

Conclave

For twenty two centuries word has been passing from ship to ship through the darkness; summoning members of your family; those who trade between the stars, to the Third Conclave.

You are the one appointed by your branch of the family as conclave representative. Your holds are filled with the cargo both exotic and mundane from your point of origin and you've spent most of the last millennium in cold-sleep bound for this meeting. It will likely end up being your life's work.

How will you, and by extension -- your clan, fare at the conclave?

To play Conclave, you need some players (6, 12, more?) and some props. Each player should be lightly costumed to play the role of a prestigious merchant captain. The central facet of the costume is the ceremonial coat which will have pins added and removed during play (and so, should be made from an appropriate material). Additionally, each player should be wearing eight finger flashlights¹ (one on each not-thumb digit) which can be distributed at the time of the game.

Before the game² each player should prepare the 'trade goods' that they will take to the conclave. These goods take the form of ten pins or medals that will be worn on the ceremonial jackets of the captains. These pins are crafted in the shape of a 9 cm tall lozenge³. The pins can be simply or elaborately crafted. Or most interestingly, one player's set of pins can include a variety of qualities and degrees of embellishment. Consider this option: when crafting your goods, you may want to put your name or handle and maybe an email address on each one so that after the game, your trade partners will know that you were the source.

The actual game-play takes place in a dark room⁴ (or on a dark field) using only the aforementioned finger-lights for illumination. The trade goods that you have crafted and brought to trade, begin the game pinned to your own upper back. Play consists of the players moving around the play-area in silence (what communication there is, will take the form of gestures), looking for trade partners and making trades.

Trades take place between two partners. A trade is initiated when one player gets the attention of another. The two players face one another, freely examining any pins on the fronts of their partner's coat. Either player may back away from their partner at this point, breaking the trade off. If this doesn't happen, one of the players must turn their back to the other, offering first selection of trade goods. The other player is then obligated to choose one of the offered pins and detach it from their partner's coat. The partners then face each other again and look at the trade-good that was selected. At this point, the player who made the first selection turns around and offers her partner free selection of any remaining pin and the partner is obligated to take one. They then turn back and collectively examine the two goods involved in the trade. At this point, the players swap the goods and each pins the one that they made and brought to the

conclave onto the front of their partner's coat. But the location on the coat matters.

When you are called upon to make this judgment, follow these rules: Place the pin onto the front of your partner's coat; at a height depending on the trade's value asymmetry. When you are giving a pin that you like much less than the one you are receiving, place your pin high, almost to your partner's collar. This publicly honors them. If you think the pin you are giving up is much nicer than the pin you are receiving, place your pin, low on your partner's coat. And if they're about the same, pin it to the middle. Keep in mind, your placement is what other captains will use to judge whether to engage that person in a trade, but there is no telling whether high or low positions (and how that interacts with the visual quality of the pin you're placing) will entice others.

Once everyone has made ten⁵ trades or no more trades will happen, the main phase of the game is complete. Whenever you find that you have ten pins on the front of your coat, you have nothing left to trade and should withdraw to a done-trading area where you may chat with other done-trading captains. You may also withdraw to the done-trading area whenever you have determined that you do not wish to engage in any further trades.

When trading is complete, if you have more pins up high, it indicates that you spent clan wealth in exchange for prestige and obligation. If you have more pins down low, it means that you were a canny trader, multiplying your clan's wealth at the conclave. Maybe talk about what that means for you and your people. If you want to have *winners*, figure out the consensus on who has the highest pins in aggregate and who has the lowest -- maybe those two are the winners.

notes:

1. Example finger flashlights:
<http://www.amazon.com/40-Super-Bright-Finger-Flashlights/dp/B0018LAGZY/>
2. When the idea for this game first came to me, the idea was that the players would plan ahead, crafting the pins weeks before the event using a variety of crafts, techniques and levels of fineness. When I first shared the design, Marshall Miller suggested that the crafting could be done as part of the event prior to the actual playing of the game. I think that there are pros and cons to keeping the players closer to the same level of expectations and style, but either path is functional.
3. A lozenge is a rhombus with two 45-degree and two 135-degree angles. In this case, they are about 9 cm tall and 4.8 cm on a side. I'm including a template of lozenges⁷ that you can print and trace or cut out or whatever in case that helps you.
4. Marshall Miller also suggested that this could be played as a con-length meta-event. This ditches the need for the darkened room and the finger-lights (good and bad, in my eyes) but you would end up with these scenes where one player spies another across the hall and tracks them down to engage in a trade. That's another kind of cool and fun, so this is also a functional variant.
5. I'm not precisely sure how the numbers should play out with this game. How many

players should there be? How many trade goods should each bring? Should the default assumption be that they will all be traded? In my current vision of the game, it would be ideal with any number of players greater than the number of trade goods and the understanding that anyone who withdraws without making ten trades has botched things. What social practices rise out of these kinds of constraints and how do they differ if you tweak the variables? I'm not sure.

6. Example pin-backs:

<http://www.amazon.com/Pins-Brooches-Jewelry-Crafts-Backs/dp/B000RB3RRA/>

7. Lozenge* template for crafting pins/trade goods:

https://docs.google.com/drawings/d/1oxjrHAbJAV0j_6unhpRMJTU5yJxmGLuLrjqQ4lpWehE/edit?usp=sharing