

LOST DAYS OF MEMORIES AND MADNESS

Andrew Kenrick
Group Sigma

Ingredients: Memory, currency, palace

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When your civilisation is at its peak, the only way is down ...

A game of memories and madness, for 3-5 players.

LOST DAYS OF MEMORIES AND MADNESS

A Game Chef 2007 entry by Andrew Kenrick

“A man's real possession is his memory. In nothing else is he rich, in nothing else is he poor.” – Alexander Smith, Dreamthorp

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WHICH INGREDIENTS HAVE YOU USED?

Memory, Currency, Palace

WHAT IS THIS GAME ABOUT?

This game is about immortal, decadent elves at the peak of their golden age, who trade memories like currency. Players take on the roles of the elves, vying for power and dominance in the elven court. The game is about memory as a form of currency, with the acquisition and trading of memories as physical items at its heart both as a mechanic and an aim. It is about self and identity, and what trading a part of you does to your sanity.

WHAT DO THE PLAYERS DO?

Players take on the roles of the elves, each with their own goals within the court. They engage in intrigue and politics and plot against one another, attempting to manoeuvre themselves into a position of power at the expense of the others.

Elves may have many goals, such as embarking on an expedition to acquire a rare and precious memory or plotting to exact revenge on another elf, planning to usurp the King or secretly meeting with the enemies of the elves to further their own wealth.

Players collaborate to create goals and memories for one another, and then vie for control of the memories they have authored. They set scenes and conflicts to gain control of new memories and to hinder their rivals' attempts to do the same.

One of the players, in addition to his role as a player, also plays the King of the Elves. The king acts as a facilitator and chief narrator, helping to guide the players' own stories and scenes, whilst at the same time trying to achieve his own goals.

The King of the Elves also narrates the bigger picture, introducing plots and events that affect all the elves, hastening the story towards its end – the descent of the elves into madness and the eventual fall of the elven race.

The position of king is tied to a memory, and may change hands throughout the game if the memory moves between players.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO PLAY?

Each player will need a handful of six-sided dice (5 or 6 will do), 15 coins or other counters and six blank index cards. Spare coins, dice and index cards won't go amiss.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Character Card – an index card with the character’s name written on it.

Coin – a measure of wealth and influence at the Eternal Court, represented in the game with physical coins. A character starts the game with 11 coins.

Coin Purse – the coins that a player does not have invested in his memories, available to spend to influence dice rolls and create new memories.

Conflict – a mechanic to resolve in-character dispute, including battles, duels, debates and magical combat. A conflict always occurs between two opponents, either two players or a player and the king. Both opponents roll a number of dice equal to the value of any relevant memories and compare their results. The player with the highest die rolls is the winner.

Descent into Madness – the ultimate fate of all elves, when the strain of his memories becomes too great for his mind to bear. When a character has more madness coins than coins invested in his memories, he begins his descent into madness and must be written out of the story. The player of a mad elf continues to play in the game, but takes on the role of adversity and opposition to the other elves.

Dice – this game uses six-sided dice, d6s.

Elf – immortal, decadent and selfish creatures who rule a mighty empire. You.

Eternal Court – the elven seat of power, from where the King of the Elves rules his kingdom.

Eternal Palace – the grand and sprawling palace that is the home of the elves, and the setting for the game.

Gain – in a conflict, any 6s remaining at the end become points of gain, representing an increase in experience, favour and reputation. At the end of a conflict points of gain are turned into additional coins that can be placed on memory card or in the coin purse.

King of the Elves (or king) – the ruler of all elven-kind and possessor of the Memory of Kingship. The player who plays the king is also the de facto games master of the game.

Madness Coins – coins placed on a character card to represent madness and insanity. In a conflict, a character’s madness coins can be spent against him by his opponent. When a character has more madness coins than other coins, they begin their descent into madness.

Margin of Success – the number of dice that a winner has higher than a loser in a conflict. At the end of a conflict, margin of success is turned into tribute.

Market of Memories (or market) – the bustling market that surrounds the Eternal Palace, where merchants come to sell their wares. Also, the space in the middle of the table where unowned memories are placed.

Memory – the most valued commodity at the Eternal Court, bought and stolen from others for the pleasure of the elves.

Memory Card – an index card describing a memory. So long as a player possesses a memory card, his character treats that memory as though it were his own. A character starts the game with 4 memory cards.

Memory Creation – the process by which players create a pool of memory cards over 4 rounds.

Memory of Kingship – the memory of ascending to the throne that determines which elf is the king. Can be traded, sold and stolen as any other memory.

Story – the overarching events at the Eternal Palace as narrated by the king, running alongside each character's personal story.

Strain – in a conflict, any 1s remaining at the end become points of strain, representing mental, physical and social injury. At the end of a conflict points of strain turn normal coins into madness coins.

Tribute – at the end of a conflict, the winner claims tribute from the loser equal to the margin of success. Tribute must be paid in coins taken from the loser's wealth. In lieu of all tribute, the loser can give the winner a memory.

Value – how desirable and influential a memory is, represented by the number of coins on the memory card. The value of a memory fluctuates over the course of the game. When a memory is relevant in a conflict, the value determines how many dice are rolled.

Wealth – the total amount of coins a character possesses, in his memories and in his purse combined.

THE ETERNAL COURT OF THE ELVES

The Eternal Palace lies at the centre of the great and glorious kingdom of the elves, the seat of the King of the Elves and his court. The palace represents the height of elven civilisation and culture, and the depths of the depravity and decadence to which it has fallen.

The elves of the Eternal Court are sensual creatures of emotion and desire, lusting after new sensations and experiences as though they were drugs. Their appetite for new sensations is fulfilled by the trade in memories, forcibly taken through magical means from the countless peoples that the elves have enslaved as part of their kingdom.

The elven quest for more and more exquisite memories drives them further and further into depravity, their armies roaming further and further afield in search of new people to conquer, whilst the elves of the court sink deeper into madness as their minds begin to fracture.

All is not well at the Eternal Court, and the golden age of the elves is teetering at the brink. The insanity of the elves and the growing dissent amongst their conquered nations threatens to bring it to a swift and bloody end.

The elves of the court continue to plot and scheme amongst one another, trying to seize the most precious memories for themselves and find a way to halt the incoming tide of madness and rebellion ... if they notice it in time.

CREATING CHARACTERS

The elves of the Eternal Palace are entirely defined by the memories they possess.

Each elf has a **character card**, with their name written on it and nothing else. During the game, players can add notes and the like to the card. As the game progresses, coins are placed here to represent madness – these are called **madness coins**.

To start with, each character has 4 memories, each written on an index card called a **memory card**. These memories make up his personality and background. Over the course of the game these will change as he gains new memories and loses old memories. How this effects your character is up to you, but it will affect him.

Each character also has a certain amount of **wealth**, represented by coins or counters. Some of this wealth will be tied up in memories, representing the memory's **value**, some free for the character to use. Free wealth is kept next to the character card and is referred to as the **coin purse**. A character starts with 11 coins in his purse.

MEMORIES

Elven society revolves around the trade in memories. Memories are the most exotic of treasures to the elves, the most decadent of luxuries.

Each memory is written on an index card so that it can be swapped about the table as it changes hands throughout the game.

These cards represent important and defining memories, memories that have value and significance to the elves. Lesser, more mundane memories are not recorded as they have little value. It is assumed that all elves have countless normal memories, but these have no impact on the game.

In the centre of a memory card a description of the memory itself is written. This should be exceptionally tightly described to make for a more punchy memory. All memories should start with the words “I remember ...”

Some examples of well written memories:

“I remember striking down my father with his own sword.”

“I remember standing in the elven court, staring down my fellow courtiers and debating that the king should bring his armies home.”

And some examples of not so well-written memories:

“I remember being good with a sword.”

“A memory of debating politics at court.”

Notice the difference between a powerful, tightly focused memory and a much weaker, vaguer memory. Both might have a similar mechanical impact, but the first couple also add plenty of flavour and potential for story.

If you have trouble thinking up good memories, think about your own memories for a moment – which of your memories are most important to you? Try phrasing them in a similar way, and see if inspiration strikes.

The value of each memory is represented by 1 or more coins placed on the card itself. The more coins a memory has, the more valuable and important it is, not just to the owner but to everybody else.

CREATING MEMORIES

To start with, memories are created collaboratively amongst the players in a series of rounds. Players bid against one another to gain ownership of each memory.

At the start of each round, each player writes down a memory on a card and reads it out to the other players. Each round has a different theme that the memories must be connected to. One player should also write an extra memory down. All the cards are then placed in the middle of the table.

One player, it doesn't matter who, although it should not be the same player every time, grabs a memory that interests him and reads it out to the group again.

Each player takes an additional coin to bid on memories during that round. This ensures that each player has at least one coin to bid in each round.

Each player then decides how many coins to bid on the memory, holding the coins within his hand to conceal the amount from the other players. Bids are then revealed simultaneously.

If one player is the high bidder, he wins the memory, taking the card and placing it by his name card. The number of coins the winner bid for the memory are placed on the memory to represent its value.

If more than one player is tied as the high bidder, each player may openly raise their bid in turn. If both players raise their bids, continue to alternate bids until one player declines to raise. His opponent in the bidding is the winner, as before. If neither is willing or able

to raise their bid to break the tie, bids are returned and the process is started again with a new memory.

Once a memory has been won, the player to the left selects a different memory and bidding is repeated. A player may only win one memory in a given round, so once a player has successfully bid for a memory they may not bid again until the next round.

Once everyone has won a memory, the round is over and any unclaimed memories are placed off to one side for now. A new round of memory making then begins as before.

You create memories in four successive rounds, each with its own theme, and each character must win a memory in each of those four rounds.

One of the memories created during memory creation must be the Memory of Kingship, which is discussed later.

An example of memory creation:

Cate, Hugo and Martin are starting a game of Lost Days of Memories and Madness. They have each written a memory down on a blank index card and Cate has written an additional one. Hugo starts by picking up one of the memories and reads it out to the others:

“I remember the first time I beat my master whilst duelling, the look on his face as his blood dripped from my blade.”

Each player then secretly decides how many coins to bid and holds them in their hand. At the same time, they each open their hands and declare their bids. Cate has bid 1 coin, Hugo has bid 4 coins and Martin has bid 2 coins.

Hugo wins the memory, taking the memory card and placing the 4 coins he bid on the card itself. This memory now has a value of 4.

Martin then selects another memory and bidding begins anew, but because Hugo has won a memory already this round he cannot bid until next round.

THE 4 ROUNDS OF MEMORY CREATION

Memory creation takes place over 4 rounds. Each round poses a question or theme for the memories to be created.

FIRST ROUND

A memory that most defines you. These memories will become the core of your character, at least to start with.

“I remember leading the army of the Kingdom at the Battle of High Pass.”

“I remember giving birth to my one and only child.”

“I remember driving my knife in between the ribs of the previous King.”

SECOND ROUND

A memory that is an unfulfilled goal or a mystery that remains unsolved. These memories form the driving force behind your character, the motivation that forms your actions.

“I remember falling for a very long time, as though from the top of one of the palace spires. Someone pushed me, but I do not remember who.”

“I remember my father dying in my hands, his killer nowhere to be seen.”

“I remember a glimpse of buried treasure and fabulous jewels, but I do not remember where.”

THIRD ROUND

A memory that is related either to another memory or to another character. These memories foster a connection between the characters, the motivation for them to work together ... or against one another.

“I remember dying, a knife in my ribs, in the arms of my son.”

“I remember pushing a man from the top of the highest spire in the palace, watching him fall for an age to his death.”

“I remember a map to a great palace, now dust and ruin, its treasures greater than anything the Eternal Court has seen.”

FOURTH ROUND

A memory of something that has just happened. These memories are preludes to action, words that start the game and frame the character's very first scene.

“I remember waking, my hands covered in blood. It's not mine.”

“I remember snatches of conversation from behind the door, raised in anger.”

“I remember treachery, of offering the keys to the Eternal Palace in exchange for just one, exquisite thought.”

FUTURE MEMORIES

Over the course of the game new memories can be created and fought over. These should be no less powerful or potent memories than those created during memory creation, but may be defined by a theme of your own choosing. Possible themes include: need, loss, madness, death, betrayal, something material, magic.

“I remember falling in love with my wife.”

“I remember first laying eyes on the tomb’s treasures, the first creature to do so in three thousand years!”

“I remember the fires of magic swirling in the palm of my hand, my foolish master looking on jealously.”

THE MEMORY OF KINGSHIP

One of the memories created during the first four rounds must be a Memory of Kingship. The Memory of Kingship denotes that the owner is the King of the Elves, with all that entails.

At any time during memory creation, a player may write a Memory of Kingship down. When they read it aloud they must announce it as a Memory of Kingship. The memory is bid for as normal.

More than one player may create a Memory of Kingship as the rounds of memory creation progress, although no player may create more than one. The memory must fit the theme for memories created during the round as normal. In each case, any such memory is treated as the Memory of Kingship for now.

Once memory creation has been completed, the players must decide which memory is the actual Memory of Kingship, if there is more than one. This is the Memory of Kingship that has the highest value. If more than one such memory share the highest value, their owners may resume bidding to break the tie, or agree amongst themselves which is the real deal.

Once the Memory of Kingship has been agreed upon, an additional coin should be placed on the memory card to signify its increased value.

Example Memories of Kingship might include:

“I remember climbing the stone steps to sit on the throne for the first time.”

“I remember a bargain unfulfilled, that my coronation would be guaranteed, if ... what?”

“I remember the King, dead at my feet, his Crown in my hand.”

PURSE OF COINS

Once memory creation is complete, any remaining coins are placed near a character's name card to be spent later. This is his coin purse. Coins represent a character's wealth and influence that are not tied up in his memories. They could be physical wealth, such as fabulous jewels or rooms full of gold, or something more immaterial such as a prominent position at court or a trail of favours owed to him his patrons.

THE KING OF THE ELVES

The elven throne is controlled by whichever elf controls the Memory of Kingship, an ancient memory of rulership passed from king to king. Matters are often confused by the existence or appearance of more than one such memory, leading to constant disputes between opposing factions.

One of the players plays the King of the Elves, ruler of the Eternal Palace and all of the elves. The position of king is determined by whoever possesses the Memory of Kingship, which is created and bid for during character creation alongside other memories.

The king is a regular player, and gets to pursue personal goals, frame conflicts and scenes as normal. In this respect he counts as any other player, and may not bend or break the rules.

The king also has additional duties. He creates adversity for the other players, as well as helping to guide narration and frame stories with them.

TELLING A STORY

Foremost amongst the king's duties is the narration of the story. Each session of the game is focused around a story that is greater, but not necessarily more important, than the character's individual stories. The king describes this story, and it is his responsibility to weave it into scenes with the other characters.

PLAYING THE OPPOSITION

In a conflict with no clear opponent, the king steps in to play the opposition. If a memory is at stake, he rolls a number of dice equal to the value of the memory. If no memory is at stake, he rolls 3 dice. He may also spend his own coins to influence the conflict as normal.

Whenever the king plays the opposition in this way and wins, any tribute or gain earned from the conflict is paid into his own coffers, regardless of how tangentially his actual involvement in the conflict was. The king does not win any memories that are at stake if he wins the conflict, however.

The reverse is not true – if the king is on the losing side in such a conflict, the king does not pay tribute nor does he gain points of strain. Such are the perks of rulership.

Note that this only applies when the king is playing the opposition in a conflict, not when the character of the king is involved in a conflict – when the king himself is an opponent in a conflict he pays tribute and gains strain as he would normally.

An example of the king's involvement in a conflict:

Hugo is currently playing the role of the king as his character Roen possesses the Memory of Kingship.

Cate's character, Illuen, is embarking on an expedition into the jungles in search of a long lost memory. This expedition takes the form of a conflict. Because the conflict is not against another player (unless another player was also racing to reach the memory), the king steps in to act as the opposition, playing the environment, hostile creatures and other obstacles lying in Illuen's path.

Because a memory is at stake, Hugo rolls a number of dice equal to its value, in this case 4. Cate rolls her dice as normal, but loses the conflict by 2. Cate is obliged to pay 2 tribute, which she must pay to the coffers of King Roen, despite Roen having no actual involvement in the conflict.

A second example:

Later on Cate launches a follow-up conflict, trying to snatch the long lost memory. Once again Hugo steps in to play the opposition. This time, however, Cate wins the conflict. Normally she would be due tribute from the loser, but because the loser is Hugo playing the opposition, Hugo is not obliged to pay her anything.

A third example:

In a later conflict Illuen and King Roen are both competing for the same memory and roll dice as normal. Cate wins the conflict by a margin of success of 3, and because Hugo's character, King Roen, was actually involved in the conflict he must pay Illuen 3 tribute.

PLAYING EVERYONE ELSE

As well as playing the character of the King of the Elves, the king is also responsible for roleplaying non-player characters that crop up over the course of the story. He describes their actions and speaks on behalf of them. This responsibility can – and should, when it comes to the king's actions – be shared amongst the other players, so everyone has a part in roleplaying non-player characters.

THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE KING!

Over the course of the game it is possible that the position of king will change hands amongst the players – it is tied to the Memory of Kingship, and if that is sold, stolen or traded then so too is the role of king.

As soon as the Memory of Kingship changes hands, the new king must immediately frame a scene for himself, interrupting the normal order of play. If he wishes he may conclude the current story and frame a new one as part of this scene, drawing the reign of his predecessor to a close.

TELLING THE STORY

At the start of each session, the king begins by narrating the opening of the story. This is an event that takes place in or around the Eternal Palace, and has the potential to affect all of the players.

The situation should provide a compelling hook to the players, drawing them into the story weaved by the king. The story should be open ended, so that the characters can respond to it however they choose. It should be a story that, if left untended, drives on regardless of the characters, complete with its own conclusion and consequences.

Examples of such stories could include:

“An embassy from a far off land has arrived at the court bearing great treasures of gold and jewels. But undoubtedly their greatest treasures will be their exotic memories, but how can they be gained without causing great offence?”

This story helps fuel the intrigue in the game, leading to scenes involving diplomacy with the newcomers, politicking amongst the elves, and the potential for memory theft, violence and possible retaliation from abroad.

If left alone, strong alliances may be forged between the foreigners and rival elves, or something foolish might be done to them, leaving the court open to reprisals from this unknown power.

“A foul demon brought forth by magic and insanity stalks the corridors of the Eternal Palace. It slays those who it encounters, but not before it has drained them of their thoughts and memories.”

This story introduces something of a mystery and a danger to the game, leading to scenes involving occult rituals, hunting down the demon and possibly even attempts to bargain with it.

If left alone the demon might come to prey on one of the characters, and should certainly eat its way through a good chunk of the court – and therefore the economy.

“The elven army sends word of another civilisation enslaved in the name of the Eternal Court. Throughout the palace nobles scramble to dispatch their forces to seize the best pickings of the dying civilisation for themselves. Those who are too slow will be left with nothing, but those who are too fast may find the assets at home under threat.”

This story has the potential to upset the balance of power in the game, creating a rift between those who embark on expeditions abroad and those who remain at home to take advantage of the power vacuum.

Scenes could revolve around characters travelling afar and searching for juicy morsels amidst the enslaved lands, or characters left behind engaging in back-stabbing and power brokerage, attempting to seize power and wealth.

If left alone undoubtedly those elves who have travelled abroad will return home, laden down with exotic memories and fabulous treasures.

FRAMING SCENES

The game gives equal power over how the story proceeds to both player and the king, alternating between the player framing a scene and the king framing a scene.

In turn, starting with the player to the left of the king, each player frames a scene of their choosing for their character. They describe the setting, who is present and what it is they intend to achieve. Players should consider whether any conflicts will take place in their scene too, and frame those as necessary.

The first scene of any game for each player might relate to his fourth memory, the memory of something that just happened. This should give each player a good jumping off point if they are having trouble thinking of something to do.

Once every player, including the king, has framed a scene, the king frames an additional scene involving the story. He can set this up however he chooses, and can frame a conflict as part of it if he sees fit.

PERSONAL STORIES

When it is his go, each player gets to frame a scene revolving around the story that he is telling about his character.

Even if the player does not know where it is going or how it will end, each character has their own story right from the start of the game. Memory creation should result in characters bursting with possible stories, each memory gained laden down with possible tales to be told and motivations that drive the character into new and interesting situations.

If a player is ever in doubt about what to do, they should look at their memories and frame a scene around one of those. Simply by their connection to a memory, such a scene will relate to the character's goal, some immediate problem, another character or the very heart of their identity.

Although each player gets to guide their own story, all of the other players should be encouraged to join in too. They should be offering suggestions for possible scenes and conflicts, as well as weaving their own stories and scenes in with those of the other players. In fact, after memory creation each character should have links and connections to the stories of at least one of the other characters, twisting their fates together. Players

are encouraged to take these strands and weave them together – the game will be all the more satisfying for it.

THE STORY

Running parallel to and independent of the individual stories of the other players is the story of events and goings on within the Eternal Palace. The seeds of this story are planted by the king at the beginning of a game session, and further developed as part of the king's story scenes, which he frames in addition to his personal scenes.

The king should weave the threads of characters' personal stories in with the story, and the players should do likewise. Players should feel free to seize upon the story as they see fit, using their own scenes to advance it as they see fit.

FRAMING CONFLICTS

At the heart of most scenes is conflict. Conflicts are the crux points of the story, the points at which the story could go in several different directions, each of them interesting.

A conflict typically arises when a player wants something that another player does not, where a character's actions brings him into opposition with another character or the environment or a player is trying to gain a new memory.

No more than one conflict should take place as part of a scene – think of a conflict as the climax to the action within a scene. If a scene is exciting or extensive enough to warrant more than one conflict, then save them for the next one.

Conflicts should be aggressively framed with clear and interesting outcomes in the event of success or failure. The more aggressive and head-on the conflict, the more exciting the story.

No one gains anything from vague conflicts like: *“I sneak about the court to see what I can find out.”*

Far better to have a conflict like: *“I hide behind a shadow and listen to the two courtiers discussing their plans to assassinate the Duke. Then I sneak off and hope nobody noticed me leave.”*

CONFLICTS

Conflicts can represent formal duels, wars of words, subtle magicks and bloody melee. They might represent something quick such as a biting insult or something protracted, such as a long and arduous expedition. Whatever the form the conflict takes, they are all resolved in the same way.

SETTING UP A CONFLICT

A conflict is always fought between two players. If the opposition is unclear or there is no opponent, the king steps up to play the opposition.

Before the conflict is fought, both opponents must settle on the scope and stakes of the conflict. They must mutually agree what the conflict is being fought over, how it is being fought and what each opponent wants out of the conflict.

A conflict is quite often fought over a memory. If so, the memory should be placed in the centre of the table for all to see.

Once the stakes have been set, both opponents take it in turns to describe their actions and to explain which of their memories has relevance to the conflict. If their opponent agrees that this is a sensible use of the memory, its owner should push it forward slightly to show that it is being used as part of the conflict.

If the conflict is fought over a memory, the owner of the memory may bring the memory into the conflict, regardless of its relevance or connection. The memory's inclusion must still be narrated, but this can and should jar with the rest of the conflict.

An example:

King Roen and Illuen are involved in a fierce debate over how best to defeat a growing rebellion against the Eternal Palace. Cate and Hugo discuss the scope and stakes of the conflict, deciding that the conflict is verbal and social, taking place within the chambers of the Eternal Court. They agree that the stakes are that whoever wins gets to dictate the Eternal Court's response to the rebellion.

Roen argues for peace, narrating the inclusion of his memory: "I remember debating law with the great philosophers in the gardens when I was a young student."

Illuen is more warlike and argumentative in her debate, narrating the inclusion of her memories: "I remember leading the elven armies to war at the Battle of the Forked Tongue" and "I remember arguing in front of the Eternal Court, persuading them to back my course of action."

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Once both opponents have narrated their actions and agreed on which memories can be used, each opponent must count up the total value of each of their narrated memories. The player rolls a number of dice equal to the value of memories used in the conflict. Both opponents roll their dice at the same time and compare their the results.

The player who has rolled more dice higher than his opponent's dice is winning the conflict. the conflict is not entirely over yet, however – any player may attempt to influence and change the results of the conflict – see *Influencing a Conflict*, below.

The number of dice the winner has that are higher than the number of dice the opponent has is the margin of success.

The winner of a conflict gets to describe the outcome of the conflict according to the stakes and scope of the conflict, as decided from the outset.

An example:

Cate has narrated two of her memories into the conflict, one with a value of 1 and the other with a value of 3. Hugo has narrated one of his memories into the conflict, with a value of 4.

Cate rolls 4 dice and gets 3, 4, 5, 5.

Hugo rolls 4 dice and get 2, 3, 4, 4.

Both of Cate's 5s are higher than Hugo's highest roll of a 4, so she has 2 dice higher than Hugo's highest die. Cate wins the conflict with a margin of success of 2.

INFLUENCING A CONFLICT

The Eternal Court is rife with politics and intrigue, and the elves revel in influencing one another's power struggles.

After the dice have been rolled in a conflict, each player may attempt to influence the results in favour of either opponent. Starting with the loser and proceeding clockwise round the table, each player may spend a number of coins to change the dice roll.

For every coin spent, the player can choose to force one player to reroll a die or to roll an extra die.

Every time this happens, the player must add a snippet of narrative to the conflict, explaining how he is influencing events.

Each spent coin is placed on the memory at stake. If no memory is at stake in the conflict, the coins are lost.

An example of influencing a conflict:

In the above conflict, Cate has rolled a 3, 4, 5, 5, whilst Hugo has 2, 3, 4, 4. If neither player acts any further, Cate will win with a margin of success of 2.

Hugo opts to spend a coin, rerolling the 2. He rolls a 6. He is now winning the conflict with a margin of success of 1, narrating that he uses his status to browbeat the courtiers into siding with him.

Cate spends a coin and forces Hugo to reroll the 6. He does so and rolls a 1. He is no longer winning. Cate narrates that Illuen resorts to bribery, spreading coins and favours about the court to persuade the King's allies to side with her.

Finally, Martin decides to come down on Hugo's side and spends a coin to force Cate to reroll one of her 5s. She does so but it comes up as a 6, cementing her victory! Martin narrates that he is calling in favours at court, but in the end Illuen's coin is more influential than Mirafar's words.

Cate still wins with a margin of success of 2.

MADNESS

The greatest fear amongst the immortal elves is madness; the greatest taboo is the mention that the stolen memories of others is the path to insanity.

If a character has any madness coins, then whenever they are in a conflict their opponent may spend their madness coins to influence the conflict as though they were their own coins. The opponent must add a snippet of narrative, showing how his opponent's insanity expresses itself.

Once spent in this way, madness coins are lost, not placed on a memory.

An example of madness coins:

In the above conflict, Cate has a madness coin. Hugo decides to use it against her to give himself an advantage, spending her madness coin as he would a coin of his own to force Cate to reroll her 6. She does so, rolling a 4, reducing her margin of success to 1. Hugo narrates that despite her fearsome words, the bloodlust in her eyes shines through and unnerves the court.

STRAIN AND GAIN

Finally, after the conflict is resolved and tribute has been paid, but before the dice have been swept away, each player must take a look at their final results.

For every 6 remaining, they may take a point of gain. For every point of gain they may take a coin and add it to one of their memories or their coin purse.

The player must narrate how the conflict has turned things in their favour, describing how they have gained influence and wealth as a result of the conflict.

For every 1 they rolled that still remains, they must take a point of strain. For every point of strain they must move a coin from one of their memories to their character card, where it becomes a madness coin.

The player must narrate how the conflict has turned things against him, describing how the strain of his memories is causing him to go insane.

An example of gain:

At the end of a conflict, after everyone has applied their influences, Cate has a 6 remaining. She takes a point of gain, taking a coin and adding it to her purse. She narrates how her success in the conflict resulted in newfound allies coming forward to support her.

An example of strain:

At the end of a conflict, Hugo has a 1 remaining amongst his dice. He takes a point of strain and must move a coin from one of his memories to his character card, where it becomes a madness coin.

TRIBUTE

The winner of a conflict must demand tribute from the loser, representing compensation, tithes, rewards or pain. For every margin of success the winner won the conflict by, the loser must pay the winner 1 coin. This coin may be taken from their coin purse or one of their memories, as chosen by the loser.

Coins paid in tribute must then be added either to the coin purse of the winner.

Instead of losing coins, the loser may instead opt to lose a memory, giving the memory and any attached coins to the winner. This negates any further coin loss, regardless of the margin of success or the value of the memory.

The winner must narrate the form that this tribute takes.

An example of tribute:

In the above conflict, Cate has won with a margin of success of 1. She demands 1 tribute from Hugo, who must pay her a coin from either his purse or one of his memories. Hugo's purse is nearly empty so he takes a coin from one of his memories and tosses it across the table to her. Cate places it in her purse and narrates that as a result of the argument, the King's reputation has suffered a bruising and he is forced to work harder to placate his allies.

Another example of tribute:

In a later conflict, Cate loses badly by 4 to Martin. She does not want to pay 4 coins, so instead gives Martin one of her memory cards with a value of 2. Those 2 coins would not normally pay the tribute, but because she is giving up a memory the tribute is paid in full.

STAKING MEMORIES

Most conflicts will revolve around a memory. This memory is said to be at stake, and the winner of the conflict wins the memory. The memory might be a memory from the market, or a memory belonging to one of the players.

If the memory at stake is owned by one of the participants in the conflict, its owner may roll dice for the memory regardless of its relevance to the narrative.

Any coins spent in a conflict are added to the memory at stake.

A character can stake their own memories as part of a conflict, hoping to increase its value. This is risky, because if they lose, they lose the memory.

An example:

In a conflict, one of King Roen's memories is at stake. The memory has a value of 2, so Hugo may roll 2 dice for the memory regardless of whether it has any relevance to the conflict.

Over the course of the conflict, a total of 3 coins are spent influencing the conflict. These 3 coins are placed on the memory, increasing its value to 5. Luckily Hugo wins the conflict and keeps the memory, its value greatly increased by being so coveted!

STEALING MEMORIES

Whilst a memory resides within a memory stone, stealing it is simply a case of stealing the stone. In reality it is rarely so simple, as elves surround their memory stones with protective wards and curses to guard against petty thievery.

Rather more complicated is the task of stealing a memory from the mind of another creature. Doing so requires powerful magic, temporarily melding the mind of the thief

and the victim to enable the thief to rifle through his victim's memories to find the desired one.

The theft of a memory is simply a conflict between the thief and the memory's owner, with the memory itself as the stake. As the memory is at stake, its owner can roll its dice regardless of their relevance to the conflict.

The description of the theft is left to the participants. It could revolve around the thief breaking into his target's bedchambers to steal a memory stone, doing battle with the magical wards that lay guard there. Or it could involve him sneaking into his victim's mind, actually entering the memory itself and attempting to seize ownership of it that way.

THE MARKET OF MEMORIES

Surrounding the gates of the Eternal Palace is the Market of Memories, the place where the elves come to find new memories, where merchants from all corners of the world come to sell their wares, and where the truly desperate come to pawn their most treasured memories.

Any remaining memories leftover at the end of memory creation are placed in the middle of the table. This is the market and represents memories that are available to buy. New memories that are created during the game are placed in the market too.

Unlike memories created during memory creation, memories in the market cannot simply be bought. Instead they must be won as part of a stake in a conflict.

CREATING NEW MEMORIES

At any point in the game, a player can opt to create a new memory as part of his scene. To do so costs a coin, which is placed on the new memory. The player then writes whatever memory he wishes on a card and places it in the market. If he wants to gain the memory for himself, he has to frame a conflict around it as normal.

REPLENISHING THE MARKET OF MEMORIES

If there are ever less than a couple of memories in the market, all the players should take time out for a new round of memory creation. Pick a theme for the round – anything from magic to love to childhood – and have every player create a memory. But instead of bidding for them, the memories go straight into the market.

GAINING NEW MEMORIES

Once the game has started, new memories can only be gained as part of a conflict with the memory as the stake. The player frames a conflict around the memory in some way and either the king or another player poses as the opposition. The winner of the conflict – if a player – wins the memory.

Conflicts could range from anything from intensively haggling with a merchant in the Market of Memories to embarking on an expedition to gather the new memory.

TRADING MEMORIES

Players are free to come to their own agreements over memories, freely trading and selling them amongst themselves for however many coins or other memories they can agree upon. Players can trade favours too, offering to help out in future conflicts in return for coin or memory now.

It should be noted that any agreements made in character are not in any way binding by the rules. Betrayal, double-crossing and the like are encouraged, in the spirit of courtly intrigue. If you engage in such duplicitous behaviour, only do so if it remains fun for everyone. Screwing over your buddies too much is a sure fire way to ensure no one has any fun.

SELLING MEMORIES

Memories are the most valuable items a character can possess, infinitely more valuable to a character than mere coin, but sometimes hard times call for hard decisions. A memory can be sold to the market, netting the character a number of coins equal to its value less one.

DESCENT INTO MADNESS

Over the course of the game, each character will tell their personal story, battling questions of self and identity and madness along the way. The fall of the elves is beyond the scope of this game, but the fall of individual characters is not. The most likely way that this will happen is through madness.

When a character has more madness coins than the total number of coins he has on his memory cards (not in his coin purse), he descends into madness. A character who descends into madness must be written out of the story in their next scene. The manner in which he is written out is up to the player.

Perhaps his body gives way under the stress of his fractured mind, or he might decide to take his own life and hurl himself off the tallest of the towers. The memories of an insane elf are fair game to other elves, and he will find himself beset on all sides by former associates eager to get hold of his memories before he loses them altogether.

To represent this, his memories are placed in memory market, available for acquisition by the other characters as normal. However, the memories of a madman are rarely without a price – if a character gains one of these memories, he gains a madness coin too.

Once a character has been written out of the game, his player takes on the role of adversity against the elves, playing the threat to the Eternal Court. He may continue to frame scenes and influence conflicts, but instead of playing his own character he plays the part of whatever insidious foes threaten the elves. He can use any coins he had remaining in his purse when he went insane, as well as any madness coins, to influence conflicts.

An example:

Cate's character, Illuen, has 2 coins in her purse and 5 coins on her memories. She has 5 madness coins – equal to the total value of her memories. In her next scene she gains another madness coin, bringing her to 6 madness coins and tipping her into madness.

Cate narrates Illuen's mind snapping after losing a game of chess with her rival and lover, drawing her blade and running him through. She describes Illuen, still spattered with blood, locked inside a cell high in one of the Eternal Palace's spires, her howls fallin on deaf ears.

All of Illuen's memory cards are placed in the market for Hugo and Martin to fight over. If either of them gains one of Illuen's former memory cards, they gain a madness coin too.

Cate continues to play the game, but instead of framing scenes for Illuen, she narrates scenes of adversity and opposition for the other players and the Eternal Palace, describing the strife and turmoil ranged against them.

ENDING THE GAME

The game ends when only one player remains in the game, the remainder of elven civilisation scattered and fallen.

At the end of the game, the remaining player may narrate an epilogue, describing the fall of the elves and the eventual fate of his character.

THE IMMORTAL ELVES

Elves are tall and delicate-looking creatures, with thin, pointed features and pale skin that glistens silver or gold in a certain light. They are arrogant and ruthlessly selfish, always on the lookout for ways to better their own position at the expense of others.

Elves are immortal creatures, untouched by old age or disease or illness. They are not entirely invincible, although myths encouraged by the elves themselves suggest otherwise, and hardy as they might be, a cursed knife in the ribs or a magical explosion can kill an elf. For this reason elves tend to favour ritualistic combat or a battle of wits to settle disagreements, or use armies of enslaved creatures to fight their wars for them.

Needless to say, elves dress flamboyantly, choosing to display their inevitably vast wealth as copiously as possible. Long flowing cloth decorated in individualised patterns is the current vogue amongst the elves of the Eternal Court. Elves venturing beyond the court may dress a little more practically, but no less fashionably.

Elven warriors march into battle with hand-crafted suits of armour, individually fashioned from crystal, bone or precious metals. The elven weapon of choice is magic, of which every elf is a master, although elven soldiers supplement this with hardened-glass swords, crystal daggers and bows that fire lightning and thunder. At court the weapon of choice is the rapier, more often fashioned out of quicksilver or a tongue of flame than mere metal.

ELVEN SOCIETY

Elven society is built on the backs of those who have fallen before their armies. Elves are decadent creatures, preferring to spend their days indulging in personal pleasure and selfish activities than pursue anything resembling hard work.

Elves make extensive use of slave labour, preferring to use slaves taken from conquered peoples, their defining memories forcibly stripped out of them, leaving behind grey, soulless and pliant masses easily cajoled into doing their work.

Supervising the slaves are the favoured amongst the subservient races, those vassals who have willingly submitted to the rule of the elves. They are treated as servants rather than slaves, granted a modicum of trust and independence to get on with their tasks on their own, and to supervise others.

Above the vassals are the elves themselves, their own society replete with multitudinous layers of hierarchy and bureaucracy. The differences between the various strata of elven society are so slight and nebulous as to be meaningless to any but the elves themselves. Suffice it to say, elven society is a constantly shifting, ephemeral and ill-defined structure, dominated by vague concepts of wealth and influence.

Elves do as they please, and only what they please. They are the ultimate elite, the noblest of the nobility, and spend their days enjoying the fruits of the labours of others. Most elves are true nobles, politicians and courtiers. Others devote themselves to magic, becoming sorcerers and magi. Others still, especially the young, foolhardy and thrill seekers, become knights, leading slave armies to war against inferior civilisations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMORIES

Elven society revolves around the trade in memories. Memories are the most exotic of treasures to the elves, the most decadent of luxuries. Once upon a time, perhaps the elves were content to enjoy their own memories, or to venture abroad to create new memories for themselves, but nowadays they are lazy and rely on others to acquire new and exciting memories for them.

MEMORIES AND MADNESS

There comes a point in most elves' lives when the jigsaw puzzle of memories that are not really their own becomes too much for their mind to handle, fractures beginning to appear in the elven psyche. As strong-willed as most elves are, even the most resilient of elves has trouble from time to time reconciling and making sense of contradictory memories.

When your strongest memory is of falling in love with your wife, of whom you have no other recollection because the memory belonged to someone else, it can cause something inside to break, sometimes to the point where it cannot be put back together again.

All elves are insane to a certain degree, but none would admit it. To even broach the topic of madness is taboo, and its existence, even amongst obviously insane individuals, is only ever alluded to in euphemism.

But just because elves don't like to talk about it, they are still more than willing to step in and do something about it. When a society's entire economy is tied into its memories, the prospect of losing them to senility and madness is a chilling thought. Once it has become known that an elf has gone insane, an unspoken decision is made to salvage the finest of his memories – for posterity, of course – leaving the elf further enfeebled and near-mindless for the remainder of his life.

ELVEN MAGIC

Elven magic is subtle in its ways, as elegant as those who wield it. It is not flashy or over the top, and nor is it able to effect many more people than the elf who uses it. All elves make use of elven magic, most often to ward themselves against the glamours of other elves or to make life easier for themselves.

A spell might cause the stone of a castle wall to fracture and crumble, but could not cause the walls to come tumbling down. A spell might cause an assassin's blade to turn aside at

the last minute, but could not cause the assassin to drop down dead. A spell might coat a diplomat's words with the gloss of honesty and truth, but could not control his audience's minds.

Although elven magic has a tendency towards personal and limited effects, its potency greatly increases when elves work together to weave their spells. A coterie of elves can wield much more powerful and insidious magic, causing armies to run away in fear, castles to crumble, and murder and betrayal to topple entire courts.

It is perhaps for the best that elves are such selfish creatures that they have little desire to work together for anything.

The most powerful elven magicks revolve around memory, allowing an elf to give physical form to his memories and those of other creatures, with or without their permission.

MEMORY STONES

Perhaps the high point of elven magic is the creation of memory stones, delicate crystals that magically store the most emotional and impassioned memories of the wearer. By extracting memories into memory stones, the memories themselves can be traded as commodities by the elves.

Elves incorporate their memory stones into fantastic pieces of jewellery, although their magical nature enables them to extract and consume ethereal memories in their pure form as well.

Memory stones are forced upon those peoples who live under elven rule, used to extract and store particularly potent memories that can be tithed to their greedy masters. In the lands ruled by the elves, memory stones are worn around the necks of all people from birth, the memories collected within them periodically sampled or taken by the tithe collectors.

The theft of a memory stone is a heinous crime amongst the elves, punishable by magically erasing all the thief's memories, leaving him a drooling, mindless husk. Ever wary of theft, elves store their most precious memories deep within their minds, only resorting to memory stones to trade memories or gather new ones.

A victim robbed of his memory stone is robbed of all memories contained within – usually the most important and sacred memories a person can hold – leaving him a little more hollow, a little more dead inside.

THE ETERNAL PALACE

Rising above the surrounding lands like five giant fingers of stone is the Eternal Palace of the elves. No one can be sure how long the palace has stood, or who originally built it, but it is a grand structure on a scale unknown anywhere else in the world.

The Eternal Palace is a sprawling structure with countless wings and extensions added to over the years. It has many entrances, all of them grand, and its walls are decorated with fabulously expensive friezes, mosaics and carvings. Dominating the palace are five great spires that rise gracefully up into the sky, as if to threaten to pierce the heavens themselves.

The Eternal Palace is the home of the elves, each of whom has their own wings and suites and rooms. The many parts of the palace are connected by a labyrinth of corridors, hallways and sweeping staircases, and many a visitor has got hopelessly lost traversing its passages.

The ease with which a visitor can find themselves lost is further compounded by the layers of magic weaved into the stones themselves, causing corridors to shift and doors to open into completely different parts of the palace. The elves maintain that this is for their own convenience, but most know it is to confound the unwary.

Interspersing the private chambers and public halls, the palace has countless open courtyards and formal gardens, each the frequent location for the political manoeuvring and courtly intrigue that is the elves' favourite pastime.

At the very heart of the Eternal Palace is a grand, vaulted chamber with a single throne at one end, atop a flight of steps. This is the Eternal Court, the focus of all elven society, and it is from here that the King of the Elves rules his kingdom. The chamber often echoes with the sounds of fierce debate and arguments, for the elves are a passionate people in all that they do.

THE EMPIRE OF THE ELVES

Beyond the spires of the Eternal Palace are the lands of the elves, incorporating hundreds of different peoples and cultures, their individuality and distinctiveness long since erased to . The elves have ruled a great empire for countless thousands of years. Most civilised lands from coast to distant coast are under the direct control of the elves, or pay tribute to the Eternal Court as vassal kingdoms.

When the emissaries of the Eternal Court arrive in a foreign land, its rulers are given a stark choice – submit willingly to the elves or have all remains of native culture and society ruthlessly and systematically destroyed.

Sensible rulers choose the former option, submitting to elven rule as client kingdoms. The elves leave these rulers their autonomy, trading rare commodities and teaching them

elven magic. In exchange the entire populace must wear elven memory stones to catch their most precious memories, and the client kingdom must pay an annual tithe of its finest memories to the Eternal Court.

Those foolhardy enough to stand up to the elves are quickly visited by the armies of the elves, their own meagre warriors inevitably swept aside by a force of elite elven knights and sorcerers. Once the armies have been defeated, the rulers captured and the people submissive, elven magi descend upon the land to forcibly strip its people of their memories, leaving behind a soulless, empty race lacking in identity and culture. The armies return home replete with slaves and memory stones, both destined for the cruel consumption of the Eternal Court.

THANKS

Thanks to all of Group Sigma for their advice and encouragement throughout.

Thanks to Jason Morningstar, Fred Hicks and Graham Walmsley for their mechanical advice.

Thanks to the members of the Collective Endeavour, especially Matt Machell and Iain McAllister for being my guinea pigs and sounding boards.

But thanks most of all must go to Ruth, whose excitement, enthusiasm and thoughts on game kept me on course throughout, and whose gentle prodding and kicks up the backside made me stay true to the original vision. I hope the finished entry lives up to its original promise!

DESIGN NOTES

Mechanically, the core of the game owes a lot to Sorcerer, Cold City and, especially, Covenant. The dice rolling of the former two games, combined with the narrative element attached to the manipulation of the dice roll from the latter has been a great influence. I like fun and interesting dice mechanics, and with the advice of Fred Hicks to attach narrative reason to every change of the dice I think this is a stronger

Thematically the primary influences for the game are Polaris, the Dictionary of Mu, and Don't Rest Your Head, all of which communicate a tragic and evocative setting in such a short space.

The vision of the elves is taken from a number of sources, most notably the self-centred elves in the Shadow of Yesterday, as well as the arrogant High Elves and Eldar from Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000.

In my head at least, the design of the elves and elven civilisation is intended to be reminiscent of art nouveau, all curves and flowing lines and sensual edges. The Eternal Palace is modelled on Gaudi's Sagrada Familia cathedral in Barcelona. Maybe someday I'll realise this vision with pictures, but for now you'll have to imagine it.

At the very heart of the setting was me wondering why elves were rarely depicted at their peak, always after their decline, and what such a powerful race would look like at the height of their hubris. This game is the end result.

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