

PERSEPHONE RULES

By Michael R. McGuire

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CHARACTERS

HADES	God of the dead, not such a bad guy, really
CERBERUS	Three-headed dog, guardian of the Underworld, actually a cute, fluffy poodle in disguise
CHARON	Grim boatman of the dead
PERSEPHONE	Demeter's beloved daughter, a spoiled brat
CYPHER	Demeter's other daughter, overlooked and ignored
HERMES	Roguish, messenger of the gods
APOLLO	Arrogant, god of light and goodness
ZEUS	King of the gods, a bit dim
DEMETER	Goddess of the harvest, wants only the best for her daughter Persephone
SISYPHUS	A conman eternally punished by the gods
JEFF	A dead guy

COSTUMES

The following are the costumes worn for the original production.

HADES – A crisp white shirt, suspenders and a tie. He should look like a put-upon, bureaucratic office manager. Later, when he goes to Olympus, he wears all black: A trench coat, fedora and dark glasses.

CERBERUS - In her official role as Guardian of the Underworld, she holds a mask indicating a ferocious, three-headed hound. In more laid-back moments, she lets the mask down to reveal a cute, fluffy poodle. On her trip to Olympus she wears a loud Hawaiian shirt.

CHARON - Long black robes, face painted a deathly white. Reluctantly wears a loud Hawaiian shirt when visiting Olympus.

PERSEPHONE - She dresses like a popular schoolgirl, bright and pretty. When she moves to Olympus she changes her style to all-black, Gothic style clothes and her face is painted white with dramatic make-up on her eyes and lips.

CYPHER - She dresses just like her older sister PERSEPHONE, but on her it somehow looks geeky.

HERMES - This adventuresome rogue favors tee shirts, sneakers and leather jackets. He often wears a flight helmet and goggles when on official business.

APOLLO - An immaculately put together preppy. Button down collars, pressed khakis and loafers.

ZEUS - He wears a slick business suit, over which he drapes a fine toga.

DEMETER - Long, flowing Earth-Mother gowns with a laurel wreath headdress.

SISYPHUS - He wears a neon orange prisoner's jumpsuit.

JEFF - A tattered rucksack.

PROP LIST

A small vase containing three colored lots

Brochures about Olympus

An enormous sack, stuffed full

A lyre

Another similar vase containing three lots

Demeter's scepter

Persephone's scepter

A massive book

A bowl of pomegranate seeds

Weapons for Apollo and Hermes

A broom

SETS

The play takes place in two locations: Olympus and the Underworld. The play can be performed on a bare stage with lighting to indicate location, or if more elaborate sets are desired, different areas of the stage can be designated as each place.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

This play is a zany comedy. The characters are larger than life and should be played as such. With each character, find a single, overwhelming desire that the character possesses in any given moment. For example, in the first scene, Hades wants only to prove that he should have gotten his brother's job, while Charon and Cerberus want only to get away from him and back to work. When Zeus first appears, his desire is for peace and quiet from his sons' bickering. After Hades arrives in Olympus, his desire switches to wanting to be the God of the Dead.

Complications that arise are simply obstacles keeping the character from his or her desire. It will not do in a play of this sort to overanalyze characters and motivations. Part of the fun is that they are like cartoon characters: simple and singularly obsessed.

A word on pacing: The action of the play ought to clip along. One line should follow the last rapidly; as should each scene rapidly follow the last - low pacing drains energy and laughs.

PERSEPHONE RULES!

Adventures of a Teenage Goddess

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Hades, the God of the Dead, forces his underlings Charon and Cerberus to re-enact the drawing of lots that resulted in Zeus becoming King of the Gods, Poseidon becoming God of the Sea, and Hades getting stuck as God of the Dead.

Cerberus suggests a vacation to Olympus where Hades can play up how great the Underworld is and make Zeus jealous.

Meanwhile, in Olympus, Hermes and Apollo, the two most eligible gods, romantically pursue Persephone. Persephone is interested in neither of them and is bored to death with Olympus, “so golden, so glorious, so blah!”

Hermes and Apollo quarrel over Persephone and Zeus is forced to mediate. The two bachelor gods go off in renewed friendship, but Demeter, Persephone’s mother and Goddess of the Harvest, arrives concerned with the future of her daughter. Zeus suggests either Apollo or Hermes, but she spurns the thought of either. Persephone’s overlooked little sister, Cypher, suggests that Persephone might become a Virgin Goddess, prompting her mother to bonk her over the head.

Hades, Charon, and Cerberus arrive accompanied by Sisyphus, who they brought along to carry their luggage up Mount Olympus. Zeus is furious at the presence of Sisyphus, but allows them to visit. Hades succeeds in making the Underworld sound like a grand place, and the Olympians exit so the Underworld denizens can rest up from their trip.

Hades, meanwhile, has spied Persephone frolicking in a meadow and has fallen in love with her. He refuses to return to the Underworld. Charon convinces him to simply take Persephone with them.

ACT II

Zeus forces Hermes and Apollo to re-enact the drawing of lots, convinced that it was *he* who got the bad deal. Demeter bursts in and informs them that Persephone has been kidnapped by Hades and demands her return, or else she’ll stop allowing the plants to grow. Apollo explains to Zeus the dire fate of the gods if the mortals are allowed to starve. “No mortals, no worship. No worship, no gods.” Zeus sends Hermes to the Underworld to find out what’s going on.

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Persephone, meanwhile, relishes her new position as Queen of the Dead. When Hermes shows up to see if she's been kidnapped, she, enjoying the drama of that scenario, lies and tells Hermes that she has.

Hades is so pleased with Persephone that he is oblivious to the sudden influx of starved mortals, as Demeter makes good on her threats. He urges Charon to cover up any problems so Persephone doesn't become disenchanted and leave.

Sisyphus, meanwhile, taking advantage of Persephone's new authority as Queen of the Dead and her youthful naivety, convinces her to release him from the Underworld.

Hermes negotiates with Hades for the release of Persephone, but Hades refuses. Cerberus informs Hades of Sisyphus' release. Hades has Persephone brought to him and he tries to explain the rules of the Underworld, foremost being that the Dead can never leave. Persephone shows no inclination to listen. Clearly, they are a mismatched couple.

Zeus and the Olympians invade the Underworld in full force and demand the return of Persephone. Zeus and Hades engage in a quarrel that degenerates into a bout of unseemly nose-pulling. Each accuses the other of rigging the drawing of lots. Cypher suggests a "do-over" and they agree. Whoever becomes King of the Gods will decide Persephone's fate.

Hades and Zeus draw lots again, but the results are the same. Hades dismisses Persephone and laments his fate. Zeus takes pity on Hades, but sees no way out of the situation. If Persephone stays, Demeter will never allow the plants to grow. Cypher suggests a course of action to Zeus when she sees Persephone eating pomegranate seeds even as she weeps.

Zeus announces that because Persephone has eaten food of the Underworld, she must remain there for a quarter of each year. "Long enough to enjoy one another's company, but not so long as to loathe one another, as is so often the case with husbands and wives."

The Olympians depart with Persephone, leaving Hades alone in a melancholy mood. Sisyphus returns, surprising Hades. He explains that after escaping the Underworld and re-establishing his life, "wouldn't you know it? I died again."

ACT I

SCENE 1

The Underworld. HADES paces, irritated. CHARON and CERBERUS look on frustrated and bored. A small vase containing three colored lots sits on a table. HADES grabs the vase and thrusts it at his two servants.

HADES: One more time!

CERBERUS: Oh, no!

CHARON: Terrible one, please!

HADES: Again, I said! Charon, Cerberus, come on!

CHARON: My ferry is behind schedule.

CERBERUS: I really should be guarding-

HADES: Aren't I the master here?

CHARON: Yes, Hades, but-

HADES: What I say goes, right?

CERBERUS: Of course.

HADES: I didn't volunteer for this.

CHARON: We know! We know!

HADES: **(CHARON and CERBERUS chime in.)** We drew lots. Zeus, Poseidon and me. I've been going on about this.

CERBERUS: A little.

CHARON: For hours now!

HADES: I'm sorry, guys, but honestly, is this any way for an immortal to spend his life?

CHARON: You think *you've* got it bad?

HADES: I understand we had to divide the work of running the universe.

CHARON: By the time the dead get down here, they've had time to get used to the idea.

HADES: And I suppose drawing lots is as fair a way as any to decide.

CHARON: When Hermes drops them off at my boat, they're still new to the concept of their own deaths. "I can't believe I'm really dead!" Do you know how many times I've heard that?

HADES: But it doesn't take into account aptitude. Do you know Poseidon couldn't even swim when he became God of the Seas?

CHARON: "Yes, you're really dead. No, we can't make any exceptions in your case. Yes, I'm sure they're all inconsolably sad for you. Now, please get aboard. I'm behind schedule." You'd think they'd be more considerate.

HADES: We had to hire a personal trainer and, even so, all he could manage was the doggy paddle for eons!

CHARON: Then there's the smart ones. "So, what are you gonna do if I don't get on your stinkin' boat? Kill me? Well, you can't! I'm already dead!"

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HADES: I, on the other hand, swim like a fish. Always have.

CHARON: “Oh, that’s very clever, sir,” I reply. “I never thought of that in all the millennia I’ve been doing this! You’ve got me there, boy! What a pickle I’m in now! I’ll probably lose my job over this!” Then they stare at me and I snatch them up and drop their dead butts in the boat.

HADES: Hades, God of the Ocean Blue! Has a ring to it, huh?

CHARON: And the ones who cry and lament-

CERBERUS: Oh, I hate lamentation.

HADES: That’s the worst.

CHARON: If I never had to hear another lamentation...

(They all sigh. CHARON and CERBERUS sneak for the exit.)

HADES: Wait! What were we doing before we got on this?

CERBERUS: Got me.

CHARON: I forget. Better get back to work.

HADES: Get back here.

(They reluctantly return and HADES again thrusts the vase at them. They all draw lots. HADES looks at his and jumps with joy.)

CHARON: Here we go...

HADES: Ha! See? I won again! Hades, King of the Gods! Ruler of Olympus! Ha, ha, ha!

CERBERUS: You were robbed, boss.

CHARON: Further proof of the injustice of the universe. Are we done now? Are you satisfied?

HADES: I guess. Carry on. ***(Exit CHARON.)*** You, too, Cerberus. Can’t have you dawdling here. Someone might slip out.

CERBERUS: Boss?

HADES: Yes?

CERBERUS: You know what you need?

HADES: Need? What could I possibly need? I am an immortal son of Chronus, perfect in every way. What, besides a cushy job, could I possibly need?

CERBERUS: A vacation.

HADES: I live in a fantastic palace. Sure, it’s in a bad neighborhood, but it’s better than anywhere else in the universe-

CERBERUS: Except-

HADES: Don’t say it!

CERBERUS: I don’t have to, do I boss?

HADES: They hate me there.

CERBERUS: They hate you *everywhere*. Kinda goes with the job.

HADES: Don't I know it! Y'know, Zeus has these long canine teeth, no offense, but he looks kind of monstrous if the light hits him just right. He would make a much better God of the Dead.

CERBERUS: You're losing it.

HADES: (**leaping in rage**) Gods don't lose it! (**HADES gasps, realizing HE has lost it**)

CERBERUS: Sure, boss.

HADES: Olympus?

CERBERUS: I hear it's spectacular. I got you some brochures. (**hands him brochures**)

HADES: They really don't like me there.

CERBERUS: Forgive my French, boss, but whoop-de-do! You are a major deity! Who gives a fig what they think?

HADES: I *am* pretty awesome.

CERBERUS: Parade about a bit, sir. Show them what a *real* god is like.

HADES: You think I could?

HADES: Get decked out. Go in true Underworld style. Play it right and you'll have them all jealous. "Look at that!" they'll say. "Now that's a god!"

HADES: Would they?

CERBERUS: You'll have them wishing *they* were the God of the Dead.

HADES: Even Poseidon? Even Zeus?

CERBERUS: He'll be begging to switch with you.

HADES: Begging! You're a genius!

CERBERUS: Three heads are better than one, boss!

HADES: Have Sisyphus pack my bag. The really big one.

CERBERUS: One more thing, sir.

HADES: What?

CERBERUS: (**dropping to her knees**) Take me with you!

HADES: Out of the question.

CERBERUS: But I need a vacation, too!

HADES: I need you here to guard. We can't have anyone leaving. Bad for our reputation. Sorry, pooch.

CERBERUS: But, I already arranged for someone to fill in for me.

HADES: Thinking ahead, Cerberus? Who'd you get?

CERBERUS: Jeff.

HADES: Jeff?

CERBERUS: Very reliable.

HADES: Who in Tartarus is *Jeff*?

CERBERUS: A dead guy.

HADES: I don't know...

CERBERUS: C'mon, boss.

HADES: Who's going to be afraid of a guy named *Jeff* guarding the Gates of the Underworld?

CERBERUS: Jeff's very scary. A big, mean, nasty guy. He's got a scar.

HADES: I don't know...

CERBERUS: Please, boss! Please!

HADES: Oh, stop whining. This Jeff had better be good.

CERBERUS: Thank you, sir! I can't tell you how much I appreciate-

HADES: Yeah, yeah, go get ready. Have Sisyphus pack your bag, too.
He likes to keep busy.

(Exit CERBERUS and HADES.)

SCENE 2

Olympus. Enter PERSEPHONE followed closely by HERMES and APOLLO. CYPHER lags behind.

HERMES: Dear girl, you'd be bored to death by this stalwart, uptight fellow.

APOLLO: Persephone, you'd be frightened to death by this amoral, heartless rogue.

CYPHER: Wait up!

PERSEPHONE: You are brothers. You ought to be kinder to one another.

APOLLO: *Half*-brothers.

HERMES: We Olympians are so interbred, who can figure it out? And who cares?

PERSEPHONE: It would make me happy to see the two of you get along.

APOLLO: Very well. You first, Hermes.

HERMES: Is it so difficult for you to say a kind word about me?

APOLLO: Not at all. There's simply so much to say that I need a moment to organize my thoughts.

HERMES: **(laughs)** Okay. Let me begin: Apollo always tells the truth.

PERSEPHONE: How admirable.

HERMES: I agree. He is unwaveringly honest. Nothing can persuade him to tell a lie.

PERSEPHONE: I'm impressed!

HERMES: In fact, once, this wretched woman, scorned by her lover, approached him. She was distraught, unsure of her worth, so she asked Apollo if she were indeed a beautiful woman.

APOLLO: Please, enough about me.

HERMES: Without a second thought, Apollo announced that with a nose that size and such thin, pinched lips, she could not possibly be beautiful.

PERSEPHONE: Apollo!

APOLLO: That isn't exactly how it happened. I simply-

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PERSEPHONE: The poor woman.

APOLLO: I tried to emphasize her inner beauty.

CYPHER: He had to be honest.

HERMES: Of course. I am trying to present him to Persephone in a favorable light.

APOLLO: Allow me to return your heartfelt compliment. I will now cast the light of truth on your character for Persephone's inspection.

PERSEPHONE: Please do.

APOLLO: Although it may appear that Hermes is irresponsible, lazy, conniving, fatuous, snake-tongued, sneaky, frivolous, undisciplined-

CYPHER: I thought you were-

APOLLO: I'm getting to that. In order to show contrast to his true nature, I am forced to recount his less than wholesome reputation.

PERSEPHONE: Go on.

APOLLO: Where was I?

HERMES: The good part, I hope.

APOLLO: Indeed I was. Though Hermes is known to embody all these disreputable traits, he actually performs a sacred duty that more than compensates for all that.

HERMES: Let's not talk about... my other job.

CYPHER: You're more than the fleet-footed messenger?

HERMES: Well...

APOLLO: Much more!

PERSEPHONE: I'm intrigued. Tell me.

APOLLO: Hermes has the solemn duty of escorting the dead-

PERSEPHONE: Who?!

APOLLO: The dead.

CYPHER: Who are the dead? An obscure band of Titans?

PERSEPHONE: No, you silly twerp. The dead are mortals who have...

APOLLO: Died. Either slain or grown old like a pomegranate left too long on the tree.

PERSEPHONE: Don't be vulgar.

CYPHER: I don't get it.

PERSEPHONE: Of course not. You're too young. Still, I knew about... death... when I was your age. I was much more mature.

CYPHER: Death?

HERMES: Mortals are fated to die. They are not everlasting like we are.

CYPHER: No!

PERSEPHONE: Do not make a show of your ignorance, Cypher.

APOLLO: In any event, Hermes-

HERMES: Are we back to that subject?

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