



Halos & Hellfire

THEY HAVE BEEN CALLED ANGELS AND DEMONS, the Heavenly Host and the Fallen Legions, the holy and unholy armies secretly locked for eons in THE WAR over the fate of humanity. These days, though, they mostly just call themselves MESSENGERS. It draws less attention when complaining about work over beers.

CREATING YOUR MESSENGER

Players, your character is an intangible being of spirit in a mortal disguise. Choose an **ASPECT** of your true form, a symbolic reflection of your abilities, like *Lightning-streaked, Six-winged, Ram-horned, Ever-burning, Dark-winged, Serpentine, Many-eyed, Formless, Leonine, Marble-hewn, Rose-adorned*, or something else.

Combine this with a **CALLING**, like *Guardian, Hunter, Herald, Scribe, Healer, Judge*, or something else.

Choose your **TENDENCY**, a number from 2–5. There’s a bit of angel and demon in us all, but a high number means you’re better at tasks aligned with **HALOS** (observation, self-restraint, and calm, precise action); a low number means you’re better with **HELLFIRE** (manipulation, force, and wild, passionate action).

Choose a **GOAL** for your character, such as to *save souls, impress the boss, stay under the radar, enjoy all Earth has to offer, help your pals*, or something else.

Choose a **NAME** from any culture, any time period.

YOU HAVE street clothes, a burner phone, and a mortal body you can shed and re-form at will.

As a **TEAM**, choose two Earth-side assets you share: *Friends in High (or Low) Places, Arms Caches, Secure Hideout, Sweet Ride, Badass Reputation, Zealots (or Cultists)*, or something else. And choose one problem: *Hunted, Indebted, Exiled, Compromised, Overbooked*, or something else. Finally, decide whether your team is composed of angels, demons, or *both*—perhaps as *buddies* who help each other out behind their bosses’ backs, *freelancers* hired off the books for deniable ops, or *deserters* on the run from both sides.

ROLLING THE DICE

When you do something risky, roll a 6-sided die to see how it goes. Roll +1 die if you’re **PREPARED** (e.g., well positioned, unhurried, or with a friend saying how they help), and/or +1 die if you’re an **EXPERT**, like from your *aspect* or *calling* (e.g., a *Dark-winged Herald* might be an *expert* at moving stealthily and speaking persuasively). Compare each die to your *tendency* to see how things go:

↓ When using **HALOS**, each die **on or under** your tendency counts as 1 success. (The angel in you wants to *understand* and interfere *less*.)

↑ When using **HELLFIRE**, each die **on or over** your tendency counts as 1 success. (The demon in you wants to *overcome* and shake things *up*.)

- 0** If none succeed, the GM says how it goes bad.
- 1** If 1 die succeeds, you manage, but at a cost.
- 2** If 2 dice succeed, you manage well.
- 3** If 3 dice succeed, you do exceptionally! The GM describes a bonus effect.

COSTS following 1 or 0 successes might include harm, reduced effectiveness, losing something (e.g., your footing, a carried item, line of sight), reality backlash from botched miracles, or other trouble.

INTERVENTIONS occur on rolls of **666** (THE MARK OF THE BEAST, *still totally metal, don’t let him hear you say he “went corporate”*) and **111** (THE LORD, OUR BOSS, *the one true divine intelligence of many names, a pretty hands-off manager*). Usually a 111 favors Heaven, and a 666 Hell, but the GM will interpret as appropriate.

AGREEING ON THE SETTING

The War centers on the struggle over human souls, but humans themselves must be kept in the dark to preserve their free will—or to prevent them from resisting. Heaven’s cosmically powerful Archangels mandate minimal interference in the mortal realm, but Hell’s own powerful Archdemons encourage their minions to sneer at Heaven’s rules. One side wants to free mortal souls from the other side’s oppression, helping humans to live on their own terms and escape the opposition’s clutches in death. The other side sees humanity like livestock to be herded, enslaving souls in the afterlife. Decide as a group which side is which—or, perhaps, whether each thinks themselves the saviors, but the truth is more complex. Be respectful of one another’s beliefs and feelings.

RUNNING THE GAME

Game master, don’t pre-plan outcomes—play to find out what happens. Let players make all the rolls. Except when responding to a failed roll (0 successes), show signs of trouble *before* it affects the characters, then ask them what they do. *“Zephar snorts and kicks off his boots to reveal hooves. What do you do?”* Ask them questions and build on the answers. *“Have you encountered nephilim before? What happened?”*

Call for a roll when the situation is uncertain. Make the characters’ successes feel awesome, and use their failures to make their lives interesting. The situation always changes after a roll, for good or ill.

HALOS & HELLFIRE (v0.5)

A role-playing game recommended for 1 game master (GM) and 2–5 players.

Created by Jason Tocci. Based on John Harper’s **Lasers & Feelings**, Ray Otus’s **Sorcerers & Sellwords**, and Derek Percy & Steve Jackson Games’ **In Nomine**.

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PERFORMING MIRACLES

All messengers can use miracles, albeit at a risk. Some common effects are available to all (e.g., manifesting wings or true form without a roll; applying preternatural strength and speed to a simple, mundane action for either *preparation* or *expertise*). Otherwise, you can only perform miracles related to your *aspect* or *calling* (e.g., a *Formless Guardian* might use miracles to deflect bullets and to shapeshift).

Most miracles require a roll against *Halos* (if subtle and non-intrusive) or *Hellfire* (if overt or manipulative). Roll +1 die if you use extra time to *prepare*, and/or +1 die if you train between missions to be an *expert*. Great effects (e.g., distant teleportation, lasting curses, felling many foes) require cooperation and/or extra preparation. Some effects may only be possible for Archangels or Archdemons, if at all (e.g., resurrecting a mortal, plaguing a city).

When you suffer cost on a miracle roll, *backlash* occurs. The GM describes an effect proportional to the effect attempted—affecting bystanders, suffering strange deformities, warping reality (e.g., unseen bells tolling, shadows writhing), losing supernatural powers for a time, etc.

DOING BATTLE

Every success and cost you roll has an effect—e.g., *dazed*, *limping*, *dismembered*—but the GM should warn if you risk death. Physical death merely sends your soul to Heaven or Hell, where you can gather your wits, then return to Earth in a new body. While revealing your intangible, true form, however, supernatural effects can cause real harm. This forces *aspects* to be reworded, hopefully only temporarily (e.g., from *Dark-winged* to *Broken-winged*). A messenger who can't rename an aspect when struck in their true form could be destroyed.

ADDITIONAL CHARACTER OPTIONS

IDENTITIES, or cover IDs, come complete with a paycheck and taxes. If you opt to have one, you're an *expert* on related rolls, but more lucrative day jobs may conflict with missions.

RELICS give access to specific miracles, often without backlash or preparation requirements. For instance, a blade of fire can be drawn from *Uriel's Scabbard*; *Winged Victory's Shoes* grant parkour *expertise*; a *Holy Sawed-off Shotgun* can banish intangible demons and spirits.

GIFTS are very specific, supernatural effects, so subtle that they risk no *backlash*. (Failed rolls might instead just reduce effectiveness, disable the gift awhile, or attract unwanted attention.) Each offers either a permanent effect upon oneself (e.g., *Friend of Beasts*, *Fearsome Aura*), or a miracle you roll as an *expert* (e.g., *Detect Sins*, *Command Machine*).

VOWS are pledged to seal contracts between messengers, including negotiations with the bosses for resources. You may opt to take a *gift* related to your *aspect* or *calling* by taking a proportional and fitting vow in keeping with Heaven's mandate of non-interference or Hell's commitment to effect change (e.g., a Heavenly *Many-eyed Judge* might *See Through Lies*, and so vow to *Speak No Lies*). As beings whose intent shapes reality, however, breaking vows warps messengers, causing *stigmata* to manifest on both mortal bodies and in true form (e.g., *glowing eyes*, *ceaseless bleeding*). An angel can avoid *stigmata* by lowering their tendency by 1, but if their tendency would ever drop below 2, they instead *fall*, becoming a demon and losing their gifts, vows, and domain. Demons have no such option—they can only convert to angelhood by surviving a test of faith. *Stigmata* fade after a few weeks of rest, but each side's Inquisition watches out for afflicted messengers, fearing defectors.

DOMAINS are concepts important to The War, each assigned to one messenger to monitor. The broadest domains—like War, Laughter, or Fire—belong to Archangels and Archdemons, but you might earn a minor domain under one of these (e.g., the *Archangel of Crossroads* oversees the *Angel of Public Transit*). A domain grants *expertise* and access to miracles like a *calling*, plus a fitting *gift* and *vow* (e.g., the *Demon of Fast Food* compels *Instant Craving*, but must *Overfeed the Hungry* no less often).

AGE can be used optionally to differentiate what characters start the game with. *Young* messengers may be entrusted with a minor *gift* and *vow*, and perhaps a minor *relic* to get them started. *Aged* messengers with more Earthly experience likely have a cover *identity* and 2 *gifts* and *vows*. *Antediluvian* messengers may have a minor *domain* and a great *vow*, or an extra *aspect* and a burdensome *identity*.

HUMANS & MYTHICAL BEINGS can also be played as characters. These might not have

SOMEONE IN THE DOMAIN OF...

ROLL 2 DICE, DIVIDE THE 2ND ROLL IN HALF

1-1 War	2-1 Laughter	3-1 The Law	4-1 Secrets	5-1 Time	6-1 Fire
1-2 Death	2-2 Passion	3-2 Devices	4-2 Dreams	5-2 Vegetation	6-2 Storms
1-3 Revelation	2-3 Freedom	3-3 Wealth	4-3 Crossroads	5-3 Beasts	6-3 Rock

WANTS SOMEONE TO LOOK INTO...

ROLL 1 DIE

1 a gate to Heaven, Hell, or another realm	4 an important mortal, to be guarded or dealt with
2 a powerful relic, to be turned over or destroyed	5 valuable intel or evidence
3 a potential defector, to capture or recruit	6 strange phenomena, disappearances, or murders

LOCATED IN OR AROUND...

ROLL 1 DIE

1 a major local landmark or public space	4 a research laboratory and/or engineering facility
2 a powerful corporation's fancy office building	5 a seemingly normal, nondescript neighborhood
3 sketchy old buildings that should be condemned	6 a convention, festival, or other irregular event

BUT EXPECTS OPPOSITION FROM...

ROLL 1 DIE

1 a rival domain's agents, on the same side of the War	4 mortals with secret knowledge or unusual powers
2 enemy agents, on the other side of The War	5 monstrous beings from myth or legend
3 mundane legal authorities or security forces	6 worshippers, and perhaps deities, of an old pantheon

AND IF THAT WEREN'T ENOUGH...

ROLL 1 DIE

1 subtlety and subterfuge are paramount	4 the Inquisition is uncomfortably close
2 innocents may soon be in the crossfire	5 expect conflicts with mundane obligations
3 a rogue Archangel may be involved	6 another faction's involved (roll above again)

aspects, but instead have a *style* (e.g., *Tough*, *Savvy*, *Quick*). Some can risk *backlash* to perform magic or miracles related to their *calling* (e.g., *Sorcerer*, *Saint*, *Trickster Spirit*); others can only use supernatural powers through *relics* or *gifts* (e.g., *Monster Hunter*, *Antiquarian*, *Hacker*). Any can have an *identity*, and/or start the game with *gifts* or *relics* with proportional drawbacks (e.g., vague and painful *Prophetic Visions*; *Unholy Strength* and *Mesmerism*, but a *Thirst for Blood* and *Sunlight Aversion*; or a *domain* and *vow*, like a lesser *Sun* deity who must *Never Act Coldly* or *Coolly*).

TWEAK ANY CHARACTERISTIC to suit your own game. For instance, if *aspects* seem too vague, replace them with *styles*—or, if you love symbolism, replace *callings* with *aspect/aspect* pairs like *Many-eyed Cyclone* or *Lion-headed Bull*. To play up politics, assign characters to rival *domains*. To downplay the Heaven/Hell distinction, make rolls instead against *Worldly* (for anything mundane) and *Otherworldly* (for anything supernatural); when you break a *vow*, roll *Worldly*, with *stigmata* on failure.

ADVANCEMENT

Gain +1 **FAVOR** after each successful mission. You may request a boon from an Archangel or Archdemon you've worked for by rolling 1 die *on* or *under* your *favor*. Roll +1 die if your last mission *kept The War a secret*, and +1 die if you *supported their domain*. You may spend up to as much favor as the number of successes rolled to choose *one* reward below.

0 DOWNTIME to either become an *expert* at a miracle you've used before, build an *identity*, shift *tendency* by 1 (within 2–5), recover from *stigmata* or a damaged *aspect*, or do paperwork for +1 *favor*.

1 A RELIC relevant to their domain.

2 A GIFT in their domain with only a modest *vow*, if any at all.

3 A SPECIAL HONOR, such as a powerful *gift* with no *vow*, an additional *aspect*, a promotion in your *calling* (e.g., *Judge* to *High Inquisitor*), or a special mission to earn your own *domain* under theirs.