

La Commedia

o Capitano Spavento della Vall'Inferna

(ENGLISH: "Comedy; or Captain Fear, Lord of Hell")



A stand-alone *Apocalypse World* hack for Little Game Chef 2010

PREMISE:

The year is 1605. The renowned performer Isabella Andreini has just died in childbirth. Her husband, Francesco, stricken with grief, has determined to retire from the theatre and disband the Gelosi, Europe's most famous acting troupe. For their final performance, Francesco has insisted that the maskers present a farce on *L'Orfeo*. However, in the midst of the performance, the earth opens up and the costumed Gelosi are dragged down to Hell. There, they are greeted by *il Summo Poeta*, Dante Alighieri, who explains that, in order to escape from the Inferno, they must recover the missing part of Aristotle's *Poetica* – the part known as *La Commedia* – from the damned soul of the pagan philosopher.

This, my friends, is the true story of Italian comedy.

CHOOSE YOUR RUSE:

The Gelosi are indistinguishable from other damned souls in Hell since, as members of the Gelosi (“the Jealous”), they are guilty of the Deadly Sin of Envy and hell-bound for sure. Additionally, demons are superficial creatures unable to easily distinguish between artifice and reality, so the costumed Gelosi have concocted an elaborate ruse by which they plan to infiltrate deep into hell and recover *La Commedia* from the damned soul of Aristotle. The first thing the players do is decide what this ruse is.

- Who do the Gelosi claim to be?
- Why do they claim to be in Hell?
- What do they need to convince the demons to do?
- How will this ruse ultimately help them find Aristotle?

Example 1: The Gelosi claim to be a visiting contingent from a foreign underworld, Greek or Roman, perhaps, or something more exotic like Aztec or Chinese. Perhaps the Gelosi even concoct a fictional place such as the Glorious Hell of Freezing and Scraping as the purported origin of their delegation. They expect the demons to show them around but also do their best to “please Satan” by showing off the “good work” that the Inferno is doing and maintain its superiority to other hells.

Example 2: Francesco puts on the mask of Il Capitano, the bombastic commedia dell'arte character, and the Captain, as is his wont, gives himself the outrageous title of *Capitano Spavento della Vall'Inferna* (“Captain Fear, Lord of Hell”). The Gelosi present the Captain as a mortal hero known for killing even the most powerful demons, a warrior come to Hell specifically looking for worthy adversaries to fight and kill. Playing to the cowardice and buck-passing of demons, the troupe hopes to use this ruse to proceed lower and lower into Hell, searching for Aristotle.

Example 3: One member of the troupe takes on the role of a particularly horrid mortal who has just died and is rumored to be on the fast track to being named a Duke of Hell by Satan himself. The demons are expected to suck up to this damned soul, since he or she may eventually be their superior, but this bootlicking will also be quite awkward because – after all – the Duke-to-be is still a mortal and demons hate feeling inferior to mortals.

Whatever ruse the players end up deciding on, it is the responsibility of each member of the troupe to do their part to maintain and strengthen the effects of the ruse, so that the Gelosi can make progress towards completing their quest and getting out of Hell as soon as possible.

CHOOSE YOUR MASKS:

As Europe's greatest commedia dell'arte troupe, the Gelosi are very capable actors. Each member is able to play any role in the commedia tradition.

Of course members of the Gelosi also specialize in particular roles.

Each player should pick one of the following three role types as a general specialty for their character. For example, Francesco, now an older gentleman himself, now specializes in playing *Veccio*. Characters get a +1 bonus to any rolls that play to the strengths and characteristics of their general type, as long as they are current wearing that mask and playing to that role.

Then, within each category, pick a further specialty in a particular role. Francesco is renowned as being perhaps the best Il Capitano in history, so that is his particular specialty. Characters get a +2 bonus to any rolls that play to the strengths and characteristics of their particular specialty, as long as they are current wearing that mask and playing to that role.

Veccio (Old Men / Masters)

- Pantalone (Wealthy Merchant, presents an obstacle to the happiness of the Innamorati)
- Il Capitano (The Retired Captain, boasts of military and carnal conquests, opportunistic)
- Il Dottore (The Pompous Scholar, knows nothing about all the things he claims expertise in)
- Tartaglia (nearsighted old stutterer, sometimes heroic like a Innamorati, often a man of letters such as a lawyer, notary, or statesman)
- La Signora (older version of Columbina, wife or mistress to the master, attracted to Il Capitano, hedonistic)

Innamorati (Lovers)

- Prima Donna (The Vain, Temperamental Female Lead)
- Prima Uomo (The Brash, Idealistic Male Lead)

Zanni (Servants / Rustics)

- Arlecchino (also known as Harlequin, quick, lazy, lustful, easily fooled, sometimes cruel)
- Brighella (risen from lower class to middle, fond of drink, vindictive, Harlequin's older brother, name means "Brawler")
- Pedrolino (charming, kind, self-effacing, blames himself for problems, easily tricked)
- Columbina (maid servant of the Prima Donna, Harlequin's mistress, conspires with the lovers against the old men, a target of the older men's lust, can be flirtatious without losing her judgment)
- Pierrot (the sad clown, pines for Columbina, inconsolable)
- Pulcinella (mean, vicious and crafty, claims to be too stupid to know what's going on, violent)
- Scaramuccia (boastful, cowardly clown, a lesser version of Il Capitano, bested by Harlequin)

WHEN TO ROLL:

The following are instances in which you should roll 2d6:

- When you attempt to bluster, obfuscate, or confuse a demon
- When you intimidate, browbeat, belittle, or show contempt for a demon
- When you appeal to a demon's vices
- When you attempt to exude confidence or not flinch in the face of demonic skepticism
- When you address the damned, allowing in their just retribution for eternity
- When you switch masks or break the ruse in any way, even when no demons appear to be around

OUTCOMES:

Add in any bonus from your current mask and read the result in the following way:

- On a 10+, you get what you want and mark progress towards your mission.
- On a 7-9, you get what you want, but one or more demons grow suspicious about you.
- On a 6 or less, you do not get what you want AND one or more demons act on their suspicions.

MARKING PROGRESS:

You can mark progress on a mission of your choosing. When you mark progress towards your mission 5 times, you earn 1 advancement towards completing the mission.

Generally speaking, each mission only requires 1 advance to complete, except for a few missions which may be described by the GM as being "particularly harrowing."

The troupe begins with the mission "find the damned soul of Aristotle," which counts as a particularly harrowing mission. Additionally, Francesco starts with the personal mission "find out if my wife, Isabella, is in Hell," which is a standard mission. Any other missions can be articulated by the players once play begins and they start marking progress.

Once the Gelosi find Aristotle, they must recover *La Commedia* from him, which could be a standard mission. Or they could decide to do something else, such as bringing the philosopher back with them. Getting back out of Hell, likewise, is another mission, though perhaps a particularly harrowing one.

Additionally, if the GM narrates the demons acting on their suspicions by, say, suspending the Gelosi upside down in a lake of fire, escaping from the demons could be a single roll or an entire mission, depending on how the players decide to play things.

PANDEMONIUM:

Some demons have special powers that complicate the Gelosi's quest:

- Lesser demons are easy to fool and gain no advantages against the Gelosi
- Major demons each have one special ability that they can use against the Gelosi to force a roll even when the Gelosi are not attempting one of the "When to Roll" actions. For example, perhaps a demon has an All-Seeing Eye or causes Extreme Pain to everyone around him
- Demon Princes have one special ability like major demons plus an additional object of power given to them by Satan as a mark of their rank, and this object can be used to give the Gelosi an additional -2 when rolling against them.
- Satan himself sees through all artifice, though he is easily amused and might just decide to play along. That, in and of itself, might end up being more frightening than having the Father of Lies reveal the Gelosi for who they truly are.