lockpicking to have earned the **skill** through a merit badge yet. No, the only thing to rely on now is good old **cabin pride**. Mac rolls 1d6, and a rival camper rolls 2d6 for the locked door, a **tricky** obstacle. Mac gets a 3, and the obstacle's highest die is a 3, too. Normally this would be a partial success, but cabin pride only gets you so far, so the tie is instead a failure. Mac sighs as the improvised lockpick jams in the door and life gets more complicated...*

CAMPER ARCHETYPES

It seems like every year, cabins break down into a few types of kids. These are the ones who tend to cause the most headaches for the staff. In play, each archetype indicates a camper's primary way of solving problems, and also grants an appropriate benefit.

- ▶ The **clever** kid. Your smarts give you an insight into most situations, and when it comes to winning a challenge or planning a prank, no matter how crazy the plan sounds you know it'll work... if you can just get what you need.
- ▶ The **tough** kid. You're more than intimidating enough for the other kids, and some of the staff, too—you know which rules you can break and people will look the other way.
- ▶ The **rebellious** kid. You know where to find everything dangerous, illicit, or banned in the camp, even better if it comes from an adult's locker of seized contraband or a kid's stash of smuggled goods.
- ▶ The **popular** kid. You've got a lot of friends, and you're firmly in the good graces of most camp staff, too. You know who'll do you a favor.
- ▶ The **sneaky** kid. You know a way to get into every building, room, and structure in the camp, especially the ones you're not allowed in.

ACTIONS IN A SCENE

The active camper has four actions to choose from in their scene, partially dictated by who the active camper chooses as a required camper in the scene with them. Though many things and multiple contests might happen in a scene, only one action can happen (or not happen, if you fail) in a single active camper's turn. Actions that require campers from the same cabin are **ally actions**; ones that require rival campers are **opposed actions**. (**Note:** If there are any campers with conflicting allegiances, any player may treat them as an ally or rival, and vice-versa.) Minor characters that crop up during play should be acted out by campers not already in the scene. Keep in mind that a scene that is being roleplayed can be interrupted by any camper, including campers not in the scene, if they think that the outcome of a situation should be subject to a **contest**.

- ▶ **Hatching schemes.** *Ally action.* Two campers and any of their friends that are called for craft

a plot and set it into motion. A scheme usually hinges on some item that the campers need but don't have ready access to, is prohibited for campers, hard to find, etc. Conflict in the scene will flow from the efforts to obtain it. If the item is successfully acquired, the scheme is in motion! All campers in that cabin may add a die to their pool for having a scheme when it is applicable in contests. (**Note:** if a camper with conflicting allegiances participated in hatching a scheme with their rival cabin, they gain the scheme as well.)

► **Winning badges.** *Ally action.* One camper steps up to try and win a badge in some camp activity, with their fellow camper's help. This help takes the form of some kind of edge: advice from an adult, a secret technique to master, or even outright cheating. Conflict in the scene will focus on acquiring the edge the campers lack. If the camper impresses the staff and wins the merit badge, hooray! Their cabin is awarded 10 points, and that camper should note a new **skill** tied to the merit badge that may add a die to their pool in contests.

► **Challenging cabins.** *Opposed action.* The active camper picks the rival camper he is challenging in some sort of public camp game, craft, or competition. These challenges are considered sporting and fair by camp staff, who oversee the event. Conflict in the scene develops from efforts of either side to tip the scales in their favor, before the final contest to determine the winner of the challenge. The manner of challenge is up to the active camper, and the rival camper chooses the camp staff to referee the event. Victory in the challenge results in the awarding of 5 points to the winning camper's cabin; more points may be wagered between the cabins themselves. Wagers that involve things other than points are also allowed. All points that are awarded or wagered in a challenge between cabins transfer from the losing cabin to the winning one. (**Note:** if the challenge being made is the final tiebreaker for the Camp Cup, use a coin flip to decide which is the "active camper". The cabin with fewer demerits calls the flip; the other cabin does the toss. The amount of points to be wagered is set at the minimum to reduce either side to 99 points or less if they lose the challenge. If the subsequent contest results in a tie for highest die, the winner is the cabin with fewer demerits.)

► **Pulling pranks.** *Opposed action.* One cabin, led by the active camper, tries to pull off a daring prank on their rival cabin. Pulling a prank requires a **scheme** to be in motion to have any decent chance of success, as campers that attempt a prank without a scheme lose any contest that results in a tie during the scene, instead of scoring a partial success. Conflict in the scene focuses on staying out of sight and executing the prank without a hitch. The cleverest pranks not only avoid any detection from other campers and adults, but might even fool staff into thinking the victims of the prank have done something worthy of demerits! If a cabin is successful with their prank, the scheme has been completed and a new one must be hatched for subsequent pranks. The scheme for a prank that fails remains in place.

*Enough is enough. Those jerks in Horsetail Cabin think they're so great? Prove it! Kris, the active camper, picks Sal to be the other required camper for the scene and chooses the **challenging cabins** action. Sal doesn't know Kris just won a merit badge in archery, which Kris thinks is just perfect. "Hey Sal! You! Me! Archery range, tonight!" Thankfully Sal has an in with a counselor, otherwise this certainly would be shaping up very one-sided. "Perfect, Kris. I know just who should judge us... I'll be there."*

EARNING POINTS & DEMERITS

Campers only have two ways to earn points: through the **winning badges** and **challenging cabins** actions. There are lots of ways to earn demerits, though... too many to count, as far as the campers are concerned. The camp staff seem to love catching kids out of their beds at night, or in restricted places they're not supposed to be at any time.

When campers get caught breaking camp rules by staff, they are almost always given demerits. Worse, while each camper is given demerits individually, a cabin's demerits are the total of all the demerits of its campers! A handful of kids caught in big trouble all at once can spell doom for their cabin's chances at the Camp Cup real quick.

Morgan, Kelly, and Pat are hunting through the camp administrator's office for some dirt on the campers in Scorpion Cabin. Their own cabin is standing strong at 80 points, but hopefully they'll find an edge in these files... except their entry was sloppy, and now they're all three caught red-handed. Breaking and entering is a serious offense—15 demerits apiece. That's 45 more demerits for their cabin, meaning their points toward the Camp Cup have dropped all the way down to 35. Maybe this wasn't such a great idea.

Demerits are given based on the severity of the rules-breaking, which falls into three stages: **minor**, **moderate**, and **serious**. Minor offenses net 5 demerits, moderate ones earn 10, and serious instances of rules-breaking are punished with 15! If it is unclear or disputed what level of rules-breaking an act falls under, the three levels of non-camper obstacles are a helpful guide. To break the rule, was what the camper was doing **simple**, **tricky**, or **tough**? A simple obstacle would likely be a minor offense, and so on.

If a camper with conflicting allegiances gets caught, they earn demerits for the cabin they are assigned to, no matter which campers they were caught with. This might not go down well with their bunkmates!

FOR THE FUTURE

Whew. That was one hell of a summer wasn't it? Now what's left but to look for the horizon, and next year at camp!

Cabin Wars isn't especially geared for sequential play over multiple sessions, but you might decide that's what you want to do. Great! A simple way to do this is keep all the camp details your last game created for the new one you're about to start, such as particular adult staff, notable NPC campers from other cabins, tales of epic pranks past still told around the campfire, etc. Especially keep track of who, if anybody, won the Camp Cup last year. Bragging rights are priceless, and it just gives more motivation for all the campers involved.

If a player is returning and wants to play the same camper again, they should be put in the same cabin as last year. A notable exception, as always, is a returning camper who had conflicting allegiances last year. They might still be in limbo, have solidified their cabin affiliation, or switched sides for good. Do what makes sense! This might mean in a game with an odd number of players that someone else (maybe even a returning camper) will have conflicting allegiances this year—everyone knows a lot can change in a year, after all...

ICON INSPIRATIONS

For the curious, and a peek behind the curtain, here's how I used this year's GameChef ingredients and theme to inspire **Cabin Wars!**

► **Theme:** *An up-and-down arrow with a bespectacled person standing in front of it.* I used this as the basis for the idea of points and demerits in tug-of-war with each other. The stylized person is Authority, the force on high that watches as the players rise and fall via points and demerits. In this case, the staff that are watching the campers and judging the games leading up to the Camp Cup.

► **Ingredient:** *A big head with a snowflake inside it.* To me, this looked more like a big head with a *gear* inside it. That implied to me plans, plots, schemes within schemes all being hatched out of the mind of this egg-headed person. So, something about making plans... this one didn't come into focus as planning a *prank* until I had a good idea from the next ingredient.

► **Ingredient:** *A belted tunic covered in a smattering of diamond shapes.* This icon fascinated me. I knew I didn't want to use the bug-apple icon, and this one seemed like it could determine a lot about my game, once I knew what it would be. Then I had it: merit badges! I'd considered something about summer camp once I settled on "points & demerits" from the theme, but this clinched it. Merit badges would be An Important Thing in my game.

► **Ingredient:** *A paper lantern in the corner softly illuminates a person's silhouette.* This just played more into the idea of summer camp stuff. Sneaking around at night when you should be in bed in your cabin is a time-honored tradition, and since I already wanted my game to be about the interplay of winning prestige (via points) and breaking rules (earning demerits), a sneaking element was a perfect fit. Since most of the sneaking I did in my summer camp days involved messing with other cabins and pranks, I figured it should be the same in this game. And I liked too how it suggested that trying to pull a prank, which is perhaps the most obviously fun action to take in the game, is a risky action that must be attempted with stealth.

Cabin Wars! is a game created by me, Nathan Harrison, in 2013.
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