

Artist: Unrecognized
- An RPG comedy by Mads Brynnum

3-6 Players – 120 minutes

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About the designer

Mads is a professional stand-up comedian, game designer and – all of a sudden – high school teacher. He's never quite gotten the recognition he obviously deserves.

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Artist is a game about stardom, fame, and recognition. But more importantly it's a game about likeable, but somewhat awful people and their petty struggles to be more successful, more famous, or just more *something* than their peers. And of course it's also a game where winning can only happen at the expense of someone else.

The players are artists (painters, playwrights, authors, etc.) that struggle to gain fame from the rabble and recognition from their peers. And rather than having a game master, all players are in control. All players must contribute to frame and create a story. While the game helps you, you are very much required to set scenes, create plot, and to help each other move the story along.

The Setting

The game takes place in modern times in a big city somewhere near you. The only important difference is that in the game world the different types of artists are much closer connected than they are in real life. Painters, performance artists, playwrights, movie makers, and so on all go to the same parties, hang out at the same cafés, work together and so on. And the audiences are huge for all genres. More people go to the theatre than in our world, newspapers write more about art installations or painters, and the audiences also shop around in genres.

The Story

Artist: Unrecognized is very much aiming to be an episode of a sitcom. Every time you play, you have one player be the tragic hero – tragic as in “with a destined fall” rather than as in “something sad happen.” The story of how something failed utterly for him or her will form the backbone of the game, and all players must help set up and resolve the inevitable failure. Meanwhile all the other players also squabble to fulfill stories of their own. And while the tragic hero must always fail – preferably in the most spectacular manner – the other players can actually accomplish something if they're lucky.

2.0 PRACTICAL STUFF

The Game Organizer

One player will be the game organizer (probably you since you're reading the rules.) As the Game Organizer you are not a game master. You do not control the game, and you play an active an equal part in the story. Rather you are the one responsible for explaining the setting and rules, guide the other players through character creation, and so on. You should also be the one keeping track of time; the game really works best if kept to around two hours including character generation.

Playing time and # of Players

You should aim to finish the game within two hours. This is very doable even including character generation. And while you can stretch the length of the game, it really isn't necessary. However, if playing with more than 5 players, you should probably add about 20 minutes of playing time.

Playing In Public

Artist: Unrecognized is not a hardcore game, and you'll not be required to do anything embarrassing or controversial while playing. But the fact that it is a comedy, and because some of the tropes are very recognizable (pun intended), you would most likely get a few eavesdroppers if playing in for instance a hallway at a convention. Don't be afraid to cater to them – a good audience can make comedy much more fun.

The Cards

The game comes with four different types of cards: stat cards, supporting characters, goals, and plots. They are meant as tools for generating story as you play and will be explained later. *Before you can start playing, you'll have to print and cut the cards.*

Starting the Game

When starting the game, do the following. Everything will be described in detail later on, and at the end of the rules you'll also find a cheat sheet to help you:

1. Tell the other players the background and setting. Mention, briefly, the idea of the tragic hero, and then go through the rules for fun guidelines.
2. Explain the concepts of Fame and Recognition.
3. Create characters.
4. Explain the tragic hero (including rules) and the plot. Introduce the plot cards. As a group choose a hero and a plot.
5. Each player – except the hero – now chooses or picks a goal.
6. Explain the playing style and the structure. Agree on the amount of larping you'll do.
7. Start playing.

3.0 RULES, STRUCTURE, & HOW TO

Artist: Unrecognized is a game with very few rules. And in fact, most of the rules does not govern player interaction, conflict resolution, and such, but are more like guidelines for interesting play.

The rules of fun

When playing you should always adhere to the following guidelines:

Failing is fun

Everybody likes a winner – especially one who wins in a way nobody had imagined. But when it comes to comedy, failing is usually more fun. So don't be afraid to fail or lose the game. Allow your character to be the butt of the joke, because, if everybody does so, you'll get your payback later.

Be the setup – not the punchline

This guideline could also be called: don't aim to be funny. Funny happens when you least expect it, so you should make room for the other players to punch in. Say and show what your character thinks and feels, make statements about stuff that's happening, and in general let fun happen rather than chase after it.

Remember you are flawed but likable

Every sitcom character is flawed in some way, and maybe the characters of Artist: Unrecognized is a bit more flawed than they usually are. But remember that they are not evil. They do not, for instance, want their friends to fail *as such*. It's just that they really want to win themselves and sometimes that's easier if you can stand on somebody's head. And sometimes they actually mean well, but still manage to fuck it up. Also, see guideline #1.

Fame and Recognition

Each player has a stats showing his/her Fame and Recognition. Fame is how, well, famous you are among what we'll refer to as the rabble. You know, people who don't really know anything about art, but whose attention you still require. Recognition, on the other hand, is a number that tells what your peers think of you.

At the end of the game, each player has the opportunity to change his/her stats depending on what happened. However, the total amount of both Fame and Recognition is unchangeable. So basically you cannot gain Fame or Recognition without someone losing it.

Fame and Recognition is foremost of all an inspiration for role playing. For instance, if you are interacting with fans or some such, the player with the highest Fame will most likely have the highest status in the given scene. But you should also use it as a tool for describing your own character and how you interact with the others.

For instance a character with High fame and low Recognition might be so because other artists know he's shit, but he always gives people what they want. Or maybe he is really talented, but just a somewhat horrible person. On the other hand a character with high Recognition, but low Fame will most likely be very bitter because he never gets what he deserves. And he might even resent the player with the opposite stats because he (obviously) steals his thunder.

Character Creation

The characters in Artist: Unrecognized do not have to be full fleshed out with lots of backstory. Instead you create quite simple characters and then allow them to be defined by what happens as you play the game.

When creating your character, write the information on a piece of paper. And remember to share information and ask for ideas.

1. Decide what kind of artist you are. Be a writer, a painter, a performance artist, an acrobat, or whatever you like. You don't have to know anything about the kind of artist you are, just as it doesn't matter if you all do different things. Remember: for the purpose of this game we pretend that the worlds of theatre, performance art, screenwriting, etc. are much more connected than in real life.
2. Decide why you're in it – your mission as an artist. Do you want the fame? The recognition? The money? The hot chicks/lads? Do you want to show everybody else how stupid they are? Do you wanna show your parents that you actually can? Or are you – crazy as it may sound – only in it for the sake of art itself? It's up to you, and don't be afraid to be pretentious. Your mission is not to be confused with goals. Goals can be achieved while playing, a mission most likely cannot.
3. Choose a flaw. Every comedy character is inherently flawed and you are no exception. A flaw can be arrogance, lack of social skills, that you're easy to anger, that you're a snob, that you're always brutally honest, or somesuch. Your flaw should be related to how you interact with other people, so don't go for obese, lazy, etc. And remember: the truly funny thing about flawed characters is that they don't every realize their own flaws even though everybody else can see them.
4. Come up with a name (can be a *nomme de guerre*) and decide on a gender.
5. Provide a tiny bit of backstory for your group. Do you live together? Are you old pals? Have you worked on different projects together? Don't spend a lot of time on this, but feel free to introduce common backstories while playing. No matter what your backstory, however, one thing is certain: just as in any sitcom you constantly visit each other, meet up in the café/bar, and so on.
6. Pick or deal out Stat Cards. Each stat card has numbers for Fame and Recognition and a sentence or two to describe what it means. You can either take turns picking one or deal them out randomly.

The Tragic Hero And The Plot

The Hero

Now you have to decide who will be the hero. As mentioned the hero's story is the core storyline that sort of sets the course for the game. For that reason I suggest letting the player who has the most experience being a game master take the role as the hero. Because, while all players have to create and shape the story, the hero is a bit more in control. Do note that you as the game owner does not have to be the hero.

(If you play a campaign, you'll take turns being the hero – more on that later.)

The following three rules applies to the hero and thus to the entire game and should not be broken.

1. The hero is always right. This is the hero's story. If a player does something and the hero believes it happened a bit differently, the hero can ask him or her to change it. Try to do this for comedic effect.
2. The hero has to fail.
3. The hero may be right, but necessarily the way he/she imagines. This means that the other players can and must challenge the hero.

The Plot

When you've agreed on who'll be the hero, you have to decide on a Plot for the game. The plot is an outline or a basic premise of the hero's story, and you can either pick one of the Plot

cards or create your own. The Plot should be created and agreed upon by all players, but the hero has final say.

Goals

After you've decided on the Plot, each player besides the hero chooses a goal for the game. A goal should be something that's relatively easily obtainable within the limits of what is basically a sitcom episode. And why it can be related to your characters' missions, it doesn't have to. You can create your own goal or pick one of the Goal Cards. No matter what, goals are public knowledge since knowing what other players want makes it easier to create interesting and funny storylines.

And remember: The goals are things that can help you create story and intrigue. They are not important in themselves, and ignoring a goal is often better than shoehorning it into a story that really doesn't have room for it. Also, failing is definitely an option.

Style of Play

In Artist: Unrecognized all players are allowed to begin and end scenes and in general use all the tools of a game master. Yes, this also includes playing supporting characters, making flashbacks or –forwards, cutting scenes, and whatever. So basically one of you just begins telling the story. Then, as the other players join in, you gradually begin to dramatize it – meaning that rather than just telling what happened, you start role playing it. You can start scenes in character (“remember when we met in the café and you asked me about the money”) or you can go sort of off screen and do it (“Shouldn't we have a scene where you two discuss the money”). Or you can do both – normally it will be quite obvious when you're talking as your character and when you're yourself as a player.

When it comes to move about, touching, working with your body, and so on, feel free to do whatever you like. The game works perfectly well if you remained seated the entire time, but it can also be played more or less as a LARP. But as always, if you as a player want to be very physical, talk about it before the game begins.

Supporting Characters

The supporting character cards should be placed in the middle of the table. They are meant as an inspiration and do not have to be in the game. There are also a few blank cards if you want to create your own. Of course you can always add characters without giving them a card, but a card can be a nice way of remembering an important supporting character. Remember that any player can play any supporting character.

Scene Length

The game owner should keep track on time and remind players if you should advance to the next act. This is not high drama, so long, lingering scenes are not recommended. Rather you should aim to end scenes when you have something funny or when you've created suspense. And remember: cutting a scene too early is better than cutting it too late. You can always revisit a scene, you cannot get back time spend with a scene that ends up leading nowhere.

Structure

The narrative in Artist: Unrecognized always follow this basic structure:

The final Scene – Beginning – Middle – End – Epilogue

The Final Scene – 5 minutes

The game begins with the hero setting the scene for the event or situation that will end the game. This is where his/her fall will take place, so give a few clues as to what you want and how it can go wrong. A rule of thumb is to add stuff that will make the failure worse. Failing at an art show is one thing, but doing it in front of the man you want to impress or while your rent is on the line adds tension.

You should not role play the Final Scene yet (you'll get to it), but just allow the hero to tell some of it. What should always be left out is the exact nature of the failure.

And then you start from the beginning.

Beginning – 15-25 minutes

The beginning is where you introduce the overall plot and individual goals, but also the possible obstacles in the way. If the final scene is a premiere, for instance, maybe the play isn't finished yet. And if one player wants to propose to her girlfriend, maybe they should have a fight or an affair. Don't be afraid to throw wrenches into other players' machinery – sorting out the problems (or failing to do so) is where a lot of the fun is.

The beginning ends when all players have introduced their goals (including the hero), and when the possible obstacles have been hinted at.

Middle – 30-40 minutes

This is where you flesh out the stories. Maybe you try to overcome an obstacle and fail, or maybe we get the first hint of just why the hero might end up failing.

During the middle you should generally try to up the ante, but also hint at solutions that *just might* work. The middle ends when the hero feels confident that things will most likely work out – even if everybody else can see failure looming.

End – 20-25 minutes

The end is mostly the scene the hero has already hinted at – the final scene, that is. But of course you can play a few short scenes that lead directly into it. This is where we'll find out who manages to fulfill their goals, but also exactly how the hero fails.

Epilogue – 5-10 minutes

Finally each player rounds up his or her story, ending with the tragic hero. When rounding up you can, for instance, talk about how your peers talked about you in the weeks after, or you can sum it up with a small story from a gossip magazine. And then you get to take 1-3 points of either Fame or Recognition from one other player. You should explain why, and if you want to take more than one point, the other players must allow it.

4.0 ON CAMPAIGN PLAY

If you want, you can easily play the game as a campaign. You simply take turns being the tragic hero, but otherwise follow all the normal rules.

When playing a campaign, you should still see each session as a sitcom episode. So try to finish storylines during a single session – unless you occasionally want to do a double episode, of course. However, just as in real sitcoms you can (and really should) develop ongoing storylines and use them to create tension. And whether or not they are actually resolved as some point is rarely as interesting as the dramatic opportunities they create along the way.

5.0 FINAL WORDS

Remember: while the goal of the game is to win, the winning really isn't important. Have fun, don't be a dick.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me at brynnnum@gmail.com

Artist: Unrecognized

The CHEAT SHEET

How to begin:

1. Tell the other players the background and setting. Mention, briefly, the idea of the tragic hero, and then go through the rules for fun guidelines.
2. Explain the concepts of Fame and Recognition.
3. Create characters.
4. Explain the tragic hero (including rules) and the plot. Introduce the plot cards. As a group choose a hero and a plot.
5. Each player – except the hero – now chooses or picks a goal.
6. Explain the playing style and the structure. Agree on the amount of larping you'll do.
7. Start playing.

Character Creation

1. What kind of artist are you?
2. Why are you in it?
3. What is your flaw?
4. What is your name and sex?
5. What kind of group are you?
6. Pick or deal out Stat Cards

Structure

The Final Scene – 5 minutes

The hero sets the scene by *telling* some of what happens. This will also be the scene that ends the game. Create suspense, set up for a surprise fall.

Beginning – 15-25 minutes

Present the overall plot and individual goals. Make obstacles for each other.

Middle – 30-40 minutes

Put more at stake, make new obstacles, and flesh out storylines.

End – 20-25 minutes

Revisit the final scene and play it out. Maybe play a few scenes leading into it.

Epilogue – 5-10 minutes

Each player (ending with the hero) tells what happens in the weeks after. Can then steal 1-3 points of either Fame or Recognition from another player – explain why.

Rules of Fun

- Failing is fun
- Be the setup – not the punchline
- You are flawed but likable

<p style="text-align: center;">PLOT The Proposal</p> <p>The hero wants to propose. Maybe the intended has a hunch, maybe it's a surprise (and somewhat over the top) declaration of love, or maybe it's all just part of a happening.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suggested Scenes</p> <p>An argument with the intended. Will this ruin everything?</p> <p>It comes up that one of the other players once had a thing going with the intended.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PLOT The Premiere</p> <p>The hero's new work is being presented at a big event. Everybody will be there. The press will be there. The rabble also, most likely. But maybe the work is not done yet, maybe it's awful, maybe it's stolen, or maybe something else entirely.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suggested Scenes</p> <p>One of the other players finds out that he/she is part of the work and not in a flattering way.</p> <p>The hero accidentally insults an important reviewer and has to make up for it before the premiere.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PLOT The Award Show</p> <p>The hero is to receive a reward, host the show or somesuch. No matter what he/she has prepared to make something special out of it. Maybe a political statement, a work of art, a public humiliation, or something else. Things won't, of course, play out as planned.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suggested Scenes</p> <p>Working on the acceptance speech or monologue</p> <p>Discussing why someone else was not chosen - one of the other players for instance.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL Impress The Rabble</p> <p>You want to do something that will change how so-called normal people view you and your art. You want to raise your fame, in other words.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suggested Scene</p> <p>A fan comes up to talk to one of the other players. You try to steal the spotlight.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL Impress Your Peers</p> <p>You want do something that will change the way other artists look at you and your works. Raise your Recognition, in other words.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suggested Scene</p> <p>One of the surest ways to increase your rep is to diss someone else. Unfortunately he or she (one of the other players) hears it. And now you have to make things up or else ...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL Another One Bites The Dust</p> <p>You want one of the others to fail. Maybe it's revenge, maybe it's so you can help him/her recover and play the role of the hero, or maybe it's something else entirely. You cannot pick the Tragic Hero for this goal.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suggested Scene</p> <p>Convince your "target" that you can help with his/her goal, but of course with a sinister double cross on your mind.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL In It For The ...</p> <p>You want money. Or a date. Or hot sex. Or maybe just a meeting with an important producer/gallery owner/impresario.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suggested Scene</p> <p>You manage to set up a date with someone you want to borrow money from, have sex with, or some such (could be another player). The only problem is that he/she has completely misunderstood your intentions.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL Me! Me! Me!</p> <p>You want the upcoming event to be about you. Maybe you want to seize the opportunity to reveal a new work of art, maybe you want to pitch something, or maybe something else. No matter what, you want to be the center of everyone's attention.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suggested Scene</p> <p>Sick of not getting any attention, you dive into a lie that convince everybody you are the most important. As long as it doesn't backfire.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL In On The Secret</p> <p>One of the other players has a secret and you want in on it. Maybe you're the only one who doesn't know about it, maybe it's not even important, or maybe it really is. But no matter what you most definitely feel that you do need to know it.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suggested Scene</p> <p>Trying to lure a player into telling you the secret, you make a promise you're not sure you can keep.</p>

SUPPORTING CHARACTER The Agent	SUPPORTING CHARACTER The Archnemesis	SUPPORTING CHARACTER The Parent(s)
SUPPORTING CHARACTER	SUPPORTING CHARACTER The Competition	SUPPORTING CHARACTER The Reviewer
SUPPORTING CHARACTER	SUPPORTING CHARACTER The Fan	SUPPORTING CHARACTER The Ex

<p>STAT - 3 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 2 Recognition: 9</p>	<p>STAT - 3 players The Premiere</p> <p>Fame: 9 Recognition: 2</p>	<p>STAT - 3 players The Award Show</p> <p>Fame: 6 Recognition: 5</p>
<p>STAT - 4 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 2 Recognition: 9</p>	<p>STAT - 4 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 9 Recognition: 2</p>	<p>STAT - 4 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 6 Recognition: 5</p>
<p>STAT - 4 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 7 Recognition: 4</p>	<p>STAT - 5 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 7 Recognition: 4</p>	<p>STAT - 5 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 4 Recognition: 7</p>
<p>STAT - 5 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 2 Recognition: 9</p>	<p>STAT - 5 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 9 Recognition: 2</p>	<p>STAT - 5 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 6 Recognition: 5</p>
<p>STAT - 6 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 5 Recognition: 6</p>	<p>STAT - 6 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 7 Recognition: 4</p>	<p>STAT - 6 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 4 Recognition: 7</p>
<p>STAT - 6 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 2 Recognition: 9</p>	<p>STAT - 6 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 9 Recognition: 2</p>	<p>STAT - 6 players The Proposal</p> <p>Fame: 6 Recognition: 5</p>