holiday heroes

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FOREWORD

It happens to each of us at some point. You're on holiday in Turkey with family, on break having lunch with colleagues, or in a pub with friends, when the conversation shifts to your hobby.

Then the questions start: "So, what's this 'roleplaying' thing that you do?", "Do you dress up?", "Is it some kind of computer game?" Time and time again, you try to explain how what tabletop roleplaying is, but each time it somehow feels that you're not doing it justice.

For me personally, after being in this situation on countless occasions — and failing to satisfactorily explain how roleplaying works more times than I can count — I realised that the only way to successfully explain roleplaying, is to actually take up the reigns as Game Master (GM) and run curious parties through a short session on the spot.

And so, I created Holiday Heroes. It does not break any new ground, nor does it intend to. The rules are also not exhaustive, meaning that there will be occasions during play where you need to improvise. But this is all fine — it is likely your players won't realise (or care)!

And of course, any group of roleplayers can enjoy Holiday Heroes as a last minute, pick up and play game system.

WHAT YOU NEED

Not everyone has dice readily available (especially polyhedral dice!), and so Holiday Heroes has been designed to be run with something that nearly every home, bar, pub, or holiday destination has available: a ordinary deck of shuffled playing cards with two jokers. Place this in the centre of the table.

You will also need the obligatory pen and paper (or napkin!) to quickly create characters on and keep track of wounds. However, even these simple items are not readily available. Consider using your mobile phone's text messaging feature, or a suitable app, to make notes.

Optionally, you can print and cut out the bridge card-sized rules summary and char-
acter cards found at the back of this book, so you can have the game with you wherever you go. You could even slide these into someone else's deck for them to (re)discover later!

GENRE

So you've convinced your colleagues/ friends/family to give it a go. What next?

The first thing you'll want to establish is genre. Nearly every gamer knows roleplaying has its origins deeply rooted in classic fantasy adventures and, as Holiday Heroes designed to introduce people to the hobby, it won't deviate from this stereotype. Besides, most of us remember a good fantasy roleplaying story or trope which we can easily draw from.

However, not everyone likes elves, dwarves and sorcery. You know your target audience better than anyone, so don't be afraid to switch genre and adapt the game if they don't like fantasy. Super-heroes, sci-fi, modern horror, or even corny 1980's action are all great options. You could even base the game entirely on a film, tv-series or computer game that everyone enjoys.

Remember, your aim is to get non-gamers interested in your hobby (and begging for more later!), so cater to their interests as best you can.

In all cases, you must establish where the characters will begin their story, who they are and what they are doing. Are they a party of gallant adventurers seeking fame and glory? Or are they simple villagers who must take up sword and wand to stop an evil presence that threatens their home?

Try to keep choosing a genre short and snappy. A few minutes should be more than enough.
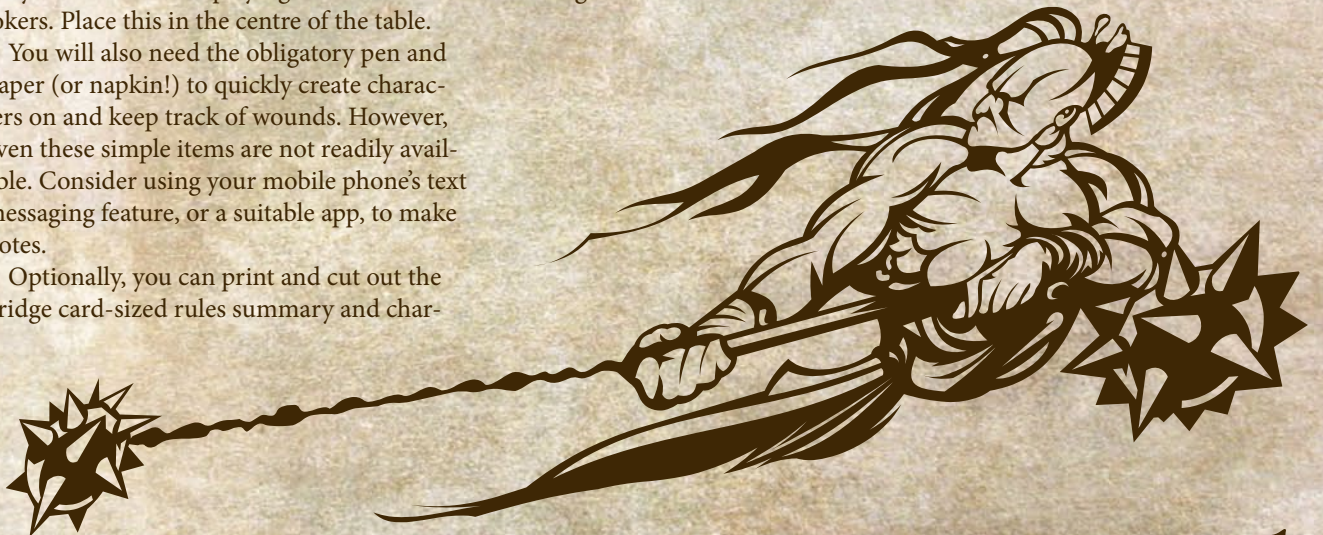
CHARACTER CREATION

Now to the meat and potatoes of any role-playing game: the characters. Try not to bore non-gamers with endless statistics, numbers and abilities. Instead, focus on who the characters are, and what they can and can't do.

ATTRIBUTES

Each character has six defining attributes: two talents, two flaws and two trappings. Your goal as GM is to coax these out of your players through conversation and create a short list of these for use during play. Help the players along during this process with suggestive questions and comments, and jot down attributes as they come up. Oh, and don't forget to have the players name their characters!

Here are some example questions and attributes:

TALENTS

What is your character good at? What physical feature makes her stand out? Where does she come from?

Examples: Sneaking, swordplay, history, elven senses, tough, agile, charming.

FLAWS

What is the character scared of? What physical hindrance does the character have? What does she simply suck at? Does she have a personality quirk?

Examples: Scared of the dark, clumsy, slow, rude, greedy, wanted, shunned species.

TRAPPINGS

What does your character take with them on their adventures?

Examples: Axe, armour, lockpicks, wand of fire rays, shield, bow, horse.

GM CHARACTERS

As the characters meet people in the story, the GM will need to come up attributes on the fly. This is dirt simple.

For talents, each character has one that relates to her profession (eg. baker, blacksmith, warrior), and perhaps another relating to her species (eg. strong, nimble).

Flaws are just as simple. Pick one that relates to her background (eg. a haughty noble, or an ignorant peasant), and another for her species (eg. hates daylight, cold-blooded).

DRAWS

As with most roleplaying games, there will be times when a character's chances of success need to be tested. The player of the character in question makes a draw.

The player draws two cards from the deck. If at least one of the cards turns up a result of 9 or higher (with aces being the high), then the character has succeeded in her action. If not, then she suffers any consequences for failure. The drawn cards are placed onto a discard pile.

MODIFIERS

In many circumstances, attributes, wounds and other effects have an effect on the number of cards a player draws:

TALENTS & TRAPPINGS (+1 CARD)

If talent or trapping would give the player an advantage in a given action, the player draws one additional card.

Examples: A sea elf sailing a ship, an orc with an axe attacking a wolf.

FLAWS (-1 CARD)

Conversely, flaws reduce the number of cards drawn by one.

Creating Bumble

Dave is a fan of the Lord of the Rings books and films, and has described his character, Bumble, as "a hobbit living amongst humans who wants to prove his worth to them in battle". From this short description, it is easy to give Bumble his attributes:

Talents: *Small, Fighter*
Flaws: *Small, Distracted by Food*
Equipment: *Sword, Armour*

Note that 'small' is both a talent and a flaw, and will be used as such during play. If it were only a flaw, then Bumble could not use his size to gain an extra card during a draw.

Magical Talents

Experienced gamers know that any system which includes magic or supernatural abilities become fairly complex — not something we want. Here, I present suggestions to prevent the game bogging down with potential off-putting complications.

Firstly, characters should have only one talent with a magical bent. GMs are encouraged to design these talents as broad or as narrow they desire keeping as close to the genre as possible. New players won't know what's right or wrong. Spells can be grouped together into this talent which can explain the type of magic the spellcaster uses. Illusions, healing, cantrips, summoning and battle-magic are all good examples.

During play, spells are cast upon a successful draw. It will happen that a spellcaster attempts to cast a more powerful spell (eg. a fireball that affects multiple targets) or a quick spell (eg. a ranged magic attack that does not need an action to ready). In this case, simply reduce the number of cards during the casting draw by one or two. GMs should use their experience and common sense to judge this. Attack spells are resolved as per a normal attack.

Examples: A rude person in the presence of the king, a clumsy ogre trying to sneak by a guard.

SITUATIONAL MODIFIERS (+/-1 CARD)

GMs may raise or lower the number of cards drawn if the character's circumstances are favourable or detrimental to her chances of success.
Examples: Librarian assistance during research (+1 card), running on ice (-1 card).

WOUNDS (-1 CARD/WOUND)

Each *wound* a character suffers reduces the number of cards drawn by one.

REATTEMPTS

If the character has time to reattempt the action, she may do so, but with one less card.

LESS THAN ONE CARD

Sometimes the odds are so stacked against a character that the player may end up draw-

Bumble in the Dark

Bumble has snuck into a cave and is attempting to tip-toe past a dosing orc guard. He draws two cards as standard (2), an additional one for being Small (+1), and a further card as the orc is asleep (+1). However, the cave is pitch black and the orc can see in the dark, so Bumble draws one less for carrying a burning torch (-1).

In the end he draws 2 + 1 + 1 - 1 = 3 cards for this action.

ing less than one card. In this situation, the player still draws one card, but requires a 9 or higher *and* a red card for her character to succeed.

HIGHLY SPECIALISED TASKS

When a character who does not have specialised training for the task at hand, a draw is made as per the Less Thank One Card rule.
Examples: A farmer from the hills trying to sail a ship, wizard attempting to pick a lock. Treat as less than one card.
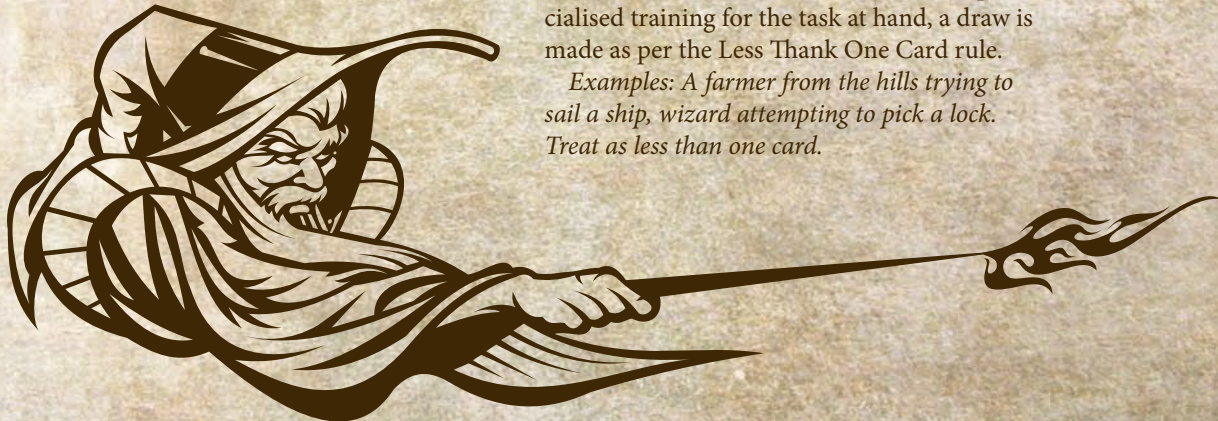
CONTESTS

If two characters (player or Game Master controlled) are attempting actions in direct contest to one-another. In this case, both sides draw cards as usual. If only one character draws a success, she wins the contest. If both draw successes, the higher card value wins.

In the case of a tie, the player character wins — she is a hero after all! Redraw if there is a tie between player characters.

CRITICAL RESULTS

Every gamer loves rolling a natural 20, and so Holiday Heroes introduces the concept of Critical Results.

CRITICAL SUCCESS

If a joker is drawn, then the character has critically succeeded well at their action, and should be awarded as such.

Examples: The character learns extra information, garners a flamboyant description of her action, causes more damage in combat.

CRITICAL FAILURE

On the flip side, if a 2 card is drawn *and* the character fails her action (ie. she does not draw a 9 or higher), then she has critically failed. This should not be a crippling affect, but more of minor hindrance.

Examples: the character slips over during a fight and must spend their next combat turn standing up.

RESHUFFLING

Drawn cards are placed onto a discard pile. The entire deck is reshuffled after two joker cards have been drawn, minus any defence or initiative cards currently on the table.

WOUNDS

The most common source of wounds is combat, however, characters may suffer wounds by other means. The exact circumstance is determined by the GM. Make a note each time a character suffers a wound.

Examples: Falling, suffocation, fatigue, starvation.

HEALING

A wound heals naturally after one full day of rest. This can be reduced to one hour if a skilled healer or wizard with an appropriate spell treats the wound with a successful draw.

DEATH

After a character suffers her third wound, she collapses and dies at the end of the following round, or after thirty seconds if not in combat. Another character may attempt first aid to remove this third wound by spending an action and making a draw.

A character with a suitable talent (eg. tough) may suffer an extra wound before collapsing.

Unnamed, unimportant characters (eg. a nameless goblin within a horde) only need to suffer one Wound before collapsing.

COMBAT

It is likely that the characters will find themselves facing adversity during the game. As with many roleplaying games, combat is divided up into rounds, during which each character acts in initiative order. A combat round in Holiday Heroes represents approximately fifteen seconds in game time, and ends when all characters have acted twice.

DRAW DEFENCE CARDS

At the start of each round, each player draws a two cards and places them *face down* on the table in front of them. These are defence cards. Players may draw an additional defence card for each applicable talent (eg. quick) or trapping (eg.

shield, armour). Flaws (eg. slow-witted) and wounds reduce the number of defence cards drawn to a minimum of one, and the GM may impose situational modifiers (eg. due to surprise).

The GM does the same for each group of opponents and allies (eg. a horde of goblins), and each important GM character (eg. the goblin chieftain).

INITIATIVE CARDS

Each player then draws two cards and lays them *face up* on the table in front on them. These are initiative cards. Again, the Game Master does the same for characters and groups under his control.

The number of initiative cards drawn is always two, except the case of surprise, when it is reduced to one in the first round of combat.

TURNS

The characters now take turns performing actions, beginning with the character with the highest initiative card. Ties a broken in the players' favour.

A character may perform one draw per turn and is assumed to be able to move a reasonably distance during this time. After her action has been resolved, she must discard the initiative card.

ATTACK & DEFENCE

MELEE

The most obvious action during combat is to attack a nearby enemy in melee. A draw is made as usual. Upon a successful attack, the recipient may attempt to defend herself by turning over one or two of her defence cards. The attack action is now resolved as a contest.

If the attacker succeeds and/or wins the contest, she hits her target inflicting one wound. The target suffers two wounds if the attacker drew a joker, but is can be reduced by one if the defender draws a success.

Whatever the result, the defence card and the current initiative card are discarded at the end of the action.

RANGED

For ranged weapons such as bows, characters must spend a turn readying the weapon before firing. They may move as usual. This may initially seem like a disadvantage, but it is likely that a melee combatant will have to spend an entire turn running towards the attacker before attacking, during which time the bowman may have retreated.

OTHER ACTIONS

Obviously, not all characters will attack all the time during combat, but instead may be picking a lock, holding a door shut, or jumping over a narrow canyon. These actions are resolved by making draws as usual.

LONGER ACTIONS

In the case of actions that take longer to complete than simply swinging a sword, the character must spend one or more additional turns performing the action, after which she can draw to determine if she was successful.

END OF ROUND

At the end of a round, everyone at the table discards any unused defence cards. Be sure to check these cards for jokers, which may trigger a reshuffle.

A new round now begins, and each player draws their defence cards, and two initiative cards.

The Orc Awakens

Unfortunately, Bumble failed to sneak by the Orc, and woke it up. Fortunately, the Orc is surprised and only draws one initiative card. In addition, the GM imposes a situational penalty on its defence cards for being tired dropping the number from three to two. Bumble has four defence cards: two as standard and additional cards each for small (talent) and armour (trapping).

In the first round, both Bumble and the Orc have a king initiative card, but as Bumble is a player character, he breaks ties and acts first.

He attacks the orc drawing three cards: 6, 10 and queen. The orc defends and turns over one defence card: a 10. Even though this was a success, Bumble drew higher and has struck the orc, inflicting one wound on it.

HOLIDAY HEROES RULES SUMMARY

CHARACTER CREATION

Each character has 6 attributes: 2 talents, 2 flaws & 2 trappings

DRAWS

When a character attempts an action, draw 2 cards as standard. A 9 or higher (aces high) on at least one card is a success.

The number of cards drawn can vary:
- +1 card for relevant talents or trappings
- -1 card for a flaw that would hinder the character
- -1 card per wound the character has
- +/-1 card if the GM deems the circumstances favourable or detrimental to success
- -1 card if the GM permits a character to reattempt a task

LESS THAN ONE CARD & HIGHLY SPECIALISED TASKS

Draw one card only. Must be 9 or higher *and* a red card for success.

CONTESTS

Both sides make a draw. If one character draws a success, she wins. If both draw successes, the higher value wins. Break ties in favour of the players.

CRITICAL RESULTS

A joker denotes a critical success.

A 2 card without success denotes a critical failure.

RESHUFFLING

The discard pile and draw decks are shuffled together immediately after two jokers have been discarded. Defence and initiative cards on the table are not shuffled into this.

WOUNDS

Each wound reduces the number of cards in a draw by one. Wounds heal after one day of rest. This can be reduced to one hour if a skilled healer or wizard with an appropriate spell treats the wound with a successful draw.

COMBAT

1. Each combatant draws 2 defence cards, applying modifiers as normal. Place these *face down* on table.

2. Draw two initiative cards per player. Do not apply any modifiers. Place these *face up* on the table.

3. Carry out actions in initiative order, from the highest card to the lowest. Break ties in favour of the players. A character may make one draw each turn.

4. Discard unused defence cards, checking for jokers in case a reshuffle is triggered.

ATTACK & DEFENCES

The attacker makes a draw. The recipient of the attack may defend if she chooses by turning over one or two of her defence cards. Compare the cards as a contest. If the attacker wins, the defender suffers one wound, or two on a critical success.

A character must spend a turn preparing a ranged weapon before she can fire it on her the next turn.

CHARACTER CARD

NAME

TALENTS

FLAWS

TRAPPINGS

WOUNDS

CHARACTER CARD

NAME

TALENTS

FLAWS

TRAPPINGS

WOUNDS

CHARACTER CARD

NAME

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