

SPARTAN

ROLE PLAYING GAME

DESIGNED BY CHARLES MCEACHERN

Players in Spartan take on the role of mortal heroes in mythical ancient Greece, striving for greatness among the scheming gods and fearsome beasts of the classics.

RULES SUMMARY

A player character (PC) in Spartan is built out of three elements: skills, aspects, and fate boxes. Skills give each PC quantitative strengths and weaknesses. Aspects tell the character's story. Fate boxes illustrate physical and mental condition, and also serve as a resource of narrative control.

The three elements are closely connected. Skills are used to create and destroy aspects not only about the PCs, but about the entire in-game world – to write an aspect is to create the effect it describes. In turn, aspects can be invoked to skew the odds on a skill roll by drawing attention to a relevant story detail. Fate boxes are the fuel that powers this back-and-forth... and for mortals, that fuel is very much exhaustible.

SKILLS

Each PC has twelve skills which break them down in terms of classical archetypes. At character creation, **these skills are ranked from 0 to 11**, where higher is better. Only players roll dice in Spartan, so only PCs have skills.

The skills are listed below, along with a few example uses. For a given action, the same skill is generally used to act and to react. Warfare is used to swing a sword as well as to parry; Performance is used to tell a lie and to sense deception.

In Spartan, as in Greek myth, mortals have limited access to magic. Gods have the ability to turn people permanently into livestock and give birth to monsters; PCs do not.

Crafts – Building, repairing, sabotaging mechanical objects.

Curses – Inflicting misfortune, particularly having to do with vermin (snakes, rats, insects) or the weather.

Diplomacy – Bartering, soliciting aid, building rapport.

Hunting – Ranged attacks, tracking, animal handling.

Illusions – Masking real things with false images.

Influence – Buying things, knowing people.

Lore – Knowledge of history, languages, geography, etc.

Performance – Playing music, dancing, acting, lying.

Physique – Running, wrestling, kicking down doors.

Prophecy – Talking to animals or the dead, who may sometimes offer cryptic hints about the future.

Subterfuge – Stealth, attacking unsuspecting targets.

Warfare – Melee attacks and tactical maneuvers.

ASPECTS

Aspects are short, improvised phrases which formally establish which details about the in-game world are important. **Character aspects** are innate to PCs and NPCs – they show motivations, magical ability, typical equipment, etc. The rest are **story aspects**, which evolve over time.

Creating a story aspect is synonymous with creating the effect it describes in the story. This could be concrete, like that *Heracles Owes King Eurystheus A Favor*, or abstract, like *Into the Lion's Den* – whatever makes sense in context.

Story aspects can be manually created and destroyed by rolling as discussed later. They can also be created by the GM to set a scene (*Pitch Dark*) or destroyed when the GM judges that they are no longer true (in this case, sunrise).

Aspects are sometimes hidden – for example, an impending *Ambush!* or an NPC's motivations or weakness. These are just like any other aspect, but written down secretly.

Each PC has three aspects. They are written at character creation, but may be revised occasionally as the character evolves. PC aspects should have positive implications (which can be invoked on rolls) as well as negative ones (which can be compelled for character advancement).

The first is the **mortal aspect**. It shows that the character is a mere mortal in a world with much greater forces at play. It often has to do with their upbringing or personality. The second is the **heroic aspect**. This is what makes the mortal's story worth telling. It need not be supernatural, though it may be. The third PC aspect is the **immortal aspect**. In the classics, gods are very much involved in the affairs of mortals – willingly or unwillingly, every hero of note has been drawn into their schemes.

FATE BOXES

Fate boxes are a measure of the Fates's patience with a character. They are an abstraction of health, composure, reputation, and luck... and are checked to show a loss of any of these. **Each PC has twelve fate boxes**; NPCs have fate boxes in accordance with their importance.

Should a character's last fate box every be checked, that character is defeated. A character's fate boxes are all unchecked after an extended rest somewhere safe.

EXAMPLE CHARACTERS

The PC Heracles is honorable and vengeful, so his Mortal Aspect is *No Debt Forgotten*. He solves problems by hitting them with a stick or wrestling them to the ground; his Heroic Aspect is *Paragon of Masculinity*. His Immortal Aspect is *Bastard Son of Zeus*, which may be more trouble than it's worth – the goddess Hera sees him as a symbol of her husband's adultery. He has twelve fate boxes. His top skill is Physique at 11. He regularly uses Warfare to swing his club, Hunting to fire his bow, and Influence to gain audience with royalty; these are his next three respectively.

The Nemean lion is an NPC. It has the aspect *King of the Jungle* (which the players know about) and *Fur Impenetrable by Mortal Weapons* (which is hidden). It has six fate boxes.

ROLLS AND EFFECTS

Active rolls are made when a PC wants to accomplish something. **Reactive rolls** are made to counter actions taken against the PCs. If an action does not directly involve a PC, no roll is made; the GM simply narrates the outcome.

To roll, a player throws a number of 12-sided dice. If all of the dice fall at or under the PC's most appropriate skill, the roll is a **success**. If any dice roll above that value, it's a **failure**. The default number of dice rolled is zero. That is, the PC succeeds automatically unless there's an aspect to explain why the roll is difficult or interesting.

A successful active roll creates one **effect** of the player's choice. A failed reactive roll creates one effect of the GM's choice. There are four effects: checking a character's fate box (such as by attacking them), creating a story aspect (*Grappled*), destroying a story aspect (breaking the grapple), and discovering an aspect that was hidden (sensing an *Ambush!*). Aspects created or discovered have a single fate box attached – they can be invoked once for free.

Invoking an aspect – that is, formally drawing attention to a relevant in-game detail – can increase or decrease the number of dice thrown by one (minimum zero) to change the difficulty of the roll. Alternatively, invoking an aspect can increase or decrease the number of effects by one (minimum one) to change the importance of the roll. Any number of aspects can be invoked, though only once each. The GM can invoke for free; players must check a fate box for each invocation (the free one on the aspect or one of their own).

If Heracles wants to put the Nemean lion in a *Chokehold*, the GM will invoke *King of the Jungle* and have Heracles roll one die against his Physique. Before rolling, Heracles may check one of his own fate boxes to invoke *Paragon of Masculinity*, either to drop the roll to zero dice or to add a second effect.

ASPECTS DURING PLAY

Even when not being invoked, aspects are always true. They inform the table as to the sorts of rolls and effects that make sense, and the GM ultimately has the power to veto any roll or effect deemed discordant with them.

For example, the Nemean lion (an NPC) has the aspect *Fur Impenetrable by Mortal Weapons*. Suppose Heracles shoots it with an arrow. Even if the roll is successful, the effect cannot be to check one of the lion's fate boxes as Heracles intended. The GM would instead narrate the arrow bouncing off the lion's pelt. At their discretion, the GM could also reveal the lion's aspect as an explanation.

CONFRONTATIONS

During any aggressive back-and-forth, rather than laissez-faire turn order, play proceeds clockwise around the table. The GM acts last unless they must act first (for example, if NPCs are ambushing the PCs).

Each player makes a single active roll per round. On the GM's turn, the GM acts for all NPCs, prompting reactive rolls from the players. In general, each NPC prompts a single reactive roll per round, though this need not strictly be the case – for example, the GM may decide that *Cerberus's* aspect *Three-Headed Guard Dog* justifies three rolls.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

Characters advance as a result of having aspects compelled against them. **Compelling an aspect** means introducing a significant and unfortunate plot twist that is thematically appropriate in light of a PC's aspect, or a story aspect that applies to them.

A compel can take two forms. A PC can be compelled to take a selfish or thoughtless action which inconveniences the rest of the party – for example, accidentally revealing a secret. Alternatively, circumstances outside of a PC's control can line up to specifically make that PC's life difficult – perhaps a debt being called in at an inopportune moment.

When the GM compels an aspect against a player, they take control of that player's next roll. The roll succeeds automatically, but the GM chooses its effect – checking a fate box or creating, destroying, or discovering an aspect.

Anyone can suggest a compel – the GM, the compelled player, or another player – but both the GM and the compelled player must agree that it is acceptable.

Whenever an aspect is compelled, the compelled player permanently increases one of the PC's skills by one (to a maximum of 11). The increase must be allocated such that there are no gaps in the PC's skill distribution.

CHARACTER NAME

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CRAFTS

CURSES

DIPLOMACY

HUNTING

ILLUSIONS

INFLUENCE

LORE

PERFORMANCE

PHYSIQUE

PROPHECY

SUBTERFUGE

WARFARE

MORTAL ASPECT

HEROIC ASPECT

IMMORTAL ASPECT