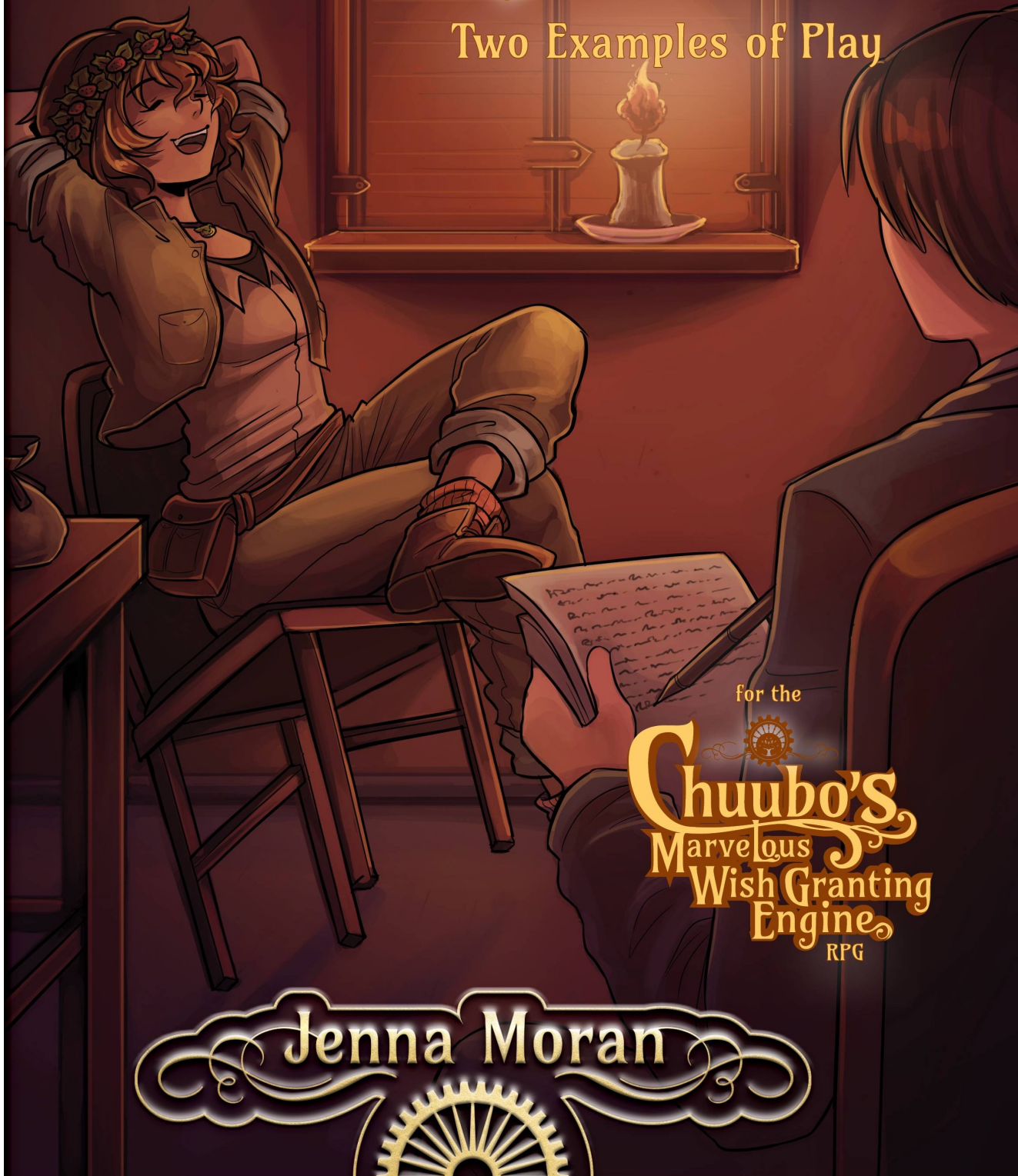


Finding Home

Two Examples of Play



for the


Chuubo's
Marvelous
Wish Granting
Engine
RPG


Jenna Moran



Finding Home

Two Examples of Play for
the Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine RPG





Dedication

For Robin Michael Alexander Maginn, who wanted to visit me in China; for Lillian Elanor Tewson Heino, just in case you get into gaming someday; and for Killian James Sebastian Maginn, whom I've finally met!

Also for Cync Brantley, Cheryl & Joseph Couvillion, Chrysoula Tzavelas, Kiva Maginn, Raymond Wood, James Wallis, Dara & Anna Korra'ti, and Gayle Margolis

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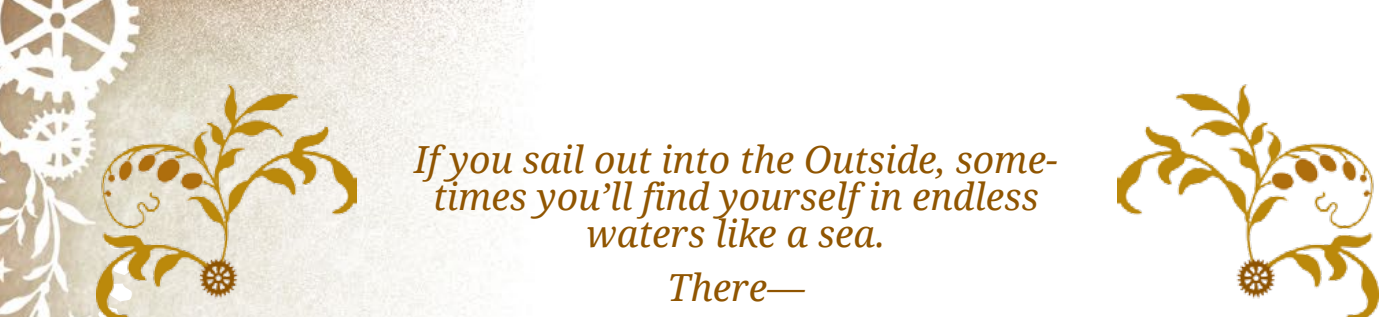
This book uses fantastical and supernatural elements in its setting, for its characters, their abilities, and themes. All such elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content and reader discretion is advised.





Last Ship Out





If you sail out into the Outside, sometimes you'll find yourself in endless waters like a sea.

There—

Somewhere out there—a distant world is drowning.

It knew it was coming. The people there had been expecting their world to die for quite some time. It was ... an article of faith ... for them.

Some left. Most drowned.

And now the young head priestess of their death cult and a couple of the knights that had sworn to serve, defend, and—eventually—kill her catch the last ship out to Town.

1

Players and Genre

Last Ship Out is a mortal-level game set in the Pastoral genre, focusing on

- ✿ Shared Actions,
- ✿ Shared Reactions, *and*
- ✿ Slice of Life.

This is a tabletop game, with four players gathered physically in one location:

- ✿ Madeline Rush, who'll be running the game;
- ✿ Heather Sullivan, playing Miriam Lockwood;
- ✿ Edward Jordan, playing Wolf; *and*
- ✿ Diane Firth, playing Gale.

They're using a bowl of poker chips to represent XP and sometimes using a whiteboard to take notes.

The players came up with the game premise themselves, so there aren't any hidden secrets to it—there's the premise I listed above, and there's a little more information in the character write-ups, but that's all the players and the HG know!

If it seems a bit bare-bones—it is!

They'll figure the rest out through improvisation in play.

Miriam Lockwood

Heather Sullivan is playing **Miriam Lockwood**, a death priestess. She was supposed to close out the story of her world—

To die, after everything was over, as part of the final rites for their world.

Instead she's going to travel to Town to try to establish a temple there in hopes of bringing other worlds into "greater harmony with death." It's not clear when the game begins whether she's a zealous hypocrite, a recipient of divine inspiration, or someone with a relatively compassionate remit that just happens to be really gloomy in form.

Rather than create a new form of death magic, Heather's opted to go with "Rider Necromancy," a style of magic that the core book describes. It's one of the magic styles used by the "Riders" (aka the Excrucians), dangerous creatures of the

furthest Outside. Heather isn't sure, and doesn't really *want* to be sure, whether this actually ties her to the Excrucians somehow or if it's just an unrelated magical ability that happens to work the same way—she'll be playing that connection by ear.

Her Skills are:

- ✿ *Magical Skill:* Rider Necromancy 3
- ✿ Dauntless 3
- ✿ Memories of an Alien Star 2

She has Connections to the other PCs:

- ✿ *Connection:* Wolf 1
- ✿ *Connection:* Gale 1

She has 1 Tough Health Level, 2 Normal Health Levels, 1 MP, and a starting Arc with two associated powers:

☙ **Emptiness (Necromancer) 0**

- *Affliction*: the Last Destined Savior
- *Bond 2*: “I must conduct myself in a fashion appropriate to my role.”

The Affliction roughly points towards her destiny; it’s underspecified and probably won’t matter much until she refines it to mean something more specific. The Bond is meant to represent the priestess-y aspect of her nature—she chose it shortly after replacing “Death Priestess” with “Rider Necromancy” on her list of Skills.

BONUS XP WHEN...

Heather has a two-sided card she keeps in front of her—

Usually reading “In the World of Life,” and tending to reset to that state between scenes, but which she can flip over to read “Contemplating Death.”

This tracks the according mental state on her part.

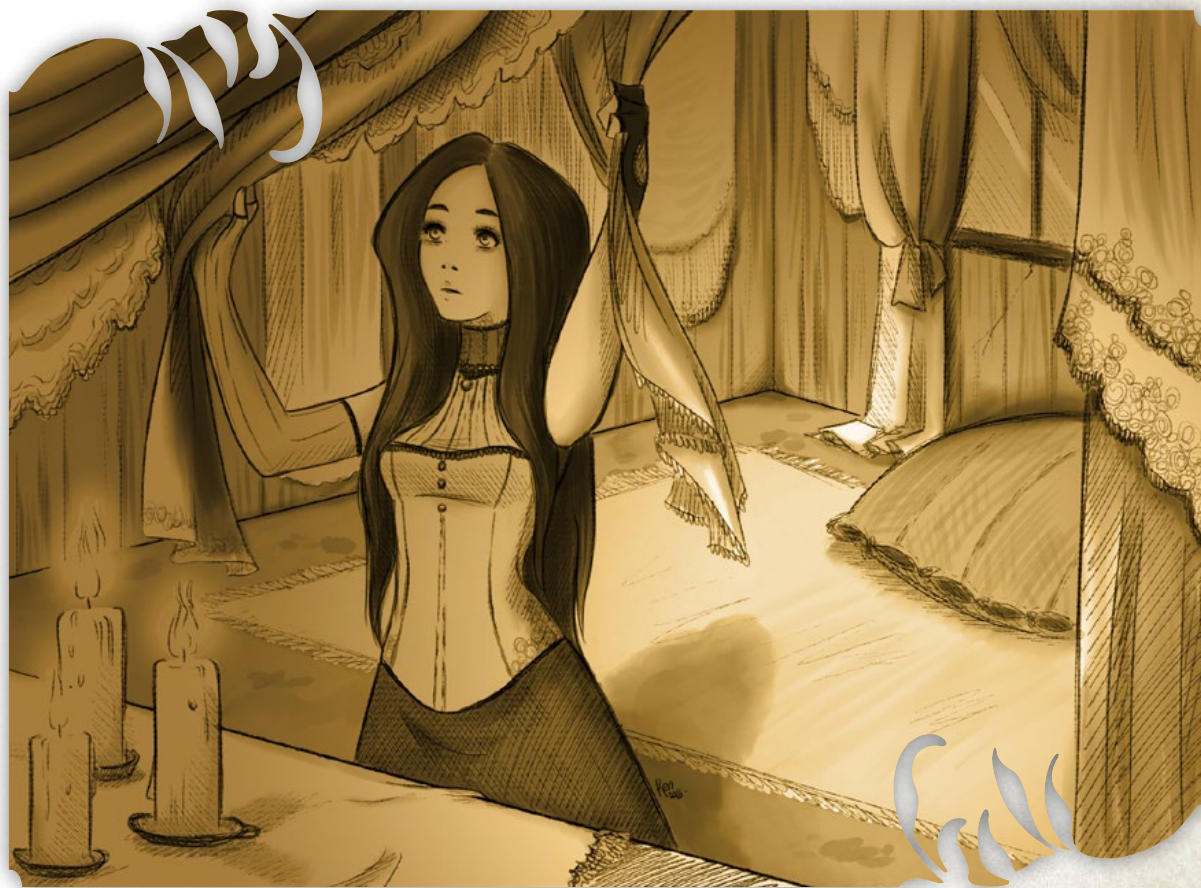
Once every ~15 minutes or so real time, when Miriam’s mental state changes, she can pick up an XP for her “basic quest” by flipping the card. Each 15 XP towards her basic quest earns her a standard reward.

XP EMOTION

She’s meant to be a sweet but troubled kid rather than a hardened missionary of the apocalypse, and her XP emotion is chosen accordingly:

“Thumbs Up” XP, for that “happy for you”/“way to go” feeling.

She picks up a general XP she can spend on whatever when her character’s actions/states trigger a thumbs-up from the other players. It’s up to the players when they have a genuine impulse to toss a thumbs-up, so I can’t give a specific rule as to when this happens or what triggers it; in theory, I think a hard life with frequent bright spots and being willing to take joy in small things is going to maximize the thumbs-ups received.



ARC QUEST

Miriam is on an **Emptiness** Arc, a storyline exploring the influence of death and the Outside and other such bleak matters on her life. Rather than build her own starting quest for this, she's appropriated a generic quest set from the main book and is starting with the 35-XP quest "Changes," with the implication that her life and soul are in the course of a substantial and traumatic transformation—

She is likely to suffer from visions, spiritual experiences, and reversals, and it's hard to say as the quest begins whether she'll end up damned or redeemed thereby.

1



Changes

MAJOR GOALS

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest when...

- ✿ ...you have a traumatic transformation or dissociation scene in play, where your reality gets weird because your true nature is changing or revealing itself.
- ✿ ...you see a confusing vision, nightmare, or premonition of your or someone else's death.
- ✿ ...you meet and get the chance to help a mysterious child find their way.

You can earn each bonus once, for to a total of 15 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest when...

- ✿ ...wrestling with/expressing nameless feelings of loss that make you act unnaturally.
- ✿ ...trying and failing to burn things, to light them on fire.
- ✿ ...getting confused about who and where you are.
- ✿ ...listening to stories about things that were lost when Jade Irinka died.
- ✿ ...talking with somebody about your destiny/nature and what it means.
- ✿ ...talking with somebody about why there's such a thing as death.
- ✿ ...dealing with acne, braces, your period, ear infections, or other annoyingly intrusive elements of physicality.

You can combine this with an XP Action, but you're not required to.

XP



Wolf

Edward Jordan is playing Wolf, a temple knight, one of two sworn to protect Miriam Lockwood.

They lived with her in a reclusive sanctuary of some sort—a “mountain temple.”

As the senior of the knights—

Possibly of a larger order that is now defunct—

He was bound to a mystical scythe with apocalyptic connotations, one of those horrible and vaguely sentient magical weapons you see in stories of the ends of worlds now and again. It has some tie to the end of the world itself, and he was supposed to use it to sacrifice Miriam and through her death kill everyone and everything else, but the three of them agreed (after many arguments and everyone taking both sides at various points) that with the world already basically dead there wasn't a point in sacrificing Miriam any longer. So they caught the last ship out instead.

Edward builds Wolf ridiculously sturdy, with the core Skills:

- ✿ Knight-Guardian 3
- ✿ Jack-of-all-Trades 2
- ✿ Superior Endurance 2
- ✿ Superior Strength 1

He has Connections to the other PCs:

- ✿ *Connection:* Miriam 1
- ✿ *Connection:* Gale 1

Wolf has 1 Tough Health Level, 2 Normal Health Levels, 1 MP, and a starting Arc with two associated powers:

- ✿  **Bindings (Knight-Guardian) 0**
 - *Affliction:* Keeper of the Scythe
 - *Bond 2:* “I cannot show weakness.”

BASIC QUEST

Wolf is really the only person left who knows how a knight-guardian is supposed to conduct their lives—

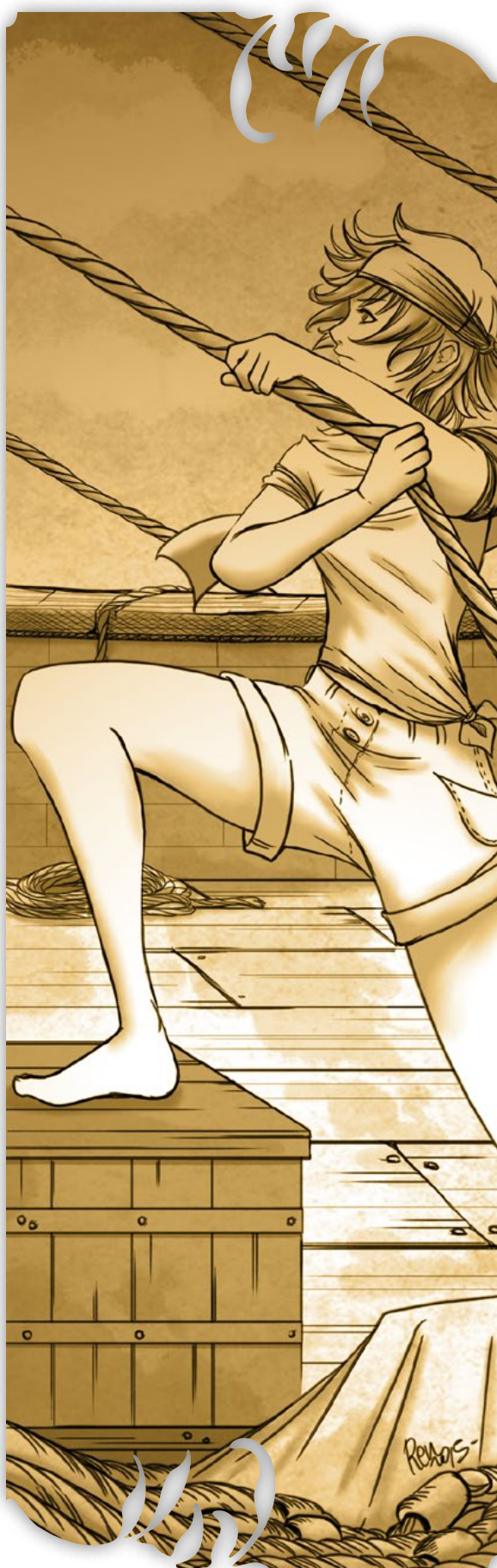
Gale was never really good with the details and traditions of the temple, and Miriam's duties were in a separate sphere. So Wolf does a lot of inexplicable things and there's nobody who can really contradict him on whether he's supposed to be

1

“Putting my Faith in You” XP, where people who are extending their faith or trust to him hand him an XP token alongside it as a token and expression of that faith and trust.

There's a 50-XP quest, "Bind," that's all about redeeming unholy monsters. Even though the scythe isn't as anthropomorphic as the quest expects, he goes with that as his starting quest anyway. Maybe it'll work out anyway, or maybe the scythe will later adopt a secondary human form?

XP



Gale

Diane Firth is playing **Gale**, the other surviving temple knight.

Well, sort of; Gale is *technically* dead, but her body was in such good shape that the temple was able to set her broken neck and revive her with her faculties intact. She's now an "expired," which mostly means that she's cold, pale, and immune to death. Possibly this character feature will pick up additional qualities in later play.

Diane wanted a faster and more consciously martial combatant than Wolf—someone constantly striving to surpass the senior, physically stronger knight through skill. She also saw Gale as someone with a lot of energy, a lot of aerial mobility, and associations with birds and high places. In Town these features are best suited to wind- and bird-spirits, so Diane decided to implement some combination of magical temple training, being "expired," and just being Gale with the Superior Celestian and Superior Wind-Spirit traits. She can even call upon and control a wind using martial skills to a certain degree.

Her Skills wind up as:

- ✿ Martial Arts 3
- ✿ Knight-Guardian 2
- ✿ Superior Wind-Spirit 2
- ✿ Superior Celestian 1

She has Connections to the other PCs:

- ✿ *Connection:* Miriam 1
- ✿ *Connection:* Wolf 1

She has 1 Tough Health Level, 2 Normal Health Levels, 1 MP, and a starting Arc with two associated powers:

- ✿ **Aspect (Warrior) 0**
 - *Affliction:* Expired (she's already dead in some technical senses)
 - *Bond 2:* "I can't resist a challenge."

BASIC QUEST

Gale likes shiny things. She's not a thief or anything, or at least isn't specified as such. She just is really fond of . . . things that are *neat*.

She can indicate this and pick up an XP towards her basic quest with some variant on:

“Ooo, I want that.” or “I’m taking that home with me!”

XP EMOTION

Gale is meant to be a bit confused sometimes. A little *hapless*. Her XP emotion is chosen accordingly:

“Head-desk” or “Face-palm” XP.

She picks up a bonus XP that she can spend towards anything when her IC actions get a face-palm or head-desk from one of the other players.

ARC QUEST

Gale is on an Aspect Arc. She’s training her light-foot technique and other abilities, trying to become *better*. Rather than build her own starting quest for this, she’s appropriated a generic quest set from the main book and is starting with the 35-XP quest

“Above the Fray,” with the implication that she’s spending a lot of time thinking about/exploring the ramifications of their decision to leave home instead of killing Miriam and then dying with it.

Ultimately right now she’s stuck. She’s *peaked*

—
She can’t improve any further. No matter how hard she tries she’s not learning anything that will take her past Wolf’s level in combat or even substantively improve on what she already *is*. One of the implications of starting an Aspect Arc with “Above the Fray” is that coming to terms with the choices she’s already made and integrating into life in Town will be what gives her the insight to push past that and reach a new level in her martial arts.

How will that happen, particularly given that they’re likely to wind up in Fortitude and integrating into Fortitude isn’t normally a dangerous or physically strenuous affair? We’ll have to see!

Above the Fray

MAJOR GOALS

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest when...

- ⚙️ ...you stand in a storm, overlooking a pit or dangerous depth.
- ⚙️ ...you stand before a dead power that was or is greater than yourself.
- ⚙️ ...you have a moment of spiritual insight and forgiveness, and are able to explain or solidly commit to both.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 15 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest when you...

- ⚙️ 🌀 ...trust yourself to a dangerous (and Arc-relevant) part of the setting, e.g., if the Arc is focused on the Outside, going out to sail on or meditate in it.
- ⚙️ 🌀 👁️ ...explore daily chores in that part of the setting.
- ⚙️ 🌀 👁️ ...deal with a child who lives/hangs out there.
- ⚙️ 🌀 👁️ ...get sucked into goofy fun there—a ridiculous game or silly experience, despite a tense situation or environment.

You can combine this with an XP Action, but you’re not required to.

XP



Last Ship Out

Week 1

Madeline (the HG): Your world is left behind you. It's been days since you could last see its mountains, days since the last of the shore-birds were seen in the sky, days of featureless water and the knowledge that behind you by now your world is probably drowned.

Edward: I'm helping out around the ship. Carrying stuff.

Diane: I'm going to hunt down Miriam.

Heather: She's in her cabin. It's probably not hard to find.

Madeline: There's room for you guys to have a cabin, yeah, though it's this little thing, practically a closet made out of dark wood with a hole high in the wall to see the light and waters through and to hear the slap of waves and the creaking of the bow. There's a bunk and a shelf and a hope chest.

Edward raises an eyebrow, wondering: A hope chest?

Madeline: . . . that's a dowry thing, isn't it. Um. I mean, a sailor's chest. You know. One of those things that sailors keep things in even if they are not dreaming of becoming brides.

Diane: Yarr. I be not having much but my eyepatch, Lord Kiss-me-Not, but I'll trade it to ya for a wedding ring and usher ya off to nautically wedded bliss!

Madeline: You can't do that, hypothetical pirate maiden Mate Chesty!

Edward: 'Mate chesty?'

Madeline, ignoring him: Your face would look awful if you took it off and what would Lord Kiss-me-Not think then?

Diane: Yarr, I be keeping many old backup eyepatches in the old hope chest. For the wedding night, it be, yarr.

Heather: . . . be that as it may.

Diane: Right. Um. [*makes a knocking gesture, as if at Miriam's door. Then, as her character, Gale:*] Lady?

Heather, as Miriam: Mm.

Gale: I was wondering if you were doing well. Weathering the journey all right?

Miriam: I've been watching a bird pace the ship for the past four hours, only to realize that it's actually a smudge in the window glass.

Gale: I could get that for you—

Miriam: It's all right.

Gale: OK.

Madeline: Nudge. Nudge. Plans for the week.

Heather: I want to discuss some of what was lost.

Edward: Ooh, I'm there. Well, soon. At an opportune time in early discussion! I'm carrying half a shark!

Miriam: Why are you carrying half of a shark, Wolf?

Edward, as Wolf: A man has responsibilities.

Heather face-palms.

[[Edward used his catch-phrase, so he marks an XP towards his basic quest.

Sadly, though, nobody gets an XP from the face-palm. *That* only happens when the face-palm is directed at *Gale*.]]

Edward mimes slinging the half-shark off his shoulder and tossing it to the side. Then, as Wolf: Still, I can sit a spell. Wait. No chairs. Lean. I can lean a spell.

Miriam: It won't go rotten?

Wolf: I've got it handled.

Miriam: I was just talking about— well, remembering, really. Home.

Heather flips her card from "In the World of Life" to "Contemplating Death."





[[Miriam marks an XP towards her basic quest.]]

Miriam: Thinking of all the— it drowned, Wolf.

Wolf: We knew it was going to.

Miriam: So many years, and so many people, and what it added up to in the end was . . .

Diane: Dang it. I want to sing a haunting song or something.

Madeline: Ooo

Diane: Not in REAL LIFE. Geez. Um. But I don't think it's the same if you describe it.

Madeline: I guess.

Diane: Give me a sec to try to fake poetry or something, I guess.

Madeline: OK.

Diane: Some cart-guy, you know, with his cart and its red cloth sides creaking on its wheels over the mountain, and he's looking forward, and he's wearing a red hat, and he's got miles to go before he gets to somewhere. And he's leaving a world behind him on the other side of the mountains, and going somewhere he doesn't know, and the horses are steady. That kind of traditional song. And if there's a motive to it, it's like, I mean, besides being a traditional song of wherever we came from, it's that feeling that the world left behind is just a thing in the mind, a cloud or something, and the road is where he is now.

Heather: That's not actually poetry.

Diane shrugs.

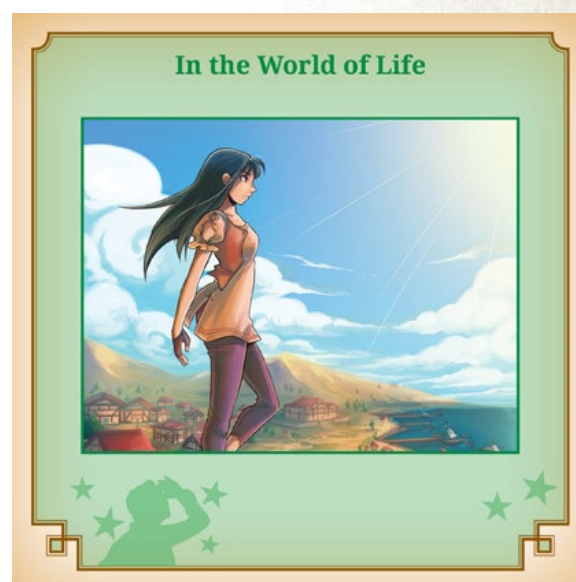
Heather, after a beat, as Miriam: So that's it? In the end it's just clouds in our minds? Everything that anybody ever did?

Wolf: I think if some future kid on some future mountain looks back on us and this ship and this day and says, "Oh, that's just an illusion of the mind," I will punch him. Like this.

Edward illustrates.

Wolf: He, having thought he was merely day-dreaming, will be surprised.

Miriam, flipping her card back to "In the World of Life": He would.



[[This *doesn't* earn Miriam an XP, because she can only pick up card-flipping XP once per 15 minutes.]]

Wolf: I'm told that the whole world goes away eventually. The whole cosmos. The whole being.

Miriam: That is the ultimate implication of the ascendancy of death.

Wolf: It goes dark, and everything ends, and so meaning is what you live for now. But I am a bad death cultist, as you may be aware.

Gale: Lord Death will not judge you poorly, I think.

Wolf: Won't he?

Gale: Your peccadilloes are trivial.

Miriam: That is the nature of peccadilloes.

Gale: True enough. Still, look at him.

Edward poses.

Gale: How can Death not love him well?

Heather: OK, here's my official Shared Reactions thingie. I'm trying to reach out. [*as Miriam*] Did you lose somebody?

Wolf: Strictly speaking, lady, we lost everybody.

Gale: It was extremely careless of us.

Wolf: It is like that thing. You know. That thing. With couch cushions.

Miriam: You know what I mean.

Wolf: Someone special? Someone who wasn't just going to die anyway eventually?

Gale: Everybody dies.

Wolf, slightly annoyed: You are not in a position— [*shakes head*] Nevermind.

[[In the short pause that follows, Heather decides that her attempt at **Shared Reactions** was at least minimally successful. This is an "XP Action," one of three XP Actions that anybody can take in the Pastoral genre, and it lets her add an XP to a group pot, which she now does.]]

Wolf, after that pause: I left everyone I cared about behind a long time ago, lady. Maybe some of them were still alive until they died. Maybe they weren't. There was a woman— [*shakes his head again*] I made my choices. We all did.

Miriam: They appear to be selfish ones.

Gale: That's not fair.

Miriam: It's all gone, and we go on. How is that not selfish?

Wolf: Well it isn't, is it? There's nothing wrong with living.

Miriam: Isn't there?

Wolf: I'm skeptical of the notion.

Gale: I'm out of here.

Miriam: Hm?

Gale, rubbing the back of her head: It's just, you know, all this living-people angst. It's weird.

Miriam: . . . oh.

Diane stands and moves to the hallway arch, preparatory to grabbing a soda from the kitchen. She stands in the door much as Gale might and looks over at the wall.

Gale: Don't forget your shark.

Wolf: Of course not.

Gale: 'Cause you can't make hákarl in milady's chambers, you know.

Miriam: Hákarl?

Wolf: I know that.

Diane, in an aside: that buried putrefied shark food thingie.

Heather: Ah.

Gale: Kay.

Diane heads off down the hall for a few minutes.

Madeline: OK, next action?

Edward: Maybe a Slice of Life over ship dinner?

Madeline: Sure. Are you guys the only survivors?

Edward: Think so. But there's maybe some . . . hm. Why do I think there's other people?

Madeline: Ship's crew?

Edward: I had the vague sense that there were like a bunch of refugees and we were the only three from our world, which would be a little bit weird. You know, us three in our corner, amidst all these scary other people.

Madeline: . . . probably not unless there were a lot of people on board for some other reason. Naturalist's expedition?

Edward: Haha. Studying the dying world!

Madeline: Or the phenomenon.

Edward: That could be.

Madeline: So you're invited, probably with a letter from the captain or something, to a dinner in the . . . relatively large room, with the naturalists that were taking observations of the submersion of your world. There'll be mini-hot-dogs!

Diane, returning with a soda: Ooh, I want one!

[[She scribbles a mark on her basic quest as she sits down and imagines eating mini-hot-dogs.]]

Wolf: It figures.

Gale: You are in no position to criticize. But I don't have a good argument as to why that should be.

Wolf: You're still young.

Gale: Yeah! One day I'll totally mock you in an apropos fashion! [*mimes chewing*.] These are good. [*Diane giggles*.] I'm taking them home with me!

Miriam: . . . one would hope—

Gale, not quite breaking character, but not really in it all the way either: Speaking of, where are we?

Miriam: In the relatively large room.

Gale: Bonus.

Madeline: It's not really a huge ship or anything, although I guess it's pretty decent-sized or a passenger ship if they can spare an actual cabin. It's got room for a 20-person table and some people leaning against the walls, anyway, with people having exciting conversations about the tsunami waves that covered your home and the seismic effects on the surrounding waters and the overall implications on the long-term survival of things.

Miriam: . . . yes, that is what is important here.

Madeline, shifting into character as someone seated near them: Not to be insensitive, Lady.

Miriam shrugs.

Madeline: It's just, you have no idea how rare a chance like this is. It's once in a lifetime.

Miriam looks away. Quietly, she says: I hope you get boils.

Madeline: Oh, my.

Wolf: I could kill him for you, lady?

Miriam: That is not necessary.

Madeline: Um . . .

Miriam: In fact it is a good thing! It is a great thing! It is the long destiny of the world come finally to its glorious end! It is a consummation most devoutly to be wished. Was. Was such a consummation.

Madeline: That appears to have been somewhat loud.

Heather: I blush, take my glass, and retreat to my cabin. [*as Miriam*] I am feeling unwell.

Diane: This is a party?

Madeline: More of a . . . yeah, actually, kind of. I mean, it's a de-stressing after the big event, really, and a chance for the crew in theory to get to know you guys, although it doesn't seem like they were really trying for that, mostly talking among themselves.

Diane: I'm going to soak in the knowledge of our exclusion for a bit, then. The clinks of glasses and the excited talk and the people not really noticing us, before I turn and go.

Wolf: Gale.

Gale: Mm?

Wolf: Don't judge them.

Gale: You were offering to kill that guy!

Wolf: That was different.

Gale: . . . I don't understand you, Wolf.

Wolf shrugs.

Diane: I'm heading up to the crow's nest to stare off at the clouds for a while.

[[Diane adds an XP to the group pot, implicitly declaring either her soaking in the crowd or staring at the clouds to be a **Slice of Life** action.]]

Edward: Dang. You stole my slice of life.

Diane: Such a sorrowful existence!

Edward: Ah, well. A day or two later? I'm going to work with the scythe.

Diane: What does that entail?

Edward: I'm sitting around somewhere, if it's not a stormy day, with the scythe's box out and open and in my lap and I'm communing with it.

Diane: I drop down from above you . . . somewhere. [*as Gale*] 'Sup?

Madeline: There's a knock at Miriam's door around then. Remind me.

Diane: Got it.

Wolf: I am thinking about how to adapt this child to the needs of a new world.

Gale: I was not aware it was necessary.

Wolf: It was born to murder a world and a death priestess. If that is to no longer be its destiny, then it must become otherwise.

Gale: Otherwise?

Wolf: I don't know. I could teach it to cut the sea, I suppose.

Gale squints at Wolf.

Wolf: I was thinking it could be a tool for . . . something of life, now, anyhow.

[[Short pause, as Wolf marks an XP towards the quest **Bind**.]]

Madeline: Miriam, there's a knock.

Heather: I pull myself to my feet. I answer the door.

Madeline: It's a . . . first mate? Second mate? Somebody. Let's say third mate, even if that turns out not to be a valid naval rank. Fresh-faced young woman, well turned-out in her uniform. Name, um, Emily.

Miriam: Hello?

Madeline: Ma'am. It's come to the captain's attention that you three have been somewhat withdrawn.

Miriam: Is that a problem?

Madeline: It is, on account of how it's not healthy for you, and it raises philosophical questions about whether it's good to take you home for Town, and finally, well.

Miriam: Well?

Madeline: Your big one. He's kind of scaring the crew.

Miriam: Scaring . . . the crew.

Madeline: Well, he's sitting on top of the cabin with a bad juju thing on his lap, and frankly, it kind of seems to be bad luck.

Miriam: I see.

Madeline: So I was thinking, ma'am, that perhaps the three of you would like to discuss greater integration into shipboard life. And perhaps a bit of discussion of where you're going when we've landed. And, uh.

Miriam: Uh?

Madeline: If, before that, you could get your big man, who is really very helpful and much appreciated what with all the help he's been, so no offense, ma'am, but if you could get him to put that thing away, we would all be greatly appreciative.

Edward: Hah!

Heather: Sure. Change scene to bugging him about it?

Edward: noooo you have to drag out the conversation fifteen minutes so I can get another XP from my contemplation of the scythe!

Diane: You can think about it! You don't have to have it out!

Edward: You are only saying that because you are a girl.

Diane gives him a look.

Edward: You'll never understand my deep and manly pain.

Diane: Haha.

Madeline: Sure, you guys are discussing the scythe or whatever and Miriam climbs up to where you are. It is an effort for her.

Heather: She's actually . . . fit, in a harsh-living kind of way. Just gloomy, not frail.

Madeline: Fair enough. She struggles because of angles but doesn't get tired, then?

Heather: Sure.

Madeline: As for Third Mate Kelly whose name I have forgotten

Edward: Emily.

Madeline: Kellmily. Emkelly. Emmabelle Maggotsworth—

Edward: A name she acquired by losing a bet with the captain.

Madeline, giggling: Yes. She is eyeing the scythe unhappily.

Miriam, somewhat reproachful: Wolf, you are scaring the crew.

Wolf: A man has his duties, ma'am.

[[Wolf would mark another XP towards his basic quest here, but it's too soon—the downside of “any-time” quests like his is that you can only get XP towards *one* of them every 15 minutes.]]

Miriam: . . . oh, it's that thing.

Wolf: Yes.

Miriam, looking at Emmabelle: I don't blame you. That's a nasty bit of work.

Wolf: Ha.

Miriam: Did you know, it was meant for me?

Third Mate Emmabelle Maggotsworth: Was it now?

Miriam: It was meant to cut my veins and let the blood flow out.

Wolf: And kill the world.

Miriam: I suppose.

Wolf: There's no reason it still couldn't, I suppose.

Emmabelle: Sir! Restrain yourself!

Edward raises an eyebrow. Then, after a moment, and miming closing the box: Click.

Miriam: It's all right, I suppose.

Gale: He was trying to find a new use for it.

Emmabelle: Yes?

Gale: Cutting ropes or waves or the like.

Emmabelle: Not waves, I think. Not anything here. Not on ship.

Wolf: Oh?

Emmabelle: It's bad luck, you see.

Wolf: It could be redeemed.

Edward sighs.

Edward: I suppose I must offer trust, if I should wish my own Shared Reactions XP.

Madeline: Such a burden for our poor stoic!

Wolf: I didn't mean to upset you, ma'am. It's . . . because I don't *want* it to upset you and set us apart that I am trying to work with it. I want it to have a new place in our new lives.

Emmabelle: Forget it. Toss the thing into the waves.

Edward: I kill her.

Diane: What? No!

Edward: You're right. I don't kill her. I *try* to kill her. I don't care if you stop me, but I don't think Wolf is up for that comment.

Diane: Seriously?

Edward: Yes. Actually please stop me. But— she doesn't get to say that. That is a call for dumping four Will into ripping a metal pin from something and stabbing her through the lung.

Diane: Jesus. This is going to be a difficult integration into Fortitude life. I practically have to kill myself to catch your arm in time to pull it aside.

Edward: Resolution?

Diane: If I spend four Will myself then I've probably . . . I've got a speed edge, right? 2 points from Wind-Spirit stuff?

Edward: Yeah, that'll beat me in the first moment, I'd guess, though I'm going to push through you in good time.

Miriam: Wolf!

Edward: . . . unless I drop the Intention when she shouts, which I guess I do, because Miriam is the boss. Grrr. Sigh.

Madeline: The sailor barely has a chance to react. I think she's still in the process of paling in shock when Wolf pulls back.

Miriam: Wolf, stand down.

Emmabelle, possibly unwisely: I should have you *chained*.

Miriam: Really?

Emmabelle, muttering: Rabid. Animals. [*as Madeline*] She leaves.

[[Edward adds an XP to the shared pot for the **Shared Reactions** scene.]]

Edward: And that is what happens when you try to connect to people.

Miriam: Oh, you fool. . . . thank you, Gale.

Gale: Ma'am.

Madeline: OK, let me think. Um. I suppose . . . that leads to Wolf being . . . brigged? I don't think they actually lash or keelhaul people because this is not the Napoleonic British navy. I don't know if they even have brigs.

Diane: They have the turnip vault. For the embarrassingly-shaped turnips, and for Wolf.

Edward: Do they not understand the difference between a turnip and a man?

Madeline: I don't think they have a vault of embarrassingly-shaped turnips on this voyage of rescue and scientific exploration. This is also not Blackadder.

Edward: For which I am glad.

Madeline: But yeah. I think that the captain comes by a bit later with a couple of the stronger sailors and suggests that Wolf stay in . . . the cabin? . . . yes. Sorry, Miriam. In the cabin, until the voyage ends.

Wolf: Acceptable.

Madeline: The captain notes, "It is not your opinion on the matter I am concerned with."

Wolf: Ah, hell. [*sighs*] My apologies for scaring your little third mate.

Gale, sotto voce: Jackass.

Miriam: I'll keep a lid on him.

The Captain: Appreciated. If I may ask . . .

Miriam: Your officer disrespected a sacred thing. In light of my man's disproportionate response, I will make no issue of it. Also, he was only going to stab a mosquito that happened to be passing between the two of them.

The Captain: And the surrender of your weapons.

Wolf: Unlikely.

The Captain: I think you'll find it desirable.

Wolf: It's not that I object, Captain. It's that it would eat your souls if you tried to handle it. Though, I do also object.

Madeline: He looks at Miriam to see whether this is in the least bit true.

Heather: Her expression is the thoughtful expression of someone who thinks this could be possible although she is not confident in it.

Madeline: In the name of the campaign getting off the ground rather than becoming an exciting introduction to nautical justice and eventually mass murder, he proposes locking your weapons away in the not-a-hope chest and binding the chest with chains to which you do not have the key.

Madeline pauses to check for objections; when nobody offers one, she switches to narration.

Madeline: A few more days pass, and one morning the sky is bright and clear and the wind is clean and fresh and sun bursts right through the cabin window to wake whomever is sleeping therein.

Edward: I do not sleep. I merely wait.

Madeline: . . . for what?

Edward: . . . Chuck Norris, I guess.

Madeline: He will never find you here.

Edward: You don't know that! No, I think he is coping with forced confinement by treating it as sitting guard over Miriam. Assuming she still sleeps there. Otherwise, he probably just sleeps normally.

Heather: I'm sure she trusts you enough to sleep in the cabin, although doubtless crowding means she spends more of the day out and about. So, thus! I wake!

Madeline: It's an actually beautiful day.

Miriam: Mm. [*stretches, sits up.*] Nice.

Wolf: It is, isn't it?

Miriam: There is something still— there is a kindness in the sunlight, I think.

Wolf: Mm.

Miriam: Thank you.

Wolf: I did not invoke it.

Miriam: For letting me live.

Wolf: Ah.

Miriam: It's all right, isn't it? To be glad? [*she is beginning to look upset*]

Wolf: Save it. Go enjoy the day.

Miriam: I could perhaps . . . am I betraying them by being . . .

Wolf holds up a hand.

Wolf: There will be much gloomy labor ahead of us. Doubtless you will live a mired and miserable life of endless labors on behalf of the principles of our faith and in memory of the world that was lost. Go enjoy the day.

Miriam: Ha. Fine. But only on the orders of my physician.

[*Edward tosses Heather an XP, then clarifies his reasoning when she looks confused by throwing her a thumbs-up.*]

Madeline: Gale's in the crow's nest or something, I'd suppose?

Diane: Or on the rigging or something. It's best to be up high if one is to enjoy a day, and being on the ropes with the wind rattling one is probably the most fun of all.

Madeline: Then you're in a position to see it when the world-ending serpent goes by.

Diane: Pardon?

Madeline: Big as mountains. Bigger, maybe. Far away, you think, scarily far away for something so visible, something that's making long low waves that touch against the ship's side every several minutes or so, slipping towards your drowned world. It's supposed to devour it at the end of things.

Diane: Wow. . . is it dead?

Madeline: Is it dead? . . . the world?

Diane: No. The snake! I get a bonus if it's dead. Like, a dead power, but, you know.

Madeline: Oh, like dead-in-life. Um. I was thinking of it more like a phoenix thing, like, life coming to devour the cast-offs and make more life from it, but maybe . . . maybe its shadow.

Diane: Hm?

Madeline: Maybe the thing itself, the snake in the sea, is alive; so very, deeply alive, alive like the forests, deep and shadowed green, great vast landscapes of it sweeping across and through the water; but behind it, there is the shadow that slips on and ever after it, grey and cold and deep in the nature of death. And the shadow of the serpent is itself a kind of serpent; it glances up at you as it passes, and coldness runs through you.

Diane: Sweet! That moment lingers, it sticks with me, but when I've got a chance I'll salute.

[[Diane puts an XP in the group pot for a **Slice of Life**, and marks a 5 XP bonus—

Even though technically she should get Madeline's more explicit permission first—

Towards her quest, "Above the Fray."]]

Miriam: Hail the freak on the mast!

Gale: Hail the deck! . . . oh wow. Miriam! *Look!*

Heather: Can I see it?

Madeline: Soon as you don't have ship or bales or whatever in the way, probably. Except you won't see the shadow. Not the same way, anyway. You can sense it, but it's kind of sulking. Hiding from you. Not looking at you, anyway.

Miriam: I have betrayed the death god. [*heaves a sigh*] I am tempted to cut myself and make an offering of blood or something.

Madeline: Is that what one does?

Heather: Perhaps. Yes. I wave down a sailor of some rank.

Madeline: "Yes'm?" He's watching the serpent. He isn't paying attention to you. But: "yes'm?"

Miriam: I need the large one released to me for a short while to propitiate the death god. Can you ask the appropriate authority?

Madeline: He looks really uncomfortable, backs away, and scurries off. Soon the First Mate, whose name is Shane Stevens, makes his way over to you. "We won't have you making sacrifices, ma'am."

Miriam: . . . are you looking at the same thing I am looking at?

Shane Stevens: It's not turning our way, ma'am. And frankly, we'd all just as soon make it home alive.

Miriam: . . . oh, for the love of— I need him to make sure I *don't* bleed out, you cretin.

Shane: . . . ah. [*hesitates*] All right. He can have an hour on decks. I'll send someone to fetch 'im.

Miriam: Thank you. [*as Heather*] I begin setting up a ritual space as best I can by the edge of a moving ship. Chalk on the deck, maybe, see if I can dig out my dagger.

Gale: This is not going to endear you to the sailors, milady.

Miriam: Then I will show them something that will.

Diane, suddenly, in re her basic quest and the snake: Dang it! I should have said “I’m taking that home with me.”

Madeline: Why not now?

Diane, shaking her head: It’s too late. [sighs] The moment is past.

Short pause.

Wolf: I am summoned, lady?

Miriam: I have an offering to make. [as Heather] Is there an Obstacle to making this the kind of thing that impresses rather than alienates the crew and the death god?

Madeline: Possibly two different Obstacles. I think impressing *that* from here is difficulty 3, and impressing the sailors is 1-2.

Heather: Then I can bring my Bond into play, I suspect, and . . . I suspect I’ll need a four-Will chunk, then.

Madeline: You are all so lavish!

Heather: It’s a slow week!

Madeline: True enough. OK, what can you get for that?

Heather: I can pump it to 8 before Obstacles by evoking Memories of an Alien Star. I’m going to assume I can’t use my magical Necromancy Skill for being cool.

[[Rider Necromancy comes with a list of techniques. It’s not necessarily an exclusive or complete list, but “make friends and impress people” is a pretty big stretch—that’s why Madeline is about to say:]]

Madeline: Not without a further +2 to the Obstacle. Mind, at that point you’d be magically impressive, but . . . there’d be fewer guarantees.

Heather: Explain?

Madeline: Well, if you do it with . . . Memories of an Alien Star, then you’re doing normal stuff, but you’re generally likely to be productive. On some level it’s a harmonious, fitting act, and if it’s not impressed and the sailors aren’t impressed then it’s because they’re actively choosing not to be. If you’re doing it with Rider Necromancy, then you can have your hair float out and you can touch on people’s hidden memories of death and your

chanting voice can cross the waters and fill the air and if you want to radiate a feeling of “I mediate between this ship and death” or “let us honor death so we can live our lives” or whatever, that’s fine, but you don’t really get a say in what happens after that, just in what *you* do with it. If that makes sense?

Heather: It still feels more right.

Madeline: Understood. Thus, you are stretching your Necromancy to touch on the rituals of some other, forgotten sect; they who honored the shadow of the serpent, long ago, before its touch devoured them—to make a plea or an offering of honor of something, to the effect of . . .

Heather: To ask its forgiveness for living; to ask its blessing for this ship, that it travel safely home; and to beg it take good care, while it is drinking them, of the thronging, surging spirits of the dead.

Madeline: OK.

Heather: OK?

Madeline: I want some physical description to segue into describing what happens, I think.

Heather: Oh. Um. There is blood falling from my arm into the water. It’s hard to focus on, I think; looking at it makes it stop being a trickle from a cut and makes it seem a vertical river; you fall into the sight of it and you are beside a bloody river and a grey-banked shore that flows from life to death; and there is a drumming in the wilderness and a wind that grows and ahead there is the surging of the seas.

Madeline: And at some point as you are falling backwards into Wolf’s arms, or Wolf and Gale’s arms depending on how you set this up, you feel the shadow’s attention on you, though it still hides from you behind the length of the serpent of life; and then it dives, slipping away from the shadow of life, down into the sea. There is only the last flick of its tail on the surface and it is gone. A fog rolls in; obscures the other serpent; and then, well, a little while later, you are not sure how long, the day is sunny and clear and both snakes are gone.

Heather: . . . and that’s *my* second action for the week.

[[Heather adds an XP to the group pot. She could justify this in two different ways: as a **Shared Action** where the key action is bonding with Wolf

and/or Gale over this, or a **Slice of Life** from the intensity of the moment. She doesn't specify, but she's thinking of the latter.]]

Madeline: OK, let's start you guys on Issues, then, because I think I'm going to toss Miriam a point of Trust.

[[Heather notes this but doesn't deal with it yet—we'll talk about this more at the end of Week 1.]]

Madeline: And then I want Emmabelle to visit Wolf.

Edward or Wolf: . . . really. [*as Wolf*] To what do I owe the pleasure?

Emmabelle: I have decided to offer my apologies.

Wolf: Really. [*tilts head to one side*] I wasn't expecting that; because, for all your offense, I can't imagine that you grasp how monstrous your suggestion might have been, nor is there anyone who can explain it to you. I take it you're mewling for the sake of amity or on your captain's orders?

Emmabelle: I was insensitive. You're going through a lot right now.

Edward or Wolf: Ohh, right, the world drowning.

Madeline: Is that IC?

Edward: . . . no, I think, um. OK, IC: [*as Wolf:*] Ah.

Emmabelle: So, no harm done, on your part. And on my part, I regret going to the Captain over it. I've asked him to unchain your box; he's still thinking about it. Well, chewing on a cigar and fiddling with a sextant, but doubtless he'll think about it at some point.

Wolf: That's kind of you.

Emmabelle: I do think you should talk to someone about what you'll be doing when you get to shore. I'm still available.

Wolf: I tried to kill you.

Emmabelle: That's very intimidating and all, but I'd rather you don't do it again.

Wolf: . . . damn it. Fine. I like you. Go away and leave me to sulk about it.

Emmabelle: You didn't want to like me?

Wolf, shrugging: Rather not. It'd make it easier.

Emmabelle: I see.

Edward: OK, formal Shared Reactions here: [*as Wolf:*] It was meant for Miriam, you know.

Emmabelle: She mentioned.

Wolf's mouth twitches, a momentary grimace: I worry sometimes that the world will fill with unquiet dead because I didn't end its story with the scythe. I didn't close things down properly, and now I have to wonder: what if that was wrong?

Emmabelle: You want to know what I think?

Wolf: No. . . .fine. Whatever.

[[Edward puts a sixth XP in the group pot for **Shared Reactions**.]]

Emmabelle: It was a long time ago. It's behind you. It's over. Worry about the rest of your life.

Wolf: Just go.

Emmabelle: I'm gone. [*as Madeline:*] And that's your six basic XP actions for the week.

[[In a Pastoral game, each player can usually take two XP actions per IC week, so at this point the first week of the game is winding down.

However, there's still some stuff that the players might want to do this week . . .]]

Madeline: What about quest stuff?

[[The players take a moment to look at their quests—particularly Heather and Diane, whose starting quests have 1/week actions they can take.]]

Diane: Question: a lot of my quest is about exploring "Arc-relevant" parts of the setting. Should I assume that's . . . out on the water?

Madeline: I'd guess that it's stuff relevant to the drowned world, yeah. Out on the waters, maybe in the places of the dead.

Diane: OK. Thinking.

Heather: I could be listening to stories of Jade Irinka and what was lost when she died.

Madeline: Sure.

Heather: Like, someone on ship winds up talking about it? Do we have any friends on board who might wind up chatting with the three of us?

Madeline: At this point you haven't been doing terribly well on that—Wolf had a bit of goodwill but lost it, Gale might know a person or two but seems kind of quiet, so Emmabelle's practically the best that you've got.



Heather: Seriously? That's hilarious.

Madeline: I do think you impressed them, you understand. It might even be what made her talk to Wolf instead of being angry. But other than her, it hasn't really *closed the gap* between you and the crew.

Heather: I don't see how that gets to storytime, so maybe I ask one of the naturalists to tell us a little bit about where we're going, and he winds up meandering off into stories of Jade?

Madeline: Sure. [*thinks*] He's leaning against the rail, and the wind is blowing his hair back from his head, fine brown hair around his glasses, and he's saying, "I think it probably led to the death of your world."

Miriam: It was destined.

Scholar: It may have been. [*hesitates*] She was beautiful. I don't know if you can understand that, you who never lived in Town when Jade Irinka was the sun. She was a miracle. I didn't even grasp it, I didn't really pay attention to celestial spirits and the like, and then one day there was an arrow in her heart and red blossoming across the sun and as suddenly as that I knew: the world was ending.

Wolf: That's all? One arrow?

Miriam: Hush, Wolf.

Scholar: The light of things that made me care about the world, about the nature and the structure of it, was dying. The light of things that made me care about being me instead of somebody else, that was dying too; and it was so terribly dark and so terribly cold. And then she died, fell into the endless sea, and the world was lost; and the waters rose and that is why, I think, your world is drowned.

Wolf: Is that a different sun than you get out here, then?

Scholar, looking up: I think sometimes it is. To be honest. There was a storm— it was on the way out here, you missed it— but there was a storm, and it was in a perfectly peaceful sky. The waters changed color, greatly and vastly changed, and the wind was still and the waves were small and yet it was a storm, and there was something terribly and awfully wrong about the sun. But— mostly no.

Wolf: No?

Scholar: Mostly it is the same sun here as it is in Town, save only that there is a certain anima that

is absent; and if there is a sun here, or anywhere, it is because after a while, and for a reason that I do not understand, a new sun . . . rose.

[[Heather marks an XP towards her **Changes** quest.]]

Heather: Miriam ex sancto dest, or, you know, some . . . Latinesque Churchesque phrase.

Diane: Amen.

Miriam: That is not what happened to us.

Scholar, shrugging: Indeed.

Short pause.

Madeline: Diane?

Diane: I need a dangerous part of the setting to explore and it has to be relevant to my Arc and my eventual reaching new levels of mastery. This is troubling. It doesn't seem to just be a ship. Can I . . . have a weird nightmare world? Like, I'm dreaming of the drowned world and that's the dangerous place, full of ghost-predators or scary vision experiences?

Madeline: Sure! What do you want to do there?

Diane: Daily chores! But I'll interact with a kid there in later weeks.

Madeline, flatly: Daily chores.

Diane: Yes! I dream of temple life. Only, you know, everything's covered in water or chaos or whatever.

Madeline: Huh. OK. Do the others show up?

Diane, after shrugging: I don't mind. They can play themselves if they want. I personally want to be out sweeping the temple yard, like, you know, you do.

Edward, as Dream-Wolf: You know they're covered in water, kid.

Gale: It's the principle of the thing. [*as Diane*] I'm leaning against the broom. [*as Gale*] You build a temple high in the mountains, you think, this isn't going to happen.

Wolf: Well, don't forget to wash down the stairs after you've finished.

Gale: Mm. Is mother around, do you think?

Wolf: I thought it was just us up here.

Gale: . . . huh.

Heather: You guys are creeping me out now.

Gale: I take the broom. I look around. Then I put it in the shed.

Madeline: You don't come out.

Diane: . . . but it's my dream! You can't leave my fate a mystery in my own dream!

Madeline: Currents sweep around through the empty yard of the abandoned temple. They scatter ocean-bottom leaves. There is the shadow of something vaster than mountains, vaster than worlds, as it moves by. Then you wake up. End of chapter; and I think I'll be giving a point of Sickness to both Wolf and Gale.

[[Diane marks an XP towards her **Above the Fray** quest, completing week 1.]]

TRUST

At the end of the first IC week Madeline digs out a Trust 1 card and the Trust 1-3 handout. She gives these to Heather, who reads:

You sometimes seem awfully comfortable palling around with vast and spiritual things, gods and fallen angels, magic, rituals, strangers, horrors, spirits, aliens, rats and foxes, the vampires, and the Outside . . .

She also now has a card to keep in front of her during play to act as part of her . . . mindscape, her thoughts, the pattern of her life. Something that's going on with her, a voice inside her as it were:



SICKNESS 1

At the end of the first IC week Madeline also provides the Sickness 1-2 handout to Edward and Diane, who read:

Some kind of unpleasant stuff's happened . . .

Edward laughs, because he's thinking of their world drowning.

She also gives each of them a Sickness 1 card to keep in front of them and remind them that, well, they're under strain:



Last Ship Out

Week 1 Recap

The first IC week featured the following XP Actions—

- ✿ **Shared Reactions (Miriam):** *reaching out to Wolf, in re: the world dying*
- ✿ **Slice of Life (Gale):** *staring at the clouds*
- ✿ **Shared Reactions (Wolf):** *reaching out to Emmabelle about the scythe*
- ✿ **Slice of Life (Gale):** *reacting to the serpent*
- ✿ **Slice of Life (Miriam):** *also reacting to the serpent*
- ✿ **Shared Reactions (Wolf):** *reaching out to Emmabelle again*
- ✿ **Changes (Miriam):** *listening to the story of Jade Irinka*
- ✿ **Above the Fray (Gale):** *dreaming of what was lost.*

If the group divides the group pot now,

- ✿ Miriam will have 3 generic XP, plus 1 XP for each quest. She also has **Trust 1**.
- ✿ Wolf will have 2 generic XP, plus 1 XP towards each quest. He has **Sickness 1**.
- ✿ Gale will have 2 generic XP, 1 XP towards her basic quest, and 6 XP towards “Above the Fray.” She also has **Sickness 1**.

Not counting character creation, the game's run for about 90 minutes—I mean, you could squeeze a good dramatic reading of week 1 into 20-25, but shuffling, stalling, distractions, and completely pointless digressions are almost certain to round it up to 80+ in an actual game.

Assuming the players have about 4 hours to game in, we're about a third of the way into the first session of play.



Last Ship Out

Week 2

Madeline (the HG): Sunday's dawn refreshes your Will and your actions and leaves you sleepless and troubled in the early light. What are you guys doing this week?

Heather: Leaning on a railing, I think. Staring out at the water.

Madeline: Forwards or backwards?

Heather: Well, technically, it's sort of to the side, but yeah, I think backwards.

Diane (as Gale): Memories?

Heather (as Miriam): Mm.

Madeline: The ship is creaking, of course. The horizon is this rich deep blue. You can hear birds crying in the distance.

[[Heather, after a moment, tosses a **Slice of Life** XP into the group pot.]]

Miriam: I'm going in.

Gale: Mm.

Madeline: A day or two passes. The ship stops over for a little bit at an island to take in fresh water and such.

Edward: I sulk in the cabin with my scythe.

Madeline: Oh! I think the Captain's let you both out by now. The Emmabelle thing.

Edward: Oh! Well, I still feel sulky. Because of the Sickness thing.

[[The Sickness 1 card in front of Edward is reminding him that life's wearing him out, you see.]]

Edward: And I don't want to meditate out on the deck or the island with the scythe.

Gale: Want me to bring you a chicken?

Wolf: . . . they have chickens?

Gale: It's an island.

Wolf: That's . . . not actually an answer, Gale.

Gale: It's *like* an answer.

Wolf raises an eyebrow.

Gale: It's an island . . . with chickens?

Wolf: That's better. Do you think I should retrain it to be the death of chickens?

Gale: The terror that clucks in the night?

Wolf: No.

Gale: That which came before the chicken and the egg? Death-granting engine "Black Rooster?"

Wolf: . . . you're in fine spirits, Gale.

Gale: It's good out there. You should come out!

Wolf: I don't want to . . .

Gale: There's wind and grass and the ground doesn't rock under your feet and there's this place you can climb to at the top of the island where you can look over everything and spin around and it's *good*. Come on. It'll do you good, Wolf.

Wolf: Fine. Fine. [*sighs, puts aside the scythe, closes the box*] Maybe I could bury it here. Pirate treasure.

[[Unlike the previous suggestions, Wolf actually entertains this notion for a moment (which means he can mark the idea towards his **Bind** quest) before rejecting the idea and joining Gale in walking out.]]

Gale: Miriam! Miriam! I brought the grump-ass!

Wolf: . . . what?

Gale: It's an ancient term of respect in the language of Fortitude!

Edward has specific standards for what he considers "hapless" or "head-desk-worthy," which this doesn't qualify for; but nevertheless he



realizes after a moment that he has both his hands covering his face. He takes them down, after a moment, sticks his tongue out at Diane, and says: Fine. Have your XP, you wench.

Diane, although she has no idea what he's grumping about: Bii!

Wolf, recovering his sense of dignity: An ancient term of respect, is it? I shall have to regale the captain and crew with it properly later.

Gale: Uh . . . yes. Yes. That is . . . yes.

Miriam: Leave off, you two.

Diane: I want to drag you up to the high place for spinning! That's my Shared Action.

Heather: Spinning?

Gale: I like being up high. It's better on land, though.

[[Diane adds an XP to the group pot for a **Shared Action**, presuming thereby that the group has reached the height together and that Gale, at least, is now spinning. She ventures a small act of trust:]]

Gale: I used to do this on the monastery roof back home.

Wolf: For which you were reprimanded.

Gale: Repeatedly, and with great vigor. [*laughs*] I may even be busted back down the ranks, you know.

Wolf: Put to work scrubbing the floors for the next year and a half. You know, we're on a ship, Gale. That can sort of happen.

Gale, with grave dignity: This is not a ship. This is an island. You are thinking of yesterday and tomorrow.

[[Neither Edward or Heather has an immediate response to this, which allows the term "yesterday" to catch at their minds and brings IC angsty to the foreground. Heather, as Miriam, winces. Edward, as Wolf, lightly bites his lip.]]

Gale, a little uncomfortably: . . . mostly 'tomorrow.'

Wolf, a little uncomfortably: It's all right.

Heather: I'm sitting on the cliff's edge. Because I assume that there is one. I'm looking down below and slowly kicking my feet.

[[Heather is pondering how to work in an XP for her quest, **Changes**, in particular by leading the discussion around to a talk about destiny.]]

Gale: Miriam?

Miriam: I am thinking of our yesterdays.

Gale, a lot uncomfortably: Well, stop.

Miriam: I am thinking that it is strange to have a destiny that is not fulfilled. Do you think I will actually be the end of the world we're going to?

Crosstalk:

Wolf: Probably.

Gale: Of course not!

Miriam: Heh.

Gale: I wasn't intending— come on. You can't do this every time I say 'yesterday.' [*Diane, who has been staring idly at her Sickness 1 card and trying to reconcile it with her recent good mood, realizes:*] I'm tired of being sad.

Wolf: You can't just turn it off.

Gale: I can. I'm already dead. [*as Diane*] I am bridging *straight* from my Shared Action into a Shared Reactions without even hardly fading into the background first! Bwaha! [*as Gale*] I am dead and I don't have to be afraid of death or other people dying or sadness any more. Let's just be happy now.

Wolf: That's not going to happen, Gale.

Gale: Why not?

Wolf, after a long moment: . . . I don't know.

[[Diane adds another XP to the group pot for the **Shared Reactions**.]]

Heather: You have totally blown my attempt to sneak in a "talk about my destiny and what it means," Gale.

Diane: Haha.

Heather: You. Wolf. Fix it. [*tosses Edward a "putting my faith in you" XP.*] I am putting my faith in you for this.

Wolf: . . . but I have an idea.

Gale: What?

Wolf: I don't think we can forget it yet. Because we are death cultists. [*as Edward*] That probably isn't how we actually put it, though. Um.

Diane: "Of the faith?"

Wolf: Because we are of the faith. The, uh, death-y one.

Miriam: Wolf, the isolation is not working out well for you.

Wolf: My eloquence must, is, thing, fine, thank you very mutt. [*coughs*] I mean, we can let go, Gale. We can turn our backs on it. But she can't. And because she can't, it's important that we don't. [*possibly as Edward, who is struggling a little, or possibly as Wolf with more humor than previously apparent*] IS THING FINE OK.

Miriam: You think I can't let go of it?

Wolf: You're still for something. Death doesn't die with . . . dying. [*as Edward, hanging his head*] I have failed your faith in me, milady.

Heather, giggling: It's OK.

Miriam: Are you all right, Wolf?

Wolf: I think I might have a bit of a fever.

Gale: . . . you did have food and water in the cabin, didn't you?

Wolf: I'm *fine*, Gale. Just a bit under the weather.

Gale: That's not an answer.

[[Heather decides that there was in fact some discussion of destiny there and marks it towards her quest.]]

Miriam: I'm a bit vertiginous myself.

Gale: . . . milady, permission to drag you bodily away from the edge of a cliff?

Wolf: Just do it.

Miriam, making a face: I can manage. Permission to hover helpfully near my elbows granted.

Diane: I will do so. 2 Will!

Madeline: . . . what does that get you?

Diane: Uh . . . highly effective hovering, I guess. It moves me closer to my goals!

Madeline: Which goals?

Diane: Really I just want to spend 2 Will.

[[Skill 2 + Will 2 produces a level 4 Intention, guaranteed to be tactically effective in terms of achieving one's immediate goals. But that isn't the reason that Diane is spending 2 Will: she's spending 2 Will because Gale is hyperfocused on getting this done, spending some of her weekly cope.

If we were to get *extremely* technical, the way to handle this is for Diane to say "I really only want to hover in the proper fashion, but I'm spending 2 Will for a level 4 Intention just in case some random element intercedes and opposes me with a level 3-4 effect, or in case there's an Obstacle I don't know about that will reduce the effectiveness of my action. Oh, but wait, that makes effectiveness free, and I don't actually *mind* the idea of guaranteed effectiveness."

Not being a 1960s-era cinematic robot programmed only for gaming, she doesn't say this.]]

Diane: I guess my goal in this case is to get them both to the ship's doctor.

Madeline: And if the ship's doctor is at the bottom of this cliff?

Diane: . . . I would request you not be a big meanie!

[[Had she been a robot she would doubtless have clarified, "My goals contain a fully-functional suite of standard safety protocols that outweigh the embedded desire for alacrity" instead.]]

Madeline: Haha. OK, well, guys, Gale is hovering near you helpfully in such a fashion as to encourage you to meander down the . . . slower way . . . and see the ship's doctor. I'm content with your feeling encouraged rather than compelled, so you don't need to bother with actively *resisting*, if you don't want to.

Edward: I'm actually willing. It is possible that I have overestimated my endur— wait, no, I can't! I can't show weakness like that!

Gale: Perhaps you could escort milady to the ship's doctor for an interview?

Miriam: I am not a patsy for your pride games.

Diane: Nudge. Nudge.

Miriam: Really, Gale, this is unhealthy and inappropriate.

Diane: But totally in genre!

Heather: Bad genre! I will drag Wolf there by his ear instead.

Wolf, folding his arms: Milady need not trouble herself.

Heather: Are you resisting?

Edward: No, I am allowing you to drag me, but with folded arms.

Miriam: Ship's doctor Egbert Dogglesworthy, I present you my unworthy companion.

Wolf: I am not unworthy.

Madeline: That's all right, I'm not Egbert Dogglesworthy. Lenard Morgan, at your service. [*makes a gesture that is incomprehensible until explained*] Shining a light in your eyes, mouth.

Miriam, defensively: I apologize for . . .

Lenard: No, no, the crew would call me Dogglesworthy, it's hardly your fault, ma'am. Sir, you're dramatically dehydrated, malnourished, and tall.

Wolf: Tall?

Lenard: Yes. Have you been enduring your evenings in a stretcher?

Wolf: Rack, you mean.

Lenard: Yes.

Wolf: No.

Lenard: Could have fooled me. Giants! I ask you. Drink this.

Edward looks around on the table, finds his long-unfinished soda can, and lifts it to his lips.

Lenard: Sloooooowly.

Wolf: I am capable of managing my own consumption. [*as Edward*] Also, blargh.

Madeline: Blargh?

Edward: I'd like to slice of life how awful this soda is.

Madeline: Nobody made you leave it out unfinished, you know.

Edward: Nobody understands my pain! Seriously, though, I am totally emoting blargh. Stoically. A stoic blargh as I drink whatever he gave me.

Lenard: Mm. Well, keep it up. Nothing rest and fluids won't cure.

[[Madeline tosses an XP into the pot for Edward's **Slice of Life**.]]

Lenard: And you, ma'am?

Miriam: I am well.

Gale: She became vertiginous at the cliff, sir.

Lenard, flashing something in Miriam's eyes: Ah.

Miriam: Ah?

Lenard: . . . it's nothing.

Miriam: I see.

Lenard: It is sometimes the case that a person becomes attuned to the . . . less pleasant portions

of the Outside. There is something in them that is uncomfortable in the presence of better, more solid worlds. It's nothing to be concerned about.

Miriam: I see.

Madeline: Hm, I'm going to toss an **(in) Over your Head** Miriam's way, there, I think, and if nobody else has anything to say there, cut the scene.

Heather: Sure thing.

[[Like Trust and Sickness, "(in) Over your Head" is an Issue. Again, Heather takes note but doesn't deal with it until the end of the current week.]]

Madeline: So, the ship heads out to sea after a while doing . . . island stuff. Portage. Is portage a word? For things you do on islands?

Edward: It sounds nautical, anyway.

Madeline: And we can cut to Gale's next XP-bearing dream.

Diane: Ooh, hm. Maybe just hanging out in the dream and listening to whatever it has to show me, then?

Madeline: You're in the old shrine, up in the mountains. There's a shadow moving.

Diane: Hm? I . . . look at it? Follow it?

Madeline: It's hard to track at first. It slips past and around you, never quite giving you a chance to get a good look at it, never quite giving you a chance to really know that it's there. It's not until you hunt it to what ought to be a little closet, well, storage shed kind of thing, the kind of place with some brooms and shovels in it, and you open it, and you're staring down into a dizzying fall and an endless emptiness and the shadow of a serpent coiling in it and—

Diane: I wake up! I wake up! I wake up already!

Madeline: Heh.

Diane: I think?

Madeline: Sure. Sometimes it's OK to turn down a challenge!

Gale: No way! I'm not going to let some dream scare me! I'm going right back to sleep and face it!

Madeline: It's too late. You can only dream of pigs and clowns.

Diane: Shiver.

Madeline: And at last there's this subtle change to the waters around you; the smell of them changes, freshens, and the color is a deeper, different blue.

You're not in the sea of the Outside, not any longer; you're in Big Lake, not far from Town.

Heather: What's it like?

Madeline: Pretty heavy on the seagulls, I think. Lake gulls. Gulls, anyway. The waves are a lot smaller. I don't know how to describe smells well enough to distinguish the Lake and the sea. And when Town itself comes into view it's this crescent of green trees and red and white roofs and zigzag docks and fluttering red and yellow canvas and life.

Heather: I feel sick.

Madeline: That seems excessive!

Heather: Not to me! I am trembling. I am holding the . . . railing? Or a rope or something? And my knuckles are white from it.

Gale: Milady?

Miriam: I feel sick.

Gale, inaccurately: So you said.

Miriam: I mustn't. We mustn't. This—

Wolf is looking at her.

Miriam: Nevermind. [*then, as Heather*] No. I should . . . I should go for Shared Reactions!

Edward: Yes! Throw yourself upon the emotional grenade! For JUSTICE!

Heather: For the death god!

Diane, seriously, raising a finger: Earning XP through healthy emotional expression is an important part of a death priestess' emotional wardrobe and thus pleases and also honors the god of death. Talk to your doctor about expressing your emotions in the name of the ultimate destruction of all things. Side effects may include, the ultimate destruction of all things, headaches, nausea, and death.

Miriam, slowly: It is beginning again. I am bringing it to them. It is beginning, again.

Gale: It was never our way to slaughter everything and laugh, milady. You don't need to fear your mission. [*possibly as Diane, or at least from a Diane/Gale hybrid position*] We're . . . the nice kind of death priests, right?

Miriam: I know, but—

Wolf: But?

Miriam: I have this fear that a shadow travels with us.

Wolf: Milady is most grump-ass and most wise.

Miriam, after multiple blinks: Seriously, Wolf? Seriously?

Wolf: It's an ancient term of respect in the local language, milady.

Miriam: I see.

[*Slowly, Heather adds an XP to the group pot for their **Shared Reactions.***]

Heather: Well, that's . . . my second moment for the week. Looks like it's up to Wolf to stage manage our arrival in Town.

Madeline: The ship docks. It's . . . something of a whirl for you. The noise of the people. The sudden change in routine. Wolf, you've got Emmabelle stopping by to see you off.

Wolf, in an admission to Emmabelle: . . . I don't know where to go.

Emmabelle: Heh. Captain thought you might have trouble. Look, the expedition's supposed to drag you guys along with them when they head back into town, but I'd honestly say you oughtn't.

Miriam: No? [*aside, as Heather*] I'm standing next to my stuff in the middle of the deck looking like I have absolutely no idea what to do with myself, by the way.

Emmabelle: They're going to want to make you practically part of a living museum. You won't be people come to Fortitude to find a home, you'll be . . . exhibits. Samples of life from the lost world. But I've got a better idea for you.

Gale: I'd be most glad to hear it.

Emmabelle: There's a hostel down by the ferry dock—the ferryman's a cousin of mine. You could stay there a little while.

Wolf: What's it like?

Emmabelle: . . . it's a hostel.

Wolf: Thank you. That's very kind.

Madeline: Polite sailor nod.

Miriam: That . . . does sound a little better than being exhibited.

Emmabelle: So you go about two hundred and twenty meters that'a-way—

Miriam gives her an appalled look.

Emmabelle: Just kidding. I'll take you guys there. Just wait a spell. [*as Madeline*] It's close to six as you get off the boat and head in towards the hostel; the immediate hubbub of landing ended a while

back, and it's actually sort of quiet now. You've got a chance to see the ferry slipping in to dock as you arrive, with the sunset behind it; a gentle, sweet-looking boat with the figurehead of a horse with flowing wooden hair. You're not sure but you think it might be looking at you.

Edward: The ferry?

Madeline: The figurehead, anyway. It has the feeling of life in its eyes.

Edward: If that moment sticks with me, does the week suddenly end while we're standing there?

Madeline: Nah. It's more, if that happens, you guys are theoretically passive puppets to my whims until the end of the week, but really even then you're only *encouraged* to be passive puppets rather than actually required to be. If you want to micromanage every second from then to Sunday morning, that's not rules-breaking so much as annoying and rude.

Edward: OK. It's a nice moment, though. I like the sunset. I think it might stick with me anyway.

[[Edward tosses a **Slice of Life** XP into the group pot.]]

Madeline: Fair enough. You get settled in. That's Friday night, I think; Saturday, it looks like Wolf's fever spiked up again, and you don't get as much acclimatization or getting to know how things are done here as you like. You meet the proprietor, a woman I'll name after a short break, and the ferryman likewise, and you make a quick trip to the store for health goods, but mostly it's actually got the two of you kind of worried and you're rather emotionally exhausted yourself. And then Sunday —

Edward: Sunday?

Madeline: Well, Sunday's dawn begins next week.

TRUST 1-2

After the week ends, Madeline reflects on her biggest impression from the week. It's the group of PCs standing at the top of a cliff. She compares this to the chart of possible Issues to hand out, and realizes that even though nothing terribly important happened—

Usually, you'd only get this emotional reaction when there was actual *meaning* involved—

Her principal emotional reaction is "This is (was) a pretty big deal."

So she winds up digging out a Trust 1 and Trust 2 card and giving out a point of Trust to the PCs—Heather gets a Trust 2 card, hands her Trust 1 off to Diane, and Edward takes a new Trust 1 card of his own.

For Wolf and Gale, this means that they have the following in the back of their thoughts:



For Miriam, it upgrades to:



This'll be playing into how they handle the coming week.

(in) OVER YOUR HEAD 1

Heather also picked up a point of the “Over your Head” Issue, so Madeline digs out an Over your Head 1 card and the (in) Over your Head 1-2 handout. She gives these to Heather, who reads:

Something isn't right . . .

She'll keep this card in front of her, next to her **Trust 2** and her **In the World of Life** cards:



Last Ship Out

Week 2 Recap

The second IC week featured the following XP Actions—

- ⚙️ **Slice of Life (Miriam):** *staring out at the dawn*
- ⚙️ **Shared Action (Gale):** *trip to the top of the island, talking about the past*
- ⚙️ **Shared Reactions (Gale):** *talking about being dead, encouraging happiness*
- ⚙️ **Changes (Miriam):** *talking about her destiny*
- ⚙️ **Slice of Life (Wolf):** *a terrible-tasting drink*
- ⚙️ **Above the Fray (Gale):** *a terrifying dream*
- ⚙️ **Shared Reactions (Miriam):** *fear that she is bringing something terrible to Town.*
- ⚙️ **Slice of Life (Wolf):** *watching the ferry as it comes in.*

If the group divides the group pot now,

- ⚙️ Miriam will have 5 generic XP, 2 XP for her quest **Changes**, and 1 XP for her basic quest. She also has **Trust 2** and **(in) Over your Head 1**.
- ⚙️ Wolf will have 5 generic XP, 2 XP for **Bind**, and 1 XP for his basic quest. He also has **Trust 1** and **Sickness 1**.
- ⚙️ Gale will have 5 generic XP, plus 1 XP towards her basic quest and 7 XP towards “Above the Fray.” She also has **Trust 1** and **Sickness 1**.

Not counting character creation, the game's run for about two and a half hours.

Last Ship Out

Week 3

1

Madeline (the HG): It's like the clearing of a fog, I think. It's the first clear-headed morning after a fever, for Wolf; and it's dawn on a crisp clear Sunday for him and everyone else as well; and everything is cleaner, more visible, easier to see suddenly, and you stop thinking the land is going to start swaying under your feet at any moment again, because it's finally settled in for you: you're somewhere new. You've made it to somewhere new. To Town.

Edward: And now for a rousing round of *what the hell do we do now?*

Heather: I sort of knew! I was going to set up a temple. But now—

Edward: Now?

Heather, looking between her Trust 2 and (in) Over Your Head 1 cards: Is it wrong to look between “You can rely on others” and “There's something here that just doesn't fit” and wonder if Town is a trap or something?

Edward: Its peace will devour you!

Madeline: You're allowed to wonder.

Edward: Though actually, I think, I will head down to the desk— getting dressed, of course— and see if there's anything I can do to help around the place.

Madeline: The proprietress— Lisa?

Edward: OK.

Madeline: She's up early, too. She's folding towels. You can help if you want.

Edward: Sure.

Lisa: Oh, hey.

Wolf: Hey.

Madeline: Companionable silence. Towel folding. [as Lisa] You're doing better, then?

Wolf: Mm.

Lisa: Good to hear it. You worried us a bit, coming in like that.

Wolf shrugs. Then, after a moment: Grateful to you for taking us in, ma'am.

Lisa: It's no trouble. [looks him over] I was just about to put a kettle on. Think your stomach can take tea and a bite?

Wolf: I'd be grateful. . . . I could help?



Lisa: . . . best you'd not, I think. I hate men messing around in my kitchen. But do have a seat.

Wolf: I assure you, I, who has slain lions and broken mountains, can handle myself in a kitchen.

Lisa: That's not the most reassuring pedigree.

Wolf: . . . I'll sit.

Lisa: It's all right to be here, you know. You don't have to throw yourself into helping.

Wolf: No?

Lisa: It's spring vacation. The place empties out.

Wolf: In the land of my childhood, we did not have such things.

Madeline: Anyone else want to come join us? This looks to be a longer conversation than I'd thought.

Heather: Sure, I'll wander down.

Lisa: Oh, morning! I was just putting breakfast on.

Miriam, smiling: Thank you.

Lisa, to Wolf: When school's in, we've got to take the kids back and forth to Little Island; and if they miss the ferry, why, they'll be staying here. But the last few kids who were going home went yesterday, you see.

Wolf: Oh.

Lisa: Thus, vacation for me and the ferryman to boot! I guess we could put together some kind of improvement project if you really want to help out, but I was honestly planning to loll around on the deck catching sunshine and painting my toenails.

Miriam: Thus being up at dawn to make breakfast for your penniless guests.

Wolf: And to fold towels.

Lisa: What? That's not *work*. I'm practically lolling on the deck catching the rays *right now*. How many eggs do you take?

Miriam: . . . I'm not a thief.

Edward loses it giggling.

Diane scrubs her hair with one hand, then speaks as Gale: You guys are being loud.

Miriam, with stiff dignity: It's apparently a "vacation."

Lisa: I mean, how many eggs would you . . . like to eat. Like, "how many lumps in your coffee?" [*pauses, then:*] I probably shouldn't have confused the matter further.

Miriam, relaxing slightly: Oh.

Gale: I'd like eggs. Do you have those . . .

Lisa looks at her. Gale waves a hand around in the air.

Gale: The green ones?

Lisa: Sorry.

Gale: Well.

Miriam, somewhat belatedly: You call him "the ferryman?"

Lisa: Old Ivan? Yeah.

Miriam: Isn't he your cousin?

Lisa: Aw, no, that's Emmabelle. He's more *my* da than anything, but . . . well. Wouldn't be right to call him Ivan.

Wolf: I will endeavor to use the correct appellation . . .

Lisa: See, a long time ago, when the sun was killed . . .

Heather: Score!

Madeline stares at her for a moment. Heather holds up her quest card for "Changes," which offers an XP for "listening to stories about things that were lost when Jade Irinka died."

Heather, repeating: Score.

Lisa: . . . when the sun was killed, one of her horses fell screaming into the Lake; and he who found it and made it a ferry for us— well, you can't call a guy like that "Ivan."

Miriam: Wait, it used to be a real horse?

Lisa: Still is, really. It's one of those ningnummies.

Miriam: Ningnummies?

Lisa: A sacred thing.

[[Heather decides that counted, though maybe only barely, and marks her XP towards **Changes**.]]

Madeline, continuing from Lisa's statement: She passes out plates. Eggs, fish sausage, some grits.

Wolf: Ah. [*peers down at the notional plate.*] It is . . . food?

Madeline: Grits are food!

Edward, raising his hands: I wasn't going to accuse them *in character* of being otherwise!

Madeline laughs. Then, as Lisa: It's why you're staying here.

Miriam: Because we might unexpectedly turn into ferries?

Diane: Gale splutters food.

Wolf: Gale! A knight eats what's before him! Or her!

Gale: I was spluttering!

Wolf: Splutter with more decorum.

Gale: Pardon, ma'am. [*as Diane*] I'll push a Will through Knight-Guardian in order to splutter with decorum and grace.

Madeline: . . . er?

Diane: Level 3!

[[Level 2 Skill + 1 Will produces a level 3 Intention, meaning that Gale can in fact splutter *properly*, in a competent and self-assured fashion.]]

Madeline: Oh. OK, everyone, Gale has revised her mode of spluttering from the previous graceless hiccougging to the sort of spluttering taught in the Knight-Guardian Academy of your former world.

Diane: Woo.

Madeline: . . . you were supposed to say “really?”

Diane: Oh! Really?

Madeline: Not really.

[[Madeline has a lot of say in how the Intention system actually translates into events.]]

Madeline: I think the best you can do with a 3 is splutter after the fashion that someone who is well-bred but is nevertheless spluttering can do, which is to say, looking embarrassed or possibly really quietly while the grits or eggs but probably not the sausage burble out between your teeth.

Heather: . . . that is a moment that is going to stick with me.

[[Heather tosses a **Slice of Life** XP into the group pot and puts her head down on the table.]]

Diane: Ooh! Ooh! You’re head-desking!

Heather, confirming: Head-desk.

[[Diane takes an XP.]]

Miriam, muttering: Something is wrong with the world.

Wolf: You said it was why we were here, ma’am?

Lisa: Well, you’re a sacred mystery yourself, aren’t you?

Wolf hesitates, then brushes the front of his shirt modestly.

Lisa: ’Zackly. Though, if you *wanted* to turn into ferryboats I reckon we wouldn’t mind it.

Gale shakes her head.

Wolf: I think that is not our destiny.

Gale, almost wistfully: Lot to recommend it, though.

Wolf: Gale.

Gale: Wolf! I mean it! Just think, out there every day on the water— I liked it, you know. But I’d have to be the crow’s nest. Not the figurehead. That could be you.

Wolf: Gale.

Gale: You are extremely bad at indulging my whims. I’ve half a mind to ask the temple for a new knight-commander.

[[Edward head-desks, to no avail, it being within 15 minutes of the last time.]]

Lisa, after a moment: What are you going to do, then?

Wolf: I’ll see where the wind takes me. [*pauses*] I mean, in a non-ship . . . ferriless fashion. Unfarrier. I don’t know what the word is for “a fashion that is not how a ferry does things.”

Lisa: Ah. [*after another silence*] I could give you some advice, if you . . .

Wolf: If I?

Lisa: Emmabelle hardly told me anything. So . . . if I knew.

Wolf: Ah.

Lisa: You know. Who *are* you?

[[Edward, after a moment, puts a **Shared Reactions** XP on the table.]]

Wolf: I’m alive past my time.

Gale: Hey, you’re the only one of us who *isn’t*.

Wolf: I’m alive past my time, and I want to keep these jerks alive past theirs. That’s all.

Miriam, muttering, still stuck on Gale’s table manners: We will be Fortitude’s new clowns.

Wolf, shrugging: It turns out that it is a surprisingly privileged position to have a spacious mountain temple to protect, endless training, and the power to decide who lives and who dies. I don’t know quite what to do without it.

Lisa: Can’t say we have many mountain temples here. You could teach people, though?

Wolf, as if his thoughts had been interrupted: What?

Lisa: Well, if you had endless training. You know, spread it around a little.

Wolf: . . . I don’t think that they will line up to be knights in milady’s service. . . . no offense, milady.

Miriam, waving a hand, head still on the table: None taken.

Lisa: Fair enough.

Gale: I’m going to work at a convenience mart!

Miriam, lifting her head: What?

Gale: When we went there yesterday to get energy drinks for Wolf, it was so romantic! Did you see the box of refrigerated pre-packaged frozen sugar water?

Miriam: . . . I saw some . . . things.

Gale: There was a giant box of coldness with three shelves of all kinds of fabulous wonders. And they had pinwheels! Oh, and Wolf could work beside me! We could be the Two Knights-Cashier!

[[Diane appears to believe “Knights-Cashier” to be correct grammar in some language, although possibly in affected pseudo-Medieval pseudo-French instead of English.]]

Wolf: Training, you say?

Lisa: I was thinking, in martial arts. . . . if it suits you, I mean.

Wolf: Mm.

Lisa: You don’t have to!

Wolf: I’ll keep it in mind. [*almost uncomfortably*] You said there might be a renovation project?

Lisa: Well, I have been hoping to clean up the roof some, if you’re up for high places?

Edward: . . . clearly she has me and Gale confused. Go teach martial arts, Wolf! Go up to high places, Wolf! . . . fine, fine. Um, right. IC. [*as Wolf*] Sure. Sure thing.

Gale, giggling: Heeheehee.

Madeline: Cut scene, then, to . . .

Diane: Job application!

Madeline: Haha, yeah, I guess the other two are kind of faded, makes sense. I don’t have any idea how it will go.

Diane: Well, I have to scour Fortitude from the roofs looking for a convenience store that will take me. If Miriam doesn’t mind?

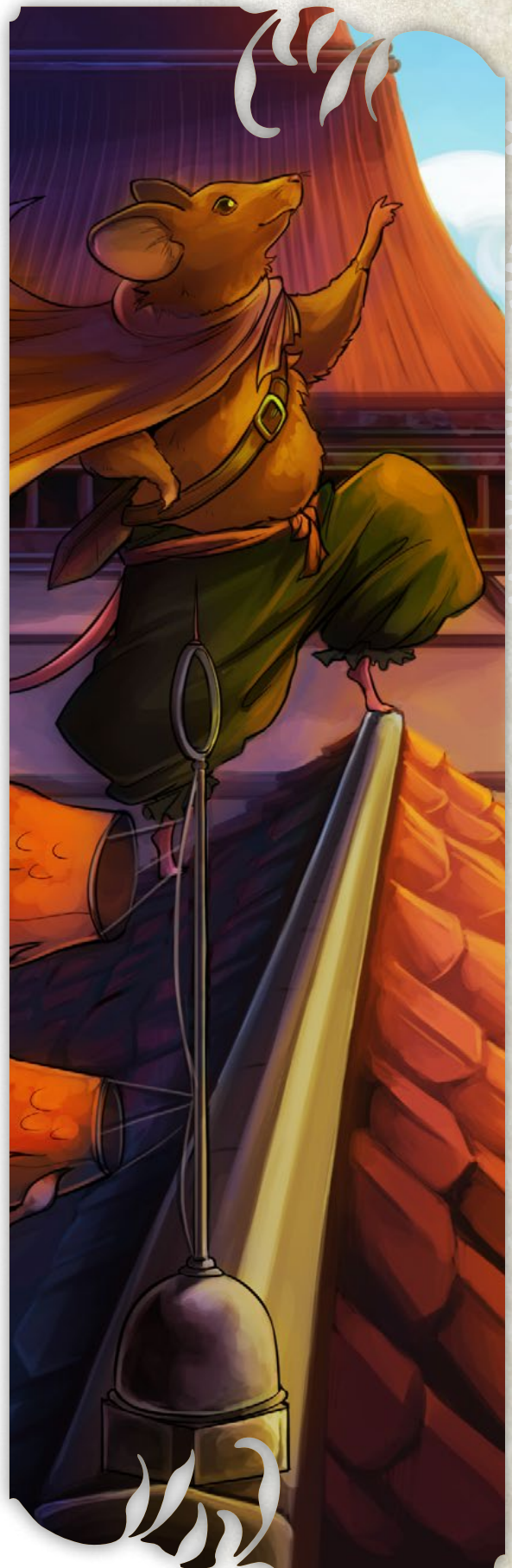
Heather: That’s fine. [*switching slowly IC over the course of the sentence*] I may . . . I need a little while. Anyway. I need to think.

Diane: Right, roof to roof jumping to find something!

Madeline: You’re not alone up there.

Diane: No?

Madeline: Indeed not! You’re pausing next to a spire with a weathervane atop, resting for a moment, when you realize there’s a foot-tall rat in a cape there . . . doing much the same!



Diane: Glah! Rat! Recoil!

Madeline: Do you say that?

Diane: . . . I probably just flinch back to a nearby roof. You know. Ten, twenty feet *thataway*. [*as Gale*] Don't eat me! I haven't done anything bad!

Madeline: . . . what?

Diane: It says 'what?' or you say 'what?'

Madeline: Do rats normally eat people for being bad?

Diane: Well, it was a plausible theory. I guess if it doesn't say anything, after I recover from the startlement, I'll approach and hold out my hand.

Madeline, as the rat: I say!

Diane: Wait, does it have a monocle?

Madeline: . . . you can say 'I say' without having a monocle.

Heather: But it should totally have a monocle.

Edward: I am forced to agree.

Heather: And a top hat!

Edward: A cup of tea! And a picnic blanket! And a floating eyebrow over its other eye to stare at Gale under!

Madeline: . . . you can have the monocle. Under protest. "I say! That was a decent jump for a two-footer."

Gale: I am definitely someone excellent. You are . . . closer to being two feet than I am, though.

Madeline, as the rat: Oh, your speech hasn't fully adapted to a language-less environment. You must be new! Denisov, at your service.

Gale: I see. I mean, um, Gale. Pleased to meet you too. [*hesitantly*] I am looking for a job at the convenience store.

Denisov: Oh! If only I were authorized to hire you for such a place. But as you can see I am on a heroic journey.

Gale: I had rather thought you might be my magical animal guide.

Madeline, while acting it out: Monocle-adjustment. Glare.

Gale: I mean, um. . . . There is no salvaging this, is there.

Denisov: Well, at least you can recognize your own rudeness.

Gale: Oh, yes! Wolf has trained me extensively in the matter.

Madeline tries to say something else, but breaks down laughing instead. Finally, she says: I'd head-desk you but I think it's still too soon.

Diane: Bah.

Edward: That reminds me, I'm supposed to do things that earn me XP sometimes.

Madeline: We can scene-switch in a moment?

Edward: It was more in the way of a general observation. Unless Gale's so turned around that we're within ear-shot.

Gale: You said a heroic adventure?

Denisov: Well, I've been hunting— [*as Madeline*] One sec.

[[Madeline has a vague half-idea on what Denisov is hunting ("some sort of Mystery"), but wants to figure out her options. She flips through the book until she finds the section on Mysteries. She looks at it for a minute, thinking, then has an idea. She shakes her head a few times in rejection of the start of Denisov's sentence.]]

Madeline: Sorry, strike that. Let's take this from "heroic adventure?"

Gale: You said a heroic adventure?

Denisov: Mm. Yes. There's been signs of a new Mystery, you see. Something wicked. There's a shadow of a scythe on the book of names and whispers of something awful in the air. Death, I'd have guessed, death come to Fortitude, if I didn't know better; but since it can't very well be *him*, I've been trying to figure out what it is *really*.

Gale: Oh. [*laughs, and with false innocence*] Shadow of a scythe, huh?

Denisov: It's our duty, you see. The rats. We stop things like that from getting too much of a foothold here. Well, not so much here as *down there*, if you know what I mean. [*as Madeline:*] He makes meaningful gestures down towards the street, as if to imply that people and houses and the part of Fortitude that *isn't* the roofs is another magisterium, another world.

Diane: I am totally not trusting him with a shared reaction. Instead I am going to burst in on Wolf. I mean, an hour or two later. [*as Gale*] Wolf! Wolf! *Wolf, striking a pose:* A man has responsibilities!

[[Edward marks an XP for his basic quest.]]

Gale: . . . what are you doing?

Wolf: I am assisting our hostess in “lolling.”

Gale: . . . I see.

Wolf, awkwardly: She . . . [*as Edward*] OK, fine, I put the XP back. I’m probably not assisting our hostess in lolling. I may be mixing some sort of roof goop.

Diane: That suggests that you don’t need to put the XP back, as that is legitimately something that could fall under knightly responsibilities.

Edward: Yes, but, but, my POSE. Fine. I’ll keep the XP. Or seize it later, at a point in the conversation when my declaration can be legitimate!

Gale: Wolf! Wolf!

Wolf: Pardon? [*wipes brow.*]

Gale: . . . why are you stirring mysterious goop in a bathtub?

Wolf: A man has responsibilities.

Gale: . . . no time to wonder about that! The rats are on to us. Wait. That isn’t it either. Wolf. [*as Diane*] Hang on, let me de-excite.

Edward, graciously: Of course.

Gale, calmly, holding up a finger for attention: Um. It appears that the scythe has been noticed.

Wolf: ‘Noticed?’

Gale: It appears to be shadowing . . . something. [*as Diane*] And now a Shared Reactions. [*as Gale*] Wolf, I don’t want rats with monocles to hate us!

Edward: Weren’t you going to be this solitary, focused martial artist?

Diane: Concepts evolve.

Wolf: I . . . [*hesitates. As Edward:*] Madeline, can I . . . what can I do about this? Can I get the scythe to behave itself and do less of this shadowing thing?

Madeline: How would I know? It’s your character prop! I’ve barely touched it!

Edward: . . . right.

Wolf: I don’t think you should worry about it, Gale.

Gale: I . . .

Wolf: I get it. You’re thinking: what if everyone hates us here? But seriously. It’s fine.

Gale: But we’re scaring them.

Wolf: Want the wisdom, straight from the ancient traditions of the Knight-Guardians, kid?

Gale: Yeah?

Wolf: Don’t borrow trouble.

Gale: Heh.

Wolf: Can you stir this for a minute? I want to make sure the thing’s not worming its way free of the box and evilly glowering or anything. But if it’s not? If it’s just, you know, the scythe? Then I promise you. It’s fine.

Gale: I’ll put my faith in you.

[[*Diane extends Wolf an XP token.*]]

Edward: I ruffle your brow. [*as Wolf*] Good kid.

Madeline: Heather?

Heather: Mm?

Madeline: A day or two has passed. You are feeling free of the burden of seeing eggs spluttering out between your junior knight-guardian’s teeth in front of one of the few locals you know and possibly even respect every time you close your eyes.

Heather: Oh, good!

Madeline: Now it is time to take your first brave steps into this new world of Town.

Heather: I want to meditate on the roof.

Madeline: . . . it’s being redone. With goop. Apparently.

Heather: . . . on the dock?

Madeline: That’s possible. You can probably find a chair or just dangle your feet over the edge, as long as you’re not in people’s way when the ferry goes in and out.

Heather: I can let my feet dangle, though it doesn’t seem very much like meditating. More like meditating than sitting in a reclining chair with a beach umbrella, though, which . . . nobody was suggesting but my cruel, cruel subconscious.

Madeline: Indeed.

Heather: I just . . . it’s going to take me a while to sort my thoughts. Days. Maybe even weeks. I guess I’m going to make sure that’s OK.

Madeline: Like, asking Lisa?

Heather: Yeah. Like: [*as Miriam*] Um. I find myself . . . wanting to know . . .

Lisa: Hm?

Miriam: It is all right that we are staying here?

[[*Heather puts a **Shared Reactions** XP on the table, because, while the incident seems pretty minor and even redundant to her, she’s definitely reaching out.*]]

Lisa: I don't think you'd be here if it wasn't.

Miriam: I am not used to needing charity.

Lisa, making an amused face: I'm not used to people stressing out over it. You know, hon, half the kids who crash here can't afford more than a breath and a blessing. If I start having trouble making ends meet, I'll let you know.

Miriam: But I . . . I am concerned that it will not be right.

Lisa: Sounds like you're making excuses to worry. Is sorting out your thoughts that scary?

Heather: Does she know I'm doing that?

[[Heather is bothered by the NPC knowing more than she ought. There's no particularly good reason for this but Madeline doesn't have any particularly good reason to push for it either, so:]]

Madeline: . . . I don't know. I mean, maybe she says "Is finding your footing that scary?"

Miriam: It just might take a while.

Lisa: Look. Pay it back or pay it forward or something. You've just lost a planet. If you want to hide in your room and shiver for a month, I'd let you be; if all you're going to do is stare at the water and think, well, frankly, I'm kind of impressed you're up for doing that instead.

Miriam: It was already lost.

Lisa: What?

Miriam: Most of my life. It was already lost. I knew it was coming. It doesn't bother me. It's not the problem. The problem is *being here*.

Lisa, non-committal: Mm.

Miriam: It really has nothing to do with them. I had already forgotten all that! It's done! It's over. I was thinking about *me*. I just don't want to. I am not doing a very good job of arguing in my defense here.

Lisa: You're not alone.

Miriam: Heh.

Lisa: Look, hon. I figure, in life, we're here for a reason. OK? We all wind up where we are for some reason or other. So if you're here— well, be here. You know? You really want to stress about it, start stressing in three weeks or so when I start revving up for the end of the break. But even then you guys don't have to go, that's just the first time when you'll be a moment's inconvenience.

Miriam: . . . Three weeks.

Lisa: That's just how long you're supposed to *not* worry.

Miriam: I can avoid worrying for three weeks.

Madeline gives Heather a thumbs-up. She hesitates. Then: But no XP from me.

Edward: You're a player!

Madeline: Yeah, but I pay too much attention and my perspective is weird. I'd rather just legitimize the emotions of you guys instead of contributing my own.

Edward: Fine! I'll . . . tell Gale to go give a thumbs-up to Miriam.

Diane: Knocking on the door. [*as Gale*] Thumbs-up for you, milady. [*as Diane*] Wandering away.

[[Diane tosses Heather an XP.]]

Heather: I've lost track of the scene.

Madeline: . . . that's fine. I think that was an adequate Shared Reactions anyway.

[[Belatedly remembering, Diane adds an XP to the pot for her earlier **Shared Reactions** with Wolf.]]

Madeline: Eh?

Diane: Belatedly remembering!

Madeline: Ah. So, OK, you and Wolf still have actions for a week, and the dream. Shall we visit Gale's dream-world next?

Diane: Sure! I want to deal with a child who lives/ hangs out there.

Heather: I'm not a child!

Madeline: Ooh, chibi-Miriam. Or chibi-Wolf. Chibi-Wolf would be cuter.

Edward: And practically unimaginable.

Madeline: I bet Gale is older than Miriam, though, as young as Gale seems sometimes. I mean, think about it: you died! At some point!

Heather: Fine. You can dream of chibi-me.

Gale: Wolf! Wolf! Wolf-wolf! Is this her?

Wolf: This is our illustrious lady, Miriam Lockwood, the world's ending and the world's blessing; yes.

Gale, apparently pretty young herself: Can I play dress-up with her?

Wolf: You may kneel before her and offer her your service.

Gale: Hm. [*tilts head this way. Tilts head that way.*] She's very quiet.

Miriam: I was not expecting this.

Gale: You weren't?

Miriam: I was not told that I was to be here. [*makes a face*] It is very tall.

Gale: Aw, Wolf's not so bad.

Miriam: No. The mountain. [*hesitates*] Also Wolf.

Gale: Heehee.

Wolf: I am blessed with such sprightly children.

Gale: [*as Edward*] I'm shoving you meaningfully on the back of the shoulders, down and forward [*as Wolf*] You are to pledge your loyalty.

Gale: Loyalty, ma'am.

Wolf: Milady.

Gale: Aww, you don't have to call me— oh. Milady. [*making as much of an approximation to a kneeling gesture as she can do given that Diane, who is playing her, is sitting at a table*] I pledge you my undying service.

Miriam, lips twitching: Really.

Gale: It's a promise! Want to see the bird-house? It's on top of the roof!

Wolf: Gale, you won't take the illustrious world's-blessing and world's-ending up on the rooftops. She could um get hurt.

Gale: Oh. But I never get hurt! I go up there all the time and I've never even broken my neck *once*.

Miriam: I will expect this behavior to continue. Wolf, um.

Wolf: Hm?

Miriam: I am tired and everything seems to be covered in water.

Wolf: That's because you are the herald of the world's drowning, milady.

Miriam: Oh.

Wolf: It's why I'm here. It's for you. For at the end.

Miriam: . . . I miss my mommy.

Madeline: There's a flick of a shadow passing above you in the waters and Gale wakes.

Diane: Wait, what happened to Miriam's family? I thought they were death priests?

Heather: I thought so too, but now I think maybe something happened and she was taken there. Or not! [*quoting from a previous group discussion/argument about when things become canonical*] On-camera or it didn't happen!

Madeline: Gale might not even know. I mean, she almost certainly *does*, but if that dream counts as a flashback too then she was definitely not driving things.

Edward: Our death cult has a long and illustrious tradition of dragging children to our mountain base for indoctrination without adequate explanation. It's what makes us so sacred.

Madeline: Gasp!

Edward: Gasp indeed.

Madeline: So, what is Wolf doing these days, now that he's out of that business?

Edward: Um, hm. Roof stuff? Up there, . . . shingling things?

Madeline: Shingling things?

Edward: I've never actually done anything on a real roof. I'm a dashing handsome renter.

Madeline: I'm not sure the adjective is relevant . . .

Edward: Well, you see, in the modern world, the best way to get discount-rate housing is to dazzle the impersonal corporation owning your housing development with a stunning smile, not some antiquated-ly helpful handymanning roof repairishness. Thus evolutionary pressure has led me to be, not equipped to understand how roofs work like my primitive ancestors, but rather dashing handsome, bubbly charismatic, and folksy as a bull on a bender— instead!

Madeline closes her eyes for a moment. Then: OK. Fine. You're shingling things. On the roof. With goop.

Edward: The goop is weather sealant. Also, I'd hoped I'd say something funny but that came out kind of plausible.

Madeline: I suppose.

Edward: Like, it's traditional in one or the other world, I don't know which, to put this goop crust on the shingles, and then it hardens and gets a little shiny but not smelly at all and it helps keep out the rain. Awesome stuff, goop!

Madeline: OK.

Edward, verging into Wolf: Gale! Could you help me with this stuff?

Gale: Mm? What do you need? [*as Diane*] I'm totally perching on something. I don't know what. Something improbable.

Wolf: I'd rather not drop the bucket or the shingles while I'm spreading the goop, much less lose

my grip and slide down to break my neck on the ground below.

Gale: That doesn't happen to hardly anybody.

Edward: Didn't we just heavily imply that's how you died in the first place?

Diane: Oh, sure, it's how *I* died, but that was a special case! I slipped!

Wolf: It only has to happen once to put a damper on our assimilation into Fortitude culture.

Gale: Point taken. Ah, well, sure. I was awake anyway. Let me change into my roof clothes.

Wolf, presumably after Gale's gone back inside: She has roof clothes? [*as Edward*] I'm going to toss a Shared Action XP into the pot for doing the chore together?

Madeline: Sure, that works.

Edward: I wasn't sure if it was enough.

Madeline: You actively invited Gale. Gale didn't ignore you. Assuming Gale doesn't get ambushed by a laundry monster or something before getting back out there, it should be fine. I mean, conversations're better in a case-by-case way but it'd be worse if you started feeling like you *had* to have them or something.

Edward: Then some quiet roof-work together is fine, I think.

[[Edward puts a **Shared Action** XP into the group pot.]]

Diane: Speaking of conversation, um, [*as Gale*] Was the scythe OK?

Wolf: Nothing special. I'm thinking that maybe one of the local temples might be able to help, you know, kind of . . . introduce it to the place. Make it not so much a mysterious foreign invading spiritual presence as a formally announced visitor. But I don't know the customs for that stuff here.

Gale: Huh.

Wolf, shrugging: Thanks for reminding me. I'll . . . I'll see who to talk to. Maybe start visiting them next week.

Gale: Next week?

Wolf: It doesn't feel right.

[[Edward marks an XP towards his **Bind** quest, not for "it doesn't feel right" but for the idea of visiting the local temples.]]

Wolf: It's not the kind of scythe you take to an enemy temple on an inauspicious day.

Gale: If you like.

Madeline, after a moment: Cut scene?

Diane: Sure.

Madeline: Hm. One more . . . Miriam action?

Diane: Gale action.

Madeline: One more Gale action! And then that'll be the week. What's Gale going to be doing? And drag Miriam along, she's just sulking.

Heather: I am not! I am contemplating infinity!

Madeline: Sul-kuh-ing.

Heather: That is not three words. Also, it would make a truly terrible Pokémon. I'm imagining some sort of giant sulking frog in a crown. Because it is a king.

Gale: Milady, I have a job interview.

Miriam: Hm?

Gale: I ask you to accompany me, that you may be a "reference." Because of my years of faithful service to you.

Miriam: Oh. [*as Heather, looking at her basic quest card*] Can I say that my card really should have been flipped, and unflip it?

Madeline: . . . all matters related to card-flipping are entirely on your own conscience. Just think what the Marquess of Queensberry would do and act accordingly.

[[Heather flips her card to "Contemplating Death," then formally claims an XP by flipping it back to "In the World of Life" in response to Gale's request. She doesn't, however, engage in any sort of fisticuffs.]]

Miriam: I would be honored.

Gale: I found this shop. "Seven Gardens Mart" with an opening for a helper. They were very impressed with me but asked in regards to my previous employment. Apparently I impressed them as a "real Horizon girl."

Miriam: Horizon?

Gale: I think it's over the hills, milady.

Miriam: I shall absolutely assist in your interview. Do you want to bring Wolf as well?

Gale: I believe he would only prejudice my case, milady.

Miriam: Mm. You judge him harshly.

[[Diane puts a **Shared Reactions** XP in the pot, preparatory to reaching out:]]

Gale: This is all right with you, milady? This is OK? I'm . . . a little scared to leave your service.

Miriam: You're not leaving it.

Gale: But I won't be on hand. I mean, what if . . . something happens and I am facilitating in the exchange of goods and services at the Seven Gardens Mart on Marlin Street?

Miriam: Gale.

Gale: Yes?

Miriam: If something happens, I will look up, and you will be there.

Gale, bobbing her head as if to kneel: . . . my undying service.

Miriam: My shining knight.

Madeline: And in this fashion do we end the week. Orientation on Sunday for Gale!

Edward: Week ends?

Madeline: Week ends. Um . . . you guys were pretty active. Does that make sense? Particularly Gale. A point of **Over your Head** to her.

Diane: I'm over your heads killing your dudes! [salutes, for no clear reason other than the vaguely military connotations of her statement.]

Last Ship Out

Conclusion

[[The game's run for about four hours now, which Madeline realizes as she thinks about continuing. This leads to the following exchange:]]

Madeline: And . . . I'm not sure we've got time for another week today, so maybe one last scene and some foreshadowing?

Edward: Sure thing.

Madeline: It's Friday morning, and you're . . . up, doing whatever, thinking, walking, working . . . and you can see the ship that brought you in raise up its sails and head back out; you don't know for what or for whom. It heads back out to distant waters and it's gone; and in the sky, for just a moment, you can see the flicker of a shadow against the sun.

Last Ship Out

Week 3 Recap

The third IC week featured the following XP Actions—

✿ **Changes (Miriam):** discussion of the ferry, and how its original form was lost when Jade Irinka died.

✿ **Slice of Life (Miriam):** the lingering realization that Gale is a goof

✿ **Shared Reactions (Wolf):** Wolf admits his sense of having lived too long to Lisa.

✿ **Shared Reactions (Gale):** Gale admits she doesn't want her new home's talking rats to hate her.

✿ **Shared Reactions (Miriam):** Miriam is nervous around Lisa.

✿ **Above the Fray (Gale):** Dream/flashback of Gale meeting Miriam.

✿ **Shared Action (Wolf):** roof repairs with Gale

✿ **Shared Reactions (Gale):** wondering if it's OK to be sort-of leaving Miriam's service to get a job.

If the group divides the group pot now,

- ✿ Miriam will have 8 generic XP, 3 XP for her quest **Changes**, and 2 XP for her basic quest. She also has **Trust 2** and **(in) Over your Head 1**.
- ✿ Wolf will have 8 generic XP, 3 XP for **Bind**, and 2 XP for his basic quest. He also has **Trust 1** and **Sickness 1**.
- ✿ Gale will have 8 generic XP, plus 1 XP towards her basic quest and 8 XP towards “Above the Fray.” She also has **Trust 1**, **Sickness 1**, and is about to receive **(in) Over your Head 1**.

That said, let’s talk about Issues for a moment.

The characters’ Issues represent dramatic tension and ongoing story movement in their lives. Some of that is going to get lost on the player level between sessions—the stuff that prompted the Issues to rise will get forgotten and any sense of continuity between what happens later and what happened now will be lost.

Accordingly, at the end of the session, each player picks the Issue point they think of as least interesting, most forgettable, or least likely to continue carrying forward and drop it. Heather can’t remember where her second Trust point came from—the island encounter wasn’t as big a deal for her—so she drops that. Wolf feels that his Sickness will linger, so he drops Trust too.

Gale, on the other hand, doesn’t feel particularly (in) Over (Her) Head, so that goes away before it even lands.

The group divides the XP pot and the PCs spend their XP on their quests. Nobody is particularly driven to spend XP on their basic quest—it’ll finish on its own eventually—so both Heather and Edward spend their XP on their Arc quest. Gale, on the other hand, picks up the quest **A New Job**, since she has one, and puts an XP into it to make it feel “real” before spending the rest of her XP on **Above the Fray**.

The session ends with the characters in the following state:

Miriam

Miriam has put

- ✿ 11/35 XP towards **Changes** and
- ✿ 2/15 XP towards her basic quest.

She also has **Trust 1** and **(in) Over Your Head 1**, meaning that she has a persistent awareness that she’s not alone but also a sense that something is *wrong*.

She’s currently motivated—well, strictly speaking, her player is—to start pushing towards the 5-XP bonuses for her quest “Changes.” That means that she’ll be angling for more flashback dreams next session in hopes of having a premonition of somebody’s death or the chance to help a mysterious child of some sort find their way.

Wolf

Wolf has put

- ✿ 11/50 XP towards **Bind** and
- ✿ 2/15 XP towards his basic quest.

He also has **Sickness 1**, pushing him towards being a bit tired and out of sorts.

Edward’s hoping to foreground his quests a little more in the next session, spending his next few weeks visiting the various shrine families of Fortitude to talk about the scythe.

Gale

Gale has put

- ✿ 15/35 XP towards **Above the Fray**,
- ✿ 1/15 XP towards her basic quest, and
- ✿ 1/35 XP towards **A New Job**—specifically, since there are two versions of this quest, the pastoral one (right).

She also has **Trust 1** and **Sickness 1**, meaning that she’s both persistently aware that she’s not alone in her new situation and that there’s something *wrong* (at least, in her mind) about their shared circumstances.

MADLINE

A New Job (Pastoral Version)

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest when...

- You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 15 XP.

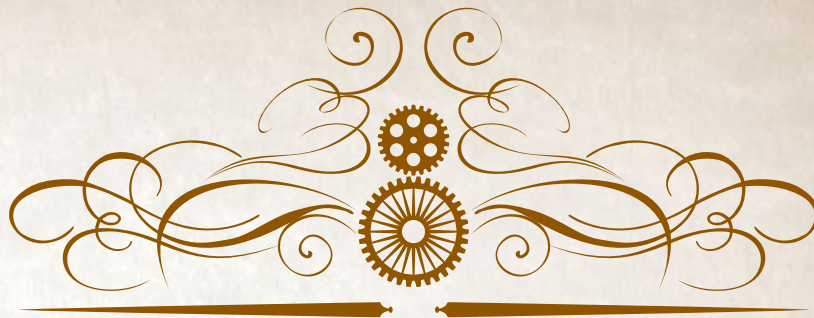
1/chapter, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest by...

- You can combine this with an XP Action, but you're not required to.

XP

A purple decorative page with a grid of 40 white circles (8 rows by 5 columns) and a floral pattern.





Stray Gods

Chapter 1: The Eating Contest



Players and Genre

Stray Gods is a tabletop game that Madeline sometimes runs when Edward Jordan's friend Hannah is in town. It stars:

- ✿ Madeline Rush, running the game;
- ✿ Hannah Fielding, playing Idrissa Wen; *and*
- ✿ Edward Jordan, playing her adopted brother/minion Lu Wen!

It's set in the "**Techno**" genre, focusing on:

- ✿ Foreshadowing,
- ✿ Sympathetic Action,

- ✿ Discovery,
- ✿ Transition, *and*
- ✿ Ritual.

Once again the players are making up most of the mythology involved as they go along. They don't even really have everything that I'm going to include in the character write-ups below when the game actually starts.

Idrissa Wen

Hannah is playing **Idrissa Wen**, a fox-eared goddess of old. Her power grew too terrible for the world and she was exiled into the divine dimension. Now she can only visit the world on weekends, taking over the body of her priestess, **Idrissa Takamishi!**

Her Traits are these:

- ✿ **Thousand Brass Chains Martial God Technique 3**
- ✿ **Fashion 3**
- ✿ **Fire and Lightning Magic 2**

Her martial technique is really just ordinary martial arts with some number of fighting chains hidden in her sleeves. Possibly more than two, almost certainly fewer than a thousand.

She starts with 2 Normal Health Levels, 1 Tough Health Level, 1 Divine Health Level, a level 1 Connection to Lu Wen, 5 MP, and a starting Arc with the following miraculous powers:

- ✿  **Otherworldly (Child of the Ash) 1—**
 - **Set the Mood (Doom)**
 - **Doom-Splosion**
 - **Wicked Mode**
 - **Kaiju Form**
 - **Mortal Form**
 - **Shed Scales**

These abilities give her the limited ability to invoke impending doom, transform into a giant

many-tailed fox goddess orbited by brass chains, and ignore certain practical elements of comparative scale. Her "Wicked Mode" offers an alternative: by demanding and donning her halo hat from her brother Lu Wen, she can become a holy creature instead who evokes the emotion of happiness.

XP EMOTION

After some discussion, Hannah has opted for a tragic XP option:

"Aww!" XP, for that "you poor thing" feeling.

It's usually meant for tragic figures, but she figures that it'll do for tragicomic figures as long as Edward plays along.

BASIC QUEST

Idrissa, despite believing herself tragically unable to understand humanity, never ceases to pontificate upon it!

She can pick up bonus XP towards this quest by proposing a new theory on human nature.

ARC QUEST

Idrissa is on an Otherworldly Arc, a storyline reflecting her progressive corruption by the modern world. She starts out on a generic 35-XP quest, wherein her weekend visits to the mortal realm are connecting her to a "modern spirit"—

Represented by a card that she keeps in front of her. One side reads "Lost Goddess of the Old

Days,” which is the default state, but she can earn an XP towards this quest by flipping the card to its other side, “I LIKE this Modern World.”

Once she gets 35 XP towards this quest she will “know what [she has] to do about this—a path [she is] called to walk, or something [she] must do to keep these experiences under control. It is possible that [she’ll find] 2-3 options; if so, it is possible to choose wrongly.”

HOW OFTEN CAN SHE EARN XP?

Her two quests are incompatible for reasons we don’t have to go into at this time, so she can earn one emotion XP and one quest XP every 15 minutes or so RL.





LU WEN

Edward Jordan is playing **Lu Wen**. Long ago he was an ordinary human scientist specializing in monstrous experiments. But after becoming Idrissa's boyfriend didn't work out, he became her foolish adopted brother and minion, instead! This led inexorably to his being declared a god on the official registers and he was exiled beside her to the divine dimension. Now he can only visit the world on weekends by possessing the body of his priest, **Lu Bu (no relation)**!

His Traits are these:

- ⚙ **Deviant Science 3**
- ⚙ **A Plan for Everything 3**
- ⚙ **"My sister!" [and taking action for her/in her name] 2**

He starts with 2 Normal Health Levels, 1 Tough Health Level, 1 Divine Health Level, a level 1 Connection to Idrissa Wen, 5 MP, and a starting Arc with the following miraculous powers:

- ⚙ **Knave (Reality Syndrome) 1—**
 - **Shared Experience (his perspective on Idrissa Wen)**
 - **Dreams made Flesh**
 - **Childish Dreams**

The first powers allow him to on rare occasions share his rose-colored view of Idrissa Wen with others, possibly including herself. The last allows him to "have set a plan in motion" weeks, months, or years ago to summon or get to whatever he wants right then. Often when he summons something it is replaced with a Buddha statue that falls from a Rube Goldberg device and, through a chain of reactions, sends whatever it is flying into his hands.

XP EMOTION

Edward has opted for the XP option of the selfish and aggravating:

"Fist-shaking" XP, rewarding him an XP when you just have to shake your fist at the sky and shout his name.

He can earn one fist-shaking XP every 15 minutes.

Lu is on a Knight Arc, a storyline reflecting the slow development of his godly powers. He starts out on the quest, **the Challenge Log**, wherein he must overcome a series of challenges laid out in the Challenge Log to become worthy of his sister and his godhood.

You can combine this with an XP Action, but you're not required to.

[illegible]

Stray Gods: Chapter 1

Teaser

Idrissa Wen: Harken, o pitiful mortals, to the tragic tale of Idrissa and Lu Wen.

Lu Wen: I attend!

Idrissa: You are not a pitiful mortal, brother.

Lu: I cannot know that. The story has not yet reached that chapter!

Idrissa: Well, I shall accept that notion this once. But do not test my patience further!

Lu: I attend with less patience-testing devotion! Surely there is something about this in my challenge log.

Idrissa: My brother!

Lu: My sister!

Idrissa: If I must slay you, the Heavens themselves will weep at this senseless tragedy!

Edward: I achieve a state of silent, listening regard.

Idrissa Wen: Long ago when the world was a brighter, better place, without the curse of modernity, I lived as a simple, happy fox goddess bringing storms and disasters to the mortal world.

Lu: Such disasters!

Idrissa: I met and fell in love with a young man—

Lu: In love, sister?

Idrissa: Have patience! Yes, we were in love. A beautiful and tragic love. For when we kissed, it was the most terrible of all events!

Lu: My heart weeps for you!

[[Edward tosses Hannah an **Aw**! XP]]

Lu: But what was this event?

Idrissa: Do you not remember, my brother?

Lu: . . . do I . . . not remember?

Idrissa: How I had been drinking orange juice before that awful, terrible kiss?

Lu: . . . orange juice. Oh!

Idrissa: Yes!

Lu: It was thus!

Idrissa: And you!

Lu: And I?

Idrissa: Had been brushing . . . oh, I weep to say it! Had been brushing . . .

Lu: Ah! My sister! The Heavens weep! I had been brushing my teeth!

Idrissa: Such a wicked taste!

Lu: There is no going back from it!

Idrissa: In that moment I understood that our romantic love was never to be. But our hearts found a different way to be together.

Lu: As adopted brother and sister!

Idrissa: Two souls as one!

Lu: Endlessly annoyed with one another!

Idrissa: A brother, my most dedicated servant!

Lu: Oh. [*tilts his head.*] I am your most dedicated servant?

Idrissa: Do you think you are not?

Lu: Well, you see, when we kissed.

Idrissa: Bleah!

Lu: Yes, yes, I understand, but when we kissed, you see, I had been brushing my teeth.

Idrissa: I do recall it.

Lu: And you had been drinking . . .

Idrissa: Had been drinking?

Lu: Well, you had been drinking . . . the orange . . .

Idrissa: I do not drink oranges.

Lu: What?

Idrissa: I do not even think it is possible to drink oranges, brother. You are mistaken. The peel would stick in your mouth.

Lu: I, er,

Idrissa: Besides, do you think my mouth is big enough to fit oranges in it, brother?

Lu: . . . small ones?

Idrissa: I suppose.

Lu: In any case, you had been drinking orange juice. So I can hardly be your most dedicated servant. After an appalling incident like that! I will allow *you* to be *my* minion!

Idrissa: Regrettably I must now tie you with heavy chains and dangle you from the ceiling until the next scene, my brother.

Lu: Well, it is only just. But—

Idrissa: But?

Lu: You must shake your fist in the air and shout my name before doing so.

Idrissa: You will not accommodate my trivial request without my indulgence in your bizarre fist-shaking fetishes, my brother?

Lu: Alas, my sister! But if you do not grant me this small request I shall spend the entire time I am chained helplessly imagining you guzzling down whole oranges, one after another, with a comically deformed jaw and mouth!

Idrissa, shaking her fist: Lu!!!! How could you?

Lu: Ah, it is done.

Idrissa: No! No, you have tricked me. That was a genuine outrage!

[[Hannah places a **Fist-Shaking** XP token in Edward's hand, then mimes grabbing that hand and slamming him into the wall with it!]]

Hannah: XP to mortal combat fakeout!

Edward: Such treacherous combat techniques! Truly even in Heaven you are the only one worthy to be the sister of the glorious Lu Wen!

Hannah: Silence, minion! I apply the gag.

Edward: Curses! I shout ellipses, followed by an exclamation point.

Idrissa, ignoring Lu's expostulations: Still, even when we had resolved the matter, and knew that our love would forever after be sororal, our life was not happy. For the plague of modernity, the sinister tendrils of brass and chrome, had crept into our lives.

Edward: I listen silently, in the fashion of someone chained and dangling from the ceiling. In fact, it is . . . a *Foreshadowing action*!

Madeline: Be still my heart!

[[Edward adds an XP to the group pot for a **Foreshadowing** action.]]

Idrissa: I was becoming something other than the simple, happy fox goddess bringing storms and disasters to the mortal world. I was becoming— [*affected sob*] a 20th century fox!

Edward: . . . you. Utter. Dork.

Idrissa: Loathing me—

Edward: No! You! No more talking! It's my turn to talk! You go sit in the corner, young lady, and you think about what you've done.

Hannah: Ha! You're gagged.

Edward: Damn it!

Idrissa, gloatingly: Loathing me, fearing my new countenance, the mortals banished me and my brother away, sealing us in the divine dimension until I'd returned to my former innocence. But we found one way to escape.

Edward: I weep quietly.

Idrissa: Every weekend! Every weekend, for a mere two days, the gate of the gods opens—giving a modern fox and her genius brother a chance to possess two of their servile priests and visit the mortal world! [*as Hannah*] I pull down the gag.

Lu: My sister!

Idrissa: My brother!

Lu: Do you mean to tell me that it is Friday already?

Idrissa: Indeed! Too long have you dithered listlessly in chains, my brother. Now it is time for us to take our weekly jaunt . . . to Town!



Stray Gods: Chapter 1

Opening Credits

Madeline: Opening credits!

Edward: I pose boldly!

Hannah: I push you out of the way.

Madeline: So there's this ritual that starts it all—every weekend. You're getting ready for the trip to Arcadia, and the gate of the gods. I need some things that you're doing to prepare.

Hannah: Why?

Madeline: Because we're in the opening credits sequence.

Hannah: Oh. Well, obviously, there's putting on the formal robes. Red and black court robe kind of stuff, possibly with an absurdly formal hat.

Edward, as Lu: Let me adjust that for you, sister.

Hannah, as Idrissa: Brother! So absurdly kind. But surely you need more time to tend to your own shabby, dismal garments?

Lu, wailing: My garments are inadequate! But this is the finest silk! Can it be that my sister has rumpled them with her terrible brass chains?

Idrissa: Hardly! My chains are the most fashionable of accouterments.

Lu: But—

Madeline, wiggling a finger warningly: I have to stop you guys there.

Edward: Huh?

Madeline: Opening credits! No interacting in the opening credits.

Edward: Bah. Fine. I will slink back to my portion of the slideshow, desperately attempting to visualize a way in which to display that in a visual medium, and prepare by . . . um . . . packing our two lunches!

Hannah: Careful shampooing of the fox-ears. The fur must be smoothest to the touch!

Edward: Unveiling our secret exit by moving the “This is not a secret exit” sign that had been covering it!

Madeline: Ceci n'est pas!

Hannah: I have exhausted my preparations. Perhaps feeding some sort of small marmot?

Edward: Striding through the streets!

Hannah: Sneaking out through the secret exit! Only, that probably happens before the striding thing.

Edward: I was only visualizing the striding through the streets before. It was a pleasant fantasy. Now we are actually doing it.

Idrissa: Brother! Such pitiable ambitions!

Lu, wailing: My ambitions are inadequate! But this is the only mechanism for walking that I know!

Idrissa: Can you not travel on four legs, my brother?

Lu: For all my virtues, sister, I only have the two.

Idrissa stares at her hands for a while: I see! They are differentiated, these strange human limbs.

Lu: Indeed.

Idrissa: It would be far more efficient if you had four relatively similar limbs, or simply resorted to a bundle of undifferentiated tentacles.

Lu: We are but pathetic imitations of the true masters of the world.

Idrissa, wailing: My brother!

Lu: My sister! [*as Edward*] . . . aren't you going to stop us again?

Madeline: Enh, there can be a different comedy act at this point each time, I guess. But! Time to show me how the gates open.

Hannah: I assume that we walk down to beside the river, a great circle of rough stone beneath a red and scenic bridge, and stand before it for a moment gathering power, then reach out both hands, and wham, it's open, there's light in the center, and the mortal world and our waiting priest and priestess on the other side.

Edward: And turn and look at each other. Stand palm to palm for a moment, then separate and bow.

Hannah: And then step through?

Madeline: And a flare of light and you take your host bodies! Fade to black.

Edward: OK.

Madeline: Right, so, game start. Um, go ahead and add an XP to the pot for that.

Hannah: Oh?

Madeline: Well, it was a Ritual, and I assume that the only reason that you didn't actually get any XP is that you didn't think about it.

Hannah: Oh, true! I'll totally claim an XP for that. Because they're totally *my* opening credits this time.

[[Hannah places an **Initiate Ritual** XP in the group pot.]]

Madeline: Oh?

Hannah: I invoked them! By making it Friday!

Madeline: And you were meant to be a disasters goddess!

[[Madeline is referring to the fact that all three players, including herself, usually *like* Fridays. Thus, one wouldn't expect a disasters goddess to create them.]]

Hannah: Well, sometimes, I, uh, make it Monday?

Madeline: Fearsome!

Hannah: OK, well, you can now, you know, make with the gaming thing.

Madeline: You're not the boss of me!

Hannah: Gam-ing! Gam-ing!

Edward: Gam-ing! Gam-ing!

Madeline: Fine! You're in Arcadia!

Hannah: Yay!



Stray Gods: Chapter 1

Scene 1

Madeline: You come to your senses standing outside the gate, with the river running beside it and the bridge spanning over it and the colors just a little more faded than they used to be.

Idrissa, addressing a notional audience: Listen to my tragic tale, oh you of the mortal world surrounding. We, who were once as shining gods, are now bound into these pathetic, pasty, muscle-less bodies, tragically forced to endure mortal existence and . . .

Lu: My sister?

Idrissa: Yes, my brother?

Lu: You like it here.

Idrissa: Oh!

Lu: We're here to party!

Idrissa: Oh! I had forgotten. It was the shock of the transition.

Lu: It is a very terrifying transition.

Idrissa: I have to stuff many different tails into this body, you know.

Lu: It must be practically as difficult as drinking oranges, my sister!

Idrissa, shaking her fist: Lu!! [*as Hannah*] Can I give him XP for that yet?

Madeline: Too soon.

Idrissa, sadly: It is too soon for such references, my brother. The sting is still fresh.

Lu: Tragedy is always with us, my sister.

Idrissa: This is a world of sorrow and tragedy! Everything has gone corrupt! Look at this grass! [*mimes plucking grass, scattering it around.*] It's some sort of green vegetable matter that grows beside a river!

Lu: The scientific classification is *grassicus riverium*. [*as Edward*] Only, more correctly.

Idrissa: An awe-inspiring scope of knowledge, dear brother.

Lu: Indeed.

Idrissa: So! The world sprawls before us! Let us lay it low before our tramping feet! We shall go to—to . . . the bookstore?

Lu: Dumplings?

Idrissa: The train?

Lu: An eating contest?

Idrissa: THE EATING CONTEST!

Madeline, as Edward marks an XP on his basic quest: CHAPTER 1. THE EATING CONTEST.

Lu: My sister!

Idrissa: My brother!

Lu: My sister!

Hannah: I bonk him on the head. [*as Idrissa*] You said that part already!

Lu: Ah, such terrible, skull-cracking agony! My sister, my sister, we cannot possibly lose this eating contest, for we have the power . . . of gods!

Idrissa: Mortals are not to be underestimated, my brother. [*with some difficulty, as Hannah finds this statement much less funny than Idrissa does, she sniggers.*]

Lu: Of course. Who knows when their [*sniggers*] human spirit ha ha will surprise us! [*as Edward*] Let us have the foreshadowing of the rules or the contestants!

Madeline: You're not the boss of me!

Lu: Oh great gods!

Idrissa: Oh heavenly powers!

Lu: We call upon the divine provenance, by the sigils of seven seals, to unveil the rules and contestants before these unworthy eyes! Mystic gibberish!

Idrissa: Mystic gibberish!

Madeline: Are you actually saying that?

Edward: Hurried consultation with Hannah.

Hannah: Mumble mumble.

Edward: We are actually saying "mystic gibberish."

Hannah: That was not the outcome of our consultation!

Edward: Oh. We are actually saying stuff that sounds like a magic spell?

Hannah: Correct!

Madeline: The skies darken. Thunder rolls out over the shopping district. Then the camera pans back to reveal—the tables! The contestants!

Edward: I attend!

[[Edward tosses a **Foreshadowing** XP into the group pot.]]

Stray Gods: Chapter 1

Scene 2

Madeline: Three Jotun! Terrifyingly huge, gnarled, vast with the weight of the power to devour! A slim little fox-eared girl that you suspect will be far more trouble than you suspect! A passel, a full passel, yes, of ordinary powerless humans— and one who looks to have some sort of eating-related martial art! And most disturbingly of all, dressed as a simple monk with a broad straw hat, you can see a Rider with his night-black eyes and falling stars.

Edward: Gasp! [*as Lu*] Sister, it is one of the enemies of the world!

Idrissa: My brother! Do you fear that he will destroy the world, in so doing claiming a false victory in this eating contest we are attending?

Lu: Anything is possible! Look at the man's eyes!

Idrissa: There's nothing for it! We must take him out before the contest starts.

Madeline: It is too late! Already the first steaming husks of grilled corn are going onto the table.

Lu: Tragedy!

Idrissa: Brother, can you use your science to remove the corn from the Rider's evil paws?

Lu: My sister! Nothing would be easier! But you will have to eat for me while I attend to it!

Idrissa: Ha! Don't underestimate the eating power of a 20th century fox!

Lu: Stop saying that. [*as Edward*] I move aside a secret panel hidden in the table in front of me that reads "Not a Secret Panel for Stealing Corn from Excrucians" and press the big red button, causing the Rider's corn to launch into my hands from afar just before he can pick it up!

Madeline: Victory! That foolish creature, yearning only to make an ending to worlds and dreams and suns, has nothing in his experience to prepare him for the sudden catapulting of his corn. He gapes, attempting to figure out what he is meant to do about this— and you no doubt seize the opportunity to crunch down a corny bite!

Lu: Nothing less from a master of deviant science!

Madeline: Tentatively, his stomach growling with unworldly hunger, he signals for another plate.

Lu: Eating delicately, I narrated, I prepare myself to press the anti-Excrucian de-corning button again. We'll see how much he eats at *this* eating contest!

Idrissa: My brother, are we sure he is not simply hungry?

Lu: Well, of course, I say, three courses later (I narrated), for he hasn't eaten anything yet! It is really too bad. I press the soup-launching button to exhume his soup from his sinister clutches!

Madeline: He wails and his head slumps down onto the table, declaring him, effectively, finished, full, and out of the contest. But there's more than a few other eaters, you know, who are still going strong.

Lu: Bah! Nobody can eat more than Idrissa and Lu Wen!

Idrissa: My brother! Mind your implications!

Lu: I have done so! That is why I included myself in the description, so that I might conceptually take up any slack that would otherwise allow people to make inappropriate inferences.

Idrissa: Oh. I see!

Lu: Another plate, garçon!

Madeline: Yes, sir. And may I have your Intention rating for this contest?

Edward: Oh, hm. I suppose I can't simply miraculously defeat this contest with my available resources, can I. Well, then, maybe if I operate on the basis of having a plan for everything—

Madeline: That'll rely on . . . clever eating tactics.

Edward: Eat wastefully so that the greatest portion of the food winds up in tiny scraps that fall away beside the table? Scientific eating contest victory principle #1! . . . but I do see your point. Fine, I'll base this on loyalty to my sister! Together, we'll win this contest!

Idrissa: My brother!

Lu: My sister! [*as Edward or possibly still Lu*] In your name, Intention rating 4!

Idrissa or possibly Hannah: And I shall use the conditioning from a lifetime of martial arts to devour food with . . . an Intention 4 of my own!

Madeline: A terrifying gluttonous dual feast! But I should warn you that as potent as your efforts may be, beside the hunger of the other fox-eared girl, the largest Jotun, and the Stomach Singularity Style student of the martial arts, it is as *nothing*.

Edward: They are wielding greater Intentions?

Madeline: Worse! Each of them in their own sinister way— has an awful, supernatural Edge!

Lu: Alas! My sister! I have embroiled us in a contest even your greatness cannot win!

Idrissa: Bah. We will find a way to triumph, brother.

Lu: Burp, my sister! Burp as fiercely as you can, until the hills resound with it! Then your stomach shall have room for excess capacity!

Idrissa: You insult my maidenly propriety, Lu.

Lu, calming: My apologies. But how will we accomplish this, then? Will you transform yourself into a gigantic fox, swathed in brass chains, and devour all the remaining food supply at once?

Idrissa: I should prefer to save that for a final boss stage.

Lu: Then it is up to me.

Idrissa: What shall you do, my brother?

Lu: I shall evoke my once-per-book power, radiating my adoration for you, my sister! Then for everyone around us you shall be as the taste of oranges and toothpaste— you shall put their appetites off completely!

Idrissa: No, my brother! This is not conducive to the dignity of a goddess!

Lu: Fear not, worry not your little flowery head, my sister! I do this thing!

Idrissa: I have said—

Edward: Invoked!

Idrissa, shaking fist: Noooo!

[[Hannah provides a **Fist-Shaking** XP token to Edward.]]

Edward: I'm attempting to apply the new Region Property, "You Share Lu Wen's Adoration of Idrissa Wen" offensively— using it as a Bond to help me overcome this opposition!

Madeline: Does that really work here?

Edward: Well, if it doesn't dissuade them from beating me, I suspect it will dissuade them from

beating *her*. But truly who else here has that particular taste coded to *good* things?

Madeline: I see your point, perhaps. It is certainly enough to get you to the finals.

Edward: Only the finals?

Madeline: The other fox-eared girl— she must be a veritable reincarnation of your adored sister!

Hannah: She can't do that! I still exist!

Madeline: Like some disaster, like some great and vicious fox goddess, despite the taste of orange and toothpaste, despite the adoration for Idrissa that you have shared, she continues as she'd been to eat!

Hannah: I must somehow circumvent this in a fashion that showcases my talents *and* earns an XP for the weekend.

Madeline: Well, you don't *have* to.

Hannah: It is only efficient! I will . . . discover new foods!

Madeline: That's fair enough, but what new foods are you discovering?

Hannah: Oh, like that's *my* job now. I look at my plate. What's on it?

Madeline: A picture of a fish!

Hannah: I cannot eat a picture of a fish! That's not cuisine at all . . . or is it? I take a taste.

Madeline: That girl! Showing contempt for her remaining rivals, she's gone so far as to start eating the plates themselves! But what's this? The servers are attempting to wrestle them away! "Ma'am! Ma'am! Save room for the flan!"

Hannah: . . . flan? [*as Idrissa*] Flan? What is this mortal . . . flan?

Madeline, narrating: This custardy traditional dessert, sometimes known as flan, caramel custard, or crème caramel, is unique among the mortal desserts for coming in seven elemental flavors: lightning flan! Ice flan! Fire flan! Earth flan! And some other miscellaneous flan that round that up to a total of elemental seven! Introduced into Town by a drunken wandering sailor in 1976, it rapidly became a key staple of upscale Mexican restaurants, eating contests, and people who like to make their food resemble a horrific Lovecraftian eye! Jiggle, lightning flan! Wiggle, earth flan! The finals of the third annual Arcadia weekend eating contest begin— now!

Hannah: I poke it with a finger.
Madeline: It wiggles.
Hannah: I poke it again.
Madeline: It . . . wiggles further.
Edward: I whip out my instruments and assess the flan's elemental nature!
Madeline: Your dear sister has been provided with a water flan!
Edward: Water— that would explain the wiggling! Plus, it has an elemental advantage against fire types like giant fox goddesses of disaster!
Madeline: I knew that.
Hannah: I poke it with a finger from a different side!
Madeline: The wiggles converge and dampen one another. It's like the flan is obeying non-Newtonian vibrational mechanics!
Lu: My sister! It's like your water flan, which is elementally superior to fire flan, is obeying non-Newtonian vibrational mechanics as you poke it with a finger! But what of our competitor? Can a dainty fox-eared girl like herself, of no particular accomplishments or virtues, consume a freakish and dangerous dish like flan?
Madeline: She can!
Hannah: I taste it.
Madeline: It tastes of caramel, custard, and elemental water.
Idrissa: Fascinating. Fascinating. It's just like that water god I ate the other day! My god! I have found it!

[[Hannah adds a **Discovery** XP to the group pot.]]

Hannah: I bolt to my feet! I hold the dish up high. I cry out, "FLAN!!!"
Madeline: But why?

[[Hannah, as if in answer, flips over her card from "Lost Goddess of the Old Days" to:
 "I LIKE this Modern World."]]

Edward: It vanishes from her plate.
Madeline: It does?
Edward: It does! Even as she holds it high, I'm sliding aside the panel labeled "Not a Reverse Divine Acquisitions for Emergency Victory in Food Eating Contests Button Panel" and pressing the Reverse Divine Acquisitions for . . . [*struggles to remember*] Emergency Victory in Food Eating Contests Button . . . button!
Madeline: Which?
Edward: Launches the flan from both of our plates to join the fox-girl's own! Plate COMPLETE!
Idrissa: Brother! Have you forgotten what happens when you combine flan of different elemental affinities on the same plate?
Lu: I have not!
Idrissa: Then what happens?
Lu: . . . my sister!
Idrissa: My brother!
Lu: I have never known!
Madeline: In truth, the less said the better, though I will note that the camera displays the explosion and the resulting custard-faces from a large number of different angles before it consents finally to agree. You have achieved your victory!
Edward: I revel in the prize! [*as Lu*] My sister! I have received a silver medal of excellence!
Idrissa: It is well-earned, though comparatively puerile beside my gold.
Madeline: What remains of the weekend, then?
Edward: I must complete it through XP-scumming!
Madeline: Ooh.



Stray Gods: Chapter 1

Scene 3

Lu: My sister! Now that we have sated ourselves and recovered, with our bellies dwindled back to their normal, nominal sizes, I recommend that we choose something from my challenge log to pursue!

Idrissa: Let us do so!

Edward: I refer to my challenge log for organization, inspiration, or security!

Madeline: Within it, a neat list of challenges, written out in invisible ink that you have revealed to yourself through science. Many of them are crossed out. Many of them are not.

Idrissa: I suggest . . . that one.

Lu, horrified: My sister!

Idrissa: What? We have a marmot.

Lu, looking relieved: Dear sister, the marmot is celestial.

Idrissa: Oh! I had not recalled that. This one?

Lu: Again, the marmot—

Hannah: Bah! I seize the challenge log and throw it into the fire.

Lu: No!

Idrissa: My brother! He has chosen the safety of his pathetic book and its pages over cheering on my decisive, vigorous actions!

Lu: Nevertheless, I narrate, I must retrieve it! And so I have done!

Idrissa: And what will our activity be?

Lu: For me, silent weeping over the singed pages of my precious challenge log until the night has passed.

Idrissa: I will join you in this, my brother.

Lu: My sister!

Idrissa, hi-5ing Lu and being joined halfway through the word: Together!

Madeline: . . . fade to black. [*after some review of the relevant rules*] Here, you two. Have a **Complex**.

COMPLEX

As the chapter closes out, Madeline offers them the Complex 1 handout and two Complex 1 cards. The handout reads:

You're trying a little too hard . . .

The card in front of each of them reads:



"It's surprisingly accurate," Edward agrees.

Stray Gods

Chapter 1 Recap / Conclusion

The first IC week featured the following XP Actions—

- ⚙ **Foreshadowing (Lu Wen):** *listening to Idrissa's story*
- ⚙ **Initiate Ritual (Idrissa Wen):** *the opening credits*
- ⚙ **Foreshadowing (Lu Wen):** *the rules of the eating contest*
- ⚙ **Discovery (Idrissa Wen):** *Idrissa learns that flan is neat!*
- ⚙ **The Challenge Log (Lu Wen):** *Lu Wen consults the challenge log.*

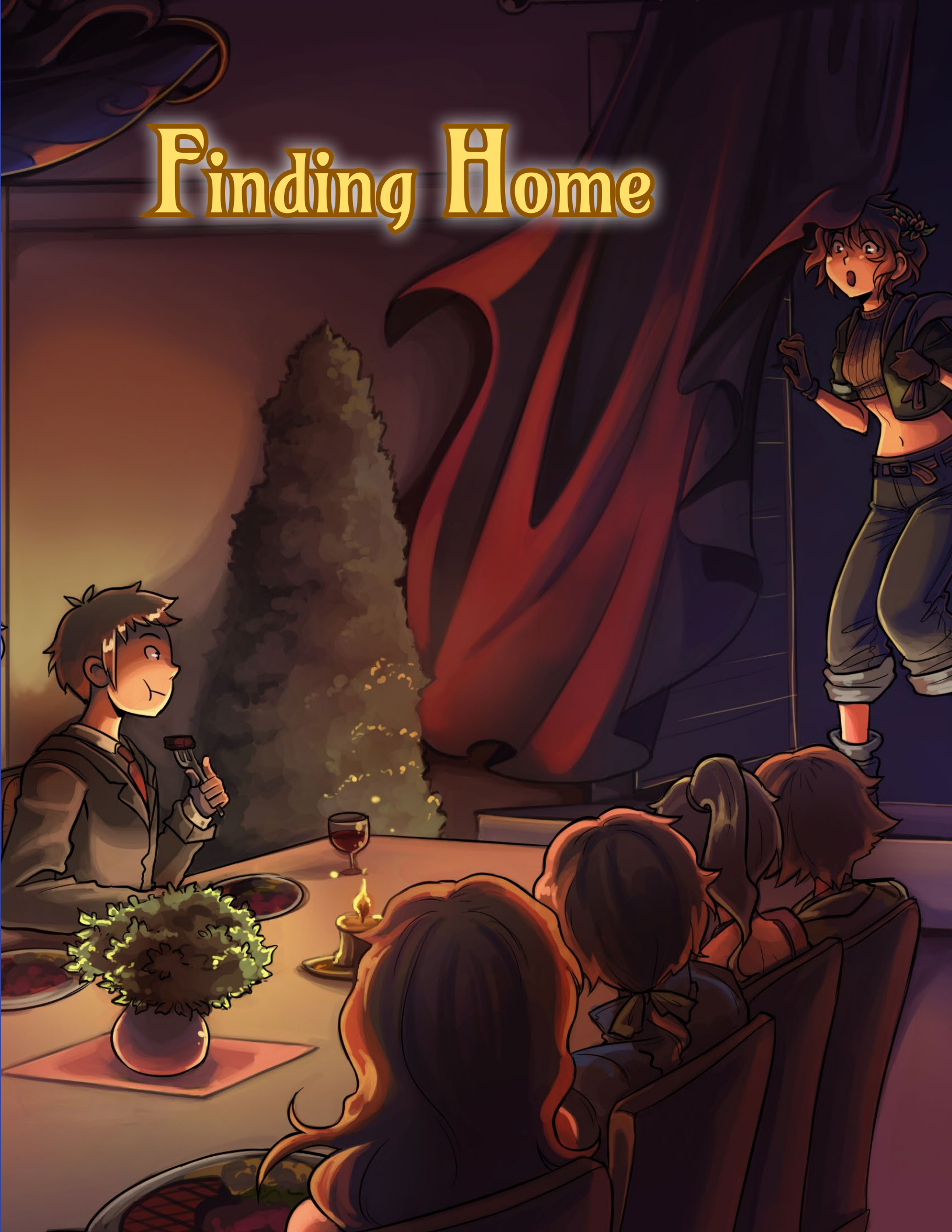
Edward also later claims a 5-XP bonus because Idrissa stole his challenge log and tried to burn it. The players haven't done a terribly good job of tracking quest XP, which Madeline is going to resolve arbitrarily at the end of the session—

But they'll be playing another three or four chapters before they get to that point.

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