

DON'T REST YOUR HEDGE

A Changeling kitbash for Don't Rest Your Head

The Storyteller system doesn't do a very good job of driving home what I think Changeling should be about: PCs who are caught between two worlds. Before I launch into mechanics, here's my Actual Play Report...

Actual Play Report

I was quite pleased with how the rules performed. Our first session, everyone managed to keep their stats fairly balanced (despite how busy they were encountering monsters, getting arrested, and exhuming graves). The death spiral of Clarity/Wyrd wasn't nearly as bad as expected. Having said that, we *did* manage to end the last session with 1 player KO'd from a Pain-dominated roll, one player forced into the Hedge with maxed-out Wyrd, and the last player left helpless in his Fetch's clutches because he had maxed out his Clarity.

We had trouble coming up with Contracts on the fly; I should have come to the table with more pre-fabs and suggestions. (I created a morphological table to help me; I should have shared it with the players.) However, we saw a *lot* of Seeming-related powers, which are a bit less interesting IMHO. If I were to run this again, I think I'd limit players to 1 Seeming power (or wad of tightly related powers) and force them to rely more on Contracts. I like Contracts.

A word on violence: I felt that one-roll resolution was leading to

under-developed combat scenes, so I drew it out a little. All combats were resolved in 2 rounds. The stakes for the first roll were always that the defenders were trying not to get powned. If they made that roll, the next would be to either escape the combat or pown the attacker(s), who could also chose to try to escape. Lastly, I started requiring a new bit of narration to justify each Wyrd or Fear die added to a roll. That seemed to do the trick.

I'm afraid I can't recount the whole game (we played each session weeks apart and my brain is not on good terms with the past), but here are a few of the highlights I do remember...

- Our gadget monkey tried to help a pregnant woman in labor, but she turned out to be a hobgoblin whose stomach was distended with the remains of her last victim. She was disgorging the indigestible bits so she could attack him. Welcome to the Hedge.
- Another player slipped into the Hedge to interrogate a road about a truck they were tracking. Very cool.
- The old man of our group went ape-scat on a pack of Briarwolves after Fear dominated his combat-winning roll. This resulted in him slipping out of the Hedge and into the middle of a crowded Target store, shirtless and bruised, miming the savage beat-down of an enemy that wasn't there. Priceless.
- A hedgebeast that looked like a low-flying cloud with slender ribbons dangling from it. The ribbons would ensare anything they touched and paralyze it, then gigantic millipedes would crawl down and cut the unfortunate victim into digestible chunks.

The Verdict

Don't Rest Your Hedge did exactly what I had intended: it made the dual natures of the PCs central to the story. I wish it had done the same for Contracts, but that should be an easy fix. It's been a while since I had this much fun just with the mechanics of a system. I highly recommend it to anyone who likes vanilla DRYH and/or is more a fan of Changeling than of the Storyteller system.

Mechanics

Players have 3 pools of dice: Clarity, Fear, and Wyrd.

Always roll your Clarity and Fear dice.

Once per roll, you may increase your Fear by 1.

Any time you roll, you may add any or all of your available Wyrd dice.

To determine success, count all the 1s, 2s, and 3s. Compare to the GM's Pain roll.

To determine dominance, find the color with the single highest roll (including the GM's Pain roll).

Clarity

This stat represents your reason, cleverness, and your grip on the real world. You always start with 3 Clarity, but this will go up and down frequently. Each increase in Clarity reduces your available Wyrd dice by 1, and vice versa.

When it Dominates: Things stay under control, even if you fail. Shift 1 point from Wyrd to Clarity and you may choose to decrease your Fear by 1.

When it hits 6: You lose the ability to enter the Hedge, use your Seeming, or invoke your Contracts. Spend enough time around magic (and spend a point of Hope) and your Wyrd will creep back, but for now you're a normal, helpless person.

Wyrd

This stat represents your attunement to the Hedge and Faerie; it fuels your magic. You always start with 3 available Wyrd dice, but this will go up and down frequently. Every increase in Wyrd reduces your Clarity by 1, and vice versa.

When it Dominates: Magic happens. Outside the Hedge, your Seeming becomes visible. Inside the Hedge... *things* may be attracted to your location. Shift 1 point from Clarity to Wyrd.

When it hits 6: You lose the ability to leave the Hedge. You also go a little loopy. You'll come to your senses eventually (by spending a point of Hope),

but you'll be like a beacon fire to hobgoblins and the Others until then.

Fear

This stat represents the one, overarching commonality of every Changeling's existence. You start the game with 1 Fear, but it will increase rapidly.

When it Dominates: Things get out of control, even if you succeed. Your response must be either Fight or Flight. Increase your Fear by 1, even if you did so before the roll.

When it hits 6: You go crazy. Act accordingly. You gain 1 point of permanent Fear. Note the thing that triggered the roll; any time you encounter it in the future, you must roll to maintain your self-control.

Pain

These dice represent the strength of the opposition. They are always rolled by the GM.

When it Dominates: Even success comes at a price. Add a coin to the Despair bowl.

Contracts

These are deals you've made with aspects of the World during your time in Faerie. You may "remember" them with Hope coins. (You could create new ones in-game, but it would mean returning to Faerie.) In any case, the exact terms of the Contract are negotiated by the player(s) and the GM. All should include a benefit, a cost for invoking, and a penalty for violation (usually that the Aspect hates you and becomes anathema to you).

Seemings

Your supernatural aspects let you do supernatural things. Any time you use your Seeming, you must roll a minimum number of Wyrd dice based upon the magnitude of the desired effect, as determined by the GM. Mortals cannot see your Seeming... unless Wyrd dominates the roll.

Adrenaline

Every Changeling has one mundane talent that's fuelled by their Fear. Often,

it is something that aided them in their flight from Faerie. To make a minor use of this talent, your Fear must be at least 1; your current Fear total becomes the minimum number of successes for the roll. To make a major use of this talent, add 1 to your Fear pool; you may add your Fear total to whatever successes you roll.

Despair

The GM adds a coin to the Despair bowl every time Pain dominates a roll. The GM may spend a coin from the Despair bowl to add or remove a 6 from any roll. (If this causes Pain to dominate, no new coin is added to the bowl.) GMs may also spend a point of Despair to add a Catch to a Contract. Finally, GMs may spend a point of Despair to force the PCs into our out of the Hedge. Spent coins are paid into the Hope bowl.

Hope

Players may spend a coin from the Hope bowl to shift their Clarity/Wyrd 1 point, or to reduce their Fear by 1. (Permanent Fear cannot be removed.) Players may also spend a point of Hope to establish a new fact about their past: Contracts, allies, where they hid the spare house key, etc. Finally, players may spend a point of Hope to voluntarily slip into our out of the Hedge. Spent coins are paid back into the Depair bowl.

Both bowls are reset to 1 coin/player at the beginning of each session.