

Creating a Character

Heartfire is a game about the inner goodness of true heroes defeating a seemingly unconquerable darkness. It is a game about wondrous places and terrible foes, astonishing magic and fearful risk. At its core it is about fairy tales.

Heartfire is about working together. It's about hope, joy and wonder overcoming anger and despair. It's about unlikely heroes finding their place in the world.

Every character is made up of their *Heart* and their *Fire*. Their *Heart* what passion drives them, and their *Fire* is how they express that passion to the world around them. From these they distil a number of *Wishes* (things they hold dear and want the most) and *Pennants* (unique powers and abilities).

First work out what you want to play—create your *Character Concept*. Talk with the rest of the players about what kind of game you want to play, and what kind of things you're happy for there to exist in the world. Come up with an idea for your character's origin and core capabilities, and pick a name for them.

Now choose a *Heart*. This is a representation of what drives your character to do good and be a hero. There are four to choose from: Loyalty, Love, Adventure, and Hope. See the left-most suit boxes for more information on your *Heart*.

Now choose a *Fire*. This is a representation of how you use what drives you to actually defeat evil. There are again four to choose from: Strength, Charm, Skill, and Wisdom. See the right-most suit boxes for more information on your *Fire*.

Now choose two *Wishes*—things that you want to achieve, and which are related to your *Heart*. One should be a long-term wish, and one should be a short-term wish.

Now choose a single *Pennant*—a unique ability, item, or power that your character possesses and which marks them out as a hero. It should be related to your *Fire*.

Work out which of your allies you have correspondence with, and make a note of it—such things will come up often in play.

Now, with the group, describe how the heroes met (or perhaps they are yet to meet!) and move onto the world creation rules. As you might have come up with some wonderful backgrounds and ideas for the setting, you can use your character creation to feed into the world creation.

Have fun in the world of **Heartfire**!

Your GM can create the world you play in if you want, but **Heartfire** is a collaborative game, and thus creating a world together can be a fun thing to do.

The world of **Heartfire** is made up of a number of *locations*, each of which has been consumed by darkness, and which must be cleansed by the characters to return them to their former wondrous state. When the heroes of cleansed all of the locations they must find the *Heart of Darkness* and cleanse that to truly return the world to its proper state.

The GM should define what the *Heart of Darkness* is – an evil warlord, a terrible curse, or an evil wizard who has summoned hordes of dark creatures. They should set the scene for the world by explaining what *Heart of Darkness* is, and how it's consumed the lands.

Now everyone knows what they're up against, you can create locations. First of all,

Creating a Magic

MAGIC

When forming the Light, clubs represent magic and wonder—anything which is impossible and astonishing.

When forming the Dark, clubs represent the misuse of magic—curses, enchantments, and sorcerous malevolence.

When forming the Light, diamonds represent natural phenomena of all kinds—any kind of terrain or animal which is natural and not magical.

When forming the Dark, diamonds represent physical evil of some kind—fell beasts, horrible monsters, and vicious soldiers.

NATURE

LOYALTY

You are driven by friendship and duty, fighting darkness to protect those who you care about.

A correspondence reminds the target of the friends who stand by them—on their next check, they can use this character's hand instead of their own.

LOVE

You are driven by idealism and an abiding love of goodness, wonder, and the light.

A correspondence allows a character to use their powers regardless of their pain—injuries do not limit *Pennant* use in the next scene for the target.

Pennants

All heroes possess a *Pennant* (or sometimes more than one) which is related to the *Fire* they have chosen to be driven by. This is a special ability, item, or power which your character possesses – a unique capability of your hero. Maybe you are the chosen of the stars and have been gifted with their light. Or perhaps you have the blood of dragons within you and can breathe fire with ease. Maybe it's just that you've learned plenty of tricks whilst performing in the circus!

Describing your *Pennant* can be tricky, but the best way to go about it is to think of something which can be broad and thematic, but not all-encompassing. Just saying your character is a wizard isn't any good (because maybe magic can do anything!) but saying they're a battlemage of the elemental order works well (they can cast elemental magic based on attack and defence). Try to remember what your *Fire* represents, and relate your chose of *Pennant* as closely to it as possible.

Mechanically your *Pennant* does a number of things, and you can always use your *pennant* (regardless of what it is) to accomplish any of these things:

You are driven by wanderlust and the need to experience new things and see new places.

A correspondence allows a target to see new challenges as opportunities—on their next check, on of the GM's cards is of the opposite colour.

ADVENTURE

- Allow you to perform actions narratively which make sense for your *Pennant* (flying, etc) thus avoiding challenges entirely.
- Engage in challenges which would otherwise not be an option (like casting spells).
- Give you an extra card draw on any check where it would give you an advantage.
- Force the GM to draw a card of the opposite colour on a check where it would disadvantage your enemy.

You are driven by the belief that things will get better, and that people are fundamentally good.

A correspondence reminds the character why they are fighting—despair does not limit *Wish* use in the next scene for the target.

HOPE

You should describe two wishes that your character aspires towards, and which are related to your *Heart*.

One should be long term, and describe the reason they are combatting evil in the first place. This will probably last then the whole length of their adventures, and should be a constant companion to them.

One should be more short term, and could be accomplished in a session or two or play. If you're stuck on picking a short-term wish

Wishes

before the game begins, ask your GM what they have planned, or to wait until play starts before picking it.

If you engage in a challenge where a wish is at stake, or otherwise aligns with your success, you can draw a card for free for each wish that applies (if you want to).

Once a wish is complete you can immediately gain another one. If you wish, however, is rendered impossible to complete, then you are considered to be despairing (see *Combat*).

Heart

Character Advancement

Improving your character in **Heartfire** isn't like improving a character in most other games. Most significantly, characters don't improve all at the same time – the game is a group effort, and so the *group* improves, not necessarily any specific individual.

Heartfire ultimately revolves around cleansing areas contaminated with darkness so they return to light and wonder. When you actually manage to do that (cleanse an area of darkness) one of the characters in the group finds themselves the recipient of new power. When you enter a new area (and thus begin the task of cleansing it) the group should nominate one of their members to benefit from its cleansing. When the area is cleansed, that character will receive new power –

the GM should craft this into the story. The group should make sure than no character receives another boost of power until everyone has received at least one, and so on.

So what can this power actually do? When you receive it you should pick one of the following options:

- Add a new *Heart*. This allows you to have one more card in your hand and use its correspondence, but does not grant you an extra *Wish*.

some aspect of the location, describing it in detail, and the next person plays a card of their own, and then plays a second card on top of the one the other player laid, explaining how that aspect has been corrupted. The actual card makes no difference except for the suit. If it's a face card it shouldn't be an as-

pect of the location, but instead an important character who abides there whose behaviour is akin to the matching Heart to the suit (see Hearts)

When the last card has been played, the location is complete. You have a number of important aspects, and information on how it's been corrupted (and thus some goals to achieve!). When you reach a new location go through this process again until the GM rules you've cleansed the land, and you can seek the Heart of Darkness.

The Heart of Darkness is a location like any other, but entirely created by the GM. It should reflect the themes and common scenarios which have emerged throughout the other location, and be the most dangerous place the heroes have visited yet. You should establish as you create the location how the darkness can be cleansed, removed, or even just sealed away—not in explicit detail, but at least a rough guide for the players.

At the beginning of the session take a standard pack of playing cards and separate them into red and black suits with the face cards removed. Shuffle both decks and place them face down on the table where you're playing. Each character then draws one card for their Heart and one for their Fire (from the appropriate deck depending on their corresponding suit). They lay these cards face up in front of them - this is their hand. Your hand refreshes at the beginning of each session.

Red cards are positive, and black cards are negative in value. Your goal is to get a total of zero counting all the cards in a challenge - if get -3 to +3, you succeed. If you hit it exactly, you succeed with style (and if you have a correspondence something awesome happens, see Correspondence). If you get more than 3 or less than -3, then you fail the action, and if you miss it by ten or more, it's catastrophic (and the GM should come up with some horrible, but nonfatal, consequence. If nothing narrative fits, then consider the character

to be despairing).

The GM should draw a number of cards depending on the difficulty and nature of the challenge presented. Broadly put, red cards (cups and discs) are passive in nature whilst black cards are active. If the challenge is changing and growing, then red cards are drawn. If the challenge is static and just needs to be overcome, black cards are drawn. One card is an easy challenge, two an average one, three hard, and four very hard indeed.

Once the GM has drawn their cards to represent the challenge, the player then tries to match it. The player can use cards from their hand or draw cards from either deck. Using cards from your hand is free, but drawing a card from the deck requires you to either use your Pennant in an appropriate way, have an appropriate wish, or invoke either a *stunt* or a *concession*.

Stunts are surprising and impressive actions the character takes that give them an advantage in some way. A GM can award a stunt to a player who describes their character's actions inventively and well, and who uses the terrain in an unusual way.

Concessions are where the character accepts an unfortunately consequence for the chance to excel. A player is free to offer a concession, but the actual outcome is determined by the GM. It could add a further challenge later on, take a really long time to succeed, or even leave the character injured or despairing.

When the challenge is resolved place the drawn cards in a discard pile next to the correct deck (except for hand cards). When you need to draw a card from a deck, but can't, shuffle the discards and flip them over.

PEOPLE

When forming the Light, hearts represent people of all kinds—any creature that has intelligence, sentience, and a society. When forming the Dark, hearts represent emotion of all kinds—anger, hatred, fear, and despair.

When forming the Light, spades represent civilisation and thought, and its products—mills, villages, library, scholars, and so on. When forming the Dark, spades represent hidden plots and machinations—cults, secret societies, and hidden cabals.

CIVILISATION

STRENGTH

You express yourself physically and with great force. A correspondence grants the will to carry on to another—they can recover from injury if they are suffering from it.

CHARM

You express yourself with charisma and sincerity. A correspondence allows a character to see a way out of a dark place—they can recover from despair if they are suffering from it.

You express yourself with cunning and precision.

A correspondence shows someone another way of tackling a task—the target can immediately draw a card from either deck, and replace a card in their hand with it.

You are driven by the belief that things will get better, and that people are fundamentally good.

A correspondence reminds the character why they are fighting—despair does not limit Wish use in the next scene for the target.

SKILL

WISDOM

Grimness

If a character suffers a catastrophe to defend in addition to a consequence they are either Injured or Despairing. Injury affects their body (your Fire), and despair their soul (your Heart). When you suffer one of these, flip the relevant card in your hand over - you cannot use it for any purpose. In addition you do not gain the benefits of your Pennant or you Wishes. The GM determines which you suffer, but should keep in mind the circumstances of the attack - in most cases characters are injured first when in combat.

You can remove Injury from your character when one of the following happens: they rest for an extended time to allow them to recover (as per GM's discretion), the use of a suitable Pennant, the use of a correspondence, or from the care of a character met in play - generally a quest, gift, or payment will be required before they can or will help you.

You can remove Despair from your character when one of the following happens: an area that was *consumed by darkness* is cleansed, they complete a wish successfully, or they have their spirits lifted by another character (through the use of a correspondence).

You cannot be injured again if you are already injured. You cannot despair further if you are already despairing. When you are both injured and despairing then Things Look Grim.

A character for whom Things Look Grim can recover from this state just by having their Injury or their Despair removed. However, if they suffer an effect which would normally render them injured or despairing, they instead become Out, removing them from the player's control. They die, fall into darkness, or otherwise find themselves no longer able to join in the adventure.

Correspondence

When a new scene begins, the GM draws two cards (one black and one red) and places them face-up on the table. These are the correspondences. All that matters is the suits of the cards.

These cards indicate the threads of fate and destiny in that particular scene, and allow characters who correspond with them to perform special actions.

A character corresponds with either scene or other characters if one of the suits from their

Heart and Fire matches one of the scene suits (to correspond with the scene) or one of another character's suits (to correspond with an ally).

A correspondence can be used if a character achieves a result of zero on a check. They can immediately use the correspondence of the suit, and whether the player has that suit as a Heart or a Fire. If the correspondence is with another player, the effect can only be used on them. If it is with the scene, it can be used on any participant in the scene.

Combat

Combat works similarly to the rest of the game - challenges are undertaken, correspondences matched, and so on. When a player is attacked the GM draws cards from the red (active) deck, and when they are attacking the GM draws from the black (passive) deck - the ability of the foe indicates how many cards to draw. Unless there is a good reason (ambush, etc) the heroes should all get a chance to take an action before any of their enemies do. You can do whatever you wish in combat as long as the action would fit into a few seconds or so, but mostly what you want to do is attack!

If a character fails to defend (catastrophically or not) then they suffers a consequence. This is a momentary disadvantage represented by the GM drawing a card from either deck and placing it face up just in front of the player's hand. This is a sort of "antihand" - the GM can choose to include the value of this card in their totals if they wish, for free. All Consequences disappear the next time the person who is suffering them acts

- Add a new Fire. This allows you to have one more card in your hand and use its correspondence, but does not grant you a new Pennant.
- Choose a new wish (either short-term or long-term, you must have a Heart without a wish attached to it)
- Improve your Pennant (expand what your Pennant is capable of, and thus allow more chances of drawing cards on checks and exerting narrative control with it)
- Choose a new Pennant (you must have a Fire without a wish attached to it)