



INTRODUCTION

Valley of Eternity is a roleplaying game about everyday heroes and fate as an outcast, reserved for those who are in any way different from their fellows. The game is about penguins, because penguins are funny. A touch of comedy makes it possible to relate to even the greatest of heroes.

You can play two kinds of characters in the game. Penguins represent civilization and society. They live on the Silent Coast and their heroes are sworn to protect their fellows from the dangers that lurk out in the sea, sky or glacier. Anti-penguins, on the other hand, are barbarians that pillage penguin communities and live far out on the glacier in small tribes.

The penguin characters are heroes. A hero is someone who has made significant personal sacrifices in order to ensure the well-being of others. The penguins played in the game have rejected their chance of building a family and taking part in the everyday lives of the regular penguins around them.

A hero is far from a typical penguin, since she's ready to rebel against tradition and choose her own destiny. She realizes that in order for the community to have a bright future, someone must grab a spear and go on to perform deeds that are simply unimaginable for normal penguins.

Anti-penguins are anti-heroes. An anti-hero is a person who is hard to accept as a hero due to his ruthless or cynical actions but who still has some heroic traits that become apparent as the story unfolds. A character who appears selfish, mischievous or violent may still be willing to make the sacrifices when it matters most.

The anti-heroes in the game are not typical anti-penguins. They have not allowed the glacier to grind away their belief in the fact that even the penguins living on the Silent Coast deserve to live in happiness.

Valley of Eternity is not a game about good and evil. Penguin communities are often desperate, racist and isolationist places where solidarity is lost under the pressure of the cold climate. The survival of one's own egg is all that matters to most penguins. Anti-penguins are free, but their freedom is bought at a price which is paid by the regular penguins, who constantly lose food or even their lives to the raiding anti-penguins.

A heroic penguin simply can't let the community act as her moral compass, because the community is always fundamentally selfish. The hero must make her own decisions. This individuality makes heroes appear untrustworthy in the eyes of the common penguin.

A game of **Valley of Eternity** lets you experience fates familiar from the movie westerns. In westerns, the iconic gunslingers are only useful as long as there are bandits nearby threatening the town. After he retires, the western hero is a hopeless drunk, and no one cares about him.

The life of a penguin hero is always one of tragedy. Whatever they do, they cannot escape a lonesome death.

A simple adventure could go something like this:

The heroes find a starved anti-penguin (another player character) in the snow near their community. As they are about to interrogate the barely breathing anti-penguin about her intentions, a group of skuas swoop down from the skies towards the community.

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

What is there to stop a penguin hero from rolling out an egg or two between adventures?

Antarctica is an unforgiving place to live, even more so when one should raise offspring. Penguins have a pouch in their bellies which they use to incubate the egg. With emperor penguins, the male is the first to guard the egg and keep it warm while the female fills her belly with fish from the sea. After waiting for months the male is ready to die from starvation. The fledglings hatch, and if the male still has anything in his belly, he vomits it up to feed his child.

As soon as spring comes, the females hurry back to feed their young with regurgitated fish. The guard changes, the female takes up the task of looking for the fledglings and the male rushes out to the sea to keep himself from starving to death.

The life of a penguin parent is a constant battle against hunger and the cold. A penguin incubating an egg cannot lose his guard even for a moment. If left unguarded, the egg will freeze over, and the life inside will perish. While carrying the egg, the penguin can only move at a snail's pace.

Penguin parents simply have no time for anything other than looking after their family. It takes up their every waking moment.

PENGUIN FACT

Penguins can go for a long time without having anything to eat, since they can store energy in their bellies and layers of fat for weeks and even months. Every now and then one can find frozen corpses of penguins on the glacier of Antarctica, hundreds of kilometers from the coast. It is almost like the penguin had one day decided to abandon his old life and head for the South Pole. It walked a straight line towards its destination for days, weeks, perhaps months, until hunger stripped it of its ability to resist the cold.

No one knows why these penguins set out on this journey. It's easy to entertain the romantic idea that they're animated by the spirit of exploration. These penguins are the inspiration for the anti-penguins of **Valley of Eternity**.

The penguins charge into battle to save their home from the malicious birds.

Once the skuas have been banished, perhaps with the help of a suitably recovered anti-penguin, the heroes find out that the attack was the result of a shadowy plot against the community. Perhaps the tribesmates of the recently rescued anti-penguin are planning a devastating assault to drive the entire population into the sea, with the skuas merely running reconnaissance. The heroes and the equally surprised anti-penguin must now travel to the anti-penguin tribe and attempt to persuade them to abandon the attack.

THE GAME

A game of **Valley of Eternity** requires a gamemaster and one to five players. In addition you will need regular, six sided dice. Ideally every player should have their own set of at least five dice. Every player is placed in control of a single penguin character, whose characteristics are recorded on a penguin sheet. You can copy it from the last page of this book, or download it from vagrantworkshop.com.

The players play their characters. The gamemaster is tasked with running the rest of the world. She designs the adventures the players will embark on, plays the non-player characters that the players will meet and keeps the rhythm of the game going. In battle and other conflicts the gamemaster is the final authority. She must ultimately decide what will happen in each situation. In this sense, **Valley of Eternity** is very much a traditional pen and paper roleplaying game in the spirit of **Dungeons & Dragons**, **Exalted** and others.

In **Valley of Eternity** you play the role of heroes and anti-heroes who experience all kinds of exciting adventures. Difficult decisions are at the core of every adventure. The story resolves with a hint of melancholy. Even though the heroes might triumph in the end, one must always ponder the **meaning** of these victories. The heroes have defeated a dangerous foe, but in the midst of this struggle they have come to respect their enemy in a way that makes the final victory feel hollow.

The game contains combat and action, but also conversation and debate. The characters cannot always agree on everything, if only because every group should ideally include both penguins and anti-penguins.

Valley of Eternity works best as clearly defined one-shot adventures the length of a single gaming sessions. This game could take anything from three to six hours. During this time one should be able to get to know the characters, get a sense of the threat, problem or conflict at the core of the adventure and finally make the meaningful decisions in the end. Because **Valley of Eternity** is a game about penguins and the Antarctica, the setting is simple, clear and quick to dive into. It is ideal for clearly defined games where the potential solutions to problems are relatively limited in scope.

Valley of Eternity can also work as a long-running campaign. In this case you could have, for example, ten sessions of gaming with a more complicated plot tying them together. In this kind of game the gamemaster must come up with a wide cast of memorable characters to make the world come alive. She must sketch out several penguin communities and use the world presented in the game in its entirety in order to avoid the inevitable monotony brought by a setting that mostly consists of ice and snow.

THE GENRE

Even though the penguins in **Valley of Eternity** have spears and armor, this is not a traditional fantasy game.

In most fantasy adventures noble warriors and cunning wizards rise far above the ordinary people to combat mythical beasts and adversaries. Upon retirement they become dukes and royal advisers.

Valley of Eternity is inspired by westerns. The future of its heroes is not bright. The gunslinger is always an outsider and the small town people are afraid of him even when they depend on his protection. Once the gunslinger grows old, some young hotshot comes along and shoots him dead to bolster his own reputation. In the best case

scenario, the hero becomes a poor pig-farmer, like in the Clint Eastwood film **Unforgiven**.

The penguin equivalent to the pig-farmer would be an elderly fool who lurks on the outskirts of the society and helps out with whatever manual labor he is entrusted with.

In westerns the hero is ultimately left on his own. He breaks the limits of society to triumph over his enemies, but when victory is achieved, he realizes that there is no going back to the life he once led. The heroic penguin, too, must wander the glacier alone while others are busy building families, fishing for food and rejoicing at the hatching of their young.

The penguin is driven to heroic deeds by an inner urge or hunger for something extraordinary. She is not the superbeing of traditional fantasy roleplaying games, wandering beyond the scope of ordinary ethics or morality. She's a lonesome wanderer on the edge of society who rarely benefits from her own heroic deeds. The penguins of the community will celebrate the hero for a day, but the next they are hoping for the hero to go somewhere else.

In theory the hero could always relinquish his spear and build a family of his own. This will make him like anyone else, a regular penguin among thousands of others. He no longer has the time to develop his philosophical powers or explore the sea or the glacier. The survival of his own eggs takes priority over everything else.

Continuing in the spirit of westerns, some penguin heroes live on the outskirts of their community, protecting it from any who would wish it harm. Others wander from one community to the next, leaving at dawn when they are no longer welcome.

Some are driven mad, no longer able to distinguish right from wrong. They become dangerous enemies against whom the younger heroes must do battle.

If the penguin hero is the equivalent of a gunslinger in the old west, the anti-penguins could be the Indians. The penguins living on the Silent Coast consider the anti-penguins to be disgusting monsters only useful for scaring fledglings into behaving. The anti-penguins stand for the wind, the cold and death. They have embraced the two

greatest fears an ordinary penguin has: a life without offspring and the eternal cold. They move on the glacier like intangible ghosts and make their homes in places that could make any penguin shiver in fear.

The comparison to Indians only carries so far. Each anti-penguin was once a penguin like any other. In a way, the anti-penguins are a symptom born from regular penguin society. They have their own wandering communities, and they draw many independent, intelligent penguins who no longer have a place on the Silent Coast.

PENGUIN TALES

For some heroes the most important thing is to live the legend. Heroic penguins have no offspring, but if they do something brave enough they can still be remembered after their deaths. It is not unheard of that the legend becomes an obsession for the hero, especially if she's old or growing weaker.

For a hero these tales are both useful and a hindrance. A well-known penguin can scatter her enemies by the power of her reputation, but at the same time her fame attracts new challengers. She's treated better by her fellows, but her chances of returning to a normal life are washed away.

In **Valley of Eternity** the hero will inevitably run into stories about herself. Young heroes want to follow their new idol and communities rejoice at the sight of the hero, sending the legend on a suicidal quest, crowing with joy. At that point one must decide whether the legend is worth dying for.

THE GAMING ENVIRONMENT

Valley of Eternity can be played anywhere: in your living room, at a summer cottage, in a car or a plane or out in the park. However, if you want the experience to be perfect you should put a little effort into it. The gamemaster must design an adventure for the players well before the game starts and the players should have plenty of time to make their characters.

If you want to take the atmosphere of a game of **Valley of Eternity** to its logical conclusion, everyone should wear proper, black tailcoats or other such formal wear. Under the coat you can have any white shirt, as long as it is not tucked into your trousers. If you are playing an anti-penguin, you can opt to wear a white suit jacket, dress coat or some other white piece of clothing. Even a white blanket will do in a pinch. You should also sport a black shirt, for obvious reasons.

If you live in a cold climate, you can play outside wrapped in warm blankets or indoors with all the windows open. If you do this, you should prepare hot drinks for the group, since getting sick is bound to ruin the game.

If you want to eat while playing, it is best to serve fish dishes and ice cream for dessert. Black and white, liquorice flavored ice cream is ideal. Finally, exotic drinks served with ice cubes will make any game run as smooth as it possibly can.

The best soundtrack for the game would consist of epic, over-the-top heroic audioscapes. The sublime, minimalist and cold music of Phillip Glass is a good expression of the endless void of the glacier. Soundtracks from the movie **Kundun** or the opera **Akhenaten** are good. The soundtrack for the film **Conan the Barbarian**, by Basil Poledouris, is naturally ideal for any story about improbable heroics. A spaghetti-western atmosphere comes from Ennio Morricone.

SOURCE MATERIAL

March of the Emperors (La marche de l'empreur), an Academy-award winning documentary by Luc Jacquet about the life of the emperor penguins. The single best film you can watch in preparation for this game. The film presents an outstanding view of the lives of the emperor penguins and their struggle to protect their eggs and fledglings from the Antarctic cold.

Happy Feet, George Miller's animation also about emperor penguins. This film offers a funnier angle on penguin society. It's not easy to make a career in tapdance when everyone else has taken up singing.

Penguins is a book by Fritz Pölkning, a nature photographer. It is an introduction to the different penguin species, their habits and habitats, complete with pictures. A good and approachable book that covers the basics.

The Ice, Stephen J. Pyne's book about Antarctica, ice and the glacier. The book is not light reading, but is still the best book one can find on this particular subject. Recommended for those who really want to understand the inner workings of the glacier.

Unforgiven, a Clint Eastwood western in which the formerly retired gunslinger Bill Munny takes one last job. The film paints a great picture of a lowly ex-hero and the grit and violence of his lifestyle.

The Penguins of Madagascar, an animated series based on the penguin characters in the Madagascar movies. The series follows the adventures of the four penguins Skipper, Kowalski, Rico, and Private, who perform various paramilitary-like missions to protect their home in the Central Park Zoo. It's a great primer on how to do quick penguin characterization.