

Creators of the Universe

An RPG for 3-8 players and a GM

Creators of the Universe is a roleplaying game about the creation of a fantasy world, featuring interplayer conflict. This game is somewhat different than other RPGs, in that the players are encouraged to destroy, scheme, betray, and steal from each other. For in Creators of the Universe, the players are not allies, but divine beings, seeking to mold the world in their image.

In order to play, you'll need someone to facilitate and referee the game, and at least 3 player, who take on the mantle of a god. Since fancy names for the role of the referee is in vogue, we'll call this facilitator "The World" (capitalized) throughout this work, although you may call him or her a GM, referee, or whatever else you can get away with without drawing his or her ire. In a similar fashion, we'll call the players Gods.

More so than in other games, selection of a referee is critically important for the success of your game of Creators of the Universe, because it features interplayer conflict. The referee needs to be fair, be able to put aside any friendships or enmities he might have, and be open-minded. Players, in turn, should remember that this is a game, and should try not to become upset at the referee.

For best experience, you'll need some sort of a dice or tokens for each player to represent their Power, which starts at 16 for each player. Paper tents for each player to write down the name of their god are also recommended, and parts of the game require the use of secret communication between the World and the players, for which we recommend post-it notes or blank flash cards. A whiteboard and dry-erase markers can and should be used in order to illustrate the world, and provide graphical clarity.

The core mechanic

Creators of the Universe is played as a dialogue between The World and The Gods. The World narrates what happens on this world. The Gods sit back and listen to the happenings of this world, and can decide to intervene. When they do this, they simply utter a command to The World beginning with the word "Let" (e.g. "Let there be light"), and spend some Power tokens by giving them to The World, to indicate the strength of the command. The World reacts to the command of the God and adds it to the narrative (e.g. "And suddenly, from the heavens, emerged a pinpoint of light, and all men were stunned").

Should The God be dissatisfied with the power of his command, he can repeat the command, giving more Power tokens to The World, in order to strengthen the effect (e.g. "And the light grew brighter and brighter, until light flooded throughout the world, exposing each nook and each cranny"). Similarly, if the

God's command is too powerful for the Power he has dedicated for it (e.g. "Let there be a supernova", while spending 1 Power), The World may take as much Power as needed from the God, or may shrink the effect to match the amount of Power spent. Should The World deem the command of The God to be unfitting for a god (e.g. an command that machine guns exist in a feudal setting, a command directly countermanding a previously issued command, or something which The World finds unfit for this universe).

Should there be no God wishing to Command The World, The World may simply continue with the narration until a God does make a Command, creating features or events as needed (although its best to avoid narrating divine or other events, which should be reserved for the Gods). Should no Gods be interesting in Commanding, The World should end the current Age of the world, and move on the next phase.

Should there be several Gods wishing to Command at once, the World may execute their Commands at an order of his choosing.

Commanding the world

There are a few rules regarding Commands. Chief among these is that a command can never be withdrawn or directly countermanded. That is to say, if one God commands the creation of a mountain, no God can command its destruction. However, a God could attempt to raise the nearby ground to match the mountain's elevation, or could attempt to create a flood and turn the mountain into an island. A permanent raincloud could be created on top of the mountain to erode the mountain away, although the World might decide that the mountain, being created by a Command, would not be so easily destroyed.

The second rule of Commands is that any creature granted Magic cannot be Commanded, forced to follow a Command, or otherwise directly ordered by a God. The gift of Magic is a powerful gift, one which grants the species freedom from the whims of the Gods. This means, for instance, that if humans are granted the gift of Magic, they could mine and thus level a mountain which was Commanded forth by a God.

The third rule of Commands is that nothing is infinite, impossible, or similar. No army is undefeatable, although they may be fearless. No wall is unbreakable, although it may be made out of an alien material much stronger than steel. No cliff is unclimbeable, although many might fall on its ascent.

Each God begins the game with 16 Power. In later playthroughs, you may want to increase or decrease this number to change the pace of the game.

As the world progresses, The Gods may regain Power through various means, including worship by creatures, growth and persistence of things that God created, and the passage of time. All these will be detailed in the Ages section.

Power

Each command takes up a certain amount of Power, depending on the power of its effect. The guidelines below are rough suggestions about how much Power a certain Command should require. In general, 8 Power is able to radically change the world, 6 Power should have a lasting impact, without being earth-shattering, 4 Power should be a feature which would be noted, and 2 Power should be small work for a God.

8 Power: A cataclysmic flood, endless night, decades of constant meteor bombardment, Large nigh-invulnerable dragon-like beasts, a cosmic principle to which all creatures are bound.

6 Power: Decades of torrential rain, a large single meteor, a 100-foot tall wall for hundreds of miles, a hivemind, a well of poison which is lethal to all living creatures.

4 Power: A mountain range, a giant whirlpool, desert-like conditions, a symbol in the sky, a plague, elves, a bottle which when opened causes the instant death of all creatures within ten miles.

2 Power: A river, a mountain, humans, a forest, elk, a torc which renders the bearer unkillable, a dagger which can slice through anything, a stone which allows the bearer to hear the thoughts of other mortals.

In general, temporary effects should be one to two power cheaper than the costs listed above, with a minimum of 1 Power cost, and as always, everything is subject to the discretion of the World.

The Flow of the Game

The First Age: The world is created

The World begins play by narrating the start of creation. This should be kept brief and vague, so that the Gods can fill in all the details. The author recommends stopping after light, ground, and miscellaneous flora and fauna are created, although this core setup might be modified for variation during subsequent playthroughs. When The World finishes with the exposition, it is time for the Gods to begin.

During the first age, the natural world will be created. The focus is on the creation of the land and its features, although forests, plants, and animals might also be created. Whenever a God Commands something into existence, whether it be a geological feature or a species of animal, they should name it.

Each God should remember what creations they Commanded forth for subsequent ages. At the end of the First Age, each God replenishes Power equal to the Power spent on their Creations that are untarnished by the designs of other players (this is at the discretion of The World, and untarnished should be used rather loosely) and on a map. In general, this should restore each God to their initial Power, unless one or more of their Creations was destroyed or despoiled, or a God began Creating creatures. Each God should also gain additional Power for any geographic features his Commands were indirectly responsible for (also at discretion of The World). These additional awards should not be plentiful, and are meant to reward good Commands which create emergent story (for instance, a

mediocre example of this which should probably not be awarded would be a mountain range which is responsible for the formation of a large river).

The Second Age: The age of beasts

The World transitions into the Second Age by stating “And thus the First Age ended. And from the ashes of this Age were born creatures of all sorts...”.

During this Age, each God may continue working on geologic features, but any such Commands require two additional Power to manifest. Any creature which was Created during the First Age becomes a symbol of that god. It costs one additional Power in order to have a Command on someone else's symbol. In addition, granting such a creature magic costs one less Power than it normally would. Note that granting such a creature magic does not make it intelligence, it merely causes it to gain magical properties, perhaps as a unicorn or a phoenix might, or rarely as a dragon.

When the Second Age ends, each God may declare a geographic feature they created as their homelands. At the end of this age, and every following age, having a homeland undespoiled by the other Gods allows a God to replenish one Power, and also reduces the cost of subsequent Commands in that region by one Power, to a minimum of one. During the Second Age, each God gains one Power for each extant species they created.

The Third Age: The age of tribes

The World transitions into the Third Age by stating ““And thus the Second Age ended, as some beasts grew and learned, and formed tribes, and then civilizations, aided by the magic of the gods”.

During the Third Age, the Gods will settle down into a pantheon, with each taking on a role within it, as they begin to stop creating, and allowing others to create on their behalf. Gods may continue creating land and creatures, but require an additional 2 power for each such Command.

Each God may select a tribe or other such group of individuals to aid and bless (e.g. Let the ratmen of Zkaros find a place in the mountains, where the baoyetis dare not venture, Let the Greeks learn the art of Fire, Let the Achinans find a spear which glows in the night, that they may be ever vigilant against the werebats).

At the end of this Age, each God declares a domain, and gains power equal to the number of Commands with power two or more he issued which are still in existence and relate to their domain. From now on, each God must spend an additional 3 power to Command in another God's domain. Each God also gains Power for each tribe or civilization whom he helped, and a Power for each Power he spent in assistance of the most dominant tribe or civilization.

The Fourth Age: Cataclysm

Each God now counts the total amount of Power they have. The player with the highest amount is the Usurper, and gains a chance to become the One God, as he enters the Earth as an avatar. If a tie, The World should select between the tied. The other Gods will also enter the earth to battle him or her, or

else lose control of the whole of their world. For each player above the third, the Usurper increases his Power by a fold.

The Gods may at last stop Commanding, and begin to narrate their actions. Each may continue to use their Godlike powers, but they cannot harm the Usurper, nor the Usurper them. Only their Creations may destroy other Gods. Each God is aided by the tribes or civilizations he or she aided, and hopefully by the creatures he or she spawned.

The fourth age ends when either the Usurper is killed, the other Gods are killed, or they spend too much time on earth, all becoming mortals as their powers fade.

Appendix: Elements of the game which might be improved, for future aspiring game designers

More detailed rules for influencing human tribes

More Ages, with perhaps a method to generate the lifecycle of a world.

Ascended Gods (for people joining halfway through)

Rules for plotting

Multiple roles for Gods

Rules for creating powerful artifacts