



THROUGH THE BREACH

MASTER CLASS

INCLUDING MALIFAUX'S MASTERS IN YOUR THROUGH THE BREACH CAMPAIGN

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Malifaux was originally marketed as a character driven skirmish game, and the pinnacle of these strong characters are the masters. The temptation for any new Fatemaster is to find a way to work these characters into your games of Through the Breach, and it's easy to understand why. They're all interesting and unique, with deep, rich backstories that make for good thematic fodder in the roleplaying game. Plus, you don't have to introduce them to players who already like Malifaux, as they're likely to already have a strong impression of them. When you describe their seeing a woman with long red hair and a bandanna tied around her eyes to your characters, they will immediately realize without directly telling them that this is Lady Justice. And, if she then looks in their direction and starts questioning them, you'll give them a chance to add to the characterization of their Fated by reacting to that potentially quite stressful situation.

There are reasons, however, to be dubious about throwing Masters into the game as opponents. Besides wanting to make sure that the focus of the game stays on your players' Fated rather than on Fatemaster characters, Masters are incredibly dangerous in combat (as they should be). You would think that this wouldn't need to be explained to most players, but experienced RPG GMs know better.

When TSR originally published Deities and Demigods for D&D in 1980 with stats for real-world gods along the lines of Zeus, the first thing players imagined was what it would be like to fight them. It's natural, but that doesn't make it a good idea.

Much like if you tried going shot-for-shot with the god of thunder back in the day, if your Fated get into combat with a Master, they're most likely going die and it isn't going to be close. Most Fated probably can't even hit a Master with the Red Joker early in their career. But still, the addition of one of Malifaux's Masters to your games can add a huge amount of character, flavor, and thematic strength as well as linking your game to the greater Malifaux world.

So, if you're not including them as combatants, what role can Masters play in your Through the Breach campaign?





ROLE 1: THE GAMED

The first use for Masters in your game is probably the simplest, as it is literally just taking advantage of the fact that all of these characters exist in the same city. Malifaux's a big place, but it's not as big as Earth. It's not out of the realm of possibility for your characters to bump into some of the movers and shakers during their daily activities. It makes the world of Malifaux seem a little smaller and gives a knowing nod and wink to players of the miniature game.

Moreover, as your Fated advance along the course of their destiny and, presumably, start getting involved in bigger and more important activities, the likelihood that something they do is going to end up crossing paths with someone they recognize will increase, as well.

One example from a Penny Dreadful One Shot involved the villain of the story framing Seamus to throw investigators off the scent of his plan. The Fated have to look closely at the clues to see through the red herring and track down the real criminal or, if they follow the false clues, may end up actually running into the Hatter himself and having to entertain his mad whims to avoid his killing them outright.

Sometimes the Masters can be used as set dressing, while other times they may be a part of the plot hook for the adventure, but the aim is to drop the Master into your game as a one-off. They show up for this particular episode in the lives of your Fated, they have an effect on what the Fated are doing, and then they leave without having anything to do with the rest of the story. I caution against over-using this particular method, as it can start to feel like a cheap trick if every time your characters walk into a bar Som'er Teeth Jones is smoking a cigar in the corner, Mei Feng is cleaning everyone out at the poker tables, and Pandora is trying to seduce people into wandering into the alley to be stabbed to death by Kade.

Done well, however, this is one of the most effective ways of including Masters in your game.

EXAMPLES

- The Fated are hired to provide security at an M&SU rally where Toni Ironsides is giving a speech decrying recent Guild increases in tax rates. The crowd gets rowdy, and the Fated step in to cool things down, eventually uncovering some Guild agents in the crowd who were stirring up trouble. Afterward, Toni meets with them to offer her congratulations and more work in the future.
- While planning a heist, the Fated hire a pair of subordinates who tag along to keep watch outside or drive the getaway vehicle. The job goes smoothly, but when they meet to divvy up the loot, they find the incompetent subordinates dead with a note indicating that the warehouse they robbed was actually a storehouse for the Ten Thunders. The note is signed with mark of the Last Blossom, and the dead men were slashed with a powerful bladed weapon like a Daibo.
- The Fated happen to be at one of the city gates when Lucas McCabe is leading a new expedition into the Badlands searching for relics. If the Fated try to get hired on, a Wastrel rudely informs them that they don't need rookies slowing them down. They can then return to their original adventure as planned, but they're later cornered by a rival team of "archaeologists" who pressure them for information on where McCabe was going and what he was searching for.
- A friend of the Fated has gone missing while traveling through the Bayou. The Fated want to look into it, but there's a problem: the friend was traveling through land belonging to the Tucker family. Most Gremlin clans are trouble, but the Tuckers are particularly territorial, and wandering inside their borders is likely to end in conflict. The Fated have to navigate a treacherous swamp filled with booby-traps, hazardous wild-life, and potential ambushes by Bushwhackers, all with the knowledge that causing too much trouble will draw the attention and ire of the Tucker clan matriarch, Mah, with whom they are likely to have to barter to save their friends' life.
- Passing through an abandoned portion of the slums, the Fated stumble upon an odd sight: an ancient cemetery where all of the graves have been emptied, apparently due to the occupants digging themselves out. A Death Marshal is on



the scene, and after some brief questioning to make sure they had nothing to do with the body theft, she lets them know that they'll need to be careful while making their way back to civilization. There's only one necromancer in the city with the power to animate all of these corpses at once, and he often leaves some of his undead behind wandering free to cover his escape. As they hear groans coming from the surrounding blocks, the Fated realize they may be in for a long night...

- The Fated need cover to covertly hand over some stolen documents to an influential figure. Luckily, the Star Theatre is opening a new show this weekend, with Collette Dubois debuting a brand new illusion. Unfortunately, another agent is looking to intercept the Fated first. At the right moment, just as Dubois is about to make her lovely assistant disappear, the Fated will have to get past this interference and make the drop before the opposition takes them out.
- Captivating Salvage and Logistics needs someone to help disassemble a large vehicle from the days of ancient Malifaux found crashed in one of the slums. It's too big of a job for Leviticus or his crew to handle on their own, so the Fated are brought on as hired hands. Unfortunately, the mechanical guardians inside may take exception to the Fated disassembling their home.

ROLE 2: FORCES OF NATURE

One of the more unique ways of involving Malifaux Masters is to use them less like characters and more like an unstoppable environmental hazard. I first encountered this idea in the Nythera campaign in an Ongoing Challenge where the Fated get caught in the middle of a fight between Kaeris and Kirai. Every duration of the Challenge was built around characters trying to survive and escape before they end up dead in the crossfire. It was especially memorable because between rounds of using their skills to make their way out of the combat zone, Fatemasters could throw in mini-encounters with a summoned spirit needing to be removed from their path or having to dodge a stray fireball that streaked out of the sky toward them.

I really like this use of Masters, as it serves to emphasize how incredibly powerful they truly are in comparison to the Fated. Done right, it can feel like a Kaiju battle has broken out in the city streets, with your players cast as the hapless Japanese townsfolk.

The other advantage, of course, is that it helps to avoid some of the pitfalls of having Masters involved in a combat with the Fated, as they don't end up in direct conflict while still giving the players a taste of their power.





EXAMPLES

- The Fated are hired to join the Barrows gang as they pull an armed job: robbing a Guild train. There's some concern that a rival has hired another crew to pull the same heist. To try and head them off, Parker takes the heavy hitters from the gang and spreads them through the train to keep an eye out while the players crack the safe. The first sign of trouble comes when someone separates the caboose from the train with Parker on board. When the Fated investigate, a cry rings out from the car behind them. One of the other bandits is dead in an instant and the body is missing, with only a spray of arterial blood on the wall. Another scream from another car allows perceptive Fated to spot a woman with a blonde mohawk and a pair of razor sharp katana blades beheading another member of their crew. The Viktorias have slipped aboard the train and are picking off the bandits one at a time and vanishing into the shadows. The Fated find themselves having to hold out as long as they can, performing skill challenges to try and corner the mercenaries, protect the gang members, and finish the job they came to do in the first place. If they can stay alive long enough, Parker hired another mercenary, the mysterious Tara, to wait with Mad Dog Brackett at the next station and bail them out if trouble comes along.
- During an otherwise normal trip to the market, members of the Witch Hunters division appear, demanding that a businessman surrender immediately. The individual in question loses control of their latent magical talent, perhaps arcing lightning into some onlookers. This is a problem for the Fated, as he is a contact they were supposed to make. Members of the Arcanists appear and try to "rescue" the hapless individual, leading to an outbreak of combat between Witchlings and Oxfordian Mages. The Fated have to get their contact calmed down and sneak him out if they're going to have any hope of getting the information they need. The situation escalates the longer this takes. Finally, Sonnia Criid appears, demanding that everyone present stand-down immediately.
- In the middle of a mission in the Ten Peaks, the Fated are startled by the sounds of explosions going off near them. Von Schill and his Freikorps have come on a hunt for the winter witch, Rasputina, looking to get a measure of payback

for his lost arm. Unfortunately, the combat zone between the mercenaries and the Cult of December includes the objective of the Fated's time-sensitive mission. To get it, they'll have to brave the gunfire and spells from both forces and, perhaps, find their way past Rasputina and Von Schill to escape with their lives.

- Sometimes the bitterest conflicts arise between colleagues in academia, and they only get worse when family is involved. Somehow, the Fated are present when the beastmaster Marcus and his former student, Dr. Douglas McMourning, are engaged in a heated debate of the various merits of their work. The argument escalates to combat, and the Fated find themselves caught between not just the two mad scientists, but also an all-out battle between their bestial and undead creations.





ROLE 3: THE TRAPPINGS OF POWER

Masters are often powerful people, but they have their fancy, signature toys just as often. Sometimes it's possible to get the flavor and feel of a character into the story without them actually having to show their faces.

Giving a player a magical hammer that can channel lightning is cool, but it's a lot cooler if it's Mjolnir, the hammer of the Norse god Thor. These items don't necessarily have to be this level of epic for the effect, of course.

The important thing is to make sure it evokes the character to whom the artifact belongs. Perhaps the Fated do a job for Collodi and as a reward, he makes them a little animated Marionette friend that follows them around (extra points if it looks creepily similar to the Fated for whom he made it).

However, much like the One Ring, such powerful artifacts often come with their own complications that characters have to overcome if they want to use them. Is the item cursed? Is its owner looking for it, and what will they do when they find you using it? Do the Fated know what they have, and if they find out that it's sinister or dangerous, is there a safe way for them to get rid of it? All of these things can introduce cool plot hooks for future adventures.

For our above example, maybe the Fated's creepy feelings about Collodi's marionette turns out to be vindicated, as the thing keeps causing mischief and getting them into trouble. Worse, if the Fated try to get rid of it or (gasp) destroy it, somehow the item in question inexplicably is back the next morning, showing no signs of having been damaged. A whole new adventure could break out, with the Fated trying to track down Collodi's cart and return the puppet, most likely realizing along the way the horrible reason why the puppeteer is actually performing his shows in these small towns and, most likely, the reality of what is animating their puppet friend.

EXAMPLES

- Competition is tough in the casino business, and not everyone is happy with the sudden rise of the Honeypot to surpass all their rivals. It's an open secret that much of their success comes from a drug known in whispers as Brilliance. One of Lynch's rivals, a brothel owner named Alexandra Swinden, hires the Fated to go get a sample of the stuff or, better, find out how it's made. They break into a Ten Thunders drug warehouse and make off with some, or perhaps a recipe. Any attempts to synthesize the drug without the Hungering Darkness' involvement are doomed to failure, but the beast makes contact with the would-be alchemist and offers to share a bit of his power to help complete the process. If the Darkness can get a Fated under its influence, he'll offer them all the power they could ask for and they'll soon rise in the ranks of Malifaux's underground, but with the obvious downside of earning the enmity of the Thunders and Jacob Lynch, not to mention the risks of becoming a hopeless Brilliance addict.
- As the Fated travel through the Quarantine Zone, a Fated with the Whisper magical theory stumbles upon the fanciest top hat any of the party have ever seen blowing down the street. One of Seamus' cast-offs from a foiled caper, the voice of the Whisper compels the Fated to acquire and wear it, as just being around the mad killer has infused it with a level of power allowing it to function as a Grimoire with a number of hard-to-find necromancy Magia and Immuto. Unfortunately, the hat is also imprinted with a bit of the Hatter's madness, and the voice of the Whisper seems to intensify when the Fated is wearing it, pushing them much more intently to acts of depravity and evil. Worse, while Seamus had barely given the hat a thought since losing it, seeing a rival Resurrectionist sporting his trademark fashion statement may draw a bit more of his attention than the Fated had bargained for.
- The Fated complete a job and, in the process, crack a case that has been vexing the Amalgamation office of the Guild for quite some time. In gratitude, Charles Hoffman offers to personally design something small to help out a member of the party that was particularly instrumental in bringing down the threat.



- Despite their ongoing hostilities with humans, not every interaction with Gremlins needs to be combat. The pig farmer Ulix hires the Fated to take care of some Bayou Gators that have been preying on his herd. Once the job is done, he offers them one of his prize piglets as payment in lieu of the promised cash (which he didn't have in the first place and never would have given to them anyways). The piglet is smart and destined to grow to into a fierce ally and companion (or, at the very least, a fantastic pork chop dinner), but without the proper care will certainly develop all the stubbornness and unpredictability for which Malifaux's porcine residents are infamous.
- The Fated are drawn to a border town deep in the Badlands to participate in a quick-draw competition. The prize for the winner is a Peacebringer pistol said to have been used by the famous monster hunter Perdita Ortega herself, but turns out that it's a near-identical replica. Perfectly balanced, the weapon is truly a work of art (in regards to both its quality and forgery). Of course, non-Guild personnel who are caught with a Peacebringer are subject to summary execution, but this is the sort of reward that's worth the risk. Probably.



ROLE 4: MY YOUNG APPRENTICE

One of the classic roles a powerful character like a Master can play in your campaign is that of a mentor. This has been a trope since Gandalf and Frodo, and there's no reason it can't translate just as easily to games of *Through the Breach*. Your Fated are adventurers with a touch of destiny surrounding them, and most Masters likely spend a good deal of their time on the look-out for additional talented individuals to add to their crews.

Maybe one of your early adventures saw you take on a gang of undead who were menacing a settlement, and Lady Justice took notice of your success. Maybe one of your Fated grew up in the Little Kingdom and has been groomed by a Katanaka Crime Boss since he was a child, and now Lady Misaki has taken an active interest in your preparation. Sandeep, Shenlong, or the Brewmaster seem like the sort of Masters who are always looking for new talent. For a more light-hearted game, perhaps Captain Zipp recruits your Fated to join his crew. The possibilities are only limited by your imagination.

Obviously, this story method works even better if you have a character interested in an Advanced Pursuit that the mentor can help them acquire like a Death Marshal or Torakage. But there are other benefits to being taken under a Master's wing. The young prodigy likely will gain access to resources which the average Malifaux citizen never could, such as Soulstones, weaponry, or cold hard scrip.

Additionally, rewards could come in the form of specialized training in elite skills or access to social circles beyond their normal means. Unfortunately, there's nothing saying all of these boons from on high come free of strings, and Fated working for a Master may soon find themselves undertaking missions the likes of which they would never have dreamed prior to their employment. Plus, strutting around town wearing a Guild badge can earn you the enmity of quite a few people, and a Fated working for one of the city's higher ups may find themselves on the wrong end of a hit in an attempt to send a message to their employer.



Also, the cost of admission into the Master's good graces may be more than the Fated are willing to pay, as would likely be the case if Titania wanted to invite a Fated into the Autumn Court (assuming the Fated receiving the invitation would prefer to remain living, that is). And, let us not forget, not all of Malifaux's Masters are completely stable or trustworthy. Sometimes the best use for a pawn is to sacrifice it, regardless of the pawn's feelings on the matter.

EXAMPLES

- One of the Fated with ranks in the Ghost Eater pursuit has shown enough prowess that tales of their exploits have reached the ears of Yan Lo, arguably the first human to wield such power. He extends a formal invitation to meet him for tea and offers his tutelage. His power and experience offer opportunities beyond anything the Fated could learn on their own, but rumors persist that the apprentices of Master Yan Lo tend to go missing, usually right around the time they reach the apex of their power. How long can the Fated risk studying with the ancient Master before they need to do what they must to save their own skins?
 - A Fated begins having disturbing dreams at night. Like it or not, the tyrant Nytemare is imparting the power to shape reality to them, much as he did for Serena Bowman and the Dreamer. Unfortunately, the Fated may not particularly want these powers, particularly when they start manifesting unconsciously every time they sleep. While this may be an amusing or embarrassing diversion for their friends some nights, any time they have a nightmare the party may be in for an unpleasant evening.
 - Life is tough in the Quarantine Zones of Malifaux. Far from the affluence of Downtown, people get by in Capetown or the Sink as well as they can, scraping out a living from the refuse of the wealthy. A growing movement of the downtrodden and disenfranchised is building, however, spearheaded by the mysterious Reva and her growing cult. After stepping up to protect a family from being ousted by a gang that wanted their tenement for their own purposes, they're given an introduction and an opportunity to be a part of the movement. If they accept it, she'll help them pull themselves up from the muck and give them the chance to truly make a difference for the people of the QZ. But in doing so, they'll
- be putting themselves in the sights of the forces that would try and stop the movement, namely the Guild law enforcement agents trying the devotees down or kill their mistress.
 - Good investigators are hard to find, and the Fated have built a reputation as people who can uncover what others try to keep hidden. They're contacted by Nellie Cochrane to see if they want jobs as investigative reporters for the Malifaux Tattler. They'll have no shortage of action if they want it, and they'll have the perks of being Guild employees without necessarily needing to wear the red coat and the badge. The only problem is that they have to look the other way from time to time when they discover Guild activities that they find... unsavory. Whether they can live with themselves after they know the things they know, that's another story.
 - One of the Fated with skill in the Bokor pursuit is sent on errands for the swamp witch, Zoraida, in exchange for lessons on how to better read and manipulate Fate. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that the Fated's tasks are being conducted for the benefit of the Neverborn and, more often than not, to the detriment of their own people. How long can they rationalize betraying their species to help creatures like the Nephilim or Pandora's Woes, no matter how good the opportunity to increase their personal power may be?





ROLE 5: THE NEMESIS

The opposite of the previous role, in this version the Master is the main antagonist for the campaign. Somehow or another, the Fated find themselves on the opposite end of a particular Masters' machinations.

While combat with a Master is a bad idea for characters early in their career (and probably not a great plan for Fated later on, either), building a campaign in opposition to one of them makes a lot of sense. Master level characters aren't a villain you throw at the party as the antagonist of an individual chapter of the campaign, but they work well as a main foe, particularly the Masters that tend to operate in the shadows through manipulation rather than moving directly against their enemies.

A great example of this is - **SPOILERS!** - used in the Penny Dreadful adventure *Northern Aggression* (and, presumably, will continue in the rest of that series). To avoid spoilers as well as I can, an outbreak of some kind of strange mental illness is happening in the Northern Hills, with those falling victim to it being altered in some sort of characteristic way. What's really happening is that a villain is using magic THAT was taught to them by one of Malifaux's Masters to twist these people, corrupting their bodies and their minds. The Fated step in and do what they can to head off the crisis, but the power behind the villain never makes themselves known.

Confrontation with the Master, if it happens at all, should be a thing to which you are building slowly. Early on, it shouldn't even be apparent whose ire they've drawn. Chances are the first few victories the Fated achieve won't even register as a blip on the master's radar. The plans of a Master are bigger than a bunch of Rank 1 nobodies. More likely, they'll get a response from a lower level Enforcer or Henchman trying to discourage them from causing more trouble, eliminate them, or possibly even recruit them to their side (good help is hard to find, after all).

As time goes on and the Fated keep being a problem, they'll start drawing a bigger and more intense response from the enemy faction, but that's the point: the Masters are leaders of a faction. They're big players, but they have lieutenants and underlings

to send at your party. This plan is likely not the only iron the Master has in the fire. Their time is limited, and so their involvement in the affairs of others must by necessity be prioritized. Then, after the stakes have been built gradually and the characters are invested personally, if you feel that makes for the best conclusion to the story, a confrontation with their nemesis can wrap things up.

However, sometimes a better conclusion is one where both sides walk away to fight another day. Nothing stings worse for your players than having to grit their teeth as the enemy for which they've been gearing up walks away unpunished, and they'll be even more motivated for the next adventure to try and find a new way to bring the Master down. Use your best judgment. You are the Fatemaster, after all.

EXAMPLES

- One of the Fated inherits a townhouse in the Southern Slums. Over the course of their early adventures, they come to know the people who live in the neighborhood are good, hard-working folks who are just doing their best to make a living out of a bad situation. Unfortunately, this particular neighborhood sits on a powerful ley line. Some of the Fated's new friends go missing with no explanation, and the Fated have to step in from time to time to drive off Oni that appear and attack for no reason. Then, members of the Katanaka Crime Syndicate begin threatening business owners and bullying tenants into selling their property and moving away. All of this is done by Asami Tanaka, who is trying to seize the place and use it for a powerful summoning ritual of her own design.
- The Fated are hired as part of an emergency effort to contain an outbreak of the Piper's Plague somewhere in Malifaux. Early missions to exterminate infected rats, quarantine and treat the victims of the disease, and deal with some clearly insane individuals who seem to be intentionally spreading the plague lead the Fated to realize that, rather than being random, the mysterious Piper himself, Hamelin, is very specifically spreading his contagion to a contract town. The party finds themselves in a race against time to determine what Hamelin wants or hopes to achieve by this and deal with it before the Tyrant takes a direct hand in destroying the town's inhabitants.



- Sometimes you run afoul of the wrong people no matter how hard you try to mind your own business. During a seemingly innocuous mission, one of the Fated accidentally kills an undercover agent put in place by Lucius Matheson. The Governor-General's secretary doesn't appreciate his operations being undermined by amateurs, and he takes a personal interest in making their life miserable. Their social contacts disappear. Their assets are seized. Their job prospects dry up overnight. And when they do get jobs or go out on adventures, they are plagued by "mishaps," usually in the form of hidden snipers shooting at them in critical moments. If the Fated ever want their lives back, they need to square things with the Secretary, one way or the other.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully this will give you some ideas for how you can use Malifaux's Masters in your games without having to resort to throwing your Fated into combat with them. As with most roleplaying game advice, these are just intended to be starting points for you to alter, dissect, or combine as a means of including them in your campaign.

Maybe you want to use Jack Daw or Lilith in place of Hamelin as a Nemesis, or you want to throw in Ophelia LaCroix as the Champion at the end of the quickdraw competition.

It's up to you.

The important thing is to use Malifaux's Masters in the way that makes the best story, enhances your game, and increases the fun for you and your players.

