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GRYMMWORLD PROMO: THE NARRADOR

In the place where stories are born from wonder and every tale begins with Once Upon a Time, we are excited to introduce Grymmworld, from the mind of Grant Ellis, produced by 2CGaming. Grymmworld is inspired by dark fairy story aesthetics, surreal fantasy characters, and utilizes innovative narrative-control mechanics that lead to perilous tales told at twilight. Grymmworld builds upon the collaborative storytelling framework of 5th Edition by providing both the Game Master and the Players with additional mechanics to facilitate play towards specific themes. This month we showcase this design philosophy by introducing you to the first of Grymmworld's narrative control mechanics: The Narrador.

IN-DEVELOPMENT CONTENT

The content presented in this document represents an upcoming project in development and is not representative of the final quality of the work in question. Many aspects (if not all) of both the details and their presentation here will change between now and future versions. If you wish to provide feedback on anything you read here, you can submit details at www.2cgameing.com or chat with developers directly through our discord server at: <https://discord.gg/2k35fY9>

THE TELLER OF TALES

Every session of Grymmworld begins with the Game Master assuming the role of the Narrador. The Narrador establishes the tone, feel, and type of adventure that the Players will engage with that session. The Narrador is more than just a persona, it is also a character in the game world that has influence over the narrative direction of the game. That is to say, the Narrador can hop in and out of a story, interact with other characters, and has a special role in the fiction of the world as a force of nature. Unlike other NPCs, the Narrador is not defined by a stat block, but instead by a mechanical move-set that rewards Players with in-game benefits or burdens them with twists of fate. The Narrador emphasizes the theme and genre of adventure the party is participating in. There are four flavors of Narrador and each has their own personality and unique in-game manifestations, called a Mask.

The Mask is the game mechanism that signals the Players that you are going to adopt themes, content, and situations appropriate to a specific type of story being facilitated through play. The Mask will determine how setting specific-features will be made available over the course of a Story Arc.

A Story Arc is the setting component that identify what starts, progresses, and ends an adventure. The Story Arc contains key questions about the game world and the Player Characters that the Narrador needs to have answered. As this is a role-playing game, the ending of a Story Arc is not pre-determined; it is discovered through play. The Narrador has the ability to continue wearing the same Mask or to select a new one when appropriate at the end of a Story Arc.

The Duties of the Narrador

When a game master assumes the role of the Narrador Character, they are agreeing to fulfill responsibilities and duties that assist the game play.

Primarily those duties are summed up as follows:

- Establish tone
- Select game structure
- Prompt progress
- Incentivize engagement
- Impose drama
- Track the plot
- Utilize setting mechanics

The Narrador and the Meta Game

The character of the Narrador is an essential part of Grymmworld. The guiding principle is that this character informs the Game Master how to steer a session, while prompting players with types of actions that advance the in-game narrative. This character type is common in many fairy stories from a variety of cultures and is inspired by other tabletop roleplaying games. It is important for player characters to be aware of the almost divine nature of the Narrador and for the group to develop an attitude of appreciation for their role in the game. Respecting the Narrador leads to rewards, fighting against their aim can produce additional hardship. It is important though, that the Narrador honor Player agency in every situation. The Narrador is telling a story where the Player Characters are the main characters.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: THE DM AS A CHARACTER?

My entire concept of stories is built from the knowledge that they are told by an outsider, written by an observer, or dreamed up while we are sleeping. As a child, I often watched the *Dungeons & Dragons* animated series, where a character named “dungeon master” would pop in and out of episodes. Likewise, *Jim Henson’s Storyteller* was narrated by the wonderful John Hurt, who often would interject as if he was part of the scene, while sitting apart from it. In the earlier parts of this decade, I became interested in a *Ryuutama* campaign that featured Story Dragons which were both part of the game world and the role the game master would play. The goal of introducing this set of ideas into Fifth Edition roleplaying is to capture the magic of the storyteller tradition and provide clear meaningful mechanics that facilitate play. Rather than rely on Game Master fiat, you can apply clear and precise procedures while you adjudicate the game. The challenges and barriers to success are the assumptions that players must agree to the influence the Narrador wields, and the inability to shake it from the world is something some players may struggle with. My hope is that the collaborative story-telling experience is improved by engaging with the existing game mechanics through this new set of rules.

The Masks

The Narrador establishes the tone of the game through the Mask they choose to wear. Taking upon a Mask signals the Players that you are going to adopt themes, content, and situations appropriate to a specific type of story: stories of battle, compassion, truth, and intrigue.

The Mask of the Narrador will determine which set of reward, penalty, and story-features will be made available over the course of that Story Arc.

The Mask of Battle: Stories of warfare, monster slaying, and dungeon delving

The Mask of Intrigue: Stories of sedition, betrayal, and solving mysteries

The Mask of Compassion: Stories of romance, friendship, and personal drama

The Mask of Truth: Stories of hope, exploration, and long journeys

The selected Mask that the Narrador wears determines what forms the Narrador might assume in over the course of the game. This aspect of a Mask is referred to as its Manifestation. The Narrador can manifest as a humanoid, a beast, or a legendary creature that is specifically aligned with the Mask they select.

Each Mask is tied to a Season, a literal atmospheric representation of spring, summer, winter, and fall. As Grymmworld is fairy tale fantasy, seasonality is not tied to science; it is tied to the Narrador and their desire to control the sights, sounds, smell, and feel of the world around them. They can choose to impact the weather and the world by invoking their Season.

The Mask provides details on the Personality Traits of the Narrador during play. These manifest through descriptive phrases and aspects that manifest through attitude and mannerisms the Narrador presents as they interact with the Player Characters in the game. Additionally, the Mask provides a set of Influences that can impact the game world. Influences are the impacts that the Narrador has over Non-Player Characters, the game environment, and the overarching fictional narrative of Grymmworld.

The Mask informs what behaviors will lead to setting-specific benefits for the Players. This is referred to as Player Rewards. As Players engage with their character-specific roleplaying details (personality traits, ideals, bonds, flaws), the Narrador has authority to give Player Rewards with benefits that will help them throughout the session. Likewise, certain behaviors that go against the direction of the Narrador might be met with burdens referred to as Failures. These Failures are specific to the mask that is worn. For example, when the Mask of Battle is active, the Players receive additional incentives for engaging character-specific details while participating in combat. There are a variety of ways this can be portrayed through play, and it is important for the player and Game Master to align during this additional metagame.

Throughout Grymmworld there are those with a close affinity to the Narrador, the Keepers. Keepers are those that know the words the Narrador has spoken and preserve the tales through oral tradition. A Keeper is a master of discerning the nature of the Narrador's desires and may be able to offer valuable insight into what lays ahead. Keepers are functional non-player characters that can become intertwined with the player characters, but should always let the players lead the way.

Roleplaying The Narrador

Playing the Narrador in Grymmworld is guided by goals, actions, and principles. The goal of play is to discover the story together, while being an honest steward of the fiction, and to bring Grymmworld to life.

The Narrador can reveal their influence subtly through an atmospheric manifestation, overtly through evocative description, or directly by walking into a scene.

The Narrador that interacts with a character should ask the Player Characters questions to learn about their goals, to lead them in the right direction, to establish truth about the world, and to fill in details that flavor the game.

The Narrador should inform the Characters what the stakes and consequences are in any given scene. The Narrador should seek opportunities to reward every Player at least once per session by encouraging them to engage with specific Character details they selected during character creation. They should also be prepared to inject hefty amounts of drama and conflict to challenge the characters.

The Narrador is the ultimate guardian and steward of the fiction, meaning they need to keep track of all the elements that are passing through Grymmworld. The Narrador has a responsibility to spotlight and emphasize elements that carry special importance in the world and make the importance known to the players.

The Opening Monologue

Each session of Grymmworld begins with a the Narrador performing an opening monologue which sets the tone for the session and makes it clear that the game has begun and we are now in character. The Narrador begins with the following key phrase: *“Once upon a time, in a land of wonder, filled with stories of (battle, intrigue, love, hope)”*

It is at this moment the Narrador dons their Mask, the moment they reveal the type of story the land is filled with.

The next thing they do is they reveal the key players in the story that the characters are familiar with:

“There was a (NPC the characters know and character bond) and a (NPC the characters will meet and conflict), our (friends, companions, adventurers) would soon come into contact with.”

The Narrador will tie the player characters to an NPC and expand the world by giving them someone new to interact with who is related to the conflict of the story. Giving their names are optional. It is important to tie these characters to the player characters to provide the assumption that this is the issue at hand.

“(describe the initial problem at hand, there will be a list of ideas for those that get stuck)”

“We begin this story (starting location) where we find our (friends, companions, adventurers) (fill in the start)”

The Narrador articulates the problem and the game structure, then describes the opening scene, location, and what the player characters are doing at the start.

EXAMPLE: OPENING MONOLOGUE

Once upon a time, in a land of wonder, filled with stories of intrigue...

... there was a penniless tailor named Sebastian, who is cousin to at least one of you, and Sandro Horsemaster, the Master of Horses to the Wise King Olman.

Sandro's wife has gone missing, she was last seen at Sebastian's where she was paying for a dress alteration.

Our story begins at the home of Sebastian, who has just been arrested. His young wife Clara is home, and our companions are trying to figure out what motives Sebastian would have to be involved."

THE MASKS

Detailed below are the masks the Narrador can assume when running a story arc in Grymmworld.

The Mask of Battle: Rustam Crimson-Snow, The Record Keeper of Soldier Songs

Rustam Crimson-Snow is the embodiment of tales of hardship, strife, and danger. Often portrayed as a battle hardened military leader, his eyes narrowed by the bright flash of blades being drawn for battle, his posture strong, and armored by the experience he's earned. It is said those that speak Rustam Tales have seen the worst of this world, but often have the most strength to share; a reservoir to draw upon in troubled times. Rustam's tales are stored in battle hymns, an old person's recollections, and in the confessions made with a warrior's final breath.

THE MASK OF BATTLE

Season: winter

Manifestation: wolves, dragons

Personality Traits: confidence in ability, never say die attitude, acts justly, protect the needy

Keepers: celestial lorekeepers, fiendish soothsayers

Rustam's stories are tales of valor, monsters being defeated, comradeship found in combat, and delving the dark places of the earth. Players will reveal their character growth through using their combat abilities, working as a team, and managing finite resources that dwindle over time. Likewise, they will come head to head with the core conflicts of Law and Chaos, one of the defining elements of the campaign setting. A Game Master should inform the characters that the path forward is full of dangers untold and hardships unnumbered, but they should draw upon the core of their character to see them through the conflict.

Rewards: Rustam allows the Players progress in both story and power when they:

- Advance towards the physical threats of this world
- Work as a team to overcome impending doom
- Apply their background details to combat encounters

Failures: Rustam penalizes or does not reward Players in both story and power when they:

- Ignore the dark portents of the threats around us
- Do not assist their allies in combat

Influences:

Rustam Influences Table	
1	Warriors look to the player characters for leadership and guidance
2	New rivals muster to test the player characters' prowess
3	The local population reaches out to the player characters to deal with a growing threat
4	Stories grow of the player characters' deeds
5	A winter storm gathers at the start of the battle, lightning crashes behind the opposition
6	A cold wind howls, underscoring the dialogue of the scene
7	Blades flash brightly in the heat of battle, revealing the presence of all
8	The moon turns full and turns to the color of blood tonight.
9	The Narrador reveals a detail that could turn the tides of battle
10	The Narrador directs the attention of the players to the biggest threat to victory
11	The Narrador reminds the players of the consequence of defeat, highlighting the level of morale in the fray
12	The Narrador describes the marks of a monster and the player characters' proximity to the creature.

The Mask of Intrigue: Eudoxia Night Storm, The Lamentor of Forlorn Dreams

Eudoxia Night-Storm is the essence of whispers in the dark, secrets shared by lamplight, ciphers cryptically concealed in the hidden places of the earth. In the deepest dens of burglars, thieves, and scoundrels are the tales and stories of the keen fey-lady and her many secrets. Eudoxia is often depicted as a strong woman, garbed in the colors of the night, her hair flowing like a warm and mysterious wind. She is associated with tales of tricksters, cunning, and conceit.

THE MASK OF INTRIGUE

Season: summer

Manifestation: ravens, kitsune.

Personality Traits: reads between the lines, quietly calculating, poetically rich, Always three moves ahead

Keepers: roguish storytellers, fey fashionistas

Eudoxia's tales are full of subterfuge, skullduggery, and things that go bump in the night. Players will experience character growth through examining the mysteries of the world, ingenuity in the face of impartiality, and confronting the shadow-side of adventures. Players will come head to head with the power hierarchy in the various societal groups, the social constructs that exist in the setting, and become acquainted with those that walk the shadows. A Game Master should inform the characters that there are clues worth seeking and the key to solving the mysteries will be their characters ability to work through puzzles together, weighing every option available. This aside, they should not betray who they are and their core beliefs, rather they should revel in the friction created by the drama that occurs when opposing ideas intersect.

Rewards: The Narrador allows the Players progress in both story and power when they:

- Embark on missions of cloak and dagger
- Work as a team to solve mysteries
- Apply their background details to situations of intrigue

Failures: The Narrador penalizes or does not reward Players in both story and power when they :

- Withdraw from the shadowy figures that lurk on the fringes of stories
- Withhold clues from each other

Influences:

Eudoxia Influences Table	
1	Rumors swirl that the player characters have great political sway due to recent events, most likely creating allies and enemies
2	Local authorities are willing to turn a blind eye to the player characters' actions, in exchange for a favor
3	Elements of the criminal faction are displeased with the actions of the player characters and want to make sure that they know it
4	The player characters find that they are wanted by local authorities for questioning
5	A heavy fog rolls in obscuring all that is in sight
6	Darkness and shadow seems to dance across the walls, inviting you to come closer
7	Every face is forgettable today, as if every detail is carefully hidden
8	Hot winds rise as the sun sets on the scene and night gathers her secrets
9	The Narrador focuses on the subtle details that point to clues and solutions
10	The Narrador obscures the facts with fiction
11	The Narrador builds tension by luring the players towards a plot against them
12	The Narrador introduces a new complication that escalates the threat

The Mask of Compassion: Daphe Hallow-Field, The Author of Blooming Love

Daphne Hallow-Field is that peaceful calm one feels as the flowers start to bloom, the fluttering of the heart when it becomes enamored, and all the tender moments that are shared between old friends, new friends, family, and lovers. These stories are not without trial and hardship, but they are the personal and societal dramas that play out through relationships to the world around us. Not every adventure takes you away from home. Daphne is associated with floral colors, bare feet walking along freshly cut grass, and carefully laced valentines.

THE MASK OF COMPASSION

Season: spring

Manifestation: songbird. kirin.

Personality Traits: considerate to all, uncertainty of emotion, deeply introspective, melts the frost away

Keepers: country farmers, noble poets

Daphne's stories are tender and pure, but with a hint of sorry behind every pretty word. Characters will experience growth as they focus on personal sociality with all the people of Grymmworld, experiencing emotions such as friendship, rivalry, romance, and heartbreak. These stories involve building relationships, providing service to others, and exploring the very personal nature of who the characters are, but also who they dream of becoming. The Game Master should advise players that they should be willing to explore their characters personal history and plan and prepare for their eventual future, and the way they treat other people determines their success and failure.

Rewards: Narrador allows the players progress in both story and power when they:

- Work to form bonds with the characters around them.
- Use their abilities to serve those they've formed bonds with.
- Revisit relationships they set aside to undergo a life of adventure.

Failures: Narrador penalizes or does not reward players in both story and power when they:

- Destroy relationships with the world around them.
- Forsake their past entirely.

Influences:

Daphne Influences Table	
1	Authorities praise the charity shown by the player characters
2	News travels that a local festival intends to honor the player characters
3	A letter arrives from a close friend, recently forgotten, who wonders if you still care about them
4	One of you has earned the reputation as a heartbreaker in a nearby settlement
5	Everything the character sees appears to be lit by the soft and gentle flicker of candlelight
6	Scarlit tulips boldly rise upwards wherever the characters step, as rich golden light shines all around
7	A warm yet sorrowful rain slowly begins to fall all around, streaming from above like tear drops, that follow the player characters wherever they go
8	Rosy clouds gather and part as the blue of the sky reveals the first stars that shine whenever the player characters speak
9	The Narrador reveals internal monologues and desires of characters, too afraid to speak open and plainly
10	The Narrador compliments player characters on what the creatures of this world find admirable about them

11	The Narrador speaks reflectively on the failures of the past, and what direction these events have sent the story
12	The Narrador lingers on a character and their desires for the player characters

The Mask of Truth: Gangesha Falling-Leaf, The Journal of One Long-Traveled

Gangesha represents the call to adventure. When a traveler is met on the road, or an unrecognized face stops in a tavern for a brief meal before setting out on a road, it is often said “Gangesha ride with you.” The hope for the future, the diplomacy shared between lands, and a strong connection to the natural world embody Gangesha Tales. The stories of Gangesha are some of the oldest as well as some of the very first that are learned during one’s youth. These are tails of endurance, of finding new places, and learning.

THE MASK OF TRUTH

Season: autumn

Manifestation: bear, phoenix

Personality Traits: weathered, perfect recall, slow-gait, distant even when close

Keepers: medicine workers, priests

“Gangesha’s Tales” are the stories of long-suffering, the road less traveled, and the path not taken. Characters will experience growth as they discover the world, its inhabitants, and all the fictional elements that await them in this land of wonder. Game Masters should advise players that they can expect to live off the road, engage in environments that are new to them, and encounter creatures that will challenge their preconceived notions of the world. There will be new magics, old magics, and an opportunity to learn about the setting and establish a personal history.

Rewards: Narrador allows the players progress in both story and power when they do:

- Journey to a place they’ve never been before.
- Learn details of the cultures they encounter.
- Successfully manage their resources while traveling.

Failures: Narrador penalizes or does not reward players in both story and power when they:

- Refuse the call to adventure.
- Destroy the world around them.

Influences:

Gangesha Influences Table	
1	Others on the road are nervous of the player characters' and the attention they attract
2	The only place on the road to stop is cold to the player characters, unless they can spare resources
3	A strange and unusual sort of creature is highly curious in what the player characters can share with them about the world
4	Someone the player characters have encountered is in need of desperate aid
5	The stars shine and guide the way forward
6	The leaves change colors and begin to fall at the arrival of the player characters
7	The days grow shorter than they used to and time must be spent wisely
8	The signs of the harvest are abounding the scene
9	The Narrador focuses on details that reveal new things the players have learned
10	The Narrador focuses on emphasizing the richness of the cultures of the area
11	The Narrador speaks to the dwindling resources and the long road ahead
12	The Narrador describes the landmark and history of the region

CONCLUDING AN ARC

The Narrador oversees the facilitation of a Story Arc in Grymmworld. The Story Arc concludes when all Questions have been answered. At the conclusion of the Story Arc the Narrador returns to their default mask, the identity they assumed prior to the opening of the tale. The Narrador assigns any and all rewards to players and their characters, and then as a group they author the Tale of the Year, in which they chronicle where they went, what they did, and how they felt about it. This record is to be preserved by the group. A future component will go into more detail about Story Arcs and their conclusion.

EXAMPLE: CONCLUSION

At the end of a Story Arc it might appear as follows, using the example above:

And so it was at the end of our tale, that these companions traveled from Pigton to Fairbrook. It was there they rescued Sandro Horsemaster's wife from the Red Feather Magicians, and ran them out of the land.

Sebastian the tailor was proven innocent of wrong doing and returned to his wife Clara.

Then they would go around and hand out player rewards, chronicle the tale in a book, and provide soft and short resolutions for each character stating how they returned to life after their tale.