

Blightburg

An intrigue-drama tabletop roleplaying game

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You'll also want to print the **situation creation references**, **character creation references**, **character sheets**, **move references** and the **Devil's seat play aids**.

These are available as free downloads from

www.frozendepths.net/blightburg.

Inspirational RPG products

- *Apocalypse World*, by D. Vincent Baker and Meguey Baker. The inspiration for the game's structure, basic mechanics and multiple moves, as well as many other aspects.
- *Class Warfare*, by Johnstone Metzger. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 4.0 International license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>). The Deceive move is inspired by the Impersonation move, and the Orate move by the Crowd Control move.
- *Conspiracy of Shadows*, by Keith Senkowski. Partial inspiration for witchcraft and some of the darker tones of the game.
- *Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition*, by Wizards of the Coast. The inspiration for the advantage/disadvantage move.
- *Dungeon World*, by Sage LaTorra and Adam Koebel. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>). The Face Danger move is inspired by the Defy Danger move, and the Poison move by the Alchemist move.
- *Fate*, by Fred Hicks and Rob Donoghue. The inspiration for the Compel move and partly how traits work.
- *Fiasco*, by Jason Morningstar. The initial inspiration for situation creation.
- *Solar System*, by Eero Tuovinen. Playstyle inspiration.
- *Sorcerer*, by Ron Edwards. The inspiration for demonic deals.
- *The Burning Wheel*, by Luke Crane. The inspiration for beliefs, grit, lifepaths, and the player driven nature of the game.
- *The Shadow of Yesterday*, by Clinton R. Nixon. Playstyle inspiration and the initial inspiration for stress.
- *Town*, by Lisa J. Steele. Inspiration for the setting.
- *Wrath: The Oblivion*, by Mark Rein-Hagen. The inspiration for the Devil's seat.

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INTRODUCTION

THE PITCH

Blightburg is a player driven game of intrigue and character drama set in a grim Renaissance era city. The dramatic intrigue is spiced with occasional action, witches and Faustian pacts with demons. The characters range from shifty lowlifes and zealous fanatics to powerful but flawed individuals involved in complex schemes. As a TV series analogy, think of it as a mash-up of Game of Thrones and Salem in the Renaissance period.

HOW DOES IT PLAY?

The object of Blightburg is to find out who the player characters are deep down inside. Players (referring specifically to character players) are not allowed to state beforehand what their characters are truly like, now or in the future. Instead the characters go through tense situations, make hard choices and thus reveal who they really are. The game master is responsible for creating the tense situations and non-player characters required to challenge the characters.

The first session is dedicated to situation and character creation. Several factions are scheming against one another in the city with each player character tied to a different faction.

Between the first and second sessions, the GM develops a cast of characters and situations to challenge the player characters. Character play begins during the second session with the GM driving the game into motion. After a session or two the players will have a good understanding of what's going on and they will become the active part while the GM's role becomes reactive.

As the player characters don't form a party, all of them are rarely in a scene together. It's not passive downtime for a player whose

character isn't in a scene, though. Instead the audience members have tools to ask the other players hard questions and influence the unfolding events as well.

A campaign of Blightburg is always set in a fictional Italian city-state during the Renaissance period. Florence with all the names changed works splendidly, for example. A dramatic game such as this doesn't benefit from historical nitpicking. You're free to mix your favorite Renaissance era phenomena in your city of lies.

In a game of intrigue all player characters are influential one way or another. Most will likely have traditional power such as money, status, military strength or the backing of an important institute in the city. Other characters might be part of a criminal syndicate or have the powers of witchcraft at their disposal.

Blightburg's combination of intrigue and individual characters on different sides of the conflict often leads to player character conflicts as well. Alliances will be betrayed, friends backstabbed and unlikely partners might find themselves working together. Make sure your play group is okay with this. Also note that it's the characters that are in conflict, not the players. The players need to cooperate to make this work.

While this is a game of intrigue, there are no secrets at the player level. The GM probably knows something about the NPCs that the players don't, but the players don't keep secrets from each other, and the GM doesn't keep secrets about, for example, the player characters' past. A strict separation of player knowledge and character knowledge is required to make most of the drama.

The mechanics of the game give the players tools to explore their characters, and make sure the situations keep moving forward. The mechanics are generally light, but intertwined. The game values fictionally interesting characters, not mechanically optimized ones.

The focus isn't on simulation, instead the play style is more akin to a dramatic movie, but without a preplanned plot. The situation

develops organically with each choice the characters make. The characters and their relationships are in the focus, and the GM should be prepared to frame convenient meetups and coincidences to get the characters in the same scene.

SETTING UP

The game works best with a GM plus 3-4 players. The players should preferably be proactive people since they'll be driving the game forward with very individualistic characters. A campaign of Blightburg takes five to ten sessions of about four hours each depending on how fast your pace is. The campaign ends organically when the most important story threads are resolved and the group decides not to spin the consequences into a new starting point.

To play Blightburg, you need at least three ten-sided dice as well as printed copies of the reference sheets: a few situation and character creation references and the character sheets for the first session, as well as move references and Devil's seat play aids after the first session. The references can be found on the game's website at www.frozendepths.net/blightburg as free downloads. You might also want to find and print a suitable city map if you like to visualize where the action is taking place. Google image search is your friend here.



BASIC CONCEPTS

GAME MECHANICS

MOVES

Playing Blightburg means having a conversation about fictional characters in their fictional situations. In this context the term fiction refers to the imaginary situation at hand. There are no strict turns in the game, instead it's a free-flowing conversation that gets resolved in the order that makes sense in the fiction. Sometimes *moves* (self-contained mechanical rules) add to the conversation. The game's mechanics consist of moves for the most part. Take a quick peek at the Moves chapter on page 72 to get an idea what a move looks like, then come back here.

Taking action in the fiction may trigger moves. Each move tells you when it's activated and what happens next. Some triggers are in the fiction, some are not. The main rule for fiction triggered moves is: If it happens in the fiction, it happens in the mechanics and vice versa. You may trigger a move in the fiction by taking character action and then rolling the move you triggered, or you may declare that you're using a move and then taking the corresponding action in the fiction. Either way, both halves need to happen or neither does.

Here's an example. Vittorio is making a deal with captain Leone and Vittorio says: "Fine. I'll marry your cousin if you free my brother." This triggers the Manipulate move, whose trigger is "*When you have something a person needs or wants and you ask them to do what you want using that as a leverage*". Another way: Vittorio's player says he Manipulates Leone to free his brother, the GM asks what Vittorio is using as a leverage and the player answers "I'll offer to marry his ugly cousin".

Moves that require rolling instruct you to roll +*Stat*, which means rolling 2d10 plus the stat from your character sheet. A final result of 14+ (14 or more) is a strong hit, 9-13 is a weak hit and 8- (8 or less) is a miss. You can think of 14+ as a "yes" (what you tried to do succeeded), 9-13 as a "yes, but..." (you succeeded, but there's a cost) and 8- as a "no, and..." (you didn't succeed, and something bad happens). There are also moves that don't involve the dice, for example the End of Session just lists things for you to do.

Only the players roll for their characters. Instead of rolling the GM describes a situation, asks the players "what do you do?" and reacts. If a move is triggered, the GM applies the move's effect in the fiction. If an NPC would require a roll, the GM either decides what happens based on the fiction and the needs of the drama, or applies an implicit weak hit, making the situation more interesting for the players.

An important point to remember: A weak hit is fundamentally a success, it just has a cost attached to it. This is most relevant with the generic Face Danger move since generally other moves have well defined outcomes that may or may not be what your character wanted.

Most moves don't have strictly defined outcomes for a miss. What this means is that the GM makes your character's situation worse one way or another, using the danger inherent in the situation. A bland failure with no consequences is no good, the situation needs to move forward toward a worse state from the character's perspective. Every move changes the situation.

Moves use certain terms that have special meanings. If a move or its effect says +/-X *forward*, it means that you apply a +/-X modifier to the next roll you make. *Hold* means that you have points that you can spend to purchase certain options or benefits during a situation. You don't need to spend all of your hold immediately. *Advantage* means taking an extra die with the roll and dropping the