

The Neptune Ball NA Rules and Scenario

The following are the rules for *The Neptune Ball*, a real-time, real-space roleplaying game sponsored by the Stanford Gaming Society. You are responsible for knowing these rules. Many of them are nigh-impossible to enforce and rely upon the honor system. Do not cheat. Do not abuse loopholes. Play fair. Be your own harshest critic.

The **gamemasters (GMs)** run the game. If you have any problems or questions concerning the game, contact a GM. Rulings they make are final. They may violate the letter of the rules to preserve the spirit. The GMs promise to be as fair and reasonable as possible. Neither they nor these rules are perfect.

This game is intended to be fun. Getting into character, roleplaying, being dramatic, and playing competitively can all increase the fun of the game. Do not take the game too seriously. Even if you are losing, keep a good attitude. When the game is over, the real winners are the players with the best stories.

This is only a game. Everyone involved should act with courtesy, sportsmanship, patience, and taste. The GMs may expel anyone they believe to be violating the spirit of the rules or the game. Emotions may run high. If you think things are crossing the line from game to reality too much, or if you are just getting too stressed, calm down and maybe take a break. Stay in control. Use common sense. Always, play safely, then play to have fun.

This game is a work of fiction. Although it may refer to things in the real world, it does so only for the sake of the scenario. It does not represent the opinions of the GMs or the Stanford Gaming Society. These rules are modifications of those used in previous games. This game and all materials thereof are copyright 2014 by Acata Felton, Jeremy Cole and the Stanford Gaming Society.

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1 Scenario

King Triton is delighted that you have agreed to attend the Neptune Ball. This annual bash is the most exclusive, and grandest ball in all of Atlantica to celebrate the turning of the year. There will be dancing, refreshments, and a grand banquet, with all of the finery the palace has to offer.

In attendance will be many of Atlantica's social and political elite. For the first time in a hundred years of war, the Neptune Ball will also be host to talks of peace with Pacifica. Witness history being made - or have your voice heard, and help steer your country in the right direction. Should politics bore you, there will always be the intrigue of court to divert you. Be careful though, in pursuit of other's secrets, you may find your own revealed as well.

Unless you know otherwise, gamespace is open. Your character is free to leave gamespace by going up the main door to the room and declaring your intentions with a 15 count, but you MAY NOT return if you choose to leave.

Game Times: Game runs from 8pm to midnight on **Saturday, October 3rd**. Surviving PCs are expected to be in-game for the entirety. Game may end early. Cleanup and Wrapup will immediately follow the end of game. Please plan at **7:00 pm** sharp to get situated before the game starts. **If you will be late, you must CALL the GMs and let us know. Acata: 650-690-5628;** otherwise we reserve the right to give away your character.

2 Getting Started

2.1 Character Packets

Your character packet is a big manila envelope. It contains your role: who you are, what you're up to; everything about your part as a **player-character (PC)** in the game. Read all the contents and generally keep them with you during the game. If you are missing something or find something which doesn't seem to belong to you, tell one of the GMs. Character packets are confidential. Game materials which cannot be given to other players are marked "Not Transferable," whereas things which can be given to others are marked "Freely Transferable" or "Game Item."

Your Character Packet would normally contain:

Name-Badge: A name-badge with your player name, character description, and **badge number** on it shows that you are in the game; wear it visibly while you are playing. It represents your character's body in-game. Badge numbers are not in-game information. See the *Character Bodies* and *Badge Numbers* sections for more details.

Character Sheet: Your character sheet describes who you are and what you are up to. It contains a list of everything else that should be in your character packet. Do not show or read your character sheet to other players.

Bluesheets: A bluesheet describes information common to members of a group. When in conflict, character sheet information overrides bluesheet information. Do not show or read a bluesheet to other players.

Greensheets: A greensheet describes and expands abilities, mechanics, or in-game knowledge. Do not show or read a greensheet to other players.

Stat Card: Your stat card lists your statistics. You might not know what all of your stats mean. Do not show your stats to others. The reverse side is a **death report**; fill it out and give it to the GMs when your character dies.

Ability Cards: An ability card explains a special ability your character has. The front side describes the effects; show it to players when you use the ability. The reverse is the rules of use and must not be shown to other players.

Memory/Event Packets: A memory packet is an envelope or stapled piece of paper with a **trigger** which describes when to open and read it. If the trigger is a number, open the packet when you see something with that number. If it's a quoted phrase, open when you hear or read it in-game. If it's a symbol, open when instructed. Do not take game action based on an unopened trigger. Do not show or read a memory packet to other players.

Items: In-game items may be transferred from character to character, and should be marked as such. See the *Items Etc.* section for more details.

2.2 Reality and Game Reality

There is a big difference between reality and game reality. Players must treat each other with courtesy and explain to each other what their characters perceive in confusing situations; e.g. “My character’s hands are covered in blood,” an **out-of-game** statement. Characters are under no such restrictions, and may do what it takes to further their goals; e.g. “Uh, hi Bob. Just got back from the butcher shop,” an **in-game** statement.

Metagaming is inferring in-game knowledge that is inappropriate for your character from out-of-game information. Do your best to not metagame and especially to prevent the risk of metagaming. Be your own harshest critic.

Halts: A halt pauses game action. To call one, say “game halt” in a clear and audible voice; other players around a corner should hear you, but you shouldn’t scare some poor grad student. End a halt by saying “three, two, one, resume.” Call a halt for one of only three reasons: because a rule instructs you to, for safety and similar out-of-game issues (see Non-players section below), or to pause game and fetch a GM (which you should normally avoid doing).

Not-Here: You may go not-here by turning your name-badge around so the “I’m Not Here” side is showing (or by removing your badge entirely, if you are leaving game). Putting a hand on your head, visible from a distance, helps if you’re near other players. Go not-here for one of only three reasons: because a rule instructs you to, to leave game, or to fetch a GM while in a halt (which you should avoid).

When you are not-here, your character is not there. Your character cannot see, hear, or remember any game actions or information you (the player) happen to encounter. Avoid other characters, common game areas, game signs, or any sort of game interaction.

Non-Players: Use tact and common sense when dealing with non-players (**NPs**). You are encouraged to spread the gospel of real-time, real-space roleplaying; however, many NPs prefer to sleep, study, or work undisturbed.

NPs may not knowingly affect the game. They and their rooms may not be used to hold items or information. They may not help you kill. Do not use the presence of NPs to hide from rampaging mobs that want your blood.

Avoid conspicuous or threatening game actions in front of NPs. Shooting your friend outside of a classroom one minute before class lets out is a bad idea, as is screaming bloody murder down a hallway. If, despite your most valiant efforts, some NPs do get upset, call the GMs who will help calm them down.

If you are about to take an action that would likely upset a nearby NP, you may call a game-halt. This is considered an out-of-game issue.

Observers: An observer is someone not playing the game who has agreed to watch. They generally wear an observer headband or an observer name-badge. Observers have traditionally been called “ghosts.” They should stay out of the way; you can always ask an observer to leave. If a friend who is not playing wants to observe game, send them to the GMs.

Mechanics: Many actions your character can take, such as walking, talking, and general interaction with other characters, are represented by you doing them. Others, like combat, are performed via abstract mechanics, which are described in ability cards, greensheets, and rules. The abstract information for mechanics (like badge numbers) may not be discussed in-game. If you want to do something special for which there is no mechanic, ask a GM.

Become familiar with your mechanics before game starts, especially those which occur under time-pressure (like combat). Game action will not stop for memory packets, greensheets, or such.

A **kludge** (and derivative forms like “kludge-ite”) is something impervious to logic and cleverness, usually for game-balance. You can’t affect a kludge without a specified mechanic.

Zone of Control (ZoC) is a rough distance measurement. You are within ZoC of someone if your outstretched fingers can touch their outstretched fingers. Double-ZoC is twice this distance, triple-ZoC is three times, etc.

Headbands represent obvious visual effects; wear them visibly on your head. If you see a headband and don’t know what it represents, ask. If you are wearing a headband, tell people what their characters see. See the end of this document for additional details

An **interruptible** mechanic has some duration, and may involve continuous roleplaying. It is stopped if you are attacked or if someone within ZoC says **“I stop you”** or an equivalent phrase. Some mechanics may be easier or harder to interrupt.

A **n-count** is an interruptible mechanic with a repeated, counted incant (“I pour a drink one, I pour a drink two, I pour a drink three”). Speak clearly; each count must take at least a full second. Each n-count will specify the number, e.g. a 3-count.

Safety: This is a game. Real violence is unacceptable. Game action should cause no real-world damage, either to people or property. If something dangerous is happening, call a halt. Stay in control, use common sense, and do not endanger yourself or others. You should not run or otherwise force your way into or through someone else’s ZoC, and you should not make physical contact with another player without permission.

2.3 Basic Strategy

Make sure you understand the rules. If you are completely confused, get a GM who will try to help you out. Make sure you know enough about your character to role-play him or her when you start talking to other people. Read through your entire packet a couple of times, and skim through it again right before game starts. If you don’t know something about your character, ask a GM.

As a character, your first priority should be to open lines of communication. Contact people, show up at meetings, and chat. Try to be easy to get in touch with. Ask people questions on relevant subjects. They’ll probably lie, but you may find something out.

There are no guarantees that you can trust anyone, but since cooperation is the key to accomplishing things, you will be forced to trust people anyway. The most trustworthy people are probably those who need you.

Those who do not study history are doomed to repeat it. This game has a lot of history in it. You should strive to learn as much as you can about your history, and the history of those around you.

3 Items Etc.

Many in-game items are represented by little white cards with a number and description. Item cards may be shown to others, passed around, stolen, etc. The **item number** on the card is not in-game information and may not be discussed.

Some mechanics in game may involve making item cards. Such items should be clearly marked as “in game” and treated as such.

Use common sense. You can’t carry a hundred rocks in your pocket, fold a sword in half, or hide a life-sized statue in a fire hose. You can’t stop a bullet with a set of blueprints or rip apart a metal safe with your bare hands. Even if your bag can carry a shovel in it, the shovel noticeably sticks out (“you see a shovel sticking out of my bag”).

Written Information: If you write in-game information down on a piece of paper, that paper is now an in-game item and must be clearly marked as such. Don’t write in-game information on out-of-game documents (character sheet, etc.). Don’t write out-of-game information (like memory packet triggers) on in-game documents.

Envelopes: Some items and locations may have an attached envelope (or just be a labeled packet or folded paper). The envelope may include directions for when to open these (“open packet if you press the big red button” or “open packet if you eat this”); otherwise you may only open them if instructed. Close them when you are done. Open and close packets gently.

Signs: Some locations and other game materials are represented by signs or packets posted throughout game area. You may read any signs and must follow any rules printed on them. If a sign or packet doesn’t have some sort of in-game description (it only has out-of-game mechanics information, like a number or just a colored dot), then your character doesn’t even see it or know that anything unusual is there.

Bulkiness: A bulky item is too big or heavy to be carried or concealed freely. Bulkiness is measured in **hands** or **dots** (how many hands it takes to carry it). If you are carrying a bulky item, make it clear to onlookers (hold the card). A hand carrying a bulky object may do nothing else. With one hand less than required, you may drag a bulky item at a slow pace.

Valuable: Some items are marked “valuable”. Some plots may require you to acquire valuable items. Any item that has this tag qualifies.

Props: Some items may have props (physical representations or **physreps**) associated with them. The card and physrep should be kept together. If they are separated, the card is the real item. Prop items are as bulky as the physrep. They can be carried in bags that can hold them, on straps that are attached to them, etc.

Character Bodies: A body is **three hands bulky** and usually represented by a name-badge. It must be willing or unable to resist for you to carry it. Carry the badge conspicuously. Onlookers can’t tell if it’s dead without close examination, unless it would be obvious (like headless).

Unstashable Items: Unstashable items can’t be hidden or left behind. They look too important, valuable, or interesting; NPCs will not let them stay there. These include any item that has a physrep. This is a kludge. If you’re not leaving an unstashable item in another PC’s care, and you want to leave it behind, give it to a GM or observer. You may leave it in plain sight in a public area if there are other PCs around.

3.1 Searching, Stashing, and Stealing

Places: To search a place, search it. Normal items can be stashed in any reasonable, legal place. Don't put items behind locked doors, inside ceilings, in construction sites, or in hacking locations; consequently, don't go rummaging through such places for game items. Don't stash or search in places that are not in-game; see the *Game Areas* section for more information.

People: All searches of characters or their belongings are conducted via player dialogue. Someone must be willing or unable to resist for you to search them. You need at least one free hand to search someone. Searching is interruptible (see above).

You can perform a **pat-down search**, which will only reveal the presence of weapons. This takes as much time as it takes your victim to tell you what you find. If you're the victim, do this at a reasonable pace.

A **total search** is an invasive, complete search of a character's clothing. This reveals all in-game items, and takes as long as your victim spends handing over possessions. If you're the victim, hand over items at a reasonable pace. **Items labeled "magical effect" are never revealed during searches unless you know otherwise.**

Bags: To search a bag in someone's possession, say "I search your bag." This proceeds just as a total search. To search an unattended bag, search the physrep. Don't look through someone's character packet, read their psets, steal their lunch, etc. If the bag has an attached, displayed item card with an envelope, the bag is a prop; search the envelope and not the bag.

If you want to leave in-game items in an unattended bag (e.g. to hide a bomb), keep items in reasonable places that could be found with a quick search of the bag. Don't hide in-game materials mixed together with out-of-game materials. You can attach an item card and envelope to segregate in-game items from out-of-game materials.

4 Violence, Damage, and Death

4.1 Health States

Characters have five possible states, concerning health and damage. When you are **fine**, you may act freely. When you are **restrained**, you are helpless and may do nothing but talk. When you are **knocked out**, you will wake up in five minutes. When you are **wounded**, you are unconscious, bleeding, and will die in five minutes. When **dead**, you are dead.

When knocked out or wounded, fall down and drop anything you are holding. Just lie there. You won't be doing much of anything until you wake up. Do not listen to conversations going on.

Dead men tell no tales. If dead, do not give out any information about your character or death to any players. You may remain on the scene to play the part of your corpse; describe obvious information to onlookers ("I have a gunshot wound in my back"). When you leave, place the front of your name-badge with a description of the body's obvious state. Take the "I'm Not Here" side to wear. Stack your items with your body. Fill out your Death Report. Make sure the GMs know about your death. If your death becomes generally known to the other characters, you may be able to become an observer. Until the game is over, you may not convey game information to any player.

4.2 Weapons

Weapons are represented only by item cards in this game (no phys reps). Weapon effects are on the card. To use a weapon, you must have it in your hand and unobstructed. Display it in an obvious manner. You cannot hold more than one weapon in a hand. You may only use one melee weapon at a time.

4.3 Killing Blow

Unless you know otherwise, killing blows are forbidden in this game. A player may still bleed out and die.

4.4 Martial Combat

All characters have a **Combat Rating (CR)** stat. This represents your basic skill in martial combat; you use the same number for attacking and defending. Someone with a CR of one can't fight very well. Someone with a CR of three is somewhat burly or skilled. When using this stat, you may pull your punches by using a lower number.

To martial-attack someone, clearly state your attack and CR ("Knock Out 2", "Wound 2", etc.) from within ZoC. You need the ability card for any attack you make; you don't have to display it. Your attack must resolve before you make another; otherwise, you may act freely. If an ally directs **Assist** at you after you attack, you may, within 2 seconds, restate your attack with the Assist's CR added ("Wound 3", "Assist 2", "Wound 5"). Assist does not change your CR for defense. You may ignore an Assist.

If you wound someone or assisting in a wound attack, you must put on a red headband for 10 minutes. This represents the fact that it is obvious that you are bloody.

Wound attacks require a Knife (351). Restrain attacks require rope (which is freely available). Knock Out attacks do not require any item.

When martial-attacked, resolve by comparing the attack against your CR. If your CR is lower, take the effects; else, say "**resist**" and the attack has no effect. If you neither say "resist" nor state your own attack within two seconds of the incant's end, you are surprised and the attack just works. The attack begins when the incant begins; until you resolve, all of your actions other than martial attacks are interrupted; serial attacks don't prevent simple actions (talking, weapon-drawing, ranged attacks) in-between. Resolve all attacks alone, in the order they occur; choose the order if it is unclear. If you are attacked with "**waylay**" instead of a CR ("Knock Out waylay"), the attack just works.

Martial Attack Abilities: Here is a list of attack abilities. You should assume that every character has Knock Out, Wound, Assist, and Restrain. Other attack abilities may exist.

Knock Out: You can knock someone out as an attack. This requires a **blunt** weapon. Say "Knock Out" and your CR.

Effect: I knock you out.

Wound: You can wound someone as an attack. This requires an **edged** weapon, such as a knife. Say "Wound" and your CR.

Effect: I wound you.

Assist: You can assist someone else's attack. You must be within ZoC of both the attacker and target. Within two seconds of an attack, direct this at the attacker, saying "Assist" and your CR.

Effect: I assist your attack.

Disarm: You can disarm one item from someone as an attack. Say "Disarm" and your CR. Point at the item you want to disarm. If the attack works, they must drop that item.

Effect: I disarm that item.

Restrain: You can restrain someone as an attack. Say "Restrain" and your CR. You may freely drag, attack, or (if you have a weapon) killing-blow them. To do anything else, or if your health state changes, incant "release" and let them go.

Effect: I restrain you. You are restrained until I incant "release."

4.5 Stealth

Stealth abilities represent sneaking up on a victim with obvious intent to invade their personal space, probably to attack them by surprise or to pick their pocket.

To use a stealth ability, you must be within ZoC of your victim. Form the sign of the devil (index and pinky fingers extended, thumb holding other two fingers down) and extend it along the direct, unobstructed line from your shoulder to the victim's head. Hold this position for the time specified by your ability. Before this time is up, the ability is thwarted if anyone attacks you or if the victim notices the symbol. If they react in any way to the symbol, they have noticed; you (the attacker) make the call.

If you notice someone using a stealth ability on you, make it obvious. "I notice you" is unambiguous; use it if you can. Once a stealth ability is finished, you may not retroactively have noticed.

Waylay: You can attack by surprise as a stealth ability. You must hold the symbol for five seconds. If you succeed, you may replace your CR with "waylay" for a single immediate attack on your victim.

Rope: Rope is freely available as seaweed. Make an item card for it. To tie someone up, they must be either willing or helpless. If you get tied up with rope, you become restrained. If you are conscious and left alone, you can wriggle free in five minutes. Rope is a one-hand bulky item.

Doors and Locks: Some doors or items in game are *locked*. You may not open them or get past them unless you fit the requirements listed, or have some other method of opening locks. Closing such an item or door locks it again.

5 Miscellaneous

Headband Colors: Differently colored head bands are used in this game to represent obvious aspects of a players appearance. They are also used to delineate GMs and observers.

1. A white headband represents GMs and observers.
2. A green headband represents a human.
3. A red headband represents a bloody character. This is immediately visible to all observers. Red headbands are acquired by performing wound attacks or assisting in such attacks.
4. A yellow headband represents a shark. Don't get too close!
5. A black headband represents a terror of the deep. You should ask what you see from a safe distance.
6. If you see another color head band, you should ask the player what you see.

Badge Numbers: The first digit of your badge number is your character's apparent age in decades. All hands are 2 hands bulky.

6 The Neptune Ball Specific Changes

This section is a recap of the changes specific to this game from other MIT Assassins Guild style games played at Stanford in the recent past. There are also several new and important game-wide mechanics. Familiarize yourself with them before game.

6.1 Tape on the floor

There may be tape on the floor in this game. It represents obvious, visual effects, or an obstruction that you cannot cross. Stop and look around for a sign that explains whether you can cross this line or not.

6.2 The Banquet

There will be a banquet 2 hours into game. All guests are expected to attend. Princess Adriana is organizing an event to precede the banquet.

6.3 Magical Effects

Magical effects in game are represented as item cards labeled “magical effects.” These items cannot be revealed with a normal search and are considered **non-transferable** unless you know otherwise.

6.4 NPCs

The Neptune Ball has many NPC pages running around. They will be wearing blue headbands. They can carry a simple message for you to another player to the effect of: “So-and-so wants to talk with you. I saw them in X location last.” They may not be terribly reliable or timely however. Pages cannot carry items unless you know otherwise. NPCs will also spread game-wide announcements, and may play certain additional NPCs as necessary for some mechanics. **Pages cannot be sent out of a room for any reason. Pages cannot be attacked or killed.**

6.5 Stickers

Placing stickers on another player represents a sketchy action like pickpocketing. If you see someone placing a sticker, you should probably ask what you see. Stickers already in place are out-of-game information.

6.6 Other

There is no ranged combat in this game.

There are many headbands in this game, some colors are known to everyone, some are not. If you do not know what a headband represents, ask.

7 Closing Notes

These rules are imperfect. The GMs may violate the letter of the rules to preserve the spirit. We hope these rules are reasonably clear, but if you have any doubts about your interpretation, talk it over with us in advance. We should also add, as much as we hate to admit it, we GMs are human: when all of our carefully laid plans are going haywire, we may lose our cool. The best way to deal with people is remaining calm and friendly, especially when everyone is tired and hungry.

We hope you have lots of fun. Good luck.