



The Greater Trumps

by

Ken Brown, Hugh Eckert, and Dave Singer;
from an original idea by Ken Brown.

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The Larp Library version of The Greater Trumps stands
as a memorial to

G. David Singer
LARP writer, LARP video pioneer
and student of the Tarot.

He was a brilliant and generous man without whom this
game would not exist.

This statement must be included in all copies of "The Greater Trumps" distributed to players. It is in the Rulebook, but must be distributed if the game is reformatted for any reason



The Greater Trumps

The Greater Trumps was written and produced by Ken Brown, Hugh Eckert, and Dave Singer; from an original idea by Ken Brown.

This game is respectfully dedicated to Charles Williams; Pamela Colman-Smith and A. E. Waite; and the unknown men and women who in the Renaissance first formulated the Major Arcana.

The authors owe the shape of the Hierarchy to Gareth Knight. It comes from his book The Magical World of the Tarot: Fourfold Mirror of the Universe, Aquarian 1991. Copyright 1991 Gareth Knight.

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Many thanks to the players who contributed to our new Trumps: Brandon Brylawski, E. Augustus Knapp, J. Gordon Olmstead-Dean, Stacia Schwartz (who also gave invaluable MS-Word support), and Celia Tite. Thanks also to all those who sent in ideas- they were great!

Inspirational Sources: Aliester Crowley, John Crowley, Eden Gray, T.S. Eliot, Tim Powers, Shriekback, Robin Williamson, ZBS Radio, and a host of others.

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SECRET GM DATA

This file is a compilation of things about The Greater Trumps (hereinafter referred to as TGT for brevity) that are not evident from reading the player material. This is in no particular order, and includes (but is not limited to) the following:

Environmental Notes - information about plot elements, game structure, playing space, and the like.

Character Notes - facts about certain characters that are not evident from reading their sheets.

Endgame - notes about judging new Hierarchies, and what should happen if there's no new one created.

General Stuff - anything else we've forgotten.

This list is by no means supposed to be exhaustive. Please feel free to contact us if you need clarifications.

ENVIRONMENTAL NOTES

TGT takes place in a "consensus space", a quasi-physical meeting spot called the Conclave that is maintained by The World, who as a consequence acts as the host. Reality is somewhat mutable, and there are no objects or items as such. Players should be encouraged to bring appropriate (non-dangerous) costume props, but they have no real function in the game.

Space requirements: there needs to be enough space for 35 players to mingle freely. It is desirable but not absolutely necessary for there to be enough space for all players to stand together. If space is too limited, group situations (like the forming of the new Hierarchy) can be simulated by laying badges out.

Feel free to set up the space in any way you see fit. Mood and atmosphere are always helpful. The following items are essential to have on hand: blank item cards, paper, writing instruments, tape, extra copies of the bluesheets, at least one set of Tarot Minor Arcana (for combat resolution), and an audio tape of a thunderstorm

with equipment capable of playing it at a high volume (see "The Storm and Reversals", below). It is also helpful to have a few extra copies of Tarot Minor Arcana (for when things get really hairy), and a few copies of the Tarot Major Arcana (for sample Hierarchy layouts).

Time considerations: TGT takes a minimum of four hours of actual playing time. At the Intercon 9.5 run, we had four hours *total* time, including some packet handout, briefing, and game wrap. Most players didn't think that was enough. At the 2/4/95 run, we had 5 hours of playing time, plus an hour before for handout/briefing, and a (practically) unlimited time after for wrap. Of course, the task expanded to fill the time allotted, and the game still went to the wire. Here is a suggested schedule:

45 minutes - packet handout and pre-game interaction. No combat or special ability use.

15 minutes - intro, combat demo, questions.

4 - 5 hours - playing time, including final Hierarchy layout.

15 minutes - GM huddle to determine outcome. (Also a good time for players to fill out questionnaires)

45 minutes + - game wrap and questions.

The Change Storm: This is the destabilizing factor for the game. If no-one had found out about it, it would have blown the Hierarchy apart; at the very least this would have returned things to pre-Hierarchy days, at the worst it would quite possibly have permanently unfocused a number of Personae.

The Change Storm is a wall of darkling chaos, swirling and boiling and roaring, that stretches in every direction as far as can be perceived. It will sweep across the Conclave by the time of endgame. For some suggestions on what happens then, see the section of this document titled "Endgame".

If anyone wants to take a closer look at the Storm, the Ship or the Chariot should be able to convey them there and get them away again (see "Character Notes" for more details). There are more reasons for doing this than simply sightseeing. In the 2/4/95 game, the Magus came up with the bright idea of putting together sample Hierarchies as "thought-forms" or mental constructs, and then

tossing them into the Storm to see if how they disintegrated could give any clues as to their viability. This a good possible conduit for GM hints if the players are floundering.

Of course, there is another, more sinister use for the Storm. If someone loses a combat near the Storm, and becomes unfocused, well... it *should* be the end of them. Use your judgment- if it is near the end of the game, or there are uncast parts for the players, or there's something else for the players to do, well... the Persona snuffs it. If not, the Persona should get a double dose of down-time, and maybe some other bad things, too. Exceptions are to be found under "Character Notes", below.

The Storm and Reversals: as the Storm approaches, it causes considerable upheaval, even in the settled and peaceful environment of the Conclave. Refer to the document called "REVERSAL.DOC". It is relatively self-explanatory. Decide who gets hosed... uh, reversed or unfocused a few minutes before each storm pulse. Tell these players what is going to happen to them when the next "storm sounds" come through. At the proper time, play the thunderstorm tape loud enough to get everyone's attention.

There are no hard-and-fast rules as to who you should reverse/unfocus, except that the Prisoner gets it every time. Do whoever you think might be amusing; pick those who haven't gotten hit yet.

CHARACTER NOTES:

The Fool: is actually not a Persona. He/she is a Form, a representation of the archetype of totality who is playing at being a Persona. He/she cannot be unfocused, and will not be affected by the Storm. It is important to cast this one carefully. All Lesser Arcana cards that are "destroyed" or removed end up going to the Fool.

The Magus: If the Magus is unfocused near the Storm, he isn't done for. He will be out for double or triple the normal time (use your judgment; it may depend on how close you are to endgame), but will get a valuable

insight into Hierarchy construction.

The Lovers: This character can be played by one or two characters. The two-player version is "LOVERS.DOC", the single-player is "LOVERS1.DOC". For the two-player version, you will have to print out two copies of the character sheets, bluesheets, ability cards, etc. You should make sure to let each player know who his/her counterpart is ahead of time so they can coordinate costume, etc.

The Chariot: Can carry one other Persona out to the Storm. Can do this four times

The Devil: is actually the reversed aspect of a card called (variously) the Satyr or Pan. The reversed aspect is really the upright one, and vice-versa. Some of the other Personae's hang-ups about sensuality and dionysian energy caused the Devil to become the way he is.

The Moon: The backdoor she needs to create will depend on her placement in the Hierarchy (on the fringe would be good) and whether she can get any others to help. She might also want to find something devious to say at the creation ritual.

The World: If the World is unfocused near the Storm, she isn't done for. The stabilizing powers of this Persona will simply make her re-manifest at the heart of the Conclave after the necessary period of inactivity.

The Chameleon: If a hint is needed on how to act like a particular character, use the intro paragraph for the character. If the Chameleon is equidistant to more than one other Persona, he/she takes on a blend of what their two personalities are like. If the Chameleon is placed equidistant to all other Personae, he/she will writhe painfully for a moment, and then become identified with the Fool for five minutes.

The Hero Twins/Hero: This character can be played by one or two characters. The two-player version is "HEROTWNS.DOC", the single-player is "HERO.DOC". For the two-player version, you will have to print out two copies of the character sheets, bluesheets, ability cards, etc. You should make sure to let each player know who his/her counterpart is ahead of time so they can coordinate costume, etc. There is a different set of ability

cards for each version. If you are using the Hero, you might want to tell people to read "Hero" for each mention of "Hero Twins".

The Prisoner: This Persona was meant to be called The Servant. The fact that the Magus and others unjustly excluded the Outsiders has made him what he is. This is why he flip-flops at every Storm-surge. It is a good idea to encourage the player to bring some removable handcuffs, chains, etc. so he/she can do lightning costume shifts-there will be a lot of them. He will have to be included in a new Hierarchy in his "reversed" aspect in order for his injustice to be redressed.

The Rains: when reversed, can become an avatar of the Storm. If he is reversed more than halfway through the game, he becomes the Storm, and can go ravaging through the Conclave for a minute or so. Anyone he touches with his left hand is unfocused for a minute; anyone he touches with his right is reversed for 5 minutes. This should also happen if he is reversed or unfocused near the Storm.

The Ship: can carry up to 5 other Personae out to the Storm. Can do this four times.

The Tree of Life: this is a brand-new Persona, born out of the turmoil of the passing of the Storm. She got to the conclave before the Storm because of her connection to everything. By her nature, she provides such a stable axis that a Hierarchy built around her does not need to be blessed by the Fool to come alive. Perhaps this is the Universe's way of trying to compensate...

ENDGAME

The game ends when the Storm reaches the Conclave. It can actually be ended before this point, if the players actually get their act together and form a new Hierarchy before the Storm reaches them. The Storm should be inexorable, though: it will reach the Conclave by the game end time, and nothing can be done to slow it down, much less stop it. At this point, the GMs should huddle and decide what happens. This comes in two parts: General Structure, and Lesser Arcana.

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General Structure: This should be pretty easy to judge. Does it cohere? Does it look stable? Is there a logical place for every Persona? Are there any gaps in the structure? Has the Moon done anything weird in her "back-door" preparations? The new Hierarchy doesn't need to be foursquare, or circular, or even hierarchical. It just needs to make sense, and have a lot of connections. Something strung-out and fragile won't make it; neither will something tenuous. Some Personae can be left Outside. More than one Hierarchy can be created, as long as both have at least eight Personae, and get the Fool to bless them (or have the Tree in one).

Lesser Arcana: Each Persona in a Hierarchy needs to have at least one Lesser Arcana. Any who do not will be torn out of place by the Storm, which will cause the whole thing to collapse. It is important to have a balance; i.e. all Personae at a certain level have one number, at a higher (or more central) level more, etc. The suit distribution should be logical, also. Basically, the distribution of the Lesser Arcana should be worked in some way into the design of the Hierarchy, in a way that makes sense.

If the players don't found a Hierarchy, well... Most Personae will be battered, confused, and unfocused for a good long time. The Fool will be unaffected. The Rains will be absorbed into the Storm. Think of hurricanes hitting a coast. Destruction, confusion, but the survivors rebuild.

If the Hierarchy collapses under the Storm, it will be even worse. Many Personae will be permanently unfocused. All except the Fool will have to spend a good long time getting re-focused. It will be a scene of terrible devastation, like the bombing of Dresden or the wreck of the Titanic.

It is quite possible for the players to have a qualified success: a new Hierarchy that weathers the storm, but won't survive the next one. After all, that's what happened with the one the Magus built.

GENERAL NOTES

Feel free to release judicious tidbits of this to the players if they use their special abilities correctly.

Reversal and Unfocusing: Reversal seems quite normal to the Persona experiencing it. They shouldn't be allowed to tell everyone about their state (although some special abilities focus on it), and will resent any imputation that they are acting strangely. Unfocusing is a different story. It is like being suspended over a pit of hungry sharks or a bottomless pit full of vast, dark shapes. It *hurts*, too. The Prisoner is the exception- he just gets locked up again. Encourage unfocused players to weep and carry on after they come out of it.

If you think TGT needs changes, let us know- we're open to suggestions. We would really prefer to make any changes ourselves. Please make sure you include the "Credits" with each character packet. We especially need to have the "Gareth Knight" paragraph left intact, as we used some of his ideas for inspiration, and we want to give him credit.

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REVERSAL SCHEDULE

7pm game starts
7:30 reverse Prisoner, 1 other trump
8:30 reverse Prisoner, 1 other trump
9:00 reverse Prisoner, 1 other trump
9:30 reverse Prisoner, 1 other trump
10:00 reverse Prisoner, 1 other trump; unfocus 1 trump
10:15 reverse Prisoner, 1 other trump; unfocus 1 trump
10:30 reverse Prisoner, 1 other trump; unfocus 1 trump
10:45 reverse Prisoner, 1 other trump; unfocus 2 trumps
11:00 reverse Prisoner, 1 other trump; unfocus 2 trumps
11:15 reverse Prisoner, 1 other trump; unfocus 2 trumps
11:30 reverse Prisoner, 2 other trumps; unfocus 2 trumps
11:45 reverse Prisoner, 2 other trumps; unfocus 2 trumps
12:00 endgame

all reversals are for 5 minutes. all unfocusings are for 1 minute. all such are accompanied by “storm surge”

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STUFFING THE MAILING AND CHARACTER PACKETS

The pre-game (post-casting) mailing gets:

The character sheet

Intro bluesheet

Disclaimers

Every packet gets:

The character sheet

Intro bluesheet

Combat bluesheet

Who's who bluesheet

Creating a new Hierarchy bluesheet

Post-game questionnaire

Credits sheet

Special Ability Cards (see below)

Nametags (see below)

Lesser Arcana Tarot Cards (see below)

In addition, the Magus, the Scholar, the Stranger, and the Moon start with the Lesser Arcana bluesheet

Special Ability Cards: the Adobe Acrobat Version contains preformatted Cards, ready to cut

Nametags: For the Originals, we used normal-sized Rider-Waite cards. These cards were placed in plastic pockets that we salvaged from an old photo album; the pockets were then sealed and had large safety pins taped to the back. For the Outsiders, we made card-sized collages of appropriate black-and-white clip-art.

Lesser Arcana: These cards should be from the same type of deck you used to make the Originals' badges, and distinctly different from the cards used for combat resolution. They represent elemental tokens of essence, and are necessary for the formation of the new Hierarchy. The distribution is as follows:

The Fool: none

The Magus: the aces and tens of each suit (8)

Justice: the court cards of Swords (4)

Strength: the court cards of Wands (4)

Temperance: the court cards of Cups (4)

The World: the court cards of Pentacles (4)

All other Originals - 2, randomly selected or appropriately chosen

The Outsiders each get 1, except for the City who gets 4 and the Prisoner who gets none.

Obviously, you will need more than one deck for this. You can use the remaining cards as a pool for certain special abilities to draw on.

If you have any questions, please get in touch!

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