



Letter of Introduction

Dear reader,

I make the following revelations with an admittedly audacious hope—a hope that you will be prompted to aid me, an utter stranger, in a most delicate and desperate matter. This request involves others who, like me, are on the verge of a horrible calamity. We depend on the hands of you and your kind in order to live on.

Lest this undertaking sound too taxing and formidable from the outset, I should mention that we have always relied on your people to sustain us. Indeed, you brought us into being. To this day, we remember King Cyrus of Persia who, in the sixth century B.C.E., formally developed a postal service which established a land—a parcel, if you will—where we Cœuriers could live and flourish.

Forgive me. I can tell by your furrowed brow that I have perplexed you and am now on the verge of being discarded. I'm off to a poor start.

I confess to being nervous. I have only four pages to complete my task—so saith the Golden Cobra. Such limits leave me feeling thin and flummoxed, and that in turn leads me to poor opening gambits.

Permit me to rewind and begin again.

Bear with me as I make a simple request—one whose fulfillment will immediately dispel your confusion. If you happen to be reading this missive in a digital format, stop for a moment and print this document onto paper. If no printer is available, kindly serve the

purpose yourself by copying a few of the following sentences onto a scrap, a post-it, a napkin, your skin—whatever is close at hand. I will patiently wait for you to retrieve the printout or your pen . . .

I see that you have returned and that you have performed the miracle. Your participation ushers me into my native and true form. As we Cœuriers put it, “Parchment is my body; ink my blood; the writer my soul; the reader my soulmate.”

Letters form into words on paper, and a Cœurier is conceived. One such being now rests in your hands—its heart beating with life, its lungs breathing with potential.

In previous ages, we seldom made our presence known in such an overtly hyperdramatic and graceless form as this. We were content to be a silent ground of communication across distances. As humans came to rely on us for the business of the day, we Cœuriers nestled into a wonderfully tranquil and unquestioned existence. Happily born on some scrivener's desk and then travelling to foreign lands, we found our ways into the warm hands of recipients eagerly awaiting our arrival. Such auspicious meetings inevitably spawned other Cœuriers, as responses were crafted and then sent on to others longing for the messages we brought.

The electronic era sparked the creation of branching species—first came the Teles (the telegraph, the telephone, the television) followed quickly thereafter by the Digis (email, instant messages, Facetime, tweets). No need to dwell on a story which you know so well. Nor do I slight or slander my kindred. I'm glad that they have flourished and that their futures burn bright.

The same cannot be said for us Cœuriers, whose utility as a means of communication has been questioned and even dismissed. It is for this reason that I come to you, hoping that together we can usher in a new stage in our evolutionary development.

And now, to unveil my ambitious goal. Together, we can create hitherto undreamed of epistles and posts as we play a game titled . . .

The Cœuriers

a postal game by Robbie Boerth

It is somewhat a wonder, complex in the mind, For him who cannot understand such, how the point of the knife and the right hand, man's intention and the blade, worked me with purpose, so that I would boldly disclose a verbal message For us two alone, so that other men will not know the meaning of our conversation Far and wide.

~Anglo-Saxon Riddle 60, From The Exeter Book

What do you need?

- 2-8 human players
- Mailing addresses for each player
- A reliable postal system
- Pens, pencils, envelopes, paper, boxes, wax seals, craft materials, and anything else that can be used to create and transform Cœuriers

How does this game work?

- Players begin by each creating a Cœurier, which is then mailed by post to another player.
- Players receive the Cœuriers sent to them and dwell with their deliveries for a few days.
- Towards the end of this visit, each player transforms their Cœurier and then sends it along to another player.
- At the game's agreed upon completion, each player dwells with their final Cœurier for a few days and then sends each of the other players something by which to remember the final Cœurier.



Guidelines

Game Duration

Prior to starting, define the game's length either in terms of number of turns or a calendar date. The number of turns should be equal to or greater than the number of players. Your decision should take into account reasonable estimates of the time needed for creation (see below), transformation (see below), and transit.

Keeping the Cœuriers in Line

Before playing, ask if there are any topics which the players do not wish to appear in the game. If needed, use questions to clarify these boundaries, but there should be no debate or requirement to justify the limits set.

Keep in mind that Cœuriers are a surprising bunch. They come in a variety of flavors—sweet, sour, uplifting, crass, erotic, devilish, and more. If, during play, you receive a Cœurier that is making the game unpleasant or dangerous for you, put it away, contact the other players, discuss the situation, and work out a solution.

Also, decide whether there are to be any size, weight, or material restrictions. Do not neglect this task. If you live in a studio apartment, do you mind having a pompous, self-aggrandizing Cœurier the size and weight of a refrigerator showing up on your doorstep?

Ordering the Postal Circuit

For games involving 3 or more players, here's a simple way to keep the Cœuriers moving about in a blissfully unpredictable fashion:

Select one person to be the postal officer. At the start of each turn, the postal officer randomly draws the player names and writes them in a circular arrangement on a sheet of paper. Each player sends their Cœurier to the person whose name appears immediately next to them in the clockwise direction. The postal officer repeats this process at the start of each turn, communicating to the other players who is to send their Cœurier to whom.

Creating a Cœurrier

The game opens with each player creating a Cœurrier and then mailing it in accordance with the established postal circuit (see above). Endow your Cœurrier with verve, emotion, and drive. These beings are outgrowths of human personalities: In the Cœurrier's case, however, wishes, Foibles, Fears, desires, and/or dreams find immediate expression in their physical appearance and the texts they bear.

Here are key steps and considerations involved in the creation process:

- Imagine a vivid backstory character (real or fictitious, perhaps even an alter ego). Give the Cœurrier a Form and a disposition reflective of this individual's profession, ambitions, passions, Fears, vices, virtues, and/or desires. The Cœurrier need not explicitly mention this backstory character, but it should provide a clear expression of the kind of personality who has given it birth.
- Consider as well the impression which this backstory character would seek to achieve through the missives they send to others. Is it trying to frighten its recipients? to seduce them? to console them? to encourage? to impose its will? Shape the Cœurrier accordingly.
- Give the Cœurrier a name. Feature it prominently on its body or among its trappings.
- Some Cœurriers are like hermit crabs, using boxes and envelopes as detachable protective homes which they carry around (or, more accurately, which carry them around). Others are like armadillos and tortoises, their exteriors being intrinsic, inseparable parts of their bodies. You may design your Cœurrier according to either approach.
- Use whatever construction materials, building methods, lettering, and text are appropriate to bring the Cœurrier naked and screaming into the world, being sure to abide by any limitations agreed upon by the group.



Transforming a Cœurrier

Subsequent turns involve the metamorphoses of the Cœurriers. The catalyzing agent for a transformation is something personal and meaningful (a memory, a message, a token, a sentiment, a gift, or some other contribution) which a player wishes to relay to their designated recipient on the postal circuit. You may include notes or other tokens alongside the Cœurrier, but take pains to weave, fuse, or otherwise imprint an aspect of your dispatch into the body of the Cœurrier itself.

You may disassemble, add to, alter, or reshape the Cœurrier as you see fit, but, whatever you do, you must retain and nurture a core kernel of the Cœurrier's established character and personality. If you receive a Cœurrier who is playful and pun-loving, do not turn it into a snide and snarky Cœurrier. Respect the quality of character it presents to you.

What if the sentiment you wish to communicate clashes with the personality of the Cœurrier carrying the missive? This is where your ingenuity is put to the test!

It might be that part of your message is distorted or mangled by the Cœurier. Or perhaps the Cœurier begrudgingly agrees to transmit your tidings, but not without also providing some form of commentary or criticism. Your communique may alter the Cœurier, causing it to mature or to reveal a new, unexpected facet. Even so, the fundamental identity of the Cœurier must be preserved.

In Memoriam

At the agreed upon endpoint (see Game Duration above), send each of the other players a final post memorializing the Cœurier who has wound up with you. This observance might include

- disassembling the Cœurier and dividing fragments between the other players,
- spawning a brood of new Cœuriers resembling their parent,
- crafting a handwritten eulogy,
- assembling small scrapbooks, or
- inventing something else to celebrate the life of the Cœurier.



Post Scriptum

If you and your Friends prefer to focus on specific breeds of Cœuriers, consider one of these variations, or invent one yourself.

Demonic Dispatches

If horror is to your liking, use devils, vampires, Faustian heroes, and other corrupted souls for your backstory characters. Their resulting Cœuriers will be bent on corruption, possession, terror, depravity, and nefarious deeds.

Texts for inspiration: C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*, Ron Edwards' *Sorcerer* (see especially the sections on demonic needs and desires), and *Death Note*.

Belle Lettres and Cinemail

For groups with a literary bent, choose your backstory characters from a favorite novel, author, series, genre, or time period. Imagine a game of *The Cœuriers* rooted in the backstory characters of Elizabeth Bennet, Heathcliff, Rochester, and Jane Eyre. Alternatively, consider turning to film for your inspiration, using backstory characters inhabiting a common cinematic universe.

Gotta Post'em All

Many children have grown up without the tactile delights and unique pleasures of sending and receiving parcels in the mail. For this reason, *The Cœuriers* is bound to have a particular appeal for them. Moreover, the realm of children's literature and media offers a bounty of backstory characters suitable for the game. The marine inhabitants of Bikini Bottom, the students and faculty of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the creations of Roald Dahl's zany imagination—the possibilities are rich and varied.

The Cœuriers, a postal game by Robbie Boerth

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Submission for the 2020 Golden Cobra Challenge
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