

NÖÖ

Rules booklet

DEAR READER,

What follows is some instructional text about playing this game. It's not the game itself, which is what happens when you and your friends sit down and start telling each other about a Barbarian having an adventure in a mysterious city called Nod. This is just a story about how you might play that game.

So, read this text, and imagine the situations I'm describing, but fill in the details with the faces of your own friends, and when I tell you that you'll do a thing, decide for yourself how that would look at your table. When it's time to play, don't refer to this text, but rather to the game you've imagined in your mind while you were reading this text.

HOW TO PLAY THIS GAME

In this game we work together to explore and enjoy an adventure story. The story has a hero - the Barbarian, and it has a whole cast of supporting characters who the hero will meet during the course of the adventure. One player's job is to play the role of the hero, to make choices on the hero's behalf, and to make us believe in that character and care what happens at the end of the story. The Barbarian has a mission in the city, someone they're desperately trying to find. When you're playing the Barbarian, you're trying to succeed in that mission, but you're also open to finding there's something the Barbarian cares about even more than that.

The other players together play the supporting characters. Their job is to make the world come alive around the Barbarian, to make the city feel real, like it has a life of its own. Each of the supporting characters has an agenda you can choose. Some of these might conflict with the Barbarian's mission, some will support it, and others could go either way. When you play a supporting character, you work toward's that character's agenda, and find out what happens as a result.

For everyone, the three things to remember are:

1. **Try to get your character what they want**

2. **Be honest to your vision of the character and the world**
3. **Let yourself be surprised by where the story goes**

But enough of this flim-flammery.
Let's get specific:

SETTING UP TO PLAY

Decide who is going to play the Barbarian. You'll have your own ideas about who is best for this role. For myself, I choose:

Myself, if I'm showing the other players the game for the first time.

A player who is very new to gaming, if they seem creatively confident.

Whoever is most interested in the job, in the absence of the other two.

They take the Barbarian's sheet and read it over. The lists on the sheet give you options to choose from about the specifics of the Barbarian in this story. Choose the things which excite you, which give you pictures in your head that you're excited to share with the other players.

Everyone else, you're going to play the other characters. If you've got time, and you haven't played before, look over the character sheets and get familiar with the basic concepts of the characters. To start with, use only the characters with the I symbol, i.e.

The Proprietor, the Sybarite, the King of Worms, the Potentate, the Apothecary, the Urchin, the Dawn, and of course the Quarry.

This list includes all the essential roles for the game, plus a couple of extras. Introduce the characters with the II symbol later in the game, if you need them.

After your first game you'll have your own opinions about the right selection of characters, and you might choose a larger or smaller group. Experiment and find what works for you.

THE FIRST SCENE

The game starts with the Barbarian already inside the city, on the trail of the Quarry.

A player (other than the Barbarian's player)



should choose a character with the  symbol beside their name. If this is your first game, make this the Proprietor. The Barbarian has come to this character's establishment following a clue or a rumour. Read the character's sheet and choose from the lists provided.

Choose the things which excite you and that put interesting images in your head. Also, don't be afraid to be obvious. Choose things which fit together to make a cohesive whole. Make something that you can describe well.

Once you've got an image of the establishment in your mind, start describing it to the Barbarian's player. There are three things it's important to get across:

1. **The sights, smells, and sounds of the the establishment**
2. **What brought the Barbarian here**
3. **Any obvious threats or leads**

The Barbarian's player will of course have questions, and likely will immediately have things they want to do. Let the conversation flow back and forth, answering questions, describing how the people in the establishment react to the Barbarian, any new information discovered, and so on. This kind of back-and-forth should form the bulk of the game. Bear in mind the three things I told you to remember:

1. **Try to get your character what they want**
2. **Be honest to your vision of the character and the world**
3. **Let yourself be surprised by where the story goes**

Look at the 'authorities' on your sheet. These things tell you what you can control in the story. All the things mentioned on the sheet, you have complete authority to describe and to make decisions about. Form a vision of how these things work in the city, and make that vision come true in the story.

There's one more thing: Right at the end of the sheet you'll see a bit of bold text. That's the 'twist' for this character, the little bit of fiction that you get to add to the story, no matter what. You don't have to ask any permission for this thing, and

it doesn't matter whether it's covered by your authorities or not. Work out what that bit of text means in the context of this story, choose your moment, and tell the Barbarian's player what they see and hear that makes that thing come true.

In this first scene, make sure you use your twist before the end of the scene.

Once you've used the twist, that's it. You only get it once.

BRINGING IN MORE CHARACTERS

The other players (except the Barbarian player) should feel free to pick up the other character sheets any time they choose. Read them over, and see what they're about. In particular, look at the 'authorities' and the 'twist' at the end of the sheet.

Whenever you want, you can put the sheet in front of you and take control of that character. Write down your choices about the specifics of that character, and let an image form in your mind about who that person is. Make your decisions, both about the specifics of the characters and also about which characters to play based on your intuition or whim, based on your vision of the world of the story, and on what seems exciting to you in the moment.

Once you're in control of a character, you have all the authorities listed on their sheet. You can just start talking, telling the Barbarian's player what they hear and see and sense that is caused by the things under your control.

Each character has an "agenda", which you can choose. Like with everything else, choose what's exciting to you, and also the most obvious thing given what you've already seen in the story. When you're playing your character, try to get them what their agenda demands. When you're unsure about what happens next, look at your characters' agendas, and make them do something to get what they want.

Every character also has their own "twist" (some have more than one!), which you can use from the moment you take over that character. Often, the "twist" is how the character is introduced to



the story, so you will need to use it right away. Other times you can hold on to it for as long as you like. Don't be shy though! Use them as soon as it makes sense to do so, and use them in the way that seems obvious and natural for the world you've established.

There's another thing that can happen. Sometimes a player will say a thing that's not covered by one of the authorities of their characters. If what they say infringes on the authority of a character controlled by another player, they should defer to that player. But if it infringes on the authority of a character who's not controlled by any player they should go ahead and pick up the character's sheet, and start playing that character in addition to any others they control.

CONFLICTS

Often, it's pretty obvious how conflicts between characters will shake out. If you've got authority over a situation, it's up to you to decide how things go for the Barbarian, whether physical force will prevail, who is quickest, whose will is strongest, who has the advantage and how much it will gain them.

Sometimes it's not clear who should win. You don't know enough about the antagonists or their relative strengths to decide who should emerge victor.

Other times, it feels like there's too much riding on the outcome of a conflict for you to make a fair decision. You could call it one way or the other, but you don't think you can make an unbiased decision because the stakes are too high.

When it's your responsibility to decide how things turn out, but you don't feel like you can make a good decision, you can turn to the Tarot.

The Tarot is a deck of cards that will ask you a question about the fictional circumstances of the conflict. Answering that question will tell you who is victorious.

Shuffle the Tarot deck at the start of the game, and put it somewhere everyone can reach. When you want to use the deck, simply flip over the

top card. The card will have a question printed on it, asking which of the participants excels in a particular quality, which has a particular advantage in the current situation, or which has a goal that best fits with a particular criteria. The situation works out in the favour of this character.

If it's still not clear after flipping a card, just flip another one.

In general, it's best to use the cards to resolve very specific problems in the story - the outcome of a few moments' action. For larger questions, trust your instincts and use your authorities with confidence.

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

I think you have everything you need now. The Barbarian is embroiled in the life of the city. Nod's denizens gather around, each with their own agenda. Each player has their part in uncovering how the events of the night play out. Talking back and forth, asking questions, consulting the Tarot, playing characters. No one knows how things will turn out, but the joy of play is in finding out, and in being surprised by the outcome.

