MEN OF STONES

A game of Shakespearean Tragedy

Game Chef Competition 2011
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This is a game of drama, of desires, motivations, and downfalls. You play characters caught up in a devastating circle of events that can lead only to a tragic fall. Set them on their course, turning a volatile situation into a disastrous final act, until the stage is filled with the bodies of the fallen, and the grief-stricken words of a single survivor.

Important Terms Reference

- **Caution:** in Act V, Caution allows you to protect yourself against downfalls
- **Desire:** a motivation/goal for a character, involving another character, that is rooted in one of the four Qualities and fleshed out by a detail. e.g., one character seeks the love of another, or one character seeks the aid of another to regain their stolen lands.
- **Detail:** a brief description that adds depth to a Relationship or a Desire. e.g., “bastard” or “forgery”.
- **Forsworn:** a key character who is cast out from the rest in some way, an exile. Unlike the rest, he is able to change his Nature, to adapt to his surroundings. However, this character tends to invite tragedy, whether they be noble or dastardly. The Forsworn is often a character who has been gravely wronged.
- **Nature:** the guiding principle of your character. A Nature comes with two Qualities, which determine which Natures you may choose from in Act I. More importantly, every Nature has three Traits, which help to guide your actions in the rest of the game.
- **Pivot:** the character who becomes the centerpiece of the game in Act III, plunging everything into a downward spiral of tragic consequences.
- **Quality:** the underlying facet of a Relationship or Desire, along with a Detail. There are four Qualities: Deed, Duty, Secret, and Taint.
- **Relationship:** a connection between two characters, it is rooted in one of the four Qualities, and fleshed out by a Detail. e.g., one character is the sworn liege of another, or one character has been the other character's rival.
- **Scene:** a unified collection of dialogue and/or actions between characters.
- **Setting:** a collection of Details, sorted by Traits. The Setting frames the story, and shapes what sorts of Details are contained in it. The best way to change the main themes of the drama is by changing the Setting.
- **Spotlight:** the character who dies last in the game, leaving the Survivor to muse upon life, death, and picking up the pieces.
- **Survivor:** the character left alive at the end of the game, to whom it falls to pick up the pieces and set things in order. Will they be broken, or steel themselves to press onward?
- **Tragedy:** in Act V, you spend your Tragedy to bring about the downfalls of other characters, in small or large ways. Beware: when you run out of Tragedy, you die.
- **Trait:** an aspect of a Nature which you gain points in over the course of Act II and Act III. Trait Points are spent during Act IV to generate Tragedy and Caution. Traits also help you to generate Details for Relationships and Desires.

What You'll Need

Pencils and a sheet of paper for every player (used to record character information)

Four six-sided dice for each player

Index cards (for Natures)

Things to Remember

Men of Stones is a story game. It is framed by scenes, and so character abilities and skills are not taken nearly as much into consideration as in traditional RPGs. The important thing about a Scene is the traits of the characters that it demonstrates.

The order of play alternates between Acts. In Act I, Act III, and Act V, the order of play is to the left. In Act II and Act IV, the order of play is to the right.

Characters need to have a Name, a Nature, and three Traits. The Forsworn also needs a space to note his total Trait Point pool. By Act IV, characters will also need spaces for Tragedy and Caution pools. For the purposes of Acts I, II, and III, you can designate spaces to place dice: Deed, Duty, Secret, and Taint.

Once Relationships and Desires are established in an Act (Acts I, II, and III) , players have Scenes to establish these. When a Scene finishes, every player who was in it assigns themselves a Trait Point for a trait which was played to in that scene, and then assigns the next player in turn order a Trait Point for a trait which *they* played to in that scene.

Scenes should always serve to ratchet up the tension between characters. Every scene needs to make something happen; no Scene leaves the game unchanged, even if it's a soliloquoy.

If at any time a player is unable to (or does not want to) have a Scene with other players, they may elect to have a soliloquoy; this establishes something about them, pushes the plot along, and allows them to assign themselves a Trait Point. However, they are only assigned a single Trait Point.

Players are allowed to participate in other Scenes, as non-central figures, and may bring minor characters (non-player characters) into Scenes as they wish. Most of the interaction should involve the players' characters, however.

Act I: Introduction

In Act I, the major players of the game establish themselves. Every character will receive their Nature, including the unpredictable Forsworn, and every character will develop a Relationship. These are done at the same time, through a simple process. Before Act I begins, set out a number of Natures equal to the number of players, plus three. One of these Natures must be the Forsworn.

First, every character rolls four dice. They then choose to assign each die to one of the four Qualities. Having more matching dice gives you better choice, although it offers you less control over the Detail of the Relationship developed in this act. (A higher number on matching dice means a more positive Relationship, and a lower number means a more negative Relationship. More on that later.)

Each player takes note of the highest number of matching dice among the four they rolled, and the value of those matching dice. The player with the most matching dice (if there's a tie, then the player who has a higher value of matching dice) goes first. They choose a Quality assigned to one of the matching dice, and choose a Nature associated with that Quality (or the Forsworn Nature). Then, they choose one of the three Traits, and check this Trait on the table for the chosen Setting. There will be six possible Details under that trait, one for each die result. Pick the one which matches the value of the die that was assigned to the Quality.

From that Quality and that Detail, develop a Relationship with the player who is next in the turn order. They are free to negotiate aspects of the Relationship and offer suggestions. In fact, this can yield far more interesting play.

e.g. Phil, playing the character Horatus, rolls three 4s, and goes first. He assigned them to the Deed, Duty, and Taint Qualities. He picks the Family Nature, which has the Qualities Duty and Secret, because he selects the Duty Quality. The Nature also has the Traits Kin, Heritage, and Companion. He rolled 4s, and chooses the Trait Heritage, checking the Setting. Under the "Heritage" entry, it lists the following Detail for the value 4: "Nobility". He determines that his relationship with the next player's character is the following: a nobles' agreement to protect one another.

The number which that player picked may no longer be chosen in Act I. All players who have that number must reroll until they no longer have it. Then, play passes to the next player in order of play, who repeats the above steps. If the Forsworn has not been chosen by the time the last player goes, that player must choose that Nature.

Natures

- *Forsworn (Special):* when you take this Nature, take three other Natures and keep them facedown. At the start of every Act, beginning with Act II, you may reveal one of the facedown Natures; that becomes your Nature for the entirety of the Act. If you have at least one revealed Nature, you may instead choose to make that Nature your permanent Nature. If you begin Act IV and still do not have a permanent Nature, the remaining facedown Nature becomes your Nature. Whenever you gain Trait Points, those points go into a generic Trait Pool.
- *Traitor (Secret/Taint; Might, Foe, Trust)*
- *Rival (Taint/Deed; Foe, Trust, Kin)*
- *Mentor (Deed/Duty; Trust, Kin, Heritage)*
- *Family (Duty/Secret; Kin, Heritage, Companion)*
- *Vassal (Deed/Duty; Heritage, Companion, Land)*
- *Friend (Deed/Taint; Companion, Land, Gold)*
- *Magnate (Taint/Duty; Land, Gold, Might)*

Act II: Conflict

In Act II, the characters show their motivations, coming into conflict with one another. Natures are already assigned, and this time, characters establish Desires. The process for giving a Desire to a character is the same as that for a Relationship in Act I; a Desire still involves another character.

e.g., Phil goes, picking the Quality Taint, and the theme Kin. With his result, he adds the Detail "Disowned", and comes up with the following Desire regarding the player next in turn order: "to ensure that their family will disown them."

Once every player has established a Desire, they begin Scenes and have Trait Points awarded. In this act, schemes should begin, plots unfold, and characters set on a collision course with disaster. Ambitions will rise...

Act III: The Pivot

This is the hinge wherein everything turns. One character, the Pivot, emerges, causing all of the action to escalate catastrophically. They force the other characters to move onward, and increase their problems.

As before, players roll and assign dice to Qualities. Before doing anything more, they add the total value of all dice. Those three players, each in order, select a Trait. Each selected Trait must belong to a Nature currently in play. Furthermore, the second of the players must select a Trait that belongs to a Nature with the first person's Trait, and the third of the players must select a Trait that belongs to a Nature with the first two Traits.

This results in the pinpointing of a single Nature; the character with this Nature is the Pivot of the game. In this Act, they will drive the action. Every player develops either a Relationship or a Desire (their choice) with the player next in the turn order, as before.

This time, after all Scenes are played through, every character participates in the Turning Point: the Pivot calls each character to a decision, by one pivotal action, something dramatic, such as a killing, a conquest, or an alliance. After every character has made their decision, each player gains one Trait Point in a Trait of their choice.

Act IV: Falling Action

It's time to spend Trait Points. Act IV unleashes the consequences of the actions that players have taken. Whenever you spend points in Act IV, they add to your Tragedy, which is used in Act V. Relationships and Desires have been established, and there's no more time for anything but the spending of your Traits.

Every player begins one Scene with at least one other player. Before the Scene begins, every player secretly bids an amount of Caution less than or equal to their Trait Point total. Caution will protect them during Act V, although the more points you set aside for Caution, the less you'll be able to get your way in Act IV.

During the Scene, you spend your Trait Points, in order to establish consequences: concrete events that come about through the events of drama (such as the death of Polonius in *Hamlet*). Every consequence must relate to the Trait which the point is spent from. The Forsworn chooses one of the Traits of his current (permanent) Nature, and spends one of his Trait Points. A consequence may not be countermanded, and may not kill one of the main characters, although it can result in the demise of a minor character. However, a consequence may be halted or diffused if another player in the same Scene spends a Trait Point. Both players bid back and forth, until one declines to bid further. The winning player shapes the fate of the consequence in question.

At any point during the scene, a player may declare themselves “finished”. Such a player continues to participate in the scene, but may not name consequences or otherwise influence the outcome of events in the scene. When all players are finished, the Scene wraps up, and all players reveal and record their secretly bid Caution. Any unused Trait Points are changed into Tragedy (one Trait Point increases Tragedy by one).

During this phase, the Forsworn may not make a Caution bid.

Act V: The Rest is Silence

This is it. Everything comes crashing down at this point. In true Shakespearean fashion, the stage will be littered with bodies before the game is done. This is where the tragedy comes crashing in, in dramatic fashion. There are two parts to Act V. First ever player participates in Framing Scenes. These set all the players up, so that every player is present at the Final Scene. (Be sure to keep plenty potential lethality in the Final Scene. You'll be using it.)

In the Final Scene, characters meet their fates. Before the scene begins, take note of which character has the highest Tragedy. That character is the Spotlight; they will be the last character to meet their demise. This means that they may not die by anyone's hands, not until the Scene concludes. (This does not, however, rule out slowly-killing poison or other such methods, for instance.)

As you play out the Scene, you may spend Tragedy to bring another character's Downfall upon them. If you spend 1 point of Tragedy, you bring some heavy mishap upon them...perhaps the death of a character related to them, or the harming of a Relationship. By spending 2 points of Tragedy, you bring a crippling mishap upon the character, such as maiming them, or destroying one of their relationships. They also lose 1 point of their own Tragedy. By spending 3 points of Tragedy, you severely harm the character, spending 3 points of their own Tragedy.

Any character who has no Tragedy remaining instantly dies by some means.

If a downfall is brought against you, you may spend a point of Caution to overcome it. The Spotlight may also spend Caution to overcome a downfall for any player.

When the Spotlight remains alive, along with one other player, it's time for the Spotlight to die. The other player is the Survivor, the player who must live with all of this death and Tragedy. The Spotlight and the Survivor add together their total Tragedy, and their total Caution. Check the results against the following table, to determine the fate of the Survivor.

	Caution 0-1 (Madness)	**Caution 2 (Grief)**	**Caution 3 or more (Resolve)**
Tragedy 3 or more (Disaster)	Driven mad by the tragedy; never recovers	Dies shortly after from grief	Broken, jaded, finds life elsewhere
Tragedy 2 (Bitter)	Is never quite right, perhaps could be brought to sanity	Lives a long, regret-filled life	Ensures happiness comes to at least a few people
Tragedy 0-1 (Sad)	Somewhat disturbed, tries to adjust to normal life	Leaves, forever holding tragedy in memory	Lives on to tell the story to the world

After this is determined, the Spotlight dies, giving a dramatic death-speech. Usually this is a reflection on what they wanted, how it came to naught in the end, and who they really are. Then, it's left to the Survivor to close it out, with a stage full of the dead. With his memorable lines committed, the game concludes.

Setting: Rotten Denmark

	Kin	Heritage	Companion
1	Kin by marriage	Bastard	Enemy
2	Distant cousin	Common	Rival
3	Uncle/Aunt	Clergy	Schoolfellow
4	Cousin	Nobility	Acquaintance
5	Sibling	Royal blood	Dear friend
6	Parent	Royal Court	Beloved

	Land	Might	Gold
1	Farm	Fool	Theft
2	Village	Judge	Plunder
3	Estate	Knight	Wages
4	Fief	Lord	Inheritance
5	Duchy	General	Merchants
6	Kingdom	King	Kingdom's wealth

	Foe	Love	Trust
1	Vengeance	Loathing	Treachery
2	Hatred	Spurned	Forgery
3	Enmity	Distant	Deceit
4	Opposition	Favorite	Secrecy
5	Competition	Enamored	Confidence
6	Sparring	Passionate	Utter trust

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