

Sample file

DEFIANT

ROLE PLAYING GAME

concept, writing, cover art, and graphic design

Katarzyna Kuczyńska & Marcin Kuczyński

proofreading & editing

Patricia Willenborg

beta-testers

Radosław Bożek, Magdalena ,Madireth' Darda-Ledzion, Maciek 'Maciejka' Elget, Dorota Grześkiewicz, Lena Jurczuk, Magdalena 'Arte' Konikowska, Agnieszka ,As' Krupińska, Paweł Łaszcz, Piotr Mysłek, Marcin ,Chomik' Niewiadomski, Marta Ordowska-Bożek, Aleksandra 'Hedere' Ososińska, Paulina ,Siowa' Piórkowska, Maciej Starzycki, Sylwia Śleziak, Maciej Tybus, Adam 'Dopler' Wysocki, Bartosz Wysoczański, Diana Zierke

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Defiant: a tabletop role-playing game where you get to play as mighty, modern-day supernatural blue-bloods who govern their subjects, and pursue their personal goals, while adhering to their Domain's Commandments. By heeding to the needs of the Sephirot, Defiant Royalty empowers the protective seals around their cities, making them the only safe-havens in a world ravaged by the Apocalypse.

In Defiant, your Characters walk a thin line between satiating their desires and following the dystopian laws of their uncanny society. They share a unique position as supernatural aristocrats, ruling over their Holdings and empowering their Domains with the strength of their passions. And while you will all be telling a tale of their struggles, triumphs, tough choices, and intense relationships, the most crucial question is not "How does the story end?" nor is it "How do we get there?".

Instead, each of you will be playing to find out who your Character really is, and what they are truly made of. What will the Characters do with all the power that has been given to them? How much are they willing to sacrifice to do what is right? How many rules are they willing to bend to get what

they want? With every Defiant Episode, you will learn more about your Characters and will have the opportunity to add more details to their intricate portraits.

Welcome to world of ruthless politics, demons from hell, extravagant parties, supernatural powers, apocalyptic cults, royal marriages, modern-day cities, blood feuds, reborn gods, aristocratic privilege, fallen angels, personal Courts, and dragons.

Welcome to Defiant.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This rulebook contains all the rules and information you need to play Defiant. While you can consult it during the game, it's best to read it beforehand, and only use the cheat sheets during the actual play, to make it run more smoothly.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

The book is divided into eight chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of the game. While some of them are only useful for the person taking on the role of the Game Master, you are free to read through the whole book, regardless of the part you are going to take during the game. The only chapter

that may potentially spoil some of the fun for the Players is the last one, titled “Bridgewood Boulevard,” so consider possibly omitting this one, if you won’t be running the game.

INTRODUCTION

This is the chapter you are reading right now. It contains all the basic information about the game, its theme, and ruleset. It should give you a good idea of what Defiant is all about and how the game works.

THE WORLD OF THE DEFIANT

This chapter focuses on the world you will get to play in. You will learn about the Apocalypse, different Defiant Origins, and major bloodlines, along with the customs and everyday life of the supernatural society.

THE FIRST MEETING

Here, you will find all the rules and guidelines you need to follow during the first meeting. This includes creating the Player Characters, setting boundaries, and playing out the first, short Episode of the game.

PLAYING THE GAME

You will find all the Player rules of the game in this chapter, along with different examples of how to use them. It sums up all different mechanics the Players use during the game. You do not have to know them all by heart, but you should have a general idea about them, and can consult this chapter as needed.

PREPARING FOR THE GAME

This chapter describes how the Game Master should prepare for meetings with the Players. It covers all the preparations needed at the beginning of a new Chronicle (a long game stretching over many sessions), as well as everything they should plan before every meeting.



RUNNING THE GAME

Just like the previous one, this chapter focuses on the role of the Game Master. Here, you will find all the rules and tips on how to run the game during meetings with the Players. After reading through the chapter, the cheat sheets provided with this rulebook should be enough to refresh the Game Master's memory during play.

THE GUIDEBOOK

This chapter consists of extended descriptions of Player Characters' "building blocks": Personal Themes, Marital Cards, Origin superpowers, and so on. It is meant as additional information, if any rules on the print-out cards provided with this rulebook are unclear.

BRIDGEWOOD BOULEVARD

In the last chapter, you will find a detailed description of a ready-to-play Defiant Province. With the information provided there, the Game Master should be able to easily set up their own Chronicle, in the city of New Hethlon.

HOW TO PROCEED

Defiant is meant as a game for both experienced and first-time role-players. Ideally, everyone should read the whole rulebook, apart from the "Bridgewood Boulevard" chapter. We understand that not all of us have enough time on our hands or the will to go through the whole book. Please consult the list below on what parts of the book may be crucial to you.

NEW GROUPS

Defiant is played in groups of between two and four people. If this is the first time you are going to play a tabletop RPG, you should start by deciding who will take on the role of the Game Master. You can read about Game Master and Player roles later in this chapter.



FIRST-TIME ROLE-PLAYERS

We've created Defiant with both the veterans and the newcomers in mind.

If you're only just beginning your adventure with RPGs, all you need before you start reading Defiant is a basic understanding of what role-playing games are. Watching a couple of minutes of any RPG online stream or video should be more than enough to grasp the concept.

THE GAME MASTER

There really is no way around this - the Game Master should read the whole book. The information in the chapters on preparing and running the game has been divided into two levels of complexity. If you are only starting as the Game Master, you should focus on the basic rules, but feel free to read the advanced ones as well - rest assured, they're not rocket science.

THE PLAYERS

Ideally, Players should read the "Introduction," "The World of Defiant," and "Playing the Game" chapters before the first meeting. You can read through "The First Meeting" during actual play, and follow its rules as you go. After your Characters are ready, you should consult "The Guidebook" and read about the elements concerning your heroes (i.e., their Origin supernatural powers, and so on).

THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM

If you are a Player, and really have no time to spare, you should try to read parts of the Introduction chapter (focus on "The Theme of the Game" and "Rules Breakdown" sections). Follow this by going through as much of "The World of the Defiant" chapter as you can, prioritizing the "Defiant Origins" and "Defiant Houses" sections. This should give you enough information to create a Character during the first meeting, but you will have to rely on the knowledge of the rest of the group to fully understand and enjoy the game.

Unfortunately, the GM needs to know most of the rulebook to successfully run a Defiant Chronicle. If time is an issue, you can read the information up to “The First Meeting” chapter before starting the game. Then, go through the chapter during the meeting with the Players, and read the rest of the rulebook before the next session (you can also omit the “The Guidebook” chapter, and only consult it if needed).

ROLES AT THE TABLE

Defiant is a game for a single Game Master (GM) and between one and three Players, who control the actions of the Player Characters (PCs). Together, you will create a supernatural society in a modern world resembling ours and tell amazing stories about your Characters.

THE PLAYERS

Each Player creates and controls their unique Character - one of the heroes of the story you'll be telling together. Rather than merely reacting to the GM's narrative, the Players may use their Characters' Special Rules to insert new elements into the story, tailoring it to better suit their needs.

Players also help the GM with unclear situations. Whenever there's a dispute at the table, you all sit together and decide on the proper solution.

THE GAME MASTER

The GM is in charge of introducing new threads and describing and playing out the roles of the Non-Player Characters (NPCs) - pretty much all people in the story apart from the heroes. It's up to the GM to outline every situation, describe the surroundings, and design interesting secrets, and the general premise.

Think of the GM as someone who designs a rough sketch of a situation. When the game starts, the GM describes the drawing. The Characters then enter the scene, and the Players get to draw additional elements if they choose to. They may also ask about certain aspects, and the GM adds more details to them, since they are now in focus.

And then, using all the information they have, the Players declare the actions of their Characters, changing the picture altogether. The GM engages in this dialogue, describing how the Characters' actions impact the situation and how the NPCs react to them. The Players respond to the new situation and engage in the dialogue by declaring actions, asking more questions, or adding new elements. And this back-and-forth dialogue is the main structure of the game.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

You will need a couple of pencils and a single set of dice (for the whole group), consisting of three six-sided dice, four eight-sided dice, and four ten-sided dice. You should print out the Defiant Character Sheets that are available to download for free. There are also a number of different game aids you can download and print to make the game run more smoothly.

DICE

The absolute minimum set of dice required to play consists of a single six-sided die (d6), eight-sided die (d8), and a ten-sided die (d10) for the whole group.

It will make die-rolling a bit difficult (since you usually have to roll a total of three or four dice) but is totally doable.

The full set of three d6s, four d8s, and four d10s will make the game run smoothly and is highly recommended. The colors of the dice do not matter at all; just grab whatever dice you have available.

GAME AIDS

While the Character Sheets make it easier to keep track of your heroes and their skills, writing all the information down on a piece of paper will work as well. The same goes for the “Line” and “Veil” cards. You can easily create your own if you don't have printed copies.

What you really need to print out are the “Character Creation Cards.” During the game, you'll have to shuffle some of them, use the information provided on them, and the whole character creation pretty much relies on them. So if you print out just one item, make it the “Character Creation Cards.”

THE THEME OF THE GAME

Players take on the roles of the Defiant – supernatural beings who rebelled against their calling. Rather than serving as the agents of the Apocalypse, they stood against it. They are now a part of one of the Defiant Domains, protected from the apocalyptic presence, each with its own specific - and usually demanding - set of rules.

THE URBAN FANTASY GENRE

While the game is set in a modern-like city, the main focus is on the paranormal. Your characters may look like humans (most of the time), but they are not mere mortals. They are powerful, supernatural beings living in a supernatural society. The city is filled with occult and weird elements that ordinary people either fail to see or choose to ignore.

BLUE-BLOODED SUPERNATURALS

Rather than playing low-ranking members of Defiant society, your Characters will be a part of supernatural royalty. Each of them will govern their own Holding within the city and will have a handful of Defiant subjects, serving as their entourage, agents, or playthings.

BEYOND THE MUNDANE

Defiant is not a game about everyday mortal problems. Mundane topics may come up from time to time, but they will usually serve as a novelty rather than an actual challenge. For the most part, your characters do not have to worry about taxes, unpaid bills, or setting up a doctor's appointment. They will have to manage their vibrant, supernatural lives instead.

THE PLEASURES OF THE FLESH AND MIND

One of the reasons the Defiant stand against the Apocalypse is their desire to experience everything the world has to offer. Defiant are creatures of grand ambitions, hungers, and resources, often indulging in earthly pleasures. While adult themes do not have to be in the center of your game, they are likely to be a part of it.

THE THINGS YOU'LL GET TO DO

While the exact plot depends on the Players and the Game Master, here are some things that you are likely to do during the game:



A STORY ABOUT YOUR CHARACTERS

The stories you will get to play will revolve around your Characters. In Defiant, you are not playing the parts of bystanders or pawns. The plot will revolve around your Characters and their ambitions, desires, virtues, and flaws. Using the rules of the game, the Game Master tailors each Episode to best resonate with the Player Characters' personalities, backgrounds, ambitions, and vices.

DEFIANT EPISODES

You will play Defiant through a series of Episodes, each focused around different events in your Characters' lives. The structure of the game resembles that of the TV series, with Episodes grouped into Seasons. A single Episode is meant to be played out either during one or two meetings with the GM and other Players. It usually takes about five to eight hours of playtime in total, meaning you can either play it out in a single long Session or two Sessions of about three to four hours.

EPISODE STRUCTURE

Every Episode (apart from the Pilot Episode) follows the same structure. It starts with the Players talking about their Characters' daily activities and dealing with problems at their Courts. It's the time for you to get to know your Character's subjects and the issues with maintaining the Holding.

Each Episode consists of two main Threads - events that take place in the Defiant world that your Characters cannot ignore. It can be anything, from attending a party held by someone important, dealing with a threat to your Province's standing, conducting an inquiry on the Princes' behalf, to fighting an apocalyptic cult, participating in a ruthless tournament, or exacting harsh justice as demanded by the Archon.

Threads are broad events with plenty of time to delve into your Characters' goals, make new friends and enemies, and so on. While all of your Characters participate in a Thread, they can have different goals and attitudes towards it.

Between the Threads, there's time for your Characters to explore personal matters, focusing on the things most important for you, even if they fall outside the spectrum of the main plotlines.



THE PILOT EPISODE

During your first meeting, you will create the Player Characters and play out the first mini-Episode to get to know them better. You will mostly focus on building your heroes' backgrounds, Traits, relationships, and such. Think of it as a pilot Episode that lets you get a hold of the general idea of the series and gives you a chance to meet the main characters.

RULES BREAKDOWN

Below you will find a basic breakdown of the rules used in Defiant. They are all described in detail in the "Playing the Game" chapter of this book.

PERSONAL THEMES

The Players choose Personal Themes for their Characters. They are a source of Traits that make your heroes better at overcoming odds. Themes come with special questions you can ask anytime, to influence the scenery, or get interesting answers from the GM. There are also Special Rules associated with each Theme, giving your Characters an additional edge. "Guide," "Socialite," or "Gem" are all examples of Personal Themes.

CHALLENGES

Whenever a Character comes across a situation, where their victory is not a given, and a potential failure would make for an exciting story, they need to face a Challenge. It is a test of the Character's skills and talents and a way to check if they can overcome the odds.

ENDEAVORS

Your Characters will be able to plot major intrigues, sway potential allies and lovers, reshape their Provinces politically, and undertake grand projects. Endeavors are more sophisticated versions of Challenges, used whenever a Character puts forth their own agenda and wishes to see it through.

TRAITS

Traits represent your Characters' abilities, areas of expertise, or talents. "Incredible Voice," "A Knack for Gadgetry," or "Friends in High Places" are all Traits. Whenever a Trait seems appropriate, you can use it in a Challenge, to increase your Potential (and the chance of success).

POTENTIAL

When the Character takes a Challenge, you need to sum up all applicable Traits and subtract all Afflictions that would hinder their effort. The number you end up with is the Character's Potential for this Challenge. The higher the Potential, the more likely it is the Character will succeed.

AFFLICTIONS

Whenever something bad happens to your Character, they might get an Affliction. "Wounded," "Distracted," or "Destroyed Outfit" are all examples of Afflictions. They work like negative Traits, decreasing your Potential in a Challenge.

ROLLING THE DICE

The basic dice you roll during a Challenge are three six-sided dice (3d6). Every point of Potential, "upgrades" one of your lowest-sided dice to the next level: from d6 to d8, and from d8 to d10. So having a Potential of 1 would mean you upgrade one d6 to d8, resulting in your pool consisting of a d6, another d6, and a d8. Having an impressive Potential of 6 would mean, all your dice would be upgraded to d10s, giving you a pool of 3d10.

OUTCOMES

All die results of "5" or more count as Successes, regardless of the number of sides. So, when rolling a d6, only "5" and "6" are Successes, while all results from "5" to "10" are considered Successes on a d10. The more Successes you rolled, the better. One Success is a mixed blessing at best, while three Successes result in a decisive victory.



SHARDS

Each Player Character has a pool of Shards they can use to improve their chances in a Challenge. Spending a Shard before the roll, adds an additional d8 to the roll, resulting in a 4-die pool. This die is upgradable, just like the other three. You can also use the Shards to power up your Special Rules or ask Theme Questions.

THE NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

While NPCs possess Archetypes, that are similar to Traits, they do not undertake Challenges. The Players are always ones to roll the dice. Whenever NPC's Archetype comes into play (for instance, when the Player Character is trying to sneak past a guard with a "Vigilant Sentry" Archetype or is attacked by someone with the "Reckless Warrior" Archetype), each appropriate element of the NPC's Archetype lowers the

Player Character's Potential by one, while any aspect of the Archetype that would hinder the NPC's chances, adds one to the Character's Potential.

THE LINE AND THE VEIL

It is likely that during the game, you will encounter potentially problematic topics concerning either sexuality, discrimination, substance abuse, or anything else that you might find difficult to deal with or outright unwelcome. There are rules in place to ensure everyone at the table feels safe and gets to play the game without having to deal with topics they are not comfortable with.

Every time you play Defiant, there should be a "Line" and a "Veil" card present at the table. You can download and print them from our gaming aids, or simply make them yourself - just draw a line, or write "line" on one card and draw or write "veil" on another. To use the card, simply tap it or say its name out loud.

THE LINE

You should use the Line Card whenever you feel uncomfortable with a topic or proceedings in the game world and wish to exclude them from the game. You do not have to explain your decision - if you feel bad about an element of the story or something happening to any of the Characters, use the Line Card. You can also do this when you're the GM; it's for everyone.

After you used the Line Card, try to explain which element you feel uncomfortable with. From this point forward, it's banned from this game. The better you explain the exact thing you're not ok with, the lesser the chance of it popping up ever again. Of course, you may not feel comfortable sharing too much; that's ok, but in that case, you cannot expect others to fully understand what they should omit.

At the very beginning of each Chronicle, you will all create a list of topics that "cross the Line." These are things you do not want to come up during the game. It's the perfect moment to exclude elements that you already know would upset you. Each time you use the Line Card during the game, you can add the current problematic event to the "crossing the Line" list.

THE VEIL

Sometimes you might be ok with a general element, but don't want detailed or graphic descriptions. This is what the Veil Card is for. Using the Veil card does not change anything in the game world. Whatever was happening still happens; however, you (both the Players and the GM) refrain from descriptions, simply acknowledging that the thing happens and moving on to the next Scene or element.

You can use the Veil Card in regard to your Character but also to others. If you're not ok with listening to what's happening to them or what they are doing, tap the Veil Card, and you should all skip the descriptions, simply stating that something has happened. The GM can use the Veil Card as well, of course.

You can also use the Veil Card to "unveil" an element of the Episode. Maybe you want the Scene to get more graphical and are eager to know all the details. In that case, you tap the Veil card, but declare that you want to unveil the thing currently happening. Unlike the veiling, you can only unveil the events concerning your Character.



Everyone at the table has the right to veto you, however, leaving the situation in question behind the veil. You cannot unveil a scene that has been veiled using the card, of course, since you already know that someone wants it hidden. The primary use of unveiling is communicating to the GM that you are ok and enthusiastic about jumping into the gory, sexy, unsettling details of what's currently happening.

DEFIANT INSPIRATIONS

It would be nice to think of Defiant as a completely original game: a one-of-a-kind creation made in its entirety from never-before-seen ideas, introducing breakthrough role-playing solutions, and a shockingly innovative fictional world concept that will dazzle the players and industry's leading designers alike. Wouldn't that be something?

As you can probably guess, this is definitely not the case. We've played or read literally hundreds of RPGs made by different authors, and we've been influenced by all the movies, TV series, books and comics we know. We've also used all the cultural and religious tropes we found fitting. We mixed everything together, to create the world of Defiant.

So while we hope there is some level of ingenuity in the way we mixed this cocktail, we'd like to acknowledge at least some of the sources of its most important ingredients.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Defiant is a game about angels, ancient gods of different pantheons, hellish demons, and dragons in human forms, fighting against the forces of the Apocalypse. It clearly draws from many cultural and religious tropes. When creating Defiant, we did not mean to accurately portray any existing religion or cultural group. This is a pulp, oversimplified version of their real-life counterparts. If we felt something would make for an exciting twist, we did not hesitate to insert additional ideas that have little to do with the original material.

For the most part, we didn't even base our creation on any in-depth works on those topics, as it was never our goal to draw a realistic portrait of the real-life cultural heritage. Our Aztlan Daeva have as much in common with the Aztec myths, as the MCU's Thor resembles the Norse legends. This game is supposed to be fun. It's not meant as a statement toward any religious groups or values.



WORKS OF FICTION

The world of Defiant is not based around any existing book, comic, or movie, though clearly, you can draw some similarities to different works of fiction. We tried to find various examples of recurring Defiant themes when compiling the list below.

We are aware that some of the listings below could as well fall into different categories since they exist as books, movies, and series at the same time. In those cases, we chose the versions that we knew or liked the best.

BOOKS

The novel, "American Gods" by Neil Gaiman is probably the closest depiction of Daeva you can find, even though they tend to be more down-to-earth than their Defiant counterparts. As for other titles, with the popularity of the supernatural genre, there are many to choose from.

MOVIES

Though this is not the exact aesthetic, the early movies from the "Underworld" series had a great depiction of supernatural, over-the-top royalty. There are plenty of movies about angels in the modern world, but perhaps the most "courtly" depiction of them comes from the movie "Constantine."

SERIES

The idea of supernatural communities and their internal politics is not an uncommon one, and titles like "True Blood," or "Shadowhunters" come to mind. Lucifer's club in "Lucifer" and the Tidelanders estate the "Tidelands" could serve as examples of Holdings and Courts (though Lucifer clearly lacks enough Courtiers).

COMIC BOOKS

Neil Gaiman's "Sandman" comics have an interesting take on the supernatural community. As for over-the-top fashion choices and dramatic potential, "Rapaces" ("Predators") by Jean Dufaux, and Enrico Marini could also illustrate some aspects of the world of Defiant.

OTHER ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

There are many different ways in which other roleplaying games inspire us when we design our own titles. We may find some aspects of imaginary worlds extremely interesting or fall in love with a particular game rule. Below, you will find a list of games that had the most significant impact on Defiant.

WORLD OF DARKNESS

Different games from the impressive range of the World of Darkness titles made for most of our roleplaying experience in the '90s. It's safe to say that there could be no Defiant without the influence of all the designers and authors who created that massive supernatural world of modern-day vampires, werewolves, mages, changelings, and other creatures.

To a point, you might say that design-wise, we are the children of World of Darkness. We started by admiring and accepting its design unconditionally at first, back in the '90s. Next, we went through a phase of rebellion, rebuking all its basic ideas before finally establishing a more mature relationship, acknowledging the ingenuity of some ideas, while disagreeing with others.

Of all the games from the World of Darkness / Chronicles of Darkness stable, two titles had the most impact on Defiant. The intricate world of "Vampire: the Masquerade" and the court-like society of "Changeling: the Lost" have definitely left their marks on the way we think about modern-day, supernatural societies. If you haven't already, you should definitely read (and hopefully play) those two games.

FATE

If you're familiar with the Fate roleplaying rules, you'll discover many of its influences in Defiant mechanics. While we felt we needed to create our own ruleset, tailored to the game experience we had in mind, we did bring much of the "Fate philosophy" into the game.

The first Fate game that we really fell in love with was "Legends of the Anglerre." We were amazed by its neatly scaling rules, which worked just as well on the level of single characters as whole kingdoms, and the idea of leaving the players in control of their character's goals and the steps