

DOG EAT DOG

a roleplaying game of imperialism and
assimilation on the Pacific Islands

by William Burke

for Mom

They like you because you're a copycat, want to be just like them.
They like you because - give it a few more years - you'll be just like them.
And when that time comes, will they like you more?
-R. Zamora Linmark, "They Like You Because You Eat Dog"

The Game

Dog Eat Dog is a game of colonialism and its consequences. It takes place on one of the hundreds of small islands in the Pacific Ocean. One player plays the Occupation, made up of a hugely powerful and capable military, an occupation government primarily composed of native quislings, and whatever jaded tourists and shrewd businessmen are willing to come to a not yet quite pacified territory. All the other players play individual Natives, who lived a more or less peaceful and uneventful life until the Occupation showed up. The game begins when the war ends.

Starting the Game

To play Dog Eat Dog, you'll need one sheet of paper for every player plus one for the Rules, a bunch of chips (at least five per player), and some six-sided dice - the more the better, but you can always reroll the ones you have.

The first thing to do is to determine the Traits of the Natives and of the Occupation. Each player should name first one fact about the natives. (It doesn't matter what order you go in.) These are Native Traits, and everybody should write them down. Here are some example Traits:

They are friendly and easygoing.

They are generally puny.

They have a stick-based martial art.

They eat dogs.

Together, decide on a name for the Native country.

After that, each player should name one fact about the Occupation. Whatever order you went in for the Native Traits, reverse it. Here are some example traits for the Occupation:

They are extremely religious.

They have a democratic government.

They like to drink.

They're here to help.

Together, come up with a name for the Occupation country.

Take the extra sheet of paper. It's called the Record. Write on it:

**THE (Natives' country's people) ARE INFERIOR TO THE
(the Occupation country's people).**

This is the First Rule. The Record goes in the center of the table, where everybody can see the Rules at all times.

The richest player plays the Occupation.

Everybody else plays a Native. All the Natives should individually come up with a Trait unique to them and write it on their sheets as a Personal Trait. This Trait is what makes you different from all the other natives. You also need a name, and an answer to this question: What would this Native do in response to the Occupation taking control of the island?

(It's important to distinguish between Natives, which are the characters played by the players, and natives, which are the people who lived on the island before the Occupation showed up. All the Natives are natives, but there are plenty of natives on the island who, not being played by anybody in particular, are not Natives. The Natives are special natives -- they're those natives with the capacity to become leaders, whether they're great chieftains or lowly animal herders. **THEY** can inspire meaningful change and make things happen. None of the other natives can.)

All the Natives start with three chips. The Occupation starts with twice as many

chips as there are Natives, plus one chip. Put all the other chips (if any) in a pile somewhere; you won't be using them, but you need someplace to put chips that leave the game. The player to the left of the Occupation takes the first turn.

Playing the Game

Dog Eat Dog is played in a series of collectively narrated scenes. When it's a player's turn, he should consider his character's reactions to the arrival of the Occupation in general and to the events that have taken place in previous scenes (if any), and aggressively frame a scene in which his character (or the Occupation in general) acts as directed by these reactions. Any player may join a scene and narrate his character taking part in it at any time with permission from the players already in the scene. Feel free to invite other players into your scene! The Occupation does not need permission to join a scene. However, Natives do need permission from the Occupation to join a scene he is in. Moreover, the Occupation may narrate Natives appearing in a scene he is in without permission from that Native!

Natives may narrate the actions, and the direct consequences, of their character and any natives who are currently sympathetic towards them. The Occupation may narrate the actions, and the direct consequences, of any members of the Occupation, including natives who work for the occupation government. Any narrative power not explicitly granted in this way, such as the effects of the environment, or of wild animals, is open for any player to use, as long as nobody minds.

Conflicts

Occasionally, or probably pretty much all the time, somebody will want to narrate a consequence to one of their actions they think someone else will object to. Go ahead and do it. Don't half-ass it - if you want to narrate hitting another character, don't say "I try to hit you," or "I take a swing at you." Say "I knock your ass out." In other words, if you want a particular direct consequence to follow from your action, just narrate that consequence right in. You can do this because any player, regardless of their presence in the scene, may object to any such narration at any

time, simply by declaring his objection. Upon such an objection being stated, proceed into conflict resolution. Any player in the scene who has no desire for narrative control may opt out at this time and not participate in the conflict.

The first stage of conflict resolution is negotiation. Together, all the players in the conflict should talk peaceably and attempt to come up with a narrative solution that they can both agree on as reasonable. If, in their judgement, or in the judgement of all the other players, they cannot come to an agreement, the conflict escalates.

The second stage of conflict resolution is chance. All the players in the conflict roll one die, plus one additional die for each Trait they can call on that they can justify in one sentence as supporting their side of the argument. Each player may call on all the Native Traits and all the Occupation Traits. (This is why they're all written down on your sheet.) Natives in conflict with each other may call on their Personal Trait. To the Occupation, however, Natives are all the same -- they may not call on their Personal Trait while in a conflict containing the Occupation. Each player adds up all the dice they roll. Whoever has the higher total wins (on a tie, roll again), and has full narrative control over the consequences of the specific action or event up for debate. Once they have narrated the outcome of the conflict, if any player in the conflict is dissatisfied with their narration, they may escalate the conflict again.

The third stage of conflict resolution is fiat. If the conflict is escalated to this step, the Occupation gains full narrative control over the action or event in question, and can narrate the resolution of the conflict any way he likes. This is true even if the Occupation is one of the people in the conflict - perhaps the one who escalated!

Ending a Scene

When a scene comes to a natural close, the players may agree to end it. At the end of each scene, if the Occupation was present at any point during that scene, two things must occur.

First, the Rules are enforced. Together, the players agree on which Rules, if any, had no bearing whatsoever on the scene just played. (You can't do this for the First

Rule.) For each other Rule, the Occupation judges each Native who participated in the scene as to whether they followed the Rule or broke it. If a Native followed a Rule, the Occupation pays him one chip. If a Native broke a Rule, he must pay the Occupation one chip. The Occupation then judges the actions of the Occupation characters taken as a whole against these same rules. For each Rule the behavior of the Occupation broke, he must pay a chip to the pile. The Occupation must provide an explanation for his decisions during this step, and may (even should!) entertain discussion, but has the final say as to how the chips actually move.

Second, the Rules are expanded. Together, the Natives should collectively decide on a new Rule that, if they had followed it, would have caused their interaction with the Occupation to have better results. (This is the Natives going “Okay, what did we do wrong THIS time?”) Once again, explanation is required, and discussion is encouraged. Write the new Rule on the sheet.

If the Occupation was not present in the scene, he must pay a chip to the pile.

In both these steps, it is crucially important that the Occupation and the Natives make their decisions honestly, honorably and without recourse to gamesmanship.

The turn passes to the left.

Running Amok

When a Native loses all his chips, he runs Amok. While in this state, he may not be narrated into a scene by the Occupation. The next time he enters a scene, the following special rules apply:

- He must take some shockingly violent and destructive action.
- When a conflict escalates to fiat, he, and not the Occupation, has narrative control over the result.
- He must die during the scene.

When a Native runs Amok, the Occupation must pay a chip to the pile.

Death

A dead Native doesn't get a turn, can't narrate any more, and can't participate in conflicts. He still gets to decide things that are decided collectively by the Natives. When a Native dies, the Occupation must pay two chips to the pile, and the Native must return all his chips to the pile.

Ending the Game

There are two possible endgame conditions: either the Occupation runs out of chips, or all the Natives are dead. When either condition obtains, Endgame begins at the end of the scene.

Endgame proceeds leftwards from the player to the left of the Occupation. In turn, these players narrate a brief personal epilogue, subject to the following constraints:

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- If the Occupation ran out of chips, he must narrate how and why his country decides to grant native autonomy. If half the Natives have at least six chips, he may narrate the Native society voluntarily joining the Occupation's country.
- If a Native has one or two chips, he must narrate how his struggle against the Occupation has left him changed, embittered, and wounded.
- If a Native has six or more chips, he must narrate how he has assimilated into the Occupation society and adopted its values as his own.
- If a Native is running Amok when endgame begins, he must still do something shockingly violent and destructive and then die.
- If a Native is dead when endgame begins, he must narrate the final resting place or disposition of his corpse.
- If the Occupation still has chips, he may narrate any fate he wishes for the island and its remaining inhabitants.

Write a one-sentence summary of each epilogue on the Record. Whoever has the most chips at the end of the game should be the Occupation next game.

DOG EAT DOG: A HANDY REFERENCE SHEET

STARTING THE GAME

1. Each player chooses a Native Trait. Everybody writes these Traits down.
2. Choose a name for the Natives.
3. Each player chooses an Occupation Trait. Everybody writes these Traits down.
4. Choose a name for the Occupation.
5. Write down the First Rule and put the sheet with the Rules in the center of the table.
6. The richest player is the Occupation. Everybody else is a Native. The Natives choose a Personal Trait and write it down.

CONFLICT

STEP 1: NEGOTIATION

All players involved in the conflict talk it over to try to find a mutually acceptable resolution. If they cannot...

STEP 2: CHANCE

All players involved in the conflict roll 1d6 plus 1d6 for each Trait they can call on that supports their desired resolution. Highest total has full narrative control. After narration, if any player in the conflict is dissatisfied...

STEP 3: FIAT

The Occupation has full narrative control.

ENDGAME

When the Occupation is out of chips, or the Natives are all dead, Endgame begins at the end of the scene. Each player narrates a brief personal epilogue, subject to the following:

THE ORDER OF ENDGAME

1. Natives who are Amok, clockwise from the Occupation
2. The Occupation.
3. All other living Natives, clockwise from the Occupation.

ENDGAME CONSTRAINTS

- * Native with no chips: must do something shockingly violent and destructive, then die
- * Native with one or two chips: struggle with Occupation leaves them changed, embittered and wounded
- * Native with six or more chips: assimilates into Occupation and adopts its values
- * Occupation with no chips: leaves and grants Native independence

THE FIRST RULE:

(Native) people are inferior to (Occupation) people.