

The Hydra Artist's Masterpiece: Mourning Acid Breath

A game for 5-6 people by Kitty Stoholski

The Hydra Artist is in trouble. After centuries of coordinating their many serpentine Heads to make small works of art, they finally have a chance to submit to the famous Monster Gallery! The deadline is approaching and an interloper has just severed the head of the Hydra Artist's creative visionary - Elder Acid. Much to everyone's surprise, 2 confused new Heads grew in Elder Acid's place. As the Heads of the Hydra Artist, release your feelings on the loss of Elder Acid and the welcoming of two new Heads onto your Masterpiece while coordinating the changes to your collective body.

Safety:

While the scenario's premise may be goofy, the game may cover issues regarding death, difficult conversations with children, and not being in full control of your body. Players create a piece of collective art together, so make sure all players feel comfortable drawing or painting in front of one another. No visual art experience is needed!

I strongly suggest using larp safety tools like "cut", "brake", and check-ins in order for players to actively care for one another during play. More information on these techniques are available here - <http://leavingmundania.com/2014/02/27/primer-safety-in-roleplaying-games/>

There is no touch between players during this game.

Setup:

This game requires the following materials

- A Canvas, anything that be drawn or painted upon - a piece of paper, some cloth, a small painting canvas
- Drawing or Painting Tools everyone would be comfortable using - pencils, charcoal, crayons, some clay or for a very performative (and messy) game, paint sets and brushes
- Any cleaning supplies based on the Tools chosen (water, smocks for paint)
- A phone to keep time

Place the Canvas in a location accessible to multiple people simultaneously. Players need to get up and move around so make sure there is enough space around the canvas. Place two Tools aside the Canvas so that players can reach them. If you're using crayons or colored pencils, start with two random ones and place the others nearby so they can be swapped out.

Characters:

Players play as Heads of the Hydra Artist. There are two types of Heads to play as:

- Two players are the Headlings, Heads who have newly sprouted from the collective body. Headlings have little knowledge of what is happening and are similar to children, but, since they are Hydra Heads, have equal control over the Hydra Artist's body.

- Other players are the Elder Heads, Heads who have lived hundreds of years as an artist and have mostly come to terms with one another. Elder Heads have memories of Elder Acid and have lots of responsibilities.

Heads differ by the element they breathe. Included is a list of commonly known hydra breaths with an incomplete list of their mannerisms to serve as a suggestion for how they interact with other Heads and what moods they enjoy creating art centered on. All players choose a Head they would like to play as well as whether to play as an Elder Head or Headling. Try not to have duplicates of Head types. Players then write their Head type on a name tag and put the name tag on. In order to differentiate themselves, Headlings should add “ling” to the end of their type. (For a particularly evocative game, have a Headling be Acidling!)

Name	Good Day	Bad Day
Acid (Headling Only)	Imaginative	Spacey
Dark	Subtle	Doubtful
Fire	Passionate	Overeager
Ice	Soothing	Doting
Light	Inspiring	Demanding
Rust	Wise	Overcomplicating
Slime	Supportive	Messy
Spark	Precise	Tunnelling
Steam	Protective	Forbidding
Water	Persistent	Stubborn
Wind	Uplifting	Distracting

Once all players have chosen the Head they would like to play, the Elder Heads and Headlings separate to answer preliminary questions as groups.

The Elder Heads consider these questions.

- What was something about Elder Acid that only you knew about? Use these answers to describe who Elder Acid was.
- What was something you admired about Elder Acid’s art?
- What can you do to welcome in the Headlings? Would you tell stories about Elder Acid? Teach them about your collective body? Tell them about the glamour of the Gallery?

One at a time, the Elder Heads share their answers with other Elder Heads.

At the same time, Headlings consider these questions.

- What confuses you about your body?
- What do you like about the other Headling?
- What interests you about this Elder Acid everyone is talking about?
- What do you like to draw?

One at a time, the Headlings share their answers with one another.

After Elder Heads and Headlings have shared their answers, all Heads gather around the Canvas.

Play

The showing at the Monster Gallery is soon and they're expecting an evocative Masterpiece based on how the Heads feel regarding the death of Elder Acid and the arrival of two new Headlings. Read the entire Play section out loud before beginning.

Initial Steps

- One at a time, all Heads should pick up a Tool and add one small mark to the Canvas so everyone has a starting point!
- Set the Priorities lists below someplace visible in case anyone would like a reminder during the game.
- Set a timer for 30 minutes and start it when everyone is ready! When the timer ends, play stops and players move to the End Game section, leaving their Head behind.

Creating

- In creating your Masterpiece only 2 Tools are available and only 2 Heads may work on the Masterpiece at any given time. If fewer than 2 Heads are working on the Masterpiece, any Head may pick up a Tool and work on the Masterpiece.
- While a Head is holding a Tool, they are entranced by a muse and cannot communicate verbally or nonverbally with other Heads. They may listen to other Heads, but they cannot acknowledge or communicate with them unless they put down the Tool they are using and move away from the Canvas. If a Head begins communicating while holding a Tool, other Heads are encouraged to make a soft serpentine hiss at them to remind them.
- If using crayons or colored pencils, a Head holding one may return it to the collection for a different color so that 2 tools remain in use. No Tool can be removed from the Canvas area.
- The Canvas cannot be moved during the timer's duration. Heads must approach the Canvas to work on it.
- Creating art in front of others can be hard! Heads are encouraged to express how they feel by adding something new or building off of what another Head has done! Heads are also encouraged to discuss their feelings and how to visualize them away from the Canvas!

Priorities for Elder Heads

In addition to working with other Heads to create a Masterpiece, Elder Heads are responsible for looking after one another. When playing as an Elder Head, consider the needs of others, including but not limited to

- What are the Headlings doing? They are brand new to you, so what are they like? Do they feel welcome or included? Do they know why everyone might be sad or stressed? They are very young so consider your tone around them.
- Do other Elder Heads need to talk about their experiences with Elder Acid or with interacting with Headlings? Do they need help in visualizing their feelings on the Masterpiece?
- Does any part of the Masterpiece trouble you? Ask about what you see in the Masterpiece! Make sure to *ask about the emotions present and not the techniques used*.

Priorities for Headlings

Poor Headlings. The Headlings have been thrust into a confusing moment. When playing as a Headling, consider exploring the emotional space, including but not limited to

- The Masterpiece seems important. Why does it look how it does? Whenever a Tool is available, pick one up and add to the Masterpiece however you want in order to contribute!
- Ask what the Elder Heads are doing, or at least the nice ones. Why are they acting the way they are and how does that make you feel?
- See what the other Headling is up to. Maybe they learned something new or need help with something confusing!

End Game

Debrief

- One at a time, each player points out one thing they appreciate that another player made in the art they collectively created. Make sure to spread the love!
- Decide what to do with the art.

Judging (optional)

- If playing in a public space like a convention, ask someone from outside the game if they'd like to view your Masterpiece.
- If they agree, ask them to describe their feelings when looking at the Masterpiece.

Thank you for playing! I'd be excited to see your art! If you'd like to share, you can tweet a picture of it @FuzziestKitty or email to thefuzziestkitty@gmail.com!