

City of Masks

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Introduction

In Bonvidaeo, the City of Masks, the mask you wear is who you are - *or so everyone tells you*. Young nobles just beginning to discover your identity, as you come of age you are thrust suddenly into the scheming and maneuvering of the powerful factions within the City. You must strive to make alliances and increase your Face, the social currency which buys you power and influence and protects you from being dragged down in the faction fights. All the time, though, your hidden face (your true personality) is coming clearer - conflicting with your mask...

Write a novel, and you tell one story. Write a storygame, and hundreds of people can tell thousands of stories. I like the setting of Bonvidaeo, the City of Masks in my novel of the same name; it has too much potential for me to keep it to myself. So here is a game you can play there. For reasons of elbow room, it is set at least 50 years prior to the novel.

What is a Storygame?

With the caveat that any definition can be argued about, a storygame is a game in which *narration* plays a key part. Narration can be defined, for this purpose, as the evocative description of actions, events, people and things in a shared imaginative setting. Usually the players of a storygame are identified with particular characters in the story, and their narrative often includes dialogue "in character". The "game" part gives guidance as to how events unfold, around which the players improvise the detailed narrative.

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The Setting

The City

Bonvidaeo is a city-state in some ways similar to Venice in the early renaissance (in that it is a maritime power and trading centre; it doesn't have canals and is built on solid ground around a harbour). It has a royal palace, a large Temple of the Sun and a rather smaller Temple of the Moon. All of these are freestanding, surrounded by streets, and have underground passages (known and secret) leading to and from them. As part of playing the game, you are free to add your own imagined locations to the city at any time.

Government

Bonvidaeo is nominally ruled by a king. The King of Bonvidaeo is always known as Emilion, and by the conventions of the city, all eight successors of the original Emilion are referred to as Emilion the First. At least one of these successors was in fact a woman, but was regarded as King Emilion nonetheless.

The original Emilion was the king who enacted the first Masking Laws, opening the way to the development of Bonvidaeo into the City of Masks. He was a drunkard and much enjoyed Carnival, so legislated that it should be extended. Since his day, if not before, the king's power has been gradually eroding and he is now a figurehead for the intrigues of the Royal Council, the Commissioners of Masks, the Priests of the Sun and the Priestesses of the Moon.

Royal Council

Your standard royal council - high-ranking nobles, close adult relatives of the king (including his designated successor if adult), the Archpriest of the Sun and Archpriestess of the Moon, high-ranking military men such as generals and admirals. In theory the council advises the king but in practice the king is a figurehead for the council.

Commissioners of Masks

The Commissioners of Masks were originally a purely administrative body which grew in power until they rival the Royal Council and the Temples and surpass the King. There is some overlap between the Commissioners and the Council, as the Commissioners are drawn from the nobility and upper merchant class, and the Archpriest and Archpriestess are members *ex officio* of both bodies. The existing Commissioners appoint new members, so it is a self-perpetuating body.

The entry criterion is power and influence, not nobility, office, age or gender, but the City of Masks being the conservative late-medieval/early-renaissance city it is, most of the people with the highest degree of overt power and influence are the older male nobility.

The Keeper of the Book is an administrative post reporting to and advising (but not a member of) the Commissioners. The Keeper's task is to administer the details of the Book of Masks in line with general policy created by the Commissioners. Any new masks created, and any existing masks brought "into play", must be registered with the Keeper.

Commissioners of Masks may wear masks composed of small masks, which are otherwise the correct mask for the character they are currently portraying. They may wear these masks at any time but must wear them while acting specifically as Commissioners.

Temples

The Solars (worshippers of the God masked as the Sun) and Lunars (worshippers of the Goddess masked as the Moon) once had a close alliance, and the Sun and the Moon were even spoken of as masks of a single deity, but at this period of the City's history this is breaking down and turning to rivalry and dissention. By the time of the novel (50 years after the time of the storygame), Moon worship has been forced underground and the values and understandings associated with the Moon temple have been lost to Bonvidaeoan society at large.

Levels

Bonvidaeo has three physical "levels", not all of which extend to all parts of the city.

1. The Underways and the Back Ways are used by the city's poor, and by small tradespeople for making deliveries. They are tunnels and alleys that extend under and behind the buildings. Most of them are damp and

unpleasant, and it is not advisable to move around in them if you are not a member of these underclasses.

2. The main streets of the city are not given their own designation. The middle class mostly use them for moving around on foot or horse or in vehicles, including the delivery vehicles of prosperous tradespeople. They are broad and are carefully kept clean and in good repair.
3. The High Paths are reserved for use by the upper classes, and run over the roofs and across the main streets by means of bridges. People below conventionally do not see anyone moving on them, although people who are also on the High Paths may do so. Often they are the only public access to the homes of the wealthy, which are built above less prestigious dwellings or shops, often belonging to their dependents and clients. Goods are delivered to these homes either by being hauled up on ropes from the streets below (in the case of furniture, etc.) or by means of back stairs, back entrances and dumbwaiters. The main paths parallel the main streets, and are broad, mostly level or with good stairs, and well-maintained. There is also a secondary network used by adventurous young nobles which is more precarious and risky, consisting of catwalks, ropes, rope ladders, narrow planks up steep roof ridges with primitive grips for the feet, etc.

Appearance

Appearance is extremely important in Bonvidaeo. Anything which is not publicly seen is extremely basic, in order to enable more money to be spent on "fronts". For example, underclothing will be coarse in order to enable the upper clothing to be rich and fine, and the back rooms of houses will be sparse and ill-furnished to allow the facade and the public rooms to be lavishly decorated. Decoration is laid on thinly, though, over a cheaper base (even in the royal palace, which is brick with a thin veneer of marble).

Characterist vs Personalist

The great religious/philosophical divide in the City of Masks is between advocates of the "Characterist" and "Personalist" viewpoints. This is not merely an academic debate but is deeply political, along the lines of the Guelphs and Ghibellines, or Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation. Currently the Characterist party is firmly in control and Personalists are a persecuted, underground group, the radical elements of which are beginning to resort to terrorist tactics. The Characterists are more or less isolationists, who emphasize the distinctive nature of Bonvidaeo. Their philosophical belief is that the character portrayed by a mask is the reality, that the "person" behind the mask is not real in the same sense. The Personalists, by contrast, believe in the reality of the person and the unreality of the mask, and wish to establish closer ties with other nations. Being a known Personalist is likely to result in rapid arrest and probably death (for heresy, officially, although Personalists are also seen as treasonous). Characterism is the official doctrine of the Temples.

Conventions

The City of Masks follows a number of conventions which make little sense to an outsider. These conventions stem originally from Carnival, but have been greatly expanded upon by civil and religious edict over the years.

Masking

The best-known and most obvious convention is that everyone must wear a mask anywhere within even theoretical sight of the City (native Bonvidaeoans also wear the mask if they travel, although few do apart from those whose living is as sailors and traders). However, they must not only wear a mask; they must stay "in character" with it (doing what is "proper" to that mask) or be arrested as Unmasked. Normally, their entire costume must be in accord with their mask unless there is some masking rationale to justify why it is not. To be without a mask is worse than being naked. In fact, some characters wear costumes which leave them practically naked, and this is perfectly acceptable as long as they have the appropriate mask. To take off one's mask with another is an act of extreme personal intimacy, and a proper married couple, for example, would not do so even with each other.

"Proper" is a key word in Bonvidaeoan society, which has not only its Victorian sense of uprightness and righteousness but also its earlier sense of "appropriately belonging to". For example, it is proper to a Barman to exchange coin for beer, or to a Secretary to perceive what his master perceives.

Being Unmasked in Bonvidaeo is simultaneously a civil crime, an ecclesiastical sin and a social gaffe. It does not necessarily consist of literally being maskless (though this is the most serious form). Anyone who is not acting in accordance with his or her mask and costume is "Unmasked" and faces civil, ecclesiastical and social sanctions, varying in severity depending how egregious the transgression is considered to be. Ironically, some characters may be denounced as Unmasked, and punished, for behaving in ways that would normally be considered positive, but which do not fit their character.

This deadly serious game of masks is only played by the educated, since it has been deliberately made too complex for uneducated commoners to grasp. Commoners wear masks also, but these are simple indications of their occupation. As long as they "keep their place" and do what is "proper" to their position in society, they need not fear the Commissioners of Masks or the Temple police.

Characters

A Character is more or less an archetype represented by a specific mask. It can be an occupation (Barman, Carter) or position (Lord Chamberlain); a "stock character" (the Flirt, the Dashing Swordsman); or a named person, historical or mythical (Ispo the Poet, Mistra the Spider in the Centre of the Web). There are also a few "utility" Characters like the Uncast.

One of the greatest honours one can attain in Bonvidaeo is to be awarded one's own Character, meaning that you have done something legendary enough that others will want to identify with you. You may then wear a partial mask of your own face.

Being Uncast

An **uncast** character is someone who is not currently portraying a particular character and is "invisible" to most people, by convention. The costume of the Uncast is a simple black domino (a mask covering only the area around the eyes) and black robe. An Uncast must not speak to anyone who cannot see him or her, or do anything to draw attention, or he or she is Unmasked. One may buy food and drink, etc., from someone to whom selling these items is Proper, however, since it is not part of their proper action that they see the person they are selling to; it is merely proper to them that they exchange items for coin.

Normally, visitors to the city who are not currently engaged in business mask as Uncast in order to protect themselves.

Seeing and Not Seeing

Some conventions define conditions under which a person - or rather, character - may be "seen" (that is, taken notice of) by other characters.

1. An Uncast character may not be seen.
2. Someone who is on the High Paths may not be seen by someone who is not on them.
3. Any mask decorated with a peacock feather (or a feather dyed in a similar eye pattern) allows the wearer to see characters who would otherwise be invisible. All law enforcement and military personnel, the Keeper of the Book and a few other characters have this decoration.

Gender

Your gender, for the purpose of others' responses to you, is the gender of the Character portrayed by your mask, except within the Personalist underground, and quite often even then. By masking as the opposite gender you can take actions considered proper to that gender which would not be proper to your own gender. However, you must be fully convincing if you are portraying the opposite gender, or you are Unmasked.

What is considered proper to each gender in the City is somewhat stereotypical by modern standards. Thus:

- Considered proper to men but not women: Swordfighting; roistering drunkenness; bawdy speech.
- Considered proper to women but not men: Fabric crafts (even if a member of the nobility).

- Considered proper to either gender: Owning property; running a business (if of the merchant/trades classes); living without a member of the other gender in the household; dancing.

Borderline cases: A woman performing physically daring acts (such as jumping across a wide gap between buildings) would be considered proper if those acts were "necessary" in the situation. If she deliberately put herself in situations where such acts were necessary, she would need to have a mask which justified it, such as Taria the Adventuress. Under similar circumstances, she could wear "men's clothing" such as breeches, while being obviously female, and not be regarded as Unmasked. She would be regarded as scandalous, certainly, but she would not be breaking the masking laws.

Playing the Game

What You Will Need

Playing the game requires the following equipment:

1. A standard pack of playing cards.
2. A standard Western set of 28 dominoes ("double six" - the ones which go from blank to six pips). Alternatively, you can use at least four standard six-sided dice (or two for each player if the players prefer not to share dice). This alters the probabilities slightly, but not in any important way.
3. A number of "Face" and "Hidden Face" tokens per player, perhaps 20-30 of each. These can be poker chips, draughts/checkers/backgammon pieces, plastic discs, glass beads, dried beans or whatever is available. Stacking ones (like poker chips or draughts) are probably best, as it is easy to compare quantities based on how tall the piles are.
4. One relationship tracking sheet per player (see the end of these instructions).
5. Optionally, cardboard masks (or distinctive hats) to act as signals of which mask your character is wearing.
6. Something (such as a business card or a passport photo) to place in front of you if you are masked as yourself (see the rules for Hidden Face).
7. A number of players preferably between about 5 and 10. Fewer than 5 will provide little scope for webs of relationships, while more than 10 will slow the game too much.

Avatars

"Avatars" in the following means what would, in other similar games, be referred to as "player characters" (that is, characters continuously played by the players, who are the focus of the story). This use of terminology is not whimsy, but

because the term "Character" has a specific meaning in the setting, and using it in two senses would be potentially confusing. Thus:

There are three layers of persona involved here rather than the two of other storygames. There is the "player" layer, the "avatar" layer (what would normally be called the "character" layer) and the layer of the characters that are being portrayed by the avatars. So, for example, a male player can be playing a female avatar who is portraying a male character. Refer to *Twelfth Night* for a parallel example. Shakespeare's original actors, including those who played female parts, were all male, so a male actor might be playing a female character who was, within the play, dressed as a man.

Avatars in the game are young people just starting out in their adult roles in the City of Masks. They have been somewhat sheltered up until now, but they must now take up the responsibility of adult relationships and loyalties.

Setting Up

1. Read these rules all the way through so you know what you're doing.
2. If using dominoes, lay them face down in the middle of the table (or, if you are not around a table, somewhere else where everyone can reach them easily) and shuffle them. Alternatively, put them in a bag for people to draw from randomly.
3. Separate the court cards from the non-court cards in the deck, and shuffle both groups of cards.
4. Draw a court card each. This is your avatar's initial character mask. (See Masks, below.)
5. On your relationship tracking sheet, record the proper actions of your mask.
6. Write a name on the sheet for your avatar.
7. Create your avatar's Hidden Face (see Hidden Face, below) and write it on the sheet.
8. Write down a few brief background facts about your avatar. Background facts can include fears, desires, childhood experiences, personal qualities, attitudes and beliefs - everything that makes the avatar a unique person.
9. In consultation with other players, you may want to specify existing relationships between your avatars, such as "sister", "cousin", or "betrothed since childhood" as part of your background.
10. On your relationship tracking sheet, record your avatar's relationships with the other avatars and the factions in the City as per the instructions under Relationships, below. This specifies whether are positive or negative, and how strong they are. You may want to revise aspects of your background as a result.

11. If you are using actual masks (or hats), this is probably the point at which to decorate them to indicate the characters' proper actions. You may want to agree as a group how long to spend on this step – a good formula is “the **shortest** time that anyone in the group thinks the activity will continue to be fun”.
12. Draw one or more Objective cards each from the non-court cards (see Objectives). After looking at them and checking their significance, keep these cards face-down and hidden from the other players.
13. Draw a number of Face tokens equal to the difference between the number of points in your mask and 25. So if your mask card is a Joker (10 points), draw 15 tokens; if a Jack (11 points), 14 tokens; if a Queen (12 points), 13 tokens; and if a King (13 points), draw 12 tokens.
14. Draw the same number of Hidden Face tokens as you have Face tokens.

You are now ready to begin the game.

Masks

Each mask your avatar possesses has several **proper actions**, each with a **face value**. A proper action is an action one may perform by virtue of wearing the appropriate mask. In some cases, it is an action one must perform if one is wearing that mask. It includes abilities, such as seeing the conventionally unseen while wearing a mask with a peacock feather on it, as well as characteristic behaviours which are expected of someone in that mask.

Everyone has access to the mask of the Uncast. The mask of the Uncast's only proper action is to remain inconspicuous and uninvolved, and this has 0 face value. Show that you are using the mask of the Uncast by displaying a card in front of you face down, or a blank card if you have one in the deck you are using, or by wearing an undecorated mask or hat.

Everyone also has access to the mask of their role in society. This is their occupation, job, position or title. If they have more than one role - for example, they are Baron Granthor and also Lord Chamberlain - they have a mask for each. Proper actions for a social role's mask each have a face value of 1.

Every avatar in the game has the social role "Young Nobleman" or "Young Noblewoman", which they have recently received at their coming-of-age ceremony - they were previously masked as "Noble Child (Male)" and "Noble Child (Female)". They do not yet have access to other social role masks. Show that you are using your social role mask by not displaying any card in front of you, or by wearing, perhaps, a plain gold mask.

In addition, each player begins the game with one mask for their avatar. These will be "character" masks, meaning that they are based on a historical, mythical or legendary character, archetype or stereotype. Character masks are represented by the court cards and Jokers from a deck of playing cards, and are drawn at random at the start of the game. You need not reveal what mask you get until you come to use it. When your avatar is wearing a particular mask,

display the card which represents it face-up in front of you. If you (the players) are wearing actual masks or hats, also wear the appropriate one.

Court cards each have a given number of points, related to their rank, to distribute among a number of proper actions. Jokers have 10, Jacks 11, Queens 12 and Kings 13. No more than 3 points should be allocated to one proper action, and there should be not more than one 3 and at least two 1s. Some attempt to relate the character name to the appearance of the card is encouraged.

You can use the default set of masks (see below), but gaming groups are encouraged to create their own masks using these guidelines.

Additional masks can be bought with Hidden Face tokens (see below) at the cost of their total face values, reflecting the fact that a person can take on more than one role (with the permission of the Commissioners of Masks through the Keeper of the Book). If you have several mask cards, you can keep the others face-down or face-up underneath your current mask.

You can't change masks when challenged, but you can before challenging.

Hidden Face

In addition to your mask, you have a "Hidden Face," a second set of proper actions with the same total face value as your mask. This represents your avatar's personality as it is beneath the mask. The rules for creating this are as follows:

1. No more than 3 points should be allocated to any one proper action.
2. There should be not more than one 3, and at least two 1s.
3. At least two of the higher-value (2 or 3-point) actions should conflict directly with your mask. These are known as the **Conflicted Actions** and play a special role in challenges.
4. None of the actions may be, or closely resemble, proper actions of your mask.
5. You may choose proper actions from another mask or masks, including ones already allocated to other avatars, but not more than three actions from any one mask.
6. At least two of the proper actions you choose must be ones not allocated to any mask.

When you play out some of your "Hidden Face" actions during the game, you gain Hidden Face tokens which are kept in a special pool. These can be used to purchase additional masks. You can also sell your mask to another player for a mutually agreed sum of Hidden Face and use the proceeds, in combination with your own Hidden Face, to buy another mask which fits your Hidden Face better.

Keep your Hidden Face tokens separate from your Face tokens. If possible, they should be visually distinguishable from each other (for example, different colours

or markings), but if this is not feasible, ensure they are kept physically separate in distinct areas or containers.

If you ever manage to bring off a Major Coup (defined below) using entirely Hidden Face actions, providing you have a positive or at least neutral (0) relationship with the Commissioners of Masks and the Major Coup was not against them, you will receive the honour of a Character. That is, you will be able to create a mask which reflects your Hidden Face and wear it as one of your masks. Signal this by placing a blank or handwritten card (perhaps an old business card) or a photograph of yourself in front of you, and, if you are wearing masks or hats, wearing a mere token: a flesh-coloured mask, a sticking plaster, something entangled in your hair instead of a hat, etc.

Relationships

Each avatar has a web of **relationships** with other avatars and with the main factions in the City. As well as one court card, each player is dealt as many non-court cards as possible given the number of players in the game (an ace counts as a non-court card; aces are low). Each player assigns these on the relationship tracking sheet to the other avatars in the game and to the four major factions (Commissioners of Masks, Sun Temple, Moon Temple, Personalist underground) to represent the strength and type of relationship they have with that person or group. This assignment should interact with your avatar's background (that is, base the assignment of relationships on the background you came up with; if it doesn't fit for some reason, modify the background).

There will probably not be enough cards to cover all of these, so once all the cards are assigned and have been noted down, they are reshuffled and dealt again, as often as necessary until all relationships and allegiances have been assigned. This will probably give you some choices in the last round, because you will not need to assign all your cards.

You don't know initially what other people's relationships and allegiances are; you have to find this out through gameplay, either by inference or by getting them to tell you.

The denomination of the card indicates the initial strength of the relationship, ranging from **A**: mild liking or dislike to **10**: obsessive devotion or hatred. The strength and direction of relationships can be changed in play as described below under Encounters.

The suit of the card represents the type of relationship (love/loyalty or hatred/antipathy) and how fickle or enduring it will be, as follows:

Suit	Type of relationship	Permanence
Hearts	Love/loyalty	Fickle
Diamonds	Love/loyalty	Enduring
Clubs	Hatred/antipathy	Fickle
Spades	Hatred/antipathy	Enduring

"Fickle" means that when actions occur which change the relationship towards zero, it changes immediately, while "enduring" means you have to build up the full number of points against the relationship that would take it to zero, and then it changes abruptly.

For example, Celia loves Dav with a love that is fickle, but fairly strong (7 of Hearts). Each time Dav does something to lose Celia's love, her love for him immediately reduces. Anna hates Celia, however, with an enduring and powerful hatred (9 of Spades). Celia must do 9 points of "love-winning" with Anna before her hatred dissolves into neutrality all at once.

Suggestion: on your relationship tracking sheet, to indicate an enduring relationship draw an outline around the boxes representing the difference between 0 and the level of your relationship, and mark off the boxes in it as play proceeds. For a fickle relationship, just add or remove marks.

For purposes of adding and subtracting, count loving/loyal relationships as running from +1 (red ace) to +10 (red 10) and hating/antipathetic relationships as running from -1 (black ace) to -10 (black 10). A relationship can start out at 0 (neutral) by simply not assigning a card to it.

Once a relationship hits neutrality, it can either go back in the direction it had before, or it can continue to change to the opposite feeling (love to hate or vice versa).

If the relationship started out as enduring, it can reverse as far as the same degree of the opposite polarity, but, as when it became neutral, this happens all at once. For example, if Celia has impressed Anna (in the example above) with 9 points of positive relationship, Anna's relationship with Celia becomes neutral all at once from its previous negativity. However, for Anna's feelings for Celia to turn positive, Celia must create another 9 points of positivity, and then Celia's feelings will again change suddenly from neutrality to love.

Fickle relationships can move freely back and forth, and do so continuously.

If the number of points in one encounter is greater than the number required to reach neutrality, the relationship goes past neutrality and out the other side (for both fickle and enduring relationships). For example, if Bertha rather dislikes Celia (-3) and Celia does something which impresses her by 6 points, regardless of whether the relationship is fickle or enduring, Bertha immediately changes to having +3 regard for Celia.

The Arbiter and Rounds

In each round of play, the player with the most *non-hidden* Face (including the face value of his or her masks) is the Arbiter. If more than one player is first equal, they do a quick domino drawing to break the tie, drawing as often as necessary to get a single winner (determined by the total value of the domino pips, blanks counting zero).

The Arbiter of each round briefly sketches the main scene, which could be a ball, a festival, a meeting in the street, a service at the Temple, etc. The Arbiter is

assumed to be present at the scene he or she has sketched. Then, in descending order of Face (including face value of masks) from the Arbiter, each player indicates either that his or her avatar is present at the scene or is elsewhere, naming the other location. Those with equal Face to each other draw dominoes for priority as above. (If there were several first equals and their tie was broken by domino drawing, use that domino draw to determine their order ' no need for another drawing.)

A player may declare that he or she has arranged to meet another avatar or avatars (whose players have not yet declared their actions) elsewhere at the time of the scene. In this case, the other player or players concerned may, when their turn comes round, indicate that they did not go to the agreed meeting place at the agreed time, but to another location, including the scene described by the Arbiter.

Any player may also indicate that his or her avatar is not present because he or she was following another avatar or avatars who have already indicated that they were elsewhere. In this case, a challenge must (in the Encounter phase) be played to determine whether the attempt to follow them was successful. Count this as an opposed challenge against any of the avatars being followed.

Each player selects a mask for their avatar to wear during the scene, if they possess more than one. They then, in the same order as they declared their location, declare their actions in the scene and play out any wooing or challenges (as per the rules given below). This is the Encounter phase.

Once all players whose avatars are present at the main scene have played, the other scenes (for players who declared that their avatars were "elsewhere") are played out, in the same order in which they were previously described.

Other Resources and Other Characters

Assume, for purposes of narration, that you have access to any material resources that you could reasonably expect to have as a young noble in the storygame setting. Most of the time, unless you draw the attention of the authorities, you are left to get on with things with minimal interference, and have minimal interaction with people outside your "circle" (that is, the other avatars involved in this game). If the appearance of a character other than the avatars is required in a scene, any player may introduce him or her in narration. If the interaction calls for it, a player not otherwise involved may volunteer to temporarily play the character. Non-avatar characters may not be wooed, since their relationship to the avatars is left deliberately vague, and challenges against them should usually be treated as unopposed for the same reason (in other words, they have no mechanical impact).

If a character has a proper action like "be supported by a gang of bravoos", this implicitly introduces the gang of bravoos. The only influence they have, however, is whatever the value of that proper action is for that character. They don't add to the character's resources, they just exemplify them.

Encounters

There are two kinds of encounters: those which concentrate upon changing the relationship, and those which do so as a side effect and have as their main focus the gaining of Face by defeating an opponent in some way. The former are referred to as *wooing*, the latter as *challenges*.

Challenges

Challenges need not be physical challenges (although they can be). They can be duels of wits, chess games, insult contests, artistic performances, library research, public speaking - anything that your avatar could potentially fail at, whether directed against another avatar or not, is a challenge. A challenge consists of:

1. Naming the proper action(s) of your mask which you are bringing into play, and any other actions you are performing (including Hidden Face actions).
2. If challenging another player, agreeing on narrative goals and countergoals (see below), and stakes in Face. You may have to call on your allies to help you cover your Face stakes.
3. The contest resolution, using dominoes.
4. Narration of the outcome, including whatever outcome was included in the agreed goals.
5. Paying of the stakes or rewards, if any, in Face.
6. Distribution of the winnings, if allies assisted you.

There are *unopposed challenges* and *opposed challenges*. An **unopposed challenge** (one which does not involve another avatar) works as follows:

1. The player names the action(s) his/her avatar will attempt. These can be proper actions, Hidden Face actions and/or other actions which the avatar could reasonably be expected to succeed at (that is, they require no special ability, training or background). The total number of actions of all kinds may not exceed 3.
Refer to the face values for the avatar's current mask for the proper actions, and to the Hidden Face section of the relationship tracking sheet for the face values of the Hidden Face actions. For all other actions, the face value is 0; these automatically succeed but have only a narrative, not a mechanical, effect.
2. The player invests the same number of points of Face as the value of the proper actions, and the same number of Hidden Face points as the value of the Hidden Face actions declared.

3. The player draws one domino, holding it by one end. The held end is the *inner court*. The other end is the *outer court*.
4. The avatar succeeds at all the actions for which the number of pips in the *inner court* is less than or equal to the total value of the actions, when taken in the order stated (blanks count as 0 pips). For example, if three actions are stated and are worth 1, 2 and 3 respectively, the first action will succeed if the inner court equals or exceeds 1, the first and second actions will succeed if the inner court equals or exceeds 3, and all three actions will succeed if the inner court equals 6.
5. For unsuccessful actions, the player loses the same amount of Face as the face value of those actions.
6. The player gains Face for proper actions, and Hidden Face for Hidden Face actions, equal to the difference between the number of pips in the *inner court* and the number of pips in the *outer court* (blanks again counting as 0). It doesn't matter if the difference is positive or negative. So if the inner court is 3 and the outer court 0, or the inner court is 0 and the outer court 3, the result is the same: 3 Face gained.
How much Face is gained reflects how well the avatar did at the challenge. If the difference is 0, the challenge was handled so unimpressively, or the avatar's response to any successes was so boorish, that the avatar gained no Face.
An avatar can gain Face despite not succeeding at any actions, by handling the failure with grace and poise.
7. For each Conflicted Action which the player declared, regardless of the outcome, and regardless of whether the player was using the proper action or the Hidden Face action or both, the player gains the same number of Hidden Face points as the Hidden Face value of that action.
8. The player narrates the resolution of the challenge in line with the successes and failures determined. All the actions stated before the domino draw must be incorporated into the narration, with successes and failures as per the domino's determination.
It isn't necessary to narrate the actions in the order you declared them (since this would mean failures always came last); you can narrate them in any order. Take account of the amount of Face gained in your narration (if little or no Face is gained, the successes should be such, or achieved in such a way, that they aren't very impressive to bystanders; if much Face is gained, they should be more spectacular).
9. Points won come from the central pool. Invested points which are lost go back to the central pool.

An **opposed challenge** (between two avatars) is resolved as follows:

1. The players negotiate the narrative goals (see Stakes, below) which will be resolved by the challenge.
2. Each player names actions and invests Face as for an unopposed challenge.
3. Each player draws a domino and turns it face up with one end pointing at the other player, holding onto the other end. They lay the dominoes next to each other, keeping track of which belongs to which player.
4. Successes and failures are determined as for an unopposed challenge. However, the player with the larger difference between inner and outer courts (the more spectacular or better-handled success) is the winner. Ties go to the challenger.
5. Although the game-level resolution of the challenge is over in a moment, the narration of that resolution can be as drawn-out as the players find interesting. The challenger begins narration, and narration then goes back and forth between the two players, always heading towards the conclusion indicated by the dominoes, and referring to the preannounced proper actions.
6. The winner takes the last turn, and indicates an end to narration by turning his or her domino face-down.
7. Either or both parties to an opposed challenge may choose to modify their relationship with the other, in either direction, *up to* the number of pips in the opponent's outer court (counting blanks as 0). The change should be consistent with the narration and with the avatar's nature. For example, an avatar being played as mean-spirited would be negatively affected by losing a fair fight, but one with a generous nature might regard the opponent with more respect as a result of the fight.
8. The loser pays all Face he or she invested to the opponent, and all Hidden Face to the central pool.
9. The Conflicted Action rule applies as for unopposed challenges – regardless of the outcome, for each Conflicted Action used the player using it gains the same number of Hidden Face points as the Hidden Face value of that action.

Wooing

When an avatar undertakes a challenge (opposed or unopposed), the outcome can move other avatars' (and the factions') relationships with that avatar in either the positive or negative direction.

If this is declared, before the challenge, as a goal of the player of the avatar undertaking a challenge, it is known as "wooing". This can be literal wooing in the romantic sense, or seeking alliance/toadying. The aim of the wooer is always assumed to be to move the relationship in a positive direction - nobody sets out to make someone dislike them. However, they may fail.

Wooring plays out as follows:

1. The wooer plays out an opposed or unopposed challenge, first declaring his or her intent to use this to woo one or more other avatars or factions. If it is an opposed challenge, the wooer may be the defender as well as the challenger.
2. Other onlookers who are present at any challenge, opposed or unopposed, and who already have strong relationships (greater than 5) with a participant in the challenge may act as if they were being wooed, even if this is not the declared intent of the participant(s).
3. If the wooer's inner court exceeds the outer court, the relationship improves by the difference; however, if the wooer's outer court exceeds the inner court, the relationship worsens by the difference. If they are equal, there is no effect.
4. The wooed player may also choose to (openly) allocate Face to the wooer, up to the total in the outer court. This Face is not given to the wooer but is made available for the wooer to call on in future conflicts. Both players should note the amount of Face made available on the relationship tracking sheet (under the "Owe" or "Owed" column as appropriate).
5. The wooed player may not allocate Face that he or she does not possess. That is, if he or she currently has only 4 Face, even if the domino's outer court shows a 6, the wooed player may only allocate 4.
6. The wooed player may allocate the same Face resource to multiple wooers. This is resolved at challenge time as described below.
7. The wooed player may not allocate Hidden Face.

Stakes and Narrative Outcomes

Stakes refers to the amount of Face at stake in a contest, not to the narrative outcomes. The players discuss, out of character, what the narrative outcomes (loss/gain) will be for the contest and also what the stakes in terms of Face are. Staking a lot of Face means the outcomes will be major. Effectively you are bidding for the seriousness of the consequences.

When deciding narrative outcomes, strive to create two interesting possibilities, from both of which the action can move forward, but one of which favours one avatar's interests and the other of which favours the other.

If one player is unable to exercise sufficient Influence (see below) to cover the Face the opposing player is risking, there are a couple of options:

1. **Backdown.** The player with insufficient Influence yields to the other, pays over the invested Face (including any lent Face), and accepts the narrative of loss for his or her avatar.
2. **Desperate Attack.** The player with insufficient Influence gambles all on winning the confrontation. If he or she loses and has insufficient Face to cover the Face stakes, his or her avatar becomes "beholden" to the winner's avatar and must accept his or her orders until such point as the Face debt is paid off.

Hidden Face may not be used as stakes.

Influence

Influence is the total Face an avatar can call upon through his or her relationships and allegiance. If you don't have enough Face to cover your opponent's stake, you can call on your allies for assistance. Your relationship with your allies, developed through wooing, gives you access to an agreed amount of their Face. They are then said to "lend their face" to the course of action. They can increase this up to the maximum of their relationship with you if they see you doing something they particularly approve of, or decrease it if they disapprove, so you have to stay on their good side (bearing in mind the proper actions of their masks).

It costs you 1 Face, paid to your ally, to solicit each direct ally to lend his or her Face. You can also call on your allies' allies and so forth. Each link further back in the relationship chain costs you more Face, because your ally must pay his or her ally 1 Face also, so you are paying 1 Face for a direct ally, 2 for an ally's ally, etc. This is also a divisor for the amount of Face you get, i.e. if person A has a relationship with you, person B has a relationship with her of value 10 and commits the whole 10 on A's word, you actually only get 5. (Round fractions down.)

The amount of Face A asks for from B may be no more than A's relationship with you. The amount you actually get is the amount B commits, divided by the number of links from you to B (in this example, 2).

As you build relationships, the amount of "influence" (total Face as above) that you can call on increases. You can't use influence directly when wooing, but the amount of influence you are known to have should incline or disincline people to ally with you.

Lending Face is requested and accepted by formal gestures. A hand gracefully turned upwards asks: "Will you lend your Face?" A graceful inclination of the head, as if bowing, indicates "yes"; the amount offered is signaled with the fingers, palm down, just above the table. The signal for "No, I will not lend my Face" is turning the face away.

Refusing to lend Face is liable to damage the other person's opinion of you (worsen the relationship from their side); they may freely adjust their relationship

with you by the amount of Face you had previously committed to them, but have now denied them.

You may not lend your Face to both sides of an opposed challenge, even if you have relationships with both parties.

Anyone who lends Face in a challenge must declare the actions they are taking to provide support in the challenge, which may not exceed 3 in number, and the value of which may not exceed the amount of Face they are lending.

Normally your avatar must be in the same scene as the other avatar in order to lend Face. A messenger may be dispatched to fetch support, in which case a subsidiary challenge can be played to determine whether the messenger gets back with the support before the challenge begins.

Support can take whatever narrative form the players choose. For example, in a fight, their avatars could join in on the side of the avatar to whom they are lending Face, by fighting themselves, tossing their friend a weapon, tripping the opponent and so forth; in a seduction, they could carry a message, put in a good word, supply information, premises or gifts, etc.

A person lending Face also draws a domino, and the difference between the inner and outer courts is added to that resulting from the domino draw by the player they are supporting.

Side bets are permitted by players whose avatars are present at the challenge. Signals for side bets: slide Face tokens towards another noninvolved player, bow and indicate the player you are betting on; the other player slides forward Face in response, less or more - bets must be equal in both directions, so you can increase or reduce as others bet until the two sides are equal.

When you win Face by borrowing Face from someone else, you are expected to repay it with interest; this will increase their opinion of you and make them more likely to lend their Face in the future. You can betray them and hold onto all the Face for yourself. This is likely to break the alliance.

If you lose the Face you have borrowed, their relationship with you will worsen by up to the amount of Face they have lost (player's choice). If you repay the Face, their relationship with you will improve by up to the amount you pay them above what they lent you. You can opt to repay them out of your general reserves even if you lose, in order to keep the relationship strong so that you can call on it in future.

Hidden Face may not be lent, or used in side bets.

Allegiance

Allegiance is a special case of relationship - it is not to another avatar, but to one of the factions in the city. The factions are impressed only by results and directly in proportion to those results. The same rules as for challenges and wooing apply, but with no player choice, as the factions are not played by any player. So if your declared aim is wooing the Moon Temple (by doing something the Moon

Temple would approve of and would be aware of); your inner court is greater than your outer court; and the Moon Temple has a positive relationship with you at the end of the turn, the Moon Temple will commit Face to you equal to the difference between the courts, and its relationship with you (which is assumed to start at 0 unless otherwise specified in your current mask's description) is improved by the same amount. If the outer court exceeds the inner, however, the faction will reduce the amount of Face committed to you, and its relationship with you will worsen, by the difference between the courts.

Once the Face committed to you reaches 0 it will go no lower, but relationships can worsen down to -10.

Face committed to you by a faction is then available as part of your web of influence. Again, the full amount is always available, providing that the challenge you are attempting is something which the faction would approve of.

The following modifiers apply:

- If your challenge is directed against another faction, but not the opposed faction, add 1. (See table below.)
- If it is directed against the opposed faction, add 2.
- Per proper action of the faction which you include, add 1.
- Per proper action of the faction which you breach, subtract 1.

Further modifiers as below:

Faction	Opposed Faction	Further Modifiers	Proper Actions
Sun Temple	Moon Temple	+1 if your avatar is male	Actions promoting the masculine; physically bold, intimidatory or coercive actions; actions involving wealth.
Moon Temple	Sun Temple	+1 if your avatar is female	Actions promoting the feminine; hidden, subtle or secret actions; actions involving pleasure.
Commission of Masks	Personalists	+1 per character mask you possess	Actions reinforcing the masking conventions, other than adhering to the proper actions of your mask.
Personalists	Commission of Masks	+1 per proper action of your mask you are breaching	Actions undermining the masking conventions, other than breaching the proper actions of your mask.

As with Face lent by other avatars, repaying with interest will improve the relationship by the amount of the interest, while loss of Face will worsen the relationship by that number of points.

Major Coups

If you initiate an opposed challenge, and win it, and a total of at least 20 Face changes hands (not counting side bets), you have brought off a Major Coup. If you bring off a Major Coup using only your Hidden Face, you may be granted a Character (see the Hidden Face rules above).

Record how many Major Coups you achieve, as they are worth points at the end of the game. Achieving a Major Coup may also be instrumental to achieving one or more of your objectives (see Objectives, below).

Alienation

If your Hidden Face exceeds your Face by more than 3 points at the end of any scene, you are at risk of Alienation.

Draw a domino, adding 1 point to the inner court for every point above 3 that your Hidden Face exceeds your Face. So, for example, if your Hidden Face is 8 and your Face is 3, the difference is 5 and you need to add 2 points to the inner court.

If the inner court, adjusted as above, has a total greater than the outer court, you are Alienated and you must add the total number of (actual, unadjusted) pips in the inner court to your relationship with the Personalist Underground and subtract the same number from your relationship to the Commissioners of Masks. The relationships of the Underground and the Commission towards you are not directly affected, though they are likely to change as you act in accordance with your relationship to them.

Becoming Unmasked

If you breach the proper actions of your mask, by omission or commission, you are Unmasked and any citizen who has observed this (and has a negative relationship with you) may denounce you to the authorities, who will arrest you if they can. Treat their attempts to arrest you as opposed challenges, with another player drawing on behalf of the authorities. You will then receive a somewhat perfunctory trial before the Commissioners of Masks, unless you can summon enough Influence with the Commissioners to get off. Treat this also as an opposed challenge in a similar way. Otherwise, when convicted, you will be punished by public flogging and lose all of your Face. However, you retain your Hidden Face.

Objectives

Objectives are determined at the beginning of the game. These are the things that your avatar wants to achieve. They are secret from the other players.

They are determined by a final card draw, after all the relationships are settled (this makes it more interesting than if you were able to shape your relationships to suit your goal).

Objectives are all expressed in mechanical terms. Achieving an objective can't be the stakes in a challenge. You have to use indirect methods.

Draw one or two cards each without showing them to the other players. (Two cards will give a longer game.) Look at them and check the rules below to see what your objective is. Keep the card face-down in front of you during the game. When you have achieved both objectives for a card, you can triumphantly turn the card over and gloat in an appropriate manner.

Each card gives you an interpersonal objective and a factional objective. The interpersonal objective is determined by suit and the factional objective by number. You also have a personal objective, determined by whether the total number of pips on all your objective cards is odd or even.

Your **interpersonal objective** applies to your greatest friend (if the card is red) or worst enemy (if it is black). Your greatest friend is the other avatar with whom your avatar has the strongest positive relationship at the start of the game, and your worst enemy the one with whom he or she has the strongest negative relationship. If there is a tie, choose enduring relationships over fickle ones; if there is still a tie, select one.

The pointier cards of each colour (diamonds and spades) are negative objectives, the more rounded cards (hearts and clubs) are positive objectives.

Like this:

	Positive objective	Negative objective
Friend	Hearts: Glorify	Diamonds: Betray
Enemy	Clubs: Seduce	Spades: Humiliate

Your **factional objective** applies to the faction with which your avatar has the strongest relationship, either positive or negative, at the start of the game. Again, in the case of a tie, choose enduring relationships over fickle ones, and if there is still a tie, choose freely.

The four types of objective are the same as the interpersonal objectives. However, whether they apply to a “friend” or “enemy” is determined by the nature of your strongest relationship, and whether your objective is positive or negative is determined by whether the card value is even or odd, respectively. Thus:

	Positive objective (even)	Negative objective (odd)
Friend	Glorify	Betray
Enemy	Seduce	Humiliate

Mechanical Interpretations

Betray means that you cause significant loss (at least 5 Face) to someone or some faction with which you have a relationship of +7 or better. This may be by refusing to support them in a challenge, by supporting a challenge against them, or by directly challenging them yourself.

Seduce means that you influence someone who initially had a negative relationship to you to lend you their Face (at least 5 points). If you have no negative relationships, draw again.

Humiliate means that, with at least 20 Face riding on the result, the avatar named, or a current champion of the named faction, fails in a challenge against

you; or that you cause them to lose all their Face. (A faction's champion is someone who supports, and is supported by, the faction with a relationship greater than +5 in each direction). You may be the challenger or defender.

Glorify means that you contribute to a victory for the avatar or faction, with at least 20 Face riding on the result. You can do this either by supporting them in a challenge or by challenging on their behalf. You, or they, may be either challenger or defender.

Ending the Game

The game ends when someone achieves all their objectives.

Scoring is as follows:

- 1 point per objective, of any kind, achieved.
- 1 point per Major Coup achieved.
- 1 point for being the current Arbiter at the end of the game.
- 1 point for having the most Influence at the end of the game.
- 1 point for having achieved your own Character.
- 1 point for each mask you have above 1, not counting your own Character.

Default Set of Masks

The following is the default set of masks; feel free to create your own. Some masks are simply “types,” others are based on the historical or mythical characters mentioned in the name of the mask. Some attempt to relate the character name to the appearance of the card is encouraged.

Court cards each have a given number of points, related to their rank, to distribute among a number of proper actions. Jokers have 10, Jacks 11, Queens 12 and Kings 13.

No more than 3 points should be allocated to one proper action, and there should be not more than one 3 and at least two 1s.

In the following examples, the Jacks are usually male masks, the Queens female masks, and the Kings and Jokers available to either gender.

Spades

Jack of Spades (the Dashing Swordsman)

Proper actions:

- Attempt to impress female bystanders (3)
- Challenge other swordsmen (2)
- Leap about athletically (2)
- Dress stylishly (2)
- Flippant humour (1)
- Pose dramatically (1)

Queen of Spades (Taria the Adventuress)

Proper actions:

- Be bold and reckless (3)
- Dress in male clothing, but be obviously female (2)
- Swing from ropes (2)
- Fence to disarm (2)
- Frenetic pace (1)
- Take charge of situation (1)
- Love high places (1)

King of Spades (Sueno the Duellist)

Proper actions:

- Be easily “offended” and always challenge offender to a duel (3)
- Fence to wound (2)
- Have escape route planned (2)
- Flirt with others’ lovers (2)
- Cultivate good relations with authorities (2)
- Do everything for own amusement (1)
- Never cheat (1)

Clubs

Jack of Clubs (the Bravo)

Proper actions:

- Support another person or faction (3)
- Bully the weak (2)
- Lurk and smirk (2)
- Don't talk much (2)
- Avoid confronting anyone stronger (1)
- Demonstrate physical strength by breaking things (1)

Queen of Clubs (Mistra the Spider in the Center of the Web)

Proper actions:

- Gather a "court" (3)
- Plot others' downfall (2)
- Carry out schemes ruthlessly and unhesitatingly (2)
- Punish disloyalty (2)
- Know all the gossip (1)
- Know everyone's weakness (1)
- Value power above anything else (1)

King of Clubs (the Ringleader)

Proper actions:

- Invent complicated schemes (3)
- Involve others in plots (2)
- Command (2)
- Avenge insults, setbacks and opposition (2)
- Be an implacable enemy (2)
- Value others only while they are useful (1)
- Fear humiliation (1)
- Blame subordinates for failure (1)

Diamonds

Jack of Diamonds (the Pious Sun Acolyte)

Proper actions:

- Support Sun Temple and its rites (3)
- Be suspicious and hostile to non-devotees (2)
- Always serious and earnest (2)
- Respect the wealthy and powerful (2)
- Speak loudly (1)
- Never change opinions (1)

Queen of Diamonds (the Pious Moon Acolyte).

Proper actions:

- Support Moon Temple and its rites (3)
- Be suspicious and hostile to non-devotees (2)
- Assist women (2)
- Oppose violence (2)
- Don't draw attention (1)
- Take pleasure in the natural world (1)
- Keep secrets (1)

King of Diamonds (the Mystic)

Proper actions:

- Talk incomprehensibly with a great air of significance (3)
- Disdain everyday matters (2)
- Be unswayable (2)
- Advocate for the poor (2)
- Gather disciples (2)
- Forgive slights and insults (1)
- Claim special spiritual status (1)

Hearts

Jack of Hearts (Alus the Lover)

Proper actions:

- Be charming towards all attractive women (3)
- Be ostentatiously courteous (2)
- Serenade the beloved (2)
- Compete publicly with other men (2)
- Ignore unattractive women (1)
- Flee if challenged (1)

Queen of Hearts (the Flirt)

Proper actions:

- Flirt with any and every man (3)
- Never promise anything (2)
- Miss appointments (2)
- Flirt with many but have few actual lovers (2)
- Cultivate air of secrecy (1)
- Plot with female friends (1)
- Make significant gestures with fan (1)

King of Hearts (Ispo the Poet)

Proper actions:

- Be brooding and distracted (3)
- Quote own poetry (2)
- Quote other people's poetry (2)
- Fall in love easily (2)
- Serenade the beloved (2)
- Flee if challenged (1)
- Laugh hollowly if at all (1)

Jokers

Red Joker (the Slapstick Clown)

Proper actions:

- Cavort and caper (3)
- Embarrass bystanders (2)
- Never serious (2)
- Play practical jokes (1)
- Make bad puns (1)
- Sing comic songs (1)

Black Joker (Enkeli the Trickster)

Proper actions:

- Dupe others using their greed or stupidity (3)
- Steal and defraud (2)
- Appear friendly to everyone (2)
- Accept no blame (1)
- Fade out of sight strategically (1)
- Give plausible excuses (1)

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