

CHOOSE YOUR MASQUES

= A STORMBRINGER 5TH EDITION SCENARIO BY CARL PATES =

CHOOSE YOUR MASQUES is a short *Stormbringer Scenario* written by Carl Pates (©199x, 2019)

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Deep with the bowels of Old Hrolmar an ancient evil has been released. Lying dormant for centuries the chaotic Masque of F'Haarok Tor has been found by a young girl who mistakenly ventured into a rotting temple of Chaos, sealed by the Champions of Donblas some two centuries before. Now the Masque has taken possession of the child's body and once again roams abroad seeking fresh hosts to feed its unholy lust.

(Note: The exact geographical setting of this scenario is unimportant, Old Hrolmar is only used as an example. Gamemasters should feel free to place this adventure in any city that is appropriate to their own campaign).

A DISTURBING SCENE

The scenario begins in the Darktown Quarter of Old Hrolmar, the seediest part of town full of thieves, beggars and other unwanted scum. As the adventurers pass one of the area's many covered alley-ways they hear the sudden screams of several children. Scant moments later several young street urchins run out of the darkness and dash across the street. They are fleeing in obvious panic, their clothes and faces splattered with blood. Quick adventurers may try to grab one with a successful DEXx2 roll as they run past. If any are caught, they just cry about the 'monster' behind them, kicking and biting in an effort to free themselves from the adventurer's grasp. Some of the locals look up at this, but such scenes are far from rare in this

district, and most prefer to mind their own business anyway.

From within the alley comes a faint voice, pitifully crying for help. Should the adventurers investigate they find a dead boy, his throat ripped out as if by the bite of some savage carnivore. Behind him cowers a small girl, whimpering to herself and clutching her head in trembling hands. This is Jena, who, possessed by the will of the Masque, has killed the boy before her. She lifts her tear-streaked and bloody face and, in a pathetic, quivering voice, asks them to help her before "the monster wakes up again". (She is, of course, referring to the Masque that has taken her as a host - Allow the adventurers to make a Search roll, to see if they notice the strange appearance of the skin on her face).

Although she cannot understand herself or why she needs to kill, Jena is quite aware of what is happening to her and is desperate to find help. Any adventurers making a successful Insight roll realise that she is terrified, and unless they appear kind and sympathetic, she tries to run away and lose them in the backstreets. If this happens and she is caught (make a Dexterity roll) she tries to escape by whatever means possible, and this includes invoking the full powers of the Masque. Should she evade pursuit or capture, stories of the "Darktown Ripper" begin to circulate over the next few days, and the adventurers could well be

asked to hunt down the killer by the city’s worried authorities.

HELPING JENA

Assuming that adventurers earn her trust, she tells them how she found the “old room in the sewers” and about “the shining face that told her to put it on”. She tries to answer any questions that they may ask, but if questioned about her dead friends, she begins to cry and tries to hug the nearest adventurer. However, if the adventurer has a Chaotic allegiance, the Masque, sensing a more powerful host, attempts to possess them instead. If it succeeds in a MP vs MP roll then it seems to flow liquid-like from the child’s face to its new victim. The adventurers may now have a serious problem as their former friend tries to fulfil his new needs!

Regardless of the outcome of this, there are only two ways to stop the Masque (see page 3 for details of the Masque of F’haarok Tor). They must kill the host or neutralise the thing itself. If they choose the former, the Masque will not hesitate to use all of the host’s POW in the fight, while if they choose the latter they must still find some way to keep the host subdued, for the Masque will not allow itself to be neutralised willingly (using the knockout attack rules or drugs is probably the safest way).

NEUTRALISING THE MASQUE

The only way to accomplish this is to return the Masque to the temple from which it came and restore the enchantment placed on it so long ago by the priests of Donblas. If Jena is still alive then finding the temple should be easy as she can guide them to it (although this should be handled carefully if she is still the host, so as not to provoke the Masque). If not then the adventurers should be able to find it’s location from some of the other urchins in the area, though this may take a few days longer. See the section The Sewers below for more information on the temple.

Ultimately they are going to need the help of the Church and of Father Uthos, the presiding Donblas Administrator in Old Hrolmar, and the only man in the city who can restore the enchantment.

THE SEWERS

Like most Vilmirian cities Old Hrolmar has an extensive sewer system running beneath it that empties into the river Hrol. Some of the main tunnels are large enough for a person to move through, and they are a favourite place for criminals and suchlike to hide. The temple where Jena

JENA - VICTIM OF THE MASQUE

Chaos 24, Balance 5, Law 6

STR: 7, CON: 8, SIZ: 6, INT: 11

POW: 4, DEX: 10, APP: 9

HP: 7 Damage Bonus: nil

Weapons: Brawl 30%, 1D3+1D8 (gained from the Masque)

Armor: 1D8 (gained from the Masque)

The young and unwanted daughter of a prostitute, this 10-year-old girl has spent most of her life playing in the slums of Darktown with the other urchins. Since the death of her mother nearly a year ago she has had to fend for herself, mostly by petty thievery and suchlike, and she has grown quite resourceful and strong. However, when she and a group of friends stumbled into an abandoned Chaos temple while exploring Old Hrolmar’s ancient sewer system, they broke the ancient warding placed there to guard against the Masque of F’haarok Tor. It was Jena who fell victim to its charms, and after killing those with her, she returned to the surface, to sate her need for blood.

found the Masque is connected to one such tunnel, which can be accessed easily from the riverside. Adventurers greater than SIZ 9 must crawl or stoop, those smaller may walk relatively unhindered. Following Jena’s directions, it takes approximately 15 minutes to reach the small hole in the sewer’s walls that marks the temple’s location.

THE TEMPLE

This rotting and ancient temple to Chardros the Deliverer was the last resting place of F’haarok Tor after his demise at the hands of the Inquisition. There is only one entrance, which was once bricked up, but the centuries of decay have exposed a small hole, big enough for a child (or anyone less than SIZ 7) to get through, but for anyone larger it would take another few hours of digging with picks to widen it (half an hour per SIZ point).

Inside the temple is roughly circular; the walls are moist and partially covered by a dark mould that obscures some of the many Chaos runes etched on them, and the floor is littered with bones and the corpses of four dead children. The centre is dominated by a man-size statue of Chardros himself, At the foot of which lies the skeleton of an armored

warrior, a broken and rusted sword piercing the Chaos rune on his breastplate.

Inscribed on the floor are three silver runes of Law, forming a triangle that encompasses both the statue and the warrior's corpse.

The enchantment that held the Masque's power in check for so long was contained in these runes, and the reason for their failure is due to the hairline crack that runs through the centre of one (Successful Search roll to spot this) - a result of subsidence in the area some years ago. Their power can only be restored by an hour-long ritual performed by a Donblas priest.

AT THE CHURCH

Although the temple of Law in Old Hrolmar is dedicated to Elgis the Gentle, like virtually every other temple in Vilmir it is actually controlled by the clergy of Donblas, in this case led by the fanatical Bishop Uthos, the eyes and ears of the Inquisition in this place. Should the adventurers approach the Church regarding this matter they will ultimately be referred to this man and face an audience with him.

Bishop Uthos is quite humourless and grim; Raised in the Abbey of the Cleansing Flame, he believes himself the instrument of his god and adheres rigidly to the letter of the Law. He a tall, imposing character with piercing blue eyes and a shaven head. The Rune of Law is tattooed in blue upon his forehead.

An audience with an Inquisitor is not a pleasant experience. Flanked by a squad of Grey Defenders the adventurers are escorted into a large stone chamber that serves as the courtroom and cross-examined one-by-one by a panel of priests led by Uthos (They are also required to hold a stone table that is inscribed with the Rune of Truth - See page 15 of The Bronze Grimoire). Gamemasters should take the opportunity to intimidate and interrogate the adventurers as much as possible, looking for any signs of Chaotic sympathies. As well as questioning them on their present situation (i.e. the Masque), they are also questioned on their past deeds too. Any disrespect is treated harshly, from imposing fines to imprisonment. Blasphemy is punishable by torture and death. The Inquisitors are also skilled at detecting lies (Bishop Uthos has an Insight of 86%). Note that the Church here has no records of the Chaos temple. They were all lost in the great fire 150 years ago.

Once the audience is over, the bishop gives his judgement; that the host be killed to avoid further contamination by Chaos, and that the temple be cleansed by fire. If the

THE MASQUE OF F'HAAROK TOR

Once belonging to a powerful Pan Tangian warlord of the same name, this Masque has not been seen for nearly 200 years and was believed by most Lawful scholars to have been destroyed. This was not the case however, for when the agents of Donblas finally cornered and killed the chaos champion in a hidden temple below the streets of Old Hrolmar, they found they were unable to destroy the Masque. Instead, they buried and sealed it with the runes of Law so that it could never possess another again. Now, however, it has been freed by the child, and seeks a stronger and more powerful host.

DESCRIPTION

In its natural state, this Masque appears to be cast in the likeness of a smiling, middle-aged human face made from highly polished bronze. It radiates an aura of kindness, tranquillity and warmth, and anyone within a 5-yard radius must resist the masque's MP with their own or feel a strong urge to touch and caress it, thereby risking the chance that it will take them as a host. If this happens it becomes virtually invisible as it spreads across its victim's face - the only evidence of its presence is the smooth slick sheen that it gives the wearer's skin making it difficult to spot (A successful Search roll is necessary).

POWERS

Apart from its ability to attract potential hosts as described above, this Masque also adds 1D8 damage points to the wear's Brawl attack when used to bite. It has all the standard powers for Chaos Masques as mentioned below. It currently has a POW of 8, due to the fact that it is weak from centuries of 'starvation'.

Needs: Its wearer needs to kill and drink the blood of a sentient creature at least once a week.

adventurers wish to argue this they may do so, the bishop is a fanatic, but he is also fair. Making a successful Oratory roll will help here but have the adventurers construct a valid argument too - don't let them rely simply on a dice roll.

If the adventurers manage to sway the Father's mind, he agrees to accompany them to the temple, accompanied by two other priests and three Grey Defenders.

AT THE TEMPLE

Once at the temple, the priests begin their work immediately. The wearer of the Masque is placed next to the dead warrior and a new rune inscribed near the old one. The three priests then begin the ritual to activate the triangle (Note that while they are performing this ritual, they can do nothing else, for any loss of concentration means that they must start again).

The minions of Chaos, however, have learnt of the Masque through their contacts in the Church, and are determined to take it for themselves by mounting an attack on the temple during the ritual. They are led by an agent, Ahortrah (Use the statistics for the Agent of Chaos on page 113 of the Elric! rules) and four other followers (use the statistics for Assassins on the same page). They attempt to enter the temple by stealth (quite possible if the adventurers don't mount a guard) and launch a surprise attack.

CONCLUSION

If the priests complete their ritual, the Masque is once more neutralised, and can be removed safely from its wearer's face. Bishop Uthos has the Masque guarded securely, until a special delegation from Jadmar arrives to exorcise it properly.

If the adventurers acquitted themselves well in the fight, then they may have made a powerful ally in the bishop, who may have use for them in the future. Jena if course, if she is still alive, is placed under special care by the bishop and sent to a special monastery for women, to be tutored in the doctrine of Law.

CHOOSE YOUR MASQUES

In the eternal struggle between Chaos and Law, both sides have often sought new means to defeat and destroy the other, resulting in the creation of many new and unique weapons. The Masques were one such attempt, first created by the Lords of Law and given to their champions to aid them in their quest to conquer the minions of Chaos. Chaos however, recognising the threat, made their own to counter this, and soon the agents of both sides were hunting each other across the Million Spheres, each seeking their opponent's Masques as trophies in this new and deadly game. Gradually, as the aeons passed by, many were lost or destroyed, leaving only a few to be found, scattered across the Multiverse. Some still lie almost forgotten in the depths of temples and ruins, waiting ever patiently for a new host...

THE POWER OF THE MASQUES

Although each type of Masque offers wildly differing powers depending on whether it is Lawful or Chaotic, they also share some common characteristics, mainly due to the fact that the Chaos Masques are merely perversions of the Lawful ones.

- 1) The Masques are heavily enchanted and are imbued with an innate POW of their own. Roll 4D6+6 for POW for Lawful Masques, and 3D8+8 POW for Chaos ones.
- 2) Once a Masque is worn it cannot be removed, unless the wearer defeats it's MP with his own in a Resistance roll (and this may only be attempted once per week). This also applies to anyone who picks one up: They must succeed in a MP vs. MP roll or be forced to wear it. The one exception to this is if the person who handles a Masque has their highest allegiance score in the Trait opposite the Masque's allegiance; a Lawful Masque would never function for a follower of Chaos and vice-versa. The Balance score has no effect in determining this.
- 3) The wearer of a Masque gains points in the appropriate allegiance score. A Lawful Masque adds 5 points to its wearer's Law score, while a Chaos Masque adds 1D8 to the Chaos score.
- 4) The Masques give the wearer an automatic ability to sense how strong a person's opposing allegiance is up to 100 yards away, making it difficult for enemies to ambush them. To do this the wearer must roll under the target's opposing allegiance score on 1D100 (The Gamemaster should make this roll in case of fumbles). The results are not exact and the Gamemaster should give the player a vague idea of the target's score to the nearest 20 percentiles. Note that this gives no indication of the strength of the other allegiance scores.
- 5) The Masque always tries to 'force' it's wearer to act in ways appropriate to its allegiance. If the Gamemaster decides that the wearer is attempting to do otherwise (such as a Lawful Masque wearer trying to summon a demon) then the Masque will try a MP vs MP roll to prevent this. If it loses then the wearer is free to carry on, otherwise they must obey the will of the Masque and stop.

THE MASQUES OF LAW

Bejeweled and cast in gleaming gold and silver, these Masques depict the radiant countenance of Donblas, Lord of Justice. They are exceptionally light, and when worn adjust themselves to fit the contours of the face, even allowing talking and eating as normal. The Masques of Law are all identical.

Benefits - By expending a point of POW the wearer is able to double their percentage in any skill for a number of minutes equal to their total POW (before using this ability). This may be used on any number of skills at any one time. Using the Masque in this way adds one point to the wearer's Chaos score. The Masque also add +3 to the wearer's armor roll.

THE MASQUES OF CHAOS

Blessed with the terrible powers of Chaos no two of these Masques were made the same. While some portrayed faces of exquisite beauty and grace, others were cast in the likeness of vile and repulsive demons. The materials used in their construction were likewise varied, ranging from precious metals and minerals, to wood and flesh. When worn a Chaos Masque stretches and flows over the wearer's face, most of them enveloping the entire head in their awful embrace.

Benefits - For a point of POW the wearer may gain a demon ability as described in the Elric! rulebook and may also expend the appropriate number of magic points needed to power it. When used, the wearer must make a D100 roll. If the result is 01 the effect is permanent, otherwise it lasts for 1D8 minutes. Add one point to the wearer's Chaos score. Wearing a Chaos Masque adds 1D8 points to armor rolls.

Needs - These Masques also have the side effects of imposing 'Needs' on their hosts, similar to those imposed on demons (Refer to page 89 of the Elric! rules). However, if these needs are neglected the wearer begins to lose HP's at the rate of 1 per week until death ensues. Note: If the wearer is ever reduced to zero POW they no longer have a will of their own and become the Masque's mindless slave.