

MIGHTY SONS OF RISUS!

CHARACTER SEEDS

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These are some very basic characters just waiting for their Hooks and Tales, Sidekicks and Shieldmates, and Lucky Shots and Questing Dice to flesh them out. Feel free to change and add details, cliches, etc. [Square Brackets] indicate Double-Pumped Cliches.

Peripetes the Philosopher

Peripetes theoretically seeks modest pleasures in order to attain a state of tranquility and freedom from fear as well as absence of bodily pain through knowledge of the workings of the world and the limits of his desires. He is more fond of the pleasure seeking and pain avoiding than seeking knowledge of the world.

Surprisingly Competent Polymath (4)

Creatively Lazy Scrounger (3)

Enthusiastic Epicurean Philosopher exploring the pleasure-seeking aspects of his creed (3)

Erissa of Knossos

An athletic young maid trained as a Minoan Bull Dancer, Erissa lost her position after the death of King Minos and the destruction of the Minoan civilization. She wanders the world, surviving any way she can.

Athletic Young Ex-Bull-Dancer (4)

Rootless Wanderer With A Talent For Thievery (3)

Struggling Street Performer (2)

Erebus The Orphic

A gloomy young lad singing morbid songs, intent on making his aristocratic parents angry out of youthful rebellion. Like his idol, Orpheus, Erebus pines for a lost love. He dabbles unwisely in

necromancy, sometimes walking the thin line between teenage angst and angering the powers of the Underworld.

Goth-Like Orphic lyrist(4)

Angst-Ridden Teenager Rebelling Against His Parents (3)

Would-Be Necromancer Thinking About Reviving His Dead Sweetheart (2)

Prince Agonistes

Disinherited prince seeking to reclaim his birthright, which was stolen from him while he was studying with Chiron the Centaur. He seeks to make a name for himself to aid his cause, which leaves him little time for or appreciation of the fairer sex.

Proud Aristocratic Pain-In-The-Butt trying to claim his dead father's throne (4)

Glory-Seeking Warrior with No Time for the Ladies (4)

Part-time Student of Chiron the Centaur (2)

Drimios, Son of Zeus

Son and occasional priest of Zeus, Drimios is a well-muscled bodybuilder type who travels around righting wrongs (aided by the prophetic flashes of insight he receives occasionally from his father).

Tempestuous Son of Zeus (4)

Mighty-Thewed Do-Gooder [2]

Part-Time Priest of Zeus with Occasional Glimpses of Foresight (2)

Gyveros the Deviser

Multi-talented son of Hephaistos, Gyveros does not seek the fame of a warrior; in fact, he avoids use of weapons whenever possible. His natural curiosity has often led him into danger, which he escapes from with his wide-ranging skills and cunning.

Laid-back Jack-of-all-trades (4)

Resourceful son of Hephaistos (3)

Intelligent, optimistic escape artist (3)

Hook: Has a code against killing

Osteos the Healer

Rustic Healer and battle-trained surgeon, who has a lot of things to say about a lot of things. He's travelled all over the world seeking cures and remedies as part of the crew of a famous ship.

Cantankerous ship's healer [3]

Priest of Apollo and Asklepius(2)

Opinionated pharmakon (2)

Democoön the Warrior

A well-educated, slightly naive young warrior of noble birth, physically and mentally fit, who has few vices and most of the virtues, and probably needs to have some of his smooth edges roughened up a bit.

Clean-cut young warrior, ever loyal to his friends and family, and respectful of the gods (4)

Shrewd tactician with an appreciation of music, philosophy, and mathematics (3)

Handsome natural athlete with a competitive nature (3)

Smintheos the Scoundrel

Smintheos, the youngest son of a noble father, was too young to inherit much when his father died. He soon found himself thrust out into the world to make his own way, which he did in whatever way he could. He found that people trusted him far more than they should because of his gift for gab and his easy smile.

Youngest son of a tight-fisted nobleman

Resourceful adventurer with a winning smile

Swift-talking scoundrel with a casual appreciation of other people's property rights

Nepheios the Necromancer

Though a necromancer and sorcerer, among other talents, Nephelos uses his magic in the service of "good", to atone for the crimes he committed as a worshipper of Hecate. He lays the restless dead back to rest, and opposes "evil" sorcerers and necromancers who prey on others.

Wise-cracking magician crusading against evil magicians and vengeful spirits(4)

Ruggedly-handsome ex-worshipper of Hecate, using his powers to atone for his past crimes (4)

Hard-Drinking Two-Fisted Danger Magnet (2)

The Mighty Sons of RISUS!

A campaign setting for Risus: The Anything RPG

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*The mighty sons of Hercules once thundered through the years!
These men of steel could never feel
the curse of a coward's fears!*

*The mighty sons of Hercules were men as men should be!
They burned with dreams, then turned their dreams
into history!
--theme song, THE SONS OF HERCULES TV series*

The myths of ancient Greece speak to us across the ages: of heroes, gods, and monsters, of mighty quests and tragic fates, of badly-dubbed dialogue and shoddy special effects. Though elements of these fables are familiar to us (who doesn't know of Zeus and his lightning bolts, Cupid and his arrows of love, the deadly gaze of Medusa, the mighty labors of Hercules?), it is relatively untouched as a setting for fantasy role-playing games.

The Mighty Sons of RISUS! (or *MSoR!*) is a tongue-in-cheek adaptation of Greek history and mythology. It draws inspiration from several sources, including Italian "sword-and-sandals" movies (also known as "peplums"), the "Hercules" and "Xena" TV shows, and the inspired retro-RPG worldview of Olivier LeGrand's "[Mazes and Minotaurs](#)". Within the following pages anachronisms and inaccuracies thrive and stalk the unwary like a large unwary-stalking thing.

To use these rules you'll need a copy of **Risus: the Anything RPG**, (copyright 1993-2001) by S. John Ross. All references to **Risus** refer to [the PDF Version \(1.5\)](#). I also assume that you have a copy of [The Risus Companion](#); if you don't, you're missing out on some crunchy bits of Risus goodness.

**MEN AS MEN (and WOMEN AS WOMEN) SHOULD
BE!**

"Through the centuries, in olden times, there lived...the sons of Hercules!
Heroes supreme, they roamed the Earth, righting wrongs, helping the weak
and oppressed, and seeking... ADVENTURE!"

--*introductory narrative, THE SONS OF HERCULES TV series*

"So", you might ask, "is **The Mighty Sons of RISUS!** a game fit only for playing well-oiled musclemen and sword-swinging gladiators?" By Zeus, *no!* Not all of the Sons of RISUS! were men of steel; they were men (and women), philosophers and priests, magicians and poets and rogues "who burned with dreams and turned their dreams into history", "helping the weak and oppressed, and seeking... ADVENTURE!" So don't "feel the curse of a coward's fear"; feel free to "take the world and shake the world"!

What is a "peplum"?

Peplums, or *Sword and sandal* films, are a genre of low-budget adventure or historical films set in ancient Greece, Rome, the Middle East, and other places associated with classical antiquity. They often featured loose adaptations of historical or mythological themes, characters and events. The term "peplum" refers to the type of garment worn by actors (usually professional bodybuilders) to show off their heroic physiques and negligible acting skills.

Primarily filmed in Italy between 1958 and 1964, the peplum has enjoyed periodic revivals and homages, such as the hugely popular *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* TV shows.

CHARACTER CREATION

MSoR! follows the standard Risus method of character creation as described in **Risus** (p. 1), which is briefly summarized as follows:

- 1) Take 10 d6;
- 2) Divide them up into piles of 1-4 dice each
- 3) Name each of the piles a juicy epic-sounding cliché, like "Battle-Hungry Warrior", "Tamer of Horses" or "Hummus-Loving Epicurean" (see **Juicy Heroic (and not-so-Heroic) Clichés**);
- 4) Come up with a brief description of the character, his personality, what he wants out of life, etc. ;
- 5) Choose or create a more-or-less pronounceable Greek-sounding name, so the other players don't have to call you "Rich's character" or "the guy with the hairy back".
- 6) Write it all down so you don't forget.

That's the simple way of doing things. If you want to start with more than 10 dice, or you want some additional ways to spend your starting dice, check out **Optional Options**, below.

OPTIONAL OPTIONS

There are a number of advanced rule options available for **Risus**. Some are allowed in **MSoR!**, some are not. Please refer to **Risus** or **The Risus Companion** for details.

Hooks and Tales (*Risus*, p. 5): Hooks and Tales are what the Greek myths are *all* about. Everyone should know something about their character's origins, their background, their heroic strengths and weaknesses. If you don't want to write up an epic about your hero, at least jot down the important details.

Examples: (Hooks)

- Meleager's life is tied to a particular half-burned log; if the log burns fully, he dies.
- Jason of the Argonauts is attracted by (and attractive *to*) dangerous women (e.g., the Lemnian women who murdered all the men on their island, the sorceress Medea).
- Odysseus is the target of Poseidon's wrath because he has slain Polyphemus (the Cyclops, Poseidon's son) .
- Achilles is doomed to live a short life full of glory since he chose to take up arms instead of living a long but inglorious amongst the daughters of Lycomedes

Example: (Tales)

1. Achilles is the son of King Peleus of Aegina, an Argonaut, and the Sea-Nymph Thetis. He is Invulnerable due to being dipped in the river Styx as an infant (heel is vulnerable). There is a prophecy about Achilles: either he lives long life with no fame or short life with great fame. His mother raised him among women to keep him safe, but was tricked into taking up arms by Odysseus. When King Agamemnon of Mycenae gathered the Greek kingdoms to make war on Troy, he was given a prophecy: the Greeks could not defeat Troy without Achilles' participation. And so Achilles became the greatest warrior of the Greeks; yet Agamemnon foolishly offended him by taking back a slave girl, Chryseis. Achilles has therefore withdrawn from battle, much to the dismay of the Greeks. Odysseus is pressuring the stubborn Agamemnon to make peace with Achilles, and Achilles' friend and sidekick Patroclus urges Achilles to return to the fray, but Achilles' wounded pride will not be salved.

Pumping Cliches: (*Risus*, p.5): allowed

Double-Pumped Clichés: (*Risus*, p.5) allowed

Funky Dice: (*Risus*, p. 5) Players may not start out with Funky Dice, but can acquire them through experience later on.

Sidekicks and Shieldmates (*Risus Companion*, p.54): allowed and encouraged.

Lucky Shots and Questing Dice:(*Risus Companion*, p.50) Allowed. This is especially suitable for representing the favor of the gods.

Eye of the Tiger (*Risus Companion*, p.52): allowed. Even Greek heroes can suffer setback and defeat; the montage is a way to recover from them.

Rescaled Risus (*Risus Companion*, p.54) To reflect the heroic nature of the characters in MSoR!, the target numbers have been adjusted on the table below. (For the math people, each TN has been divided by 2 and rounded up.)

- 3 A cinch. A snap. A challenge for a Schmuck. Routine for a pro.
- 5 A challenge for a Professional.
- 8 An Heroic challenge. For really inventive or tricky stunts.
- 10 A challenge for a Master. Nearly superhuman difficulty.
- 13 You've GOT to be Kidding. Actual superhuman difficulty.
- 15 Throwing an unloaded chariot, horses not included
- 18 Throwing a loaded chariot, including the driver (in full Dendra panoply), a couple of warriors, their armor, their shield carriers, AND their loot, AND their horses...
- 20+ Changing the course of a mighty rivers, etc.

Boxcars and Breakthroughs (*Risus Companion*, p. 54) Allowed. This option gives lucky low-powered characters a bit of an edge against more powerful foes.

Deadly Combat (*Risus Companion*, p. 54) Allowed at the consensus of the players and/or the Guy In Charge¹ (see Swing Combat, below).

Swing Combat: (*Risus Companion*, p. 55) Allowed. Most combat is presumed to be non-deadly (suited to the tone of the peplums), unless the players and/or the GiC decide that the tone becomes darker.

Last Man Standing: (*Risus Companion*, p. 56) Allowed. This fourth type of conflict (the Cascade) is especially great for athletic competitions.

Proper Cliché Notation

When you see "Such-and-such Cliché (6)", the parentheses mean that it's a normal cliché. When you see "This-or-that Cliché [6]", the square brackets represent a Double-Pumped Cliche (see **Optional Options**, below, or **Risus**, p. 5). If you see a "{6}" or a "<6>", you know it's a typo, or maybe the typist was drinking.

Examples of Cliches (and what they can do)

This isn't a definitive list of "character classes" you can play in *MSoR!*; rather, it's a small collection of some of the character types to be found in the "literature", along with some of the qualities associated with them, that can help you get started on a character. Some suggestions on customizing your clichés can be found in "The Well-Honed Cliché". A more voluminous yet equally-non-exclusive list may be found even farther below (see *Juicy Heroic (and not-so-Heroic) Clichés*).

A Man As Men Should Be (burning with dreams, turning your dreams into history)

¹ ***Guy in Charge (GiC):** *Risus*, virtually alone amongst RPGs, lacks an official designation for the person who's running the game (e.g. DungeonMaster, GameMaster, Referee, RisusMaster, etc.). IMO, this is not as an omission, but part of a grand design to truly empower the, um, guy in charge. (Besides, the term "RisusMaster" kinda sucks.)

Adventuresome Prince (looking around for a kingdom to conquer, rescuing damsels in distress, doing deeds of derring-do)

Ancient Mariner (sailing the seven seas, tying interesting knots, climbing the rigging, getting exotic tattoos)

Avenging Mother/Daughter/Wife (wreaking vengeance on those who have wronged her or her family -- I'm looking at YOU, Agamemnon!)

Evil-Eyed Sorcerer (casting the evil eye, bending weak-willed people to their wills, being generally naughty)

Beautiful Witch (changing people into animals, seducing lost mariners, brewing potions)

Blind Seer (getting around just fine without sight, being unable to just come right out and say what you mean)

Boozed-Up Hedonist (knowing where the best parties are, indulging to excess, singing loud off-color songs at all hours)

Breaker of Horses (knowing your horseflesh, training war horses, not getting kicked in the head)

Clumsy Hero ("Sorry about that, Your Majesty"; "Missed it by *that* much"; "That's the *second* biggest Trojan Horse I've ever seen"))

Demigod (having more-than-human abilities or appearance, being harassed by immortal enemies, being followed around by playwrights and poets)

Delighter in Slaughter (plunging into battle, wading knee-deep in gore, telling people how you love killing more than life itself)

Dutiful Priest (sacrificing to the gods, barbecuing cattle, taking inventory in the temple treasury, telling the people the gods are angry with them)

Eagle-Eyed Archer (seeing things way far off, hitting targets other people can't even see, snicking the wing off a fly)

Epicurean Sage (living a modest and virtuous life, enjoying worldly pleasures within reason, disdaining superstition and divine intervention)

Orphic lyrist (wearing dark clothes, moping about death, trying to think up rhymes for unrhymable words)

Hairy Brute (looking unkempt, scaring the locals, expressing yourself through casual violence)

Hard-ridin', Bow-Totin', Man-Bashin' Amazon (preaching about feminism, fighting harder than any mere *man*, looking provocatively good under all that armor)

Haughty Aristocrat (ruling, sticking it to the peasants, conquering other aristocrats' kingdoms)

Haughty Aristocratic Maiden (looking down her nose,

Heroic Warrior (scattering your enemies in your wake, earning tons of glory, getting invited to banquets in your honor)

Iron-Thewed Wrestler (pinning your opponent to the ground)

Ladies' Man (chatting up the ladies, irritating their fathers, boyfriends and husbands, jumping out the window or hiding in closets)

Long-Winded Orator (dominating the conversation, splitting hairs, contradicting what everyone else says)

Lovable Rogue (being friendly and full of confidence, tripping over local customs, lacking polish)

Merciful Healer (bandaging oozing sores, telling dying patients that they'll be all right)

Misunderstood Monster (being cursed by the gods, wreaking havoc without meaning to, meeting a humiliating and ironic end)

Natural-Born Leader (leading naturally, keeping the troops happy and successful)

Exiled Aristocrat (having no home, being exiled for a crime you did/didn't commit, being tough and mean)

Otherworldly Oracle (muttering prophetic gibberish)

Pill-pushing Pharmakon (looking for medicinal ingredients, prescribing foul-tasting potions, covering up accidental poisonings)

Reluctant Hero (being thrust into extraordinary circumstances beyond your control, doubting your ability to fulfill your heroic obligations, desiring to live an ordinary life)

Resourceful Archimedean Philosopher (putting together kooky gadgets with beeswax, string, and an Etruscan army knife)

Sacker of Cities (beseiging, looting, having fun storming the citadel)

Seductive Water Nymph (spending a lot of time at the beach without getting all pruneey, avoiding lustful pursuers, choreographing fish into amazing underwater ballets)

Shaggy-maned Centaur (riding the range looking for cattle and women to steal, sticking arrows into things, looking for too much wine to drink)

Smelly Barbarian (acting and speaking like Arnold Schwarzenegger, storming the gates, sacrificing people to your loathsome gods)

Spooky Necromancer (wearing too much dark makeup, casting a pall over any party you attend, having casual conversations with the dead)

Stoic Philosopher (being indifferent to pain, being reasonable and logical, not having fun)

Stout-Hearted Spearman (fighting in formation, aiming and thrusting, enduring countless Freudian comments about the size of their spears)

Gloryhound (sacking kingdoms just for the glory, worshipping yourself, being adored by the populace)

True Heir to the Throne (surviving the tragedy that killed your parents, striving to regain your kingdom)

Two-Fisted Boxer (taking it on the chin, pounding your opponent into submission, counting to ten)

Vulgarly Rich Dude (throwing huge banquets as if they were a simple meal, hobnobbing with kings and high priests, building enormous palaces and then tearing them down)

Wandering Do-Gooder (righting wrongs, relocating frequently, finding trouble wherever you go)

Well-Balanced Elementalist (playing with fire and air and earth and water, experimenting with Things Man Was Not Meant To Know)

Well-Oiled Muscleman (getting a cute princess to oil his muscles, working out in front of an audience, conking a few heads together)

Wild-Haired Wood Nymph (communing with nature, fighting off suitors with a stick)

Wing-Footed Warrior (racing around the battlefield, scaring the horses)

Mighty Sons of RISUS!

Art of the Cliché

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It's tempting to think of clichés the same way we think of character classes in other RPGs, but you can pack a lot more into a cliché than into a character class. In reality, there is a *potentially limitless* supply of clichés! According to [*Anatomy of a Cliché*](#) (from the Risus Companion, or online at http://unclebear.com/comments.php?id=406_0_1_0_C), they can reveal some or all of the following information about the character.

Profession: Cuckolded King of Mycenae, Beautiful Young Priestess of Aphrodite, Portly Epicurean Sage,

Race or Species: Son of a Wood-Nymph, Satyr with Pretensions of Herodom, Wise Old Centaur, Valley-Girl Nymph

Cultural Background: Sinister Egyptian Sorcerer, Rustic Arcadian Huntress, Athenian Social Climber, Spartan Orator

Personal History: Former Amazon Queen, Defrocked Priest of Poseidon, Ex-Philosopher

Degree of Dedication: Diehard Monster-Slayer, Reluctant Charioteer, World-Weary Swordslinger

Religion or Philosophic Bent: Dedicated Stoic, Enthusiastic Priestess of Dionysus, Poseidon-Worshipping Charioteer

Social Class or Financial Means: Cash-Poor Aristocrat, King of the Beggars, Evil Tyrant, Lost Heir to the Kingdom

Gender: Haughty Amazon, Burly Gladiator, "Boy" Charioteer, Thessalian Witch

Demeanor: Happy-Go-Lucky Sidekick, Dour Cynic, Fatalistic Spearman

Group Affiliation: Suitor of Helen of Troy, Initiate of the Eleusinian Mysteries, One of the Seven Against Thebes, Would-Be Argonaut

Appearance: White-Armed Maiden, Mighty-Thewed Slayer of Men, Snaggle-Toothed Beggar, Flowing-Haired Achaean Prince, Cow-Eyed Queen of Sparta, Tattooed Thracian Dog

Ham-Fisted Reference: the Ancient Greek version of Cliff Claven,
Oprah-Like Queen, "Red Tunic" Guy, "Vulcan"-ish Philosopher
Goals: Actor In Search Of Eternal Fame, Philosopher Looking For An
Honest Man, Evil Advisor Plotting To Usurp the Throne
Self-Image: Swordsman Who Can't Trust Himself Anymore, Sidekick
Who Believes He's Ready To Be A Hero, Beautiful Princess Who
Thinks She's Ugly, Overenthusiastic Under-talented Would-Be Hero
Sub-Plots and Relationships: The Charioteer Everybody Goes To For
Romantic Advice, The Philosopher Secretly In Love with His Beautiful
Rival, Necromancer Seething At The Way They All Laughed At Him
(The *Fools!*)
Problems: Blind Poet, Lucky Drunk, Born Loser, Aged Mentor, Warrior-
King Who Committed a Terrible Crime Without Knowing About It,
Rightful King Of Ithaca Striving To Return Home

JUICY HEROIC (AND NOT-SO-HEROIC) CLICHES

(Add salt and pepper to taste)

Herewith are presented a veritable onslaught of clichés that might be of use to you. Think of them as cliché "seeds", ready to bloom in the fertile garden of your imagination (substitute a less-flowery metaphor if you will). Use them as is, arrange them in your own design, or ignore them altogether.

The Mighty Sons of RISUS!

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Metaphysical Madness

A steady diet of beefcake gets a little tedious after awhile. Fortunately, the peplums serve up a little variety in their side-dishes. Magicians, priests, and philosophers are regular features of the Herculean genre, albeit more as occasional sidekicks or antagonists. Hence, they should be fairly rare (but not unknown) as party members.

Magic

Sorcery

Sorcerers (or more commonly, sorceresses) have both the talent and the knowledge to work their occult will upon the world. Like Medea and Circe, sorceresses often display dark temperaments, daring to stray beyond the bounds of divine law. The darker their motivations, the more solitude they usually require for their activities. Despite their dark reputations, they are still sought out by the desperate for their many powers, which include

- 7) necromancy, communicating with and summoning the dead
- 8) fertility, agricultural as well as human
- 9) healing ("pharmakeia", practiced by pharmakoi)
- 10) mind control (including love magic and "bindings")
- 11) conjuring spirits and demons,
- 12) oneiromancy, the ability to perceive, interpret, send, and entwine themselves into the dreams of other
- 13) creating protective amulets, charms, and talismans
- 14) divination, looking forward or backward through time

Not all sorcerers practice the same type of magic; some of them specialize, some of them are only able to pick up a hodgepodge of spells, and others are simply non-specialists, using whatever type of magic seems appropriate for the occasion. The advantage of specialization is that it makes casting your specialized form of magic easier, but other magics more difficult.

Another feature of sorcery is that repeating the same magic upon the same target is increasingly more difficult. It sometimes rebounds upon the caster or the usser, to their detriment.

Magicians often have a streak of divine blood in their background (Medea was a descendant of the Titan Helios), or worship gods such as Hecate or Hermes (both as trickster and psychopompos, or he who guides the dead to the underworld). Whatever the source of their talent, they must be trained by another sorcerer, usually in a teacher-student relationship. A few sorcerers and sorceresses have a number of followers, even schools, such as those of Chiron the Centaur and Asklepios the Healer.

Sorcerous tools of the trade can be numerous, including weird musical instruments (such as the iynx, flutes, and drums), dried parts of dead creatures and people, wax dolls imbued with the hair and nails of a victim, lead tablets for inscribing curses, herbs and potions (beneficial, harmful, and otherwise), scrying tools such as mirrors and bowls of magic water, and many other witchy props. Sorcerers sometimes carry out ceremonies at special times of the day, such as twilight and midnight, in places like graveyards, crossroads, gallows-trees, and caves.

Priesthood

Priests have a special bond with the gods, as well as certain responsibilities to them and their communities. They are responsible for assuring that the gods receive all the respect due to them, usually through ceremonies and sacrifices. They interpret the will of the gods, often by interpreting omens, and are charged with conveying the gods' messages to the king. They act as advisors and healers to all worshippers, who support the temple with sacrifices (often in the form of meat and produce), and they call upon the power of the gods to help their communities. Some priests, especially those who serve Apollo and Asklepios, are also healers, and may be *pharmakoi* (see **Magic**).

Priests are usually regarded as sacrosanct, enjoying personal immunity from insult and injury as representatives of the gods themselves. As representatives of the gods, any injury or harm done to them is regarded as a personal affront by the gods. When Agamemnon enslaved the daughter

of Chryses, the priest of Apollo, the god of archers assailed the Greek camps with plague arrows. Though most priests do not possess magic power in the form of spells, their power consists of their influence with the gods.

Priests may specialize in the worship of one god, a single aspect of a god, or worship all gods equally. Full-time priests usually live in a temple or shrine, but many heroes (especially the offspring of gods) act as priests without this restriction.

Zeus

Orphism

Orphics are mystic musicians, who touch the hearts and souls of their audience with music and magic. They can make their listeners experience any emotion, often exerting a powerful influence upon them. The most skilled Orphics can even affect animals, plants, the land, and the winds. They know secrets which Orpheus brought back from the Underworld in his doomed quest to rescue his beloved, Eurydice.

Philosophers

Bedivere: "...And that, my liege, is how we know the Earth to be banana-shaped."

Arthur: "This new learning amazes me, Sir Bedivere. Explain to me again how sheep's bladders may be employed to prevent earthquakes."

--Monty Python and the Holy Grail

Cliff: "Due to the shape of the North American elk's esophagus, even if it could speak, it could not pronounce the word 'lasagna'."

--Cheers

Often shunned for their tedious rambling, eccentric behavior, intellectual smugness, ability to detect free food and drink with extraordinary precision, and a scandalous disdain for religion, Philosophers were a nigh-ubiquitous feature of urban Greece, and deserve some representation in a Sandalpunk campaign. But philosophy itself seems like an unlikely addition to role-playing games, in part because most gamers who studied Philosophy in college had notebooks with more doodles of dragons in

the margins than actual notes themselves. How, I pondered glumly, can we use Philosophers, in a game without dragging down the level of fun?

Here's my best shot at solving the dilemma of how to tell all the wooly-bearded, wooly-headed guys apart. I hope there is enough information, scant though it is, to help you play a philosopher as a PC or an NPC. The numerous different schools of philosophy, each with its own particular brand of "the truth", eccentric notions, and cutthroat rivalries, can be a good source of entertainment and (mis)information. Having party guests from two opposing schools at the same dinner party might be sophisticated fun, scandal, a brainy brawl, or the beginnings of a full-scale war of the wise guys.

Schools of Philosophy

Socratics, Platonists, and Aristotelians

Even other philosophers sometimes have trouble telling these groups apart. Both are known for studying ethics, logic, rhetoric, and other esoteric subjects, and for crowds of disaffected youth and malcontent intellectuals gathering at their "symposia" (drinking bouts). They sniff at the thought that philosophy might have any practical applications (take THAT, Archimedean!), but are good at spreading the notion that philosophy makes one a better human being.

Socratics

Socratics are notorious for corrupting youth with questions like "What is Justice?", "What is the best way to live a good life?", and "What happened to all the baklava?". They believe that the wisest man in the world is the one who is aware of how ignorant he is, and many wise people agree that the Socratics certainly qualify.

Platonists

Platonists believe that the world as we see it is a corrupt version of the ideal form, which cannot ever be reached by material beings; gamers with visions of making off with the "Ideal Form" of a mountain of gold should just keep that to themselves. Oh, and the Platonist version of the perfect ruler is the Philosopher King, which lets you know what they're really plotting late at night over a bottle of ouzo.

Platonists are so disgustingly addicted to the practice of logic and reason that they are difficult to deceive or coerce, even by magic, real-

estate swindles, and pyramid schemes. They make use of models, diagrams, and complicated logical "proofs".

Aristotelians

Aristotelians scoff at Platonists' notion of "ideal forms", but spend an inordinate time looking for "First Causes" and "the Unmoved Mover". They believe that to be fully developed as a human being, they must master a variety of disciplines. They have developed a variety of philosophical exercises which tests their mettle. At any time, an Aristotelian may challenge another to answer random questions about Geography, Entertainment, History, Arts & Literature, Science & Nature, and Sports & Leisure.

Hippocratics (or Humourists)

Healers who apply Plato's theory of four universal Elements to the human body. An imbalance of the bodily Humours ---Sanguine (Air), Black Bile (Earth), Yellow Bile (Fire), and Phlegm (Water)-- cause diseases and excessive behavior. Through such cutting-edge techniques as bloodletting, emetics, purges, and healthful regimens, Humourists strive to balance these four fluids in the body, restoring the victim's personality as well as his health.

Pythagoreans

Suave and mysterious in the way that only mystic math geeks can be, Pythagoreans crunch numbers the way Epicureans munch olives. Reclusive and mystical, these "mathemagicians" are always finding obscure relationships between numbers in odd places, be it in poetry, architecture, geometry, music, astronomy or women's undergarments. Pythagoreans claim that mathematics is the ultimate reality, and that everything can be predicted and measured in rhythmic patterns and cycles. Since they were also expert accountants, they realized the potential profits of the "sciences" of astrology and *feng shui*, which they insist they created long before the Chinese. Being sacred architects, they also know how to build those houses where balls roll uphill and you stand sideways.

Pythagoreans also believe in reincarnation, vegetarianism, and that foods like rabbit and beans are evil.

Stoics

Stoics personify the expression "stiff upper lip". They believe in ignoring pleasure and pain, thinking that these distract them from Logic and Reason, the only thing in life worth pursuing. They can be the featured attraction at a gladiatorial bout, or witnessing the slaughter of helpless screaming widows and orphans, or consummating their marriage with their childhood sweethearts, and they won't bat an eye.

Stoicism is a popular philosophy, even amongst non-philosophers. Spartans, Romans, Native Americans, and Vulcans (the last two rather uncommon), are all card-carrying Stoics.

Cynics

These scruffy philosophers believe in "living a life of Virtue in agreement with Nature." Therefore, Cynics give up all worldly possessions, including money, houses, and personal hygiene products, to live a simple, frugal, shameless, and often naked life on the street. They eat what they find, sleep wherever they can, and say whatever they want. They scoff at the false values of those who indulge in materialistic lifestyles, care about things like honor and glory, and wear clothes free from embarrassing stains. Despite this, Cynics are rather popular as dinner guests among the trendy set, who think it's the height of hilarity when the philosophers bark at their guests.

Epicureans and Hedonists

The only important goal in life, according to the founder of Epicureanism, is the pursuit of food, drink, and company, which means they turn up at parties a lot. They can often be found expounding on the benefits of seeking "modest" pleasures (while pilfering *hors d'oeuvres* and pouring libations of the host's best wine) to attain a life of tranquility and freedom, free from bodily pain and distress. "Everything in Moderation", they caution, making sure to sample at least one of every tasty tidbit at the table.

A rival colloquium of sensual sages, the Hedonists, disagree: "Everything in Excess!" is their creed. Too much of a good thing is never enough for a true Hedonist. They wax eloquent about the virtues of stuffing every orifice full of whatever gives it the most pleasure, and praise the tranquility and freedom that only massive overindulgence can bring (at least until inevitable blackouts, hangovers, and crossbow weddings).

Sophists

All the other philosophers claim that Sophists are giving their profession a bad name. They are reviled for two things: their greed for money and power, and their ability to bend logic and reason like a pretzel. Known for twisting the truth until it cries for mercy, they function much like con-men, used car salesman, shyster lawyers, and career politicians. They specialize in splitting hairs, putting words into their opponents' mouths, padding expense vouchers, and buttering up wealthy patrons.

Debating a sophist is like standing in front of a monkey cage wearing your best white tunic: you're just begging to be pelted with dung.

Archimedeans

Derided by as "mere tinkerers" or "menial craftsmen" by the other philosophers, Archimedeans are the inventors, engineers, and gadgeteers. Their workshops are full of sputtering aeolipiles whistling like a teakettle, half-finished prototypes of siege engines, scale models of leaky aqueducts, and the like. Archimedeans were inspired by childhood tales of the mechanical servants of Hephaestus and the bronze giant Talos; they are driven by a desire to take things apart to see how they work, and yearning to improve on the design. They dream of creating burning mirrors capable of setting fire to ships, one-man vehicles that fly or swim or roll across the ground, and meddling in the gods' domain. Their tools of the trade include actual tools, measuring sticks, hammers, scaffolds, and well-supplied workshops, as well as lots of stuff to draw calculations and diagrams on.

Contrary to modern sensibilities, the possibilities of mechanized warfare have not yet caught on with the rulers of the Bronze Age. This may have to do with the novelty of the technology, the expense of research ("Call me back when you've got it finished"), or the hazards of actually using these half-tested deathtraps.

MIGHTY SONS OF RISUS!

NPCs

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Here are some fully-fleshed NPCs for **The Mighty Sons of RISUS!** As NPCs, they usually have more starting dice than player characters are allowed, representing their increased experience or the will of the gods. [Square brackets] indicate double-pumped cliches.

Testikles the Thracian

Much-tattooed berserker from Thrace with a one-sided rivalry with Herakles

Voted "Best Pillager In Thrace" Five Years Running [3]

Hulking Thracian Berserker With A Grudge Against Herakles (3)

Insanely Mean Drunk With A Short Attention Span (3)

Hook: Imagines he was slighted by Heracles

Questing Dice: Looking for Herakles [] [] [] [] [] []

Tale: Testikles, a red-haired Thracian barbarian, was one of the foremost warriors in Thrace. To prove his prowess, he issued a challenge to Heracles, to meet him in single combat. Unfortunately, Herakles never got the message, being busy with his Twelve Labors and voyaging with the Argonauts. Testikles took this as either cowardice or contempt on Herakles' part, and vowed to seek him out and prove his own might. So far, he has met Herakles 3 times. The first time he passed out drunk just as Herakles made his appearance at a feast. The second time, he was showing off his prodigious might by engaging in a head-butting contest and knocked himself out (to Herakles' amusement). The third time Herakles was serving as a slave to Queen Omphale (dressed as a woman); Testikles didn't recognize him and put the moves on the Son of Zeus, and was knocked out by the wrathful demigod.

To avenge his humiliation, Testikles, has vowed in his thick-headed way to perform his own Twelve Labors, aimed at undoing those of Herakles.

Megaera

Teenage Girl With A Thirst For Conquest

Spoiled Warrior Princess (4)

World-Travelling Seeker Of Ways To Kill People [2]

Hook: Has earned an impressive number of enemies for a teenage girl, whom she encounters pretty much on a weekly basis.

Sidekick: Ecstasia, Bubbly Ancient Greek "Flower Child" (3), Would-Be Bard/Actress/Priestess/Journalist, whichever takes her fancy that week (3)

Tale: Megaera is a typical spoiled teenage girl who just happens to be a very accomplished warrior princess. She has travelled the world learning ways to slaughter lots of people. For a teenage girl, she has a very impressive list of sacked cities to her credit. She's got issues, however, stemming from the brutal slaughter of her family and the tragic destruction of her home town, which she kinda feels guilty for; she was supposed to be on guard duty when the invaders snuck in, but she was making out with this totally hot dude. Still, at heart, she's still a typical prom queen, albeit a vengeance-crazed one. She's constantly being attacked by friends and relatives of the people she's slain. Her one companion is Ecstasia, who can charitably be described as "ditsy". Even Megaera really doesn't know why she tolerates Ecstasia, but she has been useful from time to time.

Skandros the Satyr

A Satyr Obsessed with Becoming A True Hero

Ex-Follower of Dionysus, Scorned by Aphrodite

Shabby-Looking Wanna-Be Hero

Satyr Struggling Against His True Nature

Questing Dice: Enduring Hardships (blessing of Dionysus) [] [] [] [] [] []

Hook: Trying to maintain dignity as a Hero while Aphrodite throws romantic entanglements his way

Tale: Skandros was a member of the retinue of the god Dionysus (known as Zagreus on the island of Crete). However, he couldn't keep his mind on frolicking and dancing; he was too interested in the clash of arms between Achaean and Minoan warriors, their chariots and horses, their tall spears and painted shields. Secretly he gathered up odd pieces of armor until he had a rag-tag suit of his own. Skandros asked Dionysus to excuse him from his duties and allow him to win honor and booty. Amused by the satyr's determination, and his odd assortment of armor, Dionysus blessed his prodigal satyr with great vitality to endure the difficulties that surely would come. However, Skandros foreswore the promiscuous ways of satyrs as "unheroic", and thereby managed to insult Aphrodite. As a result, the goddess plagues him with amorous intrigue whenever possible, seeking to ruin the Satyr's heroic facade.

Skandros is truly committed to the ideals of heroism, but he doesn't always know exactly what they are. He makes many people uncomfortable by watching them intently but discreetly, trying to see "how heroes do things". However, he is very sensitive about his efforts to appear heroic; anyone who ridicules Skandros risks his unbridled wrath.

One-Eye the Mariner

Pipe-smoking do-gooding son of Poseidon, whose capacity for violence (in the name of right) increases dramatically after his consumption of a special magical herb..

Cantankerous old salt with a unique accent (5)

Bulgegy-armed squinky-eyed Son of Poseidon (5)

Pipe-smoking spinach-eating do-gooding muscleman who can take an awesome amount of pounding [4]

Questing Dice: "I've had all I can stands, I can't stands no more!",
[] [] [] [] [] []

Hook: Love triangle between One-Eye, Olivia, and Brutus ensures plentiful brawling

Tale: One-Eye the Mariner is a man of mystery. Little is known of his origins, though conflicting stories of his parentage call him both the son of Poseidon and the son of a famous, lost mariner (searching for whom he originally went to sea). Within living memory, he has always appeared as he is now: a bald, one-eyed man well into middle age, slight of build, nevertheless possessing bulging calves and forearms, slightly bow-legged, with a prodigious jaw and a unique accent or speech impediment. He smokes a pipe, a unique affectation since tobacco is unknown in the ancient world.

One-eye is ill-tempered yet affable to his friends, generous to strangers, and the personification of humility; his one great fault is his love of brawling. He goes to great lengths to avoid killing people, however; rumors claim that he once killed a great enemy with his own fists, and vowed never to take a life in anger again.

He is always found near the sea, typically in towns with sea-ports, when he can be found at all. He is rumored to be both wealthy and philanthropic, especially caring for the welfare of "widders and orphinks" of sailors, though he is rarely seen flaunting his wealth. He has supposedly salvaged the treasures of many a shipwreck; he is an active foe of both pirates and piracy..

Tough and ornery One-Eye's true might does not become apparent until he ingests the leaves of a magical plant (possibly the legendary *moly*), whereupon he becomes a juggernaut of violence. He avoids this extreme unless he has been pushed to the brink of endurance ("I've had all I can stands, I can't stands no more!"). Oddly, One-Eye's one true love has provoked him to displays of extreme violence more than anybody else (though his rage is not directed at her person), His rail-thin girlfriend, Olivia, is sometimes irresistably attracted to the muscular charms of One-Eye' rival and archenemy, the exiled Roman known as Brutus; however, she soon realizes her mistake, and calls upon One-Eye to extricate her from this "predicamink".

