



# Behind the Masc

**reenvisioning masculinity through roleplaying  
game materials, art, and games**

by Beau Jágr Sheldon, Lawrence Gullo, Tracy Barnett,  
Raiden Otto, Aven Elia McConnaughey, Patrick Lickman,  
Adrian Heise, Lemmo Pew, and Eli Eaton

Edited and curated by Beau Jágr Sheldon

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Thank you to the contributors for their efforts and creativity. This project is a dream come true, and you were the key to unlocking the possibilities. -Beau (formerly Brie)

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# The Mabon Monastery

A background for Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition

Lawrence Gullo

*I had lost the road, my cart, and my horse to the crawling woods when I came across the wild, howling tribe of brothers known as the Mabon. They tipped sweet forest fruit into my mouth and pulled at my arms, inviting me to dance. Every thicket hummed with their voices and their moon shadows fell on the soft earth. I didn't know whether they meant to make love to me, or to tear me limb from limb. When morning came, they were gentle, and told me the story of their kind. It began with them asking me the simple question:*

*"Are you a man?"*

*Though it was the simplest question in the world to answer, their next would take my whole lifetime to consider.*

*"And how do you know?"*

No matter what shape the moon takes, she is still the moon. So it is with the brothers of the Mabon. The shapes, colors, and expression of a man may be terrible, beautiful, and changeable – yet every instance is that of man. Their worship is the celebration and reverence of those many infinite shapes. Their mission is for every man to explore his identity in his own way. Travelers who come from the Mabon Monastery view it as a refuge for men whose identities have in some way been restricted or denied by their society.

## Moon Worship

The monastery residents are known to follow the cycle of the moon. When the moon is full, their revelry is a frightening thing to behold – wild, violent dances wind through their forest and music fills the air. Wanderers who come upon such a revelry are easily swept up into it, and can lose themselves in wine and flurries of limbs.

When the moon is new, the priests of Mabon are as placid as pilgrims wading through a still, low tide. The forest is witness to their meditative prayer, soundless lovemaking, and whispered poetry.

These practices can inspire fear in outsiders, and many shocking tales have been spun. However, temple priests have never once taken up arms against innocents, and have always offered services to visitors. Fortune telling, massage, healing, and scribing have all been provided to those who seek it.

## A Temple For All Shape of Man

The temple is home to men of all expression – some fearsome brave, some stoic, some graceful and soft of limb and voice. To them, a man can look any way he pleases, and the goddess will rejoice so long as he lives his truth.

Some of the brothers were called to the monastery by their faith, but many arrived as refugees from terrible circumstances. So it was for the two men who founded the temple: the Mabon man and the Waxing man. One was assigned female at birth and escaped his home to live more truthfully. The other was a veteran who had deserted his battle to pursue a life of gentleness. Together they found peace, healing, comradeship, and a newfound celebration of their bodies and masculine spirits. To this day, a man who has had to correct the assumption of his birth is called Mabon, and a man who was presumed male at birth is called Waxing. No matter his background or circumstance, all men are welcome here so long as they live in joy.

## Suggested Backstories

### I Am No Man

A trans femme or nonbinary character who's faith leads them to embrace their identity.

Class suggestion: Paladin, Cleric, Sorcerer.

You were born of a Mabon man, right here in the temple, with your loving fathers gathered around you. They raised you with tales and songs, and gave you a male name. You were happy – but something within you felt undiscovered. One night as you slept under a full moon, the goddess herself descended with her shifting, luminous gown and whispered to you a new name. The name unlocked something inside you – a great, shining truth. The name also foretold that you would have to leave this place of men.

Your journey is a sacred one. It is a quest of self discovery. When you left the temple, you did so with your father's blessing, for he knew all too well that this journey must be taken alone, and your selfhood cannot flourish here.

**Supplies**—A calligrapher's kit, a moonstone pendulum, a light flowing dress embroidered across the skirt hem, a phial of ink which is invisible in daylight, but glows softly in darkness.

### A Wayward Son

A cis male character who is healing from a traumatic experience by un-learning toxic masculinity. Class suggestion: Fighter, Barbarian, Cleric.

You were a soldier in an unending crusade. Your identity as a man was steeped in blood, cruelty, and obedience to the great machine of war. Then, your mind broke. You found yourself wandering in an unknown forest, starving and dirty, with no recollection of how you lost your way. Your fist welded to your sword, you lashed out at the first living thing you saw – a priest from a nearby temple. He did not look anything like the men you knew. He was soft, and expressive, and he felled your sword from your hand using nothing but tenderness. As the temple priests nursed you back to health, you discovered that the rigid binary of man and woman, masculinity and femininity, strength and weakness, pride and shame, was all untrue. The identity forced upon you was not the only way to be a man. In the care of the Mabon men, you are re-discovering your identity — and slowly unwinding the barbs that kept you prisoner for so long.

**Supplies**—A woodcarver's set, a lacquered wooden belt fob depicting a winged phallus, a set of vestments, an ointment which is always cool to the touch, used to relax muscles.

## The Invention of Man

A trans masculine character who explores masculinity through beauty and art. Class suggestion: Bard, Rogue, Monk.

You were raised in preparation and training to be a companion for a noble lord, either as a courtesan or consort, but you always knew this was not your path. You excelled at the arts, and you came to understand that singing men's songs and playing men's parts in plays tapped into a deep truth that could not otherwise be expressed. Taking few possessions with you, you sought out a mysterious tribe of men who you had only heard of in songs. They took you in, and never questioned the identity you gave them. In that temple you honed your artistic crafts for your own joy, rather than someone else's – and you perfected your truest self. A man of beauty, creation, and independence.

**Supplies**—A lyre, a silver snake pendant, a set of theatrical clothes with peacock pattern batik, a piece of moonbeam in a phial which emits a soft glow and can be inhaled to soothe the nerves.

# Background

## Special Abilities

**Detox**—Meditation and performing therapeutic services has given you the ability to diffuse aggression. Choose one creature who can hear and understand you who is acting aggressively and make either an Intimidation or Persuasion check against their Performance. If successful, they will be calmed by you and will not attack unless you or your allies attack them first. If you fail, the creature cannot be calmed by you for the next 24 hours. You may attempt this ability once per short rest.

## Proficiencies

Insight, Perception, and choose one of: Performance (dance), Weaver's tools, Medicine, Religion.

## Ideals

Choose one or roll a d6.

- Beauty – Beauty should be celebrated and encouraged, especially if it has grown from an unlikely place.
- Peace – Meditation and contemplation of the Self can ease many causes of suffering.
- Expression – All people deserve to express themselves freely, without pressure to conform.
- People – No matter how different their experiences, all men can find something in common.
- Empathy – Suffering is a miasma. To ease someone's suffering is to ease your own.
- Change – All beings are in constant shift. Evolution, death, birth, and crisis are all part of a sacred cycle.

## Bonds

Choose one or roll a d6.

- You work to maintain the prosperity and beauty of the Mabon Monastery.
- You love meeting people who interpret masculinity or maleness in a way you haven't seen before, and meticulously record their experience when you can.
- You never really know someone unless you've danced with them.
- Taking pleasure is a sacrament. To drink good wine or eat good food with friends is to worship together.
- Whenever you make a true friend, you immortalize them in an illuminated manuscript page, an embroidery, or a song.
- You'll never forget the terrible calamity that forced a great change in your life, but ultimately led to your truer self.

## Personality Traits

Choose two.

- Your mood, energy, and even gender expression can shift with the changing of the moon.
- You quote (or misquote) proverbs from the books of the Mabon man and the Waxing man in almost every situation.
- Every movement is a celebration of your body – why walk when you can dance?
- You mark every meaningful experience on your body. Scarification, piercing, tattoos – any body augmentation you like (which does not cause harm) tells a story of your experiences.
- You don't have a great handle on etiquette and tend to ask intimate questions of people you hardly know.
- You were never socialized to laugh at dick jokes – any humor that ridicules a body part is lost on you.
- The folk around the temple feared you because of your mysterious abilities.
- The folk around the temple looked to you for guidance in matters of the heart.
- The folk around the temple love you for your kindness and generosity.
- Though your demeanor is fierce, you are soft of heart when it counts.
- Though you are outwardly gentle, you are deadly when crossed.
- You trust your instincts more than any carefully laid plan.

## Flaws

Choose one or roll a d6.

- You can't go very long without exercising your pent up energy. If there isn't a party or brawl to join, you'll start one.
- You are prone to faux pas when encountering societies with strict gender roles, because they seem unnatural to you.
- You are fixated on trinkets that symbolize masculinity (whatever that means to you – peacock feathers, phallic objects, things made of iron) and cannot resist trying to buy or otherwise obtain them.
- Despite the teachings of Mabon, there is still one aspect of maleness that you cling to, and shame other men for not showing. (Examples – kindness, strength, nobility, bravery, gentleness, humility.)
- Because of your positive experience at the monastery, you trust all men implicitly, for good or for ill.
- Like the moon, your tempers are changeable. You may be quick to aggression one day, and contemplative the next.

# Designer's Notes

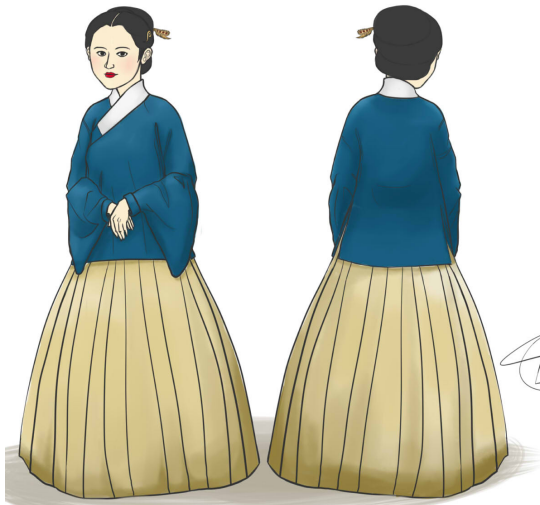
by Lawrence Gullo

**Trans Experience**—In writing this background, I wanted to pay homage to my own experience as a trans man, who has had to define and determine his own interpretation of maleness and masculinity. I was bombarded with obstacles both urging me to conform to the female label I was coercively assigned, and urging me to conform to a narrow definition of maleness in order to seem legitimate. In having this experience I have also encountered cis men who have had to self-interrogate their own male identities and non binary people who have had to navigate their own interpretation of masculinity with very similar obstacles.

I have taken great comfort in celebrating these journeys of self discovery as a sacred passage. There should be space in fantasy for critiquing and satirising toxic masculinity, and with the Mabon Monastery I wanted to also create a space for celebrating the divine in our male identities.

**Historical Inspiration**—Queer and genderqueer identities have been aggressively erased from our history and mythology by colonialism, including many varied examples of queer and genderqueer shamanism. I want the Mabon Monastery to be an inroad for the inclusion of a sacred space which is explicitly genderqueer – a nod to this forgotten history. Queer and genderqueer shamanism appears in so many societies and so many points in history that it is impossible to do justice to them in just one fictional monastic setting.

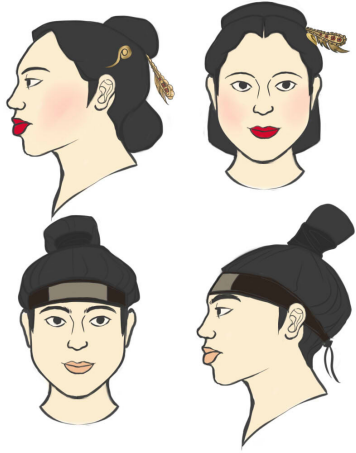
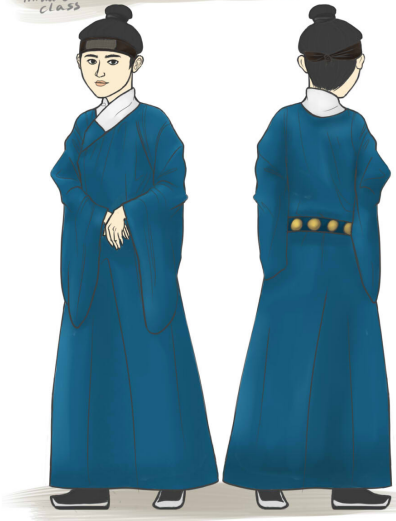
In fantasy, which gains its inspiration from history and mythology, there are very few depictions of sacred maleness outside of self sacrifice and battle. Because of my personal journey, I have put a focus on masculinity in this work. Happily, this means there is limitless space for worldbuilders to expound on this concept.



Ming Dynasty

- Han - 5'2"
- Civil clothes
  - \* 1st of 3 stories for character
- clothes always fold on their right
- leather, silk, gold + rubies
- hair never down
  - \* Dynasty before the 2000s

2018



DrockREQ Studios

# Designer's Notes

*by Raiden Otto*

My vision of masculinity ignores an individual's sex and gender. I see masculinity as one end of a spectrum shared with femininity. Masculinity is akin to a fluid state of being encompassing actions and existence; physical, mental, and spiritual. It is that something that a person radiates when they are self-confident but still within the moment, aware, and responsibility sensitive to others. Femininity may be the opposite to these traits but it is strong with its vulnerability. I find that someone is never really completely one or another all of the time but swinging between the two and sometimes getting stuck in the grey leaning towards one or another.

My project is a character concept sheet for a female-to-male (FTM) transgender man with outfits that represent both walks of life. His design would be for a middle class civilian from a southern Chinese province that starts his transition in his young adult life. The purpose of this design is NOT to equate masculinity with a specific gender or clothes, but with personal self-confidence. In walking in the role he identifies with, the character becomes more confident and able to tackle head on the emotional and social hindrances that barricade his path during his transition into living this new social role. These clothes enhance the wearer's external femininity or masculinity as perceived by a viewer, but ultimately it is how he presents himself and his level of self-confidence.

Consultation by James Mendez Hodes.

# Chosen of the People

A Sorcerer for Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition

by Tracy Barnett

<b>NAME</b>	Yan Sparks		
<b>CLASS</b>	<b>Sorcerer</b> —Chosen of the People		
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	Criminal		
<b>RACE</b>	Dragonborn		
<b>ALIGNMENT</b>	Chaotic Good		
<b>STR</b>	14/+2	<b>PROFICIENCY</b>	+3
<b>DEX</b>	12/+1	<b>SAVING THROWS</b>	Con, Cha
<b>CON</b>	12/+1	<b>ARMOR CLASS</b>	14
<b>INT</b>	12/+1	<b>INITIATIVE</b>	+1
<b>WIS</b>	10/+0	<b>SPEED</b>	30
<b>CHA</b>	18/+4	<b>HIT POINTS</b>	32
<b>HIT DICE</b>	5d6		
<b>DEFENSES</b>	Lightning Resistance		
<b>PASSIVE PERCEPTION</b>	10		
<b>LANGUAGES</b>	Common, Draconic		
<b>SKILL PROFICIENCIES</b>	Arcana, Deception, Persuasion, Stealth		
<b>OTHER PROFICIENCIES</b>	Thieves' Tools, Light Crossbow, Dagger, Dart, Quarterstaff		
<b>ATTACKS &amp; SPELLCASTING</b>	Melee +5 Ranged +4 Spellcasting +7 Spell Save DC 15 Breath Weapon (Lightning) Dex DC 12 (2d6 damage)		

<b>PERSONALITY TRAITS</b>	I would rather make a new friend than a new enemy.  I am always calm, no matter what the situation. I never raise my voice.
<b>IDEALS</b>	Freedom. Chains are meant to be broken, as are those who would forge them.
<b>BONDS</b>	My ill-gotten gains go to support my community.
<b>FLAWS</b>	If there's a plan, I'll forget it. If I don't forget it, I'll ignore it.

**Equipment**—Light Crossbow, Dagger (x2), Crossbow Bolts (x20), Crystal (Arcane Focus), Dungeoneer's Kit, Back of Tricks (Grey), Potion of Healing (Greater).

**Spells**—Cantrips (5) – Dancing Lights, Mage Hand, Message, Minor Illusion, Prestidigitation.

Level 1 (2) – Charm Person, Disguise Self.

Level 2 (2) – Invisibility, Web.

Level 3 (2) – Dispel Magic, Water Walk.

### **FEATURES, TRAITS, & BACKSTORY**

**Sorcerous Origin**—Chosen of the People (Behind the Masc)

**Additional:** Font of Magic, Spellcasting, Metamagic, Careful Spell, Subtle Spell, Ability Score Improvement (D&D Player's Handbook)

**Draconic Ancestry**—Blue Dragon (Lightning) (D&D Beyond)

**Additional:** Breath Weapon (Blue Dragon), Damage Resistance (Blue Dragon)

Crosswind was a community in need. When Yan was born, that power settled into them. They came into their sorcerous power when they turned ten years of age. The challenge for Yan was that they were raised by a local small-time gang, the Watchwords. The Watchwords have each been let down by Crosswind in one way or another. Abandoned, jailed, shunted to the side because of money, birth, or bearing.

As Yan grew, they straddled the line between valuable member of the Crosswind community and active member of the Watchwords. Even now as Yan adventures, those two ties are the things that most clearly define their life. Yan's dearest hope is to help the Watchwords reconcile with the community at large of Crosswinds. This struggle is both internal and external for Yan, as they know many of the thoughts and impetuses for the people of Crosswind, but Yan was also abandoned and only survives today because of the Watchwords.

## THE CHOSEN OF THE PEOPLE

*When you were born, some deep need of the community into which you were born was imbued into you. The empathic connection you have with the people of your city, town, village, enclave, clan, or tribe gives you the ability to manifest great power, for good or for ill.*

The Chosen of the People may be a known quantity by the community at large, or may simply be someone who arises in a great time of need. Some community leaders try to exploit a Chosen of the People, some fear the Chosen, while others work to embrace and support these living reflections of a given people.

SORCERER LEVEL	FEATURE
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1st	<p><b>Community Knowledge</b>—Starting at 1st level, you pick up knowledge and snippets of information from the minds of the people in your community. You get advantage on all knowledge-based skill checks.</p> <p><b>Home Community</b>—You have a place with a group of people which you know as home. You can change what this community is by spending a month in your new community, building connections.</p>
6th	<p><b>I Know Your Mind</b>—Starting at 6th level, your connection to the people of your community deepens such that you know the very thoughts of the people around you. You can cast Detect Thoughts a number of times a day equal to your Charisma modifier.</p>
14th	<p><b>I Know Your Heart</b>—Starting at 14th level, you can use a bonus action to read the thoughts of any being within sight of you for one minute. This functions as the Telepathy spell, but the target may make a Charisma saving throw to resist if it is unwilling. You may use this ability three times per long rest.</p>
18th	<p><b>Always Have a Way Home</b>—Starting at 18th level, you can take a standard action to teleport you and a number of willing creatures up to your Charisma modifier to the heart of your home community. This ability functions from anywhere, even across planar boundaries unless otherwise barred by another magical effect. This functions as a teleportation circle, but only for teleporting back to your community. This ability can be used once per long rest.</p>

# Designer's Notes

*by Tracy Barnett*

I wrote *The Chosen of the People* as a way to express some different kinds of masculinity, specifically the qualities of knowledge and engagement. There are a lot of negative portrayals of masculinity that revolve around the objectifying of other people, and around the actions of claiming superior knowledge. These two things are very personal to me because they are behaviors I continually struggle with, regardless of my gender.

*The Chosen of the People* puts these two things into the spotlight. The word "community" is a very intentional choice on my part. It inherently means connection with others. If you don't have that, you don't have a community. And community being the source of a sorcerer's power seems really interesting to me. It's not a vague expression of a distant ancestor. It's a manifestation of the unconscious collective will of the people around your character. That's pretty wild.

A character with these abilities would be very interesting to play, I think. As the Chosen levels up, they gain more and more access to the thoughts of the people around them. It's a power that can easily cross the lines of consent. Having those dangers be present acts as an obvious metaphor for the typically masculine coded behaviors I'm trying to highlight. You should feel uncomfortable with the amount of trust people are placing in you as you play this character, especially if you're not working to keep from abusing this power. It's personal, and powerful because of that.

# The Minotaur

A Monsterhearts skin

by Aven Elia McConnaughey

*You are the cause of every problem that everyone has ever had, or so they all seem to think. This has been the burden of your lineage since it began, and some before you have responded to this ill will with anger and violence. Many have been killed for this, and have learned much from beyond death – knowledge they have passed to you. This is a heavy weight to carry, but you are strong enough.*

*It is that strength that allows you to protect others. Perhaps you protect with words, perhaps with violence, and perhaps, if you protect enough, one day someone will protect you.*

<b>NAME</b>	Ferdie, Bruce, Angus, Harrison, Daise, Kapi, Montgomery, Cai, Ari, Luke, Theodore
<b>EYES</b>	Warm eyes, guarded eyes, knowing eyes, sad eyes, sleepy eyes
<b>LOOK</b>	Shaggy, open, hulking, still, fat, horned
<b>ORIGIN</b>	Abandoned, exiled, hybrid, bastard, sent as part of an ancient curse

	<b>HOT</b>	<b>COLD</b>	<b>VOLATILE</b>	<b>DARK</b>
<b>STATS</b>	-1	+1	+2	-1
Choose one stat line	.....	.....	.....	.....
	-1	-1	+1	+2

## BACKSTORY

You have decided someone is not worth protection. Gain two Strings on them.

Someone once wandered into your labyrinth but you brought them out safely. Gain one String on each other.

## GANG ADVANCEMENT

You shelter with other **Outcast Beasts**.

## MOVES

Start with Labyrinth and choose one more.

**Labyrinth**—You have a massive labyrinth somewhere in town. Where is it hidden? In a forest, under the ground, or somewhere else? What hunts in the labyrinth? A beast, a contagion, something else? You may navigate the maze safely and freely. Others entering the maze lose their way and must Run Away to escape.

**Matador**—When you redirect someone's anger at another to yourself, the aggressor chooses one, then you choose one:

- » give the other a Condition.
- » deal Harm to the other.

**Lost and Found**—You may spend a String on someone to join a scene they are in without justification.

**It's Not You**—When someone blames you for their feelings or something you didn't do and you take the heat, mark experience and choose one: they gain a Condition or they clear a Condition.

**Mirror of History**—When you gaze into the abyss while wandering your labyrinth, you may roll as though you have a Dark of +3. The visions come to you as echoes of you and your lineage. On a 7-9, as your visions fade, you are confronted with the monster of the labyrinth.

**Bull-headed**—When you act despite being advised otherwise, gain +1 ongoing until you hesitate.

**Safekeeping**—When someone enters your labyrinth in search of something or someone you've hidden within, roll with Dark. On a 10, what you have hidden remains so, and the seeker becomes lost in the maze. On a 7-9, what you've hidden remains so, and choose one: what you have hidden is under threat from the monster that hunts the maze, or the seeker is under threat from the monster that hunts the maze.

## SEX MOVE

When you share a moment of physical or emotional intimacy with someone, they gain access to your labyrinth. They may navigate it and leave freely, though they remain under threat from the monster that hunts in the twisting maze. You may revoke this protection at any time.

## DARKEST SELF

Suddenly everything is terrifying again, just like it was when you were small, before you became strong, before you built the maze. Who do you think you are, to think you can protect anyone, when you can't even protect yourself? You want nothing more than to hide in the maze you built to keep out the terrors. Your Darkest Self ends when someone protects you or when you sleep through the night at the heart of your labyrinth.

## PLAYING THE MINOTAUR

The Minotaur is a character that is trying hard to be a good force in the lives of the people around them, but when they intervene, things have a tendency to go sideways. Sometimes the hostility is aimed at them, and sometimes it comes from them – despite their best efforts to break the patterns of the past. This aggression isolates them from others, because they may hurt those around them, or more likely, be hurt by them.

The Labyrinth is a twisting maze of infinite paths. The Minotaur built it and finds solace in it, but maintaining it can also be a heavy weight to carry, especially if located in a place where it's easily found. There is also a significant threat within that the Minotaur cannot control but does feel responsible for.

A Minotaur that takes the **Outcast Beasts** advancement has taken on the responsibility of providing a haven for others who also provoke hostility because of their differences, which physically manifest as inhuman attributes. These beast-folk are grateful for the protection, but share the Minotaur's hesitance to make deep connections with others.

# Designer's Notes

*by Aven Elia McConnaughey*

Like navigating the Labyrinth of Crete, there are a million ways to interpret this Skin. I've tried writing this reflecting all the different facets I've tried to shape, but such a thing would have extended far beyond my word count and be instantly incomplete as I send this out into the world for you to read, explore, and play. Classical depictions of the labyrinth have only one path, simplified from the infinitely branching maze of myth – I want to avoid that here.

For me, engaging with positive masculinity is a huge responsibility, both because of the history of maleness and many of the current lessons being taught to men. It can be a hugely healing and protective force, but even in the best of hands it can still cause pain to others. In the myth, the Minotaur was locked away in the maze as a child and used as a weapon to punish others. In this Skin, the Minotaur has built the maze to protect himself, but it also isolates them and can still be a threat to others. It is a complicated path to walk, trying to contend with a violent history you are implicated in just because of who you are while protecting those wounded by that very legacy.

I can't tell you what thread will lead you out of that maze. For me, it was many things: self-reflection, profound support and patience from those around me, and some hard learned lessons. Your path through the maze will be unique. I hope this Minotaur might help you find your way out.

Consultation by Jackson Tegu.



# Designer's Notes

by Lemmo Pew

The harlequin is uncommonly put up for discourse when it comes to examples of masculinity, but seems to embody it so inherently it is hard to describe him as anything but. The harlequin, as established in the Italian Commedia dell'arte, is a clever and dashing everyman in the service of his master. In my artistic rendition, I've shown him courting his love the columbina, while being counterbalanced by his compatriot and rival the pierrot (an archetype that would later become better known as the clown).

There are so many variants of the harlequin, some lost to time, predating or deriving from this particular version. The tatterdemalion, brighella, the jester, the pantalone, mezzetino, beltrame... all created to represent certain personas and characteristics to serve the comedic role of the performance or culture.

To contrast the masculine persona of the harlequin with our modern societal perspectives on masculinity creates a noticeable deviance with gender expectations. The harlequin is often pictured wearing tight clothing and flare, sometimes frills, bells and masks, all to increase his panache on stage. It's quite amazing to see how unwavering his masculinity is when on display, from his mannerisms to his overt sexual expressions, his cleverness or deviousness (as opposed to portraying innocence or whimsy), one would see the harlequin being compared to modern macho heroes like Han Solo or John McClane. And yet, they have a different tone of bravado to them. The harlequin looks almost feminine in contrast, ironically.

It extends even further with modern adaptations of the harlequin being presented with feminine characters, most inescapably the popular character Harley Quinn, a very ladylike counterpart for the masculine Joker. But as time and culture changes, and recreations allow for new vantage points, we can still look back in awe at this baton-wielding debonair of love.

# The Demi

A Monsterhearts skin

by Patrick Lickman

*You've always been more powerful, more impressive, more...just more. Your gifts, bestowed upon you by divine forces just out of your reach, are simply a part of who you are.*

*Now, you have the chance to embrace it. Act heroically, do the right thing, help people in need and prove your glory.*

*Easy enough, right?*

**NAME** Aaron, Astra, Erin, Isaac, Jackson, Harmony, Magnus, Marius, Markus, Roman

---

**EYES** harsh eyes, hungry eyes, burning eyes, piercing eyes, bright eyes

---

**LOOK** powerful, brooding, angry, aloof, busy

---

**ORIGIN** war god, wisdom god, art god, sex god, party god, fortune god

	<b>HOT</b>	<b>COLD</b>	<b>VOLATILE</b>	<b>DARK</b>
<b>STATS</b>	+2	+1	+0	-1
Choose one stat line	-----			
	-1	+2	+1	+0

## BACKSTORY

Give everyone a String. Everyone tells you a Prayer and you keep track.

Your strength has caught someone's eye. Gain a String on each other and they tell you another Prayer.

## GANG ADVANCEMENT

You find your place in a **pantheon**.

## MOVES

*You gain Prayers, and choose two more.*

**Prayers**—When someone gains a String on you, you get an instinctive sense of something they want. It doesn't have to be something related to you, or even something you could actually achieve. Keep track of each character's Prayers. When a Prayer is answered, remove it and mark experience and they choose a new Prayer. When they lose the String, remove the Prayer.

If a Prayer is no longer viable, the character who holds it blasphemes against you publicly (gossip, threats, etc.).

**Godly Presence**—When you are involved in a display of might, roll to *Turn Someone On*. You make a single roll that applies to everyone present.

**Scary Hot**—When you intimidate someone, roll to *Turn Them On*.

**Divine Desire**—When you act in a way to help achieve someone's Prayer, take +1 forward.

**Brutal Strength**—Your attacks deal 2 Harm. When you prove yourself through might, mark experience.

**Family Reunion**—To contact the divine realm, *Gaze Into the Abyss*. On a 10 up, in addition to other results, your god-parent heals you. Remove up to two harm. On a 7-9, in addition to other results, your god-parent interferes in your life.

## SEX MOVE

When you have sex with someone, if they have a Prayer with you, remove it. They may gain a different Prayer with you. If they don't have a Prayer with you, gain a String on them.

## DARKEST SELF

You are no mere mortal. The petty concerns of the mortal race have always been beneath you, and now you must leave them behind. You need to escape all the demands these inferior beings put upon you, and fast. You can't be here anymore. You belong in the heavens. Accepting someone's help in a crisis lets you escape your Darkest Self.

## PLAYING THE DEMI

Glorious, pressured, deadly. The demi is a being of pure power and force, eager to prove themselves to the world through the fulfilment of Prayers.

When you give a string away, you learn a little about the desires of the person it goes to. They're called Prayers, but they aren't made actively – nobody tells you to do the thing, you just know that that's what they want. And since you're nearly a god, you have the tools to make that happen.

The Demi can be used to achieve those demands, but there's a fine balance between making everyone happy and not completely exhausting yourself. You get experience whenever a Prayer is fulfilled – that means you might advance faster than other characters. That's okay – you're a demigod.

As part of your origin you'll choose the divine domain of your god-parent, but beyond a name and patronage (war, wisdom, etc) for your god-parent you might prefer to keep it vague. If you choose the **pantheon** advancement (your gang), the same applies – they don't have to be based on existing demigods, but they can be.

# Designer's Notes

by *Patrick Lickman*

When I started thinking about games to create material for, *Monsterhearts* was the easy choice. It's a game about, to quote its introduction "the messy lives of teenagers who are secretly monsters. It explores the terror and confusion of having a body that is changing without your permission." So if we're exploring shifting viewpoints of masculinity, we're pretty much already on a thematic slam dunk. Or are we?

See, with *Monsterhearts* being so closely tied to our theme, there's almost too many ways to approach the subject. If this project proves anything, it's that there are a huge variety of ways to look at masculinity. A brutish minotaur, a cold-blooded killer, or a demonic oni might have fit the bill too.

So why *The Demi*? In the end I was advised to spin positive, to avoid having the message of the work be "oh no masculinity bad!" Quite apart from being incredibly simplistic, it isn't the point of this exercise. *The Demi*, instead, focuses on power and pressure, and the weight of expectations that come with that power. This was 100% the right choice, not least because it steered the goal away from critiquing the structures of masculinity and towards building new ones. And also because that's always more fun to play.

In its design the *Demi* takes a focus on glory and showing off; when you play the *Demi* you do everything as loudly as you can. Thus you can use *Turn Someone On* with large swaths of people at once (and how could that possibly cause trouble?), deal deadly amounts of *Harm*, and, of course, fulfill *Prayers*. *Prayers* are the key to the *Demi*; you know everyone's desires just by them having a *String* on you. And with the temptation of experience you can try and fulfil them, but they never go away. They just change into new *Prayers*, and you keep going. Buckle under the pressure and you'll fall to your *Darkest Self* (the part I'm proudest of, by the way).

I didn't pick a specific mythology to encapsulate the *Demi*, and the skin encourages you to do the same. That's simply because if you establish the existence of, say, *Dionysus* and the Greek pantheon, your game is in danger of revolving just around that. Plus, this isn't a game about gods – that's why you specifically aren't one – it's about people caught between two states of being. The rest is up to you.

# Palisade

A Twine game about the role of the protector

by *Adrian Heise*

*Palisade* is a short interactive narrative set in a fictional country that has recently been invaded. You have the role of the protector – though who you are protecting is part of the choices you make. Play the Twine game at [daedalumap.com/BehindTheMasc.html](http://daedalumap.com/BehindTheMasc.html). The following excerpt is your introduction to *Palisade*.

*War is declared, and the world wakes with a new face.*

*Previous ways of life must be set aside as fire and ash take the place of peacetime. The Republic of New Palisade has been invaded by the United Clans of Valour, the outer borders breached, the frontiers torched. This is the time where legends and common people must rise together in defense of their home, their dignity, their beliefs. They fight for their loved ones, faces that can never be forgotten, names forever written scarlet across the heart. This is the time for action, purpose, and care.*

*Someone is waiting for you, now, in a place which you could describe even in a dream, a fountain garden of reaching rose vines, ivy, and old stone. You've met this person here one hundred times before, but on this day of this new world, your known home feels alien. This place should be full of life and energy, townsfolk mingling and merchants peddling. It is silent, save for two voices. They are speaking to a soldier, one of the New Palisade Special Corp, and you hear that they are talking about you,*

*"I'm not here to loiter. I'm waiting for someone. They will be here soon."*



# Designer's Notes

*by Adrian Heise*

Palisade is a short interactive narrative centred on the concept of masculine protectiveness. It explores the question of what it means to truly defend a loved one – to keep them safe from external harm, and to protect them from their own fears and hardships. This project explores this from the vantage point of three masculine roles – that of a lover, parent, or friend.

The story takes place in a fictional country which has been recently invaded, and follows three central characters: a war hero, a draft dodger, and a traitor. This is not a story of the protagonist's rise to glory; instead, they must support their loved ones as they work through their doubts and fears. This is a delicate path to walk – choosing when to use a gentle touch and when to be a guiding light. The protagonist must be adaptive and observant, must know when to lead and when to support, when to defend and when to seek understanding.

To me, being a protector means to truly act in the defense of others, free of ego and ulterior interest. This project purports that a true masculine person strives to be uplifting, to raise others to their own highest potential, to never drag another down or sabotage them. To disallow emotion from clouding justice and reasoning, but to be open and vulnerable and willing to empathize. To grow stronger from togetherness, and to give and take freely.

# Echoes

An audio-text lonely game about heroes

by Beau Jágr Sheldon



Download the required audio files to play aloud while you play this game at [daedalumap.com/BehindTheMasc.html](http://daedalumap.com/BehindTheMasc.html).

*Echoes* explores the journey of you, Hero, when you discover that the fairies have stolen away your joy in spite, leaving you unable to laugh or express happiness. Read **bold** and *italic* text aloud, these are your actions, words, and descriptions of what you encounter. The plain text is there to guide you and tell the story. If it asks a question (...), respond aloud.

---

You wake and face your day, a normal day like every other day. You go through the same day as any hero:

**I save a kitten from too tall a branch.**

**I comfort a sad friend through their tears.**

**I helped to feed someone who has nothing.**

You receive gratitude from all those you save, whether it is from heights, hurt, or hunger. "Thank you!" they say, and like all heroes, you want to show how happy it makes you.

How does it feel when your joyful words come out as squeaking croaks?

...

The people forgive you, but you shudder and sweat as you remember a wisp of a nightmare – a fairy who stood on your bed, and the echoes of fading laughter that floated from your lips into their magic flask. *My joy, my laughter – the fairies have stolen it!*

You feel without your joy you can't truly be what the people need. You know that the people might struggle without you, but you need to be whole.

How long does it take you to reach the caverns? What do you lose along the way?

...

When you reach the caverns, the arching darkness surrounds you, but you see the sparkling light of magic within. There are many paths, and you fear you must tread them all. Which path do you take first?

**The darkest (page 28)**

or

**The longest (page 29)**



» If you take the darkest path...You must scare away your fears as you enter into the darkness by projecting your voice. Stand up straight and relax, then speak into the darkness in your deepest voice, forcing it to echo through the cavern.

**I am Hero, and I have come for what is mine!**

Describe, deeply, how the walls feel under your fingertips as you guide yourself: **rocky** or **gritty** or **smooth**

You can hear noises all around you. Describe them clearly: **shuffling** or **scraping** or **groaning**

You walk in such darkness you almost forget what light looks like (*I could swim through ink with better brightness!*), but under your fumbling fingers you find a torch. **I light the torch.** In front of you is a pile of gold and jewels, shining under the torchlight.

The sounds around you come together and call to you. Some tell you to dig in the gold, others tell you to sing along with them. What do you do?

**I dig in the gold to find the flask.** You dig until your hands are raw and find nothing, but now, you hunger. Continue to the next path.

**I sing along with them...**Take a deep breath and hum deep into your chest, making a steady sound. Let the air pass out of your lungs as you do. The gold disappears and reveals a door that leads to the path that leads to the falls. Do you go to the falls, or see if the longest path reveals your joy?

**I take the path that leads to the falls. (page 30)**

or

**I return to take the longest path. (page 29)**

» If you take the longest path...You must keep up a pace, so you control your breathing. Breathe naturally for six breaths. Then, breathe in deeply to your stomach, and breathe out saying **echo** to scare away the bats, keeping your voice low. Do this four times. Finally, breathe deep into your stomach and say

**I am Hero, and I have come for what is mine!**

Describe, deeply, how the ground feels beneath your boots as you walk: **crunchy** or **slippery** or **sticky**

You can see movement in the distance. Describe it clearly: **quick** or **slow** or **chaotic**

You walk for some time (*this has been so long, my feet are aching*) before you come to a large, shining wall. It sparkles beautifully.

**I touch the wall.** You touch the wall and slide through it, and you are back at the start of the path, with no way to return to the cavern entrance. You walk again the longest path, and are now thirsty.

**I look at the wall.** You see writing that instructs you to read along. When you do, stand up straight and breathe deeply from your stomach. Say each word that follows while dropping your voice lower with each word:

**A door is only a door if there is something on the other side.**

When you finish reading, the large, shining wall dissolves and opens to the path that leads to the falls. Do you go to the falls, or see if the darkest path reveals your joy?

**I take the path that leads to the falls. (page 30)**

or

**I return to take the darkest path. (page 28)**

» If you take the path that leads to the falls...The walk is long and the caverns are dark. You must again breathe carefully so you don't wear out, and scare away the fearful things in the dark. Breathe naturally for six breaths. Then, breathe in deeply to your stomach, and breathe out saying **echo**, keeping your voice low. Do this four times. Finally, breathe deep into your stomach and speak into the darkness in your deepest voice, forcing it to echo through the cavern.

**I am Hero, and I have come for what is mine!**

You walk for what seems like forever, all the while hearing the falls in the distance (*they flow with such power, and must be so massive!*). Your feet ache. You thirst. You hunger. **I miss home, and my bed.** But, you continue on. Finally, the caverns open and you see the falls, massive and beautiful before you, sparkling with magic.

**I drink from the falls.** Your thirst is quenched, and you are refreshed.

**I wash my face.** You feel cleaner, somehow lighter.

**I search the falls for the flask.** You look around the pool, and walk around behind the falls as you see the sparkling surrounding them. The flask is there, under glass so fragile that even a shout could break it. Perhaps only a shout!

You take a deep series of breaths, and then begin battering your own chest like a gorilla while you deeply, loudly say

**I am Hero, and I have come for what is mine!**

The glass shatters, and the flask falls.

**I catch it, and take back my joy!**

You imbibe the contents of the flask, and feel warmth and laughter fill you once again. When you travel back home, you find you have been gone far longer than expected. How long were you gone?

...

And yet, the people managed. They sent some to find you and bring you home, but couldn't find the caverns you claimed to have pursued. Why couldn't they find the caverns?

...

They're grateful you've returned and that you're well. They struggled, but managed, because you were part of the community. You find you can't help but laugh, amused that you were worried they might struggle at all. Take a deep breath, and laugh, deep in your stomach. Let the laughter roll inside you, and hear all of the villagers join in.

# Designer's Notes

by Beau Jágr Sheldon

I must have told people a thousand times why I was writing Echoes and why it is so important to me. It is super important. Echoes is a story about heroes because heroism has always been quite meaningful to me, the act of being the one to help and make things right – and it's always been masculine, too. There are women heroes, for sure, but the stereotype of heroism includes masculinity, and often has negative aspects of it. So I wanted to write about that!

Additionally, the presentation of Echoes – as an audio-text game – is important to me because of how I present as a person. I'm genderfluid nonbinary masculine, which means my physical presentation is all kinds of things. But my voice... my voice is something different. I had a beautiful singing voice growing up, and stage humiliation drove it down inside me. But my speaking voice was, at one point, a bit deeper than the average femme presenting person.

Until I worked in corporate for too long. There were comments on my voice, about how I sounded too masculine and it didn't fit expectations. At the time, I was still very closeted and struggling with my identity. I taught myself a new voice – higher pitched, more feminine – and used it mostly at work. Then, as my struggles with my identity grew, it got worse. Now, I can barely speak in my natural voice that once was. That masculine aspect of my identity is gone, along with freedom in laughter. My laughter is too feminine to match who I am, and all learned because of the shaming related to expectations of gender presentation.

In Echoes, you perform exercises that are like voice exercises to deepen your voice, all while traveling to find your joy. You go through the **longest, darkest** paths just to find your joy again. If you really needed to do so, after all.

# The Grifter

An Apocalypse World playbook

by Eli Eaton

*In the golden age, there were rich bastards that got what they wanted off the backs of others. They called them kings, queens, CEOs at some point. Those kinds of assholes still exist of course, but the names they call themselves are different and their piles of trinkets and toys are smaller, a bit rustier.*

*You sneer at all that. You know that those who do best in life use brains over brawn, treat those they like well, and always laugh at a tough situation.*

<b>LOOK</b>	<b>NAME</b>	Aki, Boomer, Durma, Comet, Crow, Coyote, Fig, Gallow, Mimi, Tess, Rumi, Rhee, Val, Zeb, Bento, Zuka, Ramble, Cinder, River, Breeze, Spiro, Ashen, Euro, Haze, Devo
	<b>GENDER</b>	concealed, nonbinary, man, woman
	<b>CLOTHES</b>	flashy clothes, dirty clothes, cloaks and scarves, studded leather
	<b>FACE</b>	tattooed face, soft face, sharp face, grinning face
	<b>EYES</b>	cold eyes, sharp eyes, cloudy eyes, mirthful eyes
	<b>BODY</b>	thin body, fat body, hard body, inhuman body

**Hx** Everyone introduces their characters by name, look, and outlook. Take your turn.

List the other characters' names.

Go around again for Hx. On your turn,

» Whoever you find to be a pompous bully, tell them -1Hx.

» Whoever you find amusing and fun, tell them +1Hx

On the other players' turns:

» Whatever someone tells you, add +1Hx. They have your attention.



## MOVES

Choose two Grifter moves.

**Eerie Fellow**—You feel connected to the maelstrom, and it shows. Get +1 Weird (max +2 weird) and describe how the maelstrom is reflected in your behavior or appearance.

**Spinning Webs**—In a situation where you might seize by force, explain how you have laid an elaborate trap instead (explosives, hidden pit traps, rallied a rival gang etc.). If the MC thinks it's plausible, roll Sharp instead of Hard:

10+: It works surprisingly well! Choose three. On a 7-9, choose two.

- » you take definite hold of it.
- » you suffer little harm.
- » you inflict terrible harm.
- » you impress, dismay or frighten your enemies.

On a miss, it backfires and you prepare for the worst.

**Good Deed**—Give someone something they really need. If they are a PC gain +1 Hx on them; if they are an NPC hold +1 forward.

**Master of Disguises**—You can change your appearance making it hard for people to recognize you. If you use it to act under fire, add +1 to your roll. If you use it to trick, seduce, or manipulate someone, add +1 to your roll.

**Intuitive**—When reading a person, on 10+, ask one of these in addition:

- » What does your character want most in the world?
- » What possession is most precious to you?
- » Who/what do you most despise?
- » Who/what do you most love?
- » Who/what do you fear most?

**Illusionist**—Call upon the Psychic Maelstrom to frighten, confuse, or distract someone else and make them see what isn't there. Roll + Weird On 10+, It works and they are fooled. Get +1 forward on your next move. On 7-9, It works, get +1 on your next move, but:

- » you see things in the maelstrom you'd rather not. Take -1 to cool rolls this session.
- » you have the maelstrom's attention and it may open your brain later this session.

On a miss, it backfires and plagues your mind.

## SEX

When you and another character have sex, it's easier for you to intuit something about them, but now they can also read you. Ask each other a question from the Grifter's Intuitive move (even if you don't have it selected) and gain +1 Hx on each other.

1-barter will cover a month's living expenses, if your tastes aren't too grand. As a one-time expenditure, and very subject to availability, 1-barter might count for: *a night in high luxury and company; one square meal each for around 30 people; a typical family's entire food store; the material costs of a crash resuscitation by an angel; a week's hire of the protective companionship of a battlebabe or gunlugger; any weapon, gear, or fashion not valuable or hi-tech; repair of a piece of hi-tech gear by a savvyhead; a year's tribute to a warlord; a month's maintenance and repairs for a hi-performance vehicle well-used; bribes, fees, and gifts sufficient to get you into almost anyone's presence.*

If you need some jingle this session tell the MC you'd like to work a gig. Your gigs are below, or you can negotiate another option.

- » Steal from a wealthy NPC
- » Extort or blackmail a wealthy NPC
- » Act as a spy or find information on an NPC

Choose 2-3 things you use to trick people.

- » Loaded dice or a trick card deck
- » Connections who tell you stuff
- » Prosthetics, costumes and makeup for disguises
- » Ability to subtly and temporarily shapeshift into other distinctly human appearances
- » Tools for making traps
- » Lock picks and other burglary tools
- » A secret place to stash things
- » Smoke bombs or flash grenades

# Designer's Notes

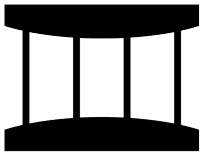
by *Eli Eaton*

I've always been drawn to trickster figures. Coyote, Ananse and Robin Hood and Loki are among some of my favorites. I feel like there is something sort of subversive to a masculine character who uses wits and guile to win fights or solve problems. Particularly when so many other mythological characters are strong and brawny or just blast everything with lightning bolts and fire. Tricksters also tend to be the liberators of goods or information that is coveted by the powerful.

This is at the core of why I chose this archetype. I want to model, for men and other masculine folks, how they might champion access and attempt to create equity for others. Humour is also an important aspect of the trickster, they are often fun and light hearted, and they often punch up in their jests, embarrassing those in power who are full of hubris rather than those who are down-trodden. This too is something I want to model for masculine folk.

I chose Apocalypse World as the system because so often those characters are gritty and violent is the main way they achieve their objective. I wanted to make a character that allowed people to still be ambiguous in how good they were, but that nudged them towards caring for others and for having morals and ideas of fairness. I also want to give players permission to be humorous.

One thing you'll notice is that I allow people to play whatever gender they want despite this being a project about masculinity. This is because I want to allow those playing a feminine character to imbue her/them with this particular style of swagger and gutsiness you don't typically see modeled in mainstream female characters. And given that the traditional tricksters are often shape-shifters, it's perfect archetype for blurring gender norms.



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