

Weighing Styx and Stones

Designed and Written by D. X. Logan



GAME CHEF 2018

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Weighing Styx and Stones

Will you be found wanting?

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Theme: Lost Stories

Ingredients: blunt, speedwalking, sheepskin, weigh

Inspiration: Aeschylus's play Psychostasia (Weighing of the Souls)

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The Beginning of the End

The first sensation is the feeling of sand on your cheek. It's followed by the scent of sulfur burning somewhere. Everything is blurry as you open your eyes and push up.

"Oh good. I was starting to wonder if you'd been hooked up to one of those machines."

It's an unusual voice. You have a hard time picking out a gender for it. Whoever it was who spoke, they are off to your left, so you blink a few times until the focus returns and turn to look. The skeletal figure rests on a basalt boulder, one knee up. A sickle rests against one shoulder with the butt end planted in the sand below. A black robe covers much of the body, including a hood casting shadows over the bleach-white skull. Empty sockets offer no expression as they look at you. At least the head is turned that way. Without eyes, it isn't clear. Fear seizes in your throat as you stare at the Grim Reaper, who in turn stares back.

"Go ahead and get it out of your system." It says, sounding bored more than anything else.

"Ahhh!" Not your most articulate moment, but your concern is getting away rather than witty banter with Death incarnate. You turn to run, realizing you're beside a winding river. The bank is rocky with sharp obsidian and rough basalt, but the black sand is soft. Not a conscious consideration, but you realize your feet are bare. As you run along the shore, you are almost immediately in sight of Death again. Did it jump ahead?

The thing is looking at you, waiting as it continues to sit, just as it had been in the direction behind you. Turning, you hurtle back the other way to immediately see it again. As if it had always been sitting in that same spot.

"You can do this a while if you like, but no matter which way you go, you'll end up here again. Can't move on without me."

A few more minutes of panic bring you to a tired enough state to stop and consider. Each way you go ends up here. You can't seem to bring yourself to go into the water. Something about it fills you with greater fear than the bony figure itself. Finally, you find the words.

"I, uh, am I dead?"

"Quite. The real question is, are you calm enough to walk with me yet?"

"No." It's too much. The last thing you remember, you pause as you can't actually recall what was the last thing to happen to you. "I can't be dead."

"Deny it if you like. It makes no difference to me. I'm only here to see you on. If you want to spend eternity running along this beach, don't let me stop you. I can go and come back in a few eons to check on you." Put that way, you shudder.

"Okay, so what happens now?"

"You put this on and we walk along the river for a lifetime or so." He, you settle on he. Calling Death 'it' seems impersonal when interacting with the figure directly. Traditionally Death is male right? He tosses a sheepskin at you.

"How'm I supposed to wear this?" There aren't armholes or clips on the thing.

"Drape it over your shoulders like a shawl. That seems to work best for most people."

You do so, frowning as you realize it's the only clothing you have at all. For a time you consider pulling it down and trying to tuck it to work like a loincloth or skirt of some sort. As you stand there pondering, Death speaks again.

"Pardon the pun, but look alive. I'd rather not spend more than a single lifetime on this. We have a long way to walk."

Hesitating, you step towards the figure. He rises from the bolder. Shifting the sickle in his hand like a walking cane, he beckons you forward with a bony finger.

"Come. Let's talk."

"Sure, why not." You start to wonder if this is all a bad dream. "So why the fleece?"

"It's mostly symbolic. Your mind couldn't handle things as they are, so we rely on a bit of symbolism. Ever hear of Jason and the Argonauts?"



What is this game about?

Weighing Styx and Stones is a two-player game centered around the weighing of a soul after death. It's focus is on the telling of a life lived through hardships and joys. Facing down whatever that might mean in the end. **Weighing Styx and Stones** isn't about winning or losing. The recently deceased already did that. Instead, the game focus' on exploring what it means to have lived a good life through the eyes of a judge who can see beyond a single perspective. Was it morality that mattered? Did playing it safe count for more or did taking risks? What about the way our lives affected those around us? By the end of your walk, the judgment will come.

What is needed?

- This document (printing it may be wise for easy reference)
- Two players
- Some form of note taking method (pen and paper, emails, etc)
- The fleece chart (page included in this document)
- A pencil
- A comfortable place to explore the setting.

The Roles

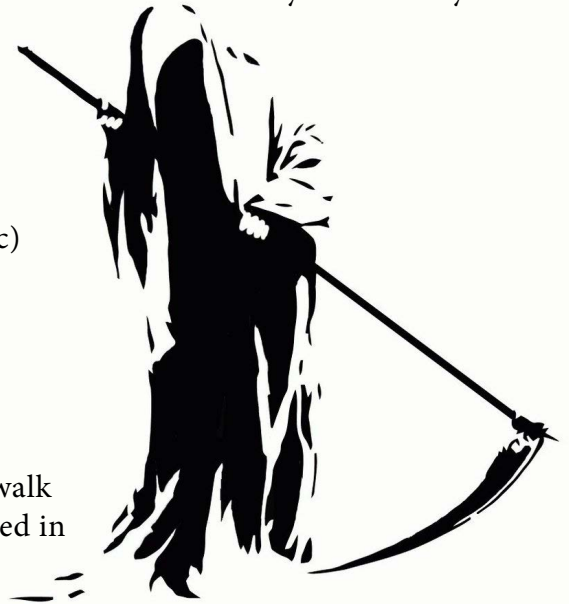
Each of two players picks a role. One is the judge who will walk along the river Styx and point out the things that were not realized in life. The other is the recently dead, whose life is reflects in the waters as they pass each moment in their life.

The Judge: There are many beings said to walk with us in death. Different cultures speak of different beings, each with their own views and values. With so many souls dying each day, it's all hands on deck. There's no way to know who will appear on the shore when you settle down to wait for the next one, but it is your job to seek the truth. Judges walk with the dead and help them to see their lives from the outside. It isn't for them to say how the person should have lived. Their only task is to be blunt in pointing out what the person may not have been aware of. At the end of the walk, they are to look on what gold has gathered in the fleece worn by the dead and determine a verdict. Is there enough there to pay the ferryman?

The Dead: You've only recently died. Maybe it was a long life, perhaps a short one. You might have been anyone. It's possible you were nobody at all. Whoever you were, you are rediscovering it as you go. The waters don't reflect the shore, but instead, reflect the life you lived. Each step takes you further along your passing days, letting you see how you lived with fresh eyes. There are moments of pride, moments of regret, and all manner of events you might rather no one had seen. Worst of all, you have no way to know what the judge who walks with you is using to measure the value of the life you lived.

What's the sheepskin all about?

Sheepskins in ancient times were valuable things. The wool, of course, had a value of its own. It could also do something special. When trying to extract gold from water, the small particles to settle into the fleece if it had been laid in the flow. A golden fleece was more than a legend. Instead it was a thing of very real substance. Since the idea of measuring a soul's value is a bit ephemeral, the sheepskin serves as a symbol in the afterlife. A life lived poorly dirties the fleece, detracting from its value. A life lived well is like gold in the water, clinging to the fleece. When you reach the end of the journey, it is this fleece that will decide the fate of the dead. Is there enough value captured to pay the ferryman?



The River Styx:

The river is where memories go when we die. Touching the water strips away those memories from us completely. Here, as you walk along, it reflects all that transpired in our lives, leaving nothing hidden. The scenes of the game are moments in those memories where important things happened. Defining moments or small victories and failures alike. In the end, the water will have our memories one way or the other.

The Rules:

The Judge

The player who picks this role is here to facilitate the story. Before the game begins, they pick one of the many beings who might walk with someone along the river. The most neutral of these would be the Grim Reaper, but there are many to choose from. There is a list of examples below. The Judge player is encouraged to spend a little time before the game researching the values of the culture their choice comes from. This will inform what constitutes a good life. Judges point out blunt truths, described further below, speak for the things happening outside of the dead's control, and mark down the value of the scene at the end. A scene that were positive in the estimation of the Judge are marked with a circle that represents a bit of gold. Negative scenes are marked with an X, lowering the value. Within the scene, the Judge serves as a narrator of events. As things go along (assuming this isn't an exchange via email) the Judge takes notes about each scene that goes on.

Judge examples:

Abaddon, Achlys, Ankou, Anubis, Archangel Michael, Cu Sith, Exu, Giltine, Grim Reaper, Hermes, Izanami, Jeoseung-saja, Ker (Keres), La Calavera Catrina, Laima, Little Pete, Magere Hein, Mara, Memitim, Mictecacihuatl, Minos, Moirai, Mot, Munkar, Nakir, Pesta, Saint Peter, San La Muerte, Santa Muerte, Shinigami, Tenebrae, Thanos (not Marvel's), and Yama Raja

The Dead

The player of the dead could have lived any sort of life. It might help to have some idea of what sort of person this was at the start, but that isn't strictly required. Instead, several scenes from early in their life will help to flesh out who they grew into. Where the Judge is able to see the blunt truths, the dead are the driving force in a scene. They describe what they were doing at the time. As the scene continues, they react to the events that were happening as described by the Judge. The dead may attempt to speedwalk through moments in their life as described below. The dead have no way of knowing what the criteria for their judgment are, so should use caution in applying this option.

Starting a Scene

In conception, a scene is a moment in the life of the dead. As the two walk along the river, the Judge will pay closer attention to some events than others. Those moments they focus on are the scenes of the game. To start a scene, the Judge begins by describing the situation where things begin. The dead then describes what they were doing. Each takes turns describing aspects that they control. The dead describes what they did. The Judge describes how others reacted or how events fell from the actions. This continues until interrupted by a blunt truth or a speedwalk action. How frequent scenes in their life occur is relative and up to those playing. There might be moments when every few months a major event occurred. Other times it might be a decade before something impactful happened. There's no hard and fast rule for this.

Blunt Truths

You can lie to yourself, but you can't lie to death. At any time, the Judge may pause the scene. All moments from the memory pause where they are and they are instead speaking on the shore of the river. In each scene, the Judge is a grounding to point out what the dead has missed. A blunt arbiter who stands to see

all sides of the events and point out both the good and the bad they find there. The Judge can point out complications that weren't visible to the Dead player's perspective. The dead and the Judge discuss these things so that the Judge can determine more about the mindset of the dead. Would this knowledge have changed how they acted at the time? Blunt truths are not meant to force the dead to feel a certain way. Instead, they are a game mechanic used to create greater conflict and complication in the scene. They can also help create a framework to expand later scenes on. After a bit of discussion, both players return to the memory scene.

Examples of Blunt Truths:

- *Pointing out how the money they found in the gutter had belonged to a poor mother and was meant to buy food for her child.*
- *Mentioning how that horrible injury they suffered and struggled to overcome led someone who'd been a passing acquaintance finding the courage to overcome their own struggle.*
- *Stating how the mind-numbing 9 to 5 job that they hated so much is what allowed them to put their daughter through college. That it was why she was one day going to revolutionize an industry with the knowledge she gained.*
- *Expressing how much their parents suffered while they were serving in the military. How they worried for him daily. That it impacted their health in small ways over a long period, leading to an early death.*



Speedwalking

Everyone has moments in their life they would rather not think about or dwell on. The Judge will forgive a little of this, choosing to look the other way once. The dead tries to distract the Judge as they talk along the shore, rushing through a particular moment of the river's reflection of their life. In mechanical terms, this is an interruption in the scene. It's used if the scene isn't feeling right to the player or isn't very fun. Maybe something about it is a little too close to home in their real life. Perhaps it isn't a scene they've been enjoying as much. Whatever the reason, the Judge player asks no questions. The Dead player stops the scene by stating they wish to speedwalk through this section and the scene stops immediately. No questions asked.

If used more than once, the Judge marks an X on the fleece chart. In theory, the Judge is allowing it to happen once as a simple courtesy. However, if it is happening often, they must be very dark events indeed that weigh the soul down.

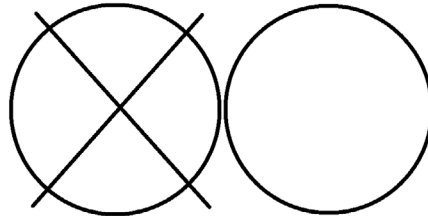
Scene Conclusions

A memory Scene one of several ways. If the scene has reached a natural conclusion, both can agree to stop there and have it noted. It can be stopped through a speedwalk, as noted above. Lastly, the Judge can decide that they have a clear view of how the events measure by the standard of their judgment. They

indicate that it is ending through a narrative conclusion. This narrative should describe how the remaining events worked out in the end. At the end of a concluded scene, both players may choose to interact as the two on the shore, discussing thoughts in character. Alternatively, they may continue on in silence and begin another scene instead.

Judging a Scene

At the conclusion of an individual scene, the Judge marks a good or bad life value to the scene on their fleece chart. Circles are positive values, X's are negative ones. Any speedwalked scene after the first freebie is an automatic X mark. For ease of tallying, a single circle and X may occupy the same location as shown below. This will make determining the outcome far simpler at the end of the game.



Example of two positive and one negative judgements.

The Final Moment

Death comes to everyone. It has already come for the dead, though they only now get to see how it all ended. Based on the scenes that came before it, there will be a final scene. Players on a limited amount of time might have died young. Players who want to go through multiple game sessions could have lived to a ripe old age. Some stories will have a natural conclusion. Others rely on the feeling of the players. Regardless, every life comes to an eventual end and the final scene is a moment for them to get one last victory in. By now, the many discussions with the Judge will have to lead the Dead player to an idea of what is a 'well-lived life'. At least as far as the Judge would see it. They may choose to actively attempt to make their death meaningful within the context of that definition. Should they succeed, the last of their judgments may be worth two circles rather than one. A negative result is still only a single X.

The Final Verdict

Once the last scene has been enacted, the Judge tally's the final verdict. The sheepskin is taken from the dead and the fleece is shaken and sorted. At the base of the docks, a scale sits and the dirt and grime are placed on one side. On the other, the small bits of gold are placed. If the gold outweighs the rest by at least 2, then gold coins form in its place. If not, the dock and scale fade away.

In mechanical terms, the Judge counts out how many more circles there are than X's. As long as there are 2 more circles, the verdict is that they will move on. The Judge takes a moment to write a note on the fleece chart, stating their assessment of the life of the Dead player. This should be based on what form of Judge they played.

Passing into Eternity

Regardless of the outcome, the dead gets touched by the water and all of their memories fade away. If they have the coins, they pay the ferryman and move on to whatever comes next. If they do not, the Judge fades away as the docks did, leaving them for eternity wandering the shores alone and without memory.

When this is done, all physical information from the game is destroyed. Emails are deleted, notes and papers are burned, shredded or thrown away. The only item left is the judgment of the Judge. The river Styx washes away all else so that it exists only in the memory of the two players themselves. The only reminder

of what has passed the judgment to remind them of what has transpired. Both players are encouraged to read over the notes of what happened prior to this loss.

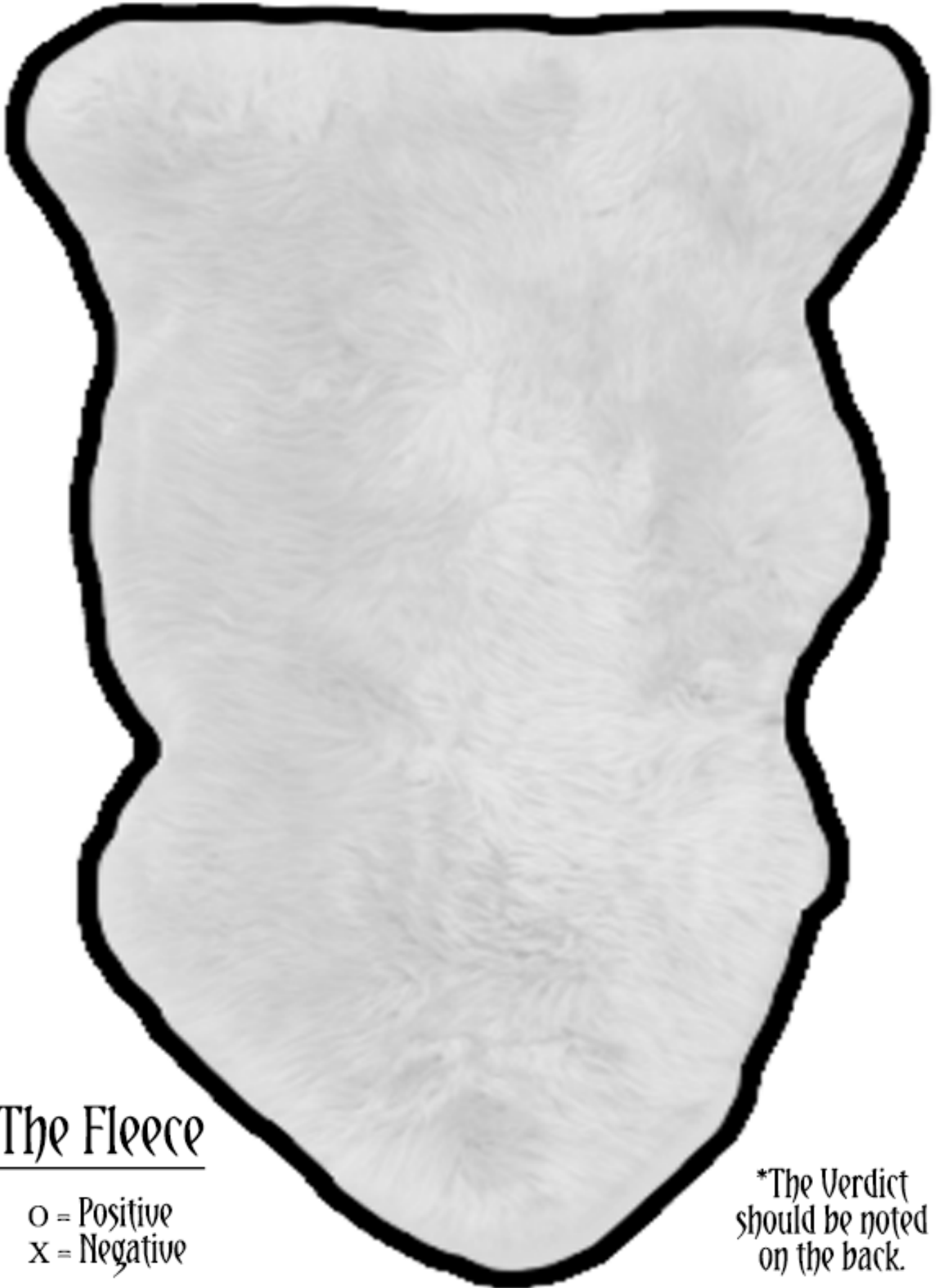


Death's bony finger scrawled along the sheepskin. Wisps of smoke rose as his assessment of the soul burned into the hide. It had been another interesting journey, but the soul had been weighed and it was time to go wait for the next. He studied the words, then laid the fleece on a pile of others he'd collected. Someday he would look at them again. Someday when time allowed. For now, however, there was no shortage of souls needing a guide and and awaiting their measure. For now, these stories would have to remain lost.



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* Print a new copy of this page for each new game.



The Fleece

O = Positive
X = Negative

*The Verdict
should be noted
on the back.