

The background is a detailed, dark-toned illustration of intricate mechanical parts. It features several large, interlocking brass gears of various sizes. Interspersed among the gears are circular watch movements, showing delicate internal mechanisms like gears, jewels, and hairsprings. The overall aesthetic is that of a complex, antique clockwork or a steampunk-inspired mechanical city. The lighting is dramatic, with highlights on the metallic surfaces and deep shadows in the recessed areas.

The City

A steampunk drama by Frederik Jensen

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No man on is truly free, all are slaves of money or necessity. Public opinion or fear of prosecution forces each one, against his conscience, to conform.

Euripides, 300 BC

A father raises his newborn high with hope. His face turns dark in disappointment. A gift for the mountain the midwife asks.

A young woman scans for smoke of a homebound ship. A hand on her belly betrays what is on her mind. When will you come she whispers to no one.

The face of a young man pressed hard into the arena sand. Tears of pain and shame sprout from his eyes. Yield, he cries.

A mother sees the face of her son in a dream. Tomorrow the council decides. I deserve to be heard she mutters.

Four people about to make decisions that will define who they are for the rest of their lives.

The City is a steampunk drama about the choices we make to fit in. A tabletop roleplaying game for four players and one game master that plays in 3-4 hours. You need a bag with six white tokens and six black tokens to play.

The City

A steampunk drama by Frederik Jensen about the choices we make to fit in. A tabletop roleplaying game for four players and one game master that plays in 3-4 hours.

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Thanks

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A steampunk drama

The themes we explore through play in The City are timeless. What is my role in society? How can I live a satisfying life within the boundaries set by the people I depend on and that depend on me? Euripedes' quote is as true today as it was when he wrote it two thousand years ago.

The City takes place in the fictive steampunk city of Agonia. We let our imagination run free with exaggerated yet recognisable social norms. We laugh and cry for a little while. Then the story ends and we return to our normal selves. Perhaps we then see the interlocked gears of our own world.

One player is the game master. This is probably you. Four other play two characters in our story. The four main characters — Pontus, Leon, Iris and Thelma — and the four secondary characters — Castor, Nico, Maia and Doris. The game master plays all other characters.

The main characters each make a choice that defines who they are for the rest of their lives. The secondary characters are younger or older versions of themselves who live the lives that society expects.

There are no right or wrong choices, only consequences. The sum of all that happen decides the fate of the city.

Game mastering The City

Your job as game master is to help the players portray the four main characters, Pontus, Leon, Iris, and Thelma. Help the players externalise thoughts and feelings by asking questions. Make the players reflect on the choices their main character must make and make sure they know what is at stake. When they have made their choice, show them the consequences.

Tokens

You tell the story of The City in a prologue, four chapters, and an epilogue. In each chapter one main character has a choice to make. When they do, they return either a white token or a black token to a bag. During the game you draw tokens from the bag to decide the course of the narrative. A white token means a better outcome for the city. A black token means something worse.

Set scenes

Within each chapter, set scenes together with the players. The text suggests scenes but ask the player what they want and allow them to explore their character. Invite other players to play their secondary characters, Castor, Nico, Maia, and Doris. Ask lots of questions before and during the scenes. Describe, narrate and direct scenes to make the city and the characters come alive.

At first give the scenes a little room to breathe. Show what it means to live in the city. Later on keep scenes short. Fast forward to the juicy parts and cut scenes on a strong line.

Opponents

Play the opponents of the main characters, Stentor, Orcus, Barbara, Theo, and Nysa. Play them strong and assertive, but ultimately they want the main characters to succeed. Make it clear what the city expects and what the consequences are if they do not.

Keep the unfolding story engaging and fun for everyone. Push the main characters hard but check in with the players that they are ok.

Before the game

Read the entire text. Spend extra time to read the player characters and understand their situation and their relations to other characters. If you know the players, decide who will play which main character. Otherwise the players decide.

Prepare a bag with six white tokens and six black tokens.

Agonia

The story takes place in the city of **Agonia**, an island state in the White Sea. Rich on copper, its people prosper through trade but depend on imports for survival. Its merchant fleet are protected by a citizen army in which every male serves. Rivalry with neighbouring **Antigonia** often turn violent, the two cities are always at the edge of war.

Rigid **norms** have evolved to keep the interlocked cogwheels of the city machine spinning. Think a militaristic class society like Ancient Athens or Imperial Britain. Segregated by social class and sex, everyone knows their place.

Men are warriors while women are housekeepers.

Citizens are expected to marry and have kids when they reach adulthood. Male offspring is preferred, it is considered a great misfortune for a man not to have a son. It is an ancient tradition to give excess females to the mountain, a euphemism for abandoning a child to die of cold and hunger to be eaten by wild animals.

Young women train at the **temple**, learning skills and customs as preparation for life as housewives and keepers of the house. Specially gifted — or those unlucky to not receive a proposal from a suitable man — join the ranks of the temple servants. Only women can become priests, the highest of which is the high priestess who reads the will of the goddess in the guts of goats.

Young men train in the **arena** daily and are expected to excel at swordplay, running and jumping. The discipline held in highest regard is free style wrestling — a very violent sport with few holds barred.

Wealthy and respectable men serve in the **council**. The council decides all matters. Only men speak at the council and women are allowed only upon invitation.

Lower classes such as immigrants (**metics**) and servants have little protection within the law. They cannot own property or marry outside their class. Only in special cases can they be granted citizenship by the council.

On everything else, you decide.

At the table

Welcome the players. Set expectations on time, breaks, and smart phones.

Have one player read aloud **The City** from the Player brief with the quote of Euripides and the character snippets. Then read or paraphrase:

“The story takes place in the city of Agonia. A fictive city inspired by Ancient Athens with strong social norms and class inequality. The world is oppressive and harsh. But player characters will not die.”

Have another player read aloud the **Social norms** and another **Everyone knows**.

“We play to find out what happens when people follow social norms or break from expectations. The sum of all that happen decides the fate of the city. Maybe it will become a better place, maybe not.”

“Everyone at the table is responsible for creating a safe and pleasant play experience for all. I, as game master will take an extra responsibility to check in. At any time anyone can call a break to discuss the game. Together we decide how and whether to continue. It is just a game.”

Let the fourth player read **What you will do**. Give each player one white token and one black token. Place the bag with the remaining tokens on the table.

Decide who will play which pair of characters and hand out player sheets. If you do not know the players, briefly introduce the characters and let the players choose.

Pontus the father of girls, and **Castor** the warrior.

Leon who is not a fighter, and **Nico** the merchant.

Iris who is pregnant and not married, and **Maia** the servant
Thelma the mother of boys, and **Doris** the obedient daughter

Give players time to read their characters. While they do, place **Relationship map**, **Map of Agonia**, and **The story** on the table in front of you.

When players are done reading, go through the relationship map.

Explain that Hector and Kato are away on a ship, sent out on a business venture by Pontus and Nico.

Pontus and Thelma are brother and sister. Hector and Castor are Thelma’s two sons. Iris and Leon are half siblings. They both have feelings for Kato, the son of Nico the Merchant.

Nico and Kato are immigrants (metics).

Use the map of Agonia to give a brief overview of the city.

Then begin the story.

Player brief

Take turns reading these sections aloud at the start of the game, one section each.

The City

No man on is truly free, all are slaves of money or necessity. Public opinion or fear of prosecution forces each one, against his conscience, to conform.

Euripides

A father raises his newborn high with hope. His face turns dark in disappointment. A gift for the mountain the midwife asks.

A young woman scans for the smoke of a homebound ship. A hand on her belly betrays what is on her mind. When will you come she whispers to no one.

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Social norms

Males

A man is a warrior and goes to war for Agonia

A young man fights in the arena

A man should marry

A man should have a son

Excess girls should be gifted to the mountain

Females

Women do not speak in public

A mother raises strong boys

A woman should marry inside her class

A young woman attends temple school

Only women can become priests

Everyone knows

Agonia

The city of Agonia is an island state in the White Sea. Rich on copper, the people prosper through trade but depend on imports for survival. Its merchant fleet is protected by a citizen army in which every male serves.

Antigonia

Neighbouring city state. The two cities are always at the edge of war.

The council

Wealthy and respectable men serve in the council. The council decides all matters.

Metics

A lower class of immigrants that have little protection within the law. They cannot own property or marry outside their class.

The temple

Citizens pray and donate at the temple. The priestess reads the will of the goddess in the guts of goats. Young women train at the temple, learning skills and customs as preparation for life as housewives.

The arena

Young men train in the arena and are expected to excel in physical feats. The discipline held in highest regard is free style wrestling — a violent sport with few rules and much glory to be won.

What you will do

You will play a main character and a secondary character.

When you play your main character, explore how the city restrains you from doing what your heart wants you to do but also how the city takes care of you.

At some point during the story you will make a choice for your main character. When you do, return one of the two tokens to the bag.

Keep the black token if you do what the city expects you to do. Keep the white token if you break with norms and tradition.

There are no right or wrong decisions, only consequences.

When you play your secondary character, help the other player externalise the thoughts and feelings of their main character. Secondary characters accept and follow the norms of the city.

The game master plays all other characters.