

Intrigue onboard the *Fleur-de-lis*

AN IMPROVISATIONAL STORY-GAME OF CONSPIRACY ON THE HIGH SEAS

by Raffaele Manzo
a.k.a. “Rafu”

In 1772, an explorer and former privateer by the name of Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen returned to France from a voyage in the southern Indian Ocean claiming he had discovered the northern reaches of the fabled southern continent Terra Australis.

King Louis XV, le Bien-Aimé, was impressed enough with Kerguelen’s report that he immediately sponsored a new expedition beyond the southernmost limits of the known world...

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* REVISED ALPHA DRAFT *

The present document constitutes an entry to the **Game Chef 2009**, using the theme **Intrigue** and the “ingredients”: **Fleur-de-lis**, **Dividers**, **Seabird** and **Star**. As the game here described has undergone very little playtesting, it is to be considered at an “alpha” stage of its development. This is the second “alpha” draft for *Intrigue onboard the Fleur-de-lis*, incorporating some mechanical tweaks and changes in terminology.

Most direct influences:

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket, by Edgar Allan Poe.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, song, by Iron Maiden.

Poison'd, by Vincent Baker.

Until We Sink, by Magnus Jakobsson.

The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen, by James Wallis.

Thanks to **Nicola Ferrari** and **Lorenzo Marcheselli** for playtesting the game with me.

Very special thanks to **Dan Maruschak** for his extensive editing of my previous draft. Most of his suggestions have been integrated into the text you’re reading; some have not, because of choices of mine I’m undoubtedly going to regret.

You can contact me by writing to raffaele.manzo@gmail.com
or visiting <http://orgasmocerebrale.blogspot.com>

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Intrigue onboard the Fleur-de-lis

Intrigue onboard the Fleur-de-lis is a game of storytelling, role-playing and retroactive continuity for three players. Playing the game takes about three hours

Situation & main characters

The year is 1773. A royally chartered French ship named the *Fleur-de-lis* is sailing the Indian Ocean heading south and is just about to cross the 45th Parallel. **Captain** Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen de Trémarec, a Breton adventurer and former privateer, commands the ship and is the appointed leader of this expedition. His second in command is Pierre Armand Baudin, **First Mate** of the *Fleur-de-lis*. A **naturalist** also joined them in the dangerous voyage: a young Picard scholar named Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de la Marck (also known as “Lamarck”).

At the onset of the game, the players themselves know next to nothing about the expedition’s goals, destination, planned route or just about anything else. As the game progresses, things will get even murkier in this regard, but sudden glimpses of understanding will reveal part of what’s happening behind the scenes – at least, until those “truths” are in turn discovered to be an intricate web of lies.

Glossary & components

Act: a full game is made up of multiple Acts, and each Act is made up of multiple scenes.

Canon: facts established as true during the game, either by acting them out in the course of a scene and writing them down into the Captain’s Log, by discovering them on a Chart, or by inclusion in a successful Explanation (which is also written down for future reference). When playing scenes or providing Explanations, players can’t explicitly contradict Canon facts, but are encouraged to expand on those facts investing Canon with new and unanticipated meanings.

Captain: Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen de Trémarec, Breton adventurer and captain of the *Fleur-de-lis* by appointment of His Royal Majesty Louis XV, a main character. Also, the player assuming his role.

Captain’s Log: a stack of paper or notebook used to record anything which happened in a scene, usually as a list of “items” of fictional facts separated by rulers; also includes a Tolerance Number meter.

Character sheet: a scrap of paper used to record basic facts about one’s main character; each player needs to have one.

Chart: a scrap of paper marked on its back in one of three distinct ways. You need three of each to play, for a total of nine:

- *Homeland Charts* are marked on their back with the fleur-de-lis insignia of King and Country
- *Ocean Charts* have on their back an abstraction of the day and night at sea: split, a seabird flying over the waves on a side, facing a star shining over the waves
- *Destination Charts* have on their back a miniature ship enclosed in a lozenge formed of two pairs of dividers

Coin: the game requires 12 coins, poker chips, beads or similar tokens.

Devil’s Advocate: a temporary player role during the Explanation & Resolution phase of the game.

Dice: the game requires a total of 4 Fudge dice (six-sided dice with two sides reading “+”, two sides reading “-” and two blank sides).

Difficulty Number: a number you're attempting to roll over when rolling dice.

Explanation: a theory which enables most, if not all, of the fictional facts to make sense.

Explanation Roll: you roll dice to make your Explanation part of the accepted Canon.

First Mate: Pierre Armand Baudin, First Mate and second in command on board the *Fleur-de-lis*, a main character. Also, the player assuming his role.

Flashback: any scene set before the voyage of the *Fleur-de-lis*.

Main character: one of Captain Kerguelen, First Mate Pierre Baudin or the Naturalist Lamarck.

Minor character: any character beyond the three main characters.

Naturalist: Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de la Marck, a young Picard scholar of natural history, a main character. Also, the player assuming his role.

Omen: a card providing a pre-written item of fictional content; some also include special rules. You can use the spades suit of a standard playing cards deck to represent Omens.

Open Sea: the area in the middle of the playing table, where Charts, Omens and the pot are.

Players: this game requires three.

Pot: sort of like in a poker game.

Scene: the actual "role-playing" part of this role-playing game happens in scenes. Each scene is usually a few minutes long (but shorter scenes are sometimes appropriate as well) and includes at least some third-person narration as well as, usually, dialogs between characters.

Tolerance Number: a number indicating how much Explanations are allowed to deviate from absolute 100% consistence and still be accepted as true (thus requiring some retroactive continuity to be applied); it grows constantly higher as the game goes on and the accepted Canon consequently gets more and more involved. This number starts at 1, escalating up 1 point for every 4 scenes played.

Tolerance Number meter: part of the Captain's Log, it's a row of check-boxes arranged in groups of four, each group marked with an increasing number.

Setup

Each player (of which there are always three) takes a blank scrap of paper to serve as their character sheet and picks one of the three available roles: **Captain** Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen de Trémarec, **First Mate** Pierre Armand Baudin or the **Naturalist** Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet (known as "Lamarck"). The Captain is also given the Captain's Log.

Each player, in turn, considers the following question and writes the answer down as a fact on his or her character sheet:

- *What does my character openly brag about?*

It doesn't matter who goes first, but speak your answer aloud as you write.

Each player then considers the following questions about the other players' characters and gives an answer to both:

- *What is the character on your right famous or infamous for, and rightly so?*
- *What is the character on your left famous or infamous for, and rightly so?*

As the answers which concern your own character are spoken, record them as facts on your character sheet. Each main character is now described by three facts.

Each player then takes three blank Charts, one of each kind, and secretly writes something on them – anything which is appropriate to the theme of the Chart:

- **Homeland Charts** represent orders, secret missions, what the crown or other sponsors back home want from the ship. Examples: "Her Majesty the Queen commanded Lamarck to fetch her samples of unknown and exotic poisons", or "The *Fleur-de-lis* carries the Holy

Grail, which has to be taken to the South Pole within the year to save the World from great impending doom. Only one man in the expedition knows this truth”.

- **Ocean Charts** represent places, cultures, life forms and natural phenomena the ship is going to meet en route to its destination. Examples: “An island on whose tall reefs millions of large birds of an unknown species nest, worshiped as gods by the superstitious natives”, or “A canoe carrying a pair of civilized apes, friendly and able to learn any language the men of the *Fleur-de-lis* care to teach them”.
- **Destination Charts** represent the ship’s planned destination and what’s supposedly to be found there, including places, cultures, resources and difficulties. Examples: “The water of springs and streams near the harbor is unnatural in color and taste and not safe to drink”, or “On a desolate plateau are the ruins of an ancient city, where fair-skinned men and women lay asleep, not fully alive nor fully dead”.

Put the Charts in Open Sea, covered and shuffled. For a standard-length game, randomly pick one Chart per type and discard them (skip this passage for a longer game).

Shuffle the deck of Omen cards and put it in Open Sea beside the Charts, together with three of the four dice. Give each player three coins and put the remaining three in Open Sea to serve as the “pot”.

Finally, the Captain takes the remaining die and hands it to the player sitting on his or her left, thus starting the first turn of the first Act.

On your turn

First, you’re given a die and you roll it: on a “+” you get a coin from the pot, on a “-” you pay a coin to the pot.

Then you do **one** of the following things, your choice:

- **Take a coin from the pot** and draw an Omen card. Some Omens call for playing out a scene involving your character, one or more specific characters, or all characters.
- **Put a coin into the pot** to frame a scene involving your own character (which may be a flashback scene). You can ask any or both other players to play a minor character in the scene, but they’re under no obligation to. They can also ask to participate in the scene with their main character, and you can allow them or not, at your option.
- **Give a coin to another player** to frame a scene involving their character. You can also be part of the scene (as your main character or portraying a minor character), but you don’t have to. If you do, however, you can also ask the third player in (either as his or her main character or portraying a minor character) and they have to oblige – but read below.
- **If you possess 4 or more coins, gather dice from Open Sea** and take a chance at *explaining what the hell is up* (putting your main character at risk in the process). Describe a scene in which your own main character is in danger and proceed to **Explanation & Resolution**.
- **Pass** by adding a few sentences of descriptive color or filler.

Finally, you pass the die clockwise around the table, giving it to the player on your left.

Scenes and their purpose

All scenes involve one or more of the main characters. Most scenes are set on board the ship, at

some time during its voyage, or wherever it takes a brief stop en route, and they follow each other sequentially – although the length of time elapsed since the previous scene is left for the framing player to determine freely. **Flashback scenes** are exceptional, in that they're set in a time before the *Fleur-de-lis* left harbor, and may be set wherever it makes sense, depending on their content.

The purpose of regular scenes (including flashbacks) is to build a sense of intrigue by obliquely alluding to some unseen conspiracy, throwing a number of hooks that shady dealings are being sealed behind closed curtains, seeding the seeds of paranoia and generally making things murky. The ulterior motives of the main characters and their involvement in these conspiracies should be alluded to, but never overtly stated. In fact, *nothing* should ever be overtly stated, except for those things which are obviously lies or obfuscations. Obviously, something is very, very wrong on board the *Fleur-de-lis*, and the whole picture is vastly larger than any one person can perceive. A few scenes have a different purpose altogether, and those happen in the final Act (see Endgame) or sometimes as a consequence of drawing an Omen – but exceptions of this last sort are explicitly marked as such.

Flashback scenes

Flashback scenes are an exception: they're set in a time before the *Fleur-de-lis* left harbor and may be set wherever it makes sense, depending on their content. Their purpose is the same of any regular scene, though.

Only one scene per Act can be framed as a flashback, and only one you frame for your own main character. Also, once you frame a flashback scene you can't do the same in the subsequent Act, unless both the other players grant you explicit permission to do so.

While a scene is being played out

If two players are involved in the scene already (not necessarily as their *main* character) and you aren't, you can immediately enter the scene as well, at your option (either portraying your main character or as a minor character).

If all three of the main characters are in a scene, however, every player has to immediately throw a coin into the pot (with no further effect).

Ending a scene

Pass on the die to bring both your turn and a scene you framed yourself to a close.

Pay a coin to the pot to end a scene you did not frame.

Pay a coin to another player to abruptly end the scene and counteract/erase the last few words that player's character spoke or the last piece of action he performed (whether said player was playing a main character or a minor character in the scene).

After the end of a scene, the player who currently possesses the Captain's Log records in it any fictional facts that happened in the scene. Whether Captain Kerguelen as a character is privy to the facts or not is of no consequence. **At least one item** has to be added to the Log per scene.

The player with the Captain's Log also checks off a scene in the Tolerance Number meter, then passes on the Log to the player on his or her left. The numbers below the check-boxes in the meter are the Tolerance Number values: when the Resolution rules refer to the current Tolerance Number, use the rightmost value which has at least one checked box above it.

Anytime

Is the pot empty? Every player has to contribute one coin to the pot, for a total of three coins.

Is a player out of coins? That player's character is deep in trouble – but the player gets a chance to *explain what the hell is up*. Go to **Explanation & Resolution**.

In case multiple players simultaneously run out of coins, only the first in turn order moves on to the Explanation phase, while the other one(s) take a coin from the pot instead.

Explanation & Resolution

1. Frame your own main character into a scene of immediate, deep trouble (which **doesn't** count as a “scene” for purposes of raising the Tolerance Number meter).
2. Narrate the scene leading up to a cliffhanger.
3. Choose another player to be the Devil's Advocate.
4. Review Captain's Log and Canon, then hand those to the Devil's Advocate.
5. Formulate a theory to explain all of the apparently inexplicable things that happened up to now, in as much detail as possible. Write it down and read it aloud.
6. The Devil's Advocate then goes through the Captain's Log and Canon sheets counting exactly how many items of story are (in the Devil's Advocate's own opinion) left out from your theory or not explained by it: this number is the Difficulty Number for your Explanation Roll.
7. Explanation Roll: roll 4dF and add the current Tolerance Number. Is the total **higher** than the Difficulty Number?
 - A) **If you roll over the Difficulty Number**, then your theory is right! So you...
 1. add your Explanation to the Canon (anything in it is now established as a fact within the fiction);
 2. make a mental note to handwave or retcon any incongruence which may be left;
 3. **take all of the coins in the pot but one** to add to your own pile; and
 4. narrate how your character gets out of trouble (you may want to involve some element in this narration which further confirms your now-verified theory).
 5. The current Act is over; the game thus proceeds to the next one (see Opening of a new Act).
 - B) **If you roll equal to or less than** the Difficulty Number, then your theory's just a theory, in other words you're probably mistaken, and your character's still deep in trouble. You now have to:
 1. mark an “X” on your character sheet;
 2. narrate how the main character gets out of the most immediate danger, but only at a terrible price;
 3. pay all of the coins you've got, but one, to the pot.
 4. **If you haven't got any coins, take one from the pot and declare the current Act to be over** (see Opening of a new Act). Otherwise, just pass the die to the player on your left and proceed with turn order.

Opening subsequent Acts

Don't go through the following passages at the beginning of Act 1: follow the “setup” rules instead.

Every subsequent Act begins in the following way:

1. The player who was neither attempting the last Explanation & Resolution nor playing

- Devil's Advocate in it uncovers three Charts, one of each kind, and reads their content aloud (as long as there are Charts available – see Endgame).
2. All content from the newly uncovered Charts is added to the Canon as facts which are true in the fiction of the game (thus, future Explanations will have to cope with them). Then the Charts themselves are permanently discarded.
 3. The player who spoke last during the previous Act – that is, always, whoever attempted the final Explanation and Resolution of it – receives the Captain's Log and hands a die to the player to their left, signaling it's now their turn. Any other dice are brought back to the Open Sea, where they belong.

Endgame

If there are no more Charts to uncover at the beginning of a new Act **and** the last Explanation attempted was a successful one (i.e. it was added to the Canon), then the current Act is the Endgame Act.

From now on, coins stop changing hands in the usual way. In this final Act, each player frames exactly two scenes; you don't pass the die around nor roll it at the onset of your turn. There's also no need to go clockwise around the table, now: you're free to decide who goes first, second and last by consensus. The Endgame Act is actually made of two distinct phases, but there's no need to observe the same speaking order for both.

In the first phase of Endgame each player frames a quick scene with their own main character (the order in which they do this doesn't matter). Other players' main characters may get involved in such scenes at the framing player's option, if their owner(s) agree to it. Scenes in this phase may also be framed as flashbacks. **The purpose of a scene** in the first phase of Endgame is not to escalate the complexity of the intrigue, as in previous Acts: it's to clarify the role, goals and ambitions of each main character within the already established web of intrigue.

After this round of scenes, players have the option to gift one or both other players one or more coins from their personal loot, as a token of appreciation for their contribution to the fiction.

Between the first and second phase of Endgame, the player with the least coins in his or her loot discards down to one. Each of the other players then discards just as many coins. If, for example, the player with the least coins had two, each player should discard one coin. Discarded coins, as well as any coins left in the pot at this time, are removed from the game altogether.

In the second phase of Endgame each player in turn has to **make a final Resolution roll**. Roll 4dF and add the number of coins you currently possess. The Difficulty Number you need to roll over is equal to the number of Xs marked on your character sheet. Rolling over the Difficulty Number means your main character deserves a **happy ending**, otherwise he gets a **bad ending**, and the more Xs on your character sheet the worse and more tragic the ending.

Players then narrate the individual endings of the respective main characters, with an eye toward all of the endings somehow fitting together (in the sense of not introducing inconsistencies in the fiction at large).

The End

Appendix

Text of the Omen cards

A♠ – Shooting down an albatross

Your main character openly defies commonly held superstitions through some voluntary or involuntary, but very visible, act. Frame (with no expenditure of coins) a scene about this act, possibly including the reactions of simple crewmen to it.

Mark an X on your character sheet.

2♠ – Famine

For some reason, provisions are scarce and the crew of the *Fleur-de-lis* is desperately wanting for food, fresh water, or both. Hunger and thirst should figure prominently in all the scenes played from now to the end of the current Act, at least.

For the remainder of the Act, when a player rolls the die at the beginning of their turn and gets anything but a “-”, reroll the die once and apply the new result instead.

3♠ – The savage tribe

An exotic people of singular customs is met, possibly on an uncharted island. Play out a scene about the encounter (framing this scene does not cost any coins). Players can then keep using the tribe (and their island, if any) as an element of backdrop in the scenes they frame, for as long as they wish.

If “Famine” is in play, any player can – at any time – pay a coin to the pot to end it.

4♠ – A colony

Whether their presence here was known or not, a small number of Europeans is found living on a tiny island or in some very unlikely place. If the presence of the colony was known, this may be a planned provisioning stop for the *Fleur-de-lis*. Frame your own main character into a scene set at the colony, or otherwise interacting with the inhabitants (at no cost). Players can keep using the colony in their subsequent scenes until the end of the current Act.

If “Famine” is in play, end it immediately.

5♠ – Vanished islands

An island, archipelago or other body of land was supposed to be located at the ship’s current position, but it’s not there. Was a previous explorer mistaken? Is the *Fleur-de-lis* not actually where nautical calculations indicate? Or did the islands just disappear for some reason? You have the option to frame a scene about the incongruence, at no cost.

6♠ – Bizarre weather

The weather the *Fleur-de-lis* encounters at sea defies any expectations. Maybe, as the ship heads south past the Antarctic Circle, the temperature keeps steadily increasing instead of decreasing further. Or maybe some spectacular, weird phenomenon happens, such as a strange precipitation.

You have the option to frame a scene with the Naturalist about the strange weather, at no coin expense (otherwise, you can just pass). All players can include anomalies of weather in subsequent scenes as they wish.

7♠ – Signs of a lost civilization

Traces are found which point to an ancient and now forgotten civilization, such as unsettling carvings which resemble a form of writing, patterns of earth or stone too regular to be a natural occurrence, or the remains of what looks like a complex building. Either frame a scene about the discovery, or pay a coin to another player of your choice who must immediately spend it to frame the scene.

8♠ – Becalmed

The wind stops blowing, the marine currents almost stop flowing, and the *Fleur-de-lis* stands still in a sea like oil for countless days. People on board the ship grow uncomfortable, desperate and fatalistic. Such is the backdrop all players should involve in subsequent scenes, until the end of the current Act.

For the remainder of the Act, when a player rolls the die at the beginning of their turn and gets anything but a blank, reroll the die once and apply the new result instead. Additionally, players can't draw any Omens.

9♠ – Zoological discovery

The expedition encounters an unknown animal, either alive or dead. Give a coin to the player of the Naturalist, who immediately spends it to frame a scene about the circumstances of the finding.

10♠ – Malcontent and mutiny

Frame, at no cost, a scene about the crew or some men in the crew disobeying orders and possibly attempting a coup.

All players each roll a die. Any player getting a “-” result has to mark an X on his or her character sheet.

J♠ – We lost a man!

For some reason, a crewman meets an untimely death or is lost to the sea beyond any chance of recovery in the most unexpected and unsettling of ways. Frame a scene (at no cost) concerning the accident and who takes the blame for it.

You choose a player who has to mark an X on his or her character sheet. You are allowed to choose yourself.

Q♠ – Caught in the storm

The *Fleur-de-lis* is caught in a fierce storm: fierce enough that the ship risks being sunk or destroyed by the fury of the wind and sea. Frame and play a scene including all three of the main characters, with the storm as a backdrop and possibly main theme as well.

Players lose coins as usual for being in this scene. Any player running out of coins because of this immediately marks an X on his or her character sheet before any other consequences apply.

K♠ – The triumph of Death

Something horrible happens, either unnatural or all-too-natural, but always involving the death of many: whatever it is, it feels like a terrifying vision of Death's grim visage, or a glimpse of Hell. All players should cooperate in framing and playing out the most horrid scene they're able to think of (no coins are expended to frame or end the scene, nor during it).

As soon as you agree the scene is over, you all mark an X on your respective character sheets.

Tolerance Number meter:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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