

The Sea Worshippers

On a small and isolated island, a tribe struggles to survive each passing year of monsoons, poor fishing, and overcrowding. Their chieftain—wise in her years—has decreed that, every year, a sacrifice be made to the sea gods, to ensure a rich harvest of flora and fauna in the coming year.

You and at least six others each play one of these tribe members, competing against your fellows either to become exempt from the Midnight Vote to Sacrifice, or to at least be passed over in it.

The tribespeople are cunning and clever, strong and dexterous, agile and fleet.

The character sheet on the opposite side of this page has five blanks surrounding a central, divided blank. Before play begins, write (or draw!) the Traits that make up your tribal character in those five surrounding blanks:

- ☼ **Head** – A Trait that describes your wisdom, intellect, genius, or any way in which you are able to benefit the tribe by thought alone.
- ☼ **Arms** – Two Traits that describe your strength, manual dexterity, or any way in which your tool making and use benefits the tribe.
- ☼ **Legs** – Two Traits that describe your swiftness, swimming, hunting stealth, or any way in which your locomotion benefits the tribe.

Though they form intense rivalries, they also are an innately loving people, who can form equally intense bonds of affection.

The character sheet also has a central blank—the Torso—which is divided into two sections:

- ☼ **Heart of Hearts** – Another player's character, which you secretly write in just before play begins. Until that player Challenges you, you may not Challenge him or her, nor may you vote against him or her at the Midnight Vote.
- ☼ **Sacrifice** – The character who you want to vote to sacrifice. You will complete this half of your Torso blank during the Midnight Vote at the end of the game.

They Challenge each other to games of wit, skill, and even chance, to curry admiration from others or to heap shame upon their rivals.

To initiate a Challenge, simply approach another player and—while acting as your character and keeping in mind your Traits—state something of the form “You are so unworthy that you can't...” and then state your Challenge as your character.

In the game fiction, a Challenge between characters is something that the tribe would find difficult or that would demonstrate a tribesperson's worthiness to survive the Midnight Vote.

In game play, a Challenge between players is similar to the basketball challenge game of HORSE: out of character, the Challenger states that he or she can throw something through a hoop from a certain spot, or hit something with an object from a certain distance, or be the fastest to quaff a drink, or otherwise use an object to accomplish a feat in a specific way.

To refuse a Challenge is a tribesperson's utmost shame, even though a Challenge can be dangerous, exhausting, or embarrassing if lost.

If the Challenged player refuses the Challenger, he or she must perform a Burn on his or her Head Trait:

- ☼ Using a lighter or a match, ignite the character sheet from below, under the Trait.
- ☼ Scream “I am not worthy!” at the top of your lungs, after which you may put out the smoldering (or flaming!) character sheet.

Obviously, it is rare to refuse. Usually, you will proceed to play out the HORSE-style Challenge, with the Challenger going first and the Challenged attempting afterwards. Should either of you fail the Challenge, the one who fails has two options:

- ☼ Perform a Head Trait Burn as above, to get out of the Challenge, but only if you still have a legible Head Trait.
- ☼ Invoke any other legible Trait by saying, in character, “No! I am...” and then describe, floridly, why that Trait lets you try the Challenge again. Should you fail again, you must perform a Burn on the Invoked Trait. Then, you may get out of the Challenge without performing a Head Trait Burn, or you may invoke another (but not the same!) Trait and try once more (again risking a Burn on that Invoked Trait).

No one may attempt a failed challenge more than three times—it is to your benefit to be able to back down after two Trait Burns! Similarly, if you both fail, neither of you need force the issue, though one of you can, which restarts the whole Challenge.

And so the Challenges ebb and flow; and as new alliances bloom, even the most firm faiths wilt.

If your Heart of Hearts Challenges you—regardless of the outcome of the Challenge—you may Burn your Heart out: simply ignite the sheet from below, under your Heart of Hearts, and let it burn until your Heart of Hearts is no longer legible.

Note that, because you may not vote to Sacrifice your Heart of Hearts while it is legible, you want to Burn it all out. However, be careful not to Burn out your Sacrifice blank as well, or you will not be able to vote! Watch out for those other Traits, too!

Finally, inevitably, midnight comes; and it is time for someone to placate the sea gods. The one most worthy is exempt, some will survive with luck... but one must die, with stones tied about the neck and high tide coming in.

After a prescribed period of play—traditionally from 8 PM until midnight—it is time to call for the Midnight Vote. Determine who is exempt (and break any ties) as follows:

- ☼ The character with the fewest Burned Traits is exempt from being Sacrificed. A tie goes to the player whose sheet has the smallest percentage of Burned blank space.
- ☼ Break a tie for the most votes to be Sacrificed, first, by who has the most Burned Traits, then by the sheet with the largest percentage of Burned blank space.

Name

Heart of Hearts

Sacrifice