

Council of the Magisters

A Roleplaying Game by Willow Palecek

Premise: The players take the roles of the Magisters, supremely old and powerful wizards that control the mystic city of Magicant. The leadership of the city is empty, and the Magisters must choose one of their own to rule. The Magisters are the mystic equals of one another, and their conflicts can only be resolved by a vote of the group as a whole. Council of the Magisters is a game for exactly five players, for exactly four sessions of exactly two hours each.

Setup: Before the first session of play, the Spheres of Influence should be divided among the players, either by choice or randomly. There are five Spheres of Influence (Love, Hatred, Joy, Sorrow, and Serenity), and each player gets one. No two players can have the same Sphere of Influence.

Additionally, each player must select an “issue” for their character, which represents some in-game civic concern they have for the city of Magicant. These are utterly freeform and up to the players’ discretions.

Each player will need two index cards, one reading “yes,” and saying “no,” and a piece of paper and pencil to jot down any notes. The group as a whole will need a timer of some sort, and at least one copy of these rules. (The rules are short enough and arcane enough that printing one copy for each player is advised.) Also, everyone will have to write down their age, and determine an ordering of ages. (It is age-old tradition to make a slight bow of the head when directly addressed by an older Magister.)

Issues: While Issues don't directly affect the game at all, they do have two important purposes: they can get debate going during the first session, and they can influence who you're likely to favor at the end of the game.

Play: Each player takes the role of one of the Magisters, empowered with that Magister’s sphere of influence. The Council of the Magisters meets both in-game and out-of-game for four sessions, each two hours long. The purpose of these meetings is to choose one of their own to be the Supreme Magister. Each session, one of the players will become ineligible for the position of Supreme Magister; but they still attend the sessions, and vote just like anyone still in the running!

(Note: the terms “Player” and “Magister” are used fairly interchangeably in the text. Council of Magisters assumes that the players will be using Actor stance, and being fairly immersed in their roles. In addition, several rules refer to the ages of the Magisters. Magisters should be considered to have the same relative ages as their players.)

In Council of the Magisters, Game Time and Real Time takes exactly the same amount. If it takes the Players of the Magisters an hour to resolve a conflict, that’s how long it took the Magisters themselves. For the most part, the players of the Magisters should sit around and talk in-character, acting as the Magisters themselves, engaged in a tense debate for leadership. (This is known as “General Debate,” as opposed to “Vote Debate.”)

Starting a Session: At the start of a session (after characters have been created, which is not considered part of the session length), the oldest Magister sets the timer for one hour

and fifty-five minutes. At this point play begins. (The oldest Magister traditionally says “The Ancient and Exalted Council of Magisters is now in session!,” to which the younger Magisters make a slight bow of the head.)

Vote Debate: Anytime the narrative can’t be resolved just by talking in-character, Votes happen. In Council of the Magisters, all conflict is handled by a vote among the participants. (Conflict between Magisters is handled by either the Duel Arcane, or the Grand Vote, see below.) Anytime there is an agreed upon element of chance as to what might happen, it’s time for Vote Debate.

Step One: Initiation:

At any time during General Debate, a Magister may declare a Vote. For the duration of the vote, that Magister is known as “The Presenter.” At this point, General Debate must immediately cease, and Vote Debate begins.

(It is age-old tradition for the Presenter to stand up and declare “Vote Debate” has now begun.)

Step Two: Intent:

After initiation of Vote Debate, the Presenter declares what the Goals of the Vote are. These goals can be just about anything that affects the game world, but not the other Magisters or the structure of the game itself. (Two examples, “It shall begin to rain in the city of Magicant,” “Henceforth, the wearing of mixed fibers by plebians shall be punishable by stoning.”) The Presenter must declare what will happen if the Vote passes. On a failed vote, the status quo remains.

(It is age-old tradition for the Presenter to remain standing and say: “I Present that…” and then state the goals of the Vote.)

Optional Step Two B:

If another Magister feels that this Vote deals too personally with that Magister’s issues or the Magister himself, he may dictate that the Vote become a Duel Arcane, and becomes the Protestor. See the Duel Arcane.

(It is age-old tradition for the Protestor to stand, raise one index finger, and say “I Protest this Vote, and demand a Duel Arcane!”)

Step Three: Execution:

The Magisters debate the nature of the Vote and desired outcomes, taking however much time they desire (but see Filibuster Breakers, below.) At anytime during the Execution stage, the Magister may place his “yes” or “no” card face down on a designated table, indicating that he has voted. At any time he may change his mind and change his selected card. If everyone has a card face down on the table, the any player may demand an immediate counting of the vote.

(It is age-old tradition for that Magister to stand and say “Let the Votes be revealed to the Council!” It is also traditional for the Presenter to say this, and considered impolite for other Magisters to do so, unless it is evident that the Presenter is stalling for whatever reason. The polite thing to do is to remind the Presenter that everyone has voted, and then demand the counting of the vote if the Presenter chooses not to.)

All the votes are turned face up. If there are three or more “yes” votes, the Vote is a success.

Step Four: Effect:

The Goals of the Vote take effect. The Presenter must briefly describe the effects. At this point General Debate resumes. (By tradition, other Magisters are encouraged to issue commentaries on the resolution of the Vote.)

Overview of Vote Debate:

Step One: Initiation: One of the players must declare that a Vote is happening. That player is known as the Presenter.

Step Two: Intent: The presenter announces to the Council what the goals of the Vote are. These will be achieved on a “yes” vote. (On a “no” vote, nothing will happen.)

Optional Step Two B: Contestation: Exactly one other Magister may immediately dictate that the Vote must become a Duel Arcane. That other Magister becomes the Protestor. See the Duel Arcane resolution.

Step Three: Execution: The Magisters vote on whether or not to accept the goals of the conflict.

Step Four: Effect: The goals of the conflict take effect.

The Filibuster Breaker:

During normal Votes and Duels Arcane, it is perfectly legal for any Magister to refuse to place his vote card (perhaps under the guise of “structured debate” or “making up his mind.”) If the other four Magisters have placed their vote cards, any one of them may declare a Filibuster Breaker. Set a second timer for five minutes, or watch the timer you do have. When it goes off, any Magister that has not voted is considered to have voted “no.” Magisters are free to change their votes during this time.

The Duel Arcane:

The Duel Arcane is a special type of Vote, pitting two Magisters directly against each other, with personal repercussions. This is the only means by which Magisters may effect their peers. The structure is similar to that of a Vote, but the main difference lies in the Effect stage.

Step One: Initiation:

At any time during General Debate, a Magister may declare a Duel Arcane, and is known as “the Presenter” for the purposes of the Duel. That Magister also names one of the other Magisters as the Protestor for the Duel. (The Protestor may not refuse.)

(It is age-old tradition for the Presenter to stand up, point an index finger at the to-be-selected Protestor, and say “I challenge thee to a Duel Arcane!” The Protestor is tradition-bound to stand, point back, and say “Your challenge is met!”

Note on Duels Arcane that arise out of Votes: Despite the fact that the Protestor declared the Duel Arcane, he remains the Protestor. In this case, “Optional Step Two B” from the Vote Resolution rules replaces Step one of the Duel Arcane.

Step Two: Intent:

At this point, the Protestor sets the terms of the Duel Arcane. There are two possible terms: Lenient Severity and Moderate Severity. (There is a third Severity, Extreme

Severity, but that is only used for the Grand Vote). This becomes relevant during the Effect stage.

(It is age-old tradition for the Protestor to say “I choose terms of (blank) Severity.”)

Step Three: Execution:

Execution for a Duel Arcane is identical for that of a normal Vote.

Step Four: Effect:

If there were three or more “yes” votes, the Presenter inflicts his Emotional Sphere of Influence on the Protestor. If there were three or more “no” votes, the Protestor inflicts his Emotional Sphere of Influence on the Presenter (see below.) The duration is determined by the Severity of the terms of the debate.

If the Duel Arcane was the result of a Vote, the Execution stage for the duel is also used for the vote. General debate resumes. Commentaries are encouraged.

Emotional States:

The reward for winning a Duel Arcane is the ability to inflict an Emotional State on the loser. A Magister will only have one Emotional State active at a time. There are five Emotional States, and each Magister will have one state as their Sphere of Influence. They are:

Love: When a Magister inflicts this Emotional State on another, they name a Magister (which may include the inflicting Magister, but not the victimized Magister), whom the victim falls in Love with. While a Magister has the emotional state of Love active, he must vote in the way that he believes the target of his Love would want him to vote.

Hate: When a Magister inflicts this Emotional State on another, they name a Magister (which may include the inflicting Magister, but not the victimized Magister), whom the victim begins to Hate. While a Magister has the emotional state of Hate active, he must vote in a way that he believes the target of his Hate would not want him to vote.

Joy: A Magister who has the emotional state of Joy active must vote “yes” to any vote that they believe at least two other Magisters would vote “yes” to.

Sorrow: A Magister who has the emotional state of Sorrow active must vote “no” to any vote that they believe at least two other Magisters would vote “no” to.

Serenity: The emotional state of Serenity has no effect. This is the default state for all Magisters at the very beginning of the game.

Important Note: If the Magister of Serenity wins a Duel Arcane, they may choose to inflict Serenity on themselves *instead* of inflicting it on their opponent.

At any time, a Magister may have up to three emotional states: an Active State, a Moderate State, and a Deep-Seated State. The Magister is affected by whatever his Active State is.

A Duel Arcane of Lenient Severity inflicts an Active Emotional State. A Duel Arcane of Moderate Severity inflicts both an Active and a Moderate State. The Grand Vote (which is of Extreme Severity) inflicts all three states.

At the end of any Vote (no matter what type of vote it was), the Magister's Active State is replaced by his Moderate State. At the end of each game session, the Magister's Active and Moderate states are both replaced by his Deep-Seated State.

Thus, low-Severity Duels Arcane will affect the target in the short term, but high-severity Duels Arcane will affect them in the long term.

A Note on Emotional States: While affected by an emotional state, ones voting options are limited. However, since they depend on trying to guess how others will vote (either one particular Magister or the Council as a whole), that analysis is intended to be half the fun. Near the end of the game, it gets even more complicated, as the other Magisters will have Emotional states of their own, possibly based on how you vote. Players are expected to honestly enforce their emotional states for themselves. If you really have no idea how others will vote, you can vote how you like. Nothing prevents you from saying how you will vote (or lying about it, for that matter.) (But age-old tradition states that you should not directly ask another Magister how he will vote.)

The Grand Vote:

After the Magisters have been in session exactly one hour and fifty-five minutes, a Grand Vote must occur. Any vote or debate that was currently in progress ceases immediately. (A normal Vote is considered to have a no outcome, unless the Effect Stage was already reached. Any ceased Duel Arcane inflicts no emotional severity, unless the Effect Stage was already reached. In either case, tradition demands that any commentary wait.)

Step One: Initiation:

Any Magister may declare himself to be the Challenger of the Grand Vote. (Ancient tradition dictates that the Magister stand, and say, "I hereby accept the Challenge of the Grand Vote!" If no Magister volunteers for the position, the youngest eligible Magister must do so.

Step Two: Intent:

After announcing himself as Challenger of the Grand Vote, the Challenger selects any other eligible Magister to be the Opposition of the Grand Vote. (It is age-old tradition for the Challenger to point at the selected Magister with one index finger, and say "I choose you to be my Oppostion!")

Step Three: Execution:

The Magisters have exactly five minutes to discuss and vote. No Magisters may call for the vote to be counted; it is done so automatically when the five minutes have expired. All the votes are turned face up. If any Magister has not voted, they are considered to have voted "yes."

Step Four: Effect:

If there are three or more “yes” votes, the Opposition of the Grand Vote is considered ineligible for the position of Supreme Magister and may not be a Challenger or Opposition of any future Grand Vote, and the Challenger inflicts an Extreme Emotional State on him. If there are three or more “no” votes, the Challenger of the Grand Vote is considered to be instead, and the Opposition inflicts an Extreme Emotional State on him. The session is now over for the night. If this was the final session, the winner becomes the Supreme Magister!

Special Types of Votes:

A few more special types of Votes exist. These affect the rules of play, and can be considered to be “optional” or “advanced” rules. Each of these dictates what the Intent of the Vote will be, and the resulting Effect. None of these laws is considered active at the start of the game.

Law of Orderly Debate:

During General Debate, a Magister may call for a vote for Orderly Debate. This is handled like a normal Vote. If the result of the Vote is “yes,” the Law of Orderly Debate is active for the remainder of the game (not just the remainder of the session.) During any Vote or Duel Arcane, During the Execution stage, each Magister has exactly two minutes to speak, in order from youngest to oldest. (This is a benefit that tradition gives to the elder Magisters, who are clearly wiser than those younger than them.) After the senior Magister has spoke his piece, each Magister has one minute to finalize their vote. Any Magister that fails to vote is considered to have voted “no.”

During a Great Vote, each Magister has only one minute to speak, and abstentions are treated as “yes” votes, but otherwise the process is identical.

Law of Extended Orderly Debate:

Extended Orderly Debate works just like Orderly Debate. (The Law of Orderly Debate and Extended Orderly Debate are mutually Exclusive. If one law is adopted the other ceases to be enforced.) The only difference is that during normal Votes and Duels Arcane, each Magister has five minutes to speak instead of two.

Law of Freeform Debate:

If the Law of Orderly Debate or Extended Orderly Debate is in effect, a Magister may call for a Vote for Freeform Debate. If successful, the Law of (Extended) Orderly Debate is no longer in effect.

Law of Ancient Tradition:

If the Law of Ancient Tradition is adopted, any and all “traditions” noted anywhere in the text are required behavior.

(It is age-old tradition for Magisters to wear hats, as available.)

If a Magister breaks the Law of Ancient Tradition, the oldest other Magister (who is not the Magister of Serenity) may inflict a Lenient emotional state on the offending Magister.

Law of Progressive Debate:

If the Law of Ancient Tradition is in effect, a Magister may call for a Vote for Progressive Debate. If successful, the Law of Ancient Tradition is no longer in effect.

Law of Commentaries:

If the Law of Commentaries is adopted, each Magister may submit, in writing, up to one typed or handwritten page to the other Magisters between sessions. Players of Magisters may not discuss these commentaries in-character between sessions. Magisters are encouraged to discuss these written commentaries during General Debate.

Law of Sequestering:

If the Law of Sequestering is adopted, then the Law of Commentaries is no longer in effect. Players of Magisters may not distribute written material discussing the game between sessions (and as always, may not discuss it in-character.)

Designer's Notes to Reviewers:

Fun trivia: I discovered the Game Chef at 4 AM the date the game was due. So this is technically also a 24 hour RPG.

Ingredient Use: The intended ingredients of Council of Magisters are Committee, Ancient, and Emotion. The Council itself is obviously a Committee, and all in-game decisions are made by the players themselves in Committee. I imagine the Magisters themselves as being Ancient and Wise, and their Traditions are even more Ancient than they. Further, the system rewards players themselves just for being old, and well, Ancient. (ironic, since I'm the youngest person in my regular group.) The means of conflict are Emotions, and political debates can get pretty Emotional.

(I feel the need to point this out because Council of Magisters happens to incorporate two of the elements from the other ingredient list "Law" and "Actor," (due to the prevalence of Actor-stance and some very LARP-like qualities), which was unintentional, and I wanted to make sure nobody thought I left out "Steel" or "Team.")