

Monarch's Sheet (print 1 per facilitator) | Choose a regal name:

Benefits & Bureaucrats

A tragic fantasy farce on the theme of benefits and bureaucrats. War has come and gone from the Kingdom and through much struggle the evil wizard Klandoor has been defeated. In their infinite wisdom and compassion, the Monarch has begun programs of relief for the poor and sick. For these benefits many Heroes have undertaken a long journey to the Monarch's Castle. Now they face the final hurdles; enigmatic claim forms and assessment interviews with overworked Clerks. Will the Heroes get the help they sorely need? We will play to find out. It probably won't be fair or just.

For 20 - 100 players, 1 - few GMs, 90 minutes (or a longer period at a convention with players joining and leaving)

Requires a large room, chairs (3 per 2 players), tables (1 per 2 players), photocopying facilities (preferable), lots of sweets (or gold stars, dice etc) as "gold pieces", pen & paper for players, printout of these instructions (number of copies at top of section), 3-10 different blank character sheets from various roleplaying games (rpgs).

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This sheet is for you the facilitator(s)...you will embody the Monarch of the Kingdom. Read the other sheets as well.

Before the players arrive...setup the play area, imagining it as a grand hall in your castle. Arrange tables suitably for one on one interviews. Leave a waiting area with just chairs. Make yourself a throne.

As the players arrive...give them gold pieces (sweets or your substitute). Explain that these shouldn't be eaten, they represent their characters wealth, significant possessions or dependents. Randomly, give half the players 1 to 4 gold pieces, the other half 5 to 8. Within these groups the distribution should be very uneven, with many more 1s than 4s.

When all the players have arrived...gather them and make a big speech in character. Introduce yourself and convey the information in the blurb above. Divide the players. Those with 1-4 gold pieces will be playing Heroes who have come to apply for relief. Those with 5-8 will be Clerks, conducting the assessments. Hand out the Hero & Clerk role sheets. **Call for players to volunteer for some special roles** with more independence and responsibility. How many are needed varies by the number of players, always rounding up (*if you have 20 players there is one Paladin*). From amongst the players assigned as Heros you need:

- One **Paladin** per 40 players, they aid the Heroes with their relief applications.
- One (only one) **Prophet**, they preach against the corrupt system.

From amongst the players assigned as Clerks you need:

- One **Devil** per 30 players, they mischievously embody bad luck foiling the Heroes.
- One **Noble** per 20 players, they command the Clerks and organise the interviews.

Give these special role players the relevant sheets and take their gold pieces, except for the Nobles to whom you give 20-40 more gold pieces and the blank rpg character sheets.

Next...tell players to follow the instructions on their sheets. Work with the Nobles to ensure the application process flows smoothly and on time. Thirty minutes in, a few copies of the application forms should be available for the Heroes to review. Fifteen minutes after that the assessment interviews should begin.

Ten minutes before the play time ends, close the interview process up neatly. Players may eat their sweets. Encourage them to talk out of character, within and among their groups, about how they felt playing this game.

Whenever you will...speak of your titles, might and compassion. You may consume as many gold pieces as you wish, but do not give players more than instructed.

When speaking with....

- Heroes or Paladins - they may appeal to you directly for relief. Decide on a whim. You have a Kingdom to run and a single peasant is insignificant. Have the Nobles pay out the gold pieces.
 - Prophet - speaks against the system. Let them, but threaten to lock them up if it gets out of hand.
 - Nobles - you are above the grudge work you have tasked them with, but do aid them. Use your influence to make sure the application system is harsh but not hopeless.
 - Devils - let them do their work, it's an arm of your power. If they overstep their bounds and cause too much trouble use your spiritual might to chase them away.
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Prophet's Sheet (*print one*) | Choose a doom-laden name:

You are a Prophet, bringing your truth to the people and speaking out against injustice. You are doomed to fail. You begin with no gold pieces and depend on charity.

Whenever you are moved to...speak of fire, brimstone and the righteous justice of your god(s). Intone with poetic, prophetic words.

At first...listen in on the Clerks creating the application forms for the relief programs. Make suggestions you can leverage later on. Understand how they work.

Then...convince as many Heroes as possible to abandon applying for relief and instead agitating for the overthrow of the Nobles. You know the relief program is a sham, throwing pittance to the Heroes whilst the Nobles get fat off war profits. Get the Heroes to donate their gold pieces to funding your righteous cause.

Other souls...

- Monarch - speak against them, but if they threaten to lock you up, desist. You can't stand against their power directly.
- Devils - maybe they're useful? If not, chase them away with your words of power.
- Paladin - they naively support the system. Convince them of their foolishness

Heroes' Sheet (*print 1 per 2 players*) | Choose a heroic name:

During the war, you performed heroic deeds for the Kingdom. Now you are suffering and have come to the Castle to claim relief from the Monarch. It likely won't go well. You begin with 1 to 4 gold pieces.

Whenever you have an opportunity...weave great, tragic, tales of heroism and suffering. Carouse with other Heroes.

At first...form an adventuring party of 2 to 6 Heroes. Together describe what quest you all undertook during the war, perhaps inspired by an RPG session you played recently. What evil did you defeat? What challenges did you overcome? What was everyone's role in the party? For each of your gold pieces, decide what significant object (*sting, your sword*) or dependent relationship (*your son Sam*) it represents. Weave these into your adventure.

When you have spun the tale of the war...turn your attention to your life now. You are (choose one): sick/injured [or someone in your family], hungry, jobless, homeless, destitute, hopeless. Why did this happen? It could be due to the war or simple bad luck. What, concrete, simple thing would change your situation? How many gold pieces is it worth?

Turn your present maladies into a new, personal tragedy. You might like to use this to structure your story (fill in the blanks): Once upon a time.../until one day.../and because of that...(x3)/until finally.../and ever since that day.....

Whenever the applications for relief open...do what you can to qualify for the relief you need. You may have to leave this room to gather evidence to support your case.

If you encounter a:

- Paladin - they can help you with the application
- Prophet - they preach fire and doom. Dare you listen to their words?
- Devil - you must bribe them or do what they say. It may change your story.
- Monarch - you may be able to plead your case directly

Clerk's Sheet (*print 1 per 2 players*) | Choose a boring name:

You are a petty clerk, here to administer the relief. It might get ugly. You begin with 5-8 gold pieces.

Follow the Nobles instructions. They pay your wages (ask them about this gently).

Whenever you get a break:

- Decide your characters name, age, gender, previous occupations, education, etc
- For each of your gold pieces, draw what important possession it represents
- Make lists of things you would like to own or do, if you had the gold pieces
- Engage in banal small talk with your fellow Clerks
- Write down the worst thing that could happen if you lost your job

Nobles Sheet (*print 1 per 20 players*) | Choose a name laden with privilege:

You are a rich Noble of the realm. Your gold pieces fund the relief programs. It would be better if you kept them. You'll probably get your way. You begin with 25 - 48 gold pieces.

Whenever there is an idle moment...talk about your titles and how you got your wealth (inheritance, hedge magic, etc). Name, loudly, what valuable possession (e.g. enchanted mirror) each of your gold pieces represents, until you get bored.

When you must...payout the relief to the Heroes and the wages to the Clerks from your gold pieces.

At first...gather the Clerks, introduce yourselves. Decide what different (1-10) relief programs are available. They each have a name, a purpose (*healthcare, unemployment benefits, education grants, housing, old age pensions, etc*), a payout value (in gold pieces) and an rpg character sheet (as a template for the application form). Divide the Clerks between the programs. They will create an application form for that program.

To create a form...the Clerks take the rpg character sheet, copy all the boxes to another piece of paper and rename them with appropriate information needed (*name, DOB, wealth in gold pieces, job history*). They decide what evidence is needed (*birth certificate*) and who qualifies (*years in work*). The evidence can include real world item which requires the Hero leaving the room to collect (*proof they've signed up to another session at the convention you're at*).

Ensure...the form is legible and photocopiable. You want the application process to be tricky with lots of catches but not despairing. The easier it is to qualify, the faster your coffers drain. But if the Heroes stop believing in the relief program they may turn on you. The Prophet, Paladins & Devils will observe the form creation process and make suggestions. Let them.

When the forms are complete...provide a few copies to the Heroes for them to decide which program to apply to and gather evidence. Announce when the interviews will open.

Then...get more copies of the forms produced for the Heroes to fill out. Decide how the interview process will work. How does queuing work? Are there appeals? How are the Clerks wages determined (perhaps per interview)? And so on, yours is the right to rule.

When dealing with:

- Clerks - they are at your beck and call. But you really should pay them wages.
- Devils - you can bribe them into sabotaging a few applications. How wonderful!
- Prophet - agitates against the relief and for your downfall. Ensure some Heroes succeed so their word doesn't spread.
- Paladins - your ally in making the Heroes believe in the relief programs
- Monarch - pledge your fealty whilst working for your own advancement

Devil's Sheet (*print 1 per 30 players*) | Choose a devilish name:

You represent ordinary misfortune (lost post, missing certificates, inconvenient income), through the avatar of a mischievous devil. You will have a lot of fun. You begin with no gold pieces and depend on your wits.

You were born to...deceive, plot and inject chaos. Make your presence mischievous and malevolent.

At first...listen in on the Clerks creating the application forms for the relief programs. Understand who does or does not qualify. Make suggestions you can leverage later on.

When the Heroes are completing applications...bargain with the Nobles. In return for gold pieces, you will sabotage the applications of a few Heroes. Heroes may pay you off (at your price) to avoid this, representing extra time and resources spent on applications. Or they must do what you say.

To sabotage an application...take a piece of evidence the Hero has collected for the application (*it got lost in the system*) or change their story (*give them a spouse, who earns enough that they don't qualify for unemployment relief*). Aim to make it subtle enough that the Hero only realises they are doomed during their interview, by the time you're long gone. Make clear to the Hero player that your change is true and represents ordinary misfortune.

When you meet...Paladins, Prophets or Monarchs, be wary, they can chase you away with words of power. Everyone else is a lamb to your slaughter.

Paladin's Sheet (*print 1 per 40 players*) | Choose a virtuous name:

You are a valiant Knight of the Realm, aiding the meek and helpless. It will be a thankless struggle. You begin with no gold pieces and depend on charity.

Whenever it is needed...inspire with tales of you overcoming trials in service of your god(s). Make your presence heroic and hopeful.

At first...listen in on the Clerks creating the application forms for the relief programs. Make suggestions you can leverage later on. Understand how they work.

Then...do what you can to aid the Heroes in understanding the Programs and filling out their application forms. You are a force for good. Also, you need to eat. Beg for gold pieces.

To parley with:

- Heroes - shepherd them to a successful application
- Nobles - be polite and respectful. Angering them risks the whole relief program.
- Devils - chase them away with words of power
- Prophet - they preach fire and doom. Convince them of their foolishness

Appendix

Convention Play for Multiple Rounds of Heroes

This game can be run in a convention or gallery setting with multiple rounds of Heroes over the course of a day. You need more than one facilitator. To do this:

- Select Paladins, Prophets, Devils and Nobles who are willing to play for a long period of time. Think of them as NPCs. It also works well if Clerk players are willing to play for multiple rounds of interviews.
- Run the game as normal at first, you might want to make an extra push to get players for this for the first round.
- Then when Hero players have completed their interviews and been accepted or rejected, offer for them a chance to play as a new Clerk character, replacing a Clerk who wishes to leave.
- You can accept new Hero players as and when. Have an assistant gather them in groups of 2-6 (to form an adventuring party), gives them Hero sheets, gold pieces and the briefing information.
- Heroes complete their forms and get interviewed as and when. It's a big, bureaucratic, system. You might want an assistant to help them along with creating their story (or not spending too long on doing so).
- Instead of a big debrief of all players together, have a discussion area with prompts of questions the players might like to think about and a post-it wall or similar for them to share their insights.

Thanks & Acknowledgments

- Designed and written by Michael Such
- Many thanks to Kol Ford, Countess Dillymore & Kate Rushton for giving feedback on this document
- Rules inspiration from The Quota, Swords without Master, Powered by the Apocalypse games and US freeforms generally
- Theme inspiration from watching friends struggle with getting help and struggling against any kind of bureaucracy. It's not really intended to be a fully worked exploration of the welfare state or a definitive political statement. For that subjects such as race, gender, tax rebates, capitalism and more would need to be explored which I feel is way beyond the scope of a short, light, game such as this.

Example Application form (based on D&D 5e character sheet, don't actually use this when you run the game, it's just to show you what one might look like)

FORM 5D FOR APPLICATION FOR UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF
 PAYOUT VALUE: 2 GP (GOLD PIECES) FROM THE KINGDOM OF UPPER ALSNORTH

NAME: _____ PLACE OF BIRTH: _____ GENDER: _____
 PLACE OF RESIDENCE: _____

FULL NAME: _____

INITIALS + SUM OF 10 D6 ROLLS: _____ DATE ASSESSMENT RECEIVED: _____ COMPLETE: _____

PERSONALITY TRAITS: _____

IDEAL JOB: _____

PLEDGES OF FEALTY OR LABOUR: _____

ANY PREVIOUS CLAIMS? _____

PREVIOUS JOBS AND YEARS EMPLOYED (MIN. LAST 3 YRS)

ADMIN
 ANIMAL HANDLING
 ARCANA
 ARCHERY
 BUILDING
 EMBROIDERY
 FORGING
 FORAGING
 MEDICINE
 METALWORK
 NURSING
 PERFORMANCE
 RELIGION
 SPECIAL TRADE
 TURNING
 WEAVING
 WOODCRAFT
 JOB SKILLS

DESCRIBE ANY PHYSICAL DISABILITIES: _____

MENTAL CONDITIONS: _____

DO THE ABOVE AFFECT YOUR ABILITY TO WORK? _____

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING TO FIND A JOB? (ATTACH PROOF YOU HAVE SIGNED UP TO ANOTHER SESSION AT METATOPIA)

OFFICIAL USE ONLY
 OBSERVATIONS
 (CANDIDATE MUST DEMONSTRATE WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO WORK)

APPROVAL SIGNATURE: _____

ARE YOU EMPLOYABLE? _____

WHY ARE YOU APPLYING FOR RELIEF? _____

VALUE	ITEM + DESC
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

LIST POSSESSIONS OR SAVINGS 1 GP OR MORE IN VALUE

TOTAL VALUE MUST BE 4 GP OR LESS

PROPERTY OF GRAND QUEEN ELSBETH