

Captivatio



two wizards confront each other within an ever-changing realm

Objective of the Game

The two players take turns attacking. A battle is won by subjecting the opponent to an attack they cannot counter.

The game concludes when a player has won two battles (either in two or three rounds). Each new battle starts with one fewer card in hand.

Components

the 11 game cards

3 different pawns, one for each player, one for Aagano

Optional additions :

A 5-minute hourglass if you wish to limit thinking time

Tokens to place on cards for better tracking of the chaos

A second deck of cards for reference

Game Principle

The two players embody wizards engaged in combat within a magical arena called the **Orb**, represented by the cards laid out on the table. Each card adds to the Orb one of its twin **sigils**, a set of symbols with complex effects (refer to Part I).

The Orb serves as both the battlefield and the battle itself. The wizards are trapped within it until one of them is defeated. They take turns attacking (refer to Part XI), and each of their actions transforms the Orb.

The Orb is endowed with a spirit named **Aagano**. It is represented by a pawn occupying one of the Orb's sigils, just like the players. They attempt to control Aagano to protect themselves from an attack, reconfigure the Orb, or hinder the opponent. However, the sigils of the Orb impose their runes, which, each turn, continually manifest their power and requirements in a constantly renewed manner (refer to Part V).

The wizards thus have precise and unyielding obligations. However, the Orb is unstable, and its law is fragmented. The wizards are supremely free in the arrangement of their actions, taking advantage of the chaos to steer the evolution of the battle.

To control the Orb, one must obey it.

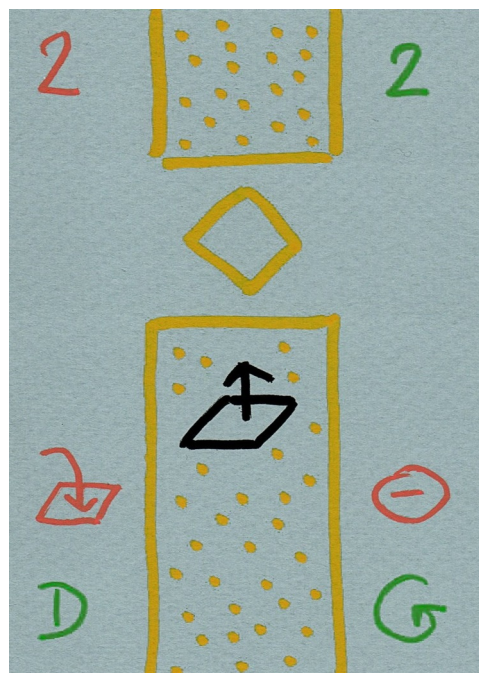
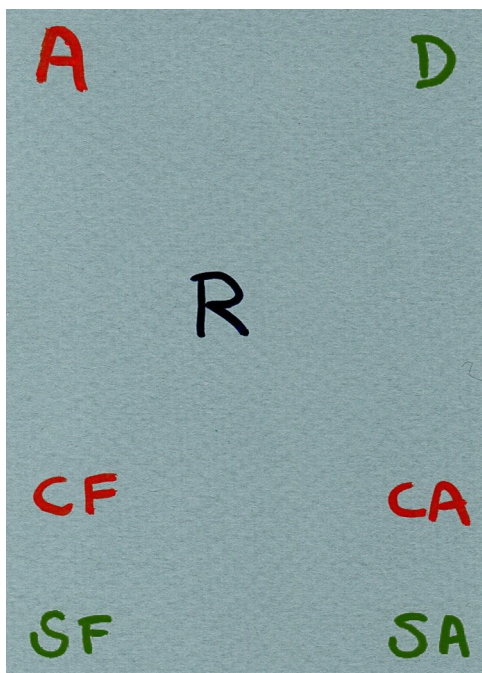
Golden Rule : In Captivatio, all game steps and actions are mandatory
unless they are not possible, in which case they are simply ignored.

It is up to the wizard's skill, to set aside the constraints they do not wish to adhere to, taking advantage of the consequences of those they had to, or willingly chose to, accept.

Order is everything.

I. The cards, and their sigils

Each game card is unique. Its front and back represent two paired sigils.



A sigil brings a fragment of *flux*, represented by a kind of path.

The flux can be continuous, connecting some of the card's sides (the *active sides*), or it can form a dead end, or be interrupted by a *source* (as in the example above on the right). In the latter case, one can exit the sigil through any active side, but cannot pass through it; only appear there (Part X).

A sigil has an attack value (**A**) and a defense value (**D**). These values accumulate along the flux that connects the positions of the wizards (Part XI).

Moreover, a sigil combines a set of magical elements, each imposing itself on the wizards but also providing them with a means to act on the Orb:


- The *rune* (**R**) must be *expressed* in each turn of the game, unless *sealed* (Part V).
- The *fusion spell* (**SF**) is cast when the sigil is bound in the Orb (Part VII).
- The *detachment spell* (**SA**) is cast when the sigil is unbound (Part VIII).

Above the fusion spell, there may be a fusion condition (**CF**), which must be satisfied for a wizard to be allowed to bind the sigil.

Similarly, above the detachment spell, there may be a detachment condition (**CA**).

The spells and their conditions are described in detail in Appendices B and C.

For example, this sigil features :

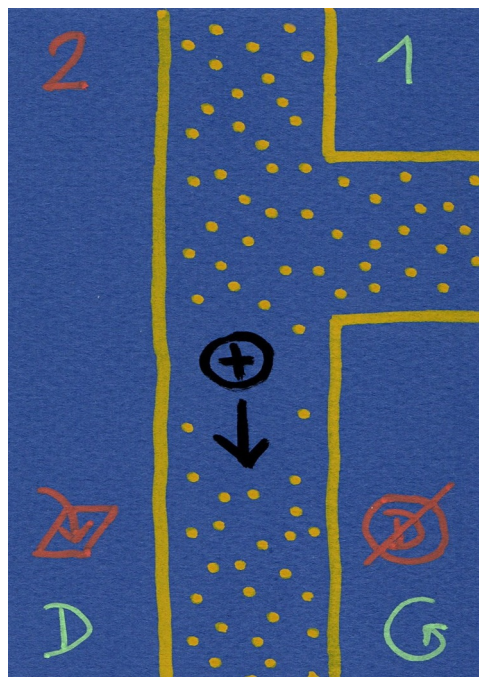
- an attack value of 2
- a defense value of 1
- three active sides linked by the flux
- the rune 





which commands



to the most powerful

the binding of a sigil



- the fusion condition  (the sigil should mask another sigil of the Orb)
- the fusion spell  that summons Aagano
- the detachment condition  (the sigil cannot be bound when Aagano is present)
- the detachment spell  that transmutes one of the other sigils of the Orb.

All this vocabulary may seem a bit cryptic at first, but it is concise and very precise (see Appendix A). Captivatio is a complex game that requires close attention to detail.

II. Preparation

At the beginning of the battle, players take turns choosing a card until they each have 5, 4, or 3 cards in hand (5 for the first battle, one less for each subsequent battle).

The remaining cards will not be in play.

The first player to choose a card is the one who lost the last battle.

Once the cards are distributed, a player places one, with their pawn on it, on the playing surface. The second player places their card and pawn in the same way, respecting the arrangement rules of the Orb (Part IV).

It is then the first player's turn to start the first round of the game.

III. The game turn

Each turn, one of the players counters the opponent's attack and then responds with their own attack.

In the next turn, the roles are reversed, and this continues until an attack proves unstoppable; the player whose turn it is loses the battle.

The steps of a game turn are as follows:

1 – The Upheaval (ou Disruption)

The wizard expresses the runes of the Orb in the desired order (Part V)

2 – The Evolution

They bind one of their sigils and change their position in the Orb (Part IX).

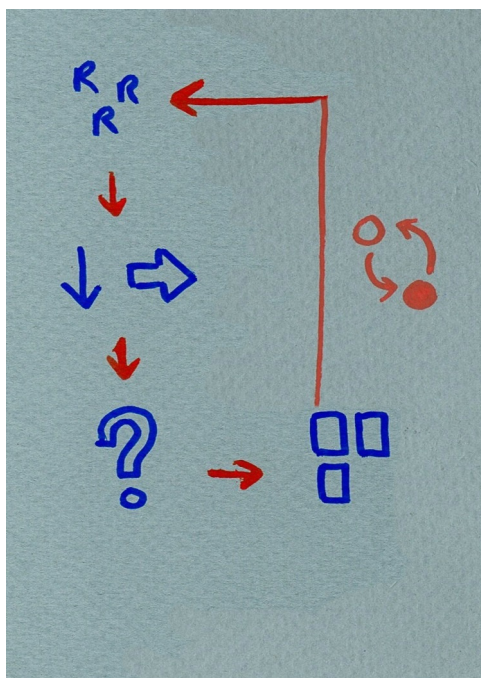
3 – The Rest

They indicate that the attack is defeated (Part XII).

If not, they have lost the battle..

4 – The Transposition (or Rearrangement)

They reorganize the Orb to construct their own attack (Part XI)



Players have the right to examine all the cards in the game at any time, whether they are on the playing surface or in a player's hand, covered or visible, front and back.

1

It can be practical to have a second deck of cards available for consultation without disturbing the playing surface (and the opponent!).

2

Optional rules, at the players' discretion:

- If choosing to limit thinking time, a game turn must be completed within 5 minutes.
- The player taking their turn explains what they are doing at each step. They may make mistakes; in such cases, it is up to the opposing player to point out the error. If they do not, there will be no going back.

Most (or least) powerful player

At any given moment, a player is considered the ***most powerful*** if they have more cards in hand than their opponent, who is then the ***least powerful*** player. If both players have the same number of cards, there is no most or least powerful.

This can change during the turn, and even multiple times.

Player of the turn and active player

The player of the turn may have to let their opponent act on their behalf, as some runes must be expressed by the most (or least) powerful player (Part V).

To avoid any ambiguity, we will refer to the ***player of the turn*** as the one whose turn it is, and the ***active player*** as the one who casts a spell (Part VI).

IV. Arrangement of the Orb

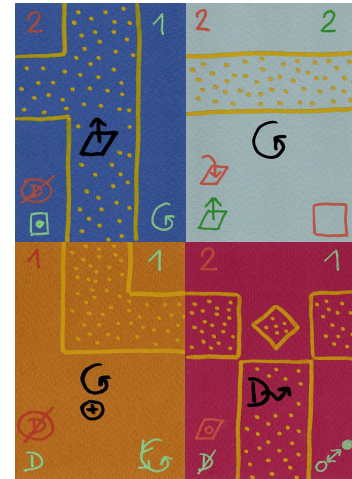
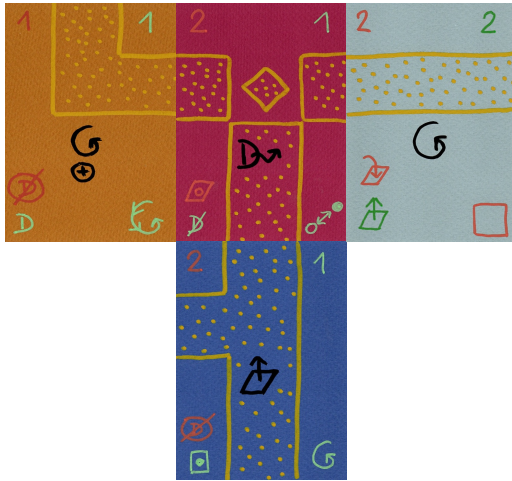
The assembled sigils form the Orb, the magical space in which the wizards battle, and whose acting spirit (the daimon, the kami, the djinn, according to different cultures) is Aagano, the third protagonist of the game.

The way in which the sigils are connected forms the flux of the orb, in which the wizards and Aagano move. It is like a path that can be followed, but also by teleporting directly to one of its sources.

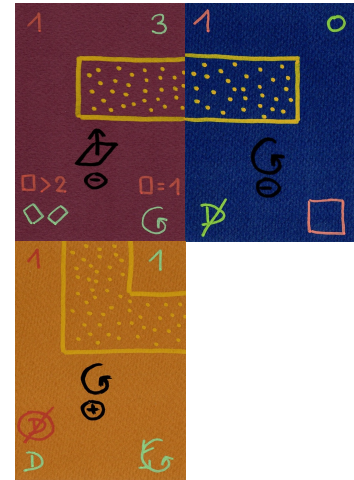
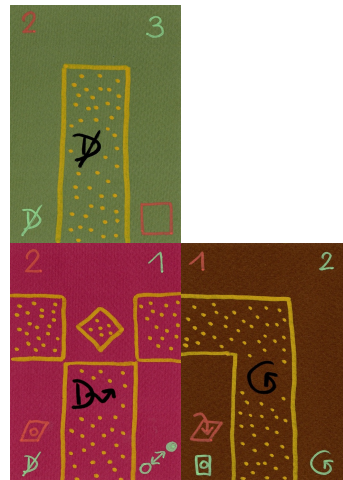
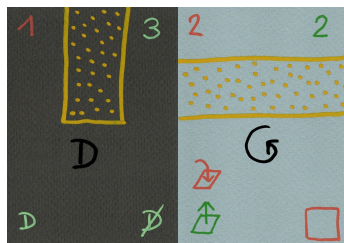
The cards must be arranged all in the same direction and connected to form a single path without separate segments.

This is not always possible, and if not it is only required that neighboring sigils be connected by their active sides.

If even this is impossible, a card just has to be adjacent, horizontally or vertically, to another.



For example, the arrangement on the left is acceptable (among many other equally valid ones), whereas the one on the right, where the gray card is disconnected, is prohibited



Here, all arrangements are allowed because it is not possible to do better.

The arrangement constraints apply both to step 2 of the game turn (Evolution) and to step 4 (Transposition).

A player can always declare that they cannot satisfy the constraints; it is then up to the opposing player to show a better arrangement.

V. Upheaval

The Upheaval is the first step of the game turn. The player must **express the runes** of the Orb, meaning, for each one, cast the spell represented by its symbol.

We do not consider the sigil occupied by Aagano, if he is there. The runes of the other sigils are noted, for example, by placing tokens directly on the sigils.

Then, the player taking their turn expresses all of them (removing their token as they go), but *in the order they desire*. This is a crucial point.

Order matters because expressing a rune transforms the Orb. Some of the sigils in the Orb may then have their own rune ***sealed***, meaning it will be ignored in the remainder of the Upheaval (if runes are noted with tokens, a token is removed from a sealed rune).

A sigil's rune is sealed when the sigil is transmuted, concealed, unbound (Appendix A), or when Aagano moves onto it. A sealed rune remains so until the next turn.

A rune may only be offered to the most (or least) powerful. This means it must be expressed by the wizard with the most (or least) sigils in hand (Part III). This player then becomes the active player, the one who will cast all spells dependent on the rune. But if there is no player more powerful than the other, expressing the rune is ineffective.

Yet, it is still the order in which the runes are expressed that will ultimately determine which player will be the most or least powerful wizard at a given moment.

By wisely choosing the order in which they express the runes of the Orb, a wizard can discard some of the runes that they don't like and activate some of those that interest them.

Through the Upheaval and the Evolution (Part IX), they also determine which runes will be imposed on their opponent in the next turn

VI. Casting a spell

A spell is cast on three distinct occasions:

- To bind a sigil (this is its fusion spell, see Part VII).
- To unbind a sigil (this is its detachment spell, see Part VIII).
- By expressing a rune (Part V).

Appendix B explains in detail how to cast each type of spell. It always involves modifying the Orb, by adding, removing, or flipping a card, or by moving certain characters (Part X).

Sometimes it is not possible, and the spell is then considered ineffective.

Casting one spell may lead to casting another. For example, expressing a rune that requires unbinding a sigil will trigger its detachment spell. It is always up to the wizard who cast the initial spell to also cast the resulting one.

VII. Binding a sigil (fusion)

Binding a sigil is mandatory in the Evolution step and can occur during the Upheaval.

A sigil can only be bound if its fusion condition is met. If a player cannot do so (they have no cards in hand, or their fusion conditions are not satisfied), they skip this step (following the **Golden Rule**, as outlined in the game principle).

Otherwise, even if the wizard has only sigils in hand that do not suit them, they must choose one and bind it, respecting the arrangement rules of the Orb: they place it where it connects to the flux.

The fusion condition must be observed for their very first card as well (see Part II); if nothing can be placed, the player has lost before even starting!

It is always up to the wizard binding a sigil to cast their fusion spell. This can be the player taking their turn or their opponent, depending on the circumstances.

VIII. Unbinding a sigil (detachment)

Unbinding a sigil is only done if a spell requires it.

Its detachment condition must be satisfied. If no sigil can be unbound, and following the **Golden Rule**, the game simply continues (the spell is canceled).

A sigil can be unbound even if it fragments the Orb into several disconnected parts; this is, in fact, one of the ways to thwart an attack.

Once the card is removed from the Orb, the wizard who has it in hand casts the sigil's detachment spell. Again, this is the active player, which may be the player of the turn or their opponent.

IX. Evolution

In the Evolution step, the wizard must bind a sigil and change position.

Once the card with the sigil is placed in the Orb, the wizard decides whether to start with the movement or to cast the fusion spell of the sigil.

Starting with the movement allows the wizard to make way for Aagano, for example, or to protect a sigil from the upcoming spell by occupying it. But it can also allow them to stay on their sigil because, following the **Golden Rule**, if it is not possible to move, one is not obligated to do so, and the flux may only open after the spell's effect.

Starting with the spell allows the wizard to move in the new configuration of the Orb. If the spell's effect has isolated the sigil from the wizard, it is again a way to cancel the movement.

Once again, the choice of the order in which the wizard acts is crucial, especially since Evolution is the last step of the turn during which the wizard can still thwart an attack.

X. Movement

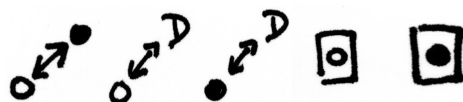
A wizard movement is either free, or imposed.

- As we have just seen (Part IX), a wizard's free movement occurs only in the Evolution step of their game turn.

The wizard can follow the flux as far as they wish, but they cannot pass through an occupied sigil, nor can they traverse a source. However, they can directly move to any source.


If a wizard cannot move at all, they remain on their sigil - but if they can move, changing position is mandatory. Therefore, they have only a relative freedom of movement.

- Some spells move wizards against their will, either by swapping their positions, by swapping their position and that of Aagano, or by aspiration :






- Regarding Aagano :

When he changes position, we seal the rune of the sigil on which he arrives.

During the Upheaval, Aagano can be forced to move by the rune 

The player of the turn chooses his path following the same rules as for the wizards, but they also seal the rune of each sigil he passes through. However, if he moves onto a source, it will always be considered that he does not pass through any intermediate sigil.

Finally, when Aagano appears (), the wizard who summoned him places him on the unoccupied sigil of their choice.

So, one can move Aagano freely by doing   (in this order)

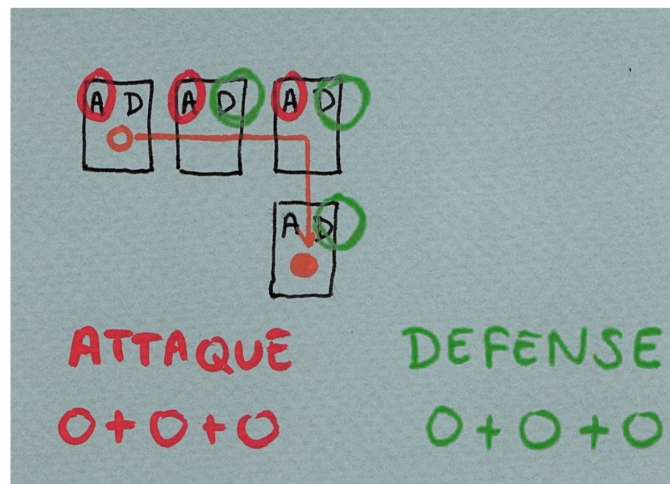
XI. Constructing an attack

It is in the Transposition step (the last one of the game turn) that the player taking their turn can construct their attack. At this stage, they are no longer in danger (see Part XII); on the contrary, they become the attacking wizard.

They are free to rearrange the sigils as they wish, as long as the arrangement constraints of the Orb are respected (Part IV). For an attack to exist, both wizards must be bound by a continuous flux, without interruption by a source or the presence of Aagano.

The attack value is then the sum of the attacks of the sigils along the flux, ignoring the one on which the defending wizard is located.

The defense value is the sum of the defenses of the sigils along the flux, ignoring the one on which the attacking wizard is located.



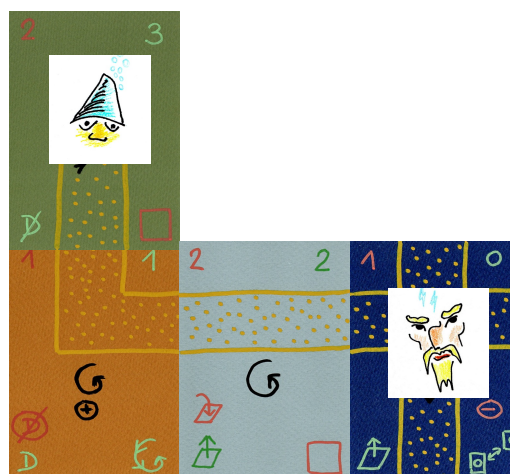
When the attack value is strictly greater than the defense value, the attack is valid. The defending wizard must counter it in the next turn, or else they will lose the battle.

For example :

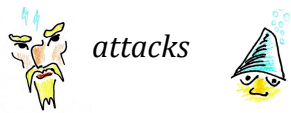


with attack $2+1+2 = 5$
and defense $1+2+0 = 3$

$5 > 3$:
the attack is valid

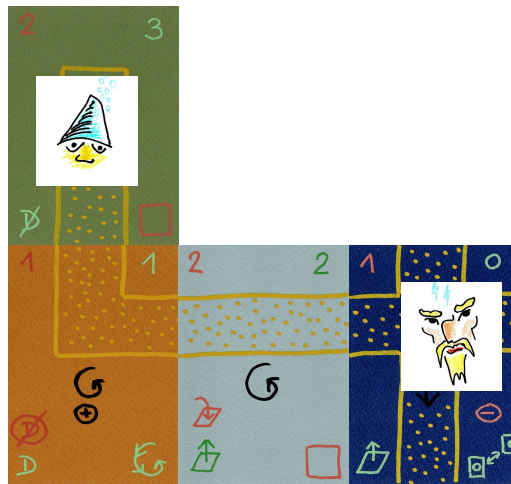


If it was the other way round :



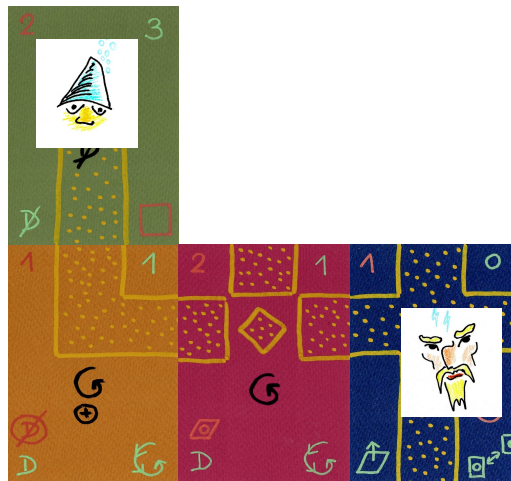
*with attack $1+2+1 = 4$
and defense $3+1+2 = 6$*

$4 < 6$: the attack is not valid



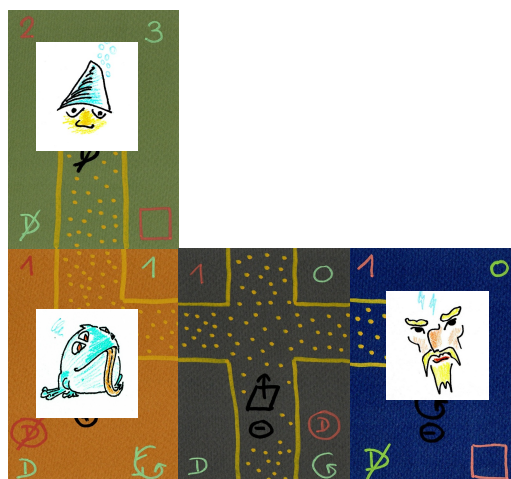
In this arrangement, the flux is not continuous, as it is interrupted by a source.

There is no attack.



Here the flux is continuous, but it is interrupted by Aagano.

Again, there is no attack.



XII. Defeating an attack

An attack is defeated when, during the Rest step (the third step of the game turn, Part III), the Orb no longer presents any valid attack against the player taking their turn. This can happen either because the wizards are no longer connected by a continuous flux or because the attack value of the flux is not greater than its defense value.

Therefore, an attack can be thwarted by moving to a better position, unbinding or transmuting a sigil to break the flux, or by summoning Aagano between the wizards.

It often happens that the Upheaval alone is enough to defeat the attack, but the player taking their turn is obliged to go through the Evolution step, and if this step is done under strong constraints, they may find themselves attacked again during the Rest step, thus losing the battle.

After the Rest step, they become the attacker and remain out of danger, regardless of the shape they give to the Orb and its flux at the end of the Transposition (see Part XI).



Example of a successful attack:

Black attacks white with a 4 to 1 defense. All cards are laid out on the table (some are covered), so white has no card to play, and the runes do not allow them to counter the attack.

Black wins the battle.

Appendix A - Glossary

Captivatio is better described with the words that are its own, those used by the wizards.

Players can declare '*placing a card by checking if it can be done and applying the placement effects*,' or '*choosing the order of application of the effects described in the center of the cards placed on the table*,' but they will certainly find, with practice, that '*binding a sigil*' and '*expressing the runes of the Orb*' are simpler and more precise expressions.

A **sigil** is one of the sides of a card.

Binding a *sigil* is placing its card on the table, following the rules seen in Part VII.

Fusion is the set of steps one must take to *bind* a *sigil*.

Unbinding a *sigil* is taking its card back into hand, following the rules seen in Part VIII.

Detachment is the set of steps one must take to *unbind* a *sigil*.

The **Orb** is the pattern created on the table by the arrangement of the *sigils* (Part IV).

The **flux** is the path drawn by this arrangement.

The *flux* connects a *sigil* to one of its neighbors by an **active side**.

A **source** is a *sigil* with a discontinuous *flux* (Part X).

The **transmutation** of a *sigil* is done by flipping its card, or its stack of cards.

A *sigil* is **occupied** if a player or *Aagano* is on its card, or if it is masked.

It is **masked** if its card is covered by another card.

Aagano is the demon-spirit of the *Orb*, represented by the third pawn.

A **spell** is a set of rules allowing a player to modify the *Orb* (Appendix B).

Casting a *spell* is choosing how to follow its rules and thus transforming the *Orb*.

The **rune** is the central symbol of a *sigil*. It is a form of *spell*.

Expressing a *rune* is *casting* its *spell* (Part V).

A **sealed** *rune* is not *expressed* during the Upheaval.

The **Upheaval**, **Evolution**, **Rest**, and **Transposition** are the steps of the turn (Part III).

Appendix B

List of all spells, and how to cast them

It is always up to the wizard who casts a spell (the active wizard) to make decisions related to that spell.



Transmute a sigil

You can only transmute a sigil if it is unoccupied.
Flip the card of the chosen sigil.
If it's a stack, flip the entire stack.
The rune of the transmuted sigil is sealed.
The rune of the sigil that appears is also sealed.



Transmute all sigils

Same as above, for all unoccupied sigils. The order doesn't matter.



Unbind a sigil

Choose the sigil to unbind by removing its card from the table.
You can only unbind a sigil if it is unoccupied and its unbinding condition is met.
If it's a stack, only unbind the visible sigil.
The rune of the sigil is sealed, and so is the one below it (if any).
The removed card returns to the wizard's hand who unbound the sigil.
The wizard must cast the unbinding spell of the sigil after retrieving the card.



Bind a sigil

You can only bind a sigil if its fusion condition is satisfied.
If, in doing so, another sigil is covered, the rune of that sigil is sealed.
Cast the fusion spell of the sigil after placing its card :
 during evolution, you move just before or just after the spell (part IX),
 but always after placing the card.
The fusion spell of a sigil may lead to unbinding the same sigil – this is allowed.
The placement of the sigil must adhere to the Orb constraints,
 but the choice of the sigil from those in hand is always free
 (one can choose, for example, a sigil that does not connect to anything).
The rune of the newly bound sigil is sealed.



Summon Aagano

Has no effect if Aagano is already present.
The player who invokes Aagano places it on the unoccupied sigil of their choice.
The rune of this sigil is sealed.



Banish Aagano

If Aagano is not already present, this action has no effect.
Remove Aagano's piece from the Orb.
The rune sealed by Aagano remains sealed (a sealed rune always remains so).



Move Aagano

Aagano moves exactly like a wizard (part X).
The active player chooses the destination ; it must not be the current position.
All the runes of the sigils it passes through become sealed.
Aagano moves onto a source without passing through any intermediate sigil.



Summon the active wizard

The active wizard is immediately moved to the selected sigil,
as if they were moving to a source.



Summon the opponent of the active wizard

Same as above



Break the Orb

All connections in the flux are cut, making any ongoing attack ineffective.
The individual sigils are separated from each other.
Movement to sources remains possible.



Exchange the positions of the wizards

Swap the pawns of the two players, effectively changing their sigils.



Exchange the positions of the active wizard and Aagano

The rune of the sigil previously occupied by Aagano remains sealed.
The rune of the sigil previously occupied by the active wizard becomes sealed.



Exchange the positions of the opponent of the active wizard and Aagano

Same as above



Exchange the sigils occupied by the wizards

Swap the actual cards between the two players, including their pawns.
Each wizard retains their sigil but is relocated to a different place on the Orb.
If a card is on top of a stack, only the card is moved, not the entire stack .

Appendix C

Liste of conditions



Must hide a sigil of the Orb

The sigil must be placed above an unoccupied sigil, at the wizard's choice.
The rune of this sigil is sealed.



Aagano must be absent (or present)

That's *before* placing (or removing) the concerned card.



Must be occupied by the wizard

The sigil can only be bound during the Evolution stage,
and only if the wizard ends up on the sigil at the Rest stage.



Must not be occupied by the wizard

If the sigil is bound during the Evolution stage,
the wizard must not be on a sigil at the Rest stage.



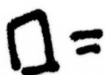
as a detachment condition :

Can only be unbound if the wizard is the most (or least) powerful,
and this *before* the concerned card is removed.

In addition to a rune :

The most (or least) powerful wizard must express the rune.

If there is no such wizard, the rune has no effect.



The number of unoccupied sigils on the board must be equal to...

A sigil is occupied if it is masked by another sigil,
or if one of the players or Aagano is present.
The count is made *before* placing (or removing) the concerned card.



as a detachment condition : **Cannot be unbound.**

as a fusion condition : **Cannot be bound.**

Appendix D

Cooperative variant

Captivatio can be played solo, or cooperatively (meaning both players lose or win together), by modifying the game objective as follows :

The players set a specific configuration of the Orb to achieve.

The game is lost if, during the Rest, the player of the turn is attacked.

It is won if, at the end of the Transposition, the Orb is in the desired configuration.

Among the possible configurations, we can imagine:

- a single flux of ten sigils
- a flux that forms a loop around a hole
- a closed single flux
- a double attack of 4 against 4, with all cards placed
- a double attack of 9 in total on Aagano, who himself will be considered an attacker of both players throughout the game
- the four free and under attack vortex
- the two players and Aagano each on a source, with no attack between them

About Captivatio

Captivatio is *a combinatorial game with perfect information*, meaning that chance plays no role, and players have access to all elements of the game at every moment. Each player knows the cards of their opponent and can try to anticipate their future actions.

The initial inspiration for Captivatio was this challenge: 'Inventing a kind of chess game, rich, replayable, and fun, with the material consisting of just a few cards.'

In the end, it also requires three pawns, but it still fits into a (very small) pocket...

Captivatio is rich and replayable. Is it fun? That's for you to decide !

***Captivatio** was created by Stéphane Rollandin
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