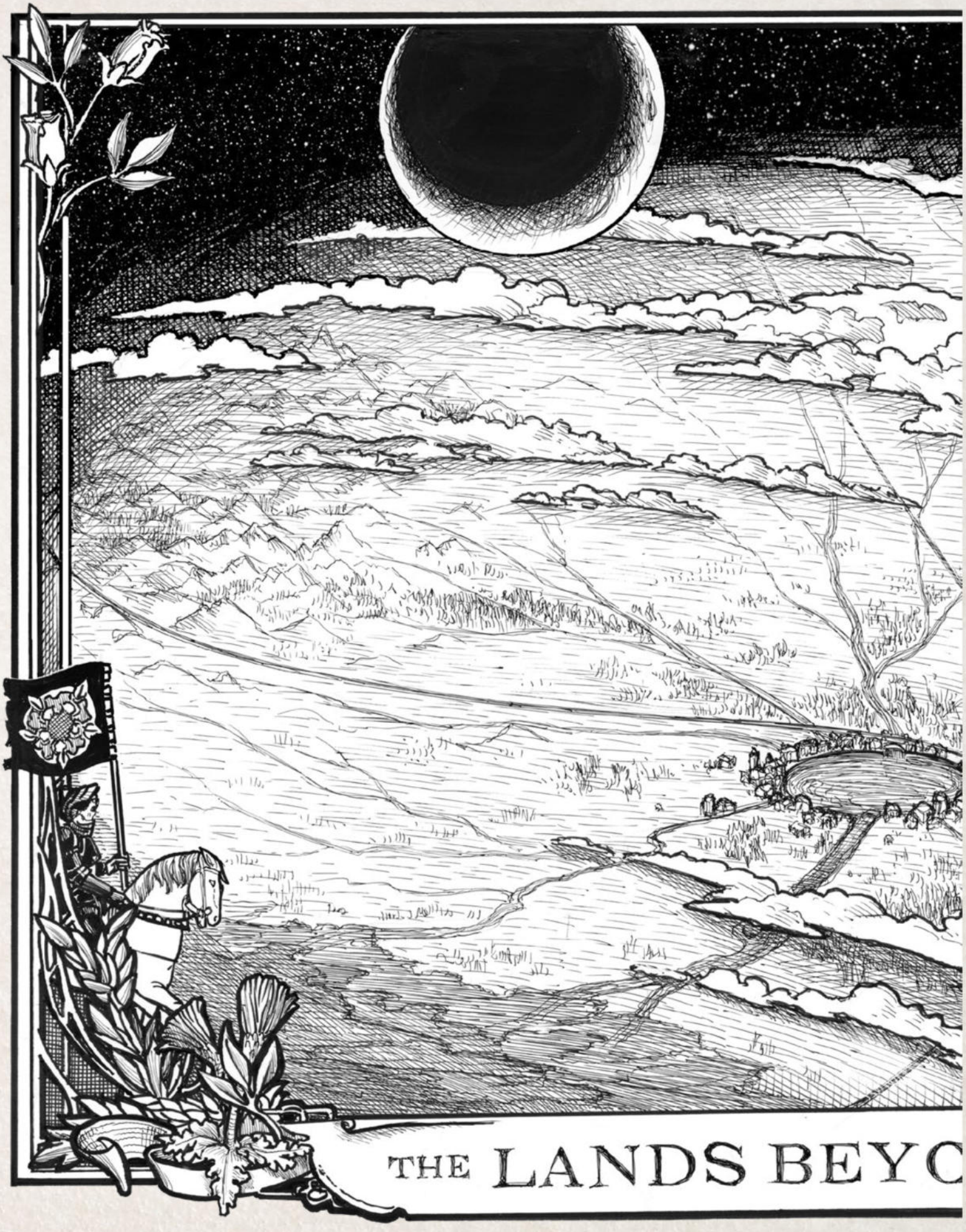
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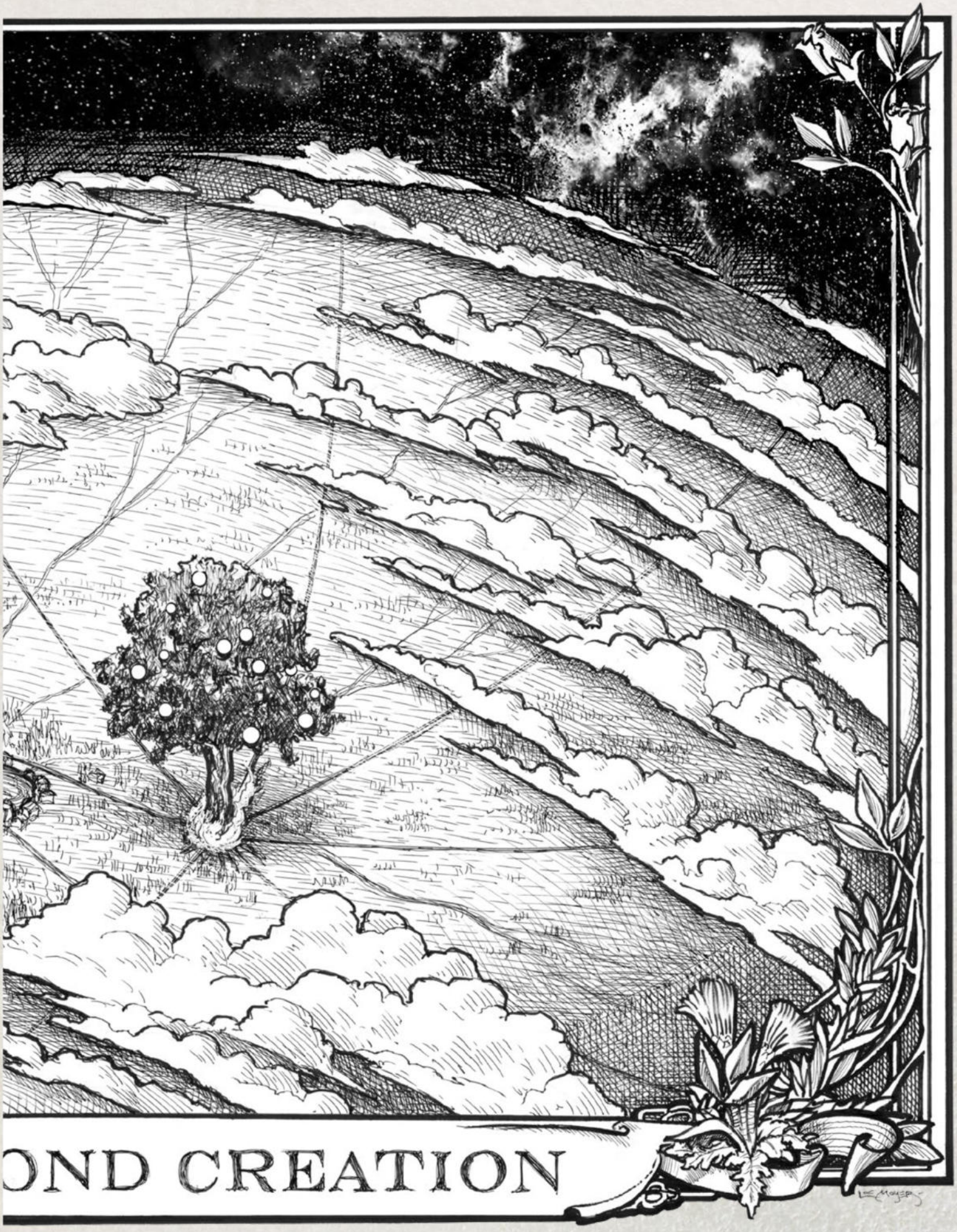
ND CREATION

Glitch

A Story of the Not

Jenna Katerin Moran

Glitch

by Jenna Katerin Moran

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Content Warnings:

This book contains existential horror; missing eyes; references to or supernatural analogues to depression, anxiety, PTSD, executive function issues, dissociation, and arguably self-harm; fantasy violence; some pseudo-Christian and some pseudo-pagan theology; blurring of the definition of reality; a content warning; and short and non-graphic descriptions of a large number of very horrible fates.

The protagonists of this game have broken from an ideology comparable to a religion, militia, or cult. Many have crimes in their past. Others are guilty only through association. This need not, however, be the theme of the game; often, it is simply one of its metaphors.

opposite: ***by Sadia Bies***

Glitch

by Jenna Katerin Moran

Dedication

For
Sonja Britt Borgstrom
Cera Kruger
Trevor Placker
Phyllis Rostykus
Gretchen Shanrock-Solberg
Cheryl Hahn
Rand Brittain
Geoffrey Grabowski
Bruce Baugh
David Bolack
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Ben Lehman
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Charles Seaton
AJ Luxton
Gayle Margolis
John Heron
Becca Newman
Jim McKinney
Kirsten Moody
Elizabeth Sherry
Melissa Uran
Roland Hansson
Miranda Harrell
and
Too many dear friends to list

In memoriam,
Zach Best, Rook Hallan, and Alice Gillberg

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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.

Nobilis was created by Jenna Katerin Moran (under the name "R. Sean Borgstrom") under the auspices of David Bolack's Pharos Press. It was later popularized by James Wallis' Hogshead Press.

Rule Zero

you are not playing ***Glitch.***

Contents

Under the Rain 9

A Cup of Flame 15
The Excrucian Aesthetic 18

Fugue Chips 25

The Ballad of Cacteric Desertian 27

A Map of World and Nothingness 35
The Glitch 35
The Imperators 40
The Beyond 43
The War 46

Immortal and Inconstant Things 51
The Excrucians 51
The Sovereign Powers 55
The Rites of War 59
The Imperators' Council 60

Hollow Places 63

What Mortals See 67

A Sound of Larks 71
The Riders' Abstinence Society 72

Weep, Oh Weep, for Puffin Pearl 75

What Miracles Target 91

The Essence of Glitch 95
Character Creation 97

The Creation of a Campaign 103
The First Story 106

Campaign Suggestions 109

The Darkness of the Stage 111
Spotlight Actions 113
Beyond the World 118

Mundane and Magical Actions 125
On Technique 131
On Ambiguity 133
Magic 134
Using Mundane and Magical Abilities 138

The Peculiar, Tragic, and Highly Alarming Death 141

The Pace of the Game 151

Divine Attributes 155
Eide, Flore, Lore, and Wyrd 156
NPC-Only Attributes 158

Eide 159
The Basics 167
Theatrics 168
Image, Defeating World 171
Greater Abilities 174
* cheatsheet 179

Flore 181
Abhorrent Weapons 190
Powers of Connection 193
Miracles of Empowerment 194
A Life of Wonder 197
Greater Abilities 198
* cheatsheet 203

Lore 205
The Apprentice Arts 212
Transcend the World 214
Arcane Mastery 216
Greater Abilities 218
* cheatsheet 223

Wyrd 225
Base States 233
Destructive Powers 235
Unnatural Effects 237
Greater Powers 238
* cheatsheet 244

Miracles 247
The Enduring Power of Miracles 248
Ordinary and Extraordinary Miracles 248
Automatic Miracles 249
Phantasmagorical Effects 250
Time-Consuming/Quest Powers 251
Bleak Powers 252
Investigation/Planning Miracles 254
The Miraculous vs. the Mundane 256
Wards 257
Rites 258
Geasa, Bonds 258
Miraculous Conflict 260
Wishes 260
Complex Conflicts 262
The Nettle Rite 265

Cost 267
The Four Costs 267
Damage 268
Revelation 270
Wear 271
Wounds 272
The Ending Book 273
Death, Disappointment 276
Infection 277
Taking Damage 279
The NPC Cost Pool 280

Gifts 283
Example Gifts 286

How Limitless, How Beauteous! 297

What Miracles Know 307

Quests 311
Session Focus 316
Any-Time Quests 318
Storyline Quests 320

Example Quests 325

Quest Sets 337
Absurdist Comedy 337
Dystopian YA 344
Folk Tales 351
Literary Fiction 358
The Long Road to Recovery 365

Arcs 371

Naming Conventions
Among the Ninuanni 379
Primary Elements 381
Secondary Elements 384
Diminutives 385
Surnames 388
Examples 390

A Voice of the World 391
A Voice of the World 391
On Prosaic Reality 392
On the Lacunae 393
* Mortal Rules 393
On Ninuan 394
On the Nobilis 394
On Heaven 395
... and, on Hell 397
Great Serpents 398
The Story of the Rules 400
The Wild 401
The Story of the Game 402
The Deep Mythic 403
On the Drowning Deeps 404
The Actuals 406
On Those Most Wicked and Faithless, the Deceivers 407
On the Strategists' Accursed Fate 408
On the Hidden Terror of the Mimics 409
On the Brutality of the Warmains 409

Index 412

Character Sheet 418

Five-Attribute Cheatsheet 419

Illustrations

FRONTISPIECE	(Ninuan)	by Lee Moyer
2	(Lacuna)	by Sadia Bies
14	(Castiel Breucos - the Sea)	by Melissa Spandri
26	(Lexigern Tamje - Diamonds)	by Silvia Cucchi
37	(Senefrid Ordes - Poison)	by Elizabeth Sherry
41	(Prescott's Children)	by Maria Guarneri
50	(Hradegais Loden - Sunrise)	by Jenn Manley Lee
57	(the Mythic World)	by Mel Uran
62	(Qistigard Serga - Interference)	by Maria Guarneri
70	(The Sound of Larks)	by Beatrice Pelagatti
74	(Erchen'in Branza - the Sandwich)	by Camille "Karma" O'Leary
83	(Semsedin Agis - of Blood)	by Melissa Spandri
90	(Filibrand Wulthos - of Questions)	by Mel Uran
94	(a Ride Through Ninuan)	by Elizabeth Sherry
102	(Guinemath Argand - the Rain)	by Sadia Bies
108	(Strategist and Horse)	by Robin Scott
117	(The Pace of the Game)	by Elena Albanese
126	(Hopeless)	by Silvia Cucchi
137	(In the Chancel of the Angel of Tears)	by Elena Albanese
140	(Dreamweed)	by Alexander Benekos
154	(Valenside Drasda - of Stairs)	by Robin Scott
161	(Kyihild Duras - Confidence)	by Lee Moyer
169	(Semsenand Gettels - The forests)	by Robin Scott
173, 180	(Reccefrid Saldanes - of Wealth; the Vineyard)	by Elizabeth Sherry
189	(Raniba Theos - Amputation)	by Jenn Manley Lee
195	(Vilita Skaudus - of Signs)	by Kirsten Moody
199	(Gaathuin Sarav - Cabinets)	by Silvia Cucchi
204	(Arcanist)	by Mel Uran
213	(Gilgud Bregerian - Birds)	by Elena Albanese
219	(Overwhelmed)	by Beatrice Pelagatti
224	(Sisyphean)	by Melissa Spandri
231	(Dulcilla Vaktin - of Teeth)	by Beatrice Pelagatti
239	(Filida Pieres - of Chalk)	by Lee Moyer
246	(Emmegild Nayan - Nameplates)	by Silvia Cucchi
253	(Ildilinds Reubos - Fatigue)	by Beatrice Pelagatti
263	(Homeless Strategist)	by Lee Moyer
266	(Gradegais Lauen - of Time)	by Beatrice Pelagatti
275	(Dresdinian Granda - Family)	by Camille "Karma" O'Leary
282	(Aunelin Alfmark)	by Silvia Cucchi
287	(Kitchen Failure)	by Jenn Manley Lee
293	(The World-Breaker's Hand)	by Kirsten Moody
296	(Hatharid gerlos - Tourism)	by Jenn Manley Lee
306	(Kaduin Vardes - Fame)	by Maria Guarneri
310	(Khetta Harmajen - Dwarven Hammers)	by Elena Albanese
319	(Rabbit Shop)	by Jenn Manley Lee
324	(Athfridia Cannolin - Subprime Mortgages)	by Camille "Karma" O'Leary
335	(Haidegard Gannon - Locks)	by Maria Guarneri
343, 350	(Fitting In; Serimarchos)	by Elizabeth Sherry
357	(An Antagonist's Troubles)	by Mel Uran
363	(Grail Quest)	by Elena Albanese
373	(Titan)	by Melissa Spandri
378	(Nikmoda Ranlin - Delight)	by Jenn Manley Lee
387	(Clarinnia Spirus - Gravity)	by Elizabeth Sherry
396	(Pelenimar Padas - Attention)	by Silvia Cucchi
405, 411	(Centipede Meditation; an Ending)	by Melissa Spandri

Under the Rain

In Hong Kong there's this street restaurant where you can get a drink made with soda and with custard, with raspberries and with ice. I was drinking one, and he was drinking one—I've never seen him finish, though—and he was telling me again about the ants.

"I thought they were coming in under the molding," he said. "I tracked them back to where they were coming from and I sealed it up with tape. But they just kept coming in."

The sky was always grey in Hong Kong. Today it was drizzly, too. The lights were yellow in the room and jagged white cut through the ice.

"I spread the tape out," he said. "Eventually I'd covered the whole ... the whole thing. The whole transitional space between the floorboards and the wall. I'd filled the window beds with diatomaceous earth. And still they came."

"So you called the exterminator," I said.

"Who has the money?" he said.

I shrugged.

"I don't know what I was going to do," he said. "I don't know what I would have done. It didn't matter, anyway, because I caught one coming through the wall."

I took a few pulls at the drink. I waited.

"It was not through the cracks," he explained. "I don't mean it came in through the cracks. I don't mean it found a weak spot in the wall. It was only that there was this place, above the tape. This place where the tape stopped covering the molding. The ant came wriggling through the wood, in this place where the ant should not have come wriggling through the wood, and it left the wood immaculate behind it.

"I got out my phone," he said. "Because this thing that the ant had done, I did not believe that it had done. I got out my phone. I used my flashlight. I looked quite hard. But there was not any hole. There was not any *thing* that it had gotten through. There wasn't any particular *thing* that *any* of them that were coming through, then, any longer. They were simply coming in. They were just ... coming in, you see?

"And in that moment I understood the world was wrong."

"Oh?"

"The world is *bad*," he said, his voice rising for a moment, and then subsiding. "... it came to me viscerally, that knowledge, in that moment. It was a thing that I knew within my bones: I did

not just live in a world that was running pretty well, only, there were the ants. I was not merely experiencing a moment of magic in an ordinary life; no superficial curse or hallucination lain atop more solid ground. This moment had betrayed a forbidden secret, a sickness running down to the very foundations of the world. A sickness that pervaded everything, a sickness that was *in* everything. It lay exposed."

"I see," I said.

"Do you?" he said.

I held up my glass. There was an ant crawling up its side with a dogged, heroic determination. I flicked it off with my other hand; it fell away into obscurity. "I do."

"They said that you could help," he said.

"There is no help," I explained.

"Donny," he said. "He said that you could *help*."

"There isn't anywhere you can run to," I said. "There isn't anyone who can help you. They'll show up wherever you are, now. Even if you died and got reborn as a cloud floating around some mountaintop somewhere, they'd keep coming, more and more of them, until they ate you up. Come on. You know that as well as I do."

He looked away.

"And if I could fix that part," I said. "If I could stop them. If I could help *you* stop them, or at least hold them off, it wouldn't really help, would it? It sounds really nice, I bet, I mean, wouldn't it be great if there *wouldn't* be more and more ants in your pantry, in your house, in your life, and eventually eating up your bones and your mortal soul? —but that's not what you actually *want,* now, is it, Mr. Cheung."

"If you can't help me," he said, "then do not be mean to me."

"You want the world to *not* be wrong," I said.

He scowled. He started to stand up, it was very dramatic, but I caught his hand. I tried not to flinch when an ant crawled across to mine. I said, "A long time ago—I think it might have been better than a thousand years ago, by now, I saw a wave."

He sat back down.

"I saw a wave without a crest," I said. "And because it had no crest, I came to understand, the wave was everywhere. The wave was in the sky. The wave was in the ground. The wave was in my eyes, in my organs, in my lungs. It was an unboundedness error; it was illimitable; there was nowhere in all existence, because the wave was crest-less, that was not subject to the wave."

He squinted at me.

"It infected me," I explained. "That's the only way to make sense of it, isn't it? Because from that day forward, I was drowning, but—you aren't drowning. It's not like the wave isn't everywhere for you, too. It's not like it *shouldn't* be everywhere for you, too, I mean, we're all in the same everywhere, aren't we? But you didn't see it. You didn't see the wave that day and understand in that moment that the world was wrong. So *you* don't wake up choking on seawater. You don't find water coming out beneath your fingernails. You don't have to worry that if you forget what you're doing the city that

you're in will drown. There's just the ants, for you, instead."

"They're bad enough!"

"They will be, in the end."

He made a face. Then, with a slow sense of resolution, "I can end myself. If I have to."

"Don't."

"Don't?"

"You'd wake up in your home," I said, "and things would be normal again, for a day or two, but there wouldn't be any tape along your molding. You'd think, maybe it was all a dream, but more likely, you just wouldn't remember it at all. You'd shudder away from the dim shadow that was remaining in your mind. And then, one day, you'd find a few ants slipping in beneath your walls. You'd tape things up. They'd get around it, and you'd tape things up a little harder. You'd ... wind up here, again, eventually, I guess, but with less of you *in* you, this time. Maybe none of you left at all. There would be more of you that was just a possession of the infection of the ants."

He looked away. Then he looked back. "Has this happened?"

"I've seen it happen," I said.

"Has this happened," he said, "to me. Have we ... been here, before. When I was more myself?"

"... not yet," I said. I looked away, then back. I forced a smile. "Even if you *did* die, you know, even if you made it all the way to death, it wouldn't help. Like I'd said. It would just follow you there. Reincarnation, whatever, Heaven, Hell—I hear it's one of the only things that can get you kicked *out* of Hell, sent spinning back onto the tree of worlds. Wherever you wound up, it'd just show up there. And it'd be harder. Each time you die to it it's harder to hang on."

"For you, as well?" he asked.

I nodded.

He was silent for a long moment. Then he said, "But something changed."

"Yes."

"For you," he said. "For you, there was a thing that changed."

"I was drowning," I said. "I was drowning, and ... and she touched my shoulder. She took it. She shook me, and she said, 'hey, are you all right?' And there was water dripping from the corners of my mouth. There was water coming from my nose. There was water welling up from the little pores up and down my arms. And she was asking me, 'are you all right?'

"It was the funniest thing that I had ever heard.

"I realized that all that time, I'd been hanging on to the world. I'd been gripping to it so hard I couldn't feel my fingers, I'd been holding on to it so tightly that I didn't even know I was hanging on to the world any longer, but I'd been hanging on.

"Only: it was the funniest thing I had ever heard, you see, so I let go, and the wave— it carried me away.

"It was unbounded. It was ... it was *illimitable.* And it washed me, thus, entirely from the world."

"Ah—" he said. He hesitated.

"That is how we were meant to die," I said. "Originally. Inside each of us—"

Here, I thumped the bone beneath my neck with the first two knuckles of my hand.

"There is a residual of *Ninuan*, that came before the world. And we were originally meant to die, and return there, to that land that is our source and home. But instead there is reincarnation. Instead there is Heaven, and there is Hell; all the mechanisms of this Creation. It is all very ... confuscatory.

"When the wave washed me from the world, it freed me from that, it saved me; it cast me adrift from all that world into a place of deepness and of darkness, a place where—unlike everything I had known before that moment—things were *not* intrinsically wrong, were *not* intrinsically corrupt from their foundations; a place I could reclaim that aeons-buried self that I was truly meant to be.

"You can hope for that," I said.

"If I let go," he said.

"... if ... oh. Um, no," I said.

"Ah."

"I mean, that's not how ants *work,* right? You can't just ..." But there I stopped. I sighed. "I don't think you can let go and hope that the ants will carry you away, Mr. Cheung. To be honest, I don't think you can do anything at all. If I thought you could, I would tell you what it was. If it were obvious, then I would spell it out for you. But it's not obvious. It's not simple. And I don't think that there's such a thing at all. It is just ... if there is. If there *is* something, then the secret is there, in the wave carrying me away. You are powerless, Mr. Cheung, but the world is broken; if you wish to find power, then you must leverage that break. The world has no hope for you; if you wish to find hope, you must *transcend* it."

"Learn," he said, his eyes vague, "to ... crawl through the walls of the world itself, into the void."

They weren't *my* ants. "... I guess?"

He was silent for a time.

I watched. I watched the shifting expressions on his face. I watched the movements of the ants. I watched him *try.* Eventually his eyes came back into focus, a plan, a thought, a theory found; and, for a moment, there was hope in those eyes too—and, none.

He slumped.

"A man," he said, "cannot accomplish a miracle, simply because it must be done."

"No," I agreed.

"How ... how many have managed it?" he asked. "How many are like you, to have accomplished such a thing?"

"I don't know how many are like you now," I said. "And I don't know how many are like me. But I have helped forty-seven men and women in your position to find their paths, and none of them have made it to the other side. One is still fighting. Letitia ... she is still fighting. The other forty-six are wraiths and revenants, they are irrecoverable: their minds and souls just recapitulations of the glitch."

"Oh," he said. I thought for a moment that he would judge me. But, bitterly, instead, he said: "This *world.*"

"... yeah," I was forced to say.

"It should ..." he said. "they should tear it down in blood and fire. Proclaim it as a stinking travesty, sound the trumpets of Armageddon, unleash fanged wolves upon its every corner to savage it to shreds."

Wistful memory warmed me. "That was what I came back for—I mean, the thing I returned to the world to do. Back when."

"God bless."

I hesitated, then I shook my head. "It was the wrong answer," I said, "though."

"The world is wrong," he said. "The world should die. Therefore, you should kill it."

Outside the entrance to the restaurant it had gone from a drizzle to a rain. Neon lights reflected off of the sidewalk puddles and splashing boots.

"This is *obvious,*" he said.

"I tried," I said. "I did try. I'm sorry. I killed a lot of things. I just don't think it was actually the right way to go."

"Because—" he said, hesitantly. Then his face brightened. "Because, because there is love and beauty?"

"No," I said.

The brightness faded.

"They've got ruinous great glitches in 'em, too, I'm told," I said. "Nah. I— I don't know why, not really. I just started feeling … like, that's a mug's game, you know? Like my *fighting* it was just another part of the way that everything was wrong."

He sighed. He made a face. He brushed an ant off of his temple, off his shoulder, off his side. "If I defeat this," he promised. "I will do you better. I will come back into the world in a blaze of fire and I will tear it all to pieces in a storm of light. I will ring down an end to all the temples and make a great shattering of chains. I will reave apart the substrate and the empyrean, when I have beaten this. And I will even end the waves for you, when I have done with all the ants."

"Thanks."

He laughed. He stood. He stared for a moment at his empty drink, and then at me, before the last bit of humor slipped away. "Is that truly it?" he said. "Is that truly all? ... I suffer for a while, and then it becomes eternity?"

"I like to think," I said, "that— that life is fighting. That life is choice. That life is hope. If you know what I mean. Not ... not that you 'have' to keep fighting, or choosing, or hoping. But just ... that once the last hope flickers out, once the last choice in it is gone, once you can't be fighting any more, then *you* aren't there to experience it any longer. That there isn't any *you* inside the revenant that you become, that there can't be, because why would Creation even bother? But I don't know."

He nodded. He began to walk away. Then he turned back.

"It's— a weirdly good drink," he said.

"The custard thing?"

"It is."

"Yeah," I said. "You wouldn't think it would be, but."

Castiel Breucos, who dies of the Sea

A Cup of Flame

"You will have to stay away from 8:01," he told me. "It is broken."
"Why are you in my house?" I asked.
"Please," he said. "When it is 8:00, you must go straight to 8:02, exactly. Or you will become a thing like me."

—from The Sin *(Emily/OC), by Galina Kirlienko*

The Beginning

Long ago, in the deepest dark, there was an awful crime; and that crime was the creation of the world. It burned up into being in the nothingness, a hot fire of *awareness* where there shouldn't have been awareness; a wretched spear of *being* where there should never have been any being; a horrid spiral suction of a pattern where none such thing had been before.

It impaled the void; burned the void; chewed it up and swallowed it.

It disturbed it, made it to roil with its presence, and left it helpless before it because, after all, the void was merely *Not*, while the world was *-Be-*.

After a while the world settled into itself. The spear flared into a lovely tree with pretty branches. The fire sealed itself into a wall. The world stopped claiming ground against the void; stopped taking quite so much from it, or quite so actively, and began to just exist there, a single candle in the endless forests of the night.

It normalized itself.

It forgot that it had ever been a crime; it began to think: it had a right to be there, a right to be that way—for look at its glory, look at its stability and its history, look at all the life that flourished there, dependent upon its existence. Beauty cascaded from the holy land upon its peak; planets grew upon the branches of the tree like fruit; when the winds of the world blew among its leaves, the whole tree bent and seemed to sing.

To exist: to exist, was right, was just—was an *a priori* good.

Glitch is a story of the *Not*: a story of the subtle fields and hills and forests that lie beyond the world. It is a story of the silvered flowers and dusty roads that can be found beyond existence, beyond perception—dreams that dream themselves in the endless darkness, "things" instantiated neither in substance or in *skandha* but in the structure of them alone.

It is a story of an intangible, hidden beauty cast into shadow by the world:

Of *Ninuan*.

But more than that, it is a story of survival.

In the void, there are those who are ruined by the world—corrupted by its presence and existence. For them, leaving the world behind and wandering in the endless vistas of the *Not* is no longer an option; Creation's presence captures them. It seizes them, arrests them, acts as a cruel lodestone and a cynosure unto their lives.

opposite: *by Melissa Spandri*

The world's weight upon their shoulders travels with them, haunting them and twisting them, and shadowing the Not wheresoever it is that they may go.

In the world there are those who are ruined, too—not by any specific factor, at least, not any that was *supposed* to exist within the world. They're not ruined by a car accident, at least not one that was part of the inexorable unfolding of causality, miracle, or karma; they're not ruined by a sickness, at least, not any proper sickness, or any that they were ever meant to have. Sometimes they're not ruined by anything that makes sense at all:

The world just ... glitches, and bits and pieces of their world are scissored out until none remain; or everyone and everything turns hostile unto them; or they become allergic to the pressures available upon Earth's surface; or their skin, bones, and body start to blow away like sand.

They end up in the void, if they're lucky. If they're *really, really, really* lucky, I mean.

And then ... if they make it that far, it ends up the same.

All that's left to them, then, is to be a creature of the Not, but it is not given unto them to roam freely and far. They become broken creatures of the Not, with the world's weight upon their shoulders, haunting them and twisting them, driving them always to confront the world, to hunger to confront the world, leaving them unable to forsake the world, and distorting and threatening the beauty of unbeing wheresoever it is that they should go.

The world—that candle in the endless dark—it has its enemies.

It calls them "the Excrucians." Most of the time. Sometimes it's a bit more sensitive, and it calls them "Riders." Sometimes it's a little more slanderous and it calls them "Damned." They're a lot like people, really, the Excrucians: pallid void-people, but *people;* except, they're the kind of people who think that the world has to be gotten rid of. The kind of people who might just break into the world one day and slaughter Angels, reap down the branches of the Ash, and tear apart the foundation of our lives.

If the world has broken you, they will take you in. They will raise you up among them; they will say, *here is a warleader among us.* From the ranks of the broken come their Strategists, their Princes; the Commanders of their Host.

This gift is very sincere and well-intentioned. More than that it is, arguably, metaphysically *necessary*—

For to be an Excrucian, to *become* an Excrucian, is, more than likely, *to have always been.*

Upon completing the game, Eduard expected it to release him; that he would look away, rise from his chair, and resume his ordinary life; but this did not occur.

The screen flashed twice, and then went blank, and Eduard's world went out.

—from A Calculus of Glory, *by Marta Meszaros*

Many of them are decent and brilliant people; their reasons for attacking the world are, more or less, just reasons; and they will welcome ye, o all ye who have been broken.

But this game isn't quite the story of the Excrucians and their welcome.

This game is a story of the few—the very, very few—who have come to realize that that welcome is a trap.

PLAYING *G*LITCH

Glitch is a game of exploration—a game of exploring the lush and mysterious world that *Is*, and the forbidden place that is Not.

That these things are vibrant and full of mysteries is intrinsic:

Play **Glitch** only once a chosen player, the "Game Master," has a vision of a version or a piece of Creation and Ninuan that is colorful and worth exploring. Play **Glitch** only when that Game Master has dreamt up a central mystery, a profound and fundamental mystery, to serve as the heart of this game of exploration—or committed to creating a series of smaller mysteries (and wonders, horrors, and dramatic emotional moments, but, most of all, mysteries) to arise and resolve.

When you have done so, these rules will brace that vision about with iron: demanding and encouraging that the players endorse and accentuate the color of the world and the Beyond.

In this vibrant and uncertain world, amidst the colors and the mysteries of this place, you will tell the stories of the lost tyrants of Ninuan—of humans, or other sorts of people, who are broken by the world; who arise from that brokenness, to discover themselves Excrucians, leaders of the host—and in particular, of those few who have pulled themselves out of the fugue of that awareness enough to turn against the remainder of their kind.

To say: I am Glitched, but not apocalyptic.

To say: I see the world is wrong, but I will not bring its end.

Do they defend the world? They may; or they may merely live within it. They may expect the other Excrucians to end it for them, or they may trust that the Powers of the world can well defend it—or they may feel called to fight on its behalf, for a world they loathe.

Either way, they will join the Chancery, the Riders' Abstinence Society—abstinent, that is, of world-murder and (traditionally) of angel-slaughter. They will come together with the scant handful of other Ninuanni who have made that same decision, beneath that banner: to face the wrongness in their lives, and yet endure.

You shall tell three basic stories of their lives, as they explore the world around them:

- Stories of grief, tragedy, and unbeing ... of finding a way to live with what is wrong and what they are;
- Stories of pastoral life, of nurturing and loving the

things in the world that they have discovered that they value; *and*

- Stories of hubris and conscience involving forbidden things, life at the borders of the world, and wielding the arts and substances of the Not.

Each player will take on the role of one member of the Chancery: one lost soul in all the lands of Creation and the Beyond. They design that Excrucian as their player character (or PC), dividing their focus between the self they dream themselves to be, the well of emptiness inside them, their mastery of the ancient lands of Ninuan, and their investment in the things they love on Earth. These PCs together form a "chapter" of the Chancery, and also a large portion of its entire current membership:

This game is meant for 2-6 players, while the Chancery's current roster numbers seventeen.[1]

In the person of their PC, each player will explore the world, digging out its secrets; speak and act, in their name; wield the powers of Unbeing; and pursue a set of *quests*: steps in their character's personal evolution, as concrete as "fixing up an old house" or as abstract as "advancing through this period of time, in which I am under great and growing strain, until it spurs a memory, and a choice." Completing one of these game artifacts both literally completes the quest, ensuring that the aforementioned house is in some sense fixed—or the memory spurred, and the choice firmly made; or whatever else—and also builds one's character towards greater strength.

The world is vast and ponderous and drives ever onwards towards its destined fate, but a wild power of choice and death lives in the people of Ninuan to change its course. Thus a player's fundamental role, when playing one of Ninuan's own, is to *take actions*—to inject their own choices into the story being told and, in so doing, change it.

The subtlest version of this role is the choice of how they *pay attention:*

It is a fundamental characteristic of Ninuan, and to a lesser extent the world, that it is *responsive* to attention; that what one attends to, what one focuses on, is altered by that perception, taking on additional significance and elements of what it is perceived to be.

One could even say that this is the *most important* kind of action—that attention will, in this story, have a prominence that regularly exceeds that of hand and tongue and blade.

For the Game Master (or, "GM,") here, the game works differently. The GM's fundamental role is not to take actions; instead, their duty is to describe ... to *play* ... the world. They present the unfolding tapestry of events that the PCs' choices may unravel, take on the role of the other characters in the world, and describe the vistas that attention may then bring to prominence.

The GM has a legacy role as the arbiter of the rules and of ambiguous situations in play—as the one with the power to decide how things work if there's a dispute and the responsibility to decide how unreliable or unpredictable abilities and interactions play out.[2] Making these calls isn't the GM's primary role, though, so **Glitch** may refer to the executor of this particular job as "the GM/group:"

The GM's *job* is to play the world, not to run the game, so if the rules or the situation have become ambiguous, it's reasonable for players to make suggestions, for a tired or confused GM to push certain decisions onto the players, or for the GM to yield to the group consensus if one is clear. They have final authority only because they play the world, and that requires a certain ability to enforce their concept of it thereupon.

Some basic roleplaying terms used herein include:

- **PC.** As noted, the Strategist you'll be playing is called your Player Character or PC.
- **NPC.** The characters in the world that the GM plays are known as NPCs, or Non-Player Characters.
- **IC.** When a player is speaking as their character would, describing their character's actions, or thinking like their PC, they are considered to be *in character,* or "IC."
- **OOC.** When a player is not IC, they are considered *out of character,* or, "OOC." For instance, if someone snarks about real-life politics in a way their character couldn't or wouldn't, that snark would be OOC.
- **Scene.** A scene in **Glitch** is like a scene in a play—a set of more or less continuous events, beginning with the first IC event and ending when all the players have turned their attention away.
- **Session.** When the players and GM gather to play **Glitch**, the game events of that real-life experience comprise a "session." If the group breaks for a short or medium period of time, e.g., for dinner, it is normally the same session when they resume; that, however, will be up to the GM.
- **XP.** Characters earn XP, or "experience points," through events in play. These may later be used to advance their character arc, earning additional abilities and powers.
- **Campaign.** A campaign is a complete game of **Glitch:** a collection of stories featuring roughly the same group of PCs and the same continuity.

1 The GM can vary this. But, if you want a canonical number: 17. Of the 150-250 Strategists, and 900-1200 Excrucians, found on Earth. You'll find a few more details on this on pg. 73.

2 If someone rewrites the world so the town all the PCs are in has never existed, for instance, what happens then? Is the town physically gone, underwater, or part of the nearest city's metropolitan area? Are the people who were in it shunted nearby, placed where they "would" have been, or dropped into Ninuan? ... do people even remember that anything has changed?

Some **Glitch**-specific terms used herein include:

- **Quests, and Arcs.** As noted, anything a character is working on or through in their life can be a "quest." These combine into larger character-focused stories called Arcs, or, Advancement Arcs.
- **Spotlight.** When a player experiences a moment of heightened attention and significance, they may often put it, or its subject, in the "spotlight." This incrementally advances their PC, and in fact all PCs, towards their goals. Nominally the spotlight is OOC, and so the heightened attention and significance are OOC as well, but it's fine for it to occasionally be "referred" significance—if the players pay attention to something and consider it significant only because their PCs do, and the PCs are significant to their players in turn.
- **Mundane Action.** A "mundane action" is something a character does using their mundane and possibly magical abilities and skills. For instance, driving to work—or, summoning a ghost *while* driving to work, simultaneously arguing with your carpool about whether the whole process is safe[3]—would be a mundane action. The rarely used converse term is "divine action," covering miracles, wishes, and switching out the law of the world.
- **Chapter.** A "chapter" of the game's story is a short unit of play with a relatively coherent beginning and ending, giving everyone enough time to spotlight one or two key moments. A typical chapter covers the events of an IC morning, afternoon, or night.
- **Story.** A story is a larger unit of play, also with a relatively coherent beginning and ending, usually taking several sessions to resolve.

THE EXCRUCIAN AESTHETIC

Here's what it's like, when you're in the Chancery.

Food can be good, and food can be bad—but no matter how good it is, how satisfying, that satisfaction is tainted by the knowledge of the glitch.

Your clothes can look good. Can *feel* good.

That's tainted too.

You can work wonders. Mostly subtle wonders, wonders humans don't notice, but you have it in you to rip down the stars. You can soar the sky. Revive the dead. You can have worldly pleasures; wealth, fame, and power. And all of it, everything, it can be *good*—

But it's never as good *as it should be*. It's never *clean*. The world is wrong.

Beauty can worm its way around that. Sometimes. You'll see a sunrise, or a raindrop on a mirror; a spiderweb; a fallen leaf. You'll meet a really immersive moment in a book. For just a moment, for just *that one moment*, you might forget the world is wrong.

For just a moment, that thing is only—*good.*

Not because it's *not* wrong. Not because it's *not* tainted. Just because, in that moment, *caught* by that, you can forget.

Really awful things can release you too. Maybe that's peculiar? But it's true. Even Glitched who aren't naturally masochistic feel some relief from sudden, unexpected pain. It takes a moment, when that pain has hit them, to remember that the world is wrong. That the world in which that pain participates is not just agonizing, is not just screaming, but is *also* ... broken. Filthy, wicked, to its core.

If you're in the Chancery, if you're the kind of person who winds up in the Chancery, you can get a little pleasure out of ironic, bitter, or wry appreciation for the world. You'll find something that you *know* is ridiculous, is *not* beautiful, maybe something you don't even really like, but it's just so *unexpected* that it kind of tickles you. Forms a pleasant friction on your thoughts. So you get really into bottlecaps or this one sports mascot or whatever, because, yeah, it's wrong, but *look* at it:

Right? *Right?*

You can have that. You can have bottlecaps, and pink sunrises, and pain. You can dig your teeth into clever wordplay; elaborate irony; weird, unbelievable stuff you find on the Internet; and the roar of the ocean, the mist of a rainy day, the colors of the autumn leaves. You can have laughter and you can have wonder. The sharp sting of a sudden fall.

... you just can't ever drink a soda without feeling like something's wrong; can't sleep right, not even once, not really; can't find yourself appreciating some soft cool breeze or warmth.

You can have friends. You're not good at it, but you can have them. Humans, maybe; spirits; maybe even gods and Powers, angels, other defenders of the world. Are your friends inherently wrong? Are they participating in the fabric of some awful glitch?

... probably?

Likely, really. But it isn't clear.

You can build a life for yourself.

You'll be bad at it. You're basically always going to be bad at it. The feedback systems of the world aren't designed for you. Nothing works quite right. The worst part is that no matter how much money you make, how much power you get, how many things you do "right," how *well you do*, you won't be safe. You *can't* be safe. You might be able to provide for your loved ones, and if you do, that's great, but none of it will matter for *you.*

You're still going to die. Horribly.

Over, and over again.

Being welcomed into the Excrucian Host, being raised up as a Strategist and a Commander, being recognized and glorified as the royalty of Ninuan—whether you quit the whole business and join the Chancery or *not*—that doesn't *stop* the process of dying. It doesn't *free* you from

3 (It's not. Don't do this. Don't call up otherworldly spirits and drive. You will *die*. And the ghost will be there. Silently, ghostily: it will judge.)

the endless cycle of death and horror you got caught in. It just keeps you from completely breaking. It just gives you *a little more control.*

Also, sometimes, you get hunted.

The defenders of the world can wind up friendly, but more often, they see you and they don't *know* you're a Chancery member. They think, ah, here's someone still out to kill the world. So they fight "back."

Even if they find out and *believe* the truth, they still might not be happy. As a member of the Chancery, you're more likely than the *average* enemy of the world to be basically OK—to have never done anything particularly unforgivable even when you *were* a part of the Host; to have, perhaps, a good case that you were in an involuntary altered state the entire time ... but there's no guarantee there. Some Chancery members were legitimate monsters. They don't even all feel remorse.

So it's not like, even if the world's agents learn that you belong to the Chancery, they'll necessarily say, "Oh, OK, then."

The native powers of the world have raised their hands against the members of the Host; they will not easily set them down.

If you're in the Chancery, your core support group will be the Chancery itself.

You won't necessarily *like* the other members of your chapter. You won't always enjoy their company. But you'll all still show up at the meetings. You'll all still be *bound* to each other. You'll distort the lives you put together for yourselves, when possible, to be more in alignment with the others'. In many campaigns, you'll all force yourselves to share a city, or a house; you may even *travel* or *work* together to address the mysteries that the GM has created for the game.

It's a connection, you see. Each other member—that's an *important* connection. With someone who sort of, at least vaguely, *gets* you.

It's one of a very few that you'll ever have.

Style

Traditional Excrucian style is predominantly black, with silver, crimson, purple, and white as traditional accents. Dramatic coats are favored. Slacks and ankle-length skirts are preferred, although jeans and shorter skirts are acceptable—particularly if they're distressed. Boots are the norm. Silver jewelry and black nail polish are preferred. The three most common overall looks are "strikingly military," "this person just walked off of a fashion runway and came straight here," and "layers on layers of thin, torn, ragged clothing, but no real skin's showing because the holes don't align." Strategists in particular—the Commanders of the Host; the kind of Excrucians that star in **Glitch**—have an additional tendency to favor hats: a nod towards the crowns, coronets, and tiaras they so rarely, these days, wear.

All of this is to a certain extent a template drawn from the specific needs of the war between Creation and the Not. It is an evocation of a certain *image* that arose from the nightmares of the angels long ago. In practice, thus, it's all more relaxed for Excrucians of the Chancery; the military variant of the costume all but vanishes from their wardrobe, their colors and styles loosen up, and Creation's style filters in.

> *The string on your finger, you realize, is a reminder that there is a zombie apocalypse going on. That everyone is dead. That things are broken.*
>
> *It did not work previously to remind you (in the earlier portion of this narrative), because you did not want to know.*
>
> —*from* The Virus, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, *by Sarah Mauer*

In speech, Excrucians are florid. They've been known to open conversations with extended monologues on the composition of the soul. They love ornate, dramatic turns of phrase, and find casual reticence nearly ... painful. At their best, they are orators and rhetoricians; at their worst, most of what they say can be ridiculous. Players aren't *required* to adhere to this, but should keep it in their mind:

If something seems a little too exaggerated to actually say ... their PC might say it anyhow.

Eyes

Excrucian eyes are generally invisible; the onlooker will witness night and falling stars, instead. For the most part, people don't react much to this. They'll *notice,* if they're paying attention, or if they're looking right at them; it may upset them, may excite them ... but usually they'll just think of it as ominous or dangerously attractive and refuse to really process it. If someone *does* see, and reacts poorly, the power **Intensity** (pg. 168) can often calm them.

Names

This text opts to assign the Excrucians given names evocative of ancient Germanic and surnames loosely inspired by late Roman-era Europe:

Symbolically, they are Goths and Vandals, as the fall of Rome draws near.

Note that this is, to some extent, an OOC adaptation—a way of localizing Excrucian culture to the expected player group—and can thus be changed. Moreover, whether the group keeps this convention or chooses to change it, players may name their characters freely regardless.

Beneath this veneer of Gothic evocation, an Excrucian given name is generally a concatenation of a primary and a secondary element. As will be shown on pg. 379-390, each such element has a unique meaning; a number of ways it may be written; and a scrap of ancient poetry associated with it, which we will name the *luthe.* Players may freely make up their own elements, their own *luthes,* and their own divisions for their character's name—or, for that matter, ignore these concepts entirely—but a number of examples will be provided in Appendix A.

Surnames, as a relatively modern adaptation to

conditions within certain portions of Creation, are more casually constructed:

Even for the most traditional of Excrucians, there are no formal rules.

Glitch Conventions

Glitch has certain conventions uncommon among role-playing games. You can find a few of them below.

Perception is Active

In **Glitch,** to become aware of something is to affect it. To pay attention to something is metaphysically potent; to see meaning in something, significance in something, often *generates* that significance and that meaning.

This is partially an OOC convention of play, but it is also a deep truth of the world:

Consciousness is a fire with a profundity to it exceeding even death's. One may stare upon the end of things to hold that end at bay, or burn life into unliving things with the power of your regard.

The Players' Emotional States are Rules-Relevant

The depth of game experience—the metaphysical *weight* of it—comes not from the GM's description of the same, or the players' assertion of the same, but from the players' emotional response. To a certain extent this is true, and must be true, in any game; in **Glitch,** though, the matter is explicit and direct. Significance is found where the players feel the *mysterium tremendum* and the *mysterium fascinans*—the fearsome, alluring power of the numinous, commanding their response. The true spirit of a PC can shine through, earning them bonus XP, when they draw to themselves a certain *player-level* emotional response.

The World Moves in Mysterious Ways

Being aware of the world is a kind of action. Being aware of the story, of what's going on—

That's an action too.

The GM doesn't have to describe everything that's going on. The space between scenes, the events in the background, the world outside the characters' metaphorical or literal windows ... it can all fade, without attention, into the illimitable and illiteral luminosity of the void.

The GM doesn't even have to describe *key things*, *critical gaming-important things,* like how that thing that just happened, happened.

They can frame a story, session, chapter, or the *in medias res* beginning of a scene, without going into the details of how the characters got there.

That doesn't mean the players and characters can't draw back the veil of uncertainty with their attention and find out. It doesn't even mean that they *shouldn't* draw it back. This isn't a pacing thing. This isn't about ignoring the details and moving on. If anything, this is a game of lush and over-done descriptions, in the end.

... but the players will have to actually *do* that.

They will have to look; or, put another way, they will have to ask.

The world will fade away if not regarded; they will have to ask ... and, in so asking, declare their character's attention to the matter; in so asking, ensure that the specifics of their curiosity and the *way that they are asking it* highlight themselves in the answer, in the things that the players and the characters are then thus told.

The spotlight system on pg. 111-124 allows the players to earn XP through digging into such uncertainties as these; its existence is part of the GM's motivation to play such cards close to their chest.

Creational Narratives are Scenario-Driven

Not every game's GM has the power to frame a story, session, or chapter in the first place, although it's nowhere near as rare as the ideas above.

In **Glitch,** though, and particularly when the PCs are in Creation ... it's the GM's job.

The GM is explicitly responsible for the basic premise of the game's stories, sessions, and possibly its chapters.

They have to start with the game concept and the actual character motivations, so they don't have a free hand. Sometimes they will have to give up their most precious ideas. Sometimes they'll have to argue over the specifics or turn to the players for their thoughts. ... but fundamentally, the GM is the one to decide that *this session* or *this story,* the characters are visiting a certain place. That the story of *this game* will be doing a particular thing.

If the PCs have narrative momentum, then the GM can just ride along with it for chapters and scenes; if they don't, and if the players don't have strong ideas, then it's the GM's job to set the premises for the scenes and chapters too.

Players *do* get a last-resort veto, a chance to say, "Um, I would *never* do that"—but that really *is* a last resort. When they're not in active play, when the GM is getting the scenario rolling, the player's job in characterization isn't about deciding *what to do* but rather *why:*

What's their character's motivation for doing this? What's their positioning here?

How, if it's hard to explain, did this actually wind up happening, for them?

Sometimes that's pretty extreme, like, "I must have been drugged or kidnapped or something."

Most of the time, though, it's more like, "I mean, sure?"; "I wouldn't *normally* want to meet at a pancake house, but social pressure or mild depression might do the trick"; "I think I drove here on mental autopilot"; or "sure, let's invade Hell to get her friend's soul back, it's *got* to be better than my day job ..."

It's not just the players who have to roll with things like this:

Sometimes a player who is *not* the GM has the chance, with a quest or a power, to declare that something happens. To frame an event or a broader scenario and say: *this.*

Such opportunities always give the GM a lot of semantic leeway, but past a certain point twisting the players' words isn't really fun: instead, when this happens, the GM gets the same veto, and the same injunction against casually using it, as anyone else. If it breaks the game's concept, the framed event or scenario will be forbidden. If it breaks a character's concept, any player can veto it. If it breaks the GM's ability to play the world or run the game, *they* get a veto ... but otherwise, everyone should find a way to make it all work out.

Ninuanni Narratives are Character-Driven

Ninuan grants the players more power.

Officially the game works the same way. The rules are basically the same ... but Ninuan's narrative is fundamentally *about* the PCs and their choices. It expects—demands—the PCs to be proactive, and the GM should expect as much, there, too.

The Game Rotates between Character Stories

In **Glitch,** each character has the opportunity to pursue one or more "storyline" quests—each an abstract or concrete element of their personal story arc.

In the standard model for play, each session will focus on a single character. The game will be colored, for that session, by the themes, motifs, and elements of that character's storyline quests—specifically, by the themes, motifs, and narrative elements recorded on those quests' "quest cards" (pg. 314). These will temporarily provide thematic options, opportunities, and incentives to the entire group. The next session, or a few sessions later if that winds up being more reasonable pacing, play will shift to focus on another character's story (or, put another way, *their* storylines) instead.

One character's narrative arc, for instance, might begin at a crossroads in their life—the quest, "The Crossroads," on pg. 368. In the sessions that focus on their story, that quest will give each player opportunities to earn XP towards that quest with actions like "being judged and found wanting," "having a flashback to the Ninuan of long ago," or "walking among rolling hills." When play shifts to focus on a different character, those options will fade into the background. When the quest completes, the character might move from "the Crossroads" to "the Long Night" (pg. 366); their themes, motifs, and opportunities will evolve.

If the stories relate, and the group is quite large, the GM may choose to focus on two characters at once.

There are No Dice

Randomness is ever an illusion; it is not one to which the folk of Ninuan are prone. They know all things are brought to pass by harmony and symmetry, and not by chance. "Failure" arises when one is opposed by a superior force or when the universe is ineluctably set against you; "success" comes when these things are not the case, and one is also acting within one's means.

Many actions remain unpredictable. Some are loosely specified, leaving certain elements to the GM's whim. Others are specifically mortal, with a mortal's weakness of uncertainty. And, of course, one can never predict what other characters, or complex scenarios involving other characters, will do. As a rule, though, there is no concept of *intrinsic* failure:

When you declare an action, that is the action you succeed at ... unless it was impossible *a priori* or some external force stands in the way.

Experiential and Functional Systems Coexist

Glitch offers two different styles of resolution.

One track of the game's engine is *experiential.* Quests are an example: they provide forward motion through a character's life based on immersion in that life's *experience.* Sometimes a quest assumes that the PC is doing or accomplishing specific things, too, and things will get weird if the player actively breaks that faith—but in terms of its rules and its pacing, a quest isn't about what the PC accomplishes. It's about their engagement:

Through participating in life, through *living* it, a character can grow.

Glitch's second track is *functional.* Divine and mundane actions, for instance, are rarely "experiences;" they're *things*

The most plausible numbers in the world are zero; one; infinity.

If there were no Excrucians; if there were, in fact, no beings that came forth from the void beyond the world at all, that would be quite understandable. That nothing should come from nothing, that nothing should arise from nothing: that would be the most natural thing of all.

Or one Excrucian, perhaps, that would be understandable: a fold, to capture the un-infinity. The quixotic exception to the rule.

But if there are a number of Excrucians—

If we are under attack from the space of "what does not exist"—

Then surely the most plausible size for that host would be infinity. Any smaller number suggests that the state of Not Being, like the state of Being, is finite; that there are literally a limited number of things that don't exist.

Surely the host must be infinite; uncountably infinite; immeasurably, impossibly, unlimited in its infinities, beyond any census-taker's dreams.

Why, then, do we only see a handful of them?

Why can we count them, rather than being crushed beneath the weight of them, dozens, hundreds of them charging in at once to trample each square meter of the world?

I have asked a Warmain of this matter; her reply was, "Ah: that crowd would be unmannerly."

—*from* The Bellum Magnum: A Chronology of Excrucian Assault, Volume II, *by Kip Narekatski*

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characters do, to solve the immediate and long-term problems in their lives. These actions don't lead to character growth, but rather survival and power:

It's through clever and forceful action that the character takes power over their environment; through clever and efficient action that they keep themselves alive.

Only in rare cases—at the conclusion of certain quests, which from time to time may be exploited for functional results; in the void, where decisive actions are intrinsic drivers for a person's growth—will these systems overlap.

Tactical Competence is Not Assumed

Many games and groups assume that characters "should" take optimal advantage of their resources; that even a fog of war or a timer on choosing actions is meant not to *discourage* optimization but to make it harder.

Glitch feels otherwise.

The characters of **Glitch** are numinous and fell, but being numinous and fell is distracting and emotionally difficult. They *aren't* expected to know what to do, or what's going on, or even what taking optimal advantage of their resources would *mean*.

Not in any sustainable or even semi-reliable way.

In **Glitch,** it can be an action just to parse out what's actually happening in a fast-paced battle; more than that, just thinking through what *a character themselves* can bring to bear is often a spotlight moment of its own—and, by the time the character has finished sorting one or both of those things out, it's quite possible that the situation in question will have changed.

Fortunately, harsh as this kind of rule may be, it will hardly be ever dispositive. Tactical competence is not assumed in **Glitch**, but it is also rarely, strictly speaking, *required*.

Conflict Goes to the Bloodiest Survivor

Understand: damage and effort are the same coin in **Glitch.** To push their powers beyond their normal limits, to do extraordinary things, a character hurts themselves in a different fashion than—but *to the same measure as*—their enemy's attacks.

Sometimes when PCs engage in conflict with other PCs or with NPCs, they simply win. Or lose. ... but a PC will always have the *power* to reverse a loss, if they're willing to bleed for it. Exceptions to this rule are vanishingly rare. Many PC-class enemies will have that power, too; thus, conflicts between beings at the PC scale are almost never ended by "I can't go on."

Instead, they're ended by a timer.

In any conflict, the GM can set a time limit. In most meaningful conflicts, the GM *will*. Usually, this is a game-world time limit plus a rough cap on the number of actions or exchanges that they're willing to see go by.

When that time runs out, if no one's won, **Glitch** puts an end to it:

If a PC or a group with some PCs in it has paid at least a certain cost, they defeat any NPC opponents. If they've paid more than any PC opponents, or any rival PC-containing group (possibly offset by some inherent or situational advantage), they'll beat *those* too.

If they've paid the price, in short, they win.

... if they haven't, then they don't.

This cost is sometimes kind and sometimes cruel, but the only way to beat the inexorable logic of "you need to be *this hurt* to win" is to put a decisive end to the conflict before that point, *without* paying *quite* so great a cost ... or to lose, ideally while paying rather less.

Players may Invoke Events Not Causally Arising from Their Characters

Preceding space, preceding time, Ninuan organizes itself by structural congruity. It should therefore not surprise you that Ninuan's people have powers and affinities that act not through cause and effect but through correlation—that there are things they can accomplish not through a chain of events but by *making them appropriate.* In some cases, this is a consciously invoked power, a way of cheating at the world, and the line between causal and acausal effects becomes murky. In other cases, the player can declare that a thing happens because it's *suited* to their character—e.g., because it is an intrinsic element of one of their quests, or an automatically/unconsciously evoked option associated with a power. Then, it can only be understood as a thing that happens *to* the character because of who they are and what their story is; it is not a thing they *do*.

Most XP Comes from the Players Themselves

Characters gain experience from moments that are significant to their lives and stories. The judgment of this significance is largely in the players' hands. In a few cases, **Glitch** specifies that the GM is the one to hand out a specific source of XP—certain large bonuses, in particular, so that players don't feel obligated by mathematical efficiency to pretend that they're appropriate when they're not. There's also one kind of XP that's awarded by the other players, potentially including the GM, based on their reaction to one's PC/play.

... but for the most part, characters earn their way forward through their lives on their own, and not at a pace the GM can adjudicate. Looking at this from another angle, character growth in **Glitch** is principally something you *do*, not something that happens *to* you.

And Finally: Death has Little Sting

The standard effect of death, or dying, is to fall from the world into Ninuan—there to gather your strength until you can bear to live once more. If you die *in* Ninuan, things are a little more troubling ... but factors still exist that can restore you, or someone very much like you, later on.

Resources

Glitch draws on works of surrealism, contemporary horror, mystery, post-Expressionism, and high fantasy for its inspirations; it is intended to capture elements of each. In practice, it works best when paired with vividly drawn characters and settings, idealized and hyperreal, such as one might see in:

- Bryan Fuller's "Pushing Daisies"
- Joel David Coen and Ethan Jesse Coen's "O Brother, Where Art Thou?"
- Joshua Brand and John Falsey's "Northern Exposure"
- Lemony Snicket's "A Series of Unfortunate Events"
  - ... also notable as a story of eternally encroaching doom where each protagonist has a unique, peculiar, and personal Technique (pg. 131)
- Neil Gaiman's "Coraline" *or*
- Paul Haggis' "Due South."

These are some stories that could have been told in **Glitch;** the protagonists—literally, or with a little translation work—bear an essential similarity to the protagonists of this game:

- C.S. Friedman's *Black Sun Rising*
- David Greenwalt and Joss Whedon's "Angel"
- DC Comics' "Hellblazer"
- Hayao Miyazaki's "Howl's Moving Castle" (based on a book by Diana Wynne Jones)
- Ikuko Itoh's "Princess Tutu"
- Kousuke Oono's "Gokushufudou: the Way of the House Husband"
- Kunihiko Ikuhara's "Revolutionary Girl Utena"
- Lawrence Watt-Evans' *The Lords of Dûs*
- Michael Moorcock's *Elric of Melniboné; The Sailor on the Seas of Fate; Weird of the White Wolf;* and *Stormbringer*
- Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (Northern Lights/The Golden Compass; The Subtle Knife; and The Amber Spyglass)
- Ryūtarō Nakamura's "Kino's Journey" (based on a manga by Keiichi Sigsawa)
  - particularly notable for its thematic statement: "The world is not beautiful; therefore, it is beautiful."

  and
- Simon R. Green's *Sharper than a Serpent's Tooth* (and the Nightside books, more generally).

These are a few more stories whose characters, taken more thoroughly out of context, might inspire PC designs:

- C.S. Friedman's *This Alien Shore*
- Lawrence Watt-Evans' *Nightside City*
- Ryukishio7's "Higurashi no Naku Koro ni" *and*
- Stephen R. Donaldson's *Mordant's Need* (The Mirror of Her Dreams; A Man Rides Through)

The world of **Glitch** is haunted by a mythic dream that hides behind, but is embodied *in*, the prosaic known; a few works with a perspective on this idea include:

- China Miéville's *The City & The City; Un Lun Dun*
- Hayao Miyazaki's "Princess Mononoke"
  - ... also notable for the quote: "Life is suffering. [...] The world is cursed. But still you find reasons to keep living."
- Hayao Miyazaki's "Spirited Away" *and*
- Kate Griffin's *A Madness of Angels.*

A reader looking for touchstones for lost Ninuan should know that the most mundane and Earthly portions of its terrain are generally evocative of the French countryside; if more than that is needed, as of course it might well be, a certain inspiration may be found in:

- C.S. Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew*
- Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*
- Jorge Luis Borges' *The Book of Imaginary Beings*
- J. R. R. Tolkien' *The Silmarillion, and*
- Roger Zelazny's *The Chronicles of Amber* (Nine Princes in Amber; The Guns of Avalon; Sign of the Unicorn; The Hand of Oberon; and The Courts of Chaos)

... in short, in broken and deserted Charn, and in the Wood Between the Worlds; in the eerie, impossible lands of Calvino's book and the eccentric singularities of Borges'; in the archaism of the Silmarillion's text as it studies events preceding the grand and well-known story of its world; and in the shadowed, hallowed glory of the princes and the princesses of Amber.

A few works that might prove inspirational to the GM when they play—or to the players, when they try to understand—the law-beings and the sovereign powers that rule within the world include:

- Garth Nix's *The Keys to the Kingdom* (Mister Monday; Grim Tuesday; Drowned Wednesday; Sir Thursday; Lady Friday; Superior Saturday; and Lord Sunday)
- John Brunner's *The Compleat Traveller in Black, and*
- Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* (Over Sea, Under Stone; The Dark is Rising; Greenwitch; The Grey King; and Silver on the Tree)

A child, no matter how sincere, ought not seek to kill the world.
An apocalyptic ideal—it is like fine wine.
It must be aged within the cellars of the soul.

—from The Dispute, *by Jocasta Monday*

Lastly, some works worth specific and individual note include:

- Iain M. Banks' *The Player of Games,* as a useful study of the Eide trait (pg. 159).
- John Sayles' "The Secret of Roan Inish" (based on a book by Rosalie K. Fry), as an exploration of the shifting boundary of humanity and alienness against a **Glitch**-appropriate backdrop of rural life and natural beauty.
- Jorge Luis Borges' *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius; The Library of Babel;* and *The Zahir* ... perhaps to illuminate this game's ideas of attention, perspective, and reality?
- L.E. Modesitt, Jr.'s *The Magic of Recluse,* to help understand the weaknesses of bleak effects (pg. 252).
- Lois McMaster Bujold's *Cetaganda* and *The Vor Game,* as two additional studies of the Eide trait.
- Madeline L'Engle's *A Wind in the Door,* for its inclusion of one of the closer Excrucian analogues in fiction.
- Tetsuya Nomura's "Kingdom Hearts"—perhaps too animated to fit well with **Glitch,** but featuring, nevertheless, dramatic strangely-dressed characters giving speeches about the nature of the world and attention to the meaning of the Not; *and*
- Tsugumi Ohba's "Death Note," for its examples of destruction (pg. 235) and strategy (pg. 171) effects.

While they are in no way a tonal match for **Glitch,** it may also help orient on the Lore trait (pg. 205) to review Clamp's "Cardcaptor Sakura" and Hironobu Sakaguchi's "Final Fantasy."

Interlude— FUGUE *chips*

Let's take a moment to discuss emphatic silence.

There are going to be times when something happens in the game and the only reasonable response is ... well, to express how impossible offering a reasonable response would be. To lift a finger, go to speak, and then stay silent. To flail one's hands.

To watch, appreciatively—that *would* be fine, sure, but it's also invisible: people actively playing aren't necessarily aware at all times of who's paying rapt attention and who's just tuned out.

So, in lieu of an actual emphatic silence, but when one would wish to offer one, the game will recommend giving the other player a "Fugue chip," also known as an "XP token." These can be scattered around on the table, for instance, in a tabletop game, and tossed—if they're light and harmless, like, e.g., the typical poker chip or small coin—to the player in question, who can then set them aside. Or they can be virtual objects of one or another form.

A player can only get one of these every 15 minutes or so—it's approximate—and only one per in-game scene. But they can get it for stunning others speechless; for being so aggravating that others are left unable to respond; for leaving others silent with a breath of awe ... probably at the scene they describe and not at their roleplay itself ... or for any of a number of other things.

The Fugue chip is thus one of two ways this game will have (the other being spotlights, pg. 111) to indicate attention without actively speaking; and it is the *best* way this game offers to express the spoken "..." when offline.

Not all moments of great roleplay will get one. Moments of great roleplay that *don't* break the flow of the game get a different reward: they don't break the flow of the game, and therefore great gaming continues to happen, and the characters can move more quickly towards their goals. Not all moments that earn XP tokens will *be* moments of great roleplay, either:

Sometimes someone is just stunningly daft, without it being on point for the game.

Fugue chips aren't about being awesome; they aren't about making the game better; they're only about evoking that moment of speechlessness, of emphatic silence.

On some level, this is meant as a *proxy* for being awesome, as a *proxy* for improving the game, but it's important to keep the difference in mind; **Glitch** uses a proxy in the first place so that players don't have to deal with the social stressors that throwing around tokens for *actual* great play would bring.

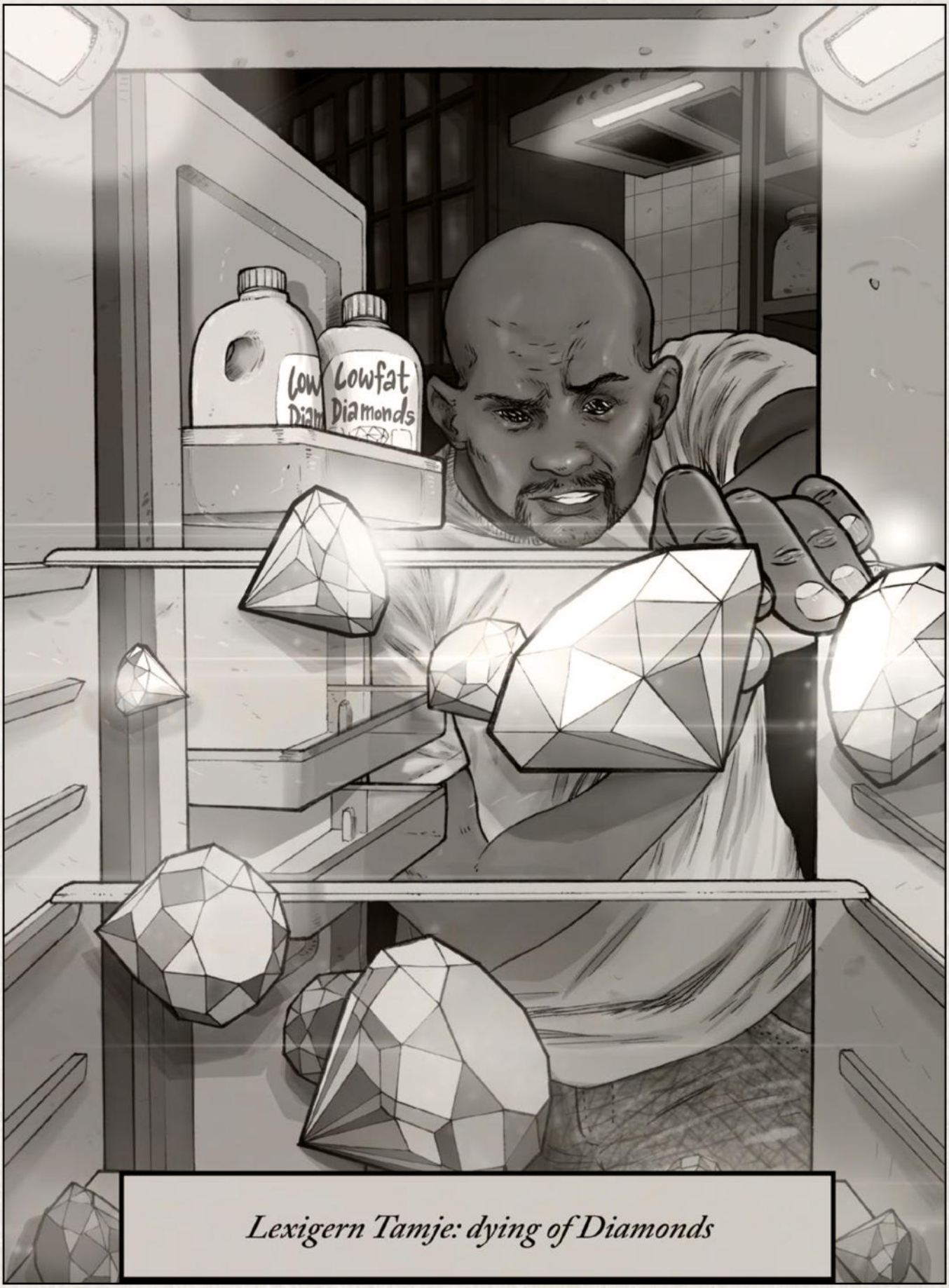
XP tokens, much like the name suggests, each represent 1 point of XP.

Each also represents one point of something called *Fugue*—a measure of how much the unnatural quality of the Beyond has affected the target; of how alienated from the world they've become. This isn't a good thing; in general, Fugue is a bad thing ...

But it's much *less* of a bad thing than 1 XP is a good thing, so a Fugue chip is still almost always a gift.

Perhaps one might be considerate and not toss one over if the recipient is actively trying to keep their Fugue very low, but that's a corner case; and, honestly, it's fine to throw it over and watch their bittersweet look, even then.

Fugue chip, XP token: a token granting 1 Fugue + 1 XP.



Lexigern Tamje: dying of Diamonds

The Ballad of Cacteric Desertian

One day, she was supposed to get up and kill the world. But she didn't. She hit the snooze button, instead, and three whole times!

— Diane Firth, on how Liutgarde joined the Chancery

SCENE I: THE DESERT

[Enter Madeline Rush, the "GM," and assorted players.]

GM: Hi everyone! Welcome to **Glitch**. Once again, it's time for the adventures of our three tormented protagonists: Tassilo, dying of treachery!
EDWARD: *[bows]*
GM: Ciara, dying of strength!
HEATHER: That's me!
GM: And Liutgarde ... who is just plain eternally dying.
DIANE: Present.
EDWARD: drumroll-ta-ta-drums
GM: Last time on Glitch, Liutgarde broke up with the faerie prince she'd been dating. Tassilo watched from afar as the Angel of the Sea was slaughtered and replaced with a Mimic. And Ciara ... mostly, slept in the van?
HEATHER: She's trying a new med.
GM: How's that going?
HEATHER: ... it's a little too strong.
EDWARD: Oh, God, Heather.
HEATHER: *[flexes her bicep.]*
GM: Today, we're headed to scenic Midland, California in a Liutgarde story, to pursue a mysterious dream.
EDWARD: Midland, eh?
GM: Yeah.
EDWARD: *[tossing a spotlight card in the general direction of the GM.]* So, what's that like?

[Spotlighting something can make the GM or a player cough up the details; see pg. III.]

GM: Well, the trip is a long and rattling drive across a lot of desert roads. I guess ... Liutgarde is driving?
DIANE: Me?
GM: Lo, for Tassilo is watching out the window with a spotlight, and Ciara appears to have some trouble staying awake.
HEATHER: Bah! I'm strong enough to drive in my sleep!
DIANE: I think that your doing that would probably be best, then.
HEATHER: Uh, *[nods]* mm!
GM: ... the trip is a long and rattling drive, um, across a

opposite: *by Silvia Cucchi*

lot of ... random desert terrain, occasionally including or crossing the road. At night it drifts into the realm of the practically hallucinogenic, with nothing but you and the beams of the headlights and the owls or whatever going by overhead and Ciara's head intermittently dipping down to bump against the wheel while you drift over the frantically clattering please-wake-up-driver-oh-god-wake-up strip built into the edge of the road. There are memories and cactuses and little things moving in the night.

EDWARD: I had planned to wait until I could actually see the city itself to react, but I think I can't help actually grabbing the wheel at some point during one of these. *[as Tassilo]* "For the love of God, Ciara!"

HEATHER, AS CIARA: I'm awake!

TASSILO: You're not awake! We almost hit that nine-foot tall guy with the antlers!

DIANE, AS LIUTGARDE: ... I ... think you may have been dreaming, Tassi.

TASSILO: ... is that so?

LIUTGARDE: We've not passed horned men for *miles.*

GM: Not since Vegas, at least.

TASSILO: ... my apologies, Ciara. I didn't mean to doubt you.

HEATHER: Ciara snores in an even-handed and forgiving manner, her head lightly bumping the wheel while her foot lightly sinks into the accelerator, as if to say that we all can make mistakes.

GM: You are going to hit a large street sign.

TASSILO: Agh! *[as Edward]* I shelter my head behind my forearms and my rising hands miraculously slice apart the street sign from afar.

[This is Tassilo's version of the inherent Excrucian power of destruction (pg. 235): he slices unliving things apart.]

EDWARD: ... and possibly also the window glass? Yeah, I don't think I can skip inorganic stuff that is in the way.

GM: In a great shattering of ... hm. Wait, this is safety glass. In a great *crumbling* of glass the wind bursts into the van and the sign falls to either side around you. A cactus looms.

TASSILO: No! Organic produce, my greatest weakness! I can do nothing but await the end.

GM: ... anyone?

DIANE: I am going to teleport out of existence for the duration of the cactus hit and then reappear once Ciara and Tassilo have suffered their just fate.

EDWARD: Wait, you can do that?

DIANE: It's witchery! Maddie, that's an Eide 2 stunt?

[This is Liutgarde's specialty: faery magic. An Eide 2 miracle—that is, a level 2 power using the Attribute, "Eide"—allows her to waive the laborious drudgery normally involved in magic and skip straight to the cinematic feats.]

GM: Yeah, sure. And, done! For a moment, you cease to notice yourself, and Liutgarde ceases to be; and, even as she does ... n't? that, the cactus plows into the van, tears free of its roots, and tumbles across Ciara and Tassilo in a storm of ten thousand needles and pulpy green.

CIARA: Anti-cactus punch!

GM, RAISING AN INDEX FINGER: ...

HEATHER: ...

[As a general rule, when no verbal reaction is really enough, you should give someone a Fugue chip (pg. 25). After a moment, Madeline shakes her head and does so. Then:]

GM, FINGER STILL HIGH: Your anti-cactus punch is a classic example of a measure intended to resolve a problem that, arguably, in fact, inflames it.

HEATHER: Aha, heh.

GM: Also, aren't you asleep?

HEATHER: ... well, not once I've punched a cactus in the face. That almost always wakes me up.

GM: Fair enough! You *are* going to take a couple of points of Wear, though.

HEATHER: as is only just.

[Wear, short for "wear and tear," usually comes from tiring oneself out ... but it can also come from physical damage.]

GM: And Tassilo?

EDWARD: Tassilo reflexively turns the cactus' needles against themselves, in grim reflection of his own tormented, eternal fate.

[Tassilo's "dying of treachery" is a sort of illness. It's not normally contagious, but it can be when he makes the effort, and he's powerful enough to do that for free. Only:]

GM: Does doing that actually ... help you?

EDWARD: Probably not.

GM: The cactus tumbles into the far back of the van in an paroxysm of torment and self-inflicted, flailing needle wounds, then, as Liutgarde fades back into view and Tassilo takes a couple points of damage of his own.

[short pause]

HEATHER: braking, slowly.

GM: The night is still.

CIARA: This, is the work of our enemies.

LIUTGARDE: Dear, I object.

TASSILO: You have no grounds—

LIUTGARDE: The cactus does not needle us because we have enemies. The cactus needles us, because the world is wrong.

TASSILO: ... accepted, then.

GM: Moonlight gently filters down across the desolate and barren land.

DIANE, REFERENCING HER QUEST CARD: Ooh, ooh! Can hints and shadows of my infection fill the world?

[This is a "quest action"—one of the options from her quest card, "Entangled" (pg. 345) that can earn Liutgarde bonus XP for the chapter. But ...]

GM: What would that look like, exactly?
DIANE: Well, I guess ... um ... ah, intimations of eternity?

[The GM opts to roll with it.]

GM: It ... does seem like this place has been here forever. Maybe also, maybe this moment is forever. *This moment,* when the van has stopped and the cactus has stopped and the world has stopped its spinning, maybe, and everything is still in a circle of frozen time; not even a breeze, not even insects moving, just a great dark space clipped out of time.
DIANE: Liutgarde goes out to walk in the frozen scene.
GM: It is as if you are the first person who has ever been here, in this patch of desert; as if you are Neil Armstrong, each footstep sending swirling the dust of ages.

[Heather tosses a spotlight card to the GM, indicating Ciara's ongoing attention to the matter—that this moment is significant to her. Since she doesn't say anything, there's no specific information or action that she's trying to draw out: this is just a way of saying that this moment is meaningful, that it's in the spotlight ... and, most often, of requesting "more."]

GM: I don't know what more there *is* to this, Heather; the place you're going is very far away. Unless Diane has something.
DIANE, AS LIUTGARDE: It is said that the entrapment of time is the source material of suffering. That it is not *events*, not even *pain*, that causes us to suffer. To know that the world is wrong. It is the organization of those events into a process, through which we may build experience, through which we may know suffering. Were we to be free of time entirely, and the world to collapse into moments like pearls from a broken string, then there would no longer be anything of consequence, or anything whatsoever wrong. Thus, it is proposed, in the Seal of Time is the world's original fault.
EDWARD, MIMING PICKING AT HIS FACE: "And you believe this, sister?"
DIANE, GESTURING AT HIS FACE: What, er, what are?
EDWARD: Needles.
DIANE, GIGGLING: Ah. [*pauses, then, as Liutgarde]* Eternity is an illusion, Tassilo. In each moment seethe the currents of the next. You have only to look around you to see it: here, where there is no time, the shadows of the past and future haunt us still.
TASSILO: Strictly speaking, I'm not sure we are *actually* outside of time—
DIANE: The Glitch is not woven from the continuum; it is, I think, rather, immanent throughout.
GM: A shadow slips across the land as a cloud obscures the moon.

[Heather tosses a Fugue chip to Diane, indicating a certain frisson from the scene.]

CIARA, EVENTUALLY: ... you know, *some* passengers would have gotten out, not to give speeches, but to actually remove the gigantic cactus from our ride.
LIUTGARDE: I'm sorry, dear. The moment moved me.
TASSILO: Also, it has needles all over it.
LIUTGARDE: ... also, it has needles all over it.
GM: Is anyone actually going to remove the cactus?
HEATHER: I assume we're just going to throw a tarp over it and leave it there. Unless Liutgarde wants to do something.
DIANE: I don't think that's a great idea.
GM: Tassilo, Liutgarde, you can get a point back for disappointing Ciara, there.
EDWARD: Oh, cool.

[PCs can recover a point of Wear, or some other "Cost," by disappointing others. This isn't so much about doing things badly—it's about stuff like "letting others down" and "recognizing an obligation, and then not fulfilling it." Tassilo recovers one of the two Wear that the cactus cost him, while Liutgarde recovers a Wear picked up from the session before.]

GM: And, driving on.

SCENE 2: THE DREAM

DIANE: What's this trip about, anyway? *[gives the GM a spotlight card.]*

[As of now, three spotlights have been used, which is equal to the number of players; this will guarantee them all a bonus XP for the chapter (pg. 112).]

GM: Mm. So, this is a Liutgarde episode, as I said; and a while back, she had a dream. A dream of a place in the desert where time was out of joint; where death was no more; where tomorrow and yesterday blurred together, and instead of living and dying people just ... circle through their lives, forever, in an eternal rondelay.
DIANE: ... for ... like, how long?
GM: Hm?
DIANE: I mean, it's California? Which incorporated as a state in like, I don't know exactly, but not exactly time immemorial either? Particularly if we're talking about a place called "Midland."
GM: Ah. Yeah, that's the thing, you see. In absolute time, the place is probably not that old, if there were such a thing as absolute time. It felt ... there was a 60s vibe. 70s at the latest. But at the same time, you don't know. Maybe it's been the 60s there for centuries. Millennia. Forever?
DIANE: Like ... what's someone's life like, being in the 60s forever?
EDWARD: ... gnarly?
DIANE: Hush.
GM: The flit of your dreaming mind hovers by the soul of one of the residents there and ... it's like, they know it's happening. This teen kid remembers sweet summer days going back forever, and can feel that they're coming; not

exactly the same, you know, not repeating the same words or anything every time, but it's always the same formula, the same combinations, the same people, the same loves and the same strife, the same friends and the same family, the same fun and the same hurt, out and out and out until it blurs by the sheer incapacity of human memory to hold it all into a comforting blanket of same as it ever was, same as it ever was. And they don't think about it, they don't like to think about it, that their choices don't matter, that nothing they do will ever matter, because they don't remember things well enough to know for sure how *this* day, with *this particular* combination of memories fueling each little subconscious choice and subconscious action for them and everyone else, much less their conscious choices and feelings, will play into the pattern. It's happened before. They may even know, they *do* know, that it's happened before, and it'll happen again, once, twice, a dozen times, a thousand times, infinity, but it's so rare and unlikely, each repeating of the pattern, that they're not afraid of it; it's just this vanishingly rare sickness that can happen, the short-loop nightmare, where just briefly, for one person, things are *exactly* the same as they know they are going to be; but that's too unstable, it can spread like a virus, or rather, it never happens unless it's already spread like a virus, but chaotic factors mean that it never locks in, and pretty soon everyone's back in the morass of free will granted by their forgetfulness again. It's a nice life, but they don't have horizons, that's all. They dream of going somewhere else someday but they know they never will because they never have. They dream of doing great things someday, and maybe they have this chance of doing bigger things than usual, but great things? They know they won't, 'cause they never have. Their homes burn down and get rebuilt and pretty soon the broken step is broken again and the creaky floor is creaky again and the new paint on the walls is new again and everything's the same, and the sweet summer days go on and on.

DIANE: Jesus, Maddie.

GM: Anyway, that's probably it for the dream.

DIANE: Yeah, I can ... see why I would be drawn to that place. Though really, Maddie, can we just burn it with fire?

GM: The traditional perspective of the Chancery is that burning the worst parts of Creation with fire is arguably acceptable but a dangerous slippery slope, as pretty soon you're back to just burning the whole place down again, and for some reason or other you've all decided it's better not to do that. Also, the place *already* burns down now and then, I mean, usually the fire department contains it, but, still.

DIANE: Same as it ever was?

GM: Exactly.

DIANE: And we tracked this down to Midland, California—

GM: You discuss this on the drive, presumably.

DIANE: Yes, we are very into exposition.

CIARA: As you know, sister, I am able to use my muscles to divine many things about the nature of the world.

TASSILO: Also, I can check the library!

DIANE: ... I'm not sure how you'd look this up in the library.

EDWARD: You didn't get the *name* of that kid you were snooping on in the dream?

DIANE: ... did I?

GM: Probably.

CIARA: Using delicate flexing, and Tassilo's *[air-quoting]* "books," we were able to track the location described by your dream to a town named Midland, California, which we are driving towards even now.

LIUTGARDE: I appreciate your catching me up on the matter, dear; I had gotten distracted and it had slipped from my mind.

GM: Do you really flex your way to a location?

HEATHER: It's a way of sensing the surrounding continuum. ... I probably need to pay a point of Fugue for it, though.

GM: Fair enough.

[The Attribute that governs investigation and pathfinding, "Lore," can be improved on a temporary basis if the character acquires Fugue. In this case, to sense the surrounding continuum properly, Ciara must pay a point of Fugue—or, put another way, raise this Cost by 1.]

LIUTGARDE, PENSIVELY: I hope we arrive there tonight; I do not want to sleep in a van with a cactus.

TASSILO, DEFENSIVELY: There's a tarp!

CIARA: You *could* take it *out* of the van.

TASSILO: Also, we have named it. It is now a member of our bold Chancery crew. It is ... Cacteric Desertian.

HEATHER: Saguaric?

TASSILO, OR POSSIBLY EDWARD: Saguaric ut-Cacterus is also acceptable.

GM: Saguaric ut-Cacterus, who is dying of impact.

LIUTGARDE, WISELY: It, like the world itself, has been broken.

GM: OK, cut ... scene. I need questions or actions.

HEATHER: I would like to know if we're going to get to town tonight, so I can, like, sleep, and stuff.

GM: Probably.

HEATHER: ...

GM: Sure. Um, you get to town. You ... find an inn?

[Heather tosses out a spotlight card, wanting more.]

GM: It's going to depend what you're looking for, really. A seedy motel? A bed and breakfast? Something well into town, so that you can get a look at the place under cover of night?

HEATHER: The first thing we find.

GM: That's a motel, then.

I don't know what Tassilo fell in love with first, that changed his mind about the world, but I do know that it betrayed him.

— Edward Jordan

SCENE 3: THE MOTEL

GM: Everything's brash light and deep dark. There's a couple of cars in the lot, not many at all—though come to think of it, would there be any at all? ... yeah. That's a bit weird, but there are. And an office under a lamp and with dim light that's inside. And a creaky metal gate blocking off the stairs that lead up to the rooms. There are palm trees here and there.
HEATHER: ... I don't understand what's on the bottom floor.
GM: Storage. It looks like this place is a motel but also a public locker site? So most of the places on the bottom floor are, like, unlit, locked up, sealed.
HEATHER: That's ... a weird arrangement.
GM, FLAILING A LITTLE ON THE INSIDE: You'd have to ask the owner about it.
HEATHER: I mean, wouldn't that be just asking for, like, theft, or something?
GM, HAVING AN IDEA: Ultimately, it's not like anything *goes* anywhere. But you'd guess—um, how smart are you?
HEATHER: I am very, very strong.
GM: ... yeah, you don't know.
DIANE: *I'm* smart!
GM: Liutgarde suspects, and this is clearly plot-critical information that I'm only giving out thanks to your exceedingly high "smart" trait, that eternal cycles tend to both produce and require reservoirs, buffer zones, and the like. Like, you have a place that serves to hold stuff and people springing up because that's a more flexible storage space for *the eternal township* than a strictly plausible business model would be.
DIANE: Dang. *[throws out a card.]* I'm going to call a retroactive spotlight on that.

[Spotlighting an already-completed experience has slightly different rules than spotlighting something currently happening in play. Most importantly, the player has to note explicitly that they're spotlighting something that already happened, and then they'll have to follow up by labelling it as neat, scary, or mysterious. Diane will only be like 98% on point with the rules here, but that's fine: first, players aren't expected to be at 100% all the time, and second, she's going to decide later on that this action was actually too shaky to count.]

GM: Does that work?
DIANE: I think it does. Like, Liutgarde's mind has been expanded! She even narrows her eyes and goes, "*aah.*" as she figures it out.
GM: OK!

[That's probably meant to count as "neat."]

GM: Anyway, you pull in and to a gentle stop, Saguaric ut-Cacterus jiggling in the seat behind you, and get out. Your footsteps echo off the walls. A few bugs orbit the office light.
EDWARD: One by one, they fall, betrayed by their own sudden recognition of the vastness of the universe.
GM: ... why ...
EDWARD: I'm a helper!
GM: The criss-cross wire grating over the light is now the only thing impeding its bitter glow.

[A level 3 or level 7 miracle of the "Wyrd" Attribute allows a character dying of treachery to curse others to a similar fate. Normally, the Wyrd 3 version, which is the one that Tassilo can use for free, is too weak to just strike things down like that—but, these are bugs, and not even important bugs. It can totally strike THOSE down.]

HEATHER: I'll head in to register.
GM, IMPROVISING: The guy inside is surly. Surly Adams. A chipper young fellow, despite the name. He seems delighted if a bit perplexed to see you, fumbles several times trying to place your names, and seems terribly embarrassed that he can't remember which rooms you like. He's trying to grow a moustache and failing. He has a cap.
HEATHER: "Ciara." And, in a bit of pity. "We haven't stayed here before."
GM: Cold existential panic flashes in his eyes for a moment before he realizes that you *obviously* mean that you haven't stayed there in the past memory-cycle, don't be ridiculous. "Of course, of course," he says, and smiles. "No wonder! Well, I'm surly, as you can see."
TASSILO: A pathetic jest. I could address it for you?
GM: "And this is the Midmarch Motel! Come on in, come on in, I'll get you settled up."
CIARA: Very kind.
GM: He shows you to a room. It's a motel room. It doesn't seem like it's changed much since the 60s or 70s. On the other hand, you're not sure they ever did.
DIANE: I think they were fancier.
EDWARD: And uglier.
DIANE: Eh?
EDWARD: Like, they used colors from the forbidden dimension. Colors from beyond space and time. Colors so tragic that a broken, traumatized humanity has forgotten how to manufacture them—we can only mine them up from the remnants of the past.
DIANE: ... and fancier, too.
GM: He shows you to a large, fancy, off-purple room?
EDWARD: Exactly!
GM: All right, then. There's a pull-chain lamp. There's a majestic bay window opening on a glorious view of the parking lot of the Midmarch Hotel: a grand vista of mountainous trash bins, wind-blown fields of old flyers blowing in the wind, and the desolate humps of cement parking space bumpers.
DIANE: Goodness! But I've already had my spotlights for the chapter,

[Each player can use two spotlights per chapter. Diane has spotlighted "what's this trip about?" and "oh, I get how the motel works, that's neat," so she's done!]

DIANE: so I can't stand in awe and appreciate the view.
GM: In fairness, that second spotlight was kind of marginal.
DIANE: That's true! Let's pretend it didn't happen so I can stare raptly out at the trash bins and the desolate humps while you describe the parking lot in further depth.
GM: ... why did I encourage you to do this?
EDWARD: The world may never truly know.

[Diane recovers a spotlight card and then tosses it back onto the table.]

GM, GAMELY: OK. Um. You see; I mean, there are ... rivers, where some car long ago leaked a trail of oil; rivers, flowing to the sea; houses ... of ... ants? Perhaps? They are too small to see. Cracks in the lot pierced up by blades of grass, like spears. Bollards cluster ominously near a hedge; they cast their shadows out into the night.
DIANE: Bollards?
GM: Like concrete sentinels.
DIANE: That was not exactly my question.
GM: Creatures of parking mystery.
DIANE: Don't make me get my phone out, Maddie. You won't like me when I have my phone out.
GM: ... short post-like things.
DIANE: Thank you.
GM: Beyond all this, you can see the faces, the corrugated metal faces, of the surrounding storage lots; and, of course, behind an iron railing, the lights and sometimes darkness of other rooms just like your own.
LIUTGARDE: … what a marvelous thing.
CIARA, SOFTLY, IN CONCURRENCE: Strong.

[A moment passes.]

GM: ... does anyone have a quest action that they want to do?
EDWARD: Hm. Can I see the card, Di?

[Diane offers him her quest card, "Entangled," to look at. He's interested because today's session is a Liutgarde plot, and thus the other players can contribute to it—earning one XP for Liutgard's quest and another, for themselves.

*One option, "the Arc's **Ally** is uncomfortably weird" (pg. 345), catches Edward's eye.]*

EDWARD: Who's the Arc's Ally?
DIANE: Um, I thought it was the faerie prince, but I guess not? Some kind of ... timeless ... thing, though.
EDWARD: So anyone from this benighted place would do, really.
DIANE: Well, if I wanted to partner with them long-term. Or, well, had to. For some reason.

[This quest and character arc involve, among other things, a troubled partnership with someone thematically connected to Liutgarde's curse. Her curse is that she's "eternally dying," so, more specifically, that means: eternity.]

EDWARD: So not Surly Whats-his-face.
DIANE: ... probably not. Maddie, is there going to be someone here I can, like, connect with?

[The GM thinks about a lot of different things with specialized terminology that you'll soon learn.]

GM: I was assuming that you'd pull in something from your Sphere, which I guess is, like, Ninuan fey? A waylet sprite? But, yeah, if you're not like, dreaming of summoning and binding something like that ... maybe ... there's someone in *particular* here that synchronizes enough with you that it attracted your dreaming? Oh, a piece of your death!
DIANE: A piece of my death is here.
GM: Yeah.
DIANE: Just ... hanging out?
GM: Hey, they've got good malts.
DIANE: OK.
EDWARD: While that *is* being weird, it's not really an action on my part. I guess I could "catch a Power's attention?"
DIANE: Augh!

[The Sovereign Powers are not the Excrucians' greatest enemies, or even arguably THIS group's enemies at all, but they are certainly the most active and most dangerous. Each rules a single element of the world, like Cotton, Arbitrage, or Stars—and catching the attention of one of those Powers is one of the options on the card.]

GM: How would you do that, though?
EDWARD: Maybe, like, while getting ice?

SCENE 4: *I*CE

EDWARD: Like, they're staying here too? And I'm like all cool, "Hey, just getting some ice here," and they're all like, "Oh, me too, haha," and then they're heading back to their room thinking *who was that mysterious ice-fetching stranger* when *suddenly* the ice machine rumbles and *betrays* me because that rumble makes them realize that my eyes are night and falling stars.

[Tassilo's eyes are night and falling stars.]
[You think.]
[Actually, you might just not be looking at them properly.]

GM: ... sure. Um, yeah, classic meeting at the ice machine. She's a cheerful college-age-looking girl in shorts, crop top, and sandals. *[searches for "random word" online to figure out the Power's Estate, the thing she rules over, getting "logography," "tabacosis," and "calcar" before switching to a slightly less fancy generator and eventually managing to get "icicle(s)."]* Oh, and an icicle or two hanging from her nose.
TASSILO, AWKWARDLY: Ah, haha, I think you might have had a few too many already.
GM: She makes an amused noise, but also an annoyed face.

"You know how it is," she says. "Family thinks it's funny sending me to get the ice just 'cause I can't actually make any."
TASSILO: You seem— well— I mean, so few can, really.
GM, AS THE POWER OF ICICLES, AND WITH GREAT EMPHASIS: *Thank* you.
TASSILO: I suppose you can't use, um ...
THE POWER OF ICICLES: Snotcicles? I don't think so.
TASSILO: No, er, no.
THE POWER OF ICICLES: You?
TASSILO: Oh, I run rather hot. I mean, I have a perfectly normal human body temperature. I mean, I haven't actually checked. I don't snot.
THE POWER OF ICICLES: Right. *[rubs an arm across her nose while sniffling, after which the GM adds:]* crash, tinkle, tinkle, rumble of the ice machine, new icicles slowly sprouting from her nose.
TASSILO: Well, good luck ... getting ice back to your room, ma'am!
THE POWER OF ICICLES: Should do! You too, man. You too.

[Tassilo salutes.]

GM: Later, betrayed by a coincidental clink of the ice— or perhaps its desperate hand-wringing warnings in the mythic world—she will realize, "Hey, that dude's eyes, they're so weird!"

[In the "mythic world" even ice can speak.]

TASSILO: We have to leave.
CIARA: But, the bed has *springs*, Tassilo.
TASSILO: Even as the perfidy and treachery of the world *springs* eterna ... just forget I said that. Ciara, we are betrayed. They are *on* to us. They are *here.*
CIARA: Strong?
TASSILO: Strong?
HEATHER: Sorry, she uses that as a generic inquiry noise.
GM: *[head-desks, shoulders shaking]*
TASSILO: ... the Powers. I encountered one. At the ice machine.
LIUTGARDE: You seem well enough.
TASSILO: She was getting ice. I was getting ice. But this superficial appearance cannot last.
LIUTGARDE: You think this motel is a trap.

[in the background, the GM throws Heather another Fugue chip.]

TASSILO: I do.
LIUTGARDE: ... fine. We'll sleep in the van. And leave a cast illusion in our place.

["Casting" lets an Excrucian split off a portion of themselves. Like Liutgarde's earlier stunt, this effect falls under the "Eide" Attribute, for which the double-sided coin of calcification and metamorphosis—"Stilling"—is the Cost.]

GM, STRAIGHTENING: So, it's nominally a time-consuming process to cast off an illusion of yourself; do you have a way around that?
DIANE: I'm not really doing the full process, I think; this is more of an abbreviated version that just makes a handful of shells that won't do much on their own or last past the morning. I figure, even if I'm doing everybody's, it's *already* a generous use of power to call it a Casting instead of a fairly basic use of faery magic?
GM: Reasonable enough; basically, you think you can cut down the time by a lot if you build in some planned obsolescence and don't expect too much out of them?
DIANE: Yeah.
GM: ... sure, OK. Pay whatever Stilling and head to the van.
DIANE: I figure the Stilling here is pretty much just from, like, I'm not just shedding a part of myself, but actually turning it into a faint shadow and admixing it with the essence of the other two as well. It *changes* me. ... but it's only two points, so the effect isn't that great.
GM: Sounds good! ... so, who has spotlights left for the night?
EDWARD: Just me, and honestly, I think I'm going to do a retroactive spotlight, too?
GM: That the Power was scary?
EDWARD: Yeah.
GM: OK! Then the night is basically done.

One day, she was in the middle of some plan, she was wrecking something, maybe about to eat a Serpent's heart or something, and some Power yelled at her, "You'll never win," and she suddenly realized. It just kind of ... dawned on her.

"... yeah," she said, and gave them this kind of poleaxed look. "You're right."

She wandered off in a blanked-out daze, its heart still beating in her hand.

— Heather Sullivan, on Ciara Bennewick

CHAPTER SUMMARY

[This chapter featured the following spotlights and quest actions:

- *Edward's **Reckoning:** "So, what's Midland like?";*
- *Diane's quest action, to bring hints and shadows of eternity to the desert;*
- *Heather's **Attention,** as she observed;*
- *Diane's **Reckoning**: "What's this trip about?";*
- *Heather's **Reckoning**: "I want to know more about the inn.";*
- *Liutgarde's **Reaction** to that inn (neat!);*
- *... or arguably her **Attention,** as she observed its parking lot;*
- *Edward's quest action, to attract the attention of a Power; and*
- *Edward's **Reaction** to the Power that he met. ("Scary!").*

Let's do some quick accounting, some of which hasn't been explained just yet!

At the end of the chapter, the group earns 2 XP each for using up all of their spotlights. This replaces the 1 XP they would have earned for using at least 3 (pg. 29, 112).

Ciara and Liutgarde have bonus XP from tokens—Ciara has two, and Liutgarde, one. Sadly, these aren't free: each one comes with a point of the "Fugue" Cost by default (pg. 25). Liutgarde also has +2 XP towards her quest from quest actions, and both Liutgarde and Tassilo have a generic bonus XP from the same; this quest-based XP doesn't come with Fugue.

At the beginning of the next chapter, each Cost will drop by one, to a minimum of 0. So,

- *Ciara will start the next chapter with +4 XP, +2 Fugue, and +1 Wear;*
- *Liutgarde, with +4 XP, +2 quest-specific XP, +1 Stilling, and -2 Wear;*
- *and Tassilo, with +3 XP and +0 Wear.*

This is relative to where they started—for instance, if Liutgarde came into the story with 40 of every Cost, she now has 41 Stilling and 38 Wear, instead. We're also ignoring any Costs that didn't show up this chapter (like Tassilo's Fugue) and assuming that everybody started with enough Cost this session to ignore that "minimum of 0" for today.]

CHAPTER 2

A Map of World & Nothingness

Our conceptualization of the world is colored by our selves—our lives, our experience, our perspective.

In like fashion, our conceptualization of true nothingness—of the not-the-world—is colored by an inverted mask: a shape existing in antiphase to the amplitudes and frequencies of ourselves.

Accordingly, true nothingness is not like the pure nullity you imagine; or, rather, "pure nullity" would have only the loosest kinship to the thing you are imagining. Just like 0° may appear as 12° on a malfunctioning thermostat, actual nothingness will present itself as a thing of positive (if ever-shifting) forms:

The shape of the wind. An anonymous poster's positions. Honey (the void born of bees.)

—*from* THE INVENTION OF MEAD, *by Aleixo Tomás*

Glitch

The world of **Glitch** is wrong.

It looks more or less like our world. There are planets. There are beetles (oh! the beetles). There are stars. Are there noodles? There are noodles. Space and time? You'll find those too. It's all the way you've always known it; except:

It's *wrong.*

There are glitches. There are mistakes.

The most fundamental glitch—the one that people mean if they start talking about *the* Glitch and there's no other context to the matter—is this deep, core property of *wrongness* that pervades it. It's not just a world that's contingently wrong, wrong by some circumstantial congruence of its constituent events and entities. It's not just a world that is *being judged as wrong* according to some specific and external moral standard. Its wrongness is intrinsic and essential. If the ordinary people of the world do not recognize it, it is because they have become accustomed to it; raised up in an environment of wrongness, they are unable to distinguish it for what it is. If the gods and monsters that dwell there do not see it, it is most likely because they have been actively blinded to it:

Because the world, in active self-defense against those who would destroy it, has created them to guard it, and will not allow them to see the truth about itself.

... but if you have seen it, *once* you have seen it, it is unmistakable and indisputable. There can be no debate on whether the world is wrong or not, only how to live with it and what that means.

The World, Creation: a thing, that is bad.

Lesser Glitches

In addition to being wrong, and scared of death, the world is full of ... smaller problems. Little errors and malfunctions.

Glitches.

The fundamental characteristic of a glitch is that it points to *the* glitch, the *core* Glitch, the primordial error: it illuminates and elucidates the wrongness of the world.

So, like, if one day you stumble upon a patch of broken time, or walk into a place that should not exist, and you're wondering: is this because the world is wrong, or because there is something going on here that I don't yet know?

Well, the bone-deep awareness of the Glitch itself is easiest to spot in places where it gets worse or better; and since it's almost impossible to find a place inside the world that's *less* infected with the fundamental and essential quality of wrongness that pervades all things, encountering that awareness probably means that you're in the presence of a mistake. If you're looking at something weird and you suddenly feel, *the world is wrong,* if you suddenly *recognize* that, when you weren't really thinking that, weren't really feeling that before; if it's suddenly this deep and chilling awareness all through you ... then that suggests *here,* in that patch of broken time, or that impossible place, it's gotten worse; that things are just a little bit glitchier here than the norm.

That's how people meet the Glitch for the first time, usually. It's not through intellectualization or direct perception. It's not through despair. It's because they stumble on something smaller, something as simple as hearing a sound nobody should ever have to hear; or, losing somebody that they should never have had to lose, they *shouldn't* have died, not in a real and whole and proper world; or, being chased by a pack of half-spider, half-machine monsters the size of dogs; or, getting caught in a trap nobody should ever get caught in; or, opening their bathroom door to discover there are only three walls, and beyond the gap is an open stage; something like that ... and thinking, not, *this is impossible* or *this is wrong, this is mistaken* but: *everything's wrong.*

Not *am I hallucinating? Can I study this and find out what is going on here?*

But just, again: *everything is wrong.*

Glitch, Flaw, Error, Snipehole: a malfunction in the world, pointing to the original Glitch.

Terrence was inside out, but it was impossible to reason with him on the subject. If you confronted him about it, he would just say, "Not topologically!"

It wasn't even true, at least, not unless he had fewer dimensions than Gertrude thought he had or had eaten the world while nobody was looking, but Gertrude didn't really dare argue. The more she argued with Terrence the more she felt her skin crawl on her bones and her stomach twist in her body, like the Worst Boy was starting some sort of a trend.

—*from* Marozia's Bastards, *by Jake 17*

The Infection

The other major sign of a glitch is that to encounter it will change you.

The moment you direct your attention to the glitch it will set its hooks in you. It is safe to wander through an impossible place not knowing it is impossible, not realizing that it is wrong and awful and means that the world is a broken place. It is safe to skid across an impossible patch of time without ever really understanding that that is what it is you've done. But it is not safe to *notice.*

Once you have noticed the glitch enters through ... well, through a sense that you spot it with, but for a sighted person, unless it is an extraordinarily visually unexciting glitch, it enters through your eyes.

It hooks in through your eyes. It climbs into your brain. From there it spreads throughout you—throughout your pith, your elemental truths: your soul.

From that moment forward you will begin to die.

The wrongness of the world begins to kill you. *Being in the world* begins to kill you, because where there is the world, there is the Glitch. You die of poisoning: the poison of the impossible place. You die of aging, ravaged by the break in time. Grief will murder you, or your dreams will try to kill you, or in the course of being hunted by half-spider, half-machine monsters you will discover that it would have been more desirable, all in all, *not* to have been thus pursued.

A person dies when the world breaks down for them—when it can no longer support them, when it becomes so unsuitable to their existence that they're cast out of it. That's the true death, the death before death, the death preceding the petty little death that leads to an afterlife or reincarnation or whatever else that we have today. That's the death a glitch will drive you towards, because a fundamental inhospitableness to our dependence on a well-constructed world is a part of what all glitches *are:*

Just one contradiction makes the entire logical edifice fall down; just one moment of absurdity turns a sensible world into a farce.

From the moment you are infected by a glitch you begin to die; if given the chance, it will chase you well beyond the grave, into your next life if you should somehow wind up having one, into Heaven, or into Hell, until eventually you are simply *gone, destroyed, unmade*—but, as you shall see, none of those things are the likely outcome. To be *glitched* out of existence requires almost as much good fortune as it required bad.

Is the infection contagious? Does the glitching spread from you, to others? It is hardly ever so.

Other people will not automatically become aware of the wrongness of the world just by looking at you. It *could* happen, but it will not. A truth perceived second-hand becomes easy to dispute; in like fashion, the infection will

opposite: *by Elizabeth Sherry*

Senefrid Ordes, whom Poison does kill

Infection: the curse inflicted by exposure to the Glitch.

Glitched, the Glitched (casual): anyone infected by a glitch; or, humans who become Excrucians by that means.

Bane: the thing someone Glitched is dying of—the (typically ordinary) thing their infection makes a toxicant unto their lives.

Nobody comes back the same from Happy Hut.

Most of the year, only the fresh meat will go there. Only the people who don't know this town, or who are so isolated, so cut off from everyone else, that they've just never happened to hear.

Even then, you've got to be pretty desperate. I mean, look at the place.

Most of the year, the place is lit up but practically silent; the parking lot's empty: it's like, the place is filled with nothing but ghosts.

Around midterms and finals, though; around Steven-Brunnings' rare layoffs—

That's when it gets busy. At least, more than normal.

That's when people think, you know, maybe I don't want to come back the same.

You couldn't pay me to go there. You couldn't pay me to get as close as its sidewalk. But I have to admit that when Chuck died I wondered; I thought, maybe I'd go, then, if the moon over the Hut weren't so red.

—*from* Tristan Hendrickson's Story, *by Roderick S*

make your presence fester with *intimations* or *hints* at the world's wrongness, but they will not sum up to the same totality of conviction:

Nobody is going to jump to the conclusion, just because somebody has a fierce and faintly inhuman presence and ages rapidly, that the world is broken. If they knew about the Glitch already, maybe. If they were so nihilistic as to be all but ready to believe in the Glitch without direct experience, maybe. But more likely they're just going to think, "Wow, what a dramatic person with a tragic disease."

In that sense and others you will not become a glitch yourself—but you are changed. It is *in* you, a part of you, forever.

The Transformation

Some who become glitched in this fashion die. They are, after all, *made to be dying.*

Some become broken. The infection tests them; they fail, before that test, *as it is natural to do,* and the *them* in them crumbles, leaving only remnants behind. They die, but their death is rarely eternal; the glitch does not let them go. There's no grand resurrection, no mechanical process in which they constellate around the infection that lived in them once; they do not rise from their graves, unless that is highly suitable, or trick worshippers into feeding them the power to return. It's just, one day, they're back, still suffering their endless fall towards death. Rare unfortunates and even rarer fortunate will have a bit of consciousness of themselves again when the process starts—the latter, if they have a meaningful chance to overcome their test again—but for the most part they died broken and return broken, their anguish more like a recording or a protozoan writhing than a person's pain.

(That's what the best evidence says, anyway. That's how the game should most likely run them. ... but it's best to treat them kindly, just in case.)

Then there's the last few, the one in a thousand that pass that awful test.

They are not defeated by the infection in them; rather they tame it.

Situations in crisis are also situations of infinite potential leverage. Where time is functional, it is extremely difficult for humans to take any power over time. Not impossible (e.g., by moving at relativistic speeds, or learning time-related magic), but really, really hard: there just isn't any traction. When time starts to break, though, suddenly you can get a grip. And not just time: where morality is functional, say, it's resistant to manipulation. You can't just declare it into anything you'd like to be, or, well, you *can*, but not in any objectively meaningful sort of sense ... but if the local morality is *broken,* if it's gone *wrong* somehow, there's a disjunction you can exploit. And the same for any other glitch: you've got a potential grip, you've got potential leverage, whenever space breaks, whenever color does, whenever you're being chased by an *unnatural* pack of spider-machines the size of dogs. I don't want to imply that that's *easy* or that I know how it's done. I don't even want to imply that the people who manage to *do* it know how it's done.

... it's just, once you have something you can get a grip on, then it's always potentially possible to do as Archimedes suggested: find a lever long enough, and move the world.

One in a thousand tame the infection inside them. They turn it into a source of power.

With three exceptions in all known history, that power immediately corrupts them; possessed by the glitch and by the knowledge of the world's inherent wrongness, they fall into a long and brutal rage. Their damage points outwards instead of inwards but it is still damage:

It becomes their mission, their overriding obsession, to destroy the world.

It becomes impossible for them to *bear* it, the world that is killing them, the world that they now recognize as innately wrong. They loathe it. They are very and ultimately self-righteous about it: the world must end because it is so very ugly, so very twisted. Because it is a carnival of awfulness driven by the pulsing beat of that particular flaw that they find most vile.

They don't return from death by clawing themselves back from the grave, either, at least, not usually. They don't rebuild

themselves from their parts. If they die, and if the essence of them is not utterly and entirely eradicated by the great divine powers that ward Creation, they come back from sheer spitting, vituperative outrage.

They can't just sleep quietly in their graves, or even just politely spin, like a normal person might; *the world is wrong.*

The world is wrong, and something must be done.

Death, the Nature of

A long time ago, the world was made. It was founded upon a portion of the territory that was Ninuan—the void.

There was no proper continuum, back then, no sense of "place"—not even in the world, much less the void—so the nature of that territory is ambiguous; yet nevertheless it may be said that the building blocks of the world, though not quite chunks of the void itself, had a strain of the void all through them. It can be said that there was a part of the void that was alloyed into Creation from its beginning, merely by virtue of its notional location:

A location, as you will see, defined not by space and time but by symmetry; by a pattern.

One could say, it devoured, as it was made, that portion of the void that melded most naturally to it; in the moment of Creation, the piece of Ninuan that fit Creation best was devoured, whole and entire, and melded, alloyed, melted into Creation's bones.

One could say, vast territories, ancient kingdoms of the nothingness, were swallowed whole; their tyrants drowned beneath a wave of *being;* their districts swept up like houses in a hurricane, tossed about, cast down, and finally—well, save some few—devoured.

Upon this foundation the world ripened; from this richness was the world given to its flourishing.

And into the world were people born—all kinds of people; people upon people; and in those people, more richly and more deeply than in the unpersoned world around them, there thrived a strand remaining still of the Not before the world.

A piece of void, a legacy of Ninuan: a chunk of the Do-Not-Be.

They held it within them, and they did not know that they held that thing within them; but it ached in them in defiance of the Is.

This strand in them was their freedom.

The void in the people of Creation was the font of agency; the source of choice. The Unbeing in them was the *reason* that they could take actions that were not in perfect harmony with the world. Put another way, that remaining alloying of Ninuan was the reason that anyone would even *care* that there were people in the world, and not just automata; not just emptiness; not just parts in a great machine.

It was perhaps even *why* they were people, why one would say, these here are *people;* and because that legacy spread throughout the world, there would be people everywhere in the world as well.

Wraith, Wight, Revenant:
a glitched endlessly recurring and re-dying.

Haunt: a dangerous wight/revenant.

Deathwright (rare):
a glitched who regains control of themselves, typically then seeking to destroy the world
(more common terms are discussed below.)

In the end, it wasn't really the monster that broke him, but his own sense of the world; his own sense of how the world had to be. Each time it came back after he killed it, his power to cope cracked a bit further; in the end, he had to go kill something else.

He's buried over there. You can see it.

Every few months, the gravekeeper has to shoo the monster, returning, away.

—from The Pixel-Flowers, *by Pavithra Beale*

the Not, the void, the Beyond, the Do-Not-Be, the Lands Beyond Creation:
everywhere that isn't anywhere.

Ninuan:
the Not, specifically considered as a place.

Stains made with Adrienne Versic's Wonder Dirt cannot be removed, but only grow more complex, with unsettling implications regarding the ending of all things.

—from Evaluation of Formula #29806, *by Gabriel Gatson*

The legacy of Ninuan made them more than just machinery ...

But it was also why they died.

The strand of the void that lived in them—it would *consume* people. Eventually. It would bring them to the point where they would belong, not to the world, but to the void. Then they would leave the world, they would have no other choice, and they would fall into the nothingness Beyond it.

They would "die."

That was death's first and original way.

The world did not like this thing called death. It fought.

It built walls around itself, walls and walls, it encircled itself a thousand thousand ways. It cupped itself in a wall to catch the falling souls, built Hell and Heaven and the river-cycles of reincarnation.

It attempted, admirably, to be sustainable; to make the death deep in its bones into a *not-death,* or at least, into a thing that was not an end, but behind it the true death-nature waited, always waited, ever lurked.

Prescott's children

Once upon a time, this guy—Prescott—got cursed so that everyone he touched would turn into the thing they really were. He thought that that meant that, when he touched people, they'd maybe turn into, like, horses, or whatever. Maybe the bad ones would be slugs or dung-beetles. Maybe the good ones would be humans still, or, maybe, more mythic things, like unicorns.

"Squabbling children," his aunt opined.

But the people he touched didn't turn into horses, or slugs, or humans, or squabbling children, or even unicorns. They turned into unimaginable things. The void woke up in them, and they became impossible beings—shapeless shadow-beings, dreams that walked, mists of fire, organic air, the living negative space between the trees. Even when they became relatively stable and comprehensible things (people-like things, animal-like things) ... the weirdest things were wrong with them. Some of them couldn't be touched, not because they were ethereal or because they'd dodged but because you were always too far away. Some of them would finish your sentences before you started them. Some held stars burning inside their chests; others, though self-renewing, dripped their surface layer off like wax wherever it was they went. One of them cut anything it looked at. Another one was always surrounded by a pleasant space, and, for some reason, by spheres: not intrinsically, but by repeatable coincidence.

One walked on water and swam in air.

One was *less* visible the more light was around her.

They became creatures, not of the world, but of the Not—and realized, as they did so, that in a deep and spiritual sense that *they had always been.*

It's not clear why that should be. It's not even clear why that should be *possible.*

It's ... it's just the way the void and Creation interact.

It was hard work, bringing them forth. In physical technicality, he just had to touch people; but on a deeper level, it *took* from him, that transformation. It *drained* him.

The curse wasn't meant to be that way, probably. It was meant to be a more mortal magic. Maybe it was Prescott's fault that it went wrong like that. Maybe it was another error in the world. But it took more power than the curse sustained, and so it took from *him*, from the *essence* of him, and he withered; and before he'd lived three full years of it, the curse turned him to dust.

It took a long time before people figured out what had been going on with him, but they did—at least the magicians did, and the botanists, and the great hidden Powers of the world.

Prescott's touch was fatal.

It brought forth the shapes of people's deaths.

The death in a person isn't very detailed. It's not like everybody contains a complete piece of the Not, a jewel of preserved structure that "survived" the formation of Creation like a bug in amber and integrated exactly into a single soul when souls were later getting made. The deaths that Prescott pulled forth were mostly *pieces,* things that only took on their full form (such as it was) when actually embedded into the world. Things that learned how to be from the life they stole, or the world around them, because ... well, you can't be in the world without, to at least some extent, *being.*

But that's what they were, anyway:

Residuals of the life—the ... thing-like-life ... of Ninuan.

Beings Made of Laws

Early on—long before "humanity" was properly invented—the first people came to be.

They weren't made of meat and words like humans are. They weren't born of woman and of man. They pulled themselves into existence, ripping themselves into being from the slaughter of primeval proto-things, and they built their flesh of laws.

Their bones were laws. Their flesh were laws. Laws ran in every drop of blood. Not *lots of little laws,* not a great code like Hammurabi's was, but a few great, vast, and solemn laws, to bind the world under their sway.

Firstborn made Meaning and Existence with its flesh, and the nature of existence became defined; its scope—its *requisite implications*—stabilized; and its qualities were set forth. If one must say, the world already was, or where did Firstborn come to be? Still, then, it "was" in a fundamentally ambiguous and imperiled way before the laws of Firstborn's birth, whereas it *was,* full stop, Existence, ever after. It *meant ... something*, perhaps, before Firstborn was, but that meaning was like the memory of a dream, and Firstborn's birth, the cruel awakening.

Firstborn was first (of course), but others followed.

The Angel of Time was born, and stole the great spiral structures of the world's deepest layers to be his own; or, rather, one could say, they revealed their time-like qualities. The Angel of Trees dragged herself upwards from the soil,

Prescott's Children: people Prescott touched (also, sometimes, any later reincarnations thereof).

On her eleventh birthday, Sarah received her official notification from the Institute that she was actually a fetch—a doppelganger, a fairy being that had replaced the REAL *Sarah some years before.*

"I don't understand," Sarah said, at the intake interview. "I feel just like myself."

"Everyone feels like themselves," the doppelganalyst informed her.

"But, like," Sarah said, picking her words carefully. "Shouldn't I be real wicked and cackling, way down underneath?"

"What do you mean, 'underneath?'" the doppelganalyst said. "People are just what they are; or, at most, they're what they'd be, if they were not afraid."

—from The Leaf-Dollar Ratio, *by Penelope Zoetrope*

opposite: *by Maria Guarneri*

and a clod of it obscured her eye; the definition slipped, and the *axis mundi*, the great branching spear struck through the world, became by technicality a Tree. Beauty was born, and Beauty screamed, but xe could not unmake xir own existence; the font of Beauty, at the peak of the world, was christened Heaven, and in Heaven a certain tribe of people came to dwell.

That tribe took the name, the "Angels."

Not all such beings take their form.

From the belly of the great Tree—the World Ash, Yggdrasill—great serpents made of laws crawled out, and crawl out still. They are eerily peaceful creatures, too peaceful to have ripped themselves into existence; most likely it is the Ash itself (and not the snakes) that stirs and tears apart the underlying proto-stuff to form their eggs; that claps the world, as each snake is born, in brass-forged seals of law.

From beyond the world the Magisters of the Wild stumble in. They do not *mean* to clad themselves in laws when they arrive, they do not *mean* to make themselves abominable unto the void—but they cannot prevent themselves from doing so. From the moment of their arrival, and *unlike* many of the Not-things of the Lands Beyond the World, they are infected by Creation: they are caught up in its wrongness, and made wrong.

On Earth beings that named themselves as Gods arose—the intrusion of algaic and amoebic life into the world of utter Law. Later some took more animalistic or human forms; others remained as ... let us say ... abstract paintings of the horrible divine.

Time passed, and certain Angels Fell.

The Lords of Rule and Game arose; like the Gods, they were born of Earth, *are* born of Earth, but steal their power not so much from the primordial substrate or the field of life as from the untapped potential within humanity.

The Earth is but one fruit on a laden Tree; the other worlds are home to Angels, Fallen, Wild, and Serpents too, and also to unique law-beings of their own. To creatures of Splintering and Domination, of Ite and Ember; to Ofeili's mercantile gods; to nameless things, and things beyond: things these words cannot describe.

These—the Angels and the Fallen, the Serpents, Gods, the Lords of Rule and Game and Wild, ... plus the peculiar divinities that are found on the other planets on the Ash—these beings have named themselves **Imperial:**

Each in themselves and in their laws above all mortal things: all mortal dukes, kings, queens, and princes; all ministers, all popes and priests.

They are the font from which all blessings flow ... and all curses too. They are the damnation of the world, and its principal defenders. —not that it is surprising that they should be that last; they are heavily *motivated* to defend the world. They are its essential portion. Killing a person or destroying a town is, after all, like kicking sand; what does it accomplish in the end? It is only when one may ruin the Angel of Conspiracy, Debate, and Trade, or the Serpent who is Spring and Molten Earth, or any other suchlike thing, that *anything* can truly end—

And only when Heaven and Hell at last are razed, and Firstborn slain, and Time is rent asunder, will the long harsh tragedy that is the world come stumbling (and finally!) to a stop.

Imperator(e)s, Law-Beings (Excrucian term), Ymerae: (self-created) beings, each of whose existence defines several major concepts of the world (e.g., "the Imperator of Doorways, Bronze, and Trust").

Angel: an Imperator dwelling in Heaven.

Fallen Angel, Devil: an Angel, thrown out of Heaven.

Serpent, Aaron's Serpent: an Imperator; a child of the World Ash; also, a very large snake.

Wild Imperator, Magister of the Wild, Wildlord: an Imperator with a core essence from Beyond.

Lord of the Game, Lord of Games, Player: an Earth-specific Imperator whose essence relates to the human power of self-destruction.

Lord of the Rules, Lord of Rule, Incarnate: an Earth-specific Imperator whose essence relates to humanity's survival-will.

Divine Imperator, True God: an Earth-specific Imperator unbound to the human soul.

God: an ambiguous term; "*a* god" often refers to a Divine Imperator, to an Imperator of some other type, or to one of their servants. "God," capitalized, may refer to the creator, Cneph, or it may be the human concept (whose connection to any deeper truths is, as of yet, unknown).

The birth of Red chained the wild horses of that color; entrapped the sunsets; shouldered open the insides of every crystal to fit its light there; and with cord upon cord, intertangling upon one another, walled out the greatest portion of the seas. From a pose upon the cliffs it stole the heat of rage; beside our beds it skulked to dye our blood. It took the rose but not the vine; took the robin but refused the swan; in a flood it drowned the red banana and the beet.

We cannot even name the red banana, now, without it; nor think of rubies without the red in them; or see the old raw truth that redness stole in those things that it cast out.

What Red's things were before, had they color then, we do not remember. We do not know. It survives, if it survives, only in their furtive, beaten glances; in the faintest whispers that "red" things exchange, when their shackles loosen, in those deepest darkest corners of the world where Red and all Red's Powers may not go.

—*from* Two Bites of the Apple, *by Clarimond Holmes*

The Seal of Time

The end of things, of course, is long since writ. It was immanent in the world before Time was made, and it

The Fall, the War in Heaven:
a doctrinal and political dispute in Heaven.

The First Age, the Golden Era: the Time before the Fall

The Second Age: the Silver Era that would follow.

The Angel of the Golden Era: Imperator of the First Age.

Jan ben Jan: Imperator of Earth's Second Age, even as others ruled the Second Age of other worlds.

The Nameless Roads: branching paths through the notional future, accessible through the Seal of Time. (One's discoveries along these roads are not canonical.)

cannot be made un-immanent.

The final battle already *exists*; it is only waiting for its players to arrive—

For the right monsters to come into the world to bring ruination to all the most sacred things, and to douse the branches of the Ash with blood. For the planets to fall from the Ash like rain, and Heaven to be set aflame; for the void to devour endless souls; for a final, transgressive act of murder, in the hidden center-point of the world, that will make the grand narrative of the world just *stop:*

The Moment of the End.

The beings of law—the **Imperators**—fear it, for who would not fear it? ... and so they sealed it away; they built a great treasure-hall to protect it, which they called the Seal of Time.

Inside that Seal the Imperators locked three futures: an age of silver, an age of brass, and an age of dust.

When War came to Heaven, the Angel of the Golden Era—of that sweet nostalgic time before the modern day—was flung down; he struck against the Seal and cracked it, and the silver age escaped. It could not be caught, could not be sealed again; it scattered itself, instead, wearing a thousand faces and a thousand names, through all the endless branches of the Ash.

THE BEYOND

Beyond the world of **Gli▣ch** there is the ℵot. It is an endless emptiness, a yawning nothingness, it is the void Beyond the world. It's not actually like space: it's not an endless *anywhere,* a great blank field within actuality. It's an endless *nowhere-at-all,* lacking space and time as much as substance. Yet it has qualities and values of its own.

To a certain extent these are projected. When we look upon nothingness we see the inside of our eyes. When we listen to nothingness we hear the beating of our heart. In an absolute sensory void we perceive not true blankness but the introspective movements of our mind. The metaphysics of the ℵot does not negate this; it remains true, and true absolutely:

The ℵot is polluted by the *that-which-looks-upon.* It can be molded like a stranger's mind.

Yet there is a structure therein nevertheless—a truth, an essence. There is nothing there, but it is a *specific* nothing. A ℵot-apple has no weight, no mass, no color, and no taste, but the color that it does not have is red. If you want to deny this, and say that the color that it doesn't have is green, that is a *different* ℵot-apple that you speak of; neither may exist, of course, but the two are not the same.

—and one, and not the other, may well be present in a given portion of the ℵot.

Because the ℵot does not exist, because it lacks the quality of existence, it also lacks the quality of intrinsically incorrect existence. Things of the ℵot are not *wrong.*

They are simply, and each of them, themselves.

Lambda-Notation

Glitch will frequently refer to ℵot-things as "λ-things" instead; more generally, λ- may be used as a prefix for anything unreal.

This lambda-notation is principally a convention meant to dull the sense of repetition and denial that would otherwise accompany the endless use of "ℵot." Put another way, it is a practice meant to facilitate conceptualizing a ℵot-apple as distinguished by its *appleness* rather than by its *un*-appleness ... while still clearly representing it as born of void. In that sense, the λ- can be pronounced as " :" a short inhale; a moment's pause. More traditionally, however, λ is read as *lambda* [lam-duh], loosely referencing both the Gothic letter *laaz* (lake/water/the unconscious), and the λ-calculus of Alonzo Church.

Lambda-notation is more technical than most Strategists prefer in conversation, but it *is* a common written shorthand and is *acceptable* to use in speech. Pretentious Strategists may use *laaz*-notation instead, pronouncing λ- as [lawz] or as [la-wooze].

ℵot-X, λ-X, X: an instance of X, as instantiated within the void. Sometimes left implicit. Thus, "a ℵot-traveler rides on a λ-road; they will reach their destination by the night."

It is widely believed that Henry Noonan's contribution to the field of modern art is "the painting that isn't"—transcending blank walls and empty frames, he painted works that were simply never delivered to the museum or buyer; arranged shows which he and his works would not attend.

It was only after the Clinton-era expansion of the Freedom of Information Act that art historians learned that this belief was fallacious:

Henry Noonan's true contribution was the painting that mustn't be looked at: paintings that museums, galleries, and private parties might own, but could not show to the public; paintings not allowed to be present even at venues and parties dedicated to their release.

The prohibition was not merely social, nor was it artistic: Noonan painted exclusively subjects not safe to have ever seen.

— *from* Mr. Snelson and the Waterdrop King, *by Janet Copeland*

A Dreaming World

The Beyond is a dreaming place; the things that there within it dwell dwell in a timeless, near-conscious slumber.

Past the wall around the world—for there is such a wall, a flickering blue wall, a "cup of flame" wrapped tight around the Thing That Is—perception is not reflexive. The Beyond dreams, in part, because its dreams are not lightly troubled: in the Not, one does not see unless one cares to look. One does not hear unless one cares to hear. In Creation, if one does not trouble oneself to know the world, the truth will still wave its hands and call out for your attention; but if one does not trouble oneself to know the void, knowledge of the void will not impinge.

More subtly, in the void, *attention* becomes less reflexive. It is, of course, often an act of will even in the world; people are always losing track of the world around them and struggling to pay the proper attention when tired, or distracted, or to boring things. In the void, though, the ground state for attention is much lower. The part of you that intermittently reminds you, *hey, wake up!* is like a voice drowned by pillows:

Still there, but muffled, sedated, and covered over in softness.

In the void, it is natural for even Creation-born to fall victim to this, to fall into the rhythm of the place, and to drift off into a sort of dream. Minutes and hours will slip past without the slightest notice; days, with only the vaguest framework of events; and the only thing that keeps one from losing years or centuries to this, instead, is that time *itself* is often rather sluggardly in the Beyond.

In the void, because attention and perception are not reflexive, the things that exist there do not tend to practice them. Entities take form there like seeds that drift down from some higher place; they root themselves in the stuff of the Beyond; and there they grow, in solitary and monadic contemplation of themselves, unaware of every other thing.

They are, I suppose, *Not-entities* or *λ-entities*—the terms would be more accurate—but if one sets aside an existence-centric perspective, it doesn't really matter. They lack substance, they lack existence, in a technical sense and in many senses that are not so technical, but they are not semantic nulls; they have a structure and a nature. They are things that can be identified; a unique, or at least somewhat unique, reference to them can be made.

They are all, or almost all, to some degree, aware. That awareness is generally extremely vague and notional; it is a *dreaming* awareness, as has been said, but it exists:

A fundamental element of almost everything in the Beyond is a rudimentary *sense of self.*

For a thing to exist without worldly substance, it transpires, *something* must conceive of its existence; in the void, where almost every possible observer turns their attention inwards, there are few things to conceive of a thing's existence save itself.

Thus, there are cliffsides and forests, but they are not dead things and they are not mindless things: they dream of their own existence, or are, at least, a part of larger landscapes that so do. They may not dream of themselves as things that move; they may not dream of themselves as things that think, not properly, or feel; but there is still a hidden life to them, a hidden, subtle will. They are as they are because, at a fundamental level, it is how they see themselves. That vision refines over the millennia, becoming more symbolically potent and more deeply resonant ... an effect that may or may not be lost on the Creation-born.

Eide, the Dream-of-Self: the self-concept that a λ-thing creates, within the void, to establish its identity.

Wyrd: that unknown and unknowable λ-IS that dreams the Eide.

A Timeless, Spaceless Symmetry

The things of the Beyond are aware of themselves—but, as has been said, of nothing else.

There are predators in the endless dark, but they do not stalk their prey; in a state of absolute internal focus, they articulate the hunting-nature of themselves. There is prey there, but it does not recognize the hunting thing that kills it: it enacts the mournful passage of its death, instead, when its prey-nature so portends.

Can this possibly be perfectly organized in time and space? It can't. There is no power that, when a hunter articulates its killing blow, miraculously arranges for its prey to enact its dying moment exactly then and exactly there.

... but, for that matter, what *is* a "then?" What *is* a "there?" The concept is in some sense vacuous; time and space do not *exist*, beyond the world. They don't even *Not-exist,* in the sense of the Not-apple, beyond the world:

They are simply features of Creation that do not extend that far.

There are time-like elements of the Beyond. There are space-like elements. There is even a kind of implicate continuum. But that continuum is epiphenomenal; it is not one dominant form that sets the shape of Ninuan, but a sheaf of many different models, each contingent upon the infinity of λ-things. It does not govern the relationships of the Beyond: instead, **interactions in the Beyond are governed by a process of structural harmony.**

Without real space, without real time, the story is told backwards:

When we see that a hunter's actions correlate with those of a certain prey—regardless of "where" or "when" that prey might be—we say, that is the prey it hunts. More than that, we say, that *is* the definition of their "where" and "when."

Where are they? In the same rough location.

When are they? In the same rough time.

The causality of the Beyond is not an order imposed upon events, but an order created *by* them, one of a handful of least-effort solutions to the puzzle of how the things of the Beyond relate. The continuum, as has been stated, is not immanent but contingent: just a best-fit candidate that mathematics pushes forwards as a space-time in which we can pretend these monads interact.

The Beyond is infinite, but it's not undifferentiated or random; it has its own conceptual biases, and for that reason its infinite extent does not guarantee that you can find any old random (Not-)thing—a cold fire, possibly, but not a pyrokinetic ferret made out of painkillers; a wicked variant on someone you know, perhaps, but not a literal evil twin; a thing that is like a world, *like* it, yes, but not a whole additional Creation. It's not like the illimitable infinity of possible ideas, or lies, or fictions:

It may be that when a given hunter goes to kill, there is literally *no* prey to match.

Not anywhere. Not in all the infinity of the void.

... but that *usually* won't happen, because the void is infinite. Only when a hard limit comes into play will the prey fail to appear.

It's the same for all the other interactions, too.

Sometimes things go wonky. Very rarely, things go wonky. Sometimes a tree will get hit by lightning and there's just no suitable lightning to hit it with. Sometimes lightning will hit a tree, only there's no tree suitable to react. That *happens*, because the continuum is after-the-fact and contingent—but not *often*.

Most of the time, it all seems correct.

THE FIRE THAT IS PERCEPTION

The creatures of the Beyond do not typically perceive; therefore, typically, there is nothing that perceives them. Their self-conception goes unchallenged. They fulfill all needs within themselves. Existence and non-existence are essentially the same for them: if one day they were to be revealed as nothing more than a trick of the light or a false idea, then, for what reason would they care?

The pressure of attention or perception upon them is dangerous. It troubles them. It shakes them from their endless dream. Perhaps most importantly, it rouses them to look about in turn. Thus the whole of the Beyond slowly creaks and crackles to a sort of invisible and agitated life when a person with the will to look upon it passes through it, everything waking everything else around it in a kind of chain reaction as the attention of things is shared around ... but at the same time, as has been said, the Beyond's most natural state is sleep, and thus the concentric waves of attention that spread from a person's passage will eventually subside.

For all that it is full of things, or ... Not-things, at least ... it should be said that the Beyond is dark beyond the dreams of shadows and even more silent than the grave. There is little to touch, taste, or smell there that is not brought with one from Creation, and even such senses as proprioception and time perception there go dim. Fortunately, light is not necessary, as *seeing* is not necessary; sound is not necessary, as it is not really through your ears or through auditory perception *as such* that the things of the void are heard. The things of Ninuan are perceptible for the same reason they do not indulge greatly in perception: because they are themselves. They are things that have grown so deeply *into* themselves that it shines in them as a thing like light, resounds from them as a thing like sound, fills the false space-time of correlated things around them, of things with a deep and underlying symmetry to them, with *Hey, listen, I am here!*

... if anyone should ever hear.

For this reason, if you have learned to be aware of any of this; if *you* have any structural relation to any of this, so that you are not merely blindly flailing in an uncorrelated region of the void, it is easy to forget that there is nothing there. It is easy to forget that one sees nothing, hears nothing, touches nothing, tastes nothing, and smells nothing; after a while, all that becomes irrelevant, save for incidental details like the absence of the sun.

Thus in one sense we may say: there are forests there, and waterfalls, in Ninuan; there are roads; there are even stars. You may pass through the forest and know the color of the leaves, and the shape of the stones, and the sound of your horse's hoofbeats on the trail. It does not matter that the forest is beyond the world, where there is no sight, no sound, and perhaps even no existence: it *itself* knows it is there, it has dreamed a shape and colors for it, and by those things and from those things a traveler may know its form.

In another sense—as most of the people of Creation would complain, if you were to bring them out Beyond—there is only darkness piled on darkness, emptiness upon emptiness, half-glimpsed shapes emerging from the contours of one's eyes, and the faint warm gentle all-embracing pressure of the Not.

These are the two faces of Ninuan:

One a vibrant and silvered land; the other, pure emptiness and dark.

Creational beings can generally perceive Ninuan only when dying or when so broken as to be plausibly considered Not-versions of themselves. Exceptions include the Lords of Games and the practitioners of certain magic arts.

THE WALL AROUND THE WORLD

A wall of flickering blue surrounds the world; a "cup of fire," as the Powers say; but it is open at the top.

It is a being of its own account—a legendary potentate of the Beyond, divine and limitless, a monster comparable

to the world itself—but it is broken; its mind, if it has one, is quiescent. It is hung around the world in folds in gathers; in stupor, stasis, death, or mute and helpless misery: save for its flickers, shimmers, and its rippling, it does not move.

It is a greater suzerain than any in Creation, but it does not act, and it does not reign.

Arguably it is because this being exists that Creation exists at all; at the least, without it, *what is the world* would be as ambiguous as the world itself had been in its earliest days. If Firstborn is Meaning and Existence—the law, at least, of Meaning and Existence—and Bet-Raqaph is Space, then the cup of fire that surrounds it all would be the law that is the world itself.

Its name is lost. Some suggest it is "Narsinha." It is mostly known as "the Weirding Wall" today.

It may be wrong. It may be the source of every wrongness. Or it may simply be a witness and an incidental casualty to the tragedy that is the world.

Seven twisting passages trace through the Wall around existence. The people of the lower worlds may, if they are skilled and brave, find their way out through them; through them, the things of the void may slip within. These passages may, perhaps, represent the wounds that brought Narsinha low, or they may simply be elements of its nature: its orifices, perhaps, or a kind of decoration; an external representation of its thoughts, now barely moving; tunnels made by parasites in its corpse-flesh; or the manipulators with which it once would sift the void.

Seven passages trace through that Wall—and one, the greatest one of all. At the top, the Wall is open; only the finest membrane of Heaven's sky holds out the void.

The beings of law have always feared the void, for they could not control it; but it was the Angels who could look up and *see* the void. It was the Angels who could disturb the void with their fear of it; who could make the void to roil with their eyes.

This thing, they should not have done.

the Weirding Wall, the Cup of Flame:
a flickering blue wall around the world.

Narsinha (hypothetical):
that wall, before it was made captive/slain.

Before there was Time, before there was Space; before there were Mountains, Depths, and Trees; before there was Breath to breathe and Light to see with, Skies to spread and Waves to roll; before even Truth, or Love, or Meaning, the world was this, and this alone:

Something, ... is not the void.

—*from* Becoming Noble, *by Fayola Osagiobare*

THE EXCRUCIANS

Some years ago, the world gazed upon the endless Not. Its gaze disturbed the void that lies Beyond, and it conjured up great nightmares from the depths.

They would be called **the Excrucians.**

They weren't weird and covered in tentacles, because there were Gods that had that covered. There are certainly things out there in the dark Beyond that are monstrous and shapeless horrors, sometimes they do come by, sometimes they are even hostile to the world when they so come—but they weren't the nightmare that the world had then.

These things looked like us.

They had a sick pallor to them, but they looked like people. They had a tendency towards being tall, and thin, and wearing black. They tended to be missing some bits, not like there were physical holes in them, but like even after coming into the world they were still a little unformed, still a little ambiguous: their details were not always clear.

The weirdest thing was their eyes, which weren't eyes at all. You'd look at them, and you'd ... miss.

You'd see the night and falling stars instead.

It's not exactly a pure and objective characteristic; at least in part, it's because of how much sighted people tend to think with their eyes. That is, the real thing there isn't that their *eyes* are weird, like, physically and specifically their eyeballs; rather, it's that your *looking outwards* can't quite connect up with theirs.

If you're blind, for instance—or even if you've been in the dark long enough to sort of forget that you're sighted—then it's their skin, and not their eyes, that is wrong. You'll touch it, if you touch it, and you'll feel a wall of crumbling snow. Behind it sprawls a winter's night.

That thing: it wouldn't even have a person's shape. It wouldn't *follow* a person's shape. Maybe if you kept pulling your hand back and putting it out again, you could trace out their true boundary, staccato; but otherwise, if you ran your hand along the wall of snow, it wouldn't have the curves and bends of their flesh. It would crumble, just like their flesh would not; your hand ... would go in?

If you moved your hand up to feel their face, it would brush against waving branches, in the wind, the night.

There are limitless permutations, so we won't cover them; those two should suffice for most encounters on Earth. All we shall note, for the rare case where it matters, is that if you don't have a major sense that *can* connect to theirs, outwards to outwards—in the way that you don't go around listening to people's ears, or magnetorecepting their organs of magnetoreception—they will lose the specificity of their location entirely, and appear to you to be all around.

In any case. They were pallid things, they had never known the sun; and when you looked upon them, you could not catch their eyes.

The Excrucians rode horses as pale as they were. ... paler, really; most were white but some were bloated green and

others *dead.* They carried weapons, *Abhorrent* Weapons, strong enough to kill even Angels; and not just Angels but Serpents, Fallen, Wild, and all other suchlike beasts.

Perhaps not coincidentally, that is exactly what they decided to do.

They descended onto Heaven from above and began a great slaughter; and the world, on that day, became much less than it had been. Countless concepts just *broke* along with the Angels of the laws that bound them; some, perhaps, survived in other forms, but most just ... no longer made sense. No longer could you read your own moods from the sunset; homunculi no longer figured in math; the idea that "art is a liquid" lost its core traction; and *ad hominem* was no longer logically sound. One color was lost, and it became no longer important:

The shades *exist,* you could steal them from green, gold, and orange and write down a new law that would govern them, but it would seem quixotic; no one would consent.

Another color was lost, and ripped forth from the spectrum—if you got down and dirty while measuring light, you'd find that those wavelengths just no longer exist.

The mind'll try to blur past that, if it can, like it does the eight impossible numbers, but if you are scrupulous you'll be able to tell.

A few of the Excrucians slipped by the Angels.

Down to the depths of the world they stormed, cleaving the substrate into screaming pieces as they passed, and they bent their will against the Seal of Time; the Age was burst asunder. The Seal was split, and the world cried out, and Time it rang like a great brass gong; and the silver days of the Second Age, they would be known no longer.

That was as far as it went, on that occasion.

In Heaven, they were eventually beaten back, though with great difficulty, and with great cost.

In the Seal of Time, before they could reap the remaining Ages of the World, they met a guardian they could not defeat: Attaris Ebrôt Appêkā, Magistra of the Third Age. On that day she named and made herself the governing law and tutelary spirit of the war itself between the world and void; of an Age that would be haunted by the shadow of the Excrucians, and the threat that they embodied: that the world might end.

In one sense, in so doing, she doomed herself, and everyone else; ensured that that war *would* not end, *could* not end, until the closing measures of her Age: made the Age that she held in trust an Age of pain and battle.

In another sense ...

Because she held the law in her of the war between the world and void, the Excrucians could not touch her. She was nigh-invincible to them; she could crush their offensive with a wave of a hand, *declare it shattered.* She could laugh and write *they failed here* into the story of the world, and so they would; nor could they circumvent this, slice past the grappling limbs of fate, and murder her instead—

For, of course, were Attaris to die, were her Third Age to die, then they would have no time to do anything else; the war would end. Were she to die while the Fourth Age that was set to follow her existed still, then that would be that:

Whatever else might happen later, the Excrucians would have lost *their* chance to kill the world.

It ended there. It ended there, except, of course, it didn't; the Third Age would be an Age of Pain and an Age of War, and the Riders, the Excrucians, returned. To Heaven; and, once they had found sufficient paths, to all the planets that hung below.

They were no longer a great army, but infiltrators and raiders; they did not seek to smite the world away with one great blow, but to harry it, to carve away at its edges, to wear it down. They were never quite as bold or quite as terrifying as in that first attack, but they did not stop.

They never stopped.

They are still fighting against the world today.

The Nature of the War

If you look at it through the right lens, the Excrucians have always existed.

They are a *people,* a people of Ninuan. Theirs was the silvered land to roam before Creation was ever made. Theirs, as much as anyone's, were the territories that Creation stole in its formation; theirs were the kings and queens, the long-lost and long-forgotten tyrants, that were covered over and drowned when Creation first was made.

Theirs is a culture and it is an ancient one; they have a language that is their own, and a history, or a Not-history, at the least. They have ancient familial lines and old connections.

In another sense, of course, it is not so.

They, like all things of the Beyond, have lived their lives in a state of dreaming. As monadic and individuated as any other creatures of the Not, they are commonly acculturated only by coincidence; share a language only by coincidence; know and remember one another, only by coincidence—or, rather, not so much coincidence as by the ineluctable logic of the sorting algorithm that draws them forth from the endless void.

Not a coincidence, but the nature of the void's continuum:

That it sifts itself for things that belong together, and places them chronologically, physically, and socially "nearby."

From one perspective, the Excrucians have always existed. From another, it was Creation's fear and loathing that defined them.

The foundation point, the initial lodestone and the touchstone for the symmetry that drew them all together, was Creation's nightmare; it birthed them from the void, summoned them from the void, drew them to it by the inevitability of correlation as a *thing to fear.* As individuals they were always self-defining, seeds that dreamt themselves into fruition in the endless void, but as "Excrucians"—

As the Riders, as the enemies of the world, as the other side of Attaris Ebrôt Appêkā's Age of War—

They are in a very real sense the shape Creation has put to its enemies.

Excrucian, Rider: a being of Ninuan, at war against the world.

The Bellum Magnum, the Void-Creation War, (colloquially) the Valde Bellum:
that war of which we speak.

Qistjan, Annujan, Strategist, Prince(ss), Commander:
a warleader of the Excrucian host.

Attaris, Attaris Ebrôt Appêkā:
Wild Magister; Imperator of the Third Age.

Ebrôt Appêkā:
Fallen Angel, somehow destroyed or incorporated into the Magistra Attaris when the Third Age began.

One day Lucy dug a hole in the back of her yard. She didn't dig it too deep but she dug it all wrong. It wasn't like a hole ought to be, and after looking into it for a while, she wasn't like a Lucy ought to be, either.

Her Mom tried to fill up that hole. She thought that maybe that would fix Lucy. Her Dad tried to fill it up too. But the more they fed it, the deeper it grew. It lined itself with the stones they threw in to fill it. It carved its pathways deeper, ever deeper, into the dark. They heard ringing, pounding sounds from deep below them, as of dwarven hammers, and the growling of great and horrid beasts down in the dark.

"We could try digging?" Lucy's cousin suggested; but by that time, if you wanted to dig, you'd have to go down into the hole.

By the time Lucy was grown the pit was bigger than the rest of the world was. It made the earth and the sky and the stars look small. Life, the surface world ... all existence ... was just a pimple on the skin of the underworld kingdom.

Anything important lived down in the depths.

The world had become irrelevant, thought the grim magisters that oversee such fates, and so they closed the books on it. They sent the Dragon that is the End of Things roaring down through the world. Straight across the plains and valleys that dragon went burning, straight from the edge of things towards the heart of the world; and it was really just a coincidence—the inevitable kind, yes, the kind that couldn't actually not have happened, yes, but still, just a coincidence—that Lucy's house, and her pit, was right along the way.

The Dragon flew past. It dipped down. It tumbled over. It fell into the pit that was in Lucy's back yard.

After that, that was it. It was over. Maybe one day it'll get out, but it'll most likely never. The world probably has to go on now for the rest of all its days.

The magisters sent Lucy a formal complaint.

"You dug a hole," they wrote, "but you dug it wrong. Incorrectly. Now it's eaten our Dragon, and you owe us fifty pence."

—*from* The Corpse in the River of Prayers, and Three Tiles from the Celestial Sky, *by Sunigilda Garland*

It is because Creation knows that shape, knows it down into its bones, that there are and must be an unending stream of beings *suited* to claim the name "Excrucian" in the nearby void. The laws of the void are rigorous: while Attaris' war exists, and anything in the void *can* be Excrucian, they will continue to arrive.

They will come, they will always come, with their blades and their hidden eyes; they will not stop, in a very real sense they *cannot* stop, until the mathematics of the War become complete. They come, and they reach the boundaries of the world, and there they wake; there, before the cup of flame, they shake away the somnolence of the void.

The fear and loathing of Creation calls forth its enemies even now, an accomplice in its own eventual murder.

But there's an even wickeder sting on the tail of all this, which is:

As long as the Age of War remains—and perhaps, too, before it began, and even a little bit after—hidden in the roots of the world, in the wild strands of void in things, in the legacy of that territory of Ninuan that was occupied and stolen in Creation's birth, it will turn out that they, the Excrucians, have always already been hidden among us.

In that wild power of choice and death in us.

Their warleaders, in particular—their *qistja*, their *annuja*, which the Powers of Creation call their Strategists—in some few of us, within the world, they are the shape of our hidden death.

The Excrucian Template

So here's how it goes.

When you seize control over your glitch infection—or rather, *to* seize control over your glitch infection—you become a creature of the void.

And, like Prescott's children before you:

In that moment, you will realize that you have always been. That *some part of you,* at least, coded into the deepest portions of the soul, has always been a monster of the Not, born of the Not *to* control that infection. Maybe you turn into a snake made of bones, or a mist of fire, or some creeping asymmetric horror from Beyond. Maybe you live between time's normal moments, or aren't so much in a *place* as in a *context* in the world. Maybe you show up when somebody whispers your name into a mirror—

But most likely you're not *that* weird. Most likely you don't go amoeboid, or all-over tentacles, or full surreal; most likely you don't even turn into a *symbolically rich yet somehow alien thing.*

Most likely you struggle to your feet, when all is said and done, and you find yourself Excrucian—and not just *any* Excrucian, but a dignitary among them. One of their Strategists or Militares, as the Powers of Creation call them: one of their *warleaders.*

That term is a little deceptive, though. It undersells the importance that they hold.

They are military commanders, yes, but they are also Ninuan's lost royalty—the tyrants, bold and glorious and fell, that Creation cast down from their thrones when it rose to swallow up the lands of Ninuan. They are the *hope* of the Excrucian host, the shining lightlessness that brings together the scattered purposes of the Riders into a great world-ending whole.

They are the *qistja* and the *annuja*, the destroyers and the redeemers: the ones who will resolve at last the Creation-burden on the void.

That's what you probably come into, when you defeat the glitch. Your death flares up inside you and you *know* it, you *know* yourself, and you lose track of who you used to be; for you remember now you are a legend, a *name* of legend, a world-doomed princeps or principissa out of Ninuan's lost lands.

You won't be quite human, any longer, after that, if you were to begin with. Or quite cat, dog, or owl, say, if you were one of those.

You'll be ... ambiguously human.

Probably human. The kind of human who can almost pass for alfar when on Aelfscienne or as Martian when on Mars, who might even fool *rats* for a moment into thinking they were one of them, but who definitely won't pass for a Serpent or Angel. The kind of human who *probably* has an ethnicity and a sex ... but for aesthetic reasons, or from nostalgia, and not because they've been imposed.

You'll be human-*like*, in short, only, not quite, with some bits that aren't always quite clear.

You could obviously wind up staying a cat, if you were a cat, in the same way that you could turn into a snake made of bones, but it's only a little more likely; the likely-humanoid nature of the thing you become isn't *based* on your having been human, or even based on Earth humans at all. It's honestly more that humans (and Angels, and others) look a little like *them.*

If you go Excrucian, you'll look colder. *Better,* too, like you've been refined, but always colder—like the color's gone, down beneath the skin, and left you a painting in snow, tea, or ashes.

Like you're dying, which you are; you'll get this *pallor* from it.

Like you've never even *heard* of the sun.

—which, I mean, you *have*. You can even go *out* in it. But unless it's particularly relevant to your particular infection or your particular legend, you don't tan. You don't burn.

You don't even really feel warmer or see better in a clear summer's light.

And then there are the eyes.

People who look at your eyes—well, that just doesn't work any more. And as for you, you don't see the way people do, really. You don't *sense* the way people do, either. You have a void sense, a structure sense:

You can sense the things around you by the way they are themselves.

Princeps (m), Principissa (f), Principia (a), Strategist, Commander, Lord, King, Queen, Tyrant: miscellaneous Excrucian terms for their warleaders.

Strategist, Excrucian Strategist, Excrucian Militares, "Spinner," Princeps (m), Principissa (f), Principia (a), Tyrant: Imperial terms for the same.

Deathwright: generic term for both Excrucian Strategists and weird non-Excrucian survivors of the Glitch.

Qistjan, Annujan: ceremonial terms/titles for the Strategists meaning, roughly, "redeemer of life (* from life)" and "redeemer of the world (* from existence)."

For eight hundred years, and more, Henry Clarke had suffered in the flames; suffered the torments of the damned. For eight hundred years and more, he had suffered, and then his torment ended.

It was a cutting and albino wind. It moved through Hell, anodyne and intercessor to the damned, and the scent of lilies and lake air was trailing all behind it. It broke the pain of Henry Clarke. It cut the demons that were hurting him apart.

Slowly, uncertainly, he stepped forward. He set his hand upon it. It was gentle and cool and it hurt him none.

"This," he said. "Th- This isn't right."

It wasn't right that he be spared. It wasn't right, he thought; he knew! and so everything was wrong.

He wrestled with that leaden meal of a feeling, for it should have been right; it ought to have been right; if anything could have been said to be true, in Hell, in the "life" of Henry Clarke, it should have been that his suffering had been enough.

That was how he broke through. That was how he remembered his true sin. That was how he remembered his true name:

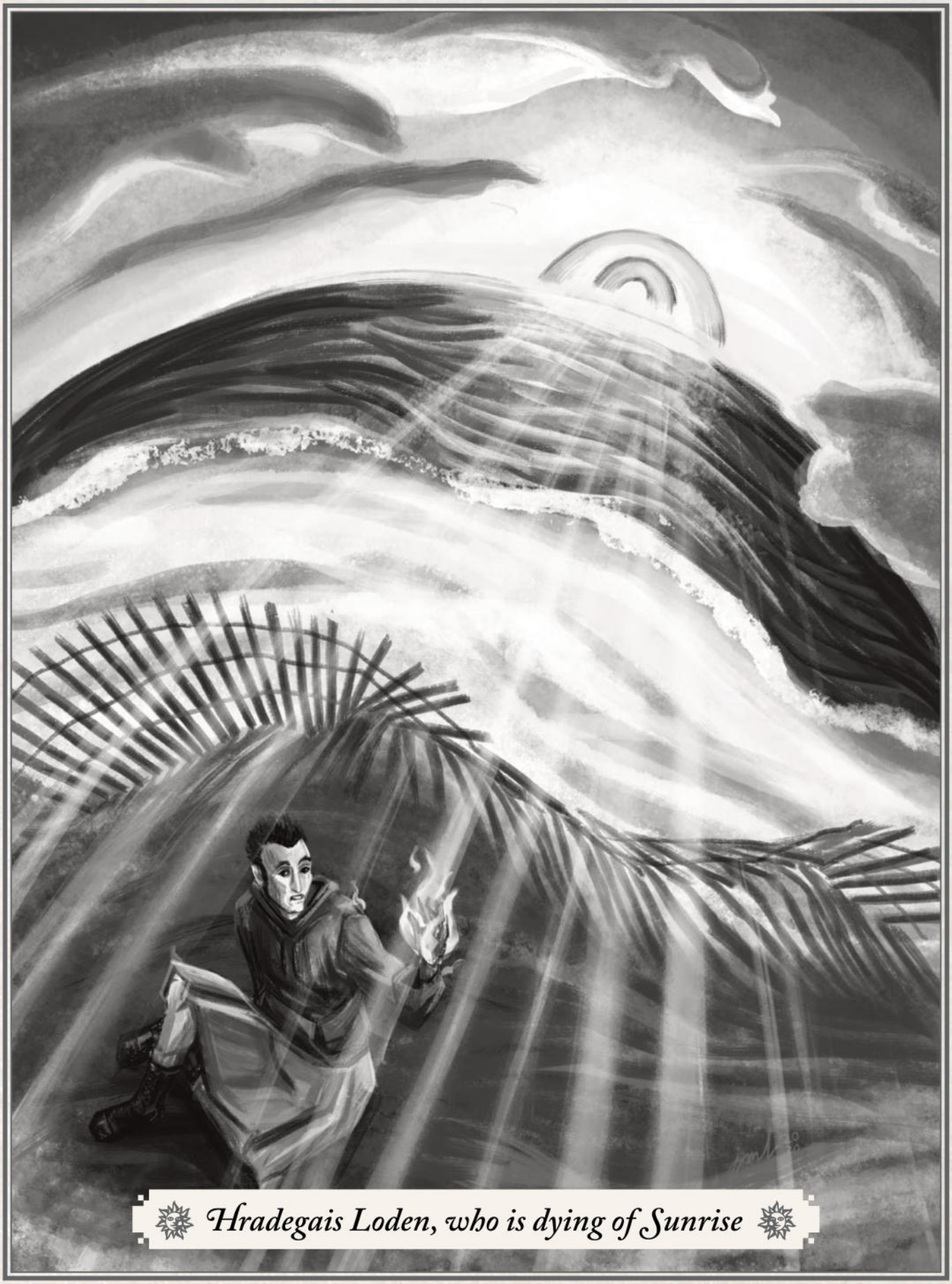
Not Henry Clarke; not mortal, damned; not the human skin he wore; but Tain Athen Ness, who helped build the world: the Traitor-King of Ninuan.

—from The Glitch, *by Vivian Buryat*

You'll "remember" the Excrucian culture, slowly—it'll seep into you like swamp water. You'll start to remember your name, only it won't be your name, but the name of the lordly one you were.

You'll start to dress in the Excrucian way.

You'll acculturalize to them, you'll affine to them; by the time you've spent a few decades or so trying to murder the Imperators and end the world, the Excrucian mold will have all but devoured (and integrated) your former, Earthly self.



Hradegais Loden, who is dying of Sunrise

Immortal & Inconstant Things

We may say with some confidence that while in Creation the Host obeys cause and effect:

They experience the morning before the evening, and the evening before the morning. If they are rained on, then they shall be wet. In lakes they sink; in planes, they rise; on trains, they are driven forward. If they seek revenge, it will turn to ashes; love without effort, it will slip from their hands.

They live the same lives as any of us, in short, save, just, perversely; and, with the power at their fingertips to burn away the mortal world.

—from The Lotus Precepts, *by Nanci Madsen (writing as Thessany Tuesday)*

Breaking

Pretty much anyone who breaks as far as a Strategist does may turn up Excrucian. For *anyone*, when you become a significant enemy of the world, and when part of that is awakening the old power of choice and death that's been slumbering in people since the world was built above the void, you *probably* have the exact same thing happen:

You realize that you're an Excrucian, and you've always been.

It's not at all easy and it's not at all common. Even counting the Glitched, we're talking one or two people a year, out of the billions of humans and even more non-humans around. (It winds up being humans the overwhelming majority of the time because humans are at a sweet spot for it in terms of intelligence, entanglement with the world, and similarity to the basic Excrucian physical model—but animals and spirits and other stuff can go Excrucian too.) ... but, as uncommon as it is, it still happens, and it *keeps* happening, and it's not always as rough as when you hit the Glitch.

In fact, for some, it's relatively kind.

Those Who Reject the World

For instance, there's these folks that the Powers call Deceivers:

The ones who hit the world at its philosophical roots rather than its physical ones. The propaganda arm, you could say, of the Excrucian host ... by their own preference, that is, at least; they'll still do a bit of conquest or murder, when they must.

They don't actually have a name for themselves—at least not like *that*—so they usually call *themselves* Deceivers too.

Some of them come from outside, just like some of the Strategists do. They were never human. They were born in the Beyond, and they come of the Beyond, to help to free the world from the lie that is itself. They come to *help*, not to harm; they come in love for the world, though not for the world as it knows itself—

They are here to free the world from Meaning and Existence; from Law and the Broken-Hearted; from Noses,

opposite: *by Jenn Manley Lee*

from Eyes, from School, from Work, from Trees and Time and Skies and Cheese and all the manifold of things.

They come from beyond the world to *wake it up*, so that it may discard its false conceptions and come to know the underlying *what*.

Other Deceivers are born within the world.

They're born within the world, but they don't hit the Glitch. That's why they're not Militares, not of the *qistja*, of the *annuja*. They don't hit *the* Glitch. They don't even hit a *small* glitch. They don't actually peel back the skin of the world and see the beating heart of how it's wrong.

Instead, or at least, *first*, they bump into something that they, personally, can't accept.

Something *they* can't deal with.

Something that *could* be a part of a world that makes sense, or ... if not necessarily *makes sense*, something that is OK, at least. Something that ignoring it or forgetting it could have saved them from. Something that could be part of an acceptable world, to *some* people. To *other* people. But not to them.

Something that means that they can't live in the world any longer.

They die.

I don't mean they kill themselves; it's more metaphysical than that. I don't mean they keel over and wind up in the river of reincarnation, either; it's a lot more complete. They die the *real* way, the *no more this person, anywhere within the world* way, just like the Strategists do.

And if that doesn't seem like they have it that easy, if that doesn't seem actually all that terribly lucky, remember that the alternative is eventually hitting the Glitch. Living life after life, maybe, or winding up in Hell or—unlikely, this—in Heaven, and then, one day: hitting the Glitch.

That kills you too, of course, but it's way worse.

So, anyway, if you're a person, and you die because of something that you can't accept, even though it's more abstractly acceptable than the Glitch, then you probably just die. And *unlike* if you die from a glitch, you probably *don't* get dragged back. If you stumble on a bag of chocolate-coated potato chips, if your boss makes you do a retro installation of Windows ME, if you lose something so precious that you just can't live in the world any longer, well ... that's it; you're done. You won't reappear, like some glitch-killed wight, stumbling back a few weeks, months, or years later to blindly re-enact the horror of your demise. If you realize that you don't exist, or if your truth is flensed out from you by a sacred text—

It's *over*.

It's usually over.

It *can* be over, then.

Sometimes, though, just like when you die to the glitch—and just as rarely—you get control of it. You don't die, or rather, you don't *just* die. You have this moment of absolute enlightenment, then:

This world is false.

You seize control over it, the wild strand of the void that is deeply buried in every person still wakes up in you, and you *transcend* the world that can no longer give fuel to your existence; and you say, *this world is wrong*.

But you don't mean it. You don't mean it like the Glitched do. You don't *see* it like the Militares do. You have it easy, even still.

When *you* say it, if that's what happened to you—when someone who has that shattering insight, but who has never seen the real problem with the world, says that the world is wrong—that just means that the world is a lie. That it's ... incorrect, that it's not the way it's supposed to be. That it's an illusion, a simulation, a web of desire and ignorance that people impose upon themselves. That on some fundamental level when people say the world exists, when they point at Firstborn and say, "See? It exists, the Angel *says* so, it's written in the structure of its skin," they are basically just lying to themselves.

What does it matter what an Angel says? That's just a semantic trick!

Rejecting the world for its falseness, the Deceivers are almost as inevitably drawn to apocalypse and to destruction as are the Deathwrights. They awaken to compassion as the illusion breaks, free at last of all the pettiness that comes from in-the-world existence, and they start wanting everyone *else* to wake up too. They want to snap everyone out of the fugue that is the world and free them to a cold clear experience of the void; and probably, that would end the world itself, and maybe even all its wrongness too, although there's no real guarantee.

The world might stay wrong even without any people in it. Even without any people *believing* in it.

And the people might still be infected with it, even after they woke. They might be infected, like the Glitched are kind of infected, still a part of the wrongness of the world.

Maybe even if the world itself was gone.

Deciever, Excrucian Deceiver:
a creature of the Beyond that sees the world as a wicked lie and intends, therefore, to unmake it.

On the dark web, she found it; paid dearly for it, because it was forbidden; sought after it, lusted after it, the fanfic that Emily Gra-Hainjan should never have seen. She knew she did not want it, and yet she wanted it. She knew she must not open it, must not read it, and yet she opened it, read it.

Some recoil; some laugh; a few, somehow, enjoy; but as for Emily, she noped herself right out of all the world.

—*from* THE KATOTERONOMICON OF STARGOTH63,
by Ramon Nico Atega

IS THE WORLD A LIE?

The Deceivers may be correct, or they may not. The world may be true, or it may be false.

That's not the subject of this book.

It matters—of course it matters!—but what it doesn't change is, *the world is wrong.*

There is a problem with the world. There is a deep and intrinsic problem with the world. That problem is *not,* "the world's a lie."

It's possible that it *is* a lie.

It could be a lie that people tell themselves, or one forced on them from "outside." It could be a simulation, a false world "inside" a true one—if the distinction is intellectually coherent—running on some cognate to a machine. It could even be a lie in a deeper metaphysical sense than that, a lie that isn't necessarily being told *by* anyone *to* anyone, but rather simply *Is*, imbuing existence with a fundamental character of falseness ...

But whether that's the case or not, that's not the Glitch.

Consider Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal:" that Ireland, in a time of economic troubles, sell its children as food to the rich. Few would say, "this proposal is wrong because his facts are in error." Fewer yet would say, "this is unethical because his satirical intent imputes a subtle air of fictionality to the whole idea. It is false. It is fictional. Thereby, it is wrong." There are unconventional ethical scholars, no doubt, who have no real quarrel with the modest proposal itself, but very few who would say, *well, the flaw here, the reason this is wrong is, it's false. It's not sufficiently real.*

In the same fashion, the fundamental wrongness of the world is independent of its truth status. It's not wrong in the sense of *something is wrong here.*

It's wrong in the sense that its fundamental structure is arranged in a way that is bad.

Worlds *shouldn't be put together like that.*

If the wrongness of things happened after the world's creation, if it was a tectonic shift, a collapsing of layers—like an earthquake that shatters an urn and sprinkles someone's ashes onto your delicious open-face tuna/Nutella sandwich; tumbles postwar times and rising fridge availability together to produce gelatin-era American cooking; and drops a young goat from a shelf above into the soup pot to start boiling in its own mother's milk—then it's possible that that structure was never intended; that it's not a *design flaw* so much as a flaw in the *pattern* ...

But it's still the arrangement of Creation, *the way it is,* and not *whether* it is, that's at fault.

In that sense, rejecting the world for its falseness is fundamentally a mistake—it's *missing the point*. It's like hearing a group of politicians start talking seriously about actually *implementing* A Modest Proposal and reacting with outrage because Swift was *kidding*, or because you think it's actually not good economics at all.

That's how the Strategists see it, so they don't really respect the Deceivers that much ... but they're still natural allies. They are two faces of the threat summoned from the void to counteract the Imperial ideal: two guerrilla forces that move within the world to take down its constructed reality at any cost.

The disturbing implication of Feldr's Syndrome is that even our ground-level experiences of the world may derive from cognitive error. It is one thing to accept that a person may have an inflated belief in one's own importance, or a distorted sense of probability; that we overgeneralize, or project our sense of control; but something rebels, no matter how many of Feldr's dryads one should encounter, at the notion that trees—trees!—are a projection, a masque of taxonomical and botanical normalcy put atop a hardwired malfunction:

We see them, we react to them, we develop deep models of their structure and actions, but they are not actually there. They are us, rather; they are the noise in our brain, written large and fractal, branching: hiding from us the true perception of nature and the original source of the oxygen we breathe.

—*from* The Elephants in the Rooms, *by Walter F. Bradley*

THE BEASTS OF THE HARVEST

The Warmains of the Excrucians are causally entangled with the world.

It is rare that they were ever human. It is rare that they were ever a person, a person *of* the world, in the first place.

Rather they are a thing the strands of whose destiny run inexorably through the world. They are a thing whose fate cannot be completed save by devouring a portion of the world, by ripping apart a portion of that Creation built atop what had been Ninuan; by taking from the things that *are* and seizing them into the Not.

They are incompatible, like rockfish infiltrating themselves into high society. Participation is essentially verboten; their only option is to tear the world apart. Personhood itself is not a natural thing to them. There is a *fundamental* incompatibility and alienation. They are in their natural state as unfeeling and inhuman as the *viruses;* as the arachnids; as the monsters of the abyssal deep.

This they recognize they must address; to this end, they murder.

They rip the life from some person in the world. They temper themselves to it. And because they are not mundane creatures, because they are not *sane* and *comprehensible* creatures, they are successful: not serial killers in the skin-suits of their prey, but beings that successfully refine themselves *as* people.

—in a real sense, though only a small one, as continuations of the story of the person that they slew.

Consider Euphrasia Savinot:

It is her peculiar taste to war against the land and not the people that dwell within it. For centuries, she was a cipher, incomprehensible to humans, Imperators, and even most human-born Strategists and Deceivers, because she had never directly slain a person who was worthy of the name. Only when she strangled Purity Simons and stole

her face and her features did Euphrasia become a person in her own right:

A being that a person *could* understand.

Did Purity, in that moment, die, or did she become an Excrucian? The matter is unclear.

Euphrasia has felt no obligation to follow up on Purity's obligations and romances, nor to keep in touch with Purity's family ... but at the same time, her habits follow Purity's; when Purity's brother found her, and asked her to return to them, Euphrasia treated him with kindness; and Purity herself cannot be found in the cycle of reincarnation, in Hell or in Heaven, or in any other corner of the world.

To become a Warmain is, perhaps, to be killed by a Warmain; or, perhaps, it's just a thing that isn't ever done (save in three or four exceptional cases, whose stories were individual and weird.)

Warmain, Excrucian Warmain:
a creature of the Beyond that seeks to harvest from the world.

Tempering:
the process by which a Warmain gains a human (or other) face.

(Tempering can be done a second or later time to change the face, but this is rare.)

Marco lived his life out of order, which is how he knew that in the latter half of it he would be replaced by an imposter. He was not quite sure how or why it would happen; the imposter rarely reflected upon the matter, and when it did, it was only in passing. There were only brief glimpses, strange glimpses, of silver and light.

An angel, he thought; an angel, wearing his face. Or, a parasite, invading his brain. An actor from his parents' foundation, redeeming his name and his legacy?

Perhaps even a monster.

Whatever it was, it was better than he was. Its intentions were cleaner; its actions more whole. When he was older, when he was ... forty-eight, almost exactly ... he would be replaced by somebody better, someone amazing.

He didn't like that at all.

—*from* The Peculiar Matter of the Nazario Signet, *by Anne Tomasson*

Mimic, Excrucian Mimic:
an Imperator, that isn't.

Weep for the beer hat; once it was noble! Then its spirit was slain—was brutally slaughtered—and a monster implanted in its cervisian corpse...

—*from* Krakor Moushian's Impractical Catalog, *by Krakor Moushian's Impractical Catalog Company*

STOLEN SOULS

Now and then the Excrucians wind up in uncontested possession of the corpse of a being of laws. Allowing it to rot or dissipate, as is its natural wont, is a substantive victory—but it's not the only thing they can do.

With enough time on hand, with enough power on hand, and if there is no interference, they can bring the dead thing "back" ... only, on their side. They can bind the pieces of decaying law together with the stuff of Ninuan, of nonexistence, and create a Mimic:

Technically, an enemy; technically, an appendage of the law of Creation; a being that holds the gaping holes in the world together for a while—

But a being ready to turn on the world at the right opportunity; and willing, if it somehow survives all such possible uses, to die.

This is not loyalty, not exactly.

At the heart of each Mimic is a horrible twisting secret blasphemy of the void. At the heart of each Mimic is something as abhorrent to them, as unacceptable to them, as the world itself. It shackles them into service and it ensures that when they are done, ending themselves is a release; is a freedom.

They are not Glitched.

The horror that is inside them is not a glitch. It's awful, but it's much cleaner than that. It's just a part of the rage of Ninuan that the world exists; that the Glitch exists; that everything that is awful is awful and everything that is good in the world is not actually good.

The horror inside a Mimic is a thing that turns their law into a law of destruction, even if the Estates that they embody are things like Flowers and Love. It's a thing that makes their law into a thing that corrodes—inevitably corrodes—the other Estates throughout the world; that makes their law not a part of the cosmic harmony, of the global whole, but a corrosion, a parasite, a principle and instrument of unmaking.

Such necromancy is not complete; if the Imperator of Cars and Trains is slaughtered, and from that corpse a Mimic made, then the laws of Cars and Trains will still be dead. Instead, corrosive forces form: perhaps Transitions, those things where qualified people regularly leave their home *somehow* and commute elsewhere with a speed nominally beyond their means—if they are not ripped inexplicably away, *en route,* to lie broken and tangled in a pile of ruined glass and steel upon some road. Perhaps there will be the Ognianov Effect, too: that subtle itch that distorts more simple cities into urban sprawls despite the increased oil consumption that such wide-spanning communities create. Perhaps the Cargo Guild will complete the set, sending freight along the ley-lines using ships that sail the land.

... or, for a simpler approach, the Mimic will rule the law of Carriages, truncating the evolutionary subdivision that spawned off Cars and Trains.

This completes the roster of Excrucians, then:

The Strategists and Deceivers, largely apotheosized from humanity (and the other folk of Creation) though "born" Strategists and Deceivers still drift in on occasion from the void; the Warmains, (almost) never human, but wearing their faces anyway; and the Mimics, corrupting blasphemies enfleshed within Imperial dead.

THE SOVEREIGN POWERS

The Imperators are *strong* enough to stand against this army. They are absurdly, abhorrently powerful ... but ...

They are not really meant for war.

They're not very good at reacting. They're not as *fast* as the Excrucians are. They're farther-seeing, deeper-thinking, but they're not as cunning, they're not as clever, they're not as sharp.

In the war between Excrucians and Imperators, they're just a bit too slow.

To this, they have an answer.

Every now and then, one of the beings of law goes on a murder spree. It uses the blood and life of a hundred people and it builds itself a private portal fantasy with the power in that blood—a secret and nurturing native ground, within and yet separate from the regions of Creation, hidden a twist away from the vast sprawling fastness of the world.

These pocket lands, they call their **Chancels.**

It's brutal and nasty and in fairness the main reason the Imperators do it is because they don't want nightmare people on awful horses with stars in their eyes to hunt them down and kill them, but they will do it nevertheless.

When they do it, they also gain the ability to bind some of the hapless people who are hanging around in the area into their service. They exalt them and they damn them. They imprison them and they empower them. They seal them, most importantly, to the power of one of the definitions that they embody in themselves.

These, they call the **Sovereign Powers.**

If Firstborn made a Chancel on Earth, which as far as anyone knows it hasn't, it could claim a Power of Meaning and a Power of Existence. These humans—or dogs, or cats, or clouds of nanomachines, or possibly other things, but most likely humans—would then resonate, would be imprinted, deeply in their souls, with those specific concepts. They would become agents and warriors of Firstborn and guardians, respectively, of Meaning and Existence.

You can meet such Powers, if you're unlucky. You can go out into the world and encounter Damon, Power of the Sands, or Adrien Elsey, who rules the Toys; Fayola Osagiobare, of Branching Paths, or Alice Acacia, who is the Reprieve; Bran Gainor, Viscount of Armor; Malahdi, Sevenfold Vengeance; Ianthe Falls-Short, the Power of Debate, or Helissent de Reymes, the Maze.

Into their hands is that concept given; into their souls is that concept welded.

Once this is done they cannot see the Glitch.

They are not so locked down by the shackles upon them that they are forced to deny its existence or rendered unable to conceptualize it; they are simply blinded to it. The freedom in them is not entirely blunted but it is encysted, encapsulated, and made a servant to the fabric of the world:

So integrated are they into the warp and weft of things that the *wrongness* cannot register upon them.

Instead, when they dwell within glitched patches of the world, *they* become wrong, they become part and parcel of that wrongness, and they do not know it; when they emerge, they will slowly drip away the wrongness until they have been cleansed. The Power of the Hunt will gladly hunt alongside things that ought not be hunting. The Power of Time will observe distorted time and recognize that it is not *the normal process;* sometimes they will try to mend it, but other times they will find it interesting, they will explore it, they will splash around in it, delighted, like a child playing in the sewers, not even understanding what a monstrous thing it is they do.

To them there is no difference between a star that falls to Earth and burns unceasingly in the side yard of a drive-thru restaurant because of magic, or because of miracle, or because the world is wrong; it is simply a phenomenon. There is no difference to them between a cold, clammy-handed monster that squirms through the tiniest crack and hunts someone down because the world is broken and one that does so because they created it themselves; or, for that matter, between a day that's sunny and bright, with a gentle breeze among the trees, because sometimes the world is good and happy ... and such a day, when there *shouldn't* be such a day, when a day like that is ripping back the veil and painting the world in shades of soulless horror—when a day like that reveals the Glitch.

Because they cannot see this most fundamental truth of their existence the Powers are dangerous.

They are the attack dogs of the Imperators. Angels have minds as deep as the arctic snow and as sharp as a winter's day, but they are slow to act, slow to react, slow to gather the fullness of their power. Serpents can sink continents and swallow stars when roused, but they are *hard* to rouse, and slower yet. The pattern persists through all of the Imperial kind:

They are absurdly powerful, but, as said ... they are not really meant for war.

Humans, on the other hand—tiny, fast-lived creatures, born to love and breed and die—given the power, they make excellent expendable troops or weapons to throw at the Excrucian invaders and interfere, repeatedly, with the extinguishment of the world.

For the infected, it's safest to imagine the Powers as sulky, hostile tweens from broken homes who have been taught to hate you their whole lives and then given the keys to their parents' gun safes. They are weak, helpless, and kind of adorable. They are bad at life. They are perfectly capable of rational thought and cooperation, you can talk to them, you can forge an understanding with them, if you have a

grounds to work with them, you can work with them, they can *do* that, and certainly murdering them is nothing to be *proud* of.

... on the other hand, they have limited self-control, limited self-awareness, when they are at their best they may very well decide that being at their best *means* they are supposed to kill you, and they have guns.

(Metaphysical guns.)

(The power of the Estates, the concepts, that they have been given.)

So the Excrucians *do* kill the Powers, if they have to, but most of them won't go out of their way to do so, because it's not really the Powers' fault. For the same reason, they'll talk to them, they'll share ideas with them, even when it isn't the tactically smartest idea. They'll tend to find it skeevy to romance Powers, even though *technically* Powers *are* adults, and some of them have lived millennia; there's just this murky immaturity to them, with the way they're shackled to the definition that empowers them, that makes the relationship too fundamentally unequal in a way that even dating *mortal humans* will not be.

Maybe that's why "Lord Entropy," the freakish god enfeoffed by the other Imperators to rule over the Powers as a whole, has forbidden them all love; though, honestly, if you were going to find a way to keep sulky tweens from dating hostile forces, inflicting horrible punishments on them when *and only when* you can prove in court that they love someone (including familial love and platonic love) is ... probably not the way.

The Powers notably possess control over the concept invested in them, such as the ability to create or destroy its manifestations; the ability to impose qualities of that concept on things in the world, or take them away; improved bodies and minds—sometimes to the point of being able to walk through steel walls, memorize new canons in a night, and beat soundwaves in a foot race, though "respectable athlete and intellectual" is the norm; and, a variety of mystical treasures. Thus the Power of Painkillers might be incredibly strong, quick, and smart, or not; might have a magical painkiller, or a flying carpet, or a pet chimera, or not; can likely conjure up, destroy, or control the movements of morphine; and can make a person more or less grating on the nerves.

Chancel:
a pocket dimension created by an Imperator.

Power, Sovereign Power, Noble, one of the Nobilis: a servant empowered by an Imperator to rule one of the concepts they define.

Estate: the concept a Noble is assigned.

Pawn of (Estate): a Noble with weak power over that Estate.

(noble title) of (Estate), e.g. Marchessa of the Knife: a Noble with stronger power over that Estate, roughly proportional to the title's merit.

(Estate)'s-Regal: Noble with pretty much peak power over their Estate.

The prince of the french fry that fell in the corner may hold her head high, even when she walks among the princes of fire and stone, of words and bronze, of teeth, the night sky, and stars. The names they wield are stronger than hers; their applicability, wider; in a fight, fire burns fries, stone can grind them, and teeth help others to devour. But it is the french fry that fell in the corner that held firm when the Beast, many-clawed, many-tendrilled, lay its weight (vastly heavy) on the walls of the world. When the fire died, and stone buckled; when words grew ever more wordless, and no bronze was anywhere to be found; when teeth chattered, when the sky thinned, when the stars began falling: it was the french fry in the corner, one end braced against the dirty floor and the other against the rippling air where the Beast sought to come through, that heard the words of its prince:

Did not squish, did not bend, did not fray; did not become the ten thousand mulched potato flakes in the corner—

... until the truck whose eyes could seal the world arrived.

— from The Prince of the French Fry that Fell in the Corner, *by an anonymous social media manager for Zushan Burgers, Incorporated*

The Ordinary World

The Imperators and the Powers are not the whole of it; the world, throughout the world, is a place of spirits and of magic.

The Earth of **Glitch** is not a mundane place, but a place where everything is alive; where everything, in a certain sense, is a person—awakened to its personhood by the power of choice and death in it, arising from the void; and perhaps exceptionally concentrated, in particular, on Earth, because of the density of the surviving portions there of Ninuan.

Trees, there, are awake, as are their individual roots; the wind, alive, awake, aware; and carrots, cars, and stones.

It's all alive. It's all thinking. It's all making choices, though generally very constrained and normal and natural choices, in how it's going to act.

This great bounty of life and personhood has been occulted.

The world, in striving for sense, for *reason*, has created—something. A great spirit, perhaps. A law. A dream, a program, or a spell. Perhaps *an artistic work* would say it best:

A picture of the world, in which events have causes; in which those causes are impersonal and amoral; in which the particulars of things are explainable and measurable; where each such particular exerts a causal force.

A great tapestry of soullessness (specific, as it happens, to the Earth) wherein people can treat the world as *not* being full of animistic spirits, and have that *work*.

opposite: *by Mel Uran*

Science exists within that fabric, more or less; technology, to a certain extent, does too.

It's not that there wouldn't be elevators, for instance, without that fabric; it's certainly not the case that there *aren't* elevators, down in the mythic substrate, because there are.

... it's just not clear that humans *made* them, or, if they made them, if they did so by assembling them out of pieces built at modern plants. Maybe they were summoned up from the earth, instead, as part of the invocation of new buildings. Maybe they arose by a process of spontaneous generation. Maybe (if this can be considered different, and like so many things) *they made themselves.*

The world isn't as neat and mechanical in "real life" as within the great prosaic dream.

For the most part, it's fine to go through life on **Glitch's** Earth believing in ordinariness anyway. It's fine to imagine that walls can't talk, that lights can't operate themselves, that that pen that fell off the desk when you were reaching for it *wasn't* actually trying to tick you off.

It's fine to live your life in a world of concrete, even if you happen to know better.

The actions of the Imperators are almost fully integrated into the mirage that is the ordinary. That's why people so rarely notice that, e.g., the world is occupied by giant snakes. When their battles shake the earth, they are seen as earthquakes—often predictable *and predicted* earthquakes; when they adjust their laws, the new laws apply to the prosaic world, and they "always have." That's how the dream of the prosaic *works.*

The acts of the Sovereign Powers damage or ruin this ideal.

Their "miracles" shatter normalcy; often, they open human eyes to the mythic layer of reality. Put another way, they often afflict the witnesses to them with *dementia animi,* the "disease of spirits:" the belief that the world around one is alive.

This is not technically a delusion, being true, but it *is* an illness; it can be hard to interact with less deluded people from that time on.

As for the powers of the Excrucians, they are sort of in between.

They *tend* not to break the illusion of the prosaic world too easily. They *tend* to come across as subtle or circumstantial, or get explained in retrospect as something else, even to the extent of being retconned as a mass hallucination:

It takes a deliberate effort to defy the norms to bring the illusion down.

It's not that Excrucians *can't* break people's minds with weirdness, or do things that are conventionally inexplicable. It's just that it takes active effort and specific intent. Otherwise, when an Excrucian breaks the rules—exactly as when an Imperator changes them—that tends to get worked (somehow or other) into the fabric of the prosaic world.

The prosaic world, for clarity, is not consensus reality,

Mythic Reality, the Mythic World: the animistic, mythic "true" reality.

the Ordinary World, the Prosaic World, Prosaic Reality, the Prosaic Dream: a constructed non-animistic reality or illusion, built on top.

The Concept is not raw chaos. The Concept is a map by which we can make sense of raw chaos. The Concept is an order that we can impose upon the chaos that exists beyond the world.

Eleanor didn't know the Concept. She went beyond the world. She was eaten by something. She didn't even know what it was. It was probably nothing, was what she thought, as she died.

Billy got the Concept as a present. He almost ignored it. He was so lucky he didn't! When his house fell in a hole he was able to pull it back out. It wasn't with muscles. It wasn't with leverage. He used the Concept's patented reality strands!

Beatrice's friends kept on laughing. Her parents disowned her! Nobody thought she had made the right choice. But she stuck to the Concept. She joined the Concept Foundation. She read Concept Weekly and subscribed to our feed. It might not pay off for you but it sure paid off for Beatrice! When the Money Beast of Seattle flew in out of nothing, she was one of seventeen people to rip the dew from its wings.

The Concept is not perfect. It cannot be perfect. It is only a mapping. It is not responsible for death by Greeleys or Irkims, which do not fit in its map.

—*from* What's Wrong with Your Nothing?, *by Benton Saylor, Jr.*

nor is it exactly what an average Western citizen might imagine it to be. It's a pure clean world of science and reason, but not specifically *your* science and reason. (Even if you're not an average Western citizen.) It's *a* science and reason, rather; an empirical world in the sense that even its most terrible of weirdnesses are *technically* amenable to scientific study ... but a world, at the same time, full of strange and unbelievable things, of monstrous and magical things, that have defied or avoided attempts to study them thus far.

There are literal monsters, for instance. Some are part of the mythic world, or emigres from the Lands Beyond, but others are a natural part of the prosaic dream. They're out there, and science doesn't know about them,[4] but it's not because they're inherently anti-scientific; they're just really, really hard to figure out. Some are impossible to think about, for instance. Others are *sort of* amenable to the standard scientific approach, and plenty of people have tried it, but they have *some* trick that makes it hard, and they're rare enough and weird enough that you need a really scrupulous and careful study, the kind that you

4 except for the ones it does, of course

can't actually do with them (because they only exist intermittently; because they don't *want* to be studied; because measurement goes weird in their vicinity ...), or your attempts will just get laughed out of peer review.

There's outright magic, too. Weird as the idea of "magic" in a "prosaic" world might sound.

How *that* works is a little simpler. Magic is *broken.* Magic is flirting with the very edges of reality. Magic's stuff like the science that *doesn't work yet,* but one day might. Like weird formation stuff that cheats by dragging in the laws of the endless void. Like alchemy, which would work just fine, which would be totally scientific, except you just can't *get* there from here. Like those spirit laws that got swept off into the corner by reality's caretakers, and just aren't *allowed* to come into wider use.

Magic's not right, it's never right, it's never a thing that can actually work by the laws of the world as they are, but like some annoying tablemate hovering their finger around saying, "I'm not touching you! I'm not touching you!" it's *just* close enough that prosaic law is forced to accept that it's really there. The ordinary world that ordinary folk live in *accepts* that futuristic and alchemical machines that it won't let IBM make will still *work* once someone's made them. It *accepts* that the right glamour can turn leaves into gold. It *grants* that, it grants that the world is a weird place, that's considered prosaic.

It's an edge case. A freaky thing, like someone surviving a fall from an airplane—not like a myth.

Reality even grasps the presence of λ-things at its edges; it's just really quite unhappy that they're "there."

ECHOES

Beneath the prosaic dream, then, there is the mythic world, the world of spirits, karma, and unpredictability. Beneath even that ...

There are shadows in the deep.

Beneath the formed Creation, beneath the worked Creation, the timeless world preceding Time—it has not departed. Not *bound* by Time, never found in Time, it did not end when Time began. Beneath the formed Creation is the deeps:

A world of ever-more-formless layers, the abyss from which the Imperators emerge.

The War is happening there.

Most of the War is happening there.

In the curling abyss that is beneath the world, the Imperators are their deadliest and their most vulnerable. In the world, they are stately things, formed things, angels, great serpents, magisters; in the abyss, they are darting and sharp-toothed shadows. In the world, they are undying; eternal; secluded in their pocket Chancel-worlds; and guarded by their Powers.

In the abyss, they *bleed.*

The Excrucians there are monstrous too. In the formed world, it is humans and their ilk who suffer the glitch, fall from the world, and realize their true nature as Excrucians. In the world beneath, it is scrabbling ... things. In the formed world, Excrucians are things of form—mostly, at least. They are like human in their nature, even as in the formed world Angels have human faces and human hands and feathered wings. Even those that come in from the Beyond, never having been human, never having been imprisoned in the world, they're like that.

Beneath, though—

They align, by symmetry, to a different world. There, where the animals are the many-limbed and many-tendrilled beasts of the substrate, blending at their edges, indistinct from one another; there, where the Angels are alien and empyreal principles and the Serpents writhing glimmers in the dark, the Excrucians are winged corrosion. There they are knife-edged and nameless curses that cut apart the *thing that Is.*

To some degree they are the same ... people. To some degree, if you are an Excrucian Strategist, then you might say, the hatred for Creation and its wrongness that burdens you; the threat to Creation that lives within you—that those things are the echo, the shadow, the reflection in this surface world of some shapeless curse that lives below. In some sense one of those things is a *part* of you ... and you, a part of it.

It is not your "deeper self;" it is not your "true" self. To the Imperators, it might seem so, because *their* true being dwells in the deeps. For the Excrucians, it is not quite so; if you are an Excrucian, you have no true being whatsoever. There is only the you that dreamed yourself in a form like a human's form; the ... you? ... that dreamt itself in a shape like knives; and the ineluctable harmony of the void, relating them.

It is not even, most likely, a one-to-one correspondence:

The deep Excrucians, the winged venom eating at the root-construction of the world, are patterns; they ebb and flow like waves. You may be a part of two of them, or two or more of you of one of they.

THE RITES OF WAR

If one wishes to kill the world from the surface of it, and one does not *have* the tools to murder an Imperator directly—neither the raw power to directly smash through their immortality, nor a weapon abhorrent enough to interrupt it—then the standard method is to force it into a contradiction.

The laws of the world are very strong things, but they can be turned against themselves, and when they are turned against themselves, the damage that they inflict upon themselves can be profound.

The laws of libraries, let us say: they must be quiet.

> *Break every wall. Kill every mason. Scratch out the concept from every atom of the world. Yet the word that is Walls will yet survive, will yet return: for it is written upon the Heartstone of the Earth.*
>
> —*from* The Builder's Chant, *by Emily Chen*

They must keep knowledge. They must be sanctuaries to minds in need. Create a circumstance where the knowledge in a library must be voiced—maneuver it into storing a continuous oral telling; bend the world around it so that books all speak—and the law comes close to breaking. Turn that quiet into the silencing of victims, or the knowledge into poison:

The same applies.

It only takes a crack in the nature of one library, in one place in the world, to do irreparable damage to the concept as a whole.

Make treachery a form of weal; make words a violence. Force existence to decide between being *there* and being *demonstrable.* Twist a dog so that it cannot *both* be a loyal friend and completely ridiculous:

Every paradox that cultures itself within the nature of a thing, that denies one or the other of the laws of a thing, makes the edifice of the world to crack.

This is not to say that the world is fragile. To be frank, there are dogs that are not completely ridiculous. There are things that are that are not demonstrable. The Power of Guns holds that guns intrinsically are symbols of death and not themselves responsible for it: this is practically a paradox *already,* even before the Excrucians get involved. The world survives these things without cracking, or repairs the little cracks that forms, *because* it is not fragile; because there is a certain weight that it can bear.

The Excrucian "flower rite," so named because it uses symbols of the laws involved (and often symbols in the language of flowers, such as the acacia and the nettle, though Tarot, gems, and other symbol sets are equally allowed), is a mechanism to overcome this hardiness:

Through those symbols, and certain acts of spirit, it exaggerates such a break. It takes the pressure formed by a little paradox and cranks it up; it drives a chisel into the substance of the world.

An example:

"The reprieve must come unexpectedly."

"The reprieve must be available to all."

These are two rules of the Reprieve as its Power, Alice Acacia, understands them; they can be cracked, and the existence of reprieves within the world itself put under threat, if an Excrucian engineers a situation where a statistical analysis of the Reprieve's global availability makes it inherently predictable—with real or somewhat deviant mathematics fed into the computing engine of their choice.

The process takes time, alerts the Power and Imperator in question as it progresses (though it rarely informs them of the details), and requires a detailed understanding of the laws in question; but still ... just imagine it! To kill Treachery, or Light, or Meatballs, without ever having to pierce the defenses of a God!

Another useful weapon, the Excrucians have found, is the welken-rite:

Embed a piece of the unworld in Creation—take something of Ninuan and *bury* it, *plant* it, in Creation—and then cultivate it there; let it, *encourage* it to, spread its roots, its influence, its mycorrhizal networks through the world. Let it entangle itself with a place, a city, or a people. Let it become *one* with them:

Then, peel it back away from world and sound; make a waylet of it, or throw it into one, making all the Creation that it adheres to into Not—or even, if one has the power for it, *cast the all of it, the whole and entire, beyond the edges of the cup of flame.*

... which is just nickel-and-diming the world, of course; only the most astounding and jaw-dropping of welken-rites will ever *matter*—but at least the things one steals in such a fashion will be freed from being *wrong.*

The last rite of war is called the "nettle rite," and it is practiced by both sides; the Nobilis even occasionally use it in internecine strife. When one has crushed an opponent's efforts or otherwise left them in a state of defeated shock—too stunned, defeated, to immediately muster a response—one can crush a handful of nettles and invoke the rite ... and, in so doing, shift a portion of one's own accumulated weariness and wounds to *them.*

It was the mistake of human advertising professionals not to understand that the language of the Byastes was the language of the world. That the Byastes did not grasp "the lie" made them a fruitful market and nothing more; it was SAFE*, to call this food free-range, name this brand improved, and to say that this particular outlet's prices were* THE BEST *there were.*

The truth filtered upwards slowly and with creaky steps. Alarm bells were rung—and chances praised—as the fundamental quality of the underlying goods was changed. Word had reached the VP for the eastern sky, and he'd begun to act, but he acted with too little haste; too little care.

Another store swore it would BEAT *that price; it wrote that claim into underlying universal law.*

Three days' time was all the world required; by then, the VP would have had it all in hand. In three days time, he'd have taken his old rivals down—Jim Brown, head of Xenotic Law; T. Angelova, in the west—and risen up to seize the cosmic throne. In three days' time, he would have set new and better standards down:

And all those memos in the Byastik tongue, secured into the structure of the world.

Three days' time was all the world required, but three days' time it did not have; the pit where economics sank drew physics, life, and corporations in.

—*from* Garden of the Byastes, *by Ennis Fearghail*

THE IMPERATORS' COUNCIL

War necessitates administration, and not merely on the battlefield. Thus the disparate Imperators have formed a ruling council to govern over the affairs of Earth. —specifically Earth, as it happens; there are other arrangements for the other planets on the tree.

It has limited power to govern the Imperators themselves:

A zookeeper can potentially euthanize the animals, but not the guests; for that, police or the army would be required. A librarian can shelve the books freely (although a certain order is *expected*); if they attempt to forcefully relocate the patrons' children ... unfortunate consequences may attend. The zookeeper has a clear authority of place, as does the librarian; it's just, from the human perspective, humans are people, and not part of such a job's dominion.

In such a fashion, the Imperators' ruling council, "the Council of Four," has a clear authority of place throughout the Earth; there is nowhere upon its mortal or immortal soil that they are not abstractly and in some sense "in charge," but it is explicitly the resources of the physical world—the places, the animals, the humans and the Powers—that they are actually meant to govern.

The Council has limited power to govern the Imperators, and its control over humanity is limited by the fact that humanity is mostly unaware of its existence; over the Sovereign Powers, though, its rule is functionally absolute.

The leader of the Council is the aforementioned Lord Entropy. The metaphysical laws from which he has formed his flesh are—allegedly—Desecration, Destruction, and Scorn. The laws he has imposed upon the society of the Powers are barely better: he insists that they bend their knee to no human (or no "beast"), that they serve their own betters, that they do not love, and that they punish none, not even their Excrucian opponents, more than sevenfold unto their crime.

It's a pretty good deal, really, for those opponents. It's why the Powers don't just unload their full metaphysical arsenal on any Excrucian that they see around; they don't *get* to. You can pretty much get anyone for loitering and disrespect, but sevenfold return on that doesn't go much further than being something of a jerk. Almost every Excrucian Strategist winds up a mass murderer along the way—even the ones, like the PCs, who eventually wake up and realize that that *isn't* the right answer to the wrongness of the world—but that has to be *witnessed* to some extent, or proven, before the Powers can murder them back in safety; anonymity and obscurity are solid, if temporary, shields. A Power can sometimes get away with the gamble that nobody's going to actually care that they didn't do due diligence; that nobody's going to investigate an unjustified conflict with the Excrucians, or that, if they do, it'll come to nothing ... but it's still a gamble. It disinclines them to such acts.

The Bellum Magnum claims a pile of Powers and a couple of Excrucians every year; a concept or two, as well—but on Earth, at least, under the weight of that particular law, it has become a shadow war. Powers hesitate, and the Excrucians hesitate in turn.

Whether that was Entropy's purpose or his great mistake is something that no Power knows.

The second member of the Council of Four is Ananda: Imperator of Murder, the Infinite, and the Fourth Age yet to come. He is infinite in beauty, to the point where even Powers risk a permanent psychotic break when they interact with him for very long. He rules the savage "Cityback" at the roots of the various cities of the world, where life is a savage jungle for the cars, trucks, buildings, streetlights, and all the rest that dwell within.

The third member of the Council is Ha-Qadosch Berakha; of him very little is known.

Finally, there is Surolam, the dog-headed goddess of ordinary things. She is a part of—an Earthly manifestation of—the cup of fire: Imperator of Willpower, Law, and the Broken-Hearted. She is the power that is given to humans to forget the extraordinary and pretend that their lives make sense; the lever by which a person may regain their grip on sanity after a brush with the "miracles" of the Imperators and the Powers. In this fashion she serves as another definitional boundary for the Glitch:

An impossible phenomenon is wrong, *truly* wrong, if the scar of having witnessed it is ineradicable even by her power; if the only answer she can make to those who have borne the burden of experiencing it is to recycle them entirely, render them down to their smallest particles and sift out those that have been least damaged by the glitch. If the person can be saved, can be *made to forget*, or better yet, brought to a kind of peace, then what they have encountered is not the Glitch, but either the work of an Imperator, Power, or Excrucian, or a second- or third-generation knock-on effect.

Most people don't get to take advantage of this metaphysical sieve. Most people who encounter magic and miracles that *aren't* the Glitch either figure out a way to accept it on their own, because that's possible, or get screwed up completely, with the only difference being that because it *isn't* the Glitch, they aren't doomed to have corroding disruption and decay follow them into the afterlife or even through many afterlives until they become wraiths or haunts or fall Beyond the world. Most people who encounter the Glitch don't have the opportunity or the clarity to seek out Surolam and discover that, whoops, there was no way of saving them after all.

... but if a person is broken, particularly by a thing that is not an ordinary thing, then they may pass through any pair of dog-flanked gates, and enter Surolam's Locust Court, and therein find a certain chance at peace.

Lord Entropy, the Bloody-Handed God: ruler of the mortal Earth, Imperator of Desecration, Destruction, and Scorn

Ananda: Imperator of Murder, the Infinite, and the Fourth Age

Ha-Qadosch Berakha: member of the Council of Four

Surolam: the dog-headed goddess of ordinary things

Qistigard Serga,
Interference her bane

Hollow Places

Outside there was a village; though,
she'd never learned its name.

—*from* Leona Peregrine,
by Jennifer Way

Sequelae of the Creation

One thing you'll learn, once you become an Excrucian, in the world, is that the void that thrived there once is not entirely departed.

The world has captured pieces of it, enwrapped its shattered remnants in its folds. It has sealed itself around lost districts ripped from Ninuan. Next to the world, if you know where to look for them—not *in* it, but *with* it—there are portions of Ninuan *not* sealed away by the cup of flame. Instead, they are pressed within the pages of the world like flowers.

These districts, these "waylets" as we shall often call them, are of every kind and size. One may be half a continent in breadth; the other, no larger than a house. One may be a single room of Ninuan's; a mountain range; a glade; or miles of labyrinthine secret halls. A waylet "somewhere near Neuchâtel" can be an archipelago on a stormy sea.

Their boundaries are finite but abstract: they have no edges. Like those pressed flowers, they have *adjacencies:* one may say that a waylet is *near* certain places in the world. That it is accessible to them, and opens to them in turn. That the "way" to a waylet can in some abstract sense be known. ... but a waylet has no true entrance and no true exit. The moment of transition is a λ-moment:

There is no *going* to a waylet; one is simply (λ-)there.

These districts are priceless treasures to the Excrucians. They are safety. They are home. There are only so many paths through the cup of flame, and all are arduous. The natural powers of Ninuan—the magics that dream within its lakes and forests, its alien insects, its hunting packs of eerie hounds, its basilisks, its night-dragons—are all but inaccessible: if one wishes to draw upon them, one must travel off the Earth, out along the branches of the Ash, to the wall of flame; break through the cordon of the world's defenders; and either tear past Heaven's sky or hunt down one of seven secret paths ... and then repeat the process in reverse, returning to the world.

Or, one may find one of these secret jewels, these treasure-districts hidden in the world, and revel in the riches kept within.

They are dangerous places, but they are not *wrong.*

They are salvific; they are pure; to the deathwright, they offer sanctity, sanity, and peace.

It's not really known why these districts remain, any more than it's known why Creation exists at all; prevailing

opposite: *by Maria Guarneri*

wisdom is that they're a rounding error. Creation, coming into being, layered itself awkwardly and unevenly onto the void. In places it bunched, it gathered; in others, it did not cover over what lay beneath.

It is in Earth's nature to host a great number of them; it is, perhaps, a place where the stitching of the world is weak, or a metaphysical depression towards which lost districts fall. There are planets that hang upon the Ash where finding even a single lode of lost Ninuan is rare; where Excrucians are forced to huddle in artificial sanctuaries, in false regions of unbeing carved out by hand:

As if on Earth the metaphorical bedrock of Creation were honeycombed with the void, concealing vast and sprawling networks of life-rich treasure-caves; while elsewhere, as in Aelfscienne, the only "caves" in Creation's bedrock are sterile holes blasted by force into the stone.

On Earth, it is not surprising if a Strategist, at least—given their status—has named such a realm as their own dominion; if they make regular visits to it, and to others, to scour out the resources of the void. On Earth, at least, and on certain other worlds, it is possible for ordinary people to encounter the beasts of Ninuan:

Not just the Excrucians, not just the Imperators' servants, not just the manifestations of the glitch, but *un*-things that appear mysteriously in a waylet's alleged vicinity, emerging not by any causal process but from the encysted Not within the world. On Earth, at least, one may meet the eerie hounds of Ninuan; may be snatched up by its night-dragons; may stumble, at an auction, upon the rich dark water from its wells.

It is the Strategists' estimate that two hundred thousand waylets somewhere touch upon the Earth, though less than a quarter of that number have anywhere been found. They are not exactly *common,* in comparison to the sheer size of the Earth itself ... but neither are they rare.

Throne, the: the region of Ninuan stolen by Creation.

Waylet, District, Byway, Grotto, Unland, Shadow, Sequela of the Creation, Unworld, Unworld Region, Unworld County, Curl:
a portion of Ninuan still surviving in Creation.

In Wendy's yard, between two stones, there slept a deep and primal thing.

It dreamt in colors that could blind the eyes. Its yawning sprawl stretched wider than the bay—though not, that Wendy could discover, any further than the cypresses in her yard. The beast was a cold and lightless thing; it sang to itself, in quiet and alien tones, to lull itself to rest.

When Dylan had died, she went to it. She sat upon its shore.

Between two stones, in the ash-like snow, there was no death; there were no tears, but peace.

—*from* The Reaches of Ur,
by Nnamdi Daelman

And Who Can See the Silvered Land?

The Beyond is principally visible to Creational beings when they are dying, when they are so broken as to be plausibly considered Not-versions of themselves, or when they practice certain relevant magical arts. This is not a guarantee; not all such characters perceive it; it is simply the case that they may.

Sometimes certain places in the Beyond, places strongly correlated to the viewer, will be perceptible regardless of the above. Even when one is flush with life; even when one is whole: they will still show their face, glowing from within with the subtle light of amity (or some darker mood). The connection must be strong, though; "this is the place where I currently 'am'" will by no means suffice. It must be a near-spiritual tie; a place of destiny.

In such places, and at such times, one may perceive other Not-things as well.

If neither of these options applies ...

The alternative is to stare at the void until one stops seeing in substance and starts seeing in structure.

For a mortal, a **Greater Focus** (pg. 130) action is generally enough for this, but it takes quite a while—hours of *Creational* time, which can be a very long time indeed within the void—before it kicks in, and even then it can flicker accidentally off again if the character should get distracted. It's not that they have to *sustain* focus, once they start seeing the void they'll keep seeing the void; it's more, they'll reach the boundaries of a given place or context, sometimes, or they'll get flustered or extremely startled, and suddenly existence will all blow out at once and they'll find themselves in nothingness again.

Higher-level actions can sometimes handle this a little faster and a little better, but they still won't be *great.*

A Strategist has a simpler option: **Vision** (pg. 212). It's a cheap power found in Lore. Regrettably, it's also what they get instead of, or *as,* the benefits of dying and being arguably broken; they don't get to claim *those* too unless they're really *exceptionally* dying or broken on a given day.

Rare it is for the Creational to go beyond the tree; rare enough even for some Strategists—but with pieces of Ninuan caught within the world, like flowers folded in the pages of a book ... the question may become a pressing one.

Lacunae

The existence of the waylets might paint the world in contrast to them—that there is the too-solid world, the full, created, trusted world, and the waylet, where nothingness and void take hold.

One might think, given how the world resents them, how it rejects their substance and it hides their doors, that the world would be different from them on a deep and fundamental level:

Wholly created. Wholly solid. Different in every way, in every place, from the essential *un-* of Ninuan.

This is not so.

The world, instead, is a continuum.

The absoluteness of reality—the concept that it *can* be absolute, that it is closer to the binary TRUE than the irrational 1—is propaganda; in truth, reality exists in shades.

Here, it is solid. There, it is mostly so. *There,* perhaps, it *would* be so, had not the Excrucians eaten away at it—

And over *here,* in the *lacunae,* it is soft.

It is squishy. Mushy. Full of holes.

In the *lacunae,* as in the void, attention is not reflexive, and the world is not defined. *Things* become ambiguous. Sometimes fully and sometimes in part. Sometimes specific things and sometimes everything.

But, *things*—one must suppose.

They are worldly things. They rarely dream. Instead, they fall into a diffuse mush of possibility. The world waits for the right perceiver to force a shape on it.

This is unlikely to be a human.

A human will instinctively avoid a lacuna. If they do enter it, their attention will fade. They will rarely *notice* the ambiguity surrounding them. If they do notice, they will make every effort to attribute it to disinterest or legitimate confusion. If necessary, they will block out the experience. They will deny, e.g., that their neighbors lack specific faces.

Fae—which is oft to say, altered or divergent people with a flair for the uses of attention—may set up their faerie courts therein. Powers, Imperial descendants, Excrucians, and other empowered beings may warp the lacuna to their ends. Angels, whose gift for magic is paramount within Creation, may descend on one and warp it into the base of operation for some plan.

It is the key characteristic of a lacuna, after all, that by lacking specificity, it could in possibility be anything. It is the key characteristic of a lacuna that it can be *made* to be anything.

Lacunae are despicable to the Ninuanni because they are a diluted void—because they have lost any merit or worth Creation might or might not possess in exchange for a pale imitation of the Not. One could say, they are unreal, but they are *bad* at being unreal; they fail the most basic test of the λ-thing, in that they *do* actually exist.

... and the second most basic test as well, for they are polluted by the Glitch.

Roughly an eighth of the world is lacuna, although this can only be an estimate; the number itself is not and cannot be precise.

THE NATIVE GROUND

Perhaps it is a shift in topic; but one day, if you've been infected, and survive—

Survive in *truth*, that is, and rise to become ... well, something else; a creature of the void, but most likely one of the Riders, the Excrucians, the enemies of the world—

You will discover that you have a home.

You will most likely discover it by dying. Creation's defenders will murder you, or the inexorability of your death by glitch will catch up to you, and you will die; and you will fall out into nothingness, because—having broken the normal processes of reincarnation and final judgment for yourself, and presuming that truly extreme methods of erasure are not used—that is what death *is.*

Probably you fall into it directly; if not, you may have to stumble into it, or hunt it down from the memories of who you were. Regardless, it is always *there:*

In Ninuan, you will find your home.

There are Strategists for whom that home is far—endlessly far, a distance creaking with dust and years. They visit Creation once; they do not return thereafter. They are bound to Creation, like any other infected being; they cannot escape it, it haunts them and it torments them. It's just, they can't actually *make it back,* or, at least, they haven't yet.

There are Strategists for whom home is not far, at least, not *that* far, but, at least, beyond the cup of flame. For them, it is a struggle; each time they die, it is an arduous and potentially fatal—potentially *soul-eradicating*, rather—journey to return.

It is those whose home may be found in the waylets—in the lost districts of Ninuan, in the pockets of Nothing trapped within Creation—that are most likely to endure; to die, of course, and to continue dying, but not in any way that would eradicate their underlying pattern. To die, but to things like blasts of lightning, being trapped within a painting and whited over, or large explosions, rather than the puissant weapons and deadly methods of the guardians at the walls of Heaven or the sentries that patrol the cup of flame.

It is those whose home may be found in the waylets who live long enough to redeem themselves and become viable PCs for this game.

Regardless:

In a waylet or beyond the world—if you've been infected, and survive—there is a location-analogue that matches you; and not just the *ideal* you but the you you have become: the *infected* you, the cursed and corrupted you, the you that is burdened by the sickness of Creation.

There is a field of chaos, tucked somewhere in the void or in some hidden fold within Creation, that is like a world for you: broken in the ways that you are broken and healing in the ways that you try to heal; or, perhaps, complementary, not echoing you, but *needing* you, and needed by you in turn. It may be as small as a forested glade set in no true place or a place as vast as planets.

For someone who has been wracked by a glitch infection, it is a glimpse of respite, a touch of balm:

A chance to heal.

The wrongness that is the world's existence, inevitably, looms over this, your native ground.

The tranquility that there endures is not a long-lasting

one, because Creation always shadows or threatens such a place. It is a stressful pressure that encircles it, rippling against its boundary; or, it is a gravity that eventually will rip it out of orbit and tear its continental plates apart. Creation produces regular destructive phenomena, there, or, a long-term problem that gets worse the longer someone tainted with the energies of the world remains therein.

It must be so, you see. There is no alternative.

If it were not so, it would be alien to you, as one of the infected. It would not match you, would not fit to you, would not be so surprisingly available to find.

If it were not so, then why would you be Excrucian?

You could be instead a peaceful thing, that fades away into the quietude of the place.

The world will ruin it, even this one thing that you are granted; it will hunt you down even in this your most precious sanctuary in the void. It must be so, it is a logical inevitability—but it is not the logic, of course, that is *causing* the effect. One can *prove* that it is threatened by the fact that the correlative logic of Ninuan demands it, but that is simply the proof and not the cause. The world is still to blame; or, at least, is still a part of the causal chain that is at fault. By symmetry, it is established that you *will* find a native ground, and it *will* be imperiled ... but it would have been so imperiled, would have been shadowed or threatened by the world *regardless,* even had you never been.

That is why you return to Creation, at any rate. That is one reason, at least, why you return; why you do not stay dead and gone, but come back full of fury at the world. You have no alternative. Where you should be soaking in peace and home, you are soaking instead in *even more* awareness that the world is wrong. In even *more* awareness that the place should die.

Though, it's not like you didn't know.

THE SPHERE

In Ninuan, also, there is a continuum.

In becoming a creature of the Beyond, in *being* a creature of the Beyond, a character organizes a slice of the void into the weft and welkin of a pseudo-space; they assemble a cosmos around themselves. They are the centerpiece for the harmony of the cosmos, there: the particular slanted *perspective* on the Beyond that defines it all, that conjugates a portion from the void; endless symmetries circle the cynosure that is the state of being in harmony with themselves.

Simply by existing, they forge a context for themselves from the endless night.

This, is their Sphere;

The things within it, their *Arcana.*

It starts with a single thing—a place or phenomenon that they may wield, may cultivate for power, because of the infection the glitch has given them. A thing which evolves out of their glitch-borne neurosis and their curse and is thus tractable for them. It may be a field, or a forest; strange insects of the Beyond; elemental stones; ghostly creatures; or something else.

Arcanum: a treasure brought from Ninuan.

Sphere: the field of study and of being from which a Strategist's Arcana come.

Around that thing there is inevitably found an ecosystem.

Each of the infected will find echoes and variations of their ecosystem appearing throughout the lost districts and the endless vast Beyond; occasionally, they will find territories entirely dominated by it. If they glitched out by drowning in a desert, then they may find themselves with a gift for controlling the eerie water spirits of the Beyond. (... were there eerie water spirits? There were; but not everyone finds them as often, or knows the trick to seeing them, or can call them out as readily, or exercise control of them for power, as that particular character, who drowned in an arid wasteland, can.) More than eerie water spirits, too, they will likely often find strange lakes that are full of the rich indigo *weyrwater* that supports such spirits and has mystical uses of its own; and the aquatic horrors that live within such lakes; and the water-witches and wizards that live beside them; and the stones infused with the ancient powers of water spirits that died many years ago; and the legacies of ancient heroes who knew the ways of weyrwater and its spirits; and more besides ... and much of this—all but the strongest phenomena, really—quite possibly shows up even in portions of the Beyond wherein their peers, without their presence, would never have spotted any evidence of it at all.

It takes a student of dreams to draw out oneiromantic power; a student of the insects of the Beyond to dig out their secrets; a student of Sisera Sanguinary (the location) to recognize its echoes where they appear in other climes—but the Beyond is naturally interwoven, when it is called upon to be so, so when the infected travel together their continua oft overlap.

A Strategist's Sphere is almost always themed to match and feature their worldly bane: that thing that they're dying of manifests in their Sphere, in another form. Their Sphere is *not*, however, host unto their sickness—it need not manifest the recurring glitch that murders them again and again. If a Strategist dying "of cabinets" is *actually* killed, for instance, by armies of small beings that they have discovered to live inside them, those beings need not manifest at all within their cabinet-themed Sphere. They may well *do* so, if the player has trouble defining a cool Sphere without them ... but it is not required.

Where a Strategist's native ground resonates with their passive qualities, their Sphere is an echo to their dynamism; it is not a solitary retreat where they may find peace, but a ubiquitous gathering field wherein they may seize power.

From the testimony of Osuin Thermidau:

What Mortals See

Author's Note

Osuin Thermidau, who is dying of artificial sweeteners, has no particular means of crossing the fourth wall; her long and mostly unprompted testimony—elicited in fever, while briefly held by the Locust Court; perhaps stalling her execution long enough for the situation she was in to change—does not, then, and *cannot*, then, include actual external references to this game. Where such references seem to be apparent, we can only understand it as an effort of translation ... or as the influence of parasites (found in artificial sweeteners) upon our human perception of the page.

When the Strategists in your game use miracles, you may find yourself asking, wait, how is it possible that people do not notice these things?

Go ahead, if you like. You may expostulate now.

I have often found myself asking much the same question regarding the deeds of the Imperators (pg. 40). They are excessive. Yet, nobody pays heed. One day there are three suns in the sky. The next day, the moon bleeds green. If I were to do these things, people would say, *that is terrible, Osuin.*

Or, *Ms. Thermidau should be killed at all costs.*

When Imperators do them, it is every-day. "Of course we have three suns," the scholars say. They do not mind. They are very easy about it.

For the Strategists there is a similar process at work. It is just not as efficient.

If you remember when the moon rose yesterday it did not seem very much like the consequence of a miraculous battle. Sometimes it is very bright. Sometimes it is not. That must seem normal too.

It is not. There was a tangle.

It was a mess.

The world tries. It does its best. People do talk about chariots and wolves, re: the moon. Nobody has forgotten the rabbit. But it has been a few months and suspicion, active *suspicion,* has faded.

The Powers are still angry sometimes. The Imperators, are not totally sanguine.

... but the *astronomers* all think that everything is fine.

That is the good case. That is the case that you see when a Strategist is using the right miracles, at the right time, for the world to do the right cover-up.

Or maybe it's the bad case. I don't know. ... the world tries.

It is not always successful. When it is successful, it is not always normative. I mean to say, the world does have magic. It does have faery courts. There are mer-people in the seas. People don't know about them but they are down there, in the like almost all of the sea that nobody has seen. Stuff's weird.

So what I mean is, the world can *explain* a miracle without making sense. It doesn't *have* to go the route of "and that's how the skies have been all along." And in fact it usually won't unless law-beings doing their whole deepness thing, their *law* thing, are involved.

All the world has to do, really, is make things look normal *enough* that a human can look at it and not see the mythic world beneath their prosaic illusion. Enough that they won't catch on to the Glitch. Humans can see someone get wings on and fly away and that will blow their minds but it won't break them, because, fundamentally, that can happen.

I mean: *birds.*

So here's the ways that the world tries to explain a Strategist's miracles.

As ordinary actions. A Strategist uses occult charm. That's awesome. ... but it just makes them more normally charming. The world explains that away. *That is their charm.*

Or, they play an organ fugue on a pennywhistle. OK: *They're just that good.*

Or, they awaken someone's hidden potential as a martial artist. ... *but, it was already there.*

Retroactively. A Strategist destroys a painting. Or ... it was never there in the first place?

Maybe it was never even painted. Maybe it got ruined a few years back and was tossed out. That still leaves a painting ... somewhere, theoretically ... but it's a *ruined* painting. It's not substantively itself any more. The destruction's still good.

Or, an ally shows up just when a Strategist needs them. But ... maybe *they were already on the way?*

They weren't. Actually. They really just kind of showed up.

But the world can *decide* that they were. It can even seed memories and evidence back along their path.

It's easy! It's not like explaining the moon!

As illusions. A Strategist's oratory makes the stones and flowers weep—or *at least it felt that way?*

Or, they erase the food from a laden table—but, *they probably just did some sort of trick?*

There are some effects we will call "phantasmagorical" that *often* get written off this way. By the world. By the witnesses. They're tricks, misapprehensions, hallucinations, or maybe delusions. People decide that, either right then, or, later on. Maybe *in the moment* when a Strategist invokes phantasmagorical telekinetic powers it all seems very real and scary, but the next day, everyone involved will realize that it cannot possibly have been; investigation may even find the evidence that it was not.

As esoteric. Weird. But, like, normally weird. Esoteric effects are like a magician summoning the dead or an otherworldly monster descending onto the Earth. People look at that and say, *hey, wait. That is not the world as I have been told the world will function.*

Even the world itself will squint a little bit, like, *wait, isn't magic forbidden?*

Or *hey, aren't you supposed to be on that other planet?*

... but fundamentally, it's legal. Legit.

Like, magic works. Fundamentally, it's a thing that can happen, even without a miracle. It's just kind of screwed up.

People who see esoteric effects are on their own when it comes to rationalizing them. They *can*. They *do*. People are good at that. But the world won't step in to help. If they want to cling to magic, instead, they are allowed to say: *I found a corridor between New York and Tokyo.* Or *that was a legitimate dragon.*

It won't *help* them make sense of their life, but it's not like *actually* seeing how the world works. It doesn't render them unfit or unable to participate in modern society. They just have to keep it on the down low.

Ninuanni Stuff. Effects that the world recognizes as being of Ninuan are the same way, only worse. This is why I said that we don't get the kind of coverage that Imperators get. It is discrimination and it is terrible but there is no one to complain to.

Most of the powers from **Lore** (pg. 205) are obviously stuff that comes from Beyond.

This is not stuff the world is OK with. But it is a *thing*. It's a thing the world *knows*. It's ... it makes sense, in a way. So sometimes the world leaves the matter at that.

When it does, this stuff screws with people's heads in a way that esoteric effects don't. It breaks people's idea of reality in a way that they can't ever completely repair. Maybe they can fill in with a kind of uneasy Not-comprehension, but maybe they can't.

I mean: sometimes people see Not-things and they're fine. They paper over their confusion or they just accept it. They grasp that something impossible happened, but they think it's a normal impossibility, some kind of magic, like that corridor or that dragon.

Sometimes they become aware of the Not, which is, of course, the most accurate response.

Other times, they go way off course. They become aware of miracles. They fall into a state of *dementia animi*—the "disease of spirits." That is what humans call it when someone learns how to see spirits but not how to *stop*.

There's no good reason this should happen, really. It's not like that person is witnessing one of the miracles of the Nobilis (pg. 55), built upon the subtle structures of Creation. Seeing the work of a Strategist's Lore and *realizing* that their own world is built on a shifting mythical foundation is not logical. It's not right!

It's like decoding the Voynich papers by accident!

... but sometimes people do.

Other times, people see the work of Lore and become aware of the Glitch. That's ... that's not right, either.

I think it's people who were close to the edge? People who'd had hints already? They just hadn't quite *tipped over* to knowing how the world worked. Not until they saw some of the magic of Ninuan and their old world collapsed.

But it is better not to make people aware of the Glitch. Not when you don't have to. It is one thing to kill people or turn them into beetles with the heads of jade lions but there are some lines that should never be crossed.

Summing it All Up. Strategists do a lot of stuff like erasing things from the world or budding off self-bits. People mostly don't notice. You'd think they would. But, really, they don't!

On the other hand, if the miracle goes on for a while—like, a summoned kraken, or a singing magic sword, or the Strategist walking on water—people kind of *have* to notice. ... but then the world either decides it's magic, or a hallucination. Basically.

... most of the time.

CHAPTER 5

A Sound of Larks

In the cattails is the world
forgiven; in the running waters; in
the sound of larks.

—*from* THE ARISTOTELIS MURDERS,
by Lena Christensen

THE PROCESS OF RECOVERY

So ... sometimes—rarely; now and then ...

A Strategist stops trying to kill the world.

Usually, in the end, this is just ... growing up. You can't keep trying to kill the world forever. You can't stew in violence and outrage forever. *You have to let it go.* Even if the world is still awful, even if you still can't stand it... you have to let it go.

And so, eventually ... they do.

A lot of the time, they're still an awful person, after.

A lot of recovered Strategists, a lot of Strategists who don't try to kill the world any longer, they only *barely* have empathy for people. They only *barely* grant them the right to exist. They were arrogant before and they are arrogant after. They were cruel before and they're not really cruel, not the same way, afterwards, but there's still a cold and nasty streak inside them. They're in *control* of their cruelty now, but they're not actually gone nice.

They're still kind of a miracle, in that hardly anybody among the Strategists gets even that far, and they're still weighed down by everything they've done, but they've got a long way to go before they're decent people, and infinitely far to go before they can find redemption—to the substantial and yet still limited extent they'll try.

A lot of the time, on the other hand, they wind up sort of OK.

The kind of Strategist who can snap out of the apocalyptic fugue *can* easily be the kind of Strategist who was weird to begin with—on a quixotic mission to end some pillar of the world, perhaps; probably even doing some things they're not proud of on the way ... but hanging onto, or quickly recovering, the basic standards of a human being (or, at least, of a person.) Having a kind of ethics, having a level of empathy or at least a respect for others' existence:

It's rare, but there *are* Strategists who don't bother being monsters, after all. They're too busy with their multifarious plans to split open the Ash, break down reality, or crack Time. If they stumble on a sick puppy on the street on their path to world destruction and victory, they might just pick it up; soothe its coughs; take it to shelter; leave it there, with a bit of milk.

They might not even be really paying attention:

For a lot of people, and even some Strategists, it's being *decent* that's the autonomic response, and the crueler things that are hard.

opposite: *by Beatrice Pelagatti*

If someone like *that* stops trying to kill the world, they can wind up OK, and they might not actually have all that much on their conscience to regret.

Sometimes, conversely, a Strategist who stops hasn't really "recovered" at all. They don't actually get to the point of thinking that they "shouldn't" kill the world.

It's not like that, for them.

They just ... fall in love. With a place or a person. A thing or a job. They find something that they're attached to, that they can't bear to let go of.

Once they find one thing, it leads to another. The whole thing spirals. It gets out of hand.

You can't kill the world *and* protect your gumball collection. You can't murder Fire, Earth, Air, and Sea and expect your adoptive kids to survive.

So, reluctantly— I mean, what other choice is there?

They have to switch sides.

The last (relatively) common way for a Strategist to recover—to break free of being the world's enemy—is just to break, full stop.

Under the pressure of the wrongness of the world; unable to escape it, forced to confront it again and again, they dissolve. They fall apart in themselves like the foam of the sea, and a new self is born. Swathes of their memories shatter or grow vague; their attachments twist; their personalities and their goals undergo a radical and unpredictable shift. At times elements of the original survive, gathered elsewhere in the Excrucian's metaphysical structure to haunt, torment, and potentially later seize control back from their newborn child; other times, the new entity in the old one's skin is the only thing that's left.

One could say, the Glitch got them, in the end; turned them into the soulless and empty things they could have been; but some flailing lever of the self pushed the Glitch down again and allowed a new-fledged personhood to be born.

It isn't *always* a better personhood, for clarity. An Excrucian that breaks and becomes someone else isn't always nicer. It's surprisingly common because personality collapse is a sign that whatever you were doing wasn't working—but it's still at most one time in eight. The rest of the time, they're different, genuinely different, but they're just as bad.

In the end, even adding up all the ways a Strategist might stop trying to kill the world, there aren't that many who do. There aren't that many who *make it through* to a non-oppositional relationship to the world. We're not talking about a vibrant population here.

Right now, on Earth, there are roughly 16.

That's actually a lot, historically speaking, but it's also probably not the peak; the rules of symmetry that govern the void mean that the numbers rise and fall in waves.

The Riders' Abstinence Society

The Strategists who aren't trying to kill everything don't have a purpose, not really. It's not like they're suddenly the ones who're meant to *save* the world.

Maybe if there's nobody else doing it, and the people they care about need them to?

Maybe if they, like, *that* Strategist in *particular*, have been completely subverted by the Imperators or the Powers?

... but usually, that's not their job.

They're not cosmically meant for anything, at that point, any more; the symmetry that bound them to the world and War is gone. They're just humanoid monsters, stuck with ties to Ninuan and to Creation, with a bunch of powers that aren't necessarily all that useful and a truckload of regrets.

So they drift.

Eventually the drifting stops. Eventually they stub their toe on a little purpose, a little thing to be doing with their lives. Maybe they need food and water, maybe they need shelter, that's not universal but it can happen, so they get a job; or find people or a community they can mooch off of; or put their hands on some riches that they then

"I have to apologize," he told me. "Re: the llamas."

"Pardon?"

"I mean," he said. "For killing them all."

They're still alive, I thought, but what I said was, "That's all right, then?"

"I mean, not the llamas," he said. "There isn't a word any more for the thing I actually got rid of. But, the thing, an awful lot like the llamas, that I backslid a bit and destroyed."

I looked at my coffee. I drank the last of it, then looked apologetically between him and the empty cup. "Ah," I said, showing it to him. "I—"

The cup wasn't empty any longer. I don't know what it was. It wasn't like it was refilled with coffee. It just, it didn't have any more emptiness inside it any more. I couldn't finish my sentence, then. I just pushed my chair back a little and I looked at him.

"And the thing we had before toilet paper," he said. "And planet Nemesis. And the ... the other light."

"It's a real planet," I protested, which wasn't what I wanted to say. I tried again. "I mean, why are you saying this?"

"It's part of my healing process," he explained.

I looked down. This brushed my eyes past the cup, which was a mistake. It took almost ... seconds before I could look away again. "Why me?" I said.

"Well, to who exactly else should I?" he said. "All the llamas are gone."

— *from* But He Didn't Have Eyes (Gavrik/Lindsey), *by immateria thron*

have to protect. Maybe they don't actually need anything, maybe they could notionally drift through the world not really doing anything in particular *forever,* and it's just the accumulated 0.1% chance per day that something distracts them from that that eventually ties them into somebody's life, somebody's troubles, somebody's town.

They try to live among people. Usually among, like, human people, though living among spirits or the Nobilis can happen too.

It's hard. It's almost impossible. There's always the temptation to fall back into old habits; or, to let the Glitch take them, and just ... dissolve.

The first purpose found hardly ever stays; it leaves a hunger and an emptiness behind.

They need another, but another's *hard.*

So there's a support group. More than one, really, since not all of them can stand one another, but under a single umbrella, with a single shared organizational memory:

The Chancery; or, the Riders' Abstinence Society.[5]

That's what the PCs are, one chapter of that Society: a group of 3-6 members, most likely, who *can* stand one another. More or less, and, at least, most of the time. Maybe they've come together in some meaningful way—pulling together into the same city, maybe; taking regular road trips together; forming a business, or even sharing a house.

Maybe all they've really done, maybe all they really *do*, until some big plot begins, is get together, now and then, to talk about the struggles and the difficulties of their lives.

The Chancery is relatively safe, and being a part of it is relatively safe, but that's not absolute. It's not like the regular Excrucians don't know it exists. It's not like they don't know *the PCs' chapter* exists. They're not going to freak out and try to kill the PCs for joining, probably, but pressuring them out of the idea is definitely on the table.

Similarly, not all that many Powers are aware reformed Strategists exist, because the Imperators aren't super-interested in their Powers stopping to wonder whether every Strategist they meet has actually come around to a peace with the world ... but the information is out there, and not actively concealed or forbidden, for all that it's not relevant and actionable enough to spread. Whenever a Chancery chapter is closer to a formal organization than a loose peer group, whenever it has regular meetings at a regular place, Powers might crash those meetings now and then. Sometimes, to try to draft the members to their cause. Sometimes, just out of outrage at their claim to have been redeemed.

Stuff happens, but ...

Well.

One muddles through.

5 It might be more accurate to call it "the Strategists' Abstinence Society;" while other Riders are technically welcome to join, not many do, and they rarely act as full members if they ever should. They correspond, they hang out, they sometimes show up to meetings or whatever, but they're not really a *part of* any particular chapter. That's not because Deceivers, Mimics, and Warmains are intrinsically less likely to drop out of the war, or are necessarily less serious about it if they should do so; just, their stories are different, and they have their own deal.

By default, the Society has a membership of fourteen Strategists and three of these miscellaneous Rider affiliates; two of the notional sixteen reformed Strategists have not chosen to, or are yet to, join.

Erchen'in Branza,
who dies by the Sandwich

Weep, Oh Weep, for Puffin Pearl, who Fadeth like the Spring

SCENE 1: ATTACKED

[Madeline's game takes a short break between chapters, giving the players time to apply their accumulated XP to their quests and stretch their legs. While they're doing that, and our book is reviewing the setting (above), the GM preps two shared "Cost pools" for her NPCs:

One is a 30-point Cost pool that she'll draw upon for the rest of the session; the other is a bonus 20-point pool that's just for the conflict this chapter will have. She preps these pools by writing "30" and "20" at the head of two columns on a piece of blank paper. She leaves space for a third column, which she'll use to track PC Costs.

You'll see roughly what these are for in the course of this chapter; full rules are on pg. 262–265 and pg. 280–281.]

GM: So, new chapter! It's time for a fun and terrifying new day!

[The game resumes.]

EDWARD: Wait, let's not have it be terrifying.
GM: Just fun?
EDWARD: Yeah!
GM: Denied! You wake up to the rocking of the van, and not, alas, in a good way. You're under attack!
EDWARD: What would even be a good way here.
GM: If the van were, like, suddenly transported onto a roller coaster that roller coastered vans instead of people, or something?
DIANE: That sounds horribly unsafe.
GM: Such is the condition of the world. What are you doing?
DIANE: Wait, that's all we get?
GM: Would you like to know more? Feel free to spend your combat actions paying attention to what's going on instead of doing things.
DIANE (TRANSLITERATED FRUSTRATED NOISES): !!!
HEATHER: *[tosses a spotlight card on the table]* I'll leap upon that grenade.
GM: If there's a grenade, are you leaping upon it or are you engaging with the situation?
HEATHER: I feel as if my phrasing both entitles and obligates me to do both.
GM: Fair enough!

opposite: *by Camille "Karma" O'Leary*

[The GM takes a moment to deduct 12 points from her Cost pool for this conflict—her quick, rough estimate of the cost of finding the PCs and launching the initial attack.]

GM: So, here's the sitch. A gigantic icicle is smashing down upon the van from above. Also, you have urgent homework.
HEATHER: Homework?
GM: Yes. A loud voice in your heart is insisting that there is no real time to deal with the gigantic icicle smashing down on the van from above because you absolutely *have to* finish your algebra assignment right now. Similar thoughts are racing through the minds of Tassilo and Liutgarde.
EDWARD: I suspect mental alteration.
GM: That, or you've just been putting it off for a really long time and the deadline has suddenly appeared.
EDWARD: ... admittedly, that is also somewhat plausible. I want to remember my options for dealing with stuff like this.
GM: Toss me a spotlight?
EDWARD: *[does so]* Done.
GM: OK, let's take a quick look over the cheatsheet.

[The cheatsheet on pg. 419 summarizes the divine and mundane actions characters have available to them.]

GM: Some of the things you can do here include Eide 4
EDWARD: ... 4 Cost ...
GM: to let things happen and declare it as part of your plan; Eide 8,
EDWARD: ... *8* Cost ...
GM: to hide the fact that you haven't done the assignment from the teacher; or, you can use a *flore* or Arcanum; or, oh, hey, there's Wyrd 6, unfettering, if you want to be just plain free of assignments as the detritus of mortality.

["Unfettering" is the power that basically says, "how can this apply to me? I'm a void being!"]

EDWARD: Will that even work? I thought unfettering didn't work if they knew you were Excrucian.
GM: Can you afford it?
EDWARD: I'm Wyrd 5, so that's what I'd *want* to do, if it's the thing that'd work.

[Tassilo would only need to suffer 1 point of a Cost (in this case, the Cost "Burn") to get from Wyrd 5 to Wyrd 6. That's a lot more appealing than spending 8 Cost to get from Eide 0 to Eide 8!]

GM: The thing is, yeah, you can't actually dodge a typical miracle that knows you're an Excrucian that way, because it's, like, "I am not a part of this world," and the miracle is more like, "I am targeting a thing that is not of the world, I *know*." But in this *particular* case, it's fine, because I just don't think it *works* to give a homework assignment to unfettered Excrucians, in the same way that you can't entangle them with karma even if it's miraculous karma that's deliberately aimed at them.
EDWARD: Cool. I'm totally going to unfetter myself from this assignment, um, when I finish reflecting on my options for handling the situation.
GM: In the meantime, Liutgarde?
DIANE: Do I have the benefits of their information gathering?
GM: Functionally, no; narratively, yes. What's happened is not "everything is too confused to follow, until Ciara carefully parsed out events;" instead, it's more like, things were confusing enough that at least one of you had to be the sacrificial staring-at-it lamb if you weren't all going to stagger around drunkenly instead.
DIANE: Or, there's a metaphysical explanation, like, Ciara's attention caused the situation to resolve?
GM: Arguably. That is, some magical scholars would argue that. Whether they are correct is very difficult to determine without a reality oscilloscope, and those are still in development.
DIANE: I think I'm going to do a major working because if I don't then everyone is going to get hit by an icicle and the van is going to explode.
GM: Possibly it won't explode.
DIANE: Or catch on fire.
GM: ... it *would* probably catch on fire, briefly.
DIANE: I am going to glamour the icicle into being the answers to our assignments.
GM: That's ... I'm not sure you can do that.
DIANE: I'm willing to eat 7 Stilling and go for a Greater Misdirection.
GM: ... fair. That's ... you ... the answers to your assignments crash through the roof, scattering through the inside of the van, and anything that suggests that it was actually something else is temporarily phantasmagorical? That one?
DIANE: Yeah.

*[**Greater Misdirection** is an Eide 12 power that tricks the world into believing something. It's still possible to encounter evidence of the converse, but that evidence is questionable and without impact, at least until the effect completes. (Or, as in this case, until the player forgets they're maintaining it.)*
Liutgarde has Eide 5, so this power costs her 7 Stilling.]

GM: OK. That happens.

[Here, as Diane adds 7 Stilling to her character sheet, we're going to introduce a tricky idea that comes up a lot more often in conflict than anywhere else—the idea that spending 3+ Cost in one shot also earns an XP. You could understand it as a balancing factor, but we're not going to talk about it that way; it's not really meant to "make up" for the Cost, or to make spending large chunks of Cost less painful, so much as make large expenses, and being willing to spend, more worthwhile. In short, 7 Stilling is a heck of a thing, and even with this bonus it's still a heck of a thing ... but, she does also get to record an XP.
Meanwhile, the GM deducts two more points from her shared NPC Cost pool, reflecting the miracle that she's about to describe.]

GM: A rhinoceros is charging the van.
DIANE: Is ... is that part of my assignment?
GM: ... that would be awesome, but I don't think they thought that far ahead. Heather, Edward, you are past that frozen instant of parsing what was going on and what you can do about it, and there are shattered fragments of your assignment ... wait, what exactly, I mean, how exactly is Liutgarde actually doing that?
DIANE: Two streams of power are swirling at the van, right? I'm just conning the world into thinking that one is the other.
EDWARD: You're reversing the polarity on the miracle streams!
DIANE: Yeah! So, like, instead of creating ice and a need to do the assignments, there's ... a bunch of assignments, and possibly a need for ice. At least, its absence.
EDWARD: I become sharply aware of the absence of ice.
HEATHER: Have you ever *looked* at your absence of ice? I mean, really *looked* at it?
TASSILO: I have not, Ciara, but suddenly I am tempted.
GM: Technically, it is not *creating* the ice, since Icicle Lass is bad at that, so much as redirecting the fate of "being crushed by a falling icicle" onto you, but the streams should still be swirlable all the same.
EDWARD: Wait, what kind of Icicle Lass can't make icicles?
GM: Look, she is very sensitive about the matter, OK? Also, please don't forget that your van is about to be flipped over by the charge of a rhinoceros.
TASSILO: But wait! I should not spend this particular moment staring at the absence of my ice, Ciara, or even philosophizing about the general *qualities* of the absence of people's ice, but rather do something about the rhinoceros that is charging us!
CIARA: What a great idea!
TASSILO: ... it is organic. There is nothing I can do.

[Tassilo's destruction power does not affect living things unless he is in "infection state" (pg. 233).]

EDWARD, A MOMENT LATER: I thrust the cactus forward. "Saguaric! I choose you!"
GM: There are several difficulties with this idea.
HEATHER: I think you mean "unexpected benefits."
GM: There are several surprising elements to the execution of this idea.
EDWARD: I am a merchant prince, and am extremely good at handling goods.
GM: ... I refuse to accept that applies to rapidly hauling a cactus to the front of a van barehanded.
EDWARD: Alas! The spines and arrows of outrageous fortune!
HEATHER: I am going to step forward and punch the rhinoceros to a halt.
GM: What level of effect is that?
HEATHER: Let's start with 2, if I think a regular stunt is enough.
GM: A regular stunt *would* definitely be enough, except this is a really competent-looking rhinoceros. I mean, seriously. Once you've seen the look in its eye, you don't feel confident at all.

*[**Stunt** is the Eide 2 power that lets Ciara access her Technique, "feats of strength." For Ciara, this is free.*

*The GM would normally let Ciara stop a rhinoceros with a punch as an ordinary stunt. It's not clear on reflection that this is actually appropriate—a charging rhinoceros is a big deal—but that's her first reaction. THIS rhinoceros, though, is actually a transformed Power using the **Aspect** attribute from pg. 395 to make its charge even nastier than it otherwise would be ... and while Madeline hasn't FIRMLY decided what that should mean (the details of NPC-only powers being in the GM's hands), she's PRETTY sure that it cancels out the various special rules for a stunt.*

That turns this, thus, into a straight numbers game:

Ciara's level 2 action against ITS action, which the GM is pegging at 6.]

HEATHER: Uh ... greater stunt, then. 4 Cost, 1 XP.

*[**Greater Stunt** is the Eide 6 power that shows off Ciara's Technique at its best, but costs Ciara 4 Stilling every time. A bonus XP, yeah, for using an expensive power, but, still ... 4 Stilling!*

Against a divine rhino, though ... is it even enough?]

GM: Wham!

[The GM takes a one-point injury to her Cost pool on the rhinoceros' behalf, because, ow! But only one, because:]

GM: That is *definitely* the hardest-headed rhinoceros you have ever punched, Ciara, and there's been some pretty stiff competition. It winds up taking three more staggering steps forward, and you a few heavy stumbles backwards, before you come to a complete halt somewhere in the middle of the engine block.
HEATHER: It is, or I am?
GM: Enh? Meanwhile, someone is shoving a cactus at your back.

[Defenders often win ties, so the GM is technically letting Ciara "win" this 6 vs. 6 tie ... but it's not a clean victory, because "human vs. charging rhinoceros" so rarely is.]

DIANE: I am heading out of the van to try to figure out if we have any more antagonists.
GM: How many do you think you have?
DIANE: I'm counting a rhinoceros, an icicle girl, and probably the Power of School or something.
HEATHER: Oh, man, I don't want to be schooled.
DIANE: It's fine, your school is life.
HEATHER: It's not fine! Life is terrible!
GM: The rhinoceros could be the Power of School.
DIANE: I am assuming that is not the case, but I suppose—I

mean, do I feel an urge to turn my assignment in to the rhinoceros?
EDWARD: how would you even
DIANE: It *has* a horn, Edward.
GM: To be honest you're not sure who you are supposed to turn this geography assignment in to. That is a puzzling lacuna in this situation. But, all right. Take a look.
HEATHER: It's in a book!
DIANE: *[tosses down a spotlight card]*
GM: It's dawn. The sun is rising over the jagged peaks of the Midmarch Hotel. Dry asphalt stretches out around you, marked by faded, dead white lines. There is a van here. It is speared through by a vast homework assignment, slowly shedding flakes of individual assignments—I guess the main one is for a group—into the inside. A rhinoceros and a very strong Excrucian are standing off in the engine block, immediately before a cactus. Red morning light dyes everything a shade of ... uh, red. I suppose. The bollards lurk.
DIANE: Is there anyone hiding among the bollards?
GM: ... a puffin. Up above, on the railing of a balcony, you can see a girl with icicles hanging off of her nose and a slacker dude with hair over one eye.
DIANE: I am totally going to invoke my Wyrd against the puffin.
GM: Doing what, exactly?
DIANE: Banishing it into faerie.

[This is Liutgarde's particular method of "destruction." Her Wyrd is 2, destruction needs 4, so it costs her 2 Burn.]

GM: ... the mists of faerie swirl around the puffin, and a moment later, it is as if it was never even there. If asked, I will deny it ever existed to begin with.

[This does not injure the GM's Cost pool; instead, the puffin is successfully removed from play. The difference is that the rhino was "hurt a little, probably" in a generic sense, which can only be expressed as Cost, whereas the puffin's fate was more specific.]

GM: Ciara, the rhinoceros' horn is glowing red.
HEATHER: WTF?

[The GM decides that this is going to be a free miracle for the rhinoceros, and again doesn't deduct anything from her Cost pool—she's not fully articulating it, even to herself, but she's loosely decided that the rhinoceros is a transformed Power with Aspect 4 (pg. 395), Flore 5 (pg. 181), and whatever it's using to be a rhinoceros; that it's hiding some kind of magical attack treasure "under" the rhinoceros transformation; and that it's about to use a level 5 Flore miracle (Flore being the attribute that activates magical treasures) to fire it off.

... the only thing she's actually committing to right now, though, is, as the players have guessed and will soon be shown, a rhino-beam.]

HEATHER: I'm going to swing it around over my head and hurl it at the balcony.
GM: That is also probably going to need a greater stunt.
HEATHER: Understood.
GM: Edward, someone is swinging a rhinoceros at your head.
EDWARD: Having already done the research, I am *ready.*
GM: OK ...
EDWARD: I invoke the Cliffhanger Rite! As far as anyone can determine, I am struck by the rhinoceros. But in *truth,* it is all part of my sinister plan!

***[The Cliffhanger Rite**, at Eide 4 ... is, basically, as Edward has just described. For him, it costs 4 Stilling (and gives 1 XP).]*

GM: As ... far as anyone can determine, you are smashed through the side of the van, with Saguaric ut-Cacterus falling from your benumbed fingers, and carried along with the rhinoceros in a great arc that lands you underneath it as it crashes into the balcony, which begins to collapse even as the beam bursts forth from its horn. At the end of the scene, you will presumably be able to reveal that you are not in fact a collection of broken bones and Tassilo paste. Or, that being so serves your ends.
EDWARD: I am already beginning to theorize that what *actually* happened was that I managed to unmake the side of the van and the balcony bars and a little space underneath myself on the balcony on landing, allowing me to nimbly cling to its side without taking more than a few light bruises, but I guess we'll discuss that at a later time.
GM: Indeed.

[They won't discuss that at a later time.]

GM: For now, though, you're basically paste. Well, OK, that's probably exaggerated. A wreck, anyway.
DIANE: What happened to the others?

[The GM pays a couple more points of Cost to represent generic rhinoceros wear and tear. She thinks about what the other two do and guesstimates it'll eat 3 Cost (emptying her bonus pool.)]

GM: Icicle girl somehow managed to get down to hang pointily from the underside of the balcony before the rhinoceros hit. The slacker dude isn't going to react in time, but you all suddenly feel that it is an *extremely* critical task assigned by a very important person that you absolutely *have* to listen to that you save him at any cost.
DIANE: Wait, by what important person?
GM: ... I don't know, who does Liutgarde take assignments from?
DIANE: ... Liutgarde?
GM: Ah, yes, you are remembering, it was the top priority item on your task list for the day. Ciara, similarly, in your exercise program.
HEATHER: Save one slacker a day, keep flabby muscles away!
EDWARD: The only person Tassilo listens to is his father, and he doesn't actually listen to his father.
GM: Saguaric?
EDWARD: ... yes.

GM: Yes?
EDWARD: ... Tassilo will accept Saguaric's sacred charge and do his best to save this man, for what twisty cactuarine purpose I do not know. There's only so much I can do while being smashed into jelly but I can at least ensure that my shattered, sundered arm flies off and knocks him out of the way just in time.
GM: ... what kind of action even is that?
EDWARD: Steel. ... Greater Steel.

[As noted on pg. 130, ***Greater Steel*** *is the level 9 Ability Action used to break past one's limitations. Edward's reasoning here is that* ***Steel*** *is the action one would take to push on through severe pain in one's shoulder, so clearly carefully aiming one's arm when it is flying off would be* ***Greater Steel*** *instead. He also likes the way that saying* ***Steel, Greater Steel*** *makes him sound like a secret agent.]*

GM: OK, then! I'll accept that, on the grounds that it has not yet been established that you get to keep both of your arms.

[Edward records a staggering +8 Wear and 1 XP on his character sheet.]

EDWARD: Secretly, it's not really my arm, but a bollard I tucked into my pants last night in case a situation exactly like this came up.

[Recall that Tassilo is not "actually" smushed, so an explanation for what "really" happened is required. Such as:]

HEATHER: You crept out of the van before we went to sleep, broke off a bollard, painted it to look like your arm, and ... stuck it down your pants?
EDWARD: Lesser minds cannot always comprehend the multitudinous facets of my genius.
GM: So true. So very true. OK, so!

[The exhaustion of her bonus Cost pool and Tassilo's newly limited ability to contribute are both making Madeline feel like the end of the conflict needs to be in sight, but she's currently not sure if it actually is. She decides to pause here, tally up spent Cost, and then put some pressure on.]

GM: How hurt is everyone? There was a 7 Stilling action earlier, and I figure Tassilo and Ciara take another Wear from Cacteric shenanigans. Tassilo is remarkably undamaged by being turned to paste so far, and I will boldly resist assigning Fugue for the bollard trick; was there anything else?
HEATHER: I've burned 4 Stilling too. Oh, wait, two stunts, so, 8? And another XP? But I don't think the cactus can actually hurt me, I'm Durant.

[Ciara's Gift, ***Durant****, protects her from minor physical damage (pg. 290).]*

GM: Oops. That's fair.
HEATHER: I mean, I did get shoved through an engine block, though.
GM: That's ... also fair. So you take a Wear from that, instead?
HEATHER: Yeah.

[Heather records it, but only after scratching off her cactus-related injury from ***The Ballad of Cacteric Desertian****.]*

DIANE: I burned ... 2 Burn, I think.
EDWARD: 4 Still, 8 Wear.
HEATHER: ... WTF, Ed.
EDWARD: Bollards don't come cheap!

[In theory, Madeline should have been tracking Costs for the whole fight—and regularly announcing how much the PCs had thus far spent. In practice, pausing at some point to tally a conflict up is just a thing that people do.]

GM: ... so you're 31 deep in Cost right now, with like a third of it spent on saving a slacker with a pants bollard. OK! I'm setting a timer for this fight.

[This is the "pressure" mentioned earlier. Once the GM sets a timer for the fight, the PCs have to either win or spend a certain amount of total Cost by the time it elapses ... or they'll lose.

Madeline writes "31" atop a third column on her Cost pool tracker page to make sure she doesn't lose track of it. She decides to go easy on the group from there, giving them a target of 40 Cost to win—just 9 away!—but she doesn't have to tell them this, and doesn't. She probably won't kill them if they lose, just cut scene to an interrogation room or something ... but she doesn't have to, and won't, tell them that, either!]

EDWARD: How long have we got?
GM: I dunno, twenty seconds? A couple of exchanges? It sort of feels like, heroic and fabulous as this all is, everyone here is one close shave away from being *actual* rhino paste, including, apparently, the rhino.
DIANE: I don't even know what we're fighting over.
EDWARD: They want me.
DIANE: No.
EDWARD: Tassilo was just *too much man* for them to let the Not retain him.
DIANE: Ciara, silence him.
HEATHER: Alas, when it comes to players, I can only throw XP.

[Heather, having no other way to reply (pg. 25), tosses Edward an XP/Fugue chip instead.]

GM, IGNORING TASSILO'S OUTRAGEOUS FOLLY: All right! So here's our situation: Rhinoceros, blasting a beam through the Midmarch Hotel from the balcony or uh from its horn, depending on your point of reference. Edward, crushed underneath. Slacker, flying sideways off of balcony, struck by Edward—er, I mean Tassilo's—arm. Icicle girl, falling,

because the balcony is crumbling. Liutgarde, standing. Ciara, ... also standing, in the middle of the van's engine block. Van: unsalvageable. Probably. Barring magic or miracle.
DIANE: We need to figure out what's going on and get out of here.
GM: Is that what you want out of victory?
DIANE: Maybe?
HEATHER: I mean, it seems like the Powers weren't fooled by our clever ruse, or at least, weren't fooled *all night,* and decided to preemptively eliminate us? So that's probably the "what's going on" thing.
DIANE: But, but, but we haven't even done anything *wrong!* I'll shout that at them. "We come in peace, you wankers!"
GM: ... is Liutgarde British?
DIANE: She's having a British moment.
GM: ... with a rumble, the balcony finishes its collapse, the icicle girl barely managing to dodge out of its way. And, uh, fling a trio of dagger-sharp icicles at you.
CROSSTALK:
EDWARD: I thought she couldn't make them?
DIANE: Does she r—
GM: She would appreciate it if you'd stop *bringing that up,* Ed. A person can just *have* icicles, you know, *on* them.
HEATHER: ... they can?

[They probably shouldn't; the GM drops six points from her session Cost pool even though this is a pretty minor miracle.]

DIANE, TRYING AGAIN: Does she really not understand what the word peace means? I thought these guys had some sort of law against just randomly attacking people.
GM: Uh—

[The GM had actually forgotten about that; she's not used to pulling her punches with NPCs. After a moment, though, she figures out why they're ignoring it—Midland is a particularly SENSITIVE location—and she soldiers on.]

GM: Apparently they're ignoring that. I mean, ah, "honoring it more in the breach than the observance." ... the icicles are very close now.
DIANE: That's fine, I'm cursing them to languishment with a point of Burn.

[The level 3 Wyrd power, ***Contagion,*** *allows Liutgarde to share elements of her curse with the icicles. Since she has Wyrd 2, this costs 1 Burn.]*

GM, TRACKING: Thirty-two! They ... fly slower? More sadly?
DIANE: They don't crash into me and finish their icicle life, but instead die over a very long time.
GM: Slower, then.
DIANE: Yeah.
HEATHER: ... I think Edward's got the right idea.
DIANE (TRANSLITERATED STUNNED EXPRESSION): !!!
HEATHER: We should let them think that they've killed us. Tragically.
DIANE: But if they don't buy it, then we're super-vulnerable, because we're just hanging around faux-dead.
HEATHER: So we bait them into doing something really big, something that won't leave a body.
DIANE: Like ... hitting us with a rhino beam.
EDWARD: Bit of a lost opportunity, that one.
HEATHER: I need insight into their psyches, Maddie.
GM: Toss in a spotlight?
HEATHER: I ... think I'm actually going to use my muscles and not my attention here. I am going to *flex* my way into insight with a point of Fugue.
GM: Thirty-*three*. The rhinoceros is buried in a collapsing building, but you can hear noises that suggest it isn't done. Icicle girl manifests a giant flying icicle platform without actually creating any icicles, somehow, and charges at you. Ciara flexes dramatically like she's trying to recontextualize this whole thing as a body-building competition, her muscle fibers trembling as they come into alignment with the delicate weave of fate.

[The GM decides that the Power of Icicles' "somehow" is a game trick that a player would be very proud of, although she isn't sure what it actually is—just, a game trick like the tricks players in her games seem proud of—and so only charges herself one Cost even though it's clearly outside of the Power of Icicles' appropriate means. She also drops more physical wear and tear on the rhino, but only one point's worth, because miscellaneous wear and tear on the rhino is getting old at this point. (A rule that would have applied to a PC in the rhino's position, too.) Finally, she figures the rhinoceros is spending a third point of Cost to work on getting out of the rubble. Her session pool is down to 21, her conflict bonus pool is at 0, and the PCs' spent Cost is up to 33.]

GM: And Liutgarde?
DIANE: Liutgarde is going to experimentally banish the icicle girl into faerie. 2 Burn.
GM, TRACKING: *Thirty-five.*
DIANE: Woohoo! First plausible numeric target hit!
GM: ... no comment.

[The GM decides that the Power of Icicles "takes damage" (pg. 279) to twist the effect. In exchange for an amount of Cost TBD—2, the GM decides—the Power of Icicles seizes control over the narrative of being banished into the mists. This is a generic system available to PCs as well, if they're ever hit by an effect they don't defend or ***Cliffhanger Rite*** *against:*

Instead of letting it happen as originally described, they "take damage" and describe how it happens, or fails to happen, instead.]

GM: Icicle girl vanishes in a swirl of mists, but the mists don't dissipate. They freeze over, and snotcicles begin to drip from them. You don't think this will last that long. Assignment guy
EDWARD: *That's* who he is!

GM: ... uh, I mean, slacker dude, lands hard and is dizzily trying to figure out what's going on. Ciara, you think you have a basic grasp of their personalities, although bear in mind that if they've been disseminating false information you'll have picked that up first. Icicle girl is mostly pretty cool with things
EDWARD: Augh
GM: but feels kind of put-upon by the world in general. Slacker dude isn't actually that much of a slacker, his outfit and general style belies a serious and studious heart. The rhinoceros is a simple and honest soul whose only real loves are its pet puffin and its rocket launchers. *[holds up a finger]* Before anyone says anything, it is the rhinoceros that has the rocket launchers, and you haven't seen them.
HEATHER: That's our in, then: the puffin.
LIUTGARDE: Who brings their beloved pets to the battlefield?
CIARA: I mean, we brought Tassilo.
LIUTGARDE: He's sort of expendable.
GM: You are running out of time for banter; the rhinoceros is starting to emerge from the building, the icicles from the mist are condensing into a girl, and studious slacker is starting to orient upon the world. Plus, your twenty seconds is almost up, and I probably *didn't* pick 35 to be your target.
EDWARD: That's a comment, Maddie.
GM: Hush, you.
LIUTGARDE, POSING: Ha! You may be tough, rhinoceros, but even *that* beam's not powerful enough to blast open the ... *bollard world* ... and unleash your puffin once again!
CIARA: *[affectedly gasping]* Liut-love! Don't give away tactical information to the enemy!
GM: ... I don't know if he's actually dumb enough to buy this obvious overacting, even if he is a rhinoceros right now.
DIANE: I'm using **Intensity,** so that it's, like, *hard* to not fall into my rhythm.
GM: Seriously?
DIANE: You can interpret it as just being much more charismatic than my actual player-words, or, like, as managing to convey the impression that I'm deliberately sounding fake so that he *won't* blast that spot with an even more powerful blast—the one thing that I'm most afraid of!

*[**Intensity** is the Eide 1 power. It makes it easy and comfortable to go along with the Strategist, as well as turning active social opposition into an Ability task. Liutgarde has Eide 5, so it's free.]*

GM: ... I think he is going to blast the two of you all-out not because he's actually listening but because you're standing there taunting him and his puffin is gone.
DIANE: Such does the universe ever strive to correlate more intently with my plans. I am going to be burned away to nothingness by the rhino-light. Assuming ... I mean, assuming it's a blast?

[The GM marks off four Cost for a GREATER rhino-beam ... and her total Cost pool for the session is down to 15.]

GM: It does seem to be, from earlier evidence.
DIANE: Yup, then. I fade away to nothing, burning from within.

*[Liutgarde is using **the Cliffhanger Rite**. Diane should probably specify this a little more clearly, particularly since it's free for her and so she isn't naming a Cost, but everyone at the table knows what she means.]*

HEATHER: I too fade away, for 2 Stilling, with a final whisper: "Strong ..."
GM: Were you even ... in the beam's path?
HEATHER: Amazing as it would be if I weren't, let's assume that I was clever enough to actually implement the plan I had decided on.
GM: ... thirty-seven! and the fight ends, unresolved. Lucky for you, since you were just about to lose.
EDWARD: I am totally going to spend 3 Fugue on a Lore action to know that. *[(+1 XP).]*
GM: *[flails for a moment, trying to figure out what that extra 3 Cost means in the context of resolving the fight, and finally just throws Edward an XP chip.]* how *exactly*
EDWARD: I read—can't take the chip, sorry, already got one this scene?—
GM: Oh, fair.
EDWARD: I read the academic literature on the statistical distribution of Noble actions in the presence of bollards last town we were in.
GM: ... I *see*.

[pause, as Edward returns the XP chip to the table.]

GM: ... And Ciara? Liut? How'd you two survive?
HEATHER: *[looking at Diane]* Faerie?
DIANE: Yeah, that makes sense, I whisked us both away into faerie temporarily, but the mists were burned away by the rhino-blast before they even became visible in the first place.
GM: OK, so you two seem fairly safe. They ... could still take away Edward's corpse, though?
EDWARD: Tassilo's.
GM: ... yeah.
EDWARD: And I think they can't, because it's only where it *is* because of the effect, so ... I mean, I don't think it makes *sense* if I'm suddenly back at the van when things end, but I'm willing to do it to keep from getting captured if you don't have a great capture scene planned out.
GM: That is a reasonable answer. They take *a* corpse away with them, but it's uh more bollards?
EDWARD: Big brass ones.
GM: I reject.
EDWARD: Medium-sized concrete ones, painted to resemble me, that crumble to dust and blow away as they try to fish them out from the collapsed building.

GM: I accept! And that's the scene. Bear in mind that that leaves them without a single body, though, so if they are even one whit like a typical PC they are going to be awfully suspicious and not really believe you guys are dead.
DIANE: They can be suspicious, as long as we have a moment to sneak away.
GM: Fair enough! Next scene. But first, I'm gonna grab some tea.

[The GM disappears into the kitchen, returning after a bit with a cup of the aforementioned.]

SCENE 2: THE PLAN

GM: OK. Where *are* you guys, anyway?
EDWARD: Slowly, painfully, pulling myself out of the rubble of the Midmarch Hotel. "I planned that," I say, dusting myself off. It's even, technically, true.
GM: Saguaric, a sappy—plant-bloody—ruin against the rubble next to you—seems to stare at you with reproach.
TASSILO: Don't even start with me, Mr. Needle-hands. You're on notice, you hear?
GM: He shudders and slumps pulpily down the building's side. Diane?
DIANE: Fading back into reality, but, like, tentatively?
GM: How does that work?
DIANE: ... tentatively?
GM: Hah. OK! So, there you are.
HEATHER: We have returned.
TASSILO: *[groans]*
GM: The parking lot is empty of life, ruined. The sun is burning in the sky, eating away the clouds with tendrils of golden brilliance. Metaphorical tendrils. Really, just pretend I didn't say tendrils.
DIANE: Pretendrils
GM: And in the distance, sirens.
HEATHER: We need a plan.
DIANE: And a new ride.
EDWARD: Tassilo slumphs over. "Do you have such a thing, sister?" he asks, mostly referring to the plan.
CIARA, PONDERING: I can construct one, but I fear that it will involve exercise.
TASSILO: No, no, do not strain myself. Liutgarde, if you would?

[Liutgarde's Eide attribute is high enough to use a "Strategy" miracle for 1 Stilling—making her the most efficient planner in the group.]

LIUTGARDE: *[tapping her fingers thoughtfully on what one must assume is rubble or the hood of a car]* It is impossible to plan for the exploration of Midland before we know what we will find, but I believe I can come up with something to replace our vehicle and divert the Powers' concerns.
GM: Technically, that would be two plans, although I imagine you can probably find a way to make one fit inside the other. What are you thinking of?

[A "Strategy" miracle is limited in that it can only revert changes to the status quo or take advantage of opportunities. (Anything more needs a more expensive miracle.) Accordingly, Liutgarde isn't trying to harm the Powers, ally with the Powers, or learn more about Midland; only, to roll back the clock.

The miracle gives the plan certain guarantees, but first Diane must come up with something that makes sense and fits Liutgarde's style. She is allowed and in fact expected to get the help of the group and even the GM in developing this plan.]

DIANE: Um. OK, so, problem statement: *whether or not they believe we're dead, they're probably suspicious—alert for Excrucian activity, now, and hype to attack on sight if we meet again.* That's what I want to revert to how it used to be.
GM: OK.
DIANE, AFTER CHEWING ON HER LIP: So, can I make them all think it was all just a terrible mistake?
GM: Uh ... they might get a bit of whiplash. I know *you* all would, if I tried to convince you that first you met a threat, then you eliminated a threat, then it was all a mistake, then they weren't eliminated after all, and then eventually you discover that they *were* a threat all along, you were just tricked again? And they're at least PC-level suspicious, being, you know, part of a long and subtle war against the Host.
HEATHER: Less likely to throw popcorn at you over it, though.
GM: They do lack your fourth-wall access, yes.
DIANE, TRYING ANOTHER IDEA: Fake Excrucian convention in town?
GM: Like, with star-falling contact lenses?
DIANE: Yeah? So, like, they could have blown up ... fake Excrucians?
GM: I ... think those might be technically difficult.
EDWARD: In fairness you don't really need contacts with eyes with falling stars, you just need contacts such that when you look at them, you miss.
DIANE: Is that how it works?
EDWARD: Yeah, you miss and see the night.
CROSSTALK:

> DIANE: Huh.
> GM: Which are *also* somewhat difficult to manufacture. I guess they could be from beyond the world, but that's just getting recursive now.

DIANE: I can't avoid trickery, really, if I'm going to—well, hm. I mean, I *guess* I could find some way to convey to them how useless we actually are.
EDWARD: Heh.
DIANE: Like ... if we could convince them we weren't actually a threat, then their hackles *can't* get too raised when they find out the truth, because that basically *is* true.
HEATHER: For a very loose sense of 'basically.'
GM: You are a threat like the loose cannon cop in a

opposite: *by Melissa Spandri*

Semsedin Agis,
who is dying of Blood

cop show, if they are "the environment," rather than a threat like the Trump EPA.

DIANE: Right! They will at most get *incidentally* blown up, as part of an exciting chase sequence, and not by malice aforethought.

GM: ... notionally, you can probably attempt this. It might be easier to get them to try to scheme around you.

DIANE: Mm?

GM: Like ... can you get them to come to the idea of conning *you* into something, if you show up again? Then you don't have to worry too much about what they actually believe about your character.

DIANE, AS LIUTGARDE: Ciara, what do your muscles tell you about what they *want* out of life?

HEATHER, FLEXING: Ciara flexes experimentally.

GM: Dangerous. Too much of this and you might become *too strong.*

HEATHER: Bravely, I must persevere.

GM: They seem to be mostly interested in—you think, the more you flex, that this town might be some sort of experiment. Like, that they're *raising* the people in this town for something, or *harvesting* something from it. And if they want anything at all, it's to avoid making waves.

HEATHER: They're just ... no dreams of their own? No ... outside world interests?

GM, PAUSING TO LOOK UP INVESTIGATION MIRACLES: That's all you're going to get on their actual motives, but you can ask other things about them to try to build a better picture.

HEATHER: Loved ones?

GM: There's a school somewhere. A puffin, in faerie. Icicle girl only loves the snow. Probably some other stuff. The rhinoceros—um, you may need three questions to get everyone?

HEATHER: I will go as deep as I must into the muscle memory.

GM: ... ow.

HEATHER: As. Deep. As. I. Must.

[Madeline has forgotten her earlier declaration that the rhino's only loves are its puffin and its rocket launchers, and now only remembers that it loves stuff.]

GM: The rhinoceros ... loves its auto detailing shop and the local malt shop. You are beginning to suspect that he may not be 100% rhinoceros.

HEATHER: Why do they care about the town? Where did they get the power to make the whole loop thing?

GM: Two answers for the price of one, and this is about as much as your muscles can take without breaking through into a new plane of muscle existence: their Imperator. *Nircoa,* God of Icicles, Assignments, and Denim, born from the seething chaos beneath the surface of the world. ... he seeks to conquer time.

HEATHER: I report this, sagging into a relaxed position.

TASSILO: The fascinating thing here is that the rhinoceros is logically the Power of Denim and the lord of jeans upon this earth.

GM: Now that you think of it, he does seem to have been wearing pants.

EDWARD: That would have been nice to know about a little earlier!

GM: ... why?

EDWARD: I don't know, it's just different to be fighting a rhinoceros if they're wearing jeans. I might have tried to like, bond. Was he also wearing sunglasses?

GM: Maybe?

EDWARD: Man.

LIUTGARDE, SLOWLY: We must convince them that they have missed an opportunity. That our presence in their system was actually empowering it, for reasons we were not aware of.

CIARA: That makes sense, sister, but ...

LIUTGARDE: What if we were to leave behind a glamour that's basically a ... hinting at that. Something that's ready to, like, shape itself into the patterns of their own expectations, once they start having them, but *starts* with just this strong impression of, hey, wait, *why is this site such an exceptional success?*

CIARA: Diffuse an aura of victory?

TASSILO: People do—and rhinoceroses, I guess—they do see what they want to see. We would have to make sure they actually come and look, of course. ... do we still want them to think we're gone? The two plans are contrarily aligned.

LIUTGARDE: ... No, I think it works together. They come here. They see this improvement. They likely assume, oh, this is something to do with *our power bleeding into the place as we died.* Or something like that.

CIARA: The loss of our accumulated time?

LIUTGARDE: ... but they are not certain. It is ambiguous. If they should encounter us again, they would go, *oh! It is not their death, but their life, we need!*

TASSILO: Problem: people do not change their minds so fast.

DIANE: ... we can roll in a bit of the other idea, maybe? Like, if they investigate, they learn about who we are. That we are, at the least, of the Chancery.

HEATHER: Our "real van" is somewhere nearby, abandoned, with indications of our history. More castoffs, if you can?

DIANE: Yeah. ... that seems sort of like a plan?

GM: For clarity: you're going to set up a dummy version of the van you came in—wait, you don't have to do that; couldn't you have saved the real one?

DIANE: ... I don't think any of us can undo the damage to it. Does anyone have a, like, roll back damage power?

HEATHER: Huh, I *think* I can actually save it from the engine block damage if I take it to my sanctuary, because its damage is sort of like, caused by raw strength? Maddie?

*[**The Greater Revenant Rite,** at Wyrd 6, lets a Strategist mitigate effects in others that resemble their own sickness. If they take the target back to their sanctuary, they can take that beyond "mitigation" to a cure.]*

GM: I mean, you're dying of your strength turning on you and consuming you, which isn't really the same as being torn apart by others' strength, but sure?
HEATHER: I don't think I'm ever going to be able to use that power if I can only fix other things that are dying because their family exercise technique eventually destroys them.
GM: ... people on weird diets?
HEATHER: ... point retracted. No can do.
DIANE: I think we let the beam blow it up, then.
GM: OK. So you're going to set up a dummy van, with enough information about you to give away your basic uselessness; and spread around a field of like, "hey, that thing you want out of this place, it's going super well here," and also a kind of glamour that's tuned to amplify confirmation bias? So they get here, go "oh, huh, what we're doing here is working super-well," and then theorize about how your presence had something to do with it, and their specific theories get additional evidence, and then later as they're investigating further they find the van and realize that you weren't all that bad?
DIANE: I guess?
GM: You're assuming that they're going to come back and investigate more.
DIANE: If *we* were playing Nobilis, *we* probably would, as soon as we got frustrated with whatever lead we were trying to follow up wherever else?
EDWARD: Or finished reporting to the Imperator, I guess.
DIANE: Ow, dang, yeah, that is probably why they're gone and not here, right now, going over this place with a fine-toothed comb. We do not have long. Maddie, is this plan good enough to commit to?
GM: ... sure. You can reliably convince them that whatever happened here was actually *good* for their experiment, and set up the dummy van well enough that they're more willing to believe that you're actually dead but also kind of hoping you're not and that they're just getting a power profit out of your being you.
DIANE: Let's do this thing.
GM: You do.

[In theory, the GM could make them play out the details, but she isn't super-interested in doing that, so instead there's just an unspoken understanding that they put some time into this, and after that, the plan goes forward as necessary until either it becomes an obstacle to the rest of their lives and the GM makes them play some part of it out or events change to the point where it just stops being relevant.]

EDWARD: As for our ride, I have a thought.
GM: Oh?
EDWARD: Theoretically I'm supposed to have, like, four *flores*

[A "flore" is another word for a Creational treasure—something bound to the character's heart and granted powers through the Flore attribute.]

EDWARD: but I never actually picked them; could I, like, find a car as we're retreating and totally fall in love with it?

[Normally a character should have already encountered any treasure that they want to claim before the player decides they claim it; after all, in theory, Tassilo might not even ENCOUNTER any cars for the next five years of play ... but assuming that Madeline is willing to cooperate on that point, this is the normal and approved method for claiming a previously unspecified "starting" treasure:

Find something the character loves. Decide it's a treasure. Finally, use a spotlight in some fashion to bind that choice into the game.]

GM: Uh ... I think that works? You just have to use a spotlight or something to, y'know, bond with it.
GM: So what are you looking for, then? A station wagon? Another van?
EDWARD: Hang on, hang on. This place is stuck in, like, the 60s, right? *[browses images on his phone, then shows the phone to the group.] This,* then. The *1965 Shelby Cobra.*

SCENE 3: THE COBRA

LIUTGARDE: ... Tassi', you have had many ideas while I have been in your company, and this is certainly one of them.
TASSILO: It's beautiful. Isn't it beautiful?
CIARA: Brother, it's a *two-seater.*
TASSILO: Help me break into it. No, wait. I—want to get to know her first.

[Edward tosses a spotlight card onto the table.]

EDWARD: Tell me, Maddie. Tell me about the spirit of this car.
CIARA: Tassilo, where will we *sleep* ...
GM: That was ... spotlighting the mystery of it, Ed?
EDWARD: Yeah. I mean, and claiming the *flore*. I'm looking into the mythic world and getting to *know* this thing.

[Diane hums the tune to "Getting to Know You" under her breath. Edward snorts.]

GM: Show me the picture again?

[Edward does.]

GM: ... she is a jeweled snake, of course, in the world of myth; a jeweled snake, dozing against the curb, as she has dozed for quite some time, her belly low against the earth, false eyes—a scale pattern, an illusion—wide beside her real ones, closed.
GM: Does she have history? She has history; but it is in abeyance now. It has been in abeyance for forever, now, for endless cycles. She was beloved, but now the one she loved is lost, the one who loved her too. Now she is décor, *backdrop,* and the leaves skitter about her, and she tastes

the summer wind and rain.
GM: From time to time she rusts, but then she forms an egg of herself, and she curls around it, her headlights swaying, dimming low, and from that egg she is reborn.
GM: Here, in Midland, she is eternal; the snake that swallows itself, the Shelby Cobra that is Ouroboros, her timeline without beginning and without end, although she remembers that it was once otherwise. That once, there was something *more* ...
TASSILO: Oh, my sweet.
LIUTGARDE: He is really doing this, isn't he.
EDWARD: I want to know what happened to her owner. I don't understand how she can not have one.
GM: Are you asking her, or are you taking an investigation action?
EDWARD: Everybody lies. I'm going to investigate, which means, mostly, poking around on the web, and then, when that doesn't work, on the secret templar web where all the secret societies hang out posting conspiracy theories.
GM: ... I think that's the regular web, just, with bad filtering.
EDWARD: Leave me my illusions! I'm burning 3 Fugue—oh, hey, another XP—uh, 3 Fugue as I trace through the twisty thoughts of the kinds of people who post the secret truth behind why random classic cars on street corners don't have owners ... along with speculation as to how this ties in to MK-Ultra, vaccination, and zombie Mao.
GM: You dig up an ancient missing person report. There's some speculation that maybe he was looking too closely into the spooky doings at the water treatment plant—they're using *fluoridation!*—but more importantly, it looks like Doug Forstat just ... never came back one day, and Midland wasn't *capable* of responding to this by closing off his affairs. His family's still waiting. His boss is still grumpy that he doesn't come in to work. Nobody's dug out his will. It's been forty three years.
TASSILO: Uh. Guys? *[as Edward]* I show them the phone, then I turn my attention to the poor cobra.
GM: She slumbers, as she has slumbered.
TASSILO: I think ... well. I can only present it with the truth of my spirit. I can only be open before it; spiritually honest; let it know that I am here, and that I have seen the beauty of it, and that I am Tassilo Caucoense—and beg it to join me, to be with me, to come with me into the beauty of the night.

***[Projection,** the level 1 Flore miracle, lets a Strategist connect deeply with the spirit of their treasures. The treasures also get access to the Strategist's skills and, in the case of inanimate things, mobility; Tassilo can open such a connection for free.]*

GM: The Cobra looks deep within Tassilo's heart; feels as he feels, understands his truth and love; and then, with a desperate squeal of tires, it retreats half a block down the street, headlights wide.
TASSILO: My heart!
GM: It revs its engine loudly, but it is backing away.
TASSILO: Liutgarde, help me.
LIUTGARDE, HER VOICE RAISED: ... we can find Doug.
TASSILO: What? No!
LIUTGARDE, VERY REASONABLY: People bond through mutually engaging activities, not through magical spiritual connections, Tassi'. *[louder]* Doug Forstat. The cops are never going to find him. They're never even going to look. His family, neither. They're just going to go around forever. But we're not. We can look for him. We can find him. We can save him, or bring his body home. That's all he wanted to do, Ms. Cobra. To help.
TASSILO: ... OK. Fine. We'll find Doug. But I won't give the car back.
LIUTGARDE: If he's still alive after being missing for forty-three years, I don't think he's going to quibble with the details of his rescue, Tassi'.
TASSILO: You say that, but she's a classic.
CROSSTALK:
LIUTGARDE: She is—
CIARA: Strong. But, still, two-seater.
TASSILO: ... fine, we can modify her.
GM: The car's engine shudders to a stop. It rattles. It settles with a flumph.
EDWARD: Eh?
GM: Tassilo isn't trancing out and granting mobility. She isn't betraying his hopes any more, so his infection isn't giving her mobility. She's a car, who is not alive. So—she's basically got no way to keep going any longer.
DIANE: One of us! One of us!

[The GM laughs.]

EDWARD: I'm pumping my Flore to 4 so I can figure out what it's feeling, thinking.

***[Greater Connection,** at Flore 4, allows a Strategist to understand the needs, moods, and reactions of inhuman treasures. Tassilo has 3 Flore, so this costs 1 Immersion each time it's invoked.]*

GM: She's terrified. Terrified of modification, of you all, of the idea that you won't actually find Doug—but ... she's not running away any more. If ... you actually mean it. If you'll actually, if you'll actually, if *someone* will finally *help.*
TASSILO: ... yes, heart of my heart, fine, fine, we'll find him too.
CIARA, LAUGHING: Soft.
TASSILO: Hush.
GM: Ms. Cobra, as Diane has named her, vrums softly into life; moves forward; and brushes briefly, gently, against Tassilo's extended hand.

[brief pause]

GM: OK, then! You have not really found a replacement for your van, but you *can* all fit into the front seat if you squish, which means you are no longer stuck in the immediate vicinity of the crumbled Midmarch Hotel. Tell me a little

about where you're going? And, anyone for a quest action?
EDWARD: I'm claiming "you interact with strange animals."
GM: ... fair.
HEATHER: I think it makes sense to "shelter beneath a bridge or overhang," since, like, I don't think this car actually has a cover if it rains?

[Edward puts his face in his hands]

SCENE 4: PETRICHOR

GM: I'm ... pretty sure it would be a convertible, guys. Possibly once you open the top you don't know how to get it back down, though?
EDWARD: Fine, fine, we can take shelter under Heather's bridge while I try to explain to my new car why my getting rained on isn't the funniest thing ever, yes.
GM: Summarize this explanation?
EDWARD: ... that's pretty much all I've got.
GM: To be honest, what you're really getting is that it's kind of scared to admit that it *can* put the top up again now that the three Strategists who were riding around in it have been drenched by a sudden storm. I don't think it's actually laughing so much as like paralyzed with fear.
EDWARD: ... I am not going to engage with this. I am going to go smoke in the rain.
GM: Do you smoke?
EDWARD: No.
GM: Do you have any cigarettes?
EDWARD: No.
GM: A ... lighter?
EDWARD: No.
GM: A ... way to keep it lit in the rain? If that's a thing? With cigarettes?
EDWARD: No.
GM: I don't think you succeed very well at smoking, but give me an Ability number.
EDWARD: ... 0.

[In choosing Ability 0 when the GM asks for a number, Tassilo recovers 1 Wear. He's so aggressively not investing his cope here that he actually gets a little bit back.]

GM: You stand in the rain, failing about as badly to smoke as it is possible to do, except in that you do have slick hair and a leather duster. Neither, however, catches on fire.

[Heather tosses a spotlight card onto the table.]

HEATHER: Tell me about the rain. Tell me about the smell in the air and the wind and what it's like out here.
GM: I mean ... it's ... there's scrub about. It's a pattering kind of rain, the ground is hard. It came in a great shadow sweeping across the flatness of the land. It changed the temperature of the air and the color of it and the taste and smell too. *Petrichor,* it's called, one of those laws that were slain long ago and remade as Mimics of themselves:
GM: The smell of rain after the dry.
CIARA: It's been a while.
LIUTGARDE: Hm?
CIARA: Since ... since this. Since I've been out in the world, and not going somewhere or behind walls, in the rain.
LIUTGARDE: It is wrong too, you know.
CIARA: Nn.
LIUTGARDE: You think there is freshness in it. Then one day you find the glitch, and it is all, ah, sometimes the rain will eat away at your being, your sense of self, your *you*-ness. Sometimes it will hunger for you, will follow you inside, once it has your taste. Sometimes the smell of rain will portend the enemy. Because there is nothing that is permitted to be good, that is not of Ninuan.
CIARA: Yet this rain seems not so wicked a rain as all that?
LIUTGARDE: It feeds the plants, dear heart, and the plants are wrong. From the oceans and the rivers it arises, and the oceans and the rivers, they are wrong. They say on the Internet, there is no ethical participation in capitalism; in like fashion, one cannot participate in a world that is wrong, and not be wrong. So, it is wrong.
CIARA: Ahh.

[brief pause]

CIARA: My family—
LIUTGARDE: Mm?
CIARA: I grew up, you know, in a rickety place. And I knew little, save my studies and the presence of the world.
LIUTGARDE: You are notably well-studied, yes.
CIARA: I studied strength, Liutgarde. I studied the family technique. But also—I would stand on the parapets. You understand? I would ... when I was not miring myself ever more deeply in the family trust, I would be out there, among the old stones and the wind, and I would be open to the world, like this. To the weather. To the rain. And it would shelter me.
LIUTGARDE: The world gives with one hand and takes with the other; in this fashion, it is like all abusive things.
CIARA: But you are distorting it, sister.
LIUTGARDE: Mm. *[as Diane]* OK, fine, I'll close my eyes and experience this rain, too. How wrong *is* it, really?

[Diane tosses a spotlight card in. The GM thinks.]

GM: There's a quote in the book: "in the cattails is the world forgiven; in the running waters; in the sound of larks."
DIANE: Canon?
GM: I don't remember. Maybe? But the point is, I don't think you can ... I think that all you are going to find, in nature, the only *shadow of evil* that you are going to find there, is the shadow of anything that is, like, actually there, or the shadow in your own heart.
DIANE: Mm.
GM: The world feared you, and conjured you from its fears. The world breaks you, and because it breaks you it always

strives to convince you to kill it once again. The world is *full* of the promise of horror, it is rife with it, the concept of *existence itself* is weighty with wrong, and if you turn your contemplation to, *I am Liutgarde, I am required to be Liutgarde, I am trapped in this world, this world of so many horrible things, eternally dying, it does not stop, it does not stop*—there is a surfeit of horror there to taste. But not in the rain that's dripping off the stones of the bridge you've taken shelter under, and spattered on your forehead still, and pattering against the ground. Not in the earth, the dry but living earth, or the scrub that has seized out a meager living here. Not in the endlessness of the sky, not really, not unless you liken it to your own. You can't *make* it be wrong. If you did that, you'd be as bad as the rest of them. All you can do is remember how much wrong you've seen, and know that maybe *you* won't forgive any old world just because of some larks and cattails and this. You know?

DIANE: Accepted.

EDWARD: Tassilo grinds out his nonexistent cigarette under his boot and marches back to the group. "I have just realized that the Militares of the Excrucians are not obligated to be rained upon like ordinary members of human civilization."

LIUTGARDE: Wait, just now?

EDWARD: I am going to take a few minutes here to work out the details and then *unfetter* us from the causal situation where getting rained on with the top down gets us and the inside of my new car wet.

GM: That does seem reasonable, but it turns out that the world is wrong and you can't use a regular **Unfettering** for that.

[Even with a few extra minutes put into it, Madeline doesn't think that the level 6 Wyrd power, ***Unfettering,*** *can free PCs from arbitrary bits of physics and causality. That's what* ***Greater Unfettering,*** *at level 10, is for!]*

EDWARD: ... grr. Uh, **Contagion?** Can I, like, *betray* the rain with our steadfast refusal to be soaked?

*[****Contagion,*** *at Wyrd 3, can spread variants of Tassilo's dying-of-treachery illness to other things. The effects are minor, but, then ... so is the task.]*

GM: It's not directly on point, really; like, it's probably a little easier to make it so all *kinds* of car-interior and Strategist-like things keep turning out to be dry when the rain looks away for a moment, but ... enh, you're taking a few minutes to hammer out the details, I'm sure you can figure it out. So, sure! You complete this complex and detailed working and smugly set out for town again. Another minute or two later, the rain slows to a stop and the clouds blow off gently to the west.

EDWARD (TRANSLITERATED FRUSTRATED GESTURES): !!

[The GM scribbles off one point of Cost from her pool, deciding that it's a fairly professional and competent rain cloud, really, but that that move took ***Steel****.]*

EDWARD: I give the sky two repeated-jabby middle fingers.

GM: You guys are really not very safe drivers.

EDWARD: I'm an *excellent* driver. Ignore anything that we were about to crash into that was not a cactus that no longer exists now.

GM: Fair enough. Where are you guys actually going?

DIANE: The water treatment plant? Or the malt shop? I think.

HEATHER: If we go to the malt shop, we can get malts.

DIANE: That *does* sound tastier than treated water, but also less productive.

CROSSTALK:

> HEATHER: We go to the malt shop.
>
> EDWARD: I kind of—the malt, shop, yeah.
>
> DIANE: ... the malt shop.

GM: You are at the malt shop.

EDWARD: Are there malts?

GM: There are malts. Mighty are they in their maltiness, and piled tall with straw. ... I mean, in that, each has a straw. In it.

EDWARD: I can't actually engage with this, I've burned my actions.

DIANE: ... so have we?

GM: ... ah. OK, then! It looks like the morning of this day is done. 10 minute break? And then, the afternoon.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

[This chapter featured the following spotlights and quest actions:

- *Heather's **Reckoning** of the initial Noble attack;*
- *Edward's **Reckoning:** "What are my combat options?";*
- *Diane's **Reckoning:** "Who do I turn my assignment in to?";*
- *Edward's **Reckoning** of the Shelby Cobra, to bind it as a treasure;*
- *Edward's quest action, "you interact with strange animals;"*
- *Heather's quest action, "you take shelter beneath a bridge or overhang."*
- *Heather's **Reckoning,** digging out description of the rain; and*
- *Diane's **Attention**, to stretch that description out a little more.*

After the bonus for using up all their spotlights, Ciara is up to 9 XP; Liutgarde, to 7 XP, plus 4 on her quest; and Tassilo, 11. Tassilo has also picked up one more Fugue from an XP chip.

At the beginning of the next chapter, each Cost drops by one, to a minimum of 0. That means a more proper rendition of where the characters were at the beginning of this chapter, relative to where they started—and assuming that none of those starting points were 0—would be:

- *Ciara had −1 Stilling, −1 Immersion, +2 Fugue, −1 Burn, and +1 Wear;*
- *Liutgarde had +1 Stilling, −1 Immersion, −1 Fugue, −1 Burn, and −2 Wear;*
- *and Tassilo had −1 Stilling, −1 Immersion, −1 Fugue, −1 Burn, and +0 Wear.*

Moving forward into the future,

- *Liutgarde starts the next chapter at +7 Stilling, −2 Immersion, −2 Fugue, +3 Burn, and −3 Wear (having taken 7 Stilling and 5 Burn);*
- *Tassilo starts the next chapter at +2 Stilling, −1 Immersion, +6 Fugue, −2 Burn, and +7 Wear (having taken 4 Stilling, 9 Wear, 1 Immersion, and 7 Fugue, and having recovered a point of Wear), and*
- *Ciara starts the next chapter at +8 Stilling, −2 Immersion, +7 Fugue, −2 Burn, and −1 Wear (having erased a two-point Wear Cost from last chapter as a mistake, but having then taken 10 Stilling, 1 Wear, and 6 Fugue).*

As for the GM, she starts the next chapter with an NPC cost pool of 14.]

Filibrand Wulthos, dying of...
QUESTIONS?

From the testimony of Osuin Thermidau:

What Miracles Target

It is sad. You cannot simply miracle at random things. You cannot just ... miracle conceptually.

To target something you must already know it, in your bones.

You must already be entangled with it. You must have wound your fate around it until you can pick it out of the cosmic lineup.

This is a delicate kind of knowing.

You can miracle at the person knocking at your door. Even before you answer. You can miracle at them.

Who are they? You do not know. But with them, you have *engaged*. You and they have begun the secret dance of the doors. You, are the inside-of-the-door. They, are the outside.

You are the listening. They are the knocking.

It is a beautiful symbiosis.

In your game there will be a "scene." There will be a space in which things happen. There will be a time in which things happen. Things will enter the scene. Things will leave the scene. When a character is in the scene, they can miracle at things that are in the scene.

Things that are outside the scene—

That is harder.

There is no symbiosis. There is no dance.

To miracle at something you must be able to identify it. Uniquely. You cannot miracle at the Smothers Brother. Or the Olsen Twin. You cannot miracle at the moon of Pluto. You cannot even miracle at the wall.

You must know which wall you mean. At least in your inner heart.

It is fine to skirt this rule. It is fine to blast "whatever is over there." It is fine to dig out "any information that I can find." It is fine to throw a miracle at the first moon of Pluto that you see.

But "the Smothers Brother" ... that is ambiguous.

Ambiguity is not correct.

Some miracles break these rules. If that happens, that is OK. **Projection** (pg. 193) is a miracle. It targets one of a character's Treasures. The Treasure does not have to be in the scene. This is part of what Projection *does*. That is the miracle.

That is OK.

Maybe someone has a kind of **Destruction** (pg. 235) that is ascended ignorance. It banishes people, but only if one isn't sure they're there. The moment the character *sees* someone, their power of banishment goes away.

That is a power that always targets an ambiguity. That is what it does. So it *will* target an ambiguity.

That is OK too.

But most miracles do not work that way.

If you do a miracle at a thing you will usually know what thing. You will know what thing you are miracling at.

It is very common to have a power that can target a gas station you are looking at. But a power that says, "I bet there's a gas station not far away. That's my target!"—

That would be rare.

opposite: *by Mel Uran*

Miracles that target things that are very far away are interesting. That is because you cannot clearly see things that are very far away. They are ambiguous. But the ambiguity is not the point. Guns can shoot very far away but nobody says, "Yay! My gun can shoot ambiguous targets!" Telephones can call very far away but who is happy about wrong numbers?

(***Theudegisklos Mosian.*** But Theudegisklos is not a role model to emulate. ... not for this.)

Here is the point.

It is the condition of the world that long range miracles cannot always precisely indicate their targets. Also, you cannot always know when this comes up. You may think that you are being precise when you say "my favorite scarf" or "my metaphysically anointed heir." You may think you are being ambiguous when you say, "someone named ... Casey Smith?"

But you may be wrong.

Shenanigans may be in play.

Here your intention will be relevant. When you miracle at something, it matters what you want to do. Your intent further refines "my favorite scarf." Gives "Casey Smith?" more meaning. But if there is ambiguity, then there is ambiguity. It cannot entirely be avoided.

When there is ambiguity, the outcome will do some choosing for itself.

Put another way, that means, the GM will.

They will choose, according to their preferences. Maybe the simplest option? The most interesting one? The one that will satisfy the player? The one that best fits some active effect?

Maybe just whatever they like.

Sometimes a miracle will target something that doesn't exist at all. Sometimes this is not even your error. You will target something you were *sure* existed. That person knocked on your door. You were sure of it! But in fact there was no knock. It was the creaking of the house. A plastic cup fell in another room. A friend was using their ventriloquism. It could be anything.

You have entered into the delicate dance of door-ing with a person who wasn't even there.

Results will vary.

When you miracle at something nearby and it is not there, it is probable that you fail. It is not certain.

When you miracle at something far away and it is not there, it is *possible* that you fail. But it is not likely.

More likely is that the GM will try one of the following ideas. They may:

- ask if the player wants to simplify their description of the target;
- *create* the target, if that's a thing you could have done;
- tell you that it is impossible, and ask if you wish to do something else;
- attempt a very strained interpretation;
- shift the target forcibly to "the air" or "the void" or whatever the ambient medium would be, where you thought the target was;
- replace a real target with a λ-target; *or*
- replace a λ-target that was inaccessible with a newly created λ-target. That new target conforms to be what you'd expect.

For instance, maybe you think a λ-bear has been troubling your town. But you are wrong. There is no λ-bear. You **Hunt** (pg. 214) it anyway. You plan how to hunt "the λ-bear that's been causing all that trouble" down. You are a wise Strategist. Your Lore is deep. This does not *fail.*

So, what does the GM do, instead?

Maybe, ask: "Do you want to simplify that?" Maybe you are fine just catching *any* old λ-bear.

Maybe, they'll let you set a perfect trap for that troublesome bear. But, you catch nothing. Or, you get a clue about the real culprit. You have caught "the ... that's causing ... trouble." In a sense.

Maybe the void will be helpful. It is a very helpful void! It correlates a new λ-bear for you. That bear was not actually troubling your town. But it was troubling *a* town. Somewhere. That is its subjective experience. Now you have caught it. You are telling it that it was troubling your town. It lacks the broader perspective that would let it argue. It rumbles awkwardly. It hangs its head.

This is not a wish power. This is not happening because "anything could happen."

It is more like calling the wrong number.

It is more like calling the wrong number, if you are not Theudegisklos, and do not get some sort of kinky thrill from it.

When you call the wrong number, that does not mean, you can't dial the last digit. Not unless it is a *very* wrong number. If it is 867-530π, maybe you cannot dial the last digit. But if it is a regular old number, then it gets *someone*. It gets *something.*

That is what miracles of this sort are like.

When you dial a wrong number, you might get someone in the same general area. Or, a sociopathic alien voice that will talk but not listen. Or, a hideous ululation of unending, inexpressible grief.

That is real. This has been tested.

You can always try it out for yourself.

CHAPTER 6

The Essence of Glitch

That tumult of a faery crew
It stilled at her raised hand, where Madge
Held—shaking, shining still, if bent—
Her electrician's pin and badge.

Caparisoned in lightning, she,
Dread faery queen of murder
But ne'er she'd paid PG&E:
Her power reached no further.

—*from* Charge of the Lightning Brigade,
by Tomine Gulbrandsen

Basics

You can think of **Glitch** as a kind of improv ethical philosophy and comedy jam session held around the table, or over Internet chat, sometimes, for you and a selection of friends. It's mostly just words, just people talking, except for the cards and books that you'll all be awkwardly shuffling. It's mostly just conversation and laughter. But out of it hopefully will emerge stories and reflections that you'll remember for quite a long time.

Here's how it works.

Glitch is a Storytelling Game

The central axis that **Glitch** revolves around is the story of the campaign. This is also the story of the PCs' lives. Playing the game is building that story and commenting on that story. You can do this from deep within the character's skin, or from a conceptual, authorial level, or from the perspective of the audience, or while buried in outlines and notes—but that's what you're doing in play.

Glitch is a Co-operative Game

The story that you build in play isn't any one player's story. You won't be able to predict it. For all that every player has control over one character and their character arc, and the GM has "control" over everything else, the actual result of play is a chaotic brew of ideas constantly refining themselves in unexpected directions as they bounce off of one another.

In **Glitch,** the other players will do and think things that you never expected. In fact, as soon as they start engaging with and paying attention to what *you're* doing, *you* may find that you're doing things you never expected as well.

Glitch is a Messy and Meandering Game

The story that you tell is not going to be perfect. Almost no one can tell a technically perfect story in real time. Telling one as a group makes it orders of magnitude harder.

Character "voices" will be uneven. Plot points will be misused or forgotten. The story focus will wander around.

It's best just to live with that chaos. To enjoy it. To accept it.

The most important thing is for people to have fun, and the second most important thing is for the story to keep moving forward until it can reach a point of eventual closure. Precision and craft are a tertiary goal, and sharp focus is a far distant fourth.

opposite: *by Elizabeth Sherry*

It's not as if you're contractually obligated to turn in a perfectly crafted story when the campaign has come to an end, after all. ... and if somehow you are, well, that's what editing's for.

... But, There are Rules

Creativity is born from boundaries. Letting other people set those boundaries (e.g., this book; e.g., the GM) isn't always the right artistic move—but the boundaries have to exist. A blank page is the enemy of inspiration; even more so, the illimited void.

You will find much ambiguity in these pages. Are you meant to agree that the world is wrong, and if so ... which world? How can one interpret today's events through **Glitch's** lens? What can a given Strategist, with a given bane, *do* with the powers found in Wyrd and Lore? With a given dream-of-self, what can they do with Eide?

What *is* the prosaic dream? Are angels good? Are the Lords of Rule?

For that matter, are the Fallen?

All these questions have answers, but the answers are semantically ambiguous. You will need to sort out much of the meaning here for yourself, and that meaning will evolve in play.

This game is arguably surreal. What it is *not*, however, is nihilistic, anti-real, or unmoored from meaning. At any given moment, there will be things that a PC can do, and things a PC can't do, and things a PC can only do at a given price. There will be choices a player can make, and choices that they are not technically allowed to make. There will be things the GM can say that will build trust in the world and the story, that will deepen the richness of the game ... and things that they are technically *allowed* to say but which will only bring that accumulated trust to ruin.

This is not a game of telling whatever story you wish to tell. Had these pages been blank, perhaps it would have been; or if you have found a misprinted version of this book, where they all are, perhaps it is. But as things *are* ... this is a game of telling a story constrained by the rules that are found within.

What You Do

The game begins when one player has a vision of a part of Creation and Ninuan—a place or context—that they see as worth exploring in the game. Something beautiful and terrible, frightening and wondrous, deeply mysterious, or, at least, sufficiently engaging to hold the players' attention through the game.

This can be "all of it," if they like the vision of Creation and Ninuan through all these pages.

It can be a portion thereof, if they need more specificity to ground their dream.

That player dreams up a central mystery to serve as the heart of the game, or, they commit to creating a series of smaller mysteries.

When they have done these things, they may take up the mantle of **"Game Master,"** or GM, and invite one or more additional players to join the game.

Each invited player then creates a **player character** or PC—one of the story's protagonists—using the game's rules. In play, they will decide what their PCs do and describe those actions to the others. This is their principal role in the game.

In addition to the protagonists, most stories include antagonists, sidekicks, romantic interests, contacts, allies, and innocent bystanders. Usually, the GM decides what these **non-player characters (NPCs)** do. The GM also generally oversees events in the world and describes the setting of the story. Sometimes, when a player's PC is absent during a major scene, the GM gives the player an NPC to play. This lets them remain an active part of the game.

Sometimes, the players are **in character**, or IC. They describe their character's actions in a precise, low-level fashion and literally speak the words their character says. The Game Master describes the world and events therein at the same precise level, as well as speaking for the NPCs.

Other times, the players are out of character, or OOC. Rather than playing out the events in their PCs' lives, they discuss them, as players, from an external perspective. This includes kibitzing while others play (something some groups enjoy and others discourage); discussing their PCs' plans and activities in broad strokes that allow days or weeks to pass for their PCs in a few minutes of real time; and taking care of player business like ordering food and cleaning the play area.

It was impossible, Kate found, to sell her home. The master bedroom's closet opened still into an old and wild land.

—from The Hook, *by Kirsten Dowell*

An Example of IC Play

Ciara Joins the Chancery

Featuring Ciara Bennewick, as played by Heather Sullivan; Tassilo Caucoense, as played by Edward Jordan; Liutgarde Payne, as played by Diane Firth; and Madeline Rush, the GM, as herself.

TASSILO: So I don't know. It's been a rough ... how long has it been since our last meeting?
LIUTGARDE: I think seventeen hours.
TASSILO: It's been a rough seventeen hours and eight minutes. I've lost two jobs, three girlfriends, and nearly died fourteen times.
LIUTGARDE: But just fourteen?
TASSILO: Yeah, I know, it's actually getting a little bit better.

[There's a knocking noise, as Heather taps on the table.]

TASSILO: ... eh?

CIARA: Hello?
TASSILO: Who are you? How did you get this number?
CIARA: ... we are in person ...
TASSILO: my question remains!
CIARA: Is this the Chancery?
LIUTGARDE, CURIOUS: It is.
CIARA: I, uh ... I think ...
TASSILO, SOTTO VOCE: She's going to attack us. Get ready.
CIARA: I think I need you guys' help.

An Example of OOC Play

Not long after

GM: So, where are you guys actually doing this, anyway?
EDWARD: what, the meeting?
GM: Yeah.
EDWARD: I assumed it was in Tassilo's apartment, honestly. There's totally enough room for two whole people to sit and talk and maybe even have the refrigerator open *at the same time.*
GM: And three?
EDWARD: Well, I mean, if she kind of stands on the stairs?
CIARA: ... can we talk somewhere else?

The Setting

The high concept for the world of **Glitch** is generally the same in every game.

In the beginning, there was the void. There was **Ninuan**. Into that void, and from that void, was born the world, and the world was a screaming wrong against the void.

The world differentiated itself.

It became a thing of many parts. God-like beings arose, governing sets of concepts: **the Imperators**. In arising, they bound those concepts with iron bands of law.

They looked out onto the void and they were afraid.

Because they were afraid, the void was full of monsters. They conjured up these monsters with their fear. They cast the void into the image of their nightmare, and from that nightmare rose the Host of **the Excrucians**. Even the remnants of the void within Creation took that shape.

Thus began the War.

Even as the War spread through it, the world continued to be wrong. It continued to be broken. Sometimes people would discover that. They'd encounter **the Glitch**. Then they'd break too.

If they were very, very lucky, though, they'd find a way past that. They'd find a way *not* to become eternal puppets of that brokenness, endlessly recapitulating the horror of their infection.

That way was to embrace the void:

To awaken the part of them that predated Creation. The part of them that has always been a lingering legacy, *in* the world, of what came before. The part of them that has always been an enemy of the world: a warleader of Ninuan.

They'd become one of the Militares, **the Strategists**, the *qistja* and the *annuja.* They'd join their brethren of the Host and fight to end the world.

That was what the protagonists of this game were all about. That was what they were doing ... until they stopped.

Now they don't really have a purpose any longer. They're just members of **the Chancery**. The Riders' Abstinence Society.

The ones who stopped.

From the beginning the world has committed aggravated interpretation unto the void. It began in the instant it sprang into existence and it has never truly stopped. Fold upon fold, nuance upon nuance, it has grown ever richer in its conception. It has made a tapestry of it, woven endlessly, laboriously, in all its byzantine and beautiful detail.

Against the weight of this the void has no defense. Its own interpretations crumble.

Perception, is violence.

—from Our Game of Masks, *by Hartmut Aedean*

Character Creation

The Bane

To create a character, each player must first decide their Strategist's **bane:** the thing that is killing them. Often this is chosen well before they figure out *how* it's killing them or what the glitch was that caused it to start killing them. A player with a cat in their lap might decide that their Strategist's bane is cats. A player who wants to focus on the theme of time might decide that their Strategist's bane is time, or "hours." A player who's just learned that horrific slavery is endemic in the chocolate industry might make a Strategist who is dying of chocolate.

Afterwards, they develop a theory of how this works:

The character loves cats, and cats are drawn to them. Too many cats. Cats upon cats. Eventually they are always crushed alive.

Or, each time a nearby clock ticks over an hour, all the clocks in the Strategist's vicinity synchronize and they get this twinge of pain. Which gets worse and worse as their infection deepens until all it takes is tick tick tick and they're convulsing in agony on the floor.

Or, they visited a chocolate factory when they were young. They ate a problematic chocolate. If you listen, you can hear the chorus singing about it even now. Now they are turning into chocolate, very slowly. It is very good chocolate. It is very hard for them not to nibble. Just a little. They already bite their nails...

In play, the progress of this sickness will be tracked by the Infection trait (pg. 277). Unless the GM explicitly decides on a different value, this trait begins at **1**.

After choosing a bane and developing a theory of their PC's sickness, the player may stop to create a full concept and name. Or, they may proceed to spending points.

Attributes

The player receives 25 points with which to build their character. There are four **divine attributes** and one **mundane attribute** at the heart of their character concept. These are rated from 0 to 7. Increasing a divine attribute costs two points per level; increasing the mundane attribute, Ability, costs three points per level.

These attributes are:

Eide

2 points per level

This divine attribute is the narrative weight of the character's self-image. The higher the rating, the more *themselves* the character is, even at the expense of the laws of the world: their personality grows more forceful, their talents grow more exaggerated and cinematic, and they can get away with more extreme in-character plans.

Flore

2 points per level

This divine attribute measures the strength of the character's emotional connections in Creation. The higher the rating, the more the character can empower the Creational treasures that they hold ... and the more compromised by those treasures they have become.

Lore

2 points per level

This divine attribute measures the depth of the character's understanding of Ninuan. Notably, at Lore 0, even *perceiving* Ninuan is effortful.

The core work of Lore is to hunt and bind **Arcana,** alien treasures of the Beyond, but it is also useful in grasping the ungraspable, navigating the unnavigable, investigating the ineffable, and in working strange and mystic arts.

Wyrd

2 points per level

This divine attribute represents a character's deep attunement to the undercurrents of their self. It allows the character to wield the power of unbeing—and, more generally, as a creature of the Not, to resist, corrode, and unmake the mortal world.

Ability

3 points per level

Finally, this mundane attribute is the character's basic ability to cope and function.

Miscellaneous Purchases

Players can also make the following miscellaneous purchases:

Bonds

1 point each

Each Bond is a subjective law of the character's nature—think, for instance, of the scorpion's law that "I must sting the frog." Each grants a bonus "Technique" (such as the scorpion's venom): a power set, to be used with Eide.

Bonds are flexible and player-driven, but their impact on clashes between powered beings is somewhat limited. They are most efficient for characters with a strong Eide and a weaker Lore.

> *"You ... have created me?" it asked. It stared uncertainly up at its maker's face.*
>
> *"That's right," he said. His eyebrows twitched with glee. "Fear me! Praise me! Behold the wonder! For I have brought you LIFE."*
>
> *It frowned. It looked down. It twisted its toe. "But," it said. "But, that was a mistake."*
>
> —*from* Pantheon, *by Anita Burford*

Geasa

1 point each

Each Geas is an objective law of the character's nature—think of light's law that "I can't be outraced." They are self-invoking: they wield an intrinsic divine power to make their law come true.

Geasa are interpreted by the GM—the player decides what the Geas is supposed to *be,* but after that, its function is no longer in their hands. Compared to Bonds, Geasa are stronger, scarier, and easier to bring into play, but also far less pliable; their impact on high-end conflict is meaningful, but fixed.

Gifts

1+ points

Each Gift is a custom-built adaptation of one of the divine attributes' powers. Costs for Gifts vary, with almost any number possible. Gifts are designed and given costs using the system on pg. 283-295.

Gifts are most useful when a player wants a power that has a hefty, "crunchy" rules definition beyond its 1C special effects—a power that interacts with game rules, or participates in conflicts, in a certain way; something that is specifically commensurate with a particular power of Eide, Flore, Lore, or Wyrd. If the player just wants their character to have a particular power 1C, and doesn't really care how it interacts with other rules and abilities, a Bond or Geas is generally a better choice.

Costs

Next, the player records their character's starting levels in each of the **Four Costs** (pg. 267):

- **Burn** is the character's mind and soul unraveling. It begins at Wyrd × 10.
- **Fugue** is delusion, confusion, and obsession. It begins at Lore × 10.
- **Immersion** is false conceptions and emotional entanglement. It begins at Flore × 10.
- **Stilling** is definition, loss of self, and calcification. It begins at Eide × 10.

... as well as in the mundane Cost, Wear (pg. 271):

- **Wear** is wear and tear to the body and mind. It breaks the pattern above and begins at **40**.

Arc Quest

The player then chooses or creates the first *quest* for their character's narrative "Arc."

Players can create their own quest using the rules on pg. 311. They may be able to find a suitable quest on the Internet or in a book. The GM may, with all parties' agreement, provide one. Otherwise, players wanting a peaceful, pastoral "Shepherd" Arc can choose between:

- "An Orderly Life" (pg. 338), if their character's routine is strongly defined;
- "Something New" (pg. 352), if their routine has just been disrupted;
- "A Peaceful Life" (pg. 358), if their character has withdrawn from the world; *and*
- "The Crossroads" (pg. 368), if approaching a choice.

For a melancholy "Emptiness" Arc, instead choose:

- "The Long Night" (pg. 366), if stuck in a grey interregnum;
- "Settled In" (pg. 351), if the character just has a sense something is ... missing;
- "An Orderly Life" (pg. 338), if their routine is strongly defined;
- "A Peaceful Life" (pg. 358), if they've withdrawn from the world; *or*
- "Two Worlds Collide" (pg. 348), if they've changed the world recently; this quest explores the aftermath.

Finally, for a tense "Bindings" Arc, wherein they tamper with forbidden powers—things that are taboo or even "beyond understanding"—players can choose between:

- "A Nameless Light" (pg. 367), if they're emerging from ... somewhere ... to face the world;
- "The Work of Time" (pg. 364), if they're wrestling with a deep self-doubt;
- "Entangled" (pg. 345), if they're wrestling, instead, with the schemes of the law-beings and the Powers;
- "An Orderly Life" (pg. 338), if their routine is strongly defined; *and*
- "A Peaceful Life" (pg. 358), if they have withdrawn from the world.

Levers

Next, the player comes up with 1-3 things that can *motivate* their PC—things that the GM can threaten, or bring into play, or otherwise move around as playing pieces, to stir their character into action. These are things the PC can't *help* caring about and reacting to, no matter how estranged from the world they might be. Their mortal family, perhaps; or bookstores, cool cars, or stamps; for some, the opportunity to "be a hero." These levers can be almost anything ... but they should *exist*, they should fall plausibly within the scope of the campaign, and the player

EIDE MINI-INDEX

Eide 0	"Ingenues" have no real practice with the arts of Eide.
Eide 1	"Titled" characters have found a place in the world.
Eide 2	"Practitioners" know the deeper secrets of some craft.
Eide 3	"Defined" characters have a strong personal image and a style.
Eide 4	"Votaries" are good at struggling/suffering their way to victory.
Eide 5	"Genius" characters are incomparably dazzling in 1+ fields.
Eide 6	"Legendary" characters are wreathed in protagonistic aura.
Eide 7	"Nonpareils" may outright overwrite the truth with Eide.

FLORE MINI-INDEX

Flore 0	"Outsiders" have no real connection to the world.
Flore 1	"Ghosts" have found some faint attachment there.
Flore 2	"Envoys" have 1+ metaphysically solid, emotionally valid ties.
Flore 3	"Catalysts" are treasured by the world itself, taking on intimations of worldly divinity.
Flore 4	"Awakeners" see the hidden beauty and power within Creation... and can bring it forth.
Flore 5	"Geomancers" adeptly wield the treasures of Creation.
Flore 6	"Eternals" are true enough to win the world's loyalty and love.
Flore 7	"World-Weavers" are wondrous artisans.

LORE MINI-INDEX

Lore 0	"Lostlings" are all but blind to Ninuan.
Lore 1	"Strays" are unfamiliar with its sights.
Lore 2	"Dustcloaks" are competent to wander in the void.
Lore 3	"Hunters" have mastered the binding of Arcana. (But not, yet, their use.)
Lore 4	"Outriders" have learned the subtler tricks of void navigation.
Lore 5	"Perquisitors" have deep, far-ranging knowledge of the Not.
Lore 6	"Arcanists" have mastered the powers of their Arcana.
Lore 7	"Exarchs" are as one with the nameless void.

WYRD MINI-INDEX

Wyrd 0	"World-Bound" characters are practically mortal.
Wyrd 1	"Wyrdlings" have seen hints as to the alienness of the void.
Wyrd 2	"Ninuanni" are more their original, Excrucian self than they are their mortal one.
Wyrd 3	"Armigers" have made a further study of their Wyrd ... and found it tainted by infection.
Wyrd 4	"Sword-Bearers" are purer, truer weapons of the void.
Wyrd 5	"Postulants" grow disaffected with destruction.
Wyrd 6	"Potentates" build a Wyrd resistant to the Glitch.
Wyrd 7	"Illuminates" have begun to shed their mortal self and worldly form.

ABILITY MINI-INDEX

Ability 0	"Hopeless" characters are barely even present.
Ability 1	"Struggling" characters aren't ready for their life.
Ability 2	"Casuals" can get through life, but aren't good at it.
Ability 3	"Basic" characters are managing, but that's all.
Ability 4	"Professionals" are good at something.
Ability 5	"Driven" characters get stuff done. ... but not always efficiently.
Ability 6	"Competent" characters are on top of things.
Ability 7	"Sparkling" characters dance through their lives.

should make sure the GM knows them. This will ensure that the GM can catch the PC's interest at need.

The character need not know about or admit to the existence of these levers.

The most common lever is a general emotional entanglement with groups and individuals "like" the PC in some way. Other common levers are personal associates, "kinds" of things that catch the character's interest, principles that the GM can manipulate to move the PC into action, and specific places or objects that have a strong personal value.

Final Details

If they haven't done so yet, the player should nail down the Strategist's name, pronouns, description, and concept. They should also think about things like "what does this character actually know how to do?"

Each PC has a characteristic virtuosity, a *modus operandus* ... a unique and personal means of tackling the world. This is their **Technique** (pg. 131). If they haven't chosen it yet, the player should do so now.

It's generally ambiguous precisely what language a Strategist is speaking and precisely what species they are. If the player is leaving some other aspect of their character ambiguous—e.g., their sex, hair color, or clothing (pg. 133)—they should decide on the details.

They should also at least loosely pin down things like the nature of their **sanctuary** (pg. 234), their power of **destruction** (pg. 235), the concept of their **Sphere** (pg. 205), and their arcanum-hunting method (pg. 206).

The player can pick up to the Strategist's [Flore + 1] in Creational **treasures**—things the character's heart cherishes, to which they may also grant power. They can record up to twelve **arcana,** λ-beings or substances they have at one time or another captured or bound; however, at most five of these will actually be somewhere *handy* and it will matter less for characters with lower Lore. **Choosing Treasures and Arcana is optional;** players can also pick up their character's Treasures and Arcana during play, or come up with ideas after the first couple of sessions, rather than choosing all of them, or even *any* of them, now.

The player should make sure they know who their Strategist hangs out with besides the other PCs, why their Strategist stopped trying to kill the world—even if it's just "no clear reason"—and anything that they might need to know about the overall concept for the PC group and the game.

Then, finally, the player should open a blank "ending book" for their character:

It will tell the story—as yet unknown—of how they die for the final time.

Action

Characters have access to three kinds of action.

The first is action of the body, mind, and soul—action deriving from the mundane and divine attributes. The player decides what they want to do. They compare their attribute rating to the **difficulty** of what they want to do. If the difficulty is equal or lower, they do it. If the difficulty is higher, the character can still do it, but they must pay (or, strictly speaking, accumulate) a Cost. For instance, the typical Cost to take Lore actions above one's natural level is **Fugue.**

Almost anything that a character might want to do is accessible in this manner. They can push their once-human (or once-whatever) bodies and minds to their natural limit—or draw upon the full divine power of their Ninuanni nature. The only limiting factor is how willing they are to pay the Cost.

A key timing rule in the system is that characters may only take two attribute-based actions at a time. These can be complex, detailed actions, like "typing and talking and petting a cat." But if a character is doing two actions, whether simple or complex, they must abandon one and its invested Cost, or wait for one to finish, before doing something else.

In Creation, characters may also use a **spotlight** as a kind of "attentional action." The power of the character's attention and focus shapes the world ... as the player's does the game. This is discussed in more depth on pg. 111.

In the Not, where the backdrop of the world lacks the deep capacity to soak up and respond to unlimited quantities of attention, spotlights work a little differently; one might more reasonably call them "volitional" or "void" actions—an exercise of will and choice. (See pg. 118.)

"I can do anything," she pointed out.

"Have you eaten?"

"I can do ... most things," she said, with a half-suppressed laugh.

"When was the last time you slept?"

"Like," she said, a hint of desperation slipping into her voice, "I can, like, blow up the moon."

He just looked at her, blankly confused. "... wait, would that help?"

"I don't know," she said, suddenly a little confused too. "I mean, it's the moon."

"If blowing up the moon is what you have to do to maintain a healthy sleep schedule, then you should blow up the moon. I guess. I don't know. There's tide stuff. Would there be, like, tsunamis?"

"The point," she said, "is that you don't need to worry about me. Not like this. I mean: I am an incarnate breath of the void."

—*from* The Tides of March, *by Robin W. Frahm*

XP

Characters will grow throughout the course of the game, completing quests and gaining additional character points thereby. The source of this progression is accumulated XP, or experience points; the source *of* that XP will be as follows.

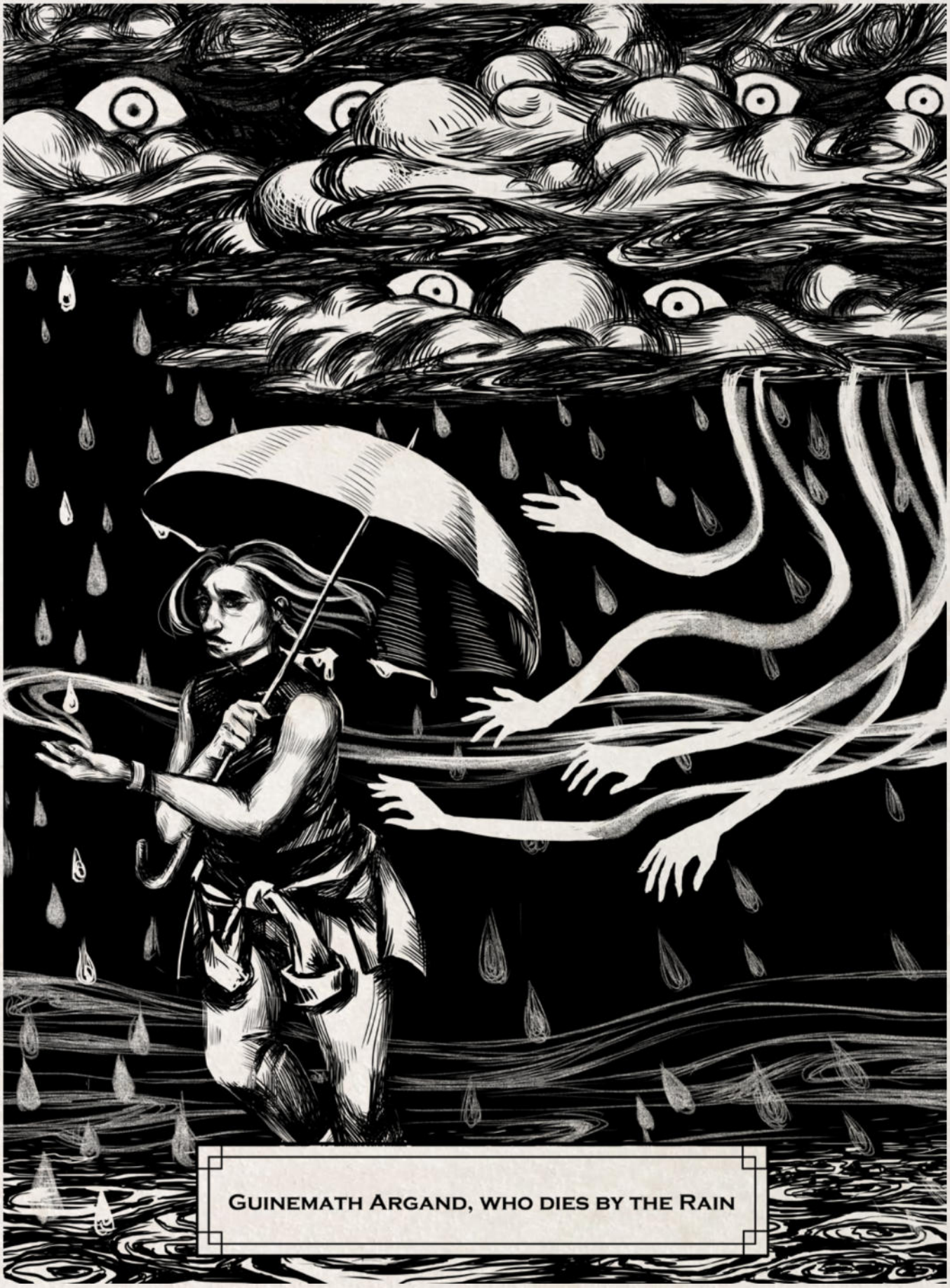
- Each PC usually earns 1-2 XP per "chapter" of the game through the use of the spotlight system (pg. 111).
- Spending 3+ Cost at once, or taking 3+ points of a Cost in damage, earns 1 XP.
- Quests come with conditions for gaining bonus XP.
  - "any-time" quests can earn XP on an irregular basis (at most once per scene; at most once per, roughly, fifteen minutes real-time) when the player/character takes certain actions.
  - "storyline" quests only earn bonus XP when the relevant player is "in focus" for the session; at such times, each player can earn +1 XP for the quest and +1 XP for themselves up to once per chapter by performing one of several specific quest-related actions.
- Some quests also have "milestone" bonuses that earn +5 XP towards the quest.
- Players can toss one another XP tokens on an irregular basis when they can't think of a better response to what someone else's PC is doing. These tokens grant +1 XP and +1 Fugue. "An irregular basis" means the same thing it does for an any-time quest: XP tokens can't stack up in a scene, or in followups to the same action, or from multiple players in response to the same thing—there needs to be a new IC scene and some breathing room (again, roughly, fifteen minutes real-time; enough to change the game's context) before the player can get such a token again.
- And finally, the GM may from time to time warn a player that doom awaits at the end of a spotlit action they take in Ninuan (pg. 123); if the player goes forward anyway, they earn +1 XP.

These XP will accumulate towards completing the character's quests—including, e.g., their first Arc quest, chosen above—at which point the characters will receive life progress, and, assorted rewards.

AS FOR THE REST

You now have enough information to play in any role save the GM.

If you want to know more—or be the GM, yourself—the remainder of this book awaits.



Guinemath Argand, who dies by the Rain

The Creation of a Campaign

We had been ready to slaughter the Heavens. We had been ready to tear down the Creating God.

We were not ready for what we found.

Outside the world, there were no clouds. There were no angels. There were no thunderous faces of booming brass.

There was an office suite that was not an office suite.

There was a machine, that ... was not a machine.

There was the sickening, grueling understanding, then, that we had not been dreamed into being by a divine artisan, had not been sung into nothing from the primordial chaos, had not been hammered out upon a forge of souls; that we had been, as Chris had long hypothesized ... before being silenced by our barrages of thrown luncheon ... statted out, point-balanced (and rather badly) for some wicked, empyreal game.

Why is there injustice? we had asked the Heavens. Why is there suffering, within our world?

The Heavens had looked down upon the dramas of our lives, and been entertained.

—from the manual for
Death of the Player,
the second expansion for the
Swords against Postmodernism
MMORPG

Earlier...

You've already seen a bit of Madeline Rush's **Glitch** campaign (on pg. 27 and 75). Now, let's look in on the group a few months earlier and see how it all began

Campaign Creation

Madeline Rush, the Game Master, is the driving force behind this particular game starting up. That's not necessarily how a **Glitch** game happens—a player can, for instance, request that a GM put a game of **Glitch** together—but **Glitch's** particular requirements mean that it'll be GM-driven an awful lot of the time.

Thinking about the game, Madeline decides that she wants to run for her regular group—Diane Firth, Edward Jordan, and Heather Sullivan. She doesn't want to deal with the issues involved in disconnected PCs or a loose sand of plots; instead, she envisions a game where the PCs travel around together investigating things. That's unusual, but PCs are allowed to be unusual; there just aren't that many of them, after all!

She has a notion that their investigations will ultimately lead them to a mastermind who has engineered most of the major events of their lives and is planning to use them as keys to a particular metaphysical lock.

... but mostly, she just wants to do episodic mysteries.

Before the First Session

Madeline gets her players together in her living room and they begin working on character creation. A few minutes into the process, the group elaborates slightly on her original concept, deciding that they want to play twisted mirrors of their PCs from an earlier campaign—

opposite: *by Sadia Bies*

In that campaign, they were Nobilis, the Powers of Eternity, Treachery, and Strength.

Now, they will be Excrucians, *dying* of those things.

That's enough of a seed idea to get them started; from there, the rest begins to flow...

Liutgarde Payne

Diane Firth starts with a bane: *eternity*. She rolls that around in her mind. Her Strategist is dying of eternity—or, rather, eternally dying. By the time eternity ends, she'll be dead! In the meantime, she's locked into a nasty stasis:

If she doesn't kick off into the Beyond or force a recovery, she never actually gets to the point of *death*, she just drifts off more and more into her timeless floaty pre-dying state.

Her backstory is that she was a mortal witch—probably from a Chancel or something to avoid leaning too far into the idea that "mythology is all secretly real." She went to die, but it didn't happen. It was Glitched. She became a Strategist with a "faerie magic"-focused Technique, instead. (See pg. 131, 150.)

Diane has 25 points to spend on Liutgarde's Attributes.

She looks over the Eide titles and decides that she wants Eide 5-6; as a witch, she's either a "genius" or a "legend." To choose her Flore, she pauses to think about *why* Liutgarde quit the war. She concludes it was just ... exhaustion. Liutgarde couldn't keep on hating any longer. That doesn't sound like Flore 0, but it doesn't sound like Flore 2+, either, which makes choosing Flore 1 pretty easy. She has no particular ideas for Lore, and feels like having a vibrant life in the Beyond pulls against her concept, so she sets it at 0-1 for now. For Wyrd, she looks over the descriptions of the various Wyrd levels on pg. 226-232 and ultimately decides that Wyrd 3, **Armiger,** sounds most like the character she has in mind. Finally, for Ability, Diane wants to play the kind of character who drifts off into dreams and private reveries on a regular basis, losing track of what's going on around her; a character who isn't generally that *great* at life, but is also not actively hopeless or unkempt. That's a Casual, she decides, at level 2.

Diane's spent 24-28 points so far—presumably, 24. To spend that final point, she looks at possible Gifts, Geasa, and Bonds. The Eternal Gift on pg. 291 is an easy and obvious choice; Liutgarde doesn't get hungry or thirsty or tired, she's just, you know, *dying*. Generically. She can't quite afford it, but she really wants it—so, gritting her teeth, she drops down to Wyrd 2.

She records her Attributes, Gifts, and Costs *(lower left)*.

To Diane, a Bindings Arc sounds like the most fun; she goes for that, and picks up the starting quest, *Entangled* (pg. 345).

For levers, she decides that Liutgarde cares about people like herself—witches, people trapped in time, weird and spacey people, people entangled with the fey, or people who look like Liutgarde ... which she decides means "silver-haired" and "short," leaving the rest of her appearance ambiguous.

For thematic elements, she goes all in on the faerie magic theming:

Her sanctuary is a dazzling and kind of abstract faerie banquet in a forest somewhere, which she gets to by getting lost in anything even vaguely resembling a woods. Her power of "destruction" banishes things into Faerie in a swirl of mist—not *worldly* faerie, though, not those courts of Creational beings that sometimes form within lacunae, but the abstract λ-Faerie that will be her Sphere.

Diane can choose up to two treasures. She doesn't really know what treasures suit her, so she chooses a kind of vaguely defined Creational ally and a magitech weapon, which she may fill in more details on later on. She can also define up to twelve arcana, and keep five handy; these will be λ-fey she has at some point bound. With Lore 0, though, this doesn't matter much. She decides that there's some kind of glowy sprite, some kind of magic dog, and some kind of magic stone available to her in some fashion or other; she doesn't even bother with the rest.

Lastly, she opens a blank "ending book" for Liutgarde, telling the story of her *actual* and final death.

Liutgarde Payne, the Strategist of Eternity

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	COST
Eide	5: Genius	50 Stilling
Flore	1: Ghost	10 Immersion
Lore	0: Lostling	0 Fugue
Wyrd	2: Ninuanni	20 Burn
Ability	2: Casual	40 Wear

Gifts, Bonds, and Geasa Eternal

Tassilo Caucoense

Edward Jordan picks the bane *treachery*. His Strategist, Tassilo, will be dying of it:

Things he trusts in are always betraying him. They can't help it. It's just how they are. He has seen a glitched faith in the world, and now *faith itself* is corrupt.

Tassilo used to be an old world merchant prince, and that's the core skillset for his Eide.

Lately he wanders as a troubleshooter—mostly, as a handyman, but occasionally doing more bureaucratic or crimefighting stuff.

Latest of all, of course, he travels with the group.

Edward wants to specialize in Wyrd. In breaking things. He wants at least 4 Wyrd, so he can freely use his power of destruction (which slices unliving things apart);

5 would be better, not so much for free Wyrd 5 miracles as because he thinks that it might fit Tassilo's reason for joining the Chancery:

That maybe he's actually seen *beyond* destruction, just a little, like Wyrd 5 characters (pg. 229) tend to do.

Specifically, Edward decides that Tassilo just kind of ... *fell* for the world, one day; that he started loving things in it; that he couldn't bear to keep killing it because, look, *gum,* you can, like, chew and chew and chew it and then either spit it out or swallow it and have it turn into an inedible lump in your stomach that eventually (given enough millennia) becomes sentient in its own right!

Or, like, *neon lights!*

Stuff. It's great.

And that's not really *specifically* any level of Wyrd, it's more about Flore—Flore 3+, he decides—but it's also *definitely* more Wyrd 5 than Wyrd 4.

He looks at the Eide titles and concepts and decides that to be a proper merchant prince requires around Eide 2. Looking over the miracles, though, he falls in love with **Talent** (pg. 170), with the idea that at Eide 5 he's always a qualified, sharp trader whether the competition is a street vendor or the supercomputers running an alien financial system; that he'd be, of necessity, in any *Who's Who* book worth the name; that he would generally *always* have enough money to impress ...

He sets Eide to 5, matching his Wyrd.

Much like Diane, he has no real attachment to Lore; *unlike* Diane, though, he finds the idea of being blind to Ninuan unless he spends Cost ridiculous. Thus, he takes Lore 1.

At this point, though, even if "Flore 3+" means "Flore 3," he's spent 28 points—more than he actually has. And he currently has Ability 0.

After wrestling with this for a bit, he turns to Gifts for a solution. He'll have Eide 2, he decides, *but*, he'll also construct a new Gift, **One of the Best,** that makes **Talent,** specifically, free. This has a base cost of 5 points (for a level 5 miracle), +1 point for Automatic activation, -5 points because it only affects him, +1 because it's the full use of the miracle level, and finally +1 because it's an uncommon Gift (see pg. 283).

That gets him down to 25, but he still has Ability 0. He's also kind of drawn to the Immutable Gift (pg. 292), which both fits his vague sense of who Tassilo is and can help a character *get by* with a low Ability—but taking it would put him back up to 26+. He ponders lowering Flore, but he likes the idea of having "intimations of worldly divinity" (pg. 99) for the same reason he likes being **One of the Best.** Ultimately, he decides that since he's already got the *most important* part of Eide, he can take it down to 0 ... letting him have Ability 1 and Immutable too.

He records his core traits *(lower right)*.

Tassilo's love for the world suggests a Shepherd Arc to Edward, so he goes for that, and picks up the starting quest, *An Orderly Life* (pg. 338).

For levers, Edward initially thinks that Tassilo will be obsessed with material goods and conspiracy theories and people in trouble ... but in fact, it turns out that he's mostly obsessed with whatever literally or metaphorically sparkly thing has most recently caught his attention. He also turns out to be the kind of person who forgets that he's lying and gets genuinely invested in anything he claims, or even vaguely *implies*, that he cares about. Edward will eventually update the GM on Tassilo's true levers, but not until after the first couple of sessions have passed.

Continuing the process of character creation, Edward decides Tassilo's Sphere will be a massive secret society conspiracy thing. Not, like, a real one, but a dream of one scattered through the Beyond; an *ur*-conspiracy, an *ur*-secret society, the one true cult that was secretly behind everything from the templars to the moon landing, who faked Abel's death and pinned it all on Cain, who run the stock market and your local co-op too:

Those guys. The Ilλ-nati.

At first he thinks that his sanctuary's going to be a place he'll go to meet his conspiracy contacts, but eventually he realizes that that's probably not a good way to recover from the treachery of the world. He needs somewhere safe and, y'know, reassuring. A place to restore lost faith. He is briefly tempted to hang out in a safe fuzzy forest with talking animals, but decides that it's narratively more appropriate to have a coffee shop in a little town somewhere where he's known and loved and faith is oft rewarded. He can get there by walking back and forth through the doors of a coffee shop three times.

He can choose up to four treasures, and this is actually a major part of his power set—nearly a quarter of his invested points, anyhow—but he forgets to do so. (You'll see him claim one in play on pg. 86 and on pg. 304.)

Edward can define up to twelve arcana; like Diane, he doesn't worry too much about this. He decides that his ilλ-nati handler, "cleaner," supplier, snitch, and a more general "informant" are the five he keeps "on hand"—they'll take his speed-dialed calls. The rest, he leaves unspecified for now.

Edward opens a blank "ending book" for Tassilo, telling the story of how he reaches his final death, and he is done.

Tassilo Caucoense, the Strategist of Treachery

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	COST
Eide	0: Ingenue	0 Stilling
Flore	3: Catalyst	30 Immersion
Lore	1: Stray	10 Fugue
Wyrd	5: Postulant	50 Burn
Ability	1: Struggling	40 Wear

Gifts, Bonds, and Geasa — Immutable, One of the Best

Ciara Bennewick

Heather Sullivan picks the bane *strength.* Her Strategist is dying because she's just too, darn, strong. Her traditional family fitness technique was Glitched, you see, and didn't *just* grant her incredible power but also made it the kind of power that even she can't fully control.

One day, it will devour her.

She needs Eide 2, because she is specifically an initiate of secret techniques. (Technically, that's not obligatory—but it *talks* about that in the description of Eide 2, so she'd be uncomfortable with the incongruity if she went with anything less.) She feels kind of ambivalent about the world and isn't even completely sure *herself* why she stopped fighting it; that could be anywhere from Flore 0-3, tending low, although Heather, like Edward, kind of likes "intimations of worldly divinity" and the idea of being a treasure to the world.

Heather is fairly interested in Lore as a player (she likes that *kind of thing*) so she wants to put a basic investment into that trait. To Heather, that means Lore 3: high enough that she can go out and hunt the arcana of her sphere and bind them to her use. Here, she pauses to consider what the Sphere of "strength" looks like. She decides that it's got to be an ecosystem of fantastic creatures eternally striving to become stronger through cultivation and devouring one another. She'll catch airborne fiery horses with magical cores inside their brains, treasure seeking electric mice, and iron-skinned panthers whose poison breath is deadly, each neatly sorted by their "monster rank" and difficulty. She adds "a wolf made of trees" and "a dragon-like thing" to that list to get to the five arcana she can have handy, which in her case means "kept in her 'spiritual space,'" and decides that she's aware of a giant lava serpent and a mysterious monster with medicinal efficacy as well.

As for Wyrd, she wants Wyrd 4:

Ciara is a weapon, with the Wyrd of War (pg. 229).

For Ability, Heather likes being reasonably competent. **Greater Well-Met** (pg. 130) seems like a bit too much for Ciara to manage for free, while free use of **Steel** (pg. 130) fits her character. Both are Ability 5 actions, so she figures Ciara's Ability *has* to be hovering in the range 4-5.

She's overbudget at this point—30-39 points—so she looks at what part of that she cares about the least. For her, it's the Wyrd: there's nothing she wants to *do* with it, she just thought that being a Wyrd 4 "Sword-Bearer" sounded cool. If she drops to Wyrd 1, she can afford everything else she wants and have a point to spare.

As for that point ... she's interested in the Durant Gift (pg. 290), to be a little tougher, so she picks that up.

She records her core traits *(lower left).*

Heather decides to round out the group's set of Arcs with an Emptiness Arc, starting with *The Long Night* (pg. 366).

For levers, she decides that Ciara cares about contests of strength, proving herself, *challenges,* and maybe other people who care about strength. More generally, she just admires ... the proud and the awesome ... and hates to see good things go away. It's one of her better features, and one of the things, perhaps, that makes her most glad *not* to be at war with the world.

She moves on to miscellaneous details.

Ciara's sanctuary, she decides, will be a place of stone and mist and green she goes sometimes to think. Any time she can climb a reasonable number of flights of stairs, she can get there. For her power of "destruction," she opts for the peculiar ability to rip away self-justification and make people face reality.

"... it's the only way they can be strong."

Her Technique, of course, is feats of strength.

At Flore 0, Heather can choose only a single Creational treasure. She opts for a pair of dice she found in a random shop in Paris that always roll what she wants them to.

Heather's already chosen Ciara's arcana, so she's basically there; all that's left is opening a blank "ending book" for Ciara, telling the story of her final death.

Ciara Bennewick, the Strong

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	COST
Eide	2: Practitioner	20 Stilling
Flore	0: Outsider	0 Immersion
Lore	3: Hunter	30 Fugue
Wyrd	1: Wyrdling	10 Burn
Ability	4: Professional	40 Wear

Gifts, Bonds, and Geasa Durant

The First Story

Madeline has made things relatively easy on herself in planning the first story because the players have already agreed to be driving around tackling mysteries. She doesn't have to worry about how she's going to catch the PCs' interest or how far the players will have to bend their roleplay to bite down on the plot hooks—their interest is, effectively, pre-caught, and all she has to do is keep it.

She glances over the PCs' levers, Treasures, Arcana, and infections, and then focuses in on their levers. For Liutgarde, she starts imagining a city trapped in time, but the idea won't gel until a later time. For Tassilo, some sort of business opportunity? For Ciara, ... something good, that is going away, and a chance to test her strength. That seems most interesting to her right then, so she narrows in on it. They'll be traveling, and they'll reach a town where an Angel is dying?

(Angels don't normally die natural deaths, particularly on Earth, but it's not so blatantly impossible that a GM can't get away with it. Here, she's specifically envisioning a kind of Studio Ghibli-influenced magical world seasonal cycles natural beauty kind of thing ... and the idea, she thinks, has legs.)

She puts this vision in context while looking at Ciara's quest, *The Long Night*. That quest is ostensibly about anhedonia, but the specific elements that catch her attention are about timelessness, snow, being in a metaphorical cage, and being moved about by others. So she gets the idea that there's a big ceremony around the Angel's death and passing, and it's going to want the characters to be a passive witness—that whatever worldly forces are there, they're not going to try to kill the PCs, but they're also not going to leave them be, they're going to try to detain them by the metaphorical road. They're going to try to tell them that they aren't allowed to help, even if it feels like they can help something; and they aren't allowed to fight, even if there's something it feels like they might want to fight ... and just move them past.

If the PCs refuse to accept that, then she has a plot. And if the PCs accept it, instead ... well, it's the first session, so that could be a problem. Normally, she'd just assume that if they accept that, if they roll with it, it's because the players are enjoying the show, that interpersonal drama and spotlight use is enough agency for them that day, but since it's the first session, it could *also* be that they think they're not allowed to do more. So if the PCs just accept that, she plans on giving some hint that basically everyone telling them what to do is fundamentally mistaken, that the Angel's dying is premised somehow on a falsehood, something to do with the glitch or an Excrucian attack rather than the natural passing that they've been sold.

... heck, maybe Angels *don't* die of natural causes, and even though it's notionally good that a law-being goes away, it's only doing so because of something broken.

For the cast of characters ... Ciara's quest card suggests someone who can distort time, which sounds like they might be a Liutgarde hook, so possibly a Power that is also a witch? And maybe someone concerned with food, which isn't as well-targeted, but could be another Power, to interact with the PC group as a whole?

There isn't much for Tassilo here, but he *is* supposed to be into people in trouble, so maybe some local kid, then, to ask the "mysterious strangers" to intervene?

As for the town they're passing through ... Cape May, New Jersey, she decides, after some online research, because this is going to be the Angel of the Sea. And after some further study, this gets more interesting, because Cape May turns out to be a tourist town at the tip of a peninsula; there's no reason for them to be *passing through*. Going there, sure. Deliberately detouring there, sure. But *passing through?*

Maybe it actually does work that way, because real life is messy; but abstractly, conceptually, the most *plausible* way that would happen is if ...

If, before now, there was a passage past Cape May? If the Angel of the Sea was also sustaining some sort of Hy-Brasil like land that will fade away with its death, leaving Cape May as it is known now? If it's possible that the characters won't be able to *get* where they were originally driving to, if things continue as they are, and that wherever they're going to is only half-real, even if things don't?

She digs up more information ... on local naval bases, on the "Cape May diamonds," on the local jazz festival and gingerbread homes; everything she can get just feeds her ability to give a strong local color to the game. She doesn't have to get it all *right*, not unless one of her players knows the place (in which case she can make them help out, instead), but the more she knows, the more starting points she has, particularly when building NPCs and the ceremony of the Angel's passing.

She doesn't wind up having time to do as much as she'd like before the first session begins, but she *does* have time to put together some names from online name generators for the main NPCs (and a few random characters). She gives each of the Powers a roughly random specialty—the Power of the Sea, she decides, is going to be heavy on **Aspect** (pg. 395); the Power of Jazz will have a jazz-of-all-trades build with a slight leaning towards **Domain** (pg. 395). The Angel will focus on **Gardener** and **Lore** (pg. 397, 205), which means she has to figure out how she thinks Lore actually works for angels; luckily, though, there's an *obvious* place for the Angel of the Sea to go to hunt its Arcana-equivalents, which is, the Sea.

She puts together a few more Powers, a Warmain, and a Divine Imperator in case she needs antagonists, and that's all the time she has before the game. It turns out to be more than enough, though, as the PCs spend more than half of the session in a complex scheme to get out of their bill for the bed and breakfast where they're staying and a good chunk of the rest arguing philosophy with a cat; by the time they've really grasped that they're being detained, and the grand festival of the Angel's departure has caught their full attention, it's time to stop for the day.

Interlude—

Campaign *suggestions*

Glitch is, as has been said, a game of exploration. A game of *experience* in a world and void that are vibrant and full of mystery—sometimes arduous, sometimes horrible, and sometimes transcendental in their beauty. There are, thus, roughly three sorts of campaigns this game is suited for.

These are,

Stories that focus on a single grand mystery, such as:

- whatever *happened* to the Creator of the world?
- who is afflicting the characters with nightmares... and why?
- where do humans *go* between midnight and thirteen o'clock?
- what's really going on in this strange fairyland the characters are visiting?
  - ... or, on this strange island?
  - ... or, at this peculiar university?
- why are the characters repeating August 16th over and over again?
- what really happened on that night that the world forgot?
- can Creation be disentangled from the Glitch?
  - ... what *is* the Glitch, really, anyway?
  - ... for that matter, what is Creation?
- why haven't there been any new wraiths since March 4th, 2012?
- why are people in Sussex dreaming of an alien invasion every night?
- who in the world thought summoning *Excrucians* to fight a "demon lord" was a good idea?
- so, Creation turned out to be a computer simulation, fine, OK, but ... was Ninuan?
  - ... and, is the "real" reality glitched, too?
- what would it take to make the world better? Or, to make a new and better world?
- who the heck are we, why does everyone hate us, and what the hell happened to our *eyes?*
- who is this "savior" that's being prophecied, and ... uh, good salvation, or bad salvation? *or*
- how should we navigate this strange and mythic situation that we're in?

Stories that focus on grand exploration—e.g., on:

- touring the Earth, or all Creation,
- exploring a mysterious lost land,
- exploring Ninuan, possibly from an Earthly home base complete with family,
- becoming ambassadors to, and exploring the society of, the Powers,
- exploring the characters' complicated, tragic, and secretly intertwined backstories, *or*
- visiting all of New Hampshire's restaurants, cafés, and bars.

Or, "mystery of the week" stories—where, e.g., the PCs:

- hunt artifacts as a mercenary team,
- sail the mysterious seas,

opposite: *by Robin Scott*

- encounter a series of Excrucian-themed murders in the small town where they live,
- travel from town to town, stumbling into strange events at every stop,
- get precognitive warnings, or messages to visit certain places ... but from who?,
- live in a big city, and mysterious threats that brush against their levers keep coming up,
- run a detective agency,
- run an explicitly occult, supernatural, or *empyreal* detective agency,
- participate in a cooking show wherein every week their opponents are coincidentally murdered and they must prove their innocence *first* before taking home their prize,
- consult for an insurance agency,
- help people the police can't or won't,
- serve as hunting dogs for an Imperator who somehow has control over their souls,
- operate a small government agency investigating supernatural events not obviously attributable to known major factions, *or*
- have perfectly ordinary lives, at least, for Chancery members, except that every time they take a group vacation they stumble on a new mystery or strange event.

In some of these cases, players may need to pre-commit to ignoring the unlikelihood of the premise—that, for example, as long as there's a good reason why *this week's* opponents on the cooking show have been murdered, they won't let their suspension of disbelief be shaken just because it's happened once or twice (or seven times) before.

Note that mystery of the week campaigns can be, and often are, combined with grand mystery campaigns: either the characters face a series of little mysteries, and the story's grand mystery emerges over time; or, the characters stumble on their weekly mysteries over the course of their grander pursuit.

The Darkness of the Stage

The gunslinger shot. It struck the balled-up noumenon. It cracked. Perception and thing were broke apart. Ideal and real were parted. Subjective was born, where objective was. And the gunslinger there, they tipped their hat and they slipped away—

Through the bramble-wood backlit door, into the world.

—*from* Ilsevith Rising,
by Cameron Garza

Creation

Creation—the primary setting of this game—is a land of the conscious.

It is a land defined by perception, by awareness, by *experience*—not because these things reshape it, although they can, but because fundamentally to live in Creation *is* to perceive it, and if one ceases to do so then one is scarcely truly there.

Accordingly, each player receives two *spotlights* per in-game "chapter:"

Two moments that they can highlight as the core of their character's experience. Two moments that they're *there* for, alert for, present for, both as a character and a player. Two things that they care about, that they *pay attention to.*

That they sharply perceive.

In Creation, this is most often used as a kind of investigative authority:

Up to twice per chapter, each player can "spotlight" something to make the GM or another player more open and detailed about it than they otherwise would be. They can, metaphorically, turn the stage lights on to something that would otherwise have been left in darkness.

From a player perspective, this is a way to explore matters of interest. But it's a little more than that, too. Shining a spotlight on something intrinsically *makes* it more important, more defining. It's not just that it forces the GM or player in question to elaborate on their exposition; it *pushes* them to re-gear, if necessary, and make sure that that exposition is worth hearing.

Under a spotlight, characters open their hearts—even if they weren't planning to.

Plot events happen—even if the GM wasn't expecting them to.

The rules can only ask for so much here. Ultimately, all the game *requires* is that the GM or player(s) under the spotlight give a solid go at making it worthwhile. It can't ask more than that ... because sometimes secrets *should* stay secrets. Sometimes dull events *can't* be polished into brilliant jewels of action. Sometimes there really *isn't* that much more that can be said, or done. There are no hard rules or hard requirements that bind the outcome, because there can't be, save that the target *does* have to at least *think* about how to make the spotlight meaningful.

If they end up coming up with a good way, then they should also then attempt it, because the spotlight makes the events in question matter, after all.

Spotlights give their subjects a certain ... narrative weight.

That's why spotlights traditionally form the core record of a **Glitch** game—that narrative weight. They're important enough that the core of *what happened* in a completed chapter is considered, by game protocol, to be a list of its spotlighted events, and of who spotlighted them, as well as of any storyline quest actions (pg. 318) that were taken, and who by.

Spotlights serve a few other functions, as well.

The spotlights in the game form a story of events, of the movements of the characters' lives. Therefore, **in any chapter where there are at least as many spotlights as there are PCs**, those lives *advance:* **the GM gives each player one bonus character XP** (pg. 101).

In any chapter where every PC's player uses both spotlights, each player, instead, is given two.

This is awarded at the chapter's end.

This game assumes that characters will earn two XP from spotlights in a typical chapter, dipping now and again down to one. Players may wish to be judicious in their spotlight use, but parsimony is not recommended; in turn, the GM is advised against racing through or abruptly ending chapters in a way that cuts the players' use of spotlights short. That said, if precise XP requirements are ever a problem, the GM *does* have the option to handwave them a little; for instance, if a chapter has clearly come to an end, but the players are stressing over how to get in a last spotlight or two, the GM can just forgive the difference. Or, if the group is large, the GM can assess "as many spotlights as PCs" on an approximate and lenient basis rather than forcing everyone to keep a constant, careful count.

The GM is permitted to use their own spotlights, if they'd like—up to two per chapter, since it's a player-level device—and will generally count any they *do* use towards "at least as many spotlights as there are PCs." They explicitly do *not* have to use both, or even *any*, spotlights for the group to earn the second character XP.

As a final note, characters using spotlights don't need a mundane **Focus** action (pg. 130) to pay attention to the thing their player is spotlighting ... unless someone actively attempts to distract them, in which case the game's conflict rules require one. In that case, they should, instead, receive 2 Edge (pg. 150).

The Silence of the World

The other side of a spotlight system is that the stage will be, on average, somewhat darker when they do not shine.

Part of the way **Glitch** works is that sometimes—maybe even *often*—there'll be something going on that a player might want to know about. Something that their character is generally a *witness* to, that's happening right in front of them ... that the GM won't actually do that much description on. Or that the player responsible won't. They'll just leave it in a sort of ... fog.

That's just how life *is,* in this game, sometimes.

The world's always *there,* presumably ... but the characters aren't always paying attention. Or, they're paying attention, but they're not processing what they're getting. It's not making sense to them. Even if it *should* make sense, they're just not putting it all together well.

Sometimes, if they don't have the energy and the will to spend a spotlight on something, they'll just have to kind of go with the flow and *let* things slip by, because the world won't always make it obvious what's going on.

Creation *centers* experience ... but it doesn't always make it easy, and it doesn't make it cheap.

Sometimes (perhaps two thirds of the time), players can work around that without a spotlight. They can use an action like **Focus** (pg. 130), **Expertise** (pg. 130), or **Vision** (pg. 212) to figure out what's going on. Other times, that won't actually help, because even that understanding is still a fog to them:

Things happen, and now the character "understands" them, but the GM still doesn't bother to explain. The experience of understanding passes without antecedent, drowning in the darkness of the stage.

How can that happen?

How can that make sense?

One can put a number of explanations to it, but fundamentally, it simply means that the experience, and the understanding, are not lasting. They *take place,* technically, in game; there is a moment when the character grasps what is going on around them. Only, without a spotlight, that moment will not appear in the formal record of the chapter when it ends; it is, at best, alleged. Nor, without being played out, can it meaningfully linger in the memory of the player or the character.

Like an understanding that someone had three days ago, and then forgot; like the shocked expression of an actor in the darkness—it exists for the actor, even for the character ... but not the audience.

In short:

Any time when the scene isn't intense, when it isn't extremely compelling to the GM and *obvious* that it would be compelling to the Strategists within as well, the GM has the option to leave things out. To be parsimonious with their descriptions. To let the world fade into the background and summarize, or skip, what happens, then.

Maybe just to make things easier on themselves—

To *not have to worry* about something that they would have to spend mental energy figuring out.

Maybe to actively bait out spotlight actions, to keep the story moving; or, to find out what exactly in the missing sections the players will care enough about *to* spotlight, *to* engage.

The GM can even high-handedly skip past large chunks of story and what ought to be, technically, PC or player-level decisions, letting those portions of the PCs' lives just ... slip past; can, e.g., jump right into the middle of fights or adventures without giving details ...

Unless, again, a player makes the active decision to spotlight something; to engage.

It may seem obvious that a player will; that a player *has*

to. But they don't. Sometimes, they won't actually care, because the GM's accurately identified subjects the players aren't actually interested in to skip past—or because the players, in choosing to spotlight only *some* of what's been skipped past, will identify what's important for the GM *then*. Perhaps, for instance, the GM cold opens on the PCs breaking into the Louvre, expecting to bait out a spotlight and give the backstory ... but instead, most of the players roll with it. One of them, upset that it's been high-handedly skipped past, spotlights where the group is staying in Paris.

... and much about the players' interests is revealed.

SPOTLIGHTING A MYSTERY

The standard use of the spotlight is to ask for more information when one would otherwise get none—when the GM or player has *already* skipped or skimmed past the relevant matter, or brought their discussion of it to an end. While a player *can* explain in full sentences that they're spotlighting a mystery, this is normally represented more somatically:

They flash a card that represents a spotlight, or toss a chip that does the same onto the gaming table.

Online, the equivalent might be a standardized phrase like "[SPOT]" or a spotlight emoji instead. Offline, if players don't have a spotlight prop or token, they might substitute a standardized hand gesture[6] or, all else failing, dramatically announce "Spotlight:" before the matter of their interest.

The point is, it's usually not phrased as "I'm spotlighting this," which might feel like any other character action; instead, it's a two-part, ideally simultaneous process:

An indication of the spotlight, paired with *the thing that the spotlight's on.*

Once a spotlight shines onto something that would have otherwise been mysterious, the fog dissolves. The darkness of the stage recedes. The story *itself* focuses on the thing that's been spotlighted; that thing gains in meaning and in relevance. And the GM, or the targeted player, or the targeted players, or possibly *everyone,* does their best to share more than otherwise they would; and, if necessary, makes that exposition or action more interesting than it otherwise would be.

Notably, **when a player uses a spotlight, their PC's attention is always held.**

It's difficult for a player to spotlight something that their character is not a witness to and *impossible* to spotlight something that their character doesn't care about. There's a little wiggle room in this for player convenience—however much leeway the players need, to feel like they don't have to stop and search their characters' souls each time they want to spotlight something and make *sure* they really care—but the principle *is* meant to be sound:

If a player is spotlighting something, their character should also pay attention or engage.

If it ever matters, the moment when the character stops paying attention—not so much "when they stop being single-mindedly focused," but just "when they stop engaging with the subject in basically the same way that they've been doing"—is the moment that the spotlight fades away.

When someone spotlights a mystery, it's going to be up to the GM or the relevant player(s) how *much* they want to explain, how *much* more open they want to be, how *far* they want to continue a scene or event that was on its way to ending before the spotlight shone ... but they should keep at least the *idea* of being more open and forthcoming about the spotlighted thing in mind as long as the character doing the spotlighting is still focused and engaged.

Spotlighting a mystery is sometimes referred to as a **Reckoning** action, and is usually recorded as such in the log of play. The principal reference is to the calculation of a ship's position ... but there is also a certain extent to which accounts are coming due.

Examples

The PCs are walking somewhere, and the GM is fine just skipping the trip ... but someone uses a spotlight, so they don't; they tell the group about it instead.

Reckoning (Spotlighting a Mystery)

Condition: There's something happening you want to know more about.

Action: Ask for more from the GM or player. Your character is absorbed in watching (or whatever) for a bit.

"You are about to wonder why you are here," he said.

I snapped into awareness behind my eyes. They widened in panic. I reached for—

"But," he said, "Don't."

The wallpaper was patterned in golden-brown. The desk was wood. His face was— "... eh?"

"Right now," he said. "You are acing this interview. I am confident that I can sell you to my superiors and put together a compensation package that will blow you away. But I'm afraid that if you remember for even a moment how you came to be here, or who I am, or where you are, that's all going to have to go away."

OK, sure fine. A job was a job. But I couldn't help it! I reached—

"Finley," I blurted, in embarrassed horror, as it clicked into place in my head.

"... your own name," he said, and rolled his eyes. "That much is fine; if, perhaps, skating a little close to the edge?"

— from EVERYTHING, INC., *by Elliott Porterfield*

6 perhaps finger-guns, or an exaggerated thumbs-up, or something like the "head exploding" gesture, but more forward facing—that is, with palms out rather than up near the head?

Or, some character is in a new place. The GM is fine handwaving what the place is like, but that character's player isn't. They want their character attentive. Engaged. *There.* So they use a spotlight, even though they don't actually need anything *more* from the GM.

Or, the group gets in a fight with an Angel. The GM is fine not explaining how things got there and just starting *in medias res,* but at least one player decides that they really *would* like to know. So they call up a spotlight, and the GM explains.

Ongoing Events

Sometimes an experience seems valuable enough to spotlight even though it's *not* a mystery—even though the necessary exposition or storytelling is already going on. In that case, it's not necessary to wait until the GM or the relevant player stop on their own to spotlight any leftover mystery and urge them to keep going. Instead, one can spend a spotlight *mid-action* or *mid-description* to say:

This thing that is going on matters to me. It's relevant. It's important.

... if you were *actually just about to stop, and I didn't realize that, please go on longer, instead.*

This use of the spotlight is admittedly tactically inefficient, in that it sacrifices some of the spotlight's value as a source of information—but it's also strategically sound as a way to signal player-level interests and reinforce compelling play. That isn't just an OOC benefit, either; each such appropriate use of spotlights bends the story in the character's direction and contributes, however infinitesimally, to their long-term ability to achieve their goals.

So when something is happening in play—whether it's ominous foreshadowing, fireworks, someone telling a story, or the GM describing landscapes or neat events—and a player wants to *encourage* that, to say that they want to see more of that, they want it to keep going ... they can toss out a spotlight token, or flash the card, or use the hand signal, or otherwise indicate that they're spotlighting what's going on.

Attention (Spotlighting Ongoing Events)

Condition: There's something other people or the GM are doing in the game that's really riveting your attention.

Action: Let the group know this should keep going! Your character is absorbed in watching (or whatever) for a bit.

She was killing us, yes, but she was doing it admirably. I couldn't stop watching.

... I'd half a mind to applaud.

—*from* The Staggered Stair, *by Adele Alexander*

This is where props and hand signals pay off the most, because it'd usually be interrupting—at least in an offline game—to say something like, "I'm using a spotlight here" or "I'm going to *spotlight this ongoing event.*" Tossing a token onto the table, though, is noticeable, distinct, and indisputable ... but it doesn't necessarily interrupt anyone in the middle of an action or a description or a speech.

If it *does* interrupt—if the scene stops while the participants look at the token, or the card, or the hand gesture, or whatever—*then* one can follow up with "Spotlight," or "Go on," or "This is great."

If things are about to wind down when a spotlight is used, spotlighting an ongoing event works in the same way that spotlighting a mystery does. It pushes the people involved *not* to wind down, to go a little bit further. If things *weren't* about to wind down, if no spotlight was needed to keep the scene live, then it doesn't make much practical difference; all it does is mark that moment as critically important for the spotlighting player's character, give them a free **Focus** action (or, possibly, Edge), and allocate one of their two spotlights for the chapter.

When a player does this, their character's attention is necessarily caught. As with spotlighting a mystery, spotlighting an ongoing event requires that the character themselves be caught up in the experience, investing their attention in the thing going on. One can even say their attention is *fed into it;* it strengthens the moment and gives it life.

Spotlighting an ongoing action is sometimes referred to as an **Attention** action, and is usually recorded in the log of play as such.

Examples

The GM describes an eerie parade of monsters. Deciding that it's caught both their player and their character-level attention, a player spotlights the parade.

Or, a PC and an NPC have an intense discussion. Another player doesn't feel like their character has much to contribute, or maybe they're just too tired to contribute much OOC, but they spotlight the conversation because they think it's neat.

Or, an NPC starts talking about the long-lost adopted child that a PC's been searching for; a spotlight token hits the table ten words in.

Completed Experiences

Sometimes it's only obvious that an event is worth spotlighting when it's complete. Something ends, or at least it reaches the point where it *can* or *should* end, and a player realizes:

That was a key experience for my character this chapter.

They don't need to demand further elaboration from anyone; the key details were already experienced. They don't need to pay more IC attention, for the same reason, or ask anyone to continue. There *is*, however, a protocol for something that should happen after the spotlight is used,

Reaction (Spotlighting a Completed Experience)

Condition: Something that just happened was meaningful for your character.

Action: Let the group know that, and decide whether your character finds its conclusion *neat, scary,* or *mysterious.*

"I thought the soup was going to be terrible," he said. "Since I didn't have any onions. But, get this: brown sugar."

"This isn't a dinner party," Clarence said. "We're here to fight to the death."

"I know, I know, but I'm just so happy," Antoine said. "I mean, the substitution actually worked! That wasn't what I was expecting at all."

—from The Dinner Party, *by Emily Chen*

and that makes this version of the action a little different than the versions above:

In lieu of further exposition or action, the player should declare the spotlight's target a key experience for their character ... and that its conclusion, the final moments or the thing they came out of it with, was (the player's choice of) *neat, scary,* or *mysterious.*

This use of the spotlight comes with an implicit suggestion that the scene or experience end, if it had not. This isn't *binding*—a person can't cut off a politician's televised speech in real life by announcing, "dun dun DUN!" at what they've decided is a dramatic, conclusive moment; similarly, a player can't stop a scythe of death energy screaming across space towards their character by spotlighting it, deciding it's over, and saying, "Wow, that was sure scary!"

... but if it's reasonable to the other parties involved that the spotlighted thing (or the whole scene) might end there, then, spotlighting its completion ends it.

For this reason, spotlighting a completed experience should be formally called. It's not enough just to use a token or say "spotlight;" a player should explicitly note that they're spotlighting a completed experience. This is sometimes called a **Reaction**, a "fade to black," or "closing out the scene (or event);" it is generally recorded in a session's log as a **Reaction.**

Examples

The GM explains something neat. When they're done, a player decides that that mattered to their character. They spotlight that completed experience.

Or, a PC and an NPC have an intense discussion. After it's over, another player realizes that they were paying a lot of attention, and that it was a pretty important scene for their character; they spotlight it retroactively and explain that it was scary.

Or, a PC explores a haunted house. They find an ancient stone mask. Mysterious! They feel that's a good note to end the scene on, and attempt a "fade to black." If the house is full of good plot potential, the scene might *not* end there, or at least the exploration as a whole might pick up at a later point ... but if there's *not* much else going on there, the scene can end, with the GM perhaps mentioning anything else they find after the scene.

Someone who's Stuck

Sometimes a character—a PC or NPC—will be stuck. They'll be frozen, or going in circles, or committed to a path that's wasting a lot of time and keeping them out of the action. It can be obvious that that's not all there is *to* the character. It can be obvious that they're *capable* of doing something interesting, of doing *many* interesting things. ... but that's not what's going on.

By default, putting a spotlight on them wouldn't help. They'd just *go in circles more dramatically*. But it's possible to say, explicitly: "OK, what you've *been* doing is just ... background stuff. Off-stage, off-camera stuff. The story, your moment in the spotlight, starts ... now!"

This is called a *nudge,* a *poke,* or a *cue.*

When a character is nudged, then—as with any spotlighting—they should give a solid go at making the spotlight on them worthwhile. However, with a *nudge*, they're specifically expected to do that by moving *past* what's going on with them instead of by expanding on it. Instead of trying to make their trapped or vacillating state interesting, in other words, they should do what they can, as much as they can, to get *past* that state and do something compelling, dramatic, and appropriately relevant. If that needs help from the GM, they can ask it; if the GM can facilitate it, then, they generally should. Often, though, it won't be the GM's help that's necessary to shake things up or break the target's stasis so much as just the specific cue that *the moment is now:*

That, as normal and appropriate as it may have been for them to flounder or freeze up or cling to an idea or mood or decision that was keeping them out of play up to that moment, *now* the call of adventure—or at least the call of the scene, the possibility of doing *something interesting*—has reached their inner self's ears.

Like closing out the scene, using a spotlight to nudge someone should be stated explicitly. It's not enough to just flash a card or declare the intention to spotlight the target; one should explicitly *call* it a "nudge" or *mention* that the point is to get the target unstuck. If possible—that is, whenever it makes sense and isn't super-awkward—one should also assist, or at least make contact, in some fashion, IC.

When a stuck PC is spotlighted, the target's player has the right to use one of their own spotlights on the action instead—basically, to say, "OK, that stirs me into action ... but that action is a big moment for me, or that stuck state was a big deal for me, so I want this to be a spotlight moment for my PC, and not yours." Players can also nudge

their own characters directly, but they need help to do so; someone *else* at the table must intervene IC, make contact IC, or at least express frustration that they can't think of a way to do so. (This "someone else" can be, and often is, the GM.) In both cases, this is a kind of storytelling; the minor rules exceptions attached to self-spotlighting have no particular game advantage attached.

Spotlighting someone who's stuck is generally recorded as a **Nudge** or a **Cuing action.** Spotlighting one's own PC is generally recorded as a **Dynamic action** instead.

Nudging and the GM

The nudge is probably the most important GM spotlight, and the spotlight the GM should try the hardest to keep in their active toolkit in play. Specifically, **GMs should try to remember to nudge the PCs when they get blocked into doing something not fun.**

If a PC talks themselves into staying somewhere where nothing is happening, or gets pressured into it by others; if they believe very firmly that doing something that isn't actually meaningful is the "right" move and need explicit GM intervention to convince them otherwise; if they're waiting for others to help them but those others won't come; if they think they need to characterize themselves by waiting until the game's narrative or spotlight pushes them into motion, but there's no *event* in the wings that will do so; if they're going in circles trying to decide what to do but in fact they really just need to do *something* ... all of these are cases where a GM spotlight can get the PC *out* of their box and back into play, or, rather, help the player justify getting them back into play to themselves.

Ultimately, taking action is the players' responsibility; it's not the GM's *job* to nudge a stuck character ... but it can be a very helpful idea.

Nudge (Spotlighting Someone Who's Stuck)

Condition: You notice that someone's frozen up. They're stuck. They can't move forward from here. Maybe emotion is overwhelming them. Maybe they've locked themselves into an idea or pattern that they can't easily snap out of. Maybe they're even physically paralyzed, blocked, or trapped. Whatever. The point is, they're stuck.

Action: Declare a **Nudge**, intervening IC if you can think of a suitable way.

"I realize I may be intruding," said the man in my kitchen, "but you've been living a confined and dolorous life, ever-repeating, ever-gray; and your world is all full of suffering; and I ... just don't think that it's deserved. Would you mind ever so terribly if I offered you a chance at something else?"

He was eating one of my oranges, I think. It was hard to tell. There were worlds and worlds and stars within his eyes.

—*from* NULL AND VOID #1: OPENING NIGHT, *by Janet Ross*

Example Nudges

The PCs are unable to rouse a despondent NPC from their doleful sulk. One of the players finds this kind of disappointing, rather than amusingly aggravating, and spends a spotlight (paired with an IC impassioned speech that would likely otherwise have been pointless) to try to shake them into motion.

Or, a tragic NPC is refusing to be rescued for abstract metaphysical reasons that the PCs can't really argue with—but a spotlighted moment, more or less, can.

Or, a PC is stuck waiting for an NPC that isn't going to show while the rest of the group is off doing interesting things somewhere else. The GM nudges that PC with a loud noise from a broken coffee machine. It's not clear that this would *normally* get them to leave instead of waving it off ... but since it's called out as a nudge, it startles the PC out of their waiting mode and they decide, a few minutes later, to leave.

Or, player A's PC is frozen up after being accused of murder. Player B spotlights them. In a moment of panic, the PC erases the investigating cops and runs! Player A decides this is definitely more *their* moment than B's, though ... so they retroactively substitute their own spotlight in.

PACING

In Creation, the flow of a character's experience is tied to the rhythm of the day. There's no hard and fast rule for how much in-world time a chapter represents; it varies with the situation, the characters, and the players—but there *is* a default, one that holds unless there's something about the PCs, the players, or (more commonly) about how events are flowing that shakes it up:

One chapter for the morning; one chapter for the afternoon; and one chapter for the night.

The GM typically introduces each chapter, e.g., with something like:

- **Morning:** "A new day dawns, and with it, a new chapter. What are you doing?"
- **Afternoon:** "The next chapter picks up after a refreshing [walk/lunch/whatever.]..."
- **Night:** "So, next chapter! It's time for a [terrifying/fun/bleak and lonely] night. Where is everybody?"

Sometimes it'll make sense to introduce a chapter in a radically different way, or to divide up the day differently, or to have just one or two chapters for a given day. After major events, it is sometimes worth skipping straight from the end of a chapter to a new morning days or weeks or even longer later on.

The default, though, is one chapter per morning, one per afternoon, and one per night. Each chapter is built around roughly two spotlight moments per PC. For instance, a player might take the following actions in a day:

- Morning:
  - the character shakes off the remnants of a dream, but the *player* spotlights it to find out what it was;

opposite: *by Elena Albanese*

  - the character drives out to a town in the countryside to meet an old friend; after going in and sitting down, their player realizes that the town and the diner they're having breakfast in is a little creepy/scary, declares an after-the-fact spotlight, and fades to black.
- Afternoon:
  - their old friend shows up at the diner—but doesn't recognize or remember them! The player spins their wheels for a bit before the GM nudges them. They stop spinning their wheels, claim the spotlight as their own, and decisively declare that they "must have been mistaken" about knowing them ... before going outside to lurk near the diner's entrance, secretly planning to follow their friend home from there and investigate!
  - as they follow their friend home, the GM describes the route as strange and dreamlike. The player finds this experience interesting and meaningful, and puts a spotlight on the ongoing action.
- Night:
  - later, the character meets with a county clerk, who talks about recent events and local strangeness. The player puts a spotlight on this ongoing action too; *and, finally,*
  - late at night, as they return unsatisfied to their motel, they find someone being accosted by monsters at a crossroads. That person was frozen in fear, but bolt when the character *nudges* them, yelling at them to run. There's a fight, too, but that's not important; what *matters* is that the player wanted to see them do more than just stand there frozen in fear, and they did, and that experience was thereby made to matter.

If the character's name was Valamir, this set of actions could be summarized in the game log as:

- **Reckoning (**Valamir - a dream)
- **Reaction** (Valamir – the town & diner are spooky!)
- **Dynamic Action** (Valamir – breaking off the conversation with Valamir's friend)
- **Attention** (Valamir – a strange and dreamlike route)
- **Attention** (Valamir – the county clerk's stories) *and*
- **Cuing Action/Nudge** (Valamir – the monsters' prey runs)

How to Use Chapters

Under normal circumstances, the number of spotlights used versus the number of spotlights that *can* be used is a rough guide to how much time has passed in a chapter. Obviously time doesn't jump forward during a scene just because a player uses a spotlight, and sometimes there are more pressing considerations that will slow the clock, speed it up, jump it forward, or even hop it back—but if three players have used four spotlights in a morning chapter, and someone asks the GM what time it is, the likely answer is, "a little over half the morning's gone." Or, if no one's used a spotlight yet, they might say, "the morning's pretty young."

The most important thing that can drive the clock to move a little faster is a player suffering for lack of spotlights. More specifically, when a player's been out of spotlights for a while, but their PC is having experiences that "feel" like the kind of thing a spotlight might show up in—they've become a central figure in the story, or are confronting personally important business, or are dealing with mysteries and things left unspoken, or are just off on their own having a bunch of *different* experiences—that's a signal to the group and the GM that the chapter should be drawing to its end. That means that the in-game clock should be moving on towards the boundary between morning and afternoon, afternoon and night, or night and morning; that the GM/group should be encouraging players who haven't used all their spotlights to use them up promptly; and that if those spotlights *don't* get used, the chapter will end soon nevertheless. If the other PCs have been sparing with their spotlights, that probably means that it'll be a 1-XP chapter; on the other hand, if everyone except for one player has used both spotlights, the GM should encourage them to use their last spotlight(s) soon ... and consider making it a 2-XP chapter anyway, if they do not.

The March of Time

On the other side of this, when nobody's spending spotlights *at all,* the game clock slows down. Sometimes that's a good thing—sometimes it's good pacing to have a languid interval. Sometimes that indolence, that molasses pace, allows the story to linger for a while on something great. The rest of the time, **it's part of the GM's job to bait out spotlights when they're running slow.** To leave things alluringly, tauntingly, or frustratingly blank, in a way that earns them an investigative spotlight—in a way that gets the players in the *habit* of spotlighting mysteries, so often that their other spotlight uses will become natural too. This isn't just a procedural matter, either; it's a key part of playing the world:

The world cares a very great deal about time, as players who have been living in it may have very well noticed. It accepts the possibility that now and again there will be long slow intervals or intense moments that never seem to end, but mostly, it likes to keep the days moving forward, *hour* slapping down after hour, in a brutal death march out to eternity. Honestly, one would think it had somewhere to get to.

... or, perhaps, that it had something to prove?

Beyond the World

Spotlighting experiences is specific to Creation. That doesn't mean that spotlights can't be *used* in the void; they can, and players still get two per chapter.

Rather, it means that the rules therein are different.

The void is a land of arising. Of becoming oneself, amidst dreams. What matters there will not be conscious experience or attention. Rather, the moments that matter, the defining moments of the self, will be the players' *choices.*

In waylets and the Beyond—in *Ninuan*—the fundamental building block of time is not the passing day or hour but the choices that define what each becomes. Accordingly, the spotlight there is not so much an investigative authority as a *power of action:*

In the Beyond, players can "spotlight" one of their own actions to increase its dramatic weight.

It remains possible to use the spotlight as an investigative authority—to spotlight a mystery, in particular; occasionally, an ongoing action; or, with the GM or group's explicit permission, for reaction shots or nudges, even as in Creation. This use, alas, is a dangerous thing:

When a character in the Beyond uses their spotlight to experience things, instead of increase the dramatic weight of their actions—that is, to spotlight the ongoing or the unknown; or, for reactions; or, for a nudge—**their bane and their infection may bleed into the void.**

SPOTLIGHTING THE DEFINITE

In the void, the standard use of spotlights is to highlight one's own character's most important and meaningful choices. The player's decision to use the spotlight represents a certain kind of will, dedication, and decisiveness on the part of their PC; it gives the action resonance.

In the void, and by the void, such an action will be remembered.

Each such spotlighted action *impresses* itself upon the emptiness. There, in the wild lands beyond the world, it is made by will and choice to matter; it is limned in silver: it is imprinted upon the memory of the timeless void.

Ideal form is to begin this use of spotlights with one or two sentences of explanation, and sometimes more, that focus on the character's thoughts, hopes, dreams, circumstances, and/or actions. This situates the choice within the context of the game and gives the GM a little advance warning ... but it need *not* come from the acting player, nor does it need to be IC—a short IC speech works; an OOC explanation does, as well; and if another player or the GM happens to have already *been* explaining that character's circumstances or thoughts, nothing more is required. Once the monologue/explanation is out of the way, the player declares the spotlight ... and acts.

Spotlighting an important and meaningful or daring choice is sometimes referred to, and generally recorded as, a **Decisive action.**

Examples

A PC seizes a mind-altering sacred weapon, declaring that it cannot and it *won't* subdue their will.

Or, after a few words on what it means to them, they claim a recently-met NPC as "family."

Or, their PC's path briefly obstructed by a passing creature of the Beyond, a player reflects OOC on how the ancient royalty of *Ninuan* wore red and black, and why, before their PC cuts the beast in half and walks through the newly-opened way.

Decisive Action (Spotlighting the Definite)

Condition: You're about to do something definite—something you want to treat as a big deal; something you can't easily take back.

Action: Briefly talk about why, unless someone else has already done that for you. Then, do it!

"This may be all the magic that my world has left," I say, fists balled. "But it's worth it, if there's a chance to save my friends."

"Uh—" says the wizard, and raises a finger. He is probably going to say something like, yes, definitely, use up all the magic that is left for this, that is a great idea. The enchantress and the fire sprite, how they'll nod their heads! But there's no need to speak it out, good sir! No need!

I fling the lever and the worldcore screams.

—from DANA'S JOURNEY, *by Melanie Tumbarius*

SPOTLIGHTING A TEST

Players may also spotlight an action whose outcome is unknown.

Since the natural outcome of a test, in the absence of all else, is the null hypothesis, the whiff, the failure, this can be seen as a kind of nudge to the GM: in spotlighting *this particular test,* the player is putting the weight of their character's story behind it. It can still fail, but there is more pressure on the GM to have it succeed, or, if not succeed, then fail in an interesting way—and with the assumption that it was at least in some sense worth the try.

Players will often spotlight a test when the GM asks them what they're looking for or doing in the void. The player explains what they're looking for, what they think they're doing, what they want to do. If this is something they obviously *can* do, they'll have the option to make a Decisive choice, or not to use a spotlight at all—but often, they'll move on to a theory, instead, and test it, spotlighting both that testing and its outcome. If it's *not* obvious that what they're doing is possible, in particular; if it's *not* clear that they can do it in the first place ... then what they'll spotlight is the "test" of their checking or trying:

Can I find a way into that valley? perhaps. Or, *If I look around, can I find a λ-place like I had thought to find?*

Spotlighting a test is also common when a player wonders how something works in the void, or when their PC is explaining something that they already know. That kind of scene can often wind up falling bland or dead if it *doesn't* spur the character to action, and specifically to action that's a little bit uncertain. So the player moves on to a theory, and a test, and spotlights that test:

Uncertain action is provided.

The final common use case for spotlighting a test is

when the player has an idea for something that "could" be true or "ought to" be true about the void. Coming up with a theory and a way to test it, and then spotlighting that test, can help them to test out the idea—of course—but more importantly, if it's something that they're hoping or needing to find *is* true, it puts the weight of their story behind it being so.

In full, the protocol for spotlighting a test begins with some level of explanation/monologue, as per spotlighting the definite; proceeds to a theory and a test; and, finally, concludes with a declared spotlight *on* that test.

Sometimes, spotlighting a test is simply called that (or spotlighting the untested; or just "using a spotlight.") Other times, if the character is consciously experimenting, they might call it a Science action; if they have faith in the results, they might call it a Faith action; and if they are trying to *cause* the void to be as they wish it to be *through* their action, it might be a Sorcery action—or, if they don't know exactly where they fall on the matter, they might just call it a **Science, Faith, and Sorcery action.** Regardless, it is generally recorded as the last.

Examples

Studying a monster of the void, theorizing that it's reachable, a PC tries to tame it with careful, honeyed words.

Or, realizing that there's a symbol on the mask of a mask-faced spirit, a PC comes up with the idea of replacing it with the Ninuanni glyph for "friend" to change the spirit's nature—and gives the idea a try!

Or, after a stressed-out internal monologue about whether or not it's safe, a PC decides to trust someone.

Or, after listening to the GM's description of a broken-down machine, a player theorizes that the secret word to activate it is "*Garēhsns*"—and their PC speaks.

Science, Faith, and Sorcery (Spotlighting a Test)

Condition: You're explaining or wondering how something works.

Action: Propose a theory. Test it!

It was an essential truth of Pengratian's being that he would one day kill the sun. One may understand the despair that gripped him when he understood that the task had already been accomplished:

For decades, he sat upon the stone floor of his tower crafting paper suns and then extinguishing them, drawing futile plans to set new suns in the sky—and then, to kill them, and generally being a downer and a mope. Finally, he brightened. He burst in on me, while I was otherwise engaged. He said, "Letitia! Letitia!"

I did not have occasion to respond.

"I have it!" he said. "Time travel!"

Then he was gone again, and swiftly, before I scarcely had begun to find a comment on his words.

—from Finalton: Pengratian's Tower, *by Grace Whitmore*

Implausible Tests

It's worth note that the "pressure" a spotlight exerts on a test—the increased likelihood of success, or interesting failure, that comes with the spotlight—is not a purely OOC phenomenon. Instead, it is an outgrowth of Ninuan's correlative continuity.

If something follows from a PC's story, if a theory *fits* into a PC's story, then naturally, in the portion of the void that they experience, it's at least a *plausible* theory.

No matter how *a priori* ridiculous ... plausible.

That doesn't mean it's *right;* just, that the starting point for every spotlighted test is always "this makes *some* sense; it could work."

If a PC wakes to find themselves being strangled, and they grope about in the scrub with a desperate hand, and their story says that they should find an absurdly powerful and ancient, eldritch weapon there ... well, shouldn't they? If their story says that feeding their own blood to some random λ-beast that they've encountered will tame it ... well, shouldn't it be such a beast as that would tame?

It isn't always that easy or that neat, because part of being a Strategist is accepting imperfection.

Their lives aren't symphonies of perfect synchronicity, because that's not what Strategists *are.*

... but, if a player is serious when spotlighting a test, then their efforts are, as noted, plausible. The GM shouldn't deny them the ancient eldritch weapon in the scrub on the grounds that "that's just vanishingly unlikely;" more likely, the character lost such a weapon, or heard of someone losing such a weapon, in just such a place as this, long before Creation ever was. It's *there*, quite possibly there; or, it *was* there, once; or, it's in a similar-looking or -feeling place somewhere elsewhere in the void; or, *something's* there, just not an ancient weapon, something that reminded them of the weapon that was lost. It's definitely not just *absent* based on the average ancient weapons per square meter to be found within the scrubland of the void. Similarly, the GM shouldn't deny the player that blood-based beast-taming idea on the grounds that λ-beasts "don't work that way," not unless they know for *certain* that they don't; if it fails, it's more likely to be due to the willpower of the beast, or a pollution in the character's blood, or some other factor that they've overlooked.

Spotlighting a test won't always give the character what they're looking for, in short, but it will always bring them to *at least* the starting line.

Spotlighting an Experience

As noted, players can spotlight an experience in the void even as they can in Creation—and, in particular, can spotlight mysteries and ongoing events. They'll do this the

same way and for pretty much the same reasons as they would within the world:

There's something they want to know more about. Something they *could* find out about: something that's in easy reach for exploration, or that they've directly witnessed. Only, whoever's in a position to explain it—normally, the GM—has, thus far, left the matter void.

So the player spotlights the matter; so, the GM (or whomever) explains—

... alas, that the Strategist is sick.

Sickness

The Not being the way it is, it's quite possible to miss things, even extremely obvious things, until they're directly observed. It is possible to live for months in a city of walking corpses without *realizing,* until one actually looks a passersby or neighbor in the face. It's unlikely but possible that if the character has not checked the sky, at any given moment, it is dripping venom; that if they have not checked the ground, that the ground is lava.

This can come to pass.

For the most part, it *doesn't*; it doesn't happen, or it doesn't matter, and so the possibility of such events can be ignored.

... but a spotlight increases the relevance of this effect.

When someone spotlights an experience in the void—when they use a spotlight for, basically, the kind of thing that it gets used for in Creation—then the target shouldn't *just* expand on the subject at hand in the way that seems most natural to them. They should take an extra moment to consider including (previously unnoticed) elements of the Strategist's Sphere in what the Strategist perceives, as well.[7] Further, the higher the Strategist's Infection rating (pg. 277), the more *likely* it should be that those elements should appear ... and the more likely they are to see their naked bane, unaccompanied by their Sphere, and outright manifestations of their *infection*, too.

In casual travel through the void, a Strategist dying of mustard is not exceptionally likely to encounter mustard. Nor will they always encounter evidence of their Sphere. ... but when they look *carefully,* when they shine a spotlight into the void, signs of their Sphere are generally found; any restaurant's condiment bar is likely to have mustard in it; and as their Infection rises, it's not just *restaurants* but newspaper stands, passing limousines, and eventually random patches of vegetation that will carry mustard in them, as well as creeping manifestations of whatever strange way that mustard kills.

It is difficult to mete this out precisely.

The GM is *not* expected to track all of the Strategists' exact Infection ratings and scientifically tune the results so that an Infection 4 Strategist suffers strictly more from this over time than their companion with Infection 2. They aren't even required to bring the Strategist's Sphere, bane, or infection into the narrative at all! And when a player provides exposition to another player, their obligation manages to be, somehow, even less.

... still, this is the concept for how a spotlighted experience works within the void; this is the baseline, the idea to which the expectation has been pegged:

That even at Infection 0, a Strategist spotlighting an experience is more likely to see their Sphere come up than they are when *not* spotlighting one; that, as their Infection rises, not only does that chance increase, and keep increasing, but first their naked bane and then their sickness too begin to manifest.

Spotlighting an experience is sometimes referred to, and generally logged as, a **Witness** action.

Examples

A PC with a fire-based Sphere tries to understand how a λ-village (dying though it may be) can survive *at all* by farming ancient demon bones. As they do so, ghost-fires flicker here and there amongst the demons' ribs.

Or, a PC dying of heart disease listens to the backstory of a cursed land or family that they've met. Their Sphere is tragic love stories, so the GM tries to work one in. If their Infection is high, the GM might also try to work *actual* heart disease in ... and, quite possibly, fail, because that kind of thing can be awkward when it doesn't slot immediately into place.

Or, a PC with a wolf-based Sphere studies the function of a machine in an ancient ruin. Most of the time, they'd just learn about the machine, and maybe the wolves that have been following them for a while now would howl in the distance. Every now and then, though, the GM might actually take advantage of a spotlight like that to have a wolf actually show up, or, e.g., have the machine turn out to *summon* malfunctioning metal wolves, or have the PC see a certain shade of red in the machine and lose their concentration, flashing back to a recent memory of a wolf pack tearing out their throat.

Witness (Spotlighting an Experience)

Condition: There's something happening you want to know more about.

Action: Ask for more from the GM or player. Your Sphere, bane, and even infection often leak into the answers.

Having no language, she spoke in blades. Languageless, she spoke in fire.

The world contrived to interpret it for him. It filled in words where there were only edges. It filled in phatic pauses where there were only burns. Ralph understood her; he grasped her meaning.

"Come quickly," she was saying; her hand reached for him:

... but his ears still bled.

— from {x-1}*, by Amelin Jarrell*

7 In the rare case where a Strategist is spotlighting a completed experience in the void, the target should consider *revising* what just happened to include an element or two of such a thing.

How Responsible is the Strategist for These Effects? How Much Does it Change the Void?

The phenomenon/curse that accompanies spotlighting experiences, where a Strategist's sickness arises in the focal points of their attention, comes in three intensities:

The first is **coincidental.** The Strategist sees their sickness in the void, but not because they *created* it there; rather, correlative continuity ensured that it would be there when they chose to look. Confirmation bias then makes this seem a more significant phenomenon than it actually is.

The second is **casual.** The Strategist's attention *impinges* on the void; it changes it. But the effects are not severe. If one construes the weighted description as a change in the void, that change may have a broad but phantasmagorical (pg. 250) effect, or it may be more substantive ... but focused and targeted sharply onto the Strategist themselves. It's never both forceful *and* widespread. In either case, it's somewhat temporary: a delirious, surreal, and ultimately *passing* phenomenon in the void.

The last is **inflicted.** If the Strategist actually *tries* to curse the void with their perception, or forcibly bring their Sphere, bane, or infection into prominence, then they may alter the Not in wanted and unwanted ways. The dramatic weight of the spotlight magnifies, and the Strategist is definitely responsible. Even then, they cannot see the Glitch itself into the void; only their own personal crisis, stripped of its moral character, comes through.

The effects of spotlighting an experience are coincidental or casual unless the Strategist brings the third level upon themselves or some intensifying phenomenon is in play. One such phenomenon is *spotlighting the wicked act,* as is shown below.

SPOTLIGHTING THE WICKED ACT

It is in committing sins against their nature—even more than in misusing their attention—that a Strategist bleeds their sickness into the void.

Formally, a "wicked" act—the kind of decisive action that, when spotlighted, *automatically* escalates the risk of damaging the void—always begins with something the character knows that they shouldn't do. It doesn't have to be bad from a player or an objective perspective. It usually *is* bad, because it's less intuitive for the player to label something as a wicked action if their character is about to be heroic, but this fundamentally isn't *about* objective moral standards. It's about the character's private rules. It's about a character's standing principle that this thing that they're going to do is something that they just *don't do*; or, the idea that *they themselves have* that this thing they're about to do is actually a vice.

They know it's wrong. They know they shouldn't.

... but they're going to do it anyway.

Usually there's a reason for that. Usually they've decided that it's OK *in this particular case.* Or *just this once.* That's fine; it's still a "wicked" act. If someone has a rule that they don't kill, but they decide that they're going to kill a mosquito anyway, because it's just a mosquito, that's still wicked. Only if their rule was *already* something like, "don't kill things that can feel it" or "don't kill people"—or if the mosquito just doesn't even *register* to them, like all the bacteria that even the most dedicated pacifist can't help but kill—will it be fine. If someone has a rule like "don't lie," and they're lying to save someone's life, or because it'll help them a lot and won't hurt anyone else that much, or because they don't know how to explain the truth, or because they're panicked, any reason, whatever, it's still wicked. If they have a rule like "don't lie unless it's to save a life or something," though, and that's what's going on, then they're in the clear.

Basically, a player can call an action that they're spotlighting "wicked" when their PC is being a hypocrite; when they're giving in to what they recognize as temptation; or when they're actively in the process of revising their internal rules.

One possible wicked act is to *consciously* use attention against the void—to actively spread the curse of one's infection, or force one's Sphere to the surface in the Not. If one uses attention alone to do so, staring one's illness into the void, then spotlighting experience and spotlighting the wicked overlap.

If that's *not* what the character is doing, though, then this action will still include a portion of that function:

Protocol for spotlighting the wicked *doesn't* require introductory exposition or monologuing, though it doesn't hurt. Instead, before or as the action is taken, the player declares it as wicked. When they do so, their character gets a free spotlight view of something in the void ... and their infection will almost certainly seep in.

This works exactly as per spotlighting an experience, save in two respects:

First, the GM generally decides for themselves what portion of the void they will describe further; it must be something the Strategist's attention would *naturally* drift across at some point as they prepare for their wicked act, but is not necessarily the first place the *player* would have thought to look to find their Sphere, bane, infection, or an event of interest.

Second, unlike the effects of spotlighting an experience, the Strategist is inherently *responsible* for the effects: there's no reason to privilege the possibility of coincidence. Either they don't see any meaningful or harmful intrusion by their sickness—they watch for it, perhaps, nervously, but it doesn't show—or they *do* see such an intrusion, and it's probably of the "casual" or the "inflicted" type.

If the impact on the void is going to be way out of proportion to the sin, then it's polite for the GM to warn the player; see *Turn Back! Turn Back!,* below. Strictly speaking, though, they don't have to. If a Strategist dying of swamps kills a mosquito that they shouldn't, the entire λ-city that they're in could drown. Perhaps the wall gives way to

rot as the mosquito bleeds against it, and then falls over; beyond it, swampwater might seep ever upwards onto the previously unwitnessed streets—and nothing need ever have suggested earlier that such lavish vengeance for such a small creature lay anywhere in wait.

Examples

A PC with a steampunk Sphere turns their back when a holy, beautiful, or innocent thing of the Beyond is being hurt. In the sky in the distance, clockwork turns.

Or, a PC with a shadow Sphere gives in to the blandishments of someone they know they shouldn't trust; shadows deepen in the room.

Or, a PC dying of lycanthropy uses **Greater Contagion.** They're dismayed to find that they've lost control over the effect: their target is afflicted ... but so is the mountain on which they stand: unfolding, stretching, great and horrid, lanky limbs and hungry peaks beneath the moon.

Pacing

In the void, the flow of a character's experience is unmoored from time. Play is still meted out in chapters, and each character may still use up to two spotlights per chapter, but a chapter can last anywhere from "a moment" to "several centuries" (or beyond). The core identity of each chapter is not a *duration* but a *situation*—an episode title, perhaps, although that title may wind up being assigned in retrospect—and the chapter lasts, loosely speaking, as long as that situation lasts.

The GM isn't *bound* by this model ... but, as a general rule, when it's about time for a chapter to wrap up, it's about time to wrap up the current situation in the void, or evolve it into something new through a miniature conclusion and complication, and *vice versa.*

Chapters in the void and chapters in Creation are meant to be roughly synchronous. Accordingly, *time* is not. It distorts. Whether a chapter in the void lasts for an instant, an hour, a day, a year, or a millennium, exactly one chapter's worth of time will have passed in Creation; no matter how much time passes *between* two chapters in Creation, which can be anything from "no time at all" to "a significant time skip," the next void chapter and the next Creational chapter will begin at corresponding times.

If a character goes into the void in the morning, and a hundred years later the chapter ends; and then the character spends ten years in the void as part of the next chapter but returns to Creation before the chapter is complete, they will almost certainly return the afternoon of the day they left. That's when it *would* have been, after all[8], if they'd never left Creation in the first place.

The void is not, in fact, bound to a single time stream, but rather to many. All characters participating in the same situation are on a roughly similar clock, but characters involved in unrelated situations elsewhere in the void need not be synchronized. That same morning, *another* character could go into the void, spend a week on the chapter, a week on another, and a couple hours on a third—and return that night, hours and hours *after* the character who'd spent much longer in a different portion of the Not.

For one character, perhaps, this was "the morning of the 25th," then "the afternoon," then "the night." For another, "the morning/my retreat to the mountains," followed by "a pilgrimage/the afternoon." For a third, it was "the morning/in which I explore strange forests," followed by "a visit to the sage of fountains," followed by "death of the wicker beast/the night."

Wicked Action (Spotlighting the Wicked Act)

Condition: You decide your character will bend or break a principle or indulge a vice.

Action: Ask the GM to talk about how your Sphere, bane, or infection are visible in the void around you. Then, carry out your decision.

The decisions of the past weeks piled on my shoulders. They ground me down. They left me with no choices. I didn't want to do this. I told myself— I promised myself. I didn't want to do this.

There wasn't some traitorous part of me— no.

It was just, I told myself: I wasn't going to make it. I wasn't good enough. I wasn't subtle enough. The others were fine, they weren't going to screw up here, but I was going to get us all caught. The Eyes of the Fallen Citadel were going to catch the train of my shadow or the dust of my trail and every last one of my friends here would die.

There wasn't any alternative; so I stood up. So I straightened. I stepped out into the light.

I couldn't sneak past them, so what choice had I? But to dazzle them down to silence with the use of my mother's name?

—from Beneath the Citadel, *by Dianna James*

Turn Back! Turn Back!

In the void, the GM may occasionally see fit to spell out the consequences of a spotlighted action before it is complete. They may do so IC, through omens, portents, and fey warnings, or they may do so OOC. The doom they warn of may potentially be uncertain or unclear—"if you do that, this could happen" or "if you do that, this thing will definitely happen, but what does that mean?" It can also be dead certain:

"If you do this, you will lose that hand, or, at least, spend 7 Wear (pg. 271) to save it."

If the GM provides such a warning, and it's explicitly foreshadowing—not a player-level heads-up, not purely IC

8 barring time skips

events or communication, but stuff thrown in there to *be* an ominous warning of where this path may lead—then the spotlighted player cannot proceed without encountering that doom. If it is certain, they must either accept it, or take damage (pg. 279) to prevent it when it arrives ... and that damage will generally skew high. If it is uncertain, they must accept that the circumstances that decide whether it *becomes* certain need not be completely within their control, nor "fair."

If they proceed anyway, knowing that this will be their fate, they earn +1 XP.

If they do not, and they were the one who used the spotlight, the spotlight itself is usually invalid, and they get it back. For instance, if a character "turns back" from spotlighting a Decisive choice, then they didn't make one—so the spotlight is, presumably, not spent.

There and Back again

The standard method of entering a waylet is to use a spotlight as if already there. If a character has located a waylet—has determined that one *is* in reach, figured out loosely "how" to get there, and overcome anything that would oppose their path—and the GM or group has given implicit or explicit assent to the idea that the waylet *is* in fact truly accessible, the player may use a spotlight premised upon the notion that their character is already within. The instant that spotlighted action, or the spotlight itself, requires/assumes the PC to be inside the waylet ... well, they *are*.

Thus, for instance, the standard method for entering a waylet to hunt down the arcana of one's Sphere (pg. 205) is to say something like, "All right, I'm off to the Samsaiwal Hlaine for some spline-sprites," and then figure out what action to spotlight to best kick that off. Perhaps a player will explain what their character is doing, starting at some part that they *know* that their PC can manage and then, when they hit a part they're not too sure of, coming up with a theory and testing it—and spotlighting that test.

Or, they could ask the GM for more details about some part of that particular waylet—and spotlight the mystery (or, more generally, the experience) to illuminate them.

If it seems right, and particularly if Samsaiwal Hlaine is already well-established in the game, they could even jump straight into spotlighting a definite or wicked action that they do within.

If the road to the waylet is obstructed or clouded and the GM feels the character cannot go there yet (or simply doesn't want to allow it), they can veto the whole thing, rejecting the idea that the character *does* have access to the waylet; if not, the character is already there, and the act proceeds.

Similarly, **the standard method of entering Creation from a waylet is to use a spotlight on something in Creation.** Essentially, the character gets explicit or implicit GM or group permission and then turns a spotlight on something that's going on somewhere within the waylet's reach. They are now implicitly in Creation; as soon as something happens for them to pay attention to, or someone responds to their presence, or the action otherwise requires their presence in the world ... they are.

Perhaps, for instance, the other PCs are investigating something interesting. The player spotlights that ongoing action—and, in so doing, implicitly places their character in a plausible nearby place to observe.

These rules apply only to the waylets; at the GM's option, one may pass either way through the gaps in the cup of flame with mundane or divine actions alone. If it is possible to travel directly between two waylets, that is also generally doable without a spotlight ... although a spotlight would, almost certainly, be of help. The last exception is travel to and from a character's native ground (or "sanctuary;") this is discussed immediately below.

Native ground

A Strategist's native ground or sanctum is generally considered to be a portion of the void—likely, existing within a waylet somewhere in the world.

That said, a few unusual rules therein apply.

First, certain Wyrd miracles (pg. 234, 240) allow for mundane entrance and exit from this sanctuary. It's likely *possible* to use a spotlight to exit from this sanctuary to the same general area, or to get there from *certain places* in the world and void, but Wyrd miracles paired with mundane actions will generally end up the default.

Second, the "bleed" from a Strategist's Sphere, bane, and infection when spotlighting experiences or taking a wicked action is generally subdued in a Strategist's "native ground." Specifically, **a Strategist cannot permanently harm their native ground with a spotlight unless doing so is their explicit intent.** Even temporary harm is unlikely. This does not protect their native ground from the action *itself*, just the spotlight—that is, if the Strategist sets fire to a native ground café, it may do permanent harm, but it won't do *more* harm because they dramatically spotlight that action ... *even though* the narrative weight of that action will increase.

I fell. I fell ... I think, forever.

—*from* Ten Thousand Steps in Flame, *by Fengmian Xu*

CHAPTER 9

Mundane and Magical Actions

For Pepin Rhaterin, erasure is effortless; communication, substantially harder.

—*from* A Pocket Guide to the Strategists, *by Raakel Koskela*

Introduction

A Strategist's mundane attribute, **Ability,** represents their access to human-level abilities—to the power to debate philosophy on the Internet; to shiver in the rain and cold; to feed the hungry, employ the lost, coax forth a child's smile; to bring great suffering onto others through unwise, short-sighted greed.

Ability ranges from 0-7, and costs three points per point. It's a bad bargain, weaker and more expensive than just about anything else a PC can get—but it's also one of the hardest things to live *without,* so a balance must be struck.

In play, Ability works on a "buy up to the target" or "pay the difference" system. It's tied to a ladder of possible actions with difficulty ranging from 0-12. To take one of these actions, a character needs [Ability ≥ its difficulty]. If they don't meet that mark, they can make up the difference by paying a **Cost**—normally, "Wear," short for Wear and Tear: the wear and tear on their body and mind that pushing themselves brings on.

For instance, an Ability 1 character can take an Ability 4 action ... if they take 3 (that is, 4 – 1) Wear.

Some of the key terms used in this chapter include:

- **(Base) Difficulty.** The **(base) difficulty** of a task is intrinsic in the effect. For instance, taking the Ability action "Steel" is difficulty 5.
- **Contest or Conflict.** It's called a contest or conflict when two characters take actions that are in direct opposition—they can't both succeed, or one's success directly diminishes the other's.
- **Everyday Actions.** Actions without specific game mechanics are called everyday actions.
- **"Greater" Actions.** Ability comes with nine effects, ranging in difficulty from 0-8, and a stronger, "greater" form of each of these effects, which has +4 difficulty. Thus, taking the Ability action "Greater Steel," a stronger form of the Steel action, is difficulty 9 [5+4].
- **Edge.** Sometimes one party in a contest has an inherent advantage. This is known as their Edge.
- **Tasks.** Actions that *could* be treated as everyday actions, because they're pretty ordinary, but which the GM has chosen to demand an Ability or other action for, are called tasks.
- **Wear.** The cost to the character's body and mind for taking strenuous action is known as Wear.

Ability

Ability is the raw and trained power of a character's body and mind. It's the mundane Trait that a character uses to get most things done:

Their basic life competence. Their functionality.

It's specifically limited to goal-directed behavior, which makes it an incomplete social tool. Stuff like etiquette and well-phrased words and getting along with others *does* fall under under Ability, but actually *connecting* to people is usually a matter of roleplaying. Persuasion and influence tend to be too unless the character is trained in a relevant skill.

Ability *also* specifically doesn't cover cinematic abilities or flashy magic. Characters who *know* magic can use a mundane action for the most work-a-day parts of it—such as laboriously drawing a ritual circle or professionally exorcising the occasional ghost—but impressive magic will be beyond them, as will be the more ridiculous stunts available to non-magical skills. Even the most "competent" person in the world can't do Hollywood hacking, shoot around corners, or call down lightning without three days of ritual magic and a sizable support staff; Strategists who *can* are not using Ability. They're using the Eide power, **Stunt** (pg. 168).

Outside of those restrictions, Ability is used for basically everything.

Driving is Ability. Fighting is Ability. Organizing and clipping coupons is Ability. Painting is Ability. Building computer systems is Ability. Cooking pancakes at a cheap restaurant needs Ability; staying on top of your bills requires Ability; espionage, arson, and assassination demand it too.

Ability does not specify the character's training or talents—that's part of the character's history. It only determines how well they can use what they've got. Some Strategists have studied every field of human endeavor and can bring that training (mostly) to bear with an Ability action; others only really know how to kill, and will have to pick up everything else on the way.

For player convenience, each level of Ability comes with a unique title and a non-binding description of what choosing that level says about a given character. These are:

- **Ability 0- Hopeless:** Ability 0 characters are barely even present.
- **Ability 1- Struggling:** Ability 1 characters are not ready for their life.
- **Ability 2- (a) Casual:** like a casual player in a videogame, someone with Ability 2 can *get through* their life, but they're not all that good at it.
- **Ability 3- Basic:** having Ability 3 means that a character can handle most things, but only at a basic level—they don't have a very high ceiling.
- **Ability 4- Professional:** Ability 4 characters are generally good at *something*, maybe even many things, but are rarely leaders.
- **Ability 5- Driven:** Ability 5 characters get stuff *done* ... but not necessarily all that efficiently.
- **Ability 6- Competent:** Ability 6 characters, on the other hand, are actually on top of things. And, finally,
- **Ability 7- Sparkling:** Ability 7 characters dance through their life in a state of flow.

These titles are, of course, purely for player convenience; neither Strategists or humans use them on any consistent basis, much less correctly.

Everyday Actions

Most actions that a character takes don't require Ability. These are the *everyday actions*. They are things that go by without note or rules, simply because the player describes them.

Walking. Talking. Eating. Drinking. Doing an average day's work. Even the hard stuff, sometimes—

As long as it's something that can go by without note in an average human's life, controlling for their specific circumstances and credentials, the player can usually just say that their character does it, and they do.

The need to actually expend effort is unpredictable. It is fundamentally *arbitrary*.

Sometimes, the world—the GM—just decides that things are hard. They turn a *default action*, a thing that a character can just describe, into a *task*.

Each Ability task has a certain level of difficulty. Normally, for GM-set tasks, the difficulty is 1-6.

The player will have the choice to provide an Ability action of that level, or, to fail. If the character's Ability is too low, they can still provide that Ability action and succeed, but it costs [difficulty – Ability] Wear. If they choose to fail, instead, their character usually *recovers* a point of Wear, down to a minimum of 0.

For example, a character with Ability 0 is "hopeless." Even keeping track of what's going on in the game is potentially too much for them. Most of the time, they can manage ... but now and then, the GM might say something like, "Hey, I need an Ability 3 Action if you're paying attention here." Then it will *cost* them 3 Wear to pay attention; or, they can tune out, and get a point of Wear back. Or the GM might say something like, "All right, Ability 1 actions for all the Strategists who've actually showered today. ... 5 if you don't

The gods of the world have no faith in us; if we should heal a wounded heart, they imagine we have blasted the wound with eldritch magic. If we should clean a room, that we have burnt away its filth. At one time I made mapo tofu for a Noble that had come to visit; "tasty," she assessed, "but I can't eat this. That you have infected it with the perverse heat of some unworldly thing is all too clear."

It was, perhaps, in that case, accurate, but there was no reason to presume.

—*from* The Jeremiad of the Draught, *by Malakai Mesmer*

opposite: *by Silvia Cucchi*

have a shower?" Then being clean will cost either 1 or 5 Wear, depending on the character's life circumstances ... or they can save some energy by skipping that for a day, and probably recover one point instead.

Ideally the GM will remember to impose tasks, but won't fill the whole game with them. Ideally, they'll spread them out equally among the PCs—particularly since characters can still get Wear by the player choosing to fail an action even when they could have succeeded for free.

... in the end, though, it really is arbitrary. That's the way of the world.

Rising to the Occasion

The player can also invoke Ability actions on their own initiative. They may do so as a kind of self-imposed task, e.g., deciding that the major organizational task their character wants to do needs an Ability 6 action even though it's *possible* they could have just declared it and slipped it by the GM. They may do so in order to provide an action to the rest of the system—

If they want to *add a numerical bonus* to their action with a miracle, or *contest* someone else's action, they can't do it with an everyday action; they need to take a formal action with Ability or some miraculous attribute.

It's also possible that they want to do *more* than just everyday things. The range of possible Ability difficulties extends to 12; past 6, these no longer involve doing the expected, but going above and beyond. For two examples, entering a flow state is difficulty 7; unlocking "hysterical strength" would be 11. Strategists may or may not have conscious access to this sort of thing—certainly, they're more likely to than a human—but players always have access to all levels of Ability as long as they're willing and able to spend the requisite Wear.

Professional Skills

Expertise actions (at difficulty 4; pg. 130) apply the character's professional expertise to a task.

In general, players decide on their own Strategist's backstory, and can give them as much expertise as they like. Do they know how to build an irrigation system? Ride a horse? Fly a plane? Manage a company? Bake a cake? Paint a portrait? Work safely with dangerous chemicals? It's probably all fine.

The player may wish to take a few moments during character creation to decide what their Strategist actually knows how to do.

The *default* is that a Strategist:

- has whatever skills fit their Eide (pg. 159);
- can ride a horse, if they have to;
- is okay, but not *great*, at a few skills suitable for their former lifestyle, like stealth and gunplay;
- is similarly sort of okay at wielding exorcism (pg. 135), the language of flowers (pg. 136), and the welken-law (pg. 136).

Being "okay, but not great" at something tends to give one's opponents an Edge. Being "rusty" (a common problem for Strategists whose backstories give them all *kinds* of skills) does so as well.

Some of the Strategist's skills are probably magical ones. When using Ability, magical skills scale down to the level of an appropriate, portable toolkit of mundane skills and gear. A sorcerer using Ability won't be blasting armies or summoning the leviathan; they'll be walking around in the lobby of their apartment building trying to find a place where their communication spells can get good reception. An exorcist won't be banishing cinematic, terrifying hauntings—they'll be removing ghosts that nobody can really prove were ever there in the first place, and which *they* can't really prove, afterwards, are gone. Magic, in short, is nowhere near *useless* when used with Ability, but it won't be dramatically more impressive than any other mortal skill—even given magic's inherent valence.

If a Strategist wants something more flashy, they should rely on a **Stunt** (pg. 168).

Rules for Ability

The "power source" for Ability is called **Wear**. A character begins the game with 40 points of Wear. This will rise as they invoke difficult mundane effects. It will fall both over the course of time and when it has harmful results.

Characters may invoke Ability effects with [difficulty ≤ Ability] for "free"—it costs no Wear.

Often a character will wish to go beyond that. Not only are higher-Ability actions a part of life even for lower-Ability Strategists: it is only by going beyond their base Ability that a Strategist can access the difficulty 8-12 Ability actions *at all.*

To use effects beyond their Ability, a Strategist must push themselves past their normal limits:

Must tire themselves out; run themselves ragged; force themselves to work in ways that they *don't*. In that fashion they can buy an effectively higher level of Ability, for a time.

The character names the Ability level they wish to emulate; the practical maximum, in the absence of a

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"Where did you learn to drive like that?"

"I have absolutely no idea how to drive," he said. "I am literally fooling the world right now into thinking we got here instead of dying in a fiery wreck."

"... wait, what?"

"I have no idea how to drive," he said, a little bit slower. "But I'm a whiz-bang heck of a magician."

"We ... died in a fiery wreck?"

"Look at me!" he said. He gestured up and down the front of him. "Why you'd ever let me get behind a wheel, well, I don't even know."

—*from* How I Met Myron Omega: Three Stories, *by Nidia Brunt*

An anonymous writer of clerihews
Once said, and I feel this is true:
A poet reaches the peak—not by scansion, and not by persistence—
But by erasing their rivals' existence.

—*from* The Only Clerihews in the World, Except Obviously for Bentley's and That One Over There (Which Doesn't Count), *by Angel Evans*

bidding war, is 12. They perform the effect. If the effect succeeds—which is to say, if it functions essentially as stated, rather than being blocked or undone outright by hostile countereffects—they accumulate Wear equal to [desired Ability – original Ability.] For instance, if a Casual with level 2 Ability wishes to take a level 6 action, they will, by default, accumulate 4 points of Wear. Put another way, the character adds +4 to their Wear total.

It's good to note, from time to time, what this Wear that the character is spending actually represents—the ways in which what the character is doing is bad for them as well as useful and productive—but it isn't required. More precisely, if it isn't established at the time of the action, it's assumed to be either be a subtle influence that eventually fades away or a dramatic one to be established at some later time.

Thus, a player whose character is dramatically reaching beyond their limits may choose to explain how, in doing so, they damage themselves; if the character is engaging in what they consider a fairly ordinary action, *even if the total amount of accumulated Wear is the same,* the player need not.

A character must always buy enough Wear to succeed at the basic effect. They can add more to win a conflict when and if they discover it to be necessary. This extra purchase generally takes a small percentage of the time it takes to do the action in the first place; that's not always relevant, but in a critical situation, it means that they can scale up their effort a bit too late.

Conceptually,

- An effect that costs 0 Wear is **instinctive**—it doesn't drain the character at all.
- Spending 1 Wear is still **fine**.
- Spending 2 Wear is **less fine.**
- Spending 3 Wear leaves them **shaky and exhausted.**
- A 4-7 Wear effect is **seriously depleting**—it can tap the character out for days.
- Anything beyond that is genuinely self-destructive.

Efficiency and the XP Bonus

The two most efficient numbers for spending are going to be 0, and 3:

0, because +0 costs nothing.

3, because **spending 3+ Wear at once earns an XP.**

A 3+ Wear action is a very rough action, from the PC's perspective. They're working hard, *pushing* hard. Thus, it's a milestone in their life. It's not a *huge* milestone, mind; it's not the kind of thing they'll necessarily remember a year or two later ... but it's at least as big a deal as a typical spotlight: on this day, at this moment, they attempted this task.

They can't stack up *more* XP by spending 6+, so the optimal numbers end there.

Wounds and Recovery

At the beginning of each chapter, Wear drops by one, to a minimum of 0.

Characters may also reduce Wear when it brings them to a crisis: when the player, or, at 80+ Wear, sometimes the GM, has an interesting idea for the harm or change the Wear might inflict on their character, and implements it as a "Wound." Superficial Wounds burn off 10 Wear, with no minimum; harmful ones, 25; metaphysically potent and transformative ones, 50. This isn't unlimited, though, even if the player would want it to be:

The character will suffer at most one such Wound per session—*counting* the Wounds from other, similar, Costs—and at most one 25+ Cost Wound in two consecutive sessions.

Characters may freely accumulate Wear until it hits 80; then, as noted, there are circumstances in which the GM may force a harmful crisis upon them. At 108—the number of pressure points in the human body—they may no longer spend Wear at all.

... after roughly 300 points of Wear have been poured into Wounds over the course of a character's life, they'll be too frayed, too broken, and too much worn down to function as a PC at all.

EXAMPLE

A character is a Professional, with **level 4** Ability. For this character, the chart looks like:

EFFECT TYPE	ACTION LEVELS
Instinctive (0 Wear)	Levels 0-4
Casual (1 Wear)	Level 5
Tiring (2 Wear)	Level 6
Exhausting (3 Wear)	Level 7
Depleting (4-7 Wear)	Levels 8-11
Self-Destructive (8+ Wear)	Level 12+

What the player probably memorizes is this:

Ability 0-4 is being a functional professional. This is free.

Unless the work is actively unpleasant, in which case I need Ability 5, and 1 Wear.

Or needs me to be meticulous, diligent, and organized, in which case it costs 2.

Or needs me to be inspired, in which case it costs 3 (and would earn an XP!).

Ability 8-11 is self-training, leadership, and my very best work. That stuff's really draining! ... and going beyond it to Ability 12, which costs 8 Wear, *basically* breaks my mind and body: the price, to make one of my high-end tricks repeatable.

Difficulty 0: Fail

When the GM explicitly asks for a level 1-6 Ability action, whether for something the GM assumes they want to do or for something the player just casually described doing, the player can opt to *fail* instead. Their character *doesn't* manage to do whatever it is, or at least not well ... but,[9] as discussed earlier, they recover a point of Wear, down to a minimum of 0.

Greater Fail (diff 4) allows a Strategist to declare something basically impossible for them. The player may also invoke this on their Strategist's behalf. This isn't really advantageous—the character doesn't recover a point of Wear, and may even *gain* some—but it does have the advantage of being able to actively oppose attempts to "make the Strategist feel better," "snap them out of it," "*prove* that they can do it," and the like.

Difficulty 1: Well-Met

Given adequate support systems, sleep, etcetera, the Strategist can more or less stay on top of the very basics of life and appear more or less together. For instance, **Well-Met** allows a Strategist with a good life situation to declare that they're personally presentable or that their home is clean. Strategists tend to look stylish and intense but they also tend to look like they've been run over by a truck while having four hangovers and a migraine; it's the latter that this action helps keep under control.

Greater Well-Met (diff 5) lets the Strategist stay on top of this stuff even when they don't really have the resources to do so. It's what they need to stay hydrated while being hunted; to maintain perfect hair despite sleeping on the streets.

Difficulty 2: Function

Function lets the Strategist pull themselves together and get some basic task done properly. The exact line between "basic" tasks and the professional/adult tasks below is for the GM to determine; roughly speaking, though, this level is for fundamentally everyday tasks that don't require specialized expertise. A Function task is typically at least somewhat consequential, but the GM may occasionally demand Function from a character in order to complete some random small thing without screwing it up or just failing to do it in the first place.

Greater Function (diff 6) is generally about having the time and mood to get things done *just right.* Because the focus is still just fairly basic tasks, this is generally gilding the lily: unless one is expecting foreign dignitaries, one doesn't *need* to set the table "just right" and fold the napkins into roses. Even when we're talking about investigating a legitimate threat at the local library, is it *really* worth building your own little catalog for possibly relevant articles or giving a full slideshow presentation on whatever you've found?

9 subject to a GM veto for use in cases where the failures begin to blur together

Difficulty 3: Focus

Focus allows the Strategist to be *present.* To not just kind of ... get distracted, drift off mentally, and fail to pay attention.

Greater Focus (diff 7) is a power of intense attention. This can influence, can *shape,* the more malleable portions of the world and void. It can also grant sharp insights or allow the character to maintain focus in extremely distracting and confusing situations.

Difficulty 4: Expertise

Expertise lets the Strategist apply functionality, focus, and professional expertise to a task that suits them—one that they're relatively comfortable doing. This action is specifically limited to the professional expertise that the character actually *has:* the player may reference fractional expertise picked up over time, or ask the GM/group to OK their Strategist knowing more about something than previously revealed, but basically, it's for doing things that they actually know how to do, and not things that they don't. It's for writers writing, bakers baking, singers singing, and fighters fighting, and not, e.g., for any other way around.

Greater Expertise (diff 8) lets the Strategist produce stunning but ultimately conventional work, in the fields of work that suit them, with the kinds of skills they know. For athletes, for instance, this is enough to win a bronze or silver medal at the Olympics, but not enough to shatter a world record, and probably not even quite enough for a gold. For scientists, it's enough to release an impressive paper but not enough to reshape the modern understanding of the world.

Difficulty 5: Steel

Steel lets the Strategist nerve themselves to perform and engage with inherently unpleasant tasks or tasks which they're just not very well-suited for. It's also what lets them persevere past unpleasant conditions to complete pleasant/rewarding tasks.

Greater Steel (diff 9) allows the Strategist to break past their limitations. It's what's necessary for stunning work that fits the Strategist's skill set but is way out of their comfort zone, as well as for pushing on despite injury and doing just a bit more than they can possibly do.

Difficulty 6: Organization

Organization lets the Strategist bring mindfulness, diligence, and organization to the table. It's usually the highest level the Strategist will ever need to tackle the responsibilities of adult, independent, and professional life. Ultimately, which tasks actually *need* Organization is somewhat subjective, principally decided in play by the GM picking certain tasks to ask for a level 6 action for and by the player picking certain tasks for which to volunteer one.

Greater Organization (diff 10) is used to weather major life transitions; for leadership; and for the kind of awe-inspiring competence that has all the details *handled.*

These tasks tend to blur together at the edges; still, when tackling more than one of them at once, or when tackling them while *also* doing something amazing (see **Greater Expertise/Steel**), this action tends to devour more time.

Difficulty 7: Flow

Flow lets the Strategist reach a flow state—to be at, or slightly beyond, their personal best. At this level, they're still *them*, so the peak of what they can accomplish, in the big picture, is only a few standard deviations above where they usually hang out ... but everything's aligned, everything's smooth, it all fits together, it *works*.

Greater Flow (diff 11) gives rise to legendary professional achievements at or past the peak of what's been done before. It's also useful for unlocking the sealed and hidden resources of the Strategist's mind and body, from sharpened senses to hysterical strength to completely shutting out the sense of pain. If it's the kind of thing that a person like the Strategist can possibly achieve, a level 11 Ability action can achieve it.

Difficulty 8: Study Up

By practicing in the background for a few days, or in three moments of intense study that their player chooses to spotlight, **Study Up** lets a Strategist pick up the basics of a new non-magical professional skill or a special trick for a skill that they already have. They can learn to drive, learn to read Sumerian, or learn how to quickly do cube roots in their head. An acquired technique like this is "stored" in a quest slot (pg. 316)—as long as they keep it around, they can't also use that slot for a quest, and conversely, if they actually have five quests running, they don't have the brain space available to learn something new.

Greater Study Up (diff 12) works in much the same way, but they can also learn magical skills or memorize relatively specific level 8-11 Ability effects as repeatable "tricks." Once memorized, the new tricks fall under the Strategist's baseline professional expertise—they can, e.g., *maintain* peak professional performance, or trigger hysterical strength *on command*. Actually using the new skill or effect is generally an Ability 4 action, but can range from 1-6 as best fits.

On Technique

In addition to their Ability, every Strategist has access to a cinematic **Technique**—a personal methodology, falling within their Eide, by which they have dreamt themselves as solving problems in the world. It is their particular genius; it is their illimitable talent:

They address the world *with magic,* or *with cleverness*; *with brutality,* or *with guile;* with *common sense,* or *with science*; *with psychic powers,* perhaps, or *with some consummate version of a mortal skill*—as *a great historian, a great merchant prince,* or *the greatest tamer of beasts.*

A Strategist's Technique should allow for broad application. If you visualize a Strategist solving problems by throwing the apples of the void at them, their Technique is not "throwing apples"—that may leave the player unable to come up with anything at a time when the Strategist ought to have a plan. A better concept is "using Ninuan's plants and their strange properties;" if throwing an apple always suffices, that option will still remain.

> *In reflexes; speed; in sheer grasp of motion, Lampridius Ansamen is comparable even to the Powers.*
>
> —*from* A Pocket Guide to the Strategists, *by Raakel Koskela*

To *access* a Strategist's Technique relies on miracles of Eide—the **Stunt** and **Greater Stunt** abilities, below.

In *use*, however, their Technique is functionally mundane. A human may contend against cinematic guile. A modern trader may fight, and lose, but hope to win, against the Eide of a merchant prince. An athlete, even without the powers of the Nobilis, may dodge a fiery spell. Thus, Stunts and Greater Stunts are sometimes defeated in mundane contests; conversely, if the wording permits, they will often ignore Wards against miraculous power.

A Technique generally grants 3 Edge (pg. 150). However, it may be less than that when a character is new to their Technique—e.g., a PC with amnesia or an NPC granted power by a miracle. In such cases, the Edge granted by a Technique will begin at 0-1 and rise to 3 only with sufficient practice.

In many cases, Techniques will have a Cost in "Stilling" (pg. 271)—their use changes the character, or, calcifies them further in who they are. Sufficient Stilling, like sufficient Wear, eventually manifests as a sort of death.

Stunts

Stunts for a "non-magical" Technique offer the kind of abilities you'd expect of a movie protagonist in a stylized but not fantastic genre. Put another way, the options won't be limited so much by what's *realistic* as by what doesn't *actively* break verisimilitude. What's neat instead of weird? What's probably impossible, if you think about it, but still *feels* like something a human can get away with, anyway?

Stunts for an inherently magical Technique are comparable—the character has *magic,* and it's stylized and cinematic, but it's not world-shaking. It's low-fantasy magic, roughly granting the same level of *competence* as cinematic levels of a mortal skill. Earthquake magic isn't knocking cities down; it's knocking down shelves, boosted jumps, and maybe tumbling small buildings *if* the character stands there with their hands pressed against the walls for five or ten minutes while the shaking grows. Reality editing isn't spawning worlds with a thought; it's closing a cupboard on three mugs and opening it to find four, shaving off a bit of travel time, and ensuring that a cable installation actually goes well.

Both kinds of **Stunts** also allow the Strategist to *bring their Technique into play* in a cinematic fashion. That is,

even a Technique that would normally be dependent on the GM providing proper tools and the player having proper inspiration becomes less so in practice. A Technique like "common sense" or "cleverness" is implicitly bolstered by availability of the necessary fortuitous coincidences and options:

The Technique is never, e.g., *just* common sense, or *just* cleverness, but also the option to use such things practicably. The power to have the script of the world *written,* to a certain extent, to play that Technique up.

Greater Stunts

Greater Stunts are available at a higher cost, or with a higher Eide. The step from stunt to greater stunt isn't as dramatic as the step from Ability to Technique; greater stunts are still fundamentally in the class of cinematic or low fantasy abilities ... but they're closer to what gets pulled off at the *most intense moment* in a movie or a book, or after the most setup, or by an antagonist working in the background, than they are to the standard pick-a-page or pick-a-scene accomplishments of the movie/book's protagonist. A greater stunt, in short, is something from the jawdropping *end* of the cinematic/low-fantasy pool. Thus, if Ability-based beast taming can show off a falcon on a late night talk show, and *stunt*-based beast taming would let someone just kind of take their pet panther on a leashless stroll through the city without major incident, a *greater stunt* is what would let them ride into town with a herd of elephants ... and still have it all under control.

Bonus Techniques

Strategists may buy additional Techniques through Bonds (pg. 259). Certain powers (e.g., **Glorification** and **Infusion**) allow them to grant themselves or an NPC temporary Techniques in play. These "bonus" Techniques are the same strength as, but traditionally much narrower than, a Strategist's base Technique—if the base Technique is a toolkit with which to face the world, then any bonus Techniques are closer to being "superpowers."

Functionally, **PCs and NPC Strategists use Techniques through Eide,** including any additional ones**.** The higher their Eide, the better they are at using imposed or granted powers without being changed or re-defined by them. Mimics, who also have access to the Eide attribute (pg. 409), use any bonus Techniques a Strategist may grant them in exactly the same way.

Other NPCs use any Techniques that they are granted through Ability.[10]

Roughly speaking, when an NPC has a Technique, they may use the rough equivalent of a stunt with an appropriate Ability action and the rough equivalent of a greater stunt with an appropriate "greater" Ability action.[11] Conceptually, this also gives them access to the Stilling Cost, and their Stilling will rise as they use this power (roughly granting +2 Stilling for a stunt and +6 for a greater stunt) ... or, if they already have a Stilling-like Cost, they'll take *that,* instead. The GM is not, however, expected to keep careful track of NPC Costs, and "death" by Stilling is ambiguous from the outside, so this is all more in the way of concepts than of rules.[12]

If the target of a Technique-granting power is inanimate or has compromised volition, their Technique may be used *by others*, using *that other person's* Ability. That is, others take enhanced Ability actions for or through them, using their own Ability and Wear. It's still the target that takes the notional Stilling, not the person *using* the target, so a Strategist taking advantage of someone else's power uses Ability and not Eide.

As noted, it is normal for the Edge granted by a bonus Technique to start at 1 (or even 0) and rise to 3 only with practice.

Extraordinary Techniques

A few "extraordinary" powers (pg. 248) may grant extraordinary bonus Techniques. These shift in genre from cinematic/low-fantasy to superheroic/mythic.

The rule of thumb here is that *granting* the Technique should be a city- or region-shaking act; that's what it means that the power is extraordinary. Individual *uses* of the Technique, though, are probably well below that standard. Boiling it down, such Techniques are probably comparable to the power of a wizard, monster, or superhero in a setting where those are rare and special ... but not quite *shocking*.

As you'll see on pg. 248, with a high enough price, this kind of gesture can be strengthened, and such a power can grant an *epic* bonus Technique instead. *This* is potentially a *world*-shaking or even *worlds*-shaking act ... although, again, each individual *use* of the Technique is likely to be rather less so. Here, we're talking about investing power comparable to that of the truly *great* mages, monsters, heroes, and mythic beings in the worlds that allow such beings to exist.

It's worth note that even an Ability 11 action with an epic Technique is still a mundane action; in direct conflict with even the simplest of miracles, the works of archmages and cosmic heroes will be snuffed out.

Example

Radegond Gethiran's Technique is magical chalk art. Her stunts are things like amazingly quick and realistic

10 The GM may optionally allow certain NPCs to enhance or use their Techniques through the GM-defined, NPC-only attributes Aspect (pg. 395), Holy (pg. 397), or Monstrous (pg. 401); players generally shouldn't worry about this, though, and the GM doesn't need to implement it if it makes things harder instead of easier on themselves.

11 The word "appropriate" is meant to be the check on just using the cheapest possible actions to invoke these stunts.

12 More specifically, it's a way to keep imbued powers from being *better* than the Strategist's own abilities if someone plays a non-Strategist PC, e.g., with homemade rules or rules that are later released.

drawings with emotional or mind-altering effects. Her greater stunts blur the boundary between reality and art or allow her drawings to complete themselves.

Later, someone infuses her with a fire spirit. Now her Technique is "magical chalk art, and also, a fire aura." She now has access to stunts like burning a sheaf of documents with a snap of her fingers and greater stunts like being an unapproachable inferno during a battle of some sort.

Even later, she grants a chalk image she's fallen in love with the power to come to life. It can, perhaps, animate itself with an Ability 2 action, or become "human" with an Ability 9 action[13]—notionally spending +2 or +6 Stilling, respectively, to activate the power, in addition to the normal cost in Wear. The GM may rule that Radegond herself has to get the process started, with the chalk image being completely inanimate until *someone else* brings it to life; in that case, the Ability action would be Radegond's, but the Stilling would still go to the drawing itself. Radegond herself won't become any more defined, nor will she break her definition, no matter what that chalk drawing does!

If Radegond wanted to offer an extraordinary version of that power, the chalk person would emerge into the world as a potent magical being and not merely "a human, who was once chalk." They would have an innate Technique, perhaps, involving turning other things into chalk and back, or redrawing portions of themselves, or bringing "the chalk world out"—something of that sort. The extraordinary version of this empowerment would be the same thing every time.

The *epic* version is presumably how you get chalk-*kaiju* drowning entire cities in chalk dust and distorting the fundamental perspective of the world.

ON AMBIGUITY

It is not in the Excrucians' nature to be wholly defined.

This begins with the species—with *what they actually look like.* This seems very clear, until you look at them closely; then, for some, it starts to get a little complex. A few of them genuinely *do* look human, save for the pallor and the eyes, and continue to look human even when they walk among giants or alfar. A few of them genuinely do look like, well, something else.

... but most of them are missing something. Something ... key.

They look human not just because humans resemble Excrucians, but because the key signifier of their species is missing. They look human because it's not actually *clear what* they are except *people* ... and humans are the kind of people that humans expect.

The living clothes of Dionyl'll look at an Excrucian, though, and most of the time they'll see a suit of living clothes.

The alfar, they'll tend to see alfar.

Talking goats? Well, they'd probably see talking goats.

That's the kind of people *they'd* expect, on *their* worlds, to see.

There's something similar going on with Excrucian language (pg. 286). If an Excrucian wants to be understood, they're usually going to be understood. People see an Excrucian talking to them, they *hear* an Excrucian talking to them, and they usually just assume that they *will* understand.

... and the next thing you know, people do.

If a person's talking to an Excrucian, and thinks *they'll* understand *them*—the same thing happens, the other way around.

Usually it stops there, with species and language ... but it doesn't have to. An Excrucian doesn't *have* to have a defined hair color, age, height, or sex. Even more abstract things, like, e.g., whether you know them, can be left entirely ambiguous. That wouldn't mean that everyone just assumed that they *did* know them, of course; it would mean, they'd assume whatever made the most sense.

Here's how this all works in practice.

It takes **Focus** to notice that some part of an Excrucian's identity has been left undefined. Anyone who just casually checks without a formal level 3+ task won't be able to tell. They'll see what they're looking for—in essence—instead.

Someone aware of an ambiguity may impose a specific alternative through the force of their attention. Thus, a hairdresser wanting to dye an Excrucian's ambiguously-colored hair might forcefully *observe* it to be white, and thus easier to dye—or, if they're a little more on the ball, simply see *the color they want to dye* into the hair. This is a **Greater Focus** action (or possibly something a little harder, depending on the circumstances.) Once complete, the ambiguity is resolved, and no longer present—even people who *thought* the Strategist's hair was a specific and alternate color will now see the "true" color imposed. Such a resolution is, however, not permanent:

The targeted Excrucian can terminate it at the end of any scene, at the end of the observer's action, or at any time when they're concealed from everyone actively paying attention to them; it ends automatically at the end of the next chapter; and it can be "re-evaluated" with another, similarly effortful act.

Note that an Excrucian may resolve their own ambiguity.

Occasionally an Excrucian will have a feature that is incomprehensible rather than ambiguous—e.g., a hair color that does not, and *cannot*, exist within the world. Functionally, this is ambiguous, save that spotting

Niketas is very grand at every meal. "Order what you like!" he says. "I am quite rich, you know." But when the check comes, he gets this expression. Say it along with me, kids. THAT expression:

"Ah! My funds are not denumerable in the currencies of this world."

— posted to Tooth and Flame, *by Bea Davenport, 6/08/16*

13 The GM could have picked a different task difficulty, but "this needs **Greater Steel**" is the one that they chose.

it is harder—requiring at least **Greater Focus**—and manipulating it, resolving the ambiguity, is all but impossible. (The GM may allow someone with a good plan or a relevant magic to succeed.) An example of this is speaking Ninuanni:

If a Strategist is speaking an unspecified language, or a mortal language, and just expecting other people to understand, it only takes **Focus** to catch them out at it—but if they're speaking the native language of the void, it takes **Greater Focus** to realize, and "forcing" that language to be French or Chinese instead is an all but impossible act.

Characters may gain or lose ambiguity as a consequence of their Wounds (pg. 272).

ON MAGIC

When **Glitch** speaks of magic and magical actions, we're talking about a category of effects between the mundane and the miraculous.

From a rules perspective, this stuff is still mundane actions.

Humans do magic. *Beasts* do magic. Strategists can do it, too ... but ultimately, *magic* is a method used by mortal creatures, bound within causality and time. Before true miracles, the "magic" of the world is nothing more than a candle in the wind or a sand-castle in the tide: bright and deep and full of nuance but as futile as a toy.

From a human perspective, though—

It's something amazing. Magic offers a slew of fantastical powers, things that just aren't possible. Things out of dreaming and storybooks.

It's critical to remember that using magic really *is* just another mundane action as far as the high-end powers like miracles and Rites are concerned—to remember that unless a miracle says otherwise, it treats magical and non-magical mundane actions exactly the same. A power that enhances a mundane action can enhance a magical one. An effect that can blast away a mundane wall can get rid of a magical wall too.

It's all one thing. It's all ... the world.

There are a few scant differences besides magic's scarcity. Many Strategists have powers with player-defined elements ... so, while the *default* Strategist treats magic much the same as science, a *particular* Strategist might be much more facile with, or against, one or the other. The Nobilis are notably poor with magic, though only compared to their ability to perfect every other mortal skill; they are, in short, paragons of Ability, not Technique. Angels, conversely—and specifically Angels, though the other law-beings may dabble—can easily reach the peak of mastery in any given magical art.

It's fine to come up with unique or stereotypical magical arts, to give a new PC or NPC the magic system you dreamt about a few nights ago or something classic like wind magic, music magic, or necromancy. The *most common* magics in the setting are somewhat more particular; many of these will be described in depth below.

Unless they're in a hurry, **players should not think in terms of picking a Technique from the list of magics soon to follow.** They're all acceptable bonus Techniques, and if one expands the competence base a bit and errs towards the strong side, many become functional base Techniques—but that's not what the descriptions here are *for.* They're here to give a sense of what the world's most common magical arts are like ... and nothing more. It's possible, and even common, that a Technique might include several forms of magic, or part of several forms of magic, or a form of magic and something else.

A Note on Artifact Creation

Characters can use magic to create many wondrous things, and those wondrous things can stick around for a fair while. If the character wants to keep an artifact indefinitely, however, their player must first claim it as a Treasure or as part of a collection of Treasures (pg. 182). Players whose characters are driven to keep everything they create may therefore want to slow their production rate below what the GM would otherwise allow; otherwise, the Cost of such acquisitions may prove ruinous (again, pg. 182).

Advanced (Science)

There's science out there that's still in a deuterocanonical state—principles and subtle laws that the prosaic world is *probably* going with, but hasn't fully *committed* to yet. It's already fully implemented in certain futuristic Chancels, and in certain waylets and lacunae it can be *defined* as correct ... but there are other possible futures where the details aren't quite the same.

Even before they're formally "true," and even though they might yet prove false, the world will usually allow devices built using suchlike principles to function. Thus, "(advanced) science:" a character with this form of magic can create, understand, and innovate in some deuterocanonical scientific field, becoming an engineer, scientist, or practitioner. With stunts, a character can use this kind of science (mostly reliably) everywhere in Creation; if the character is using Ability and mundane knowledge, they're limited to doing research, construction, and repair in specific, appropriate places ... but the *products* of their work will still generally work worldwide.

For the most part, characters practicing this art train in a (specific) hypothetical 22nd–23rd century science, assuming

After a while, I realized that I could feel my legs again. After a while, I realized that I could move. I could think. The haze of pain was gone.

I cracked dry lips.

"You need to market this," I said. I rolled my tongue, tasting the memory of the pill. "You need— the drug companies. Emergency rooms. They need this."

"You forget:" the Excrucian said. "I don't like people."

—from My Pet Monster (Janice/Engeram)*, by Diane Drees*

continued innovation with no unexpected unsolvable problems, civilization collapses, or Singularities; they learn, e.g., advanced biotechnology, metallurgy, robotics, or psychiatry. Options with a softer science fiction twist, like "dimensional science" or "psionic technology," may be available at the relevant player or GM's option.

Thought-Record Technology

A few Excrucians have made a study of the practical use and subversion of Nobles' "thought-record" technology, through which a handful of Nobles and their servants transcribe their thoughts in real-time to recording devices located elsewhere in the world. In practice, this technology is an Advanced Science like any other; it is given its own rubric here only because it's not a 22nd–23rd century advance upon an *existing* scientific field and also not a well-established science fiction staple.

Alchemy

Alchemy is the art of unlocking hidden qualities within the substances of Creation. The "essential insight" that awakens alchemy is supernal; one cannot attain it without the assistance of magic, miracle, or the void. Once it has been awakened, though, this is an ordinary skill.

In practice, alchemists perform elemental transmutation and infuse artifacts, unguents, trinkets, and medicines with wondrous essences. It takes stunts or a great deal of time to produce anything qualitatively superior to a material scientist or biochemist's work; greater artifacts are the work of greater stunts or a lifetime, and may need refinement over the course of multiple experiments in either case.

Conjury

Conjury is an eclectic hodge-podge of different magical techniques gathered under a single umbrella; it features the ability to substitute a highly portable incantation/gesture and effort of will for almost any technological solution as well as "spirit magic" (such as summoning demons or the dead).

As a general rule, conjury techniques are magical because they are *illicit*. The art draws its power from an accumulated detritus of conceptual edges scattered through the world: from orphaned bits of Imperial will; from bumps where natural law has been disrupted by the Glitch; from things that have been forbidden or forever lost but not entirely vanished from the world. The law-being that governs Conjury acts as a kind of garbage collector for the flotsam and the jetsam of the real and weaves it together into a coherent *thing* ... but also sequesters it away, declaring it occulted, hidden, and befogged; naming it, most importantly of all, a thing that *people should not do*, or, at least, that *should not be done.*

It generally takes stunts to realize the full potential of this art; mortal practitioners generally only know how to do three or four specific tricks, and they're often less effective (where it exists) than just using the equivalent technology.

For just $4 a day you too can learn the ancient Daoist art of "Ghost Punch."

Never let extranormal pugilists intimidate you again!

—from an advertisement in Ketsuban!

Exorcism

The art of exorcism is an art of *attention.* It is the power of subjective experience and the will to constrain the ambivalently real. The techniques here are generally generic ones—the same magic circles that can bind a ghost can also trap an intrusive thought; the same blood sacrifice that lets one wrestle poltergeists will capture incompletely-manifested dimensional travelers, as well.

Most Strategists have a rudimentary grounding in Exorcism from their time as warriors of the host. This lets them use Ability to deal with the intangible. The effects are, however, somewhat limited without Technique—

Ability-based exorcism is best at handling ghosts that one is never sure were really there at all, and can only do so much against more potent haunts.

Faery Magic

To wield faery magic is to unfix truth; to paint dream, uncertainty, and sophistry onto the surface of the world—and then propose an alternate existence. The substance of this work is *glamour,* and the deeper secret of this art is its creation:

A mortal practitioner must labor effortfully to harvest gossamer uncertainty from ambiguous moments or gather it from fields and fluxes in lacunae, waylets, certain Chancels, and the Beyond. A Strategist with an appropriate Technique may pull it out of nothing and quickly shape it into form ...

But in truth, once the world is unfixed with glamour, it does not *require* faery magic to transform it; the adept will be faster and surer, but even a mortal can use attention—**Greater Focus**—to give new form to a formless world.

Formation Magic

In places where Creation is weak, where Ninuan's *way-of-life* slips through, one may work magics drawing upon the deep structure of the void. For instance, formation magic:

Eventually, Sam's manager caught on to the illusory formation: realized that Sam was not, in fact, working diligently whenever he walked by; that, in fact, that he had no way to determine if Sam was even there at all at any given time ... but this did not discourage him. It, in fact, incited him. Sam was not fired. He was, rather, promoted:

"Listen," Mr. Serafin said fervently, "you have to understand the possibilities. Our product is not our product, Sam; it is the market share. It itself is an illusion, and we need you."

—from The Life and Times of Entality Inc., *by Janice Black*

the art of constructing large-scale magical symbols to various occult effects. Most often, these are continuous area-effect spells that target the location where the formation is set up; more rarely, they gather energy in that region to launch singular or repeated spells against something else. The art of formation magic is generally used to build automated magical defenses, either subtle or blatant; to provide various enhancement effects to an area; and to sustain real or illusory pocket worlds. The art is laborious and slow—a work somewhere between architecture and geometry, with a hint of civil engineering; stunts are required to use formation magic without extensive project planning, and even then, it's still among the slower arts.

Language of Flowers, the

When a miracle is used, its use leaves scars or marks upon the world. This is true for Nobles and Excrucians alike. The greater the miracle—and more specifically, the greater its *Cost* (pg. 267)—the more vivid, and the longer-lasting, is the mark. It's an abstract thing rather than a physical one; it is attention to the subtle, not direct sensory perception, that brings the vision of it forth. But it is there.

To muddle this, the Nobilis have taken up the practice of associating themselves with symbolic "Designs," often using the symbology of paired flowers (but sometimes Tarot cards, gemstones, or other symbolic objects). Not only does this substantively confuse the traces of their miracles—turning, e.g.,"the Power of War made the people of this town more warlike here" into "blood and groaning; an achillea rustles, its petals scattering in the breeze;" or "the Power of Contradiction pushed themselves beyond their physical limits, here" into "the Hanged Man, self-inverting"—but those who know a Noble's Design may communicate with them from afar.

No aspect of this is specific to the Nobilis; **most Excrucians have trained in this to the extent of being able to communicate with a handful of Nobilis and read the signs of miracles.** Those with more intensive training may have a crude, simplistic Design to call their own. Characters with Techniques that touch upon this field may be able to properly interpret Design-muddled traces, conceal their own powers well, and dig up older traces with their stunts; a greater stunt (in addition to doing all of the above, but better) allows a Noble-quality Design.

The cell was dark and damp and I was left alone as the sun sank behind the hills. Night closed around me and hid the subtle shape of chains and stone; outside, a chorus of the frogs.

For a moment, I forgot the straits that I was in. For a moment, I thought that I was in my bedroom again—my old childhood bedroom, breathing, quiet, in the dark, with my sister across from me, in the other bed.

"Samantha," I asked her softly. "—are you there?"

"Always, Ellie," she said. I heard her hair drag against her pillow. I heard her bed creaking upon its springs. I heard her breathe. "I am always here. It is you who leave."

—*from* The Hand Between The Light and Interstice, *by Lyda Jamison*

Night-Craft, the

The night-craft is the art of reifying the psychic wounds within the world. The sea of unreason on which this power draws is a draught of infinite variety, but the nightmare that manifests is somewhat particular—

One may say, the anxieties of the world are limitless, but its neuroses are constrained.

To the practitioners of the Night-Craft, blood and filth are sticky things, entangled with immaterial webs of portent. The rich soil of the earth at night is a breeding ground for poisons. From dirt and clay and spit and blood but most of all from *immanence,* they may craft goblin- and imp-like servants—from *foreboding,* from *disquietude:* from the world's building sense that the servants of the Night-Craft will soon come.

This art requires both a fierce power of attention and a compromised environment: where the world is strong and things are well-defined, Creation's fears may not be manifested, as they simply are not real. Where the world is weak, however, the unreal may be made so, and the Night-Craft functions: in lacunae; in glamour-painted lands; in places much ravaged by bleak miracles, or the glitch.

Welken-law, the

The Excrucians have hidden cruxstones throughout Creation, vested deep with the power of the void, and holding in them a power of communication and synchronicity. While they are there, the practitioners of this art—of **the Welken-Law**—may from time to time meet one another in dreams; in visions; in glimpses caught in mirrors. They may, from time to time, hear one another's voices arising from the babble of other noise. When a cruxstone is near, they may walk into a room, plaza, alley or night-bound glade that has no real business being present, much less being present in multiple locations on the tree of worlds, and *meet.*

It is all awkward, uncertain, and deniable. Even for skilled practitioners, who have learned to dip more deeply into this art, to listen more ably to its whispers, it is not so much a cross-Ash telephone as a thing of omens; even true meetings, when the Host gathers across the worlds, or a message comes through clearly, are muddled and psychically fraught ... comparable, perhaps, to a drug trip, a psychotic break, or an intense delusion. Only a relevant Technique can turn the welken-law into something closer to a chat program or the mail, and, in general, only from one side.

Most Excrucians have at least a little familiarity with the welken-law from their time in the Host—enough to understand the basics; to call out to others, even if they may only hear them as a distant whisper; to sense the presence of a cruxstone; or to understand what it means when half their face goes twisted in the mirror and starts talking without their own volition about a major offensive being launched.

opposite: *by Elena Albanese*

In the Chancel of the Angel of Tears

Player-Crafted Arts

By default a player-created magic is, like Advanced Science, a deuterocanonical feature of the world—or perhaps something more dimly present: apocryphal or even outright heretical. It exists, it operates, it *may* even one day be truth, but it is not fully implemented: like features of a game, their development in progress but removed before the most recent public release, dredged up and made functional once again by the power of the character's attention ... but not actually *completed* thereby, all the same.

Perhaps the character can divine truth in spilled intestines, or raise unliving hosts; some of the structure for these arts exists within the world, but it is subtle, hidden, the world has not actually *committed* to the idea that this stuff works. Thus: magic.

In other cases, a player-created art may be more like Exorcism: something that is possible, that was always possible, but which hinges too severely on the power of attention for a mundane character to truly master it. Elemental magic that relies on pacts with spirits, for instance, might work like this. A "fate magic" where a character accumulates power through risk and then binds it away within their bones might work in this way too:

Perhaps anyone can do it, if they have the kind of tangible, graspable fortune that fierce attention to one's luck can grant ... but so few do!

A final option—or, at least, the final option we shall consider—is that the player-created magic is simply present in the world, without these justifications. It is out there, it is technically mundane, but also it is shrouded in a mystery. These arts are rare, and work best when their practitioners are few and some barrier (such as an Imperial ban upon their broad dissemination, or, as with Alchemy, a spark of attentional or miracle-based power necessary to *begin* the craft) prevents them from coming more generally into use. Hearth magic in various forms might be out there, for instance, and thus be viable for a PC to learn, but it wouldn't be something just *anyone* could pick up:

Some more substantial barrier should be out there, from a need for personal selection by its overseeing god to having to have (at minimum) died and then awakened to use it, lest some random physicist stumble upon it, spend a year or ten discovering that it's replicable, and start as big of a kerfluffle about it as they can.

"Love," mused the old wizard. "The rarest and most wonderful magic of them all."

"Except for graticulatomancy.".

"... except for graticulatomancy," the old wizard, reluctantly, agreed.

—from The Gullensnith, *by A.D. Collins*

Using Mundane and Magical Abilities

When a player advances the idea of doing something using Ability, or the GM asks for an Ability action to determine how a character reacts to something in the world, or the player describes an action and the GM asks about the underlying action score, the important number is the final sum:

The **action result** is the character's [base Ability (+ spent Wear or other Cost.)]

This result number is usually attached to the declaration of the specific action involved. (This is separate from a description of what the character actually *does,* which is either obvious, has already been specified, or should likely immediately follow.) Thus, if a character is trying to talk down the monster they've discovered in their bedroom, they might say something like, "Ability 2: I'm going to be **Functional** here," or "I'm spending 1 Wear for Ability 2."

Actions don't normally fail. When a player invokes an action, they get what the ladder of effects says they get. The GM's discretion comes into play *after* that:

Is being Functional here enough?

That's also where circumstances will come into play—e.g., if the monster is the character's childhood imaginary friend, warped by time, and is thus inclined to listen to them; or, if the character is covered in monster blood and surrounded by the corpses of the monster's family, and they're not. The exact degree of effect that a functional attempt at conversation will have, paired with whatever it is the player actually *says*, changes based on circumstances like that.

... but under normal circumstances, that's the *only* point where circumstances come into play. If the player buys an Ability 2 action, they get an Ability 2 action. From an abstract rules perspective, they can't normally *fail* to get an Ability 2 action, only to have that Ability 2 action do what they want it to do.[14]

The exception is when there's a **conflict.**

Conflicts

When two successful actions oppose one another, this is a *contest* or *conflict.*

There are two ways in which this can happen. One way, the most common way, is when the two actions are opposed in *their desired outcomes.* Two characters are in a race. Both are using Ability 4 actions ("Expertise.") Both of them, therefore, adequately leverage whatever professional ability they have as runners or racers. ... but only one of them can actually win.

In this case the GM compares the numerical rating of the two actions. For mundane actions—unlike for miracles, below—this is a comparison of the rating for the actual

14 Similarly, if they do better than they expected to do in the world, that doesn't count as an Ability 4+ success; that's just ... doing better with their Ability 2 action result.

actions, not the characters' Ability; and, by default, either the higher-rated action wins, or there was never a real contest to begin with.

By *default,* Expertise will always beat Functionality unless Expertise had already lost. Organization, similarly, always beats Expertise. Flow will beat Steel ... and so on.

If both characters are taking the same action, or actions of the same level—e.g., Greater Function and Organization—*then* (again, by default) it comes down to whomever has the highest Ability. Organization, used with an effective Ability of 7, beats Greater Function used with an effective Ability of 6.

If the matter is not decided instantly, characters can upgrade their action, spending Wear as necessary. It is generally possible to upgrade any action to anywhere in the Ability 5-11 range while preserving its basic concept, with 2-4 being available depending on circumstance.[15] Once all parties in a conflict hit 11, all that's left is a bidding war for the highest effective Ability and a GM call on who has the highest *native* competence in the event of a tie.

The GM may wish to grant one character a circumstantial bonus in these contests. For instance, one racer might have a car, or start the race halfway to the finish line. If this bonus is strong enough then they just automatically win, because there's only so much ground that their opponent *can* make up with the action they took. If it's not, the GM expresses it as a number:

An **Edge.**

This number ranges from 0-7, and adds to the effective action level and Ability level that the advantaged character has in the contest. It looks something like:

- **Edge 0.** The two sides have the same starting place.
- **Edge 1.** An edge that's small, but worth note.
- **Edge 2.** A meaningful edge.
- **Edge 3.** An incredibly unfair advantage.
- **Edge 4.** It *might* be possible for a normal person to turn this around ... maybe?
- **Edge 5.** Overcoming this would definitely be larger-than-life.
- **Edge 6.** Overcoming this would require absolute perfection and absolute precision.
- **Edge 7.** This edge is fundamentally impossible to overcome ... except, reality isn't strong enough here for "impossible" to have 100%, absolute force.

Thus, for example, Expertise with 2 Edge can beat out Steel; with 4 Edge, it can conquer Flow.

Edge is not additive. It's a GM estimate. Most of the time, when you add up Edges, you just get the highest Edge. Maybe you get one point above that? But it's whatever the GM re-evaluates as the character's advantage. This is important, because the divine attribute **Flore** on pg. 181 offers various different ways to give actions Edge, and players might wonder if there's any merit to combining them. The answer is no—most of the time, even stacking its powers up, it gives the same 3 Edge as the best of them.

... but that's just because it's still "incredibly unfair," as an Edge—and not more, and not less. If something evens things out, like, both sides are using **Glorification** (pg. 196) and one side is also using **Guidance** (pg. 194)? Then Guidance might tip the scales.

Characters are allowed to take higher-level actions than strictly necessary in order to win a contest, but only if they can actually leverage that. It can be difficult to use level 5-6 actions to win a pie-eating contest, for instance[16]; probably *possible,* but the contortions necessary to justify it may cause the base action to fail ... or grant the opponent 1-2 points of Edge.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER

Aiderida Elsevir is a PC Strategist dying of **illumination.** Her secrets inevitably come out, including ones she never actually had, and she is driven from her community and her life. This is her fate, having seen a glitched revelation.

Before that, she was a record executive.

Her player opts to spend nine character points on Ability. She records her mortal abilities thus:

- Ability 3
  - record executive
  - fashionable
  - can drive
  - surprising level of self-defense training
  - from her time in the Host:
    - some criminal rep and intrusion/security experience
    - familiarity with exorcism, the language of flowers, and the welken-law
- Technique: "Musica Magicae"
  - Aiderida can use illicit remixes of, e.g., angel song, the screams of Hell, environmental sounds, mathematically precise musical structures, and Avril Lavigne's "Sk8er Boi" to work strange, magical effects.
  - More generally, she's good at using music, rhythm, and her industry experience to get things done.

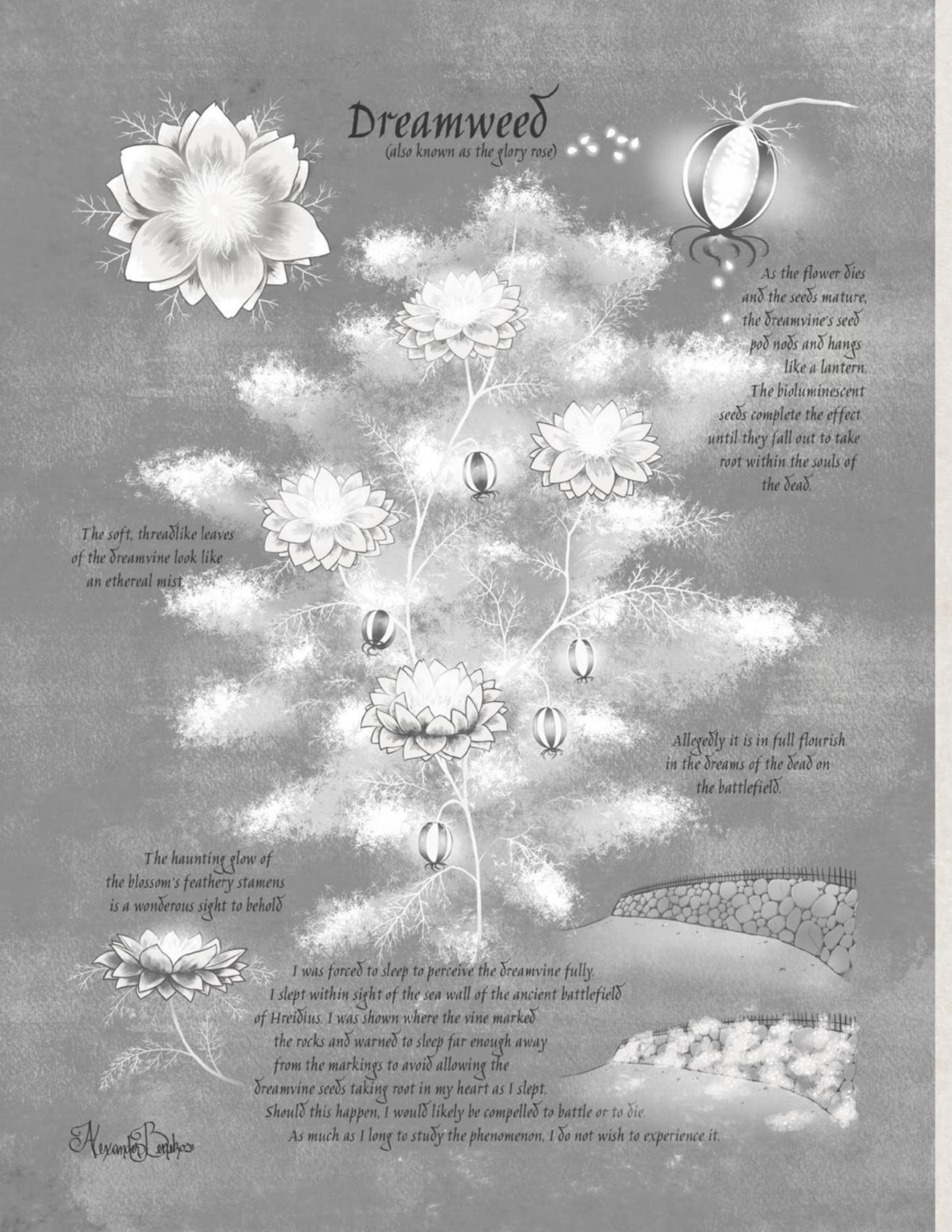
The notes under Ability are somewhat arbitrary; they're simply the kinds of things that her player wants to make clear in advance that Aiderida Elsevir can do.

FIN

Thus completes our study of Ability; only miracles await.

15 That said, it can be tricky to, e.g., use a level 6 action in a 50 yard dash—an example which, while unusual, is by no means unique.

16 unless, ironically, you don't like pie


Dreamweed
(also known as the glory rose)
As the flower dies and the seeds mature, the dreamvine's seed pod nods and hangs like a lantern. The bioluminescent seeds complete the effect until they fall out to take root within the souls of the dead.
The soft, threadlike leaves of the dreamvine look like an ethereal mist.
Allegedly it is in full flourish in the dreams of the dead on the battlefield.
The haunting glow of the blossom's feathery stamens is a wonderous sight to behold
I was forced to sleep to perceive the dreamvine fully. I slept within sight of the sea wall of the ancient battlefield of Hreidius. I was shown where the vine marked the rocks and warned to sleep far enough away from the markings to avoid allowing the dreamvine seeds taking root in my heart as I slept. Should this happen, I would likely be compelled to battle or to die. As much as I long to study the phenomenon, I do not wish to experience it.
Alexander Landon

Come one, Come All! The Mysterious, Tragic, and Highly Alarming Death of Liutgarde Payne

SCENE 1: THE YURT

GM: It is now afternoon, and your malts have depleted.
HEATHER: So too all things in this impermanent world.
EDWARD: ... I don't think we get to complain about its impermanence, and also about its existence.
HEATHER: Counterpoint: I will complain about what I like. That's my Excrucian way!
EDWARD: ... fairly argued. All things pass. All things are terrible. And in such small portions!
GM: Indeed. They are just bits of malt and wet amidst the ice; so too is the manner of all things. What do you want to do about it?
EDWARD: I actually want to do a flashback first, if that's OK.
GM: Sure?
EDWARD: To a trip to Ninuan, preparing for this journey.
GM: I'll need a spotlight for that.
EDWARD: I mean ... that's just my definitive action, there, isn't it? *As we prepare to go to Midland, California, I slip off to Ninuan to consult with my ilλ-nati contacts.*
GM: Monologue a bit.
EDWARD: Mm?
GM: It's in the rules! Tell me why you're doing this. What's going on in your head here. Obvious, or little, though that may be.
EDWARD: These my friends are naïve fools. They cannot survive in the deep waters of the world without me—without someone willing to treat with what must be treated with; to do what must be done. They need a figure in the shadows, a cunning, subtle chessmaster, to guide their flailing movements through the world.
HEATHER: Elsewhere, Ciara sputters into laughter without entirely knowing why.
EDWARD: It falls on me to take on the burden for them, of facing the murky matters, the grey world between the black and white. Thus, I have once more slouched off again, to take secret consultation with those who might know the deeper truth:
GM: And found a teacher, and a friend, of sorts, in Ninuan.
EDWARD: And found a teacher and a friend.

[This is one of Edward's Arcana. The GM believes she is introducing a new Arcanum; Edward thinks she's introducing his "handler;" one of them should probably have been clearer ... but ultimately all this mistake will do is produce a few minutes of confusion, and then 74 seconds of Edward and Maddie apologizing to each other, about four sessions on.]

opposite: *by Alexander Benekos*

GM: And here, where you travel, the plains are dark, as they are always dark, in the endless night beyond the world—lit by the fitful glow of not no sun nor, tonight, by neither any moon, but by only the blue brilliance of *the fisher's star*. Push on your closed eyes' lid—not too fiercely, of course, don't hurt your eyes for it—and you might see it, there, that star, coruscating where your finger is, surrounded by the strange geometries that pressure makes, within the dark. Stare at the ceiling in a lightless room, until the blackness seems to blur and refract into colors: blue, auroreate red: that, too: the fisher's star. And the wind is cold amidst the grass (that is not grass, that is not wind) beyond the reaches of the world. Wings go by in the distant night, and eerie howls.

EDWARD: This is where we meet?

GM: You had imagined something more congenial?

EDWARD: I had imagined sipping wine in a fancy lodge, a smoking room of sorts, overlooking through a one-way mirror the humbled masses of the world.

GM: There is that, in certain places, perhaps. There are certainly more than a few houses of the Ilλnati that have such windows, or spiced wine; that are richly appointed; that can evoke the dream of luxury beyond that of most mortal's ken. Here, in the plains of the distant east, such as east may be said to be, in Ɲinuan, there is a yurt.

EDWARD: A yurt.

GM: Once, your contact lived in the world, but its spurs and burrs and spears became too sharp for them. They have withdrawn from it, from the noise of it, and even from the central regions of the void, to live upon the empty plains, in the middle distance, where the silence is richer and the silvered night is deeper, far from the urban, gentrified portions of Ɲinuan that you, apparently, prefer. It is a long, hard journey, meant to dissuade casual approaches, or even kill the simple-minded or the weak, but you are a prince of Ɲinuan, and you have not faltered on the way. He ... he? She? They?

EDWARD: She.

GM: Your contact does not greet you as you approach, but she is doubtless aware of your presence. Blind eyes stare off towards the distant cliffs. They are jagged lines within the nothingness, faultlines in the mathematics of the weft.

EDWARD: ... blind?

GM: It is known that she is blind. It is obvious that she is blind. It is known, and it is obvious, because her eyes are visible. They are in fact *so* visible that you can see them from behind her—well, not *see* them, not exactly, but become aware of them, as if the artist painting the scene, impatient with the limits of perspective, impatient with the fact that only her back is visible from here, had felt the need to splash her faded, watercolor face across the upper corner of your view. She is blind, because her eyes are visible, and not the endless falling of the stars. She is blind, in turn, because her touch, her sound, her *presence* is not quite right: not as jangled and disrupted as it would be if *you* were blind, and touch or hearing *your* principal sense, but a certain lurch in that direction: this, what she has, instead of the Excrucian eyes.

EDWARD: Aha.

MYSTERIOUS CONTACT: ... Tassilo.

EDWARD: We probably use code names.

GM: ... you do. Your code name, randomly assigned, was Tassilo. This is a narrative convenience that keeps me from having to remember others.

EDWARD: That is extraordinarily convenient, and perhaps even suspicious.

GM: It can be "Tassilo X."

EDWARD: ... as always, Maddie, you know the way into my heart.

GM: All that aside, *[as the Mysterious Contact]* What brings you here?

TASSILO: We are traveling to Midland, California, and I wanted to ...

MYSTERIOUS CONTACT: ... to know the lay of the game, as it is played there?

TASSILO: Yes, something of that sort.

[This is not quite what he will get, because OOC matters will disrupt the flow of conversation.]

GM: It is always very hard, when you have come here, to remember that you have not been here forever. That you have not lived here, forever, beneath the turning of the skies; out in the openness of this place that is not the world, in your associate's place of exile. It is a teetering cliff within you; over, one might call it, peace.

EDWARD: It is a bitter taste, to me, for peace too would just betray me in the end.

GM: I think ... to know what kind of thing she gives you, I need an infusion action (pg. 216), and a specification of the Bond you plan to get, even if you don't necessarily experience it as a miracle that you use right then.

EDWARD: Hmm. I guess I want a Technique for getting access to Midland's secrets—for being *allowed* access to it, like, the kind of pass-phrases that would make the Powers think I'm in on things with them, and certainly their minions—and a Bond, *I'm in on the game.*

GM: OK. ... how does that work, exactly?

EDWARD: Well, I mean, *obviously* Nircoa is conspiring, so Nircoa is part of *some* branch of the organization. Or is a pawn of it. I guess maybe it's possible that they're not, but at minimum, some group that they're working with or that's investigating them or that their Powers have interacted with, would be.

GM: ... after a while of staring off at nothingness, she says, "The games of Powers and Imperators will flense you. I hope you know that, little mockingbird. You may think that because you are good at the masks and the secrets and the moving the pieces around, you are ready to play with them, but ... they are broken, they are broken and they are covered in sharp edges, and when you play games with such broken toys as these, your hands will be scored deep."

TASSILO: That is my fate, I think. I certainly never expected *not* to have scarred hands for any length of time.

MYSTERIOUS CONTACT: I will give you a name and a

number. If you contact them ... they should be able to give you what you will need, here. But I cannot help you if your own nature betrays you in this, if you are shunned upon the basis of your eyes.
TASSILO: ... thank you. The number ...
MYSTERIOUS CONTACT: It is for an inquisitorial team among the Powers. A group that ... looks into deviancy among the Imperators and others. They are generally free to access what they like and where they like, and this particular team—in the name of the organization—more so than others, as they are known for a cooperative and lenient attitude rather than a zealous pursuit of all offense. Tell them you will be an adjunct for a time, a local affiliate, and with luck they will assist you in such concerns.
TASSILO: I see.
MYSTERIOUS CONTACT: Come, then, child, and I will take the price.
TASSILO: Eh?
GM: What happens then is ... what's your Lore again?
EDWARD: 1.
GM: A 5-Fugue enchainment on your soul; a 5-Fugue toll to the Ilλnati, and to her, to pay the cost of the **Infusion.** I think she ... probably, rewrites you a little, just a bit? In her own vision, to her own dream; this, the currency of the sect? But it is up to you, it being your Sphere and your Infusion action. She could also impress a vision on you as a message to someone else, or ... I dunno.
EDWARD: Rewriting is fine, I guess. It's only 5 Fugue worth, just the smallest coin of individuality.
GM: That's what they all say, when the first hooks go in.

[Tassilo takes 5 Fugue, and gains +1 XP.]

GM: OK! Flashback complete. I think that technically you should probably still take a spotlight action in Creation before you formally assume yourself to be there again, regardless of chronology, but I intend to ignore this if I have to and you can do so too.
EDWARD: So I'm ... not there?
GM: I mean, obviously you're there, you are in the malt shop, but since Ninuan isn't signatory to mortal causality it feels like that flashback is part of this chapter, and we should stick to the associated rules for that unless verisimilitude requires otherwise.
EDWARD: Right. OK. I'm out of synch with time.
GM: Procedurally. If possible.
EDWARD: Right.
GM: Which is sad, because the last of your ice is melting into your malt, and soon it will be too watery to drink the dregs; and the other two have basically already finished. You! You other two! What are you doing?

SCENE 2: THE MALT SHOP

HEATHER: The ... water treatment plant, maybe? The auto detailing shop?
DIANE: Hm.
HEATHER: Now I kind of want to hunt for an arcanum of my own. Or maybe just fetch out my poison-breathing panther. Maddie, is there a waylet near?
GM: Flex for it.

[Heather makes two fists in front of her face, tensing the muscles of her arms.]

HEATHER: rrrr
GM: There is in fact a waylet not that far from here, although locating it is probably—well, it might take a fair bit of tromping around the old gypsum mines until you get close "enough" and then using a **Navigation** miracle from there. It doesn't seem to actually be *hidden*, though, either by intrinsic nature or by any conscious agency, so that's all it'd take.

[Heather pays 1 Fugue for the effect.]

HEATHER: That's interesting. I wonder if ... are they using it? Common sense first, before I investigate.
GM: Common sense?
HEATHER: Like, odds that it's a coincidence?
GM: Eeyh, it's hard to say. I think you're like fifteen miles away from a waylet on average at any given time, on Earth—I might be screwing up the math there, it's not super-important, the important thing is, it's substantially closer than that, but not, like, in town hall, and even if it were, sometimes waylets are just *in* random little cities' town halls. Probably it's causally related to why they're doing stuff here, but not necessarily a core motivation, like ... you know when you're playing 4x games, and you're placing a city? Like it probably spiked the "weird and interesting" quality of the local hex when they were placing their Chancel, but that doesn't mean they were necessarily from a game build that can utilize the power of the void.
HEATHER, SQUINTING: Nice, I can't tell if you're frantically justifying why it's there at all or giving an excuse for why I don't immediately realize it's important.
GM: Heh.
HEATHER: Well, let's add spelunking to our schedule just in case.
DIANE: Before that ...
HEATHER: Mm?
DIANE, TO THE GM: Wasn't there some sort of lead here at the malt shop?
GM: Uh ... what sort of lead exactly were you looking for? I mean, these prices are definitely out of this world, harkening back to an ancient era, suggesting that a truly unscrupulous Excrucian could commit some sort of arbitrage. Other than that ...
DIANE: Other than that?
GM: You would have to use a spotlight on the subject of your interest.
DIANE: *[squints and thinks for a moment]* Wasn't there supposed to be a piece of my death somewhere around

here? Or some other ... supernatural thingie?
GM: ... possibly?
DIANE: I guess I'm going to spotlight that, then. Like, I want to shake out some of the mystery of this town and stuff, *here,* because I know that the malt shop kept coming up.
GM: You are distantly aware, as your metaphorical spotlight clicks to life, that the malt shop *may* have kept coming up because it was thematically on point, because it's a traditional motif of old-time Americana, but I suppose that doesn't mean it doesn't *have* a direct connection to the story. Give me a moment to figure out what's around.
DIANE, NODDING: OK.

[Twenty seconds pass.]

GM: ... sure, why not? That green-haired teenager over there at the bar—the malt bar obviously, because they are a teenager, the *non-alcoholic* malt bar, but the point is: they are over there, and they appear to be a portion of your death. M, F, neutral?
DIANE: ... go with M, this place is stuck in the 60s, they've got to be having enough trouble just with the hair.
EDWARD: It could be the anime 60s.
HEATHER: did they even *have*
EDWARD: Owing to certain mistakes that Tassilo made in his youth anime dates back to the 18th century in this continuity.
GM: ... that is ... I guess ... *[pause]* anyway, the green-haired boy at the bar, *anyway*, appears to be a portion of your death.
HEATHER: Alternative question: were they actually mistakes?
EDWARD: Nobody had invented robots yet, so there were a whole lot of animes where just giant absences fought each other. Also, no Astro Boy, just, you know, "Boy."
HEATHER: *They didn't even have astros?!*
GM, STIFLING A GIGGLE FIT: Your death, Liutgarde, is drinking malt.
DIANE: *[holds up a hand for silence; then, as Liutgarde]* I'm going to dramatically drop onto a barstool next to him. "So."
GM: You die.
DIANE: ***What?*** Wait. What?
GM: Sorry, sorry, OK, you don't die, it just ... there's definitely an *oomph* to that. Take a Burn. He looks up at you, haunted-like, over a long noisy sip of malt. "... yeah? I know you or something?"
DIANE: I wave the others over. *[as Liutgarde]* Yeah, you might say that. I've been looking for you for a *really* long time, mister.
GM: "Adrian," he says. "And I guess you found me. Congratulations! Go die in a fire or something."
LIUTGARDE, SWEETLY: Oh, I don't think that's going to happen, but if it does, I'm sure you're going to be right there next to me.
GM: He looks a little disturbed. "OK, lady. I guess we ... met ... some cycles ago or something? 'Cause I'm not placing you at all."
DIANE: Does he seem honest?
GM: He does not show signs of being an ancient eldritch being playing verbal games with his conversational partner, unlike certain *other* individuals that I might name.
DIANE: I'm going to drop a point of Fugue on Vision, then, just so I can peek behind the surfaces of things.
GM: Yeah, you can see it there, within him. It's not like you were *wrong*. It's just ... like a sleeping dragon in his body. In his bones. It stirs a bit, when seen, it turns a blind embryonic head a bit your way, whiskers floating in the emptiness of the perceptual abstract, but it does not wake. He himself is still there, not *identical.* Not *quite* the same.
LIUTGARDE: Fascinating. Yes, we met ... or, rather, we didn't meet. Yet. We had an engagement, and you did not *attend,* young man. Ah, ... Adrian.
ADRIAN: You're beginning to creep me out a little. Stranger danger, y'know? And ... oh, hey, you don't have eyes. *[voice is genuinely worried now.]* That's a little bit concerning.
LIUTGARDE: ... you will come with us, I think.
ADRIAN: I haven't committed to that.
LIUTGARDE: Commit to it. *[as Diane]* I'm going to amp up the **Intensity** here, make it harder for him to slip the hook.
ADRIAN, CHEWING ON HIS LIP: Tch. Fine. But you better be the cool kind of monsters.
TASSILO: Um. Ah ...
CIARA: What is your point of comparison?
ADRIAN: Unbelievable. [*as the GM]* He looks up at the maître d', hooks his thumb at Liutgarde. [*as Adrian]* Gotta go, these freaks got my tab. Apparently.
TASSILO: Technically, "freaks" is a hurtful term for arguably uncool beings of consummate destruction.
ADRIAN: Yeah, you do you, man. I'll just be over here calling you freaks.
DIANE: You're not even *here*, Tassilo.
EDWARD: I am totally here. I am spotlighting how incredibly cool I am.
GM: The camera lovingly pans over how cool Tassilo is. Give me a ... coolness ... action.
EDWARD: O.

[The GM face-palms.]

GM: You ... languidly smoke your malt straw, Jimmy Dean-style.
EDWARD: Rock on! I have materially improved my smoking style.
GM: *[laughing]* ... yes.

[Tassilo recovers 1 Wear from this "failure."]

EDWARD: I'll also toss down some change to cover the kid's tab, unless it's more than sixty-five cents.
GM: It is an absurd, but not impossible, $35.
EDWARD: Yowza.
HEATHER: Whatever, whatever, I'll get it.

EDWARD: It's not that Tassilo doesn't *have* it.
HEATHER: Of course not!
EDWARD: It's just, do *you* have it?
HEATHER: Worst case, I'll just squeeze some tens into twenties or something later.
GM: ... that is ... extremely strong.
HEATHER: Believe it!
GM: Well, toss in a Wear for the expenditure, I guess, since you've just conversationally established yourselves as of questionable means, and then y'all can head in a disorganized fashion out of the malt shop out to the Shelby Cobra, your amazing, magical, semi-sentient two-seater car. Adrian gives it, and then you all, a long, slow, disbelieving look.
TASSILO: *[coughs]*
ADRIAN: Look, if I've got to ride in the trunk here, I'm out. I can scream like two babies tied to a frisbee, you hear me? I am *not* coming quietly.
CIARA: Tassilo, this one's on you.
TASSILO: *[closes one eye, then the other. Coughs again.]* Fifty bucks.
CIARA: What? T—
ADRIAN, HOLDING UP A HAND FOR SILENCE: No, wait, I'm listening. Go on.
TASSILO: Half now, half on arrival.
ADRIAN: Awful hard to spend that if I wind up disassembled in a ditch, though.
CIARA: We don't even know where the ditch is—
ADRIAN: Shh, shh, shh, negotiating.
TASSILO: Half now, half on arrival, and we ... *won't* disassemble you and put you in a ditch?
ADRIAN: Fifty now, twenty when we get there, and the pink slip stays at the shop.
TASSILO: ...
ADRIAN: I mean, until we get back.
TASSILO: That's a very reasonable proposal, kid, with one problem— Liutgarde, do we have a pink slip?
DIANE, TO THE GM: Rummaging motions. Is there one in the car?
GM: ... sure?
LIUTGARDE: This thing?
TASSILO: ... I suppose we can put off the one problem until we get back. I'll just go drop it off with the owner, shall I?
GM: Let's say that Adrian insists on watching the handoff, and that the whole process is awkward, but that all that happens, unless you want to engage in trickery, and you are now back at the car. Which is still kind of small for the all of you, but I suppose he has now technically volunteered to ride in the trunk.
TASSILO: I will provide him with the promised fifty, slide into the driver's seat, and pop the trunk.
GM: You have fifty now?
TASSILO: Fortunately, impressing people with my vast, flashy wealth is one of my 0-Cost talents.
GM: ... ohh, *right*. OK. He takes it, eyes it dubiously for a long time, licks it to check for counterfeiting—look, not *everybody* has a fancy counterfeit pen, right?—and then finally shrugs and climbs into the Shelby Cobra trunk, on what appears to be the principle of, "eff it, they don't have any *eyes,* what good is actual common sense gonna be here?" And you are off to the ... presumably, to the the water treatment facility.
HEATHER: Yeah.
GM: You are at the water treatment facility.

SCENE 3: THE FACILITY

HEATHER: ... let's let the kid out of the trunk first. Then I'll spotlight the place.
GM: He emerges, stretching and wriggling a bit, not at all like the ancient eldritch horror you know him to, at least partially, be. "Unh," he says. "OK, not a murder hole, good start. ... I think. What do murder holes look like?"
TASSILO: They are holes in the fabric of the world, and full of murder.
ADRIAN: Yeah, OK. Thanks for the ride, this has been fabulous, who the hell are you people?
LIUTGARDE: Ciara, can you see how it's attached to him?
CIARA, IN TONES OF MILD COMPLAINT: I wanted to look at the water treatment facility.
GM: It stands there before you in all its grey, aquatic neutrality.
CIARA: Fine. *[as Heather]* I'll do a quick Investigation on what's actually up with the kid.

[Ciara takes +1 Fugue for the investigation.]

GM: You flex before the increasingly nonplussed teenager, soon pushing him past the point of nonplussed all the way to nonminused. ... and begin to see. Roughly speaking, it looks like Liutgarde's death was kind of floating by, or at least, this part of it was, and then ... pwick.
HEATHER: Pwick?
GM: Something got it stuck to the web of causality here, so entangled that eventually it had to incarnate ... I guess, really, in the same way all of you did, because arguably, you know, with the exception of Liutgarde, you're all arguably the deaths of who you used to be.
EDWARD: That's ... you're going to need to go into that a bit more.
GM: Well, I mean, like, you were humans, right? Born as humans? But inside you there was the wild strand of death that was Ninuan. And it was that death, as much as that human, that emerged from the chrysalis as an Excrucian. That's part of why you're born again entangled with your suffering, your death, your curse, why you're inseparable from it. And why you can therefore argue that this is a part of Liutgarde's intrinsic nature, her potential, born into Creation; or possibly the opposite, because, again, she's weird.
HEATHER, SLOWLY: Weird, in that her particular death is the death of failing to die.
GM: Yeah. So, it's going to be unclear right now exactly

what relationship this has to her, because it cuts too deep into her story for me to just *declare* it, it needs to wait for me or Diane to have an epiphany moment coming out of play, also, this is the Arc **Ally** apparently so like it's a big part of several quests?, but— what you *can* see is that he's part of that same wild Ninuanni energy, entangled into the world, that became Liutgarde, just like Liutgarde herself is. Her other self, or her caul, or her catalyst; her cousin, or her enemy. The death she was meant to have, separated from her by the intrinsic causality of her nature, and then ripped further away from the path it was meant to follow by the spiderweb that was Midland, California.

CIARA: ... a moral quandary.

LIUTGARDE: Ah?

CIARA: He is meant to be like us, but I do not know what it will do to him or you if it is so.

GM: He laughs nervously. "That's quite all right, thanks, I like having eyes."

TASSILO, INTERESTEDLY: Arguably consent is irrelevant for beings inextricably entangled into Creation's network of causality; they do not make choices so much as ... exist ... in a web of effects, following causes.

ADRIAN: It's, ah, probably best not to discard consent based on the first argument that comes to mind, but, like, only, maybe, after rigorous testing and evaluation of your philosophical premises?

EDWARD: Really? *That's* what he says?

GM: Look, he's a teenager, but he's a *part-Excrucian* teenager, and it's not like even the normal ones can't be pretty loquacious if they wanna be.

EDWARD: ... fine. *[as Tassilo]* Fairly argued, I suppose. Then will you consent, so we can move on to the matter of scientific experimentation? Because you do have the opportunity to transcend the world, seize the true nature of abreality, and achieve perfection, which not every green-haired money-hungry brat in your position gets the actual opportunity to do.

ADRIAN: He calls me money-hungry but neglects to pay me the other thirty that I'm owed.

TASSILO: Currency is an illusion and a dream.

ADRIAN: See? *See?*

LIUTGARDE: I think he just can't resist the argument, Adrian. He's not *that* short on money.

ADRIAN: ... these are fine adulthood words, but in the end, your grandiose ascension above the petty struggle for wealth is just an airy dream if you put off paying your actual debts until you get distracted, and then forever.

EDWARD: I pay him thirty?

GM: I don't know, that's a lot of money, after the last fifty. You sure you have the cash?

EDWARD: I have a Gift for it!

GM: OK, *fine,* you invoke your Gift, and fork over the cash. He looks upset, in the very fashion of an Excrucian who can no longer argue that someone is being hypocritical and deceptive, only, you know, with clearer eyes.

TASSILO: Ha! Cash got your tongue?

ADRIAN: ... tell me more about grandiosely ascending above the petty struggle of the mortal world.

EDWARD: I throw my arm around his shoulder, start to gesture broadly to the horizon and give him the pitch, and then stop. *[as Tassilo]* wait, being an Excrucian sucks, why am I pitching it.

CIARA: Technically it sucks less.

TASSILO: Does it? Does it really?

CIARA: The sad reality of it is that if he does not break the cage of the world and join us, he will inevitably either succumb to a mediocrity so bland as to be indistinguishable from the fabric of Creation, or, will be tortured into eternal numbness as a wraith. I know of no alternatives, and, if they exist, can conceive of no possibility that he, being such as us, would be a thing they would apply to.

ADRIAN: ... uh ...

CIARA: Here is the truth, child: before the world was born, you were. You were a lord or lady of the Host, a tyrant of the throne; and then the world was wrapped around you like a prison, like a twisted brace. It broke you, divided you, split you, and spat you out to live amidst and among the flashy, painted pieces of itself. Life after life you lived, encysted and enchained, and nothing in you to break from the grand design that was Creation save that lingering wild remnant of the truth before the world. And now you are here, today, and you are in the presence of another portion of yourself.

ADRIAN: I get it.

TASSILO: That was fast.

ADRIAN: She's going to eat me for power, right?

LIUTGARDE: I ... don't think I could get my mouth around your skull.

ADRIAN: ... oh.

LIUTGARDE: I think I will just free you from this prison, child.

GM: He's gonna bolt.

LIUTGARDE, SHOUTING: This town! This time-loop! Not your life!

CIARA: You don't need to shout. *[as Heather]* I'm intercepting him before he gets far enough that Liutgarde needs to shout.

GM: I dunno if raw strength can do that, give me an Ability action?

HEATHER: I mean, I can do 4 for free, and that's *with* fighting skill and limitless strength to back it up with.

GM: ... yeah, he runs straight into your arm and falls to the ground wheezing.

TASSILO: A delightful interval but if you do not mean to make him an Excrucian—I know, I know, it's not like that's trivial or even necessarily possible—I feel we should actually pay attention to this mysterious facility that we have come to investigate.

LIUTGARDE, PETTISHLY: I wanted to discuss, like, his existence with him. ... but, fine. Ciara, can you bring him?

CIARA: Easily.

EDWARD: I'd spotlight the place, since I don't think Heather's went off, but I guess I'm out for the chapter.

HEATHER: Yeah, I'll just ... trigger it again.

GM: The old and tetchy spotlight, unreliable though it may be, sparks to life this time. And there is light!

[The GM pauses a moment in thought.]

GM: Metaphorical light, at least. OK. So, let's start with this: the place is deserted. Concrete buildings, parking lot, guard posts, lots of signs that there *should* be people here, people in at least moderate numbers, but ... nothing. No lights. No movement. No life at all, save you.
CIARA, SLOWLY: They have heard of our coming, and fled. Mighty is the roaring of our steed!
TASSILO: ... that seems unlikely.
GM: As you move inwards, you further notice that ... somebody give me an Ability action suitable to understanding water filtration systems, or more generally this kind of place?
EDWARD, AFTER NO ONE VOLUNTEERS: I can do a merchant stunt?

[Tassilo's Eide Technique is "merchant prince," allowing him to do cinematic merchant prince things as Eide 2 effects. It's possible that if he'd noted out loud that it cost him 2 Stilling to invoke this the GM might have given him more than what he gets, but he does not:]

GM: You are all woefully confused by the place, and don't even know what to look for, except for Tassilo, who rapidly determines that this place cannot possibly be profitable, owing to the fact that nobody is here and none of the equipment is turned on.
EDWARD: Unless it's a tax shelter!
DIANE: Do we ... *see* any taxes?
EDWARD: ... weirdly, they're not actually kept in the shelters.
DIANE: The perversity of this world!
GM: Eventually, your exploration trips what you think is an alarm, not in the sense of a loud ringing, but in the sense of how you notice after opening a door that there are some kind of vaguely techy sensory things on it—and a sign beside it that claims the property to be guarded by one "Alarm Company, Inc."
EDWARD: Is ... that a real company, or did a 5-year-old make the sign?
GM: It is standing in temporary stead for a real company name which I have not made up yet. Let's say, *Highly* Alarmed, Ltd. Are you alarmed? Are you *highly* alarmed? Well, if you're not, then you should be! Or so their commercials assert.
TASSILO: An opportunity!
CIARA: Oh?
TASSILO: If someone actually comes in response to the alarm, they may know more about what's going on. Or let something slip! Let's hide and observe.
GM: Adrian says, "Seriously?"
TASSILO: Do you have a better idea?
ADRIAN: ... *not* doing that?
LIUTGARDE: I can conceal us.
TASSILO: Cool, cool, we have a start of a plan. Let's get inside here and wait, then.
GM: Oh, hey, looks like you've found the source of the water, at least; there's a truly *intense* icicle hanging from the ceiling in here, dripping down like a river into the cistern below. Adrian is gaping. The wind is chill.
HEATHER: I will approach it. Why ... why not just ... get water normally?
GM: Icy indifference is its only response.
HEATHER: I will flex on this.
GM: Your muscular probing of the fabric of reality suggests that water previously came to Midland by train, which was too strong an interaction point with the outside world to be permitted to endure. Therefore, water now condenses, precipitates downwards from a giant icicle, and from there funnels outwards to the town.
HEATHER: ... I think I'm going to go ahead and peer into the web of fate and see what happened to Doug Forstat, when he investigated. When he, possibly? Found *this.*
GM: He never got here. He randomly decided to leave Midland and move to Los Angeles to become one of millions of faceless people striving to become stars there.
HEATHER: *[squints]* Really?
GM: That is what your muscles determine. He was *en route* to check the place out but for no reason whatsoever he pulled over for a while and then changed his mind and moved to L.A..
HEATHER: Weird.

[Ciara takes +1 Fugue for each investigation, for a total of +2.]

GM: I should probably remind you that your investigations *are* likely to pull up consciously established cover stories first, only hitting the truth when you've actually seen through them.
HEATHER: Ah.
EDWARD: ... implausibility and disbelief isn't enough?
GM: It honestly wouldn't be the strangest thing that's ever happened. It wouldn't even make top hundred, *Californian.*
EDWARD: Fair. ... I don't want to actually wait right next to the giant icicle, though, in case mortal police come and have to get vanished or icicle girl comes and has a giant tactical weapon sitting right beside me; can we relocate to a different vantage?
GM: Yes, except, you have trouble wanting to leave.
EDWARD: ... what kind of trouble.
GM: You have a very important task in this room, you discover. A critically important task. You need to, *need* to, write up the story of your life and your key contacts in it so that you can turn it in to *Highly* Alarmed, Ltd. when they arrive.
DIANE: That might alarm them.
GM: Sometimes you have to crunch a few graham crackers, Liutgarde, to make a crumby crust.
EDWARD: Well, hell. Is there pen and paper? And ... is this an assignment from Saguaric, again?
GM: Indeed. You stand within his prickly shadow.

LIUTGARDE: I am torn.
TASSILO: I am, to be honest, beginning to wonder if that cactus has our best interests at heart.
LIUTGARDE: I am torn, because I feel driven to this thing, to do this thing; yet, it is a thing that I do not wish to do.
CIARA: When I do not wish to study strength, on the grounds that to do so will only rip me again to pieces in the end, I think back to what my father told me as a little girl. He told me, "Buck up and stop whining, sweetie; it's just *one* crocodile." And I smile, and I know that I can go on.
DIANE: ... I am going to attempt to unfetter us. To pull myself away from this intrusive need, and then drag them after me. For 4 Burn, assuming I can work out the methodology.
GM: That's fine, then. It passes from the four of you like a dream in morning, like a glamour at the dawn.
DIANE, CONCERNED: Glamour breaks at dawn?
GM, WAVING OFF THAT CONCERN: If it isn't coated properly.
DIANE: I see.

[The game pauses for a moment, during which Diane records 4 Burn and also (for the high-Cost action) 1 XP.]

GM: You are alone, with a giant icicle and a handful of forms and the absence of your need to do anything about them.
LIUTGARDE: This would be eerily familiar, if there were only a rhinoceros.
ADRIAN: Yeah, tell me about it.
DIANE: I will make efforts to conceal us, using glamour if I can and misdirection if I can't.
GM: You may do either, although the misdirection miracle is more reliable.
DIANE: ... that is a sound point; I'll invoke the misdirection.

[Liutgarde has Eide 5, and misdirection—the regular kind, that just hides things rather than creating new perceptions—is level 8, so this is a relatively efficient effect for her: it costs 3 Stilling, and earns her 1 XP.]

GM: You blend into the mists of faerie and are gone.
DIANE: Even to ourselves?
GM: Strictly speaking, no, not if you don't choose to be, but I suspect you are still somewhat occluded to your mortal sight, if only because the swirling mists of faerie are more *interesting* in their patternlessness than the room with the giant icicle, for however long it takes.
DIANE: Fair enough. It takes some time?
GM: It does.
DIANE: I am going to spotlight Adrian a bit, get him to be more open, as I slip up to him amidst the mists. I observe, "You are eldritch. Yet of this, you seem unaware. I wonder how this can be."
ADRIAN: Is that a serious question?
LIUTGARDE: As serious as the ice.
ADRIAN: It's fine to call me special, miss, but I know better. It's fine to try to turn my head with aethereal visions of faery lands and silks and swords and fine spiced wines. But I get that it's just a sales pitch. I gave up on thinking I was special long ago.
LIUTGARDE: ... I don't know enough about what you are to dispute that, really.
ADRIAN: Heh.
LIUTGARDE: But it seems to me, that isn't a thing that one can know?
ADRIAN: What?
LIUTGARDE: A person can puff themselves up with false delusions, and I'm just as glad that you're not doing that, but nobody can ever really know that they're *not* a magical prince from the kingdom of never-ever, beyond the wide world's ending.
ADRIAN: As it were.
LIUTGARDE: As it were.
ADRIAN: You can't know, that's fair enough, but you can ... get a pretty good idea.

[Diane gestures, listening.]

ADRIAN: See, the thing is, I *did* think I was special, once. I *did* think I could see beyond the veil of the world. I thought I had ... power. I thought I meant something. I got myself so convinced of it.
LIUTGARDE: And?
ADRIAN: And then I tested it, because that's what reason says to do, yeah? You say, OK, if you're *so sure,* if it's *so bloody certain,* then, here's something that can't *possibly* fail if that's true. And you decide, beforehand, that—you know, there are always going to be explanations. If it fails. If you fail. The phase of the moon was wrong. The stars were against you. A supernatural, malevolent force intervened. The government was tracking you. There are always things that could have gotten in your way, and after that, after the test, you can't know that it wasn't one of them, but you can say in advance, you know? You can say in advance, *if this one test, this one simple little test, fails, then it's all just dreaming.*
LIUTGARDE: So.
ADRIAN: So I went to the gas station at the center of town, and I set the fire.
TASSILO: Uh.
ADRIAN: We burn down sometimes, you know. That's fine. That's normal. But I thought, if I'm so great, then— I could break it, I could *end* it, I could tear apart the blanket of this world, and things *wouldn't* just be the same, wouldn't just go on and on and on like they'd gone on and on and on forever. I thought I could burn the place down and *not* rebuild it. ... I couldn't even burn down me.
LIUTGARDE: You ... couldn't?
ADRIAN: You know I couldn't. That's not how fire works. ... here. That's ... I don't think that's how fire works *anywhere?* Not any more. You can get little burns. Even bad burns. But you can't burn to *death.* You can't plunge into the flames. The timeline won't *let* you. You lock up, you know, you try to do it but you *lock up,* you tell yourself over and

over again to just *go forward,* to just *jump forward,* into the flames, but you *can't,* because you're a captive in the palm of time. And it goes on. It goes on, and on, and on, and you go to jail, and you get out, and you never even grow up old enough to drink.
LIUTGARDE: It ... may not have been time holding you back.
ADRIAN: So I dyed my hair green. I couldn't remember it ever being green before. I thought, this would be new. This would be special. This would *change* things. But it didn't change things. Nobody even notices. They just restock the dye.

[silence]

TASSILO: So you decided you weren't special.
ADRIAN: I tested it, and I learned. I'm just like anybody else. I'm ... just the same *person* as everybody else, you get that? We're just one web of eyes and ears and mouths and bodies, one giant lurching organism, stuck together, only we can't see the other portions of ourselves. I wanted to escape it, I wanted to shove myself out of that giant blob of flesh, but it just dragged me back down in.
CIARA: That's all very vivid, but ultimately, you're still a piece of Liutgarde's death.
ADRIAN: That's how the fair folk work. I get it. You lift me up, you get me to believe, and then, when my pride is at its peak, I fall.
LIUTGARDE: I ... don't know whether to commend your insight or to put my face within my hands, if you should think me fae.
ADRIAN: What else can you be?
LIUTGARDE: ... a magical princess from the land of never-ever, beyond the wide world's ending. *[pause]* A warrior of emptiness. *Liutgarde,* which has the meaning, *the people's house,*

[A detailed discussion of Excrucian etymology may be found on pg. 379.]

LIUTGARDE: or, *home to the folk.*
ADRIAN: The ... faerie ... folk.
LIUTGARDE: The point is, you are in the wrong mythological context entirely; to obsess over aliens would be more accurate.
TASSILO: Excepting, I said helpfully, for the fact that you have withdrawn us beyond the surface of the world, into the land of faery.
LIUTGARDE: Yes, Tassilo, yes. Excepting that.
ADRIAN: I have no response to that.
DIANE/LIUTGARDE: Then silence falls.
GM: There is a time of drifting mist and silence.
DIANE: P.S. I am totally claiming the "the Arc's **Ally** is uncomfortably weird" quest option.
GM: There is a time of drifting mist and silence; a moment of, almost eerie, *connection*; and a nagging ... awareness begins to register in all your minds.
TASSILO: Bloody hell, I left the oven on.
GM: *[cough]*
TASSILO: Bloody hell, I left the *oven.*
LIUTGARDE: Tassilo! Without an oven, how will we cook the "hot pockets" of the world's demise?
CROSSTALK:
TASSILO: That's a *microwave.*
CIARA: We aren't doing that any more.
GM: That nagging, drifting awareness being, there is a waylet *very* near.
DIANE: ... that is not the Highly Alarmed, Ltd. patrol I was expecting; nor, a visitation of the Powers.
GM: It is a subtle touch upon your senses. It is not the kind of thing you would just *notice,* under normal conditions, if you were not drifting in the nothingness, in the mists of faerie, in silence and in contemplation. But you are. And so you do.
EDWARD: Do we have a sense of ... location? Direction?
GM: Strictly speaking, irrelevant; a waylet does not strictly exist *inside* the world, but like ... a bead inside a crumpled map. If the map were very large, I mean, and the bead extremely small. It is not in the world, but possessing only a certain proximity; a certain adjacency.
EDWARD: OK ...
GM: In another sense, you would need to hunt for it, and use **Navigation** within a quarter mile, as I noted earlier; except ...
EDWARD: Except?
GM: It is coming nearer. Nearer, and nearer, until an eye opens in the icicle itself.
DIANE: Wait, before we deal with that, the icicle has eyes?
GM: How do you *think* you spell icicle?

[pause]

EDWARD: Oh my GOD, Maddie, get out of my house.
GM: This is my house.
HEATHER: ... that's fine, we can leave.
GM: *[head-desks]* Regardless.
DIANE: So the icicle is looking around for us.
GM: Yes.
DIANE: Is there any evidence that we were ever here?
GM: Did any of you start filling out the forms?

[Edward raises his hand. After a moment, so does Heather. Diane sighs.]

GM: There is, possibly, a certain degree of evidence, although I am willing to imagine that your misdirection extends to cover it.
DIANE: Please, thank you. And they should both get disappointment bonuses here, seriously.
GM: Yeah, sure, Tassilo, Ciara, recover a Cost.

[Tassilo and Ciara both take -1 Fugue.]

GM: Meanwhile, the eye looks around the room, icicle turning, and finally says, petulantly, "Nothing there." A

voice from somewhere behind it—like it was a recording, and someone was speaking over the actress' shoulder—says, "Figures."

HEATHER: Your move, Edward.

EDWARD: I don't actually have a move.

HEATHER: You were going to do something clever when they showed up to investigate!

EDWARD: I was expecting a physical presence!

GM: The waylet—not that you'd be aware of it if you hadn't felt it, previously—is definitely co-located with the consciousness in the icicle. It is fading as that consciousness begins to recede.

EDWARD: Um. Um um um.

GM: "Initiating containment and cleansing protocols," it says. "Site clear in 30." Pause. "25." Pause ...

EDWARD: I'm going to step out and invoke the clearance codes I got from the ilλnati, and also see about infecting this icicle with treachery.

GM: "Uh," she says. "Brad? We've got inquisitorial Powers on site." In the background, you hear a baffled obscenity.

TASSILO: Listen. We need to meet. Somewhere your Imperator can't observe you.

DIANE: Do you even know what you're doing, Edward?

EDWARD: *I* don't know, not getting contained and cleansed, right?

ICICLE: Actually, uh, 15, I can't *stop* the countdown from here, it's not my site-cleanser.

TASSILO: What?

GM: Adrian tosses in an, "idiot says, 'what?'"

TASSILO: What? No, you can't do that backwards.

ICICLE: 10.

CIARA: Were you aware, incidentally, that you contain a portal to the portion before and beyond the world?

ICICLE: Oh, geez, that's *private*. But I guess it doesn't matter any longer.

CIARA: What?

GM: Adrian smirks. Icicle: "5."

HEATHER: I am aborting into a dive into Beyond.

GM: Give me a spotlight there.

HEATHER: This is me, closing my outer eyes and ripping open the other side of the darkness with my strength. This is me *looking* at the Beyond beyond the icicle, in willful, wicked witness.

GM: You fall into a land of endless, static snow. And I guess, unless anyone has another quest action, the chapter ends.

EDWARD: I'm calling "you catch a Power's attention." *Again.*

HEATHER: I'm done, I think, I mean, I'm in Ninuan.

EDWARD: How much can a cleansing protocol really hurt us, anyway?

GM: "0."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

[This chapter featured the following spotlights and quest actions:

- *Edward's* ***Decisive*** *choice to approach his ilλ-nati contacts about this trip;*
- *Diane's* ***Reckoning:*** *"What's there to find in this malt shop? Like, is there a piece of my death here?"*
- *Edward's* ***Attention*** *to how cool? Tassilo? is??*
- *Heather's* ***Reckoning*** *of the water treatment facility;*
- *Diane's* ***Reckoning:*** *"What's up with this Adrian kid?"*
- *Diane's quest action, "the Arc's* ***Ally*** *is uncomfortably weird."*
- *Edward's quest action, "you catch a Power's attention."*
- *Heather's* ***Decisive*** *diving out of the world.*

After the bonus for using up their spotlights, Ciara is up to 11 XP; Liutgarde, to 12 XP, plus 6 on her quest; and Tassilo, to 15.

At the beginning of the next chapter, each Cost drops by one, to a minimum of 0. Then,

- *Liutgarde starts the next chapter at +9 Stilling, −3 Immersion, −3 Fugue, +7 Burn, and −4 Wear.*
- *Tassilo starts the next chapter at +1 Stilling, −2 Immersion, +9 Fugue, −3 Burn, and +5 Wear, and*
- *Ciara starts the next chapter at +7 Stilling, −3 Immersion, +9 Fugue, −3 Burn, and −1 Wear.*

The GM looks at her NPC cost pool and decides that Adrian or icicle girl probably spent one Cost on something along the way, and—while she hasn't actually thought out the details yet—that the "cleansing protocol" should be impressive enough to cost SOMEBODY 5. Her pool for the remainder of the session is now 8.]

From the testimony of Osuin Thermidau:

The Pace of the Game

Speaking a miracle needs an entire heart. That is why you can only invoke one miracle at a time. You can keep one going. You can keep other things going.

But you cannot speak two miracles into the world at once.

Just one. Only one.

It is all of you. It is all you have.

Characters in a scene set its pace. It is a group effort. They decide, communally, how much time will pass between each action of note.

It is possible to have a scene in Minuan with actions every few years. That does not mean characters stop breathing. Talking. Walking.

... but *the scene* is not about that.

The *scene* is about their competitive castle-building. Or whatnot. So those are the actions that count.

Those are the actions that set the pace of the scene.

Maybe you can go the other way too. Maybe you can have a scene where stuff happens every tenth of a second. Stuff that *matters*. Maybe in that scene people take new actions every tenth of a second. They say, "OK, here's what I'm doing at 6:36:18.4-5."

Do you remember why we are talking about this?

It is because of the miracles.

Whether the pace is a year or a tenth-second, a character can use one miracle at a time. At a year. At an hour. At a tenth of a second.

It is all of them.

They cannot do more.

It is not the GM that sets the pace. Maybe the GM arbitrates the pace. But they do not set it. It is set by the people. It is set by the interactions in the scene.

If a character wants to *be* faster, they speed up.

They turn their attention to a shorter time.

A character cannot do two miracles at a time. But a character can do one miracle, *and then* one miracle.

So they do.

Faster than two miracles used to be. Even, maybe, in the time they used for just one miracle, before.

This ups the game for the other characters in the scene.

Maybe, they think, they must move faster too?

At some point, looking at a shorter time does not do any good. At some point you can do many more things, but why? You are going so fast that things don't have room.

They don't have time to breathe or have consequences.

If all you can do is blink part of a blink, it is easy to forget your big goals.

Too fast, and your actions get into a logjam. You must stop. Relax. Shift to longer time.

Even if it will slow you down.

That is the scene's pace:

The time it takes to do one action that matters, and then see what it did.

You can only keep two actions going at a time.

They can be complicated. They can be *very* complicated.

Here is a mundane action:

- I want to hang around the lab, coding a simulation, chatting with my officemates, and drinking really terrible coffee.

Here is a miracle:

- I combine **Glorification** and **Guidance** to release the ice dragon within my tattoo and bury the room in ice.

Does that look like two miracles?

It is not. It is one miracle. It is one *whoosh.* It is actually one miracle and one mundane action, stuck together, in one big *whoosh*. That is fine, because that is only one miracle. It would be two miracles if it was a *whoosh* and a *bang.* A *whoosh* and a *yow.* A *whoosh* and ... whatever.

It is one miracle. One giant *whoosh.*

It is one action, too. It has a miracle part and a mundane part—but, one action.

An action can be complicated. But once it starts it has started. If you pay for an action, you pay for that action. You cannot change it. You can expand it. You can explain it. But it is *that action.*

And you can only do two at a time.

Glitch is not a tactical game. But that is as close to tactics as it will come. There will be times when you will be stuck. You will have two actions. You will not want to let go. You have *paid* for them. But there is something else that you want to do.

What now?

Or, you have one action. But there are two things you want to do. They are not the same *whoosh.* If they were the same *whoosh* then they would be only *one* thing that you wanted to do. They are not both of them miracles. If they were both miracles, you could not do them both at once anyway. No. One of them is mundane. Maybe one of them is a miracle. They are anyway separate things.

You can do them together. You can grab a backpack and use a miracle at the same time. One in one hand. One in the other. A *whoosh* and a [mundane, uninspiring sound.]

... but you have one action going. You want to do two. That is three things.

That is not okay.

... this will come up much more than you think.

Let's talk about cheats.

The first cheat is that it is not the Eide that does two things at a time. It is the Wyrd.

It is not the *character* that does two actions. It is the *player.*

If the GM says you do something. If they say you dodge. If they say you hear a sound. That is not *you*. That is not you, *taking action.* That is the continuum.

That is ... integration.

Do you want to blink? You can't blink if you are doing two things. But you are assumed to be blinking. "I blink" is an action. "I am probably blinking," or, "GM: you're blinking."—those are *not* actions. Those are description. Just a part of the world.

Do you want to digest? Do not take time to digest. Do not use your action on it.

Just ... you are probably digesting right now.

You are seeing. You are hearing.

You only need an action for *more.*

The second cheat is powers that are Automatic (pg. 249). Those are free. No action. Usually the player must still say: "I am using this power."

Sometimes it is the GM's idea.

Either way they are free. Action-wise, they are free. They start on their own.

They end when they stop.

The third cheat is very cheap. It is hax.

The third cheat is taking damage (pg. 279). You can take damage without an action. You *get* to take damage without an action.

Then, you get to react.

You get to show what that damage is doing to you. You get to emote or, e.g., devolve into goo.

Even if you were doing two things.

This can't keep going forever. You have to stop *one* of those three actions before the next scene.

But you can do three things for a while.

The last cheat is very tricky. You can technically take action out of sequence. You can do two things. Then you can finish them. Then you can flashback to that time and do a third thing.

This is a hard thing to exploit. I do not think you should try. I do not think you should spend the game thinking about ways to go over events more than once.

Instead I am just saying:

Can you use attention to say you just blinked, when you had been doing two things? Maybe. Probably, yes.

Can you *do* flashbacks and flash forwards and time travel without screwing the game up?

Yes.

The actions players take at different player-times do not clash.

If players engage in time travel I do not know what will happen. I am told that players cannot time travel because of the inexorable physical conditions of the world.

On this conceit, this rules system depends.

VALENSIDE DRASDA
who is Dying of Stairs

Divine Attributes

In that moment Priscivell died, as they had always been fated to die. They fell, as they had always been fated to fall. Their story ended, as it had always been fated to end, nevermore to continue, save in the bellies of birds.

... until a breath it broke the world, and everything had changed.

— from The Irreducible Wing, *by N. Iolanthe Kess*

Something ... immortal

In the Strategists there is a spark of something immortal. Something ... transcendental. There is a secret flame inside them that is not measurable in mortal talent, or even in the magic arts:

This, we call divinity.

It is cousin, perhaps, to that which mortals name as such (the immanent power of the law-beings and their serfs). They too have a thing within that burns beyond mortality.

It is heir and splinter, perhaps, to the greater empyreal powers of the Beyond: to those rare, inscrutable, and suzerain phenomena that stalk the void, attending to unknowable business of their own—from time to time disrupting matters of the world and void, but far more often intangible, ineffable: a numinous breath of passage. They are the stars and suns to the Excrucians' inner fire ...

... but what the Strategists have within them is enough; it is a darkness deeper than the world's, or a light far brighter, and what it allows for them is miracles.

These they wield with **divine attributes.**

There are four divine attributes accessible to Strategists:

- **Eide:** the power of the Strategist's dream-of-self;
- **Flore:** the power of the Strategist's bonds in Creation;
- **Lore:** the power of the Strategist's tie to Ninuan; *and*
- **Wyrd:** the power of their deep truth and fate.

These function much like Ability. Each is rated from 0-7. Each allows for the performance of tasks up to that level—and may be pushed further, at a Cost.

Characters may power:

- Eide with the loss of self, named **Stilling;**
- Flore, with the loss of perspective, named **Immersion;**
- Lore, with confusion and delirium, named **Fugue;**
- and Wyrd with **Burn**: damage to the mind and soul.

Normally this is the only Cost that may be spent. That said, this is flexible to circumstance. If it's an obvious fit to what the character *does,* they can power an attribute up with one of the three other Costs. The exception is mundane Wear, which ... regrettably ... is unable to fuel the power of miracles.

A character's [base Attribute + spent Cost]—minus any relevant "Ward," as discussed on pg. 257—is called their **action level** or **action result.**

Burn, Fugue, Immersion, and Stilling—the Costs that *can* fuel miracles—are sometimes known as **the Four Costs.**

opposite: *by Robin Scott*

Eide

A character's **Eide** is the being they have dreamt themselves to be and the power and attention they have vested into that dream. It's used for feats of charm, talent, strategy, and stagecraft. Most of all, it's used to *be* who they believe themselves to be.

A character's Eide is closely entangled with that character's **Technique.**

- **Eide 0- Ingenue:** Eide 0 characters have no real practice with the arts of Eide.
- **Eide 1- Titled:** Eide 1 characters have found a place in the world ... but what is it? And what title do they wear?
- **Eide 2- Practitioner:** Eide 2 characters have been initiated into the deeper secrets of their Technique.
- **Eide 3- Defined:** Eide 3 characters have an image and a style ... but what are they?
- **Eide 4- Votary:** Eide 4 characters are good at struggling and suffering their way to victory; often, they are *willing* to struggle and suffer their way to victory, to make of themselves and of their lives a sacrifice ... but for what cause?
- **Eide 5- Genius:** Eide 5 characters are dazzling in at least one particular field—that is to say, their Technique. They may be dazzling in others.
- **Eide 6- Legendary:** Eide 6 characters have done impossible things; they have built a legend ... but what is that legend? What were those things?
- **Eide 7- Nonpareil:** Eide 7 characters may outright overwrite reality with their Eide.

The titles listed for the various levels of Eide are those that the Excrucians themselves have broadly settled upon for use in referring to certain classes of proficiency with the arts of Eide. To a certain degree they are also acceptable titles for individuals, but that's a secondary use; it is *possible,* for instance, that an Excrucian might refer to a given Strategist as "Titled" or "Defined (One)," but they are more likely to use the actual title by which that Strategist is known. Similarly, formally referring to someone as "Legendary" or "Genius" is at least mildly trenchant; to honor the relevant level of Eide, one normally cites the specific talent or legend associated with that, instead. **Ingenue, Votary,** and **Nonpareil**—while somewhat dismissive, each in their own way—do see use in reference to individuals now and then, as does **Practitioner.**

An example Eide task is demonstrating dazzling talent in the Strategist's Technique—e.g., winning or running up in a cooking contest, for a character with the Eide of a genius chef. This is the difficulty 5 task, **Talent.**

Flore

A Strategist's **Flore** measures their entanglement with Creation. It's used to connect to the things that their heart has come to treasure; to receive aid from them; and to awaken their innate and hidden powers.

It is progressively harder to stay loyal to Unbeing the further one travels along this path, and harder to travel along this path the more loyal one is to Unbeing; thus, the Chancery has a higher concentration of Flore than does the Host.

- **Flore 0- Outsider:** Flore 0 characters have no real connection to the world.
- **Flore 1- Ghost:** Flore 1 characters have found a faint attachment to the world—but what is it?
- **Flore 2- Envoy:** Flore 2 characters have built something metaphysically and emotionally valid.
- **Flore 3- Catalyst:** Flore 3 characters have taken on intimations of worldly divinity; they have become treasures, to the world.
- **Flore 4- Awakener:** Flore 4 characters have learned to see the hidden beauty and power of the world ... and to bring it forth.
- **Flore 5- Geomancer:** Flore 5 characters wield the treasures of Creation with an adept hand.
- **Flore 6- Eternal:** Flore 6 characters are true enough to win the love and loyalty of the world.
- **Flore 7- World-Weaver:** Flore 7 characters are artisans of wonder: they sip from the same sacred well of creation as the maker of the world itself.

The Flore titles are a bit more popular for individuals than the Eide titles are, with the exception of "Outsider;" with the vast majority of Strategists having Flore 0, and not being outsiders to *their own* society, *that* title is used as formal address only rarely, and only tongue-in-cheek.

An example Flore task is awakening the "true power" within a loved one—revealing their hidden talent as, e.g., a painter, hero, politician, or a lightning beast in human form. This is a difficulty 4 task. A character with Flore 4+ can do it easily; one with 0-3 must spend Immersion (or, more rarely, some other Cost) to do the same.

Alexei is very committed to bitterness. It is sad. He sneers at magic. It is sadder. If he were not so very much in love with the wrongness of the world I could tell him that he was its exception. If he were not so very angry at the idea of there being more to things than the simple physics he grew up with, I could tell him what I see when I look inside him:

The bird as large as continents, as pure as winter snow, its feathers blue.

—*from* The Court of Desmilla Montaud, *by Santa Rosenberg*

Lore

A character's **Lore** measures their ability to command treasures and powers born of Ninuan. It's used to hunt and bind a Strategist's favored λ-servants or artifacts, to navigate the void, and for various related arts.

For Lore more than for any other attribute the Strategist profits from their ability to spend the Costs. Were they bound to their Lore rating, and unable to spend Fugue, a Lore 0 character falling into Ninuan would be as blind as any human, incapable of perceiving the subtle stratifications of the Not. A character with higher Lore would have eyes to see ... but below Lore 6, would have little to *gain* from it.

- **Lore 0- Lostling:** Lore 0 characters are all but blind to Ninuan.
- **Lore 1- Stray:** Lore 1 characters are unfamiliar with its sights.
- **Lore 2- Dustcloak:** Lore 2 characters are competent to wander the Beyond.
- **Lore 3- Hunter:** Lore 3 characters have mastered the binding of Arcana.
- **Lore 4- Outrider:** Lore 4 characters have learned the subtler tricks of void navigation.
- **Lore 5- Perquisitor:** Lore 5 characters have a deep and far-ranging knowledge of the Not.
- **Lore 6- Arcanist:** Lore 6 characters have mastered the powers of their Arcana.
- **Lore 7- Exarch:** Lore 7 characters are as one with the nameless void.

Lore titles are also fairly popular in practical use, although "Lostling" and "Stray" are teasing when they are not derogatory and "Hunter" and "Outrider" have limited *gravitas.*

An example level 0 Lore task is looking up some information about a particular Arcanum in a book, database, or whatever other resource the Strategist prefers to use. Even a Lostling may do this much; in fact, with the Lore Attribute, they may do so with a certain miraculous efficiency.

"They say you'll answer anything," London said.

"Anything and everything. Five bucks."

London fished in his pocket. He tossed across a ten.

"Two questions," he said. "First, what's a question that you can't answer?"

Perry leaned in a bit. Whispered in London's ear. London's complexion grew darker, and darker with each word.

"I can't ask you that!" he said.

"No refunds," Perry said.

— *from* A Walk With Ravens (Perry/OC), *by Shelly Singleton*

Wyrd

A character's **Wyrd** is their understanding of, and attunement to, their fate; their deep nature; their interconnected meaning and purpose within the world. It's used to endure or spread the Strategist's infection and manifest pure Unbeing within the world.

The world can put up a fight against the Wyrd. Sometimes even mortals can oppose this attribute's bleak miracles. Its signature effect is the power to unmake the world, but that power is eerily vulnerable to mundane action: to true hearts and daring gambles; to honest effort and honest witness; to everything the world is when it's at its best. It's not that true hearts are terribly common, much less honest effort or witness, and even daring gambles are fairly rare; this is just a thing that Strategists who specialize in Wyrd should bear in mind.

- **Wyrd 0- World-Bound:** Wyrd 0 characters are essentially mortal.
- **Wyrd 1- Wyrdling:** Wyrd 1 characters have grasped a few hints as to the *alienness* of the void.
- **Wyrd 2- Ninuanni:** Wyrd 2 characters are more their original self than their mortal one.
- **Wyrd 3- Armiger:** Wyrd 3 characters have studied their deep truths further ... but the Wyrd they've found is poisoned by their infection.
- **Wyrd 4- Sword-Bearer:** Wyrd 4 characters are purer weapons of the void.
- **Wyrd 5- Postulant:** Wyrd 5 characters are those who, disenchanted with pure destruction, have begun to seek more useful paths.
- **Wyrd 6- Potentate:** Wyrd 6 characters have found a truth within that is potent even against the Glitch.
- **Wyrd 7- Illuminate:** Wyrd 7 characters have begun to shed their mortal self and worldly form.

"Ninuanni" is not used as a title; it is merely an acknowledgment. Few would claim the title "World-Bound" or "Wyrdling" for themselves. The other titles are commonly in use.

An example Wyrd 3 task is sharing a shadow of one's own infection with someone else. A character with Wyrd 3+ can do this without spending Burn; those with Wyrd 0-2 must spend Burn (or some other Cost).

Using the Divine Attributes

Each divine attribute grants access to nine lesser powers and nine greater powers. These are specific, although many are flexible and many are personalized in various ways. **Lore,** for example, offers powers of investigation, vision, spherecraft, hunting, navigation, percipience, infusion, inchoation, and invocation.

The lesser powers for each Attribute are arranged from difficulty 0-8. The greater powers are roughly parallel to

them—each similar to a lesser power, but stronger—and add +4 to the difficulty. Thus, actions using the divine attributes can face a difficulty ranging from 0-12, and each individual difficulty level is tied to one lesser power, one greater power, or both.

Most of these powers are "miracles:" actions writ directly into the world. A few are "Rites," which circumvent the world, shifting the substrate beneath it, or "wishes," wild dreams that focus on the ends but not the means.

These specific powers aren't the limit for the divine attributes.

Instead, they're the central focus. They're the most typical, straightforward effect(s) available at that level of difficulty—but each level of difficulty, at the start of its description, will also talk about *what the power is about:*

An energy, an effect, that the Strategist can manipulate.

They can counter it, or similar effects, when used by others. They can twist or alter it as a thing within the world. They can develop new ways to use it that don't quite fit the standard form. Creating what amounts to a brand new basic effect may raise the difficulty, take a certain amount of time and practice, or require a certain level of attention, at the GM's discretion—

But more generic *manipulations* of the power are the same difficulty as the effect itself.

More specific rules for miracles are found on pg. 247; for Rites, pg. 258; and for wishes, on pg. 260.

NPC-Only Attributes

Eide, Flore, Lore, and Wyrd are more or less specific to Strategists—the Nobles, Imperators, and even the other kinds of Excrucians have their own divinity, and breaching through to the powers of another type is rare.

In practice, these other powers will function *much* like the Strategists'. They'll come in sets of four attributes, like, e.g., the Deceivers' quartet of Deepness, Persona, Sealed, and Theft (pg. 408). They'll have nine lesser abilities, nine greater abilities, and a "buy up to" system. These have been developed in depth for previous RPGs, and distilled down for use here, with details found on pg. 394-410:

Thus, if a GM wants to build a character of any type as preparation for the game, and get a sense of what they can do by, e.g., dividing 25 points among their attributes ... they may.

However, there will be a key difference in how these NPC-only attributes function: as discussed on pg. 280-281, NPC attribute levels and Costs aren't there to facilitate tactical faceoffs between NPCs and PCs. Rather, they exist to keep the GM's use of miracles grounded. Thus, the NPC-only attributes are built not for precision but for Fermi approximation: for rough, in the moment, calculations of what they might be able to do, and for (about) what rough cost.

It should be noted that this is specific and intentional; that, in short, the GM is not obliged in any sense to update this manner of handling things if more information becomes available about an NPC-only attribute at some later time. A player might know details of previous games using an attribute. A later game or supplement might express one (or four) of those nine-power ladders in tactical detail, and in fully **Glitch**-compatible form.

None of that matters; the GM can and should ignore all of that that doesn't actively help them and keep running NPCs in loose, approximate terms. ... for that matter, until they've fully internalized the Strategist rules, they should probably be running NPC *Strategists* based on a loose sense of how *they* work as well.

Combining Powers

Characters may combine multiple miracles or multiple Rites, from the same Attribute, into the same action. This does not allow combining miracles and Rites, nor does it allow combining miracles or Rites from different Attributes. The combined power has difficulty equal to that of the highest level power involved.

Combining powers can't override a power's various *tags*, discussed on pg. 247-256, but it *does* share them—e.g., a combination of two powers tagged Time-Consuming (pg. 251), meaning they take a while to execute, is usually just "on the high end of Time-Consuming." A combination of two powers tagged Quest (pg. 252), meaning that they're sustained in quest rather than action slots, can fit into a single quest slot ... but a combination of a Quest power and a regular power can't go in a quest slot, and can't be sustained as a regular action, either.

The final power does have to make *sense*, so combining powers won't come up as often as you might think; however, for instance, a silver-tongued Strategist might combine **Intensity** and **Stunt** (pg. 168) into a single, level 2 Eide effect.

Characters can also combine Ability actions with miracles, Rites, Gifts, and wishes. The difficulties here do *not* combine—the player pays for the Ability action, if necessary, and the divine power separately. Consider **(Greater) Study Up** actions to have the "Very Time-Consuming" and "Quest" tags and other Ability actions to have no tags at all; as before, combined actions can combine, but not override, tags.

This option—combining Ability and the divine Attributes—may sound complicated, but it's not:

It's mostly for things like "this power makes my words more charming, so I'd like to say some words while I use it" or "I want to run forward while using miracle X." Ability actions are fundamentally normal things to be doing, so allowing Ability to combine with the divine Attributes really just says that characters can walk, talk, run, throw, scheme, shoot, curse, read, write, swim, laugh, scan the Internet, or whatever else while using their various divine powers, paying Wear to do so if they must.

Eide

Strategy, at heart, is presentation.

—*from* How to Kill Enemies, *by Frideric Krim*

THE SHELL OF SOULS

Eide is the power of a Strategist's dream-of-self: of the mind and body and most of all the *being* they have chosen. It is not the powers of the *shape* of that dream, even if that dream has a superior shape. It is not the inherent puissance of the Strategist. Rather, it is a richness invested *into* that dream through time and will.

Eide expresses itself in presentation. It glitters with the glamor of celebrity. It is not the deep arising Wyrd from which the Strategist derives their dream; it is the dream as it is seen. Therefore, Eide is a correlated power. It is deeply connected to the relationships that the Strategist has formed, the places they have built for themselves within the world, the people they have known. Amidst that context their dream has expressed itself; in those eyes has that dream shone.

Unlike mortal image, which is ephemeral and phantasmal, Eide is metaphysically concrete. It exists of itself, without the consent of others. It is not contingent upon the flickering of human thoughts. Eide is what is seen, but at the same time:

Eide sustains, even when not seen.

Eide is armipotent. From their dream the Strategist gains the ability to impose their self-definition on the world. *Through* that dream they gain the power to control the perceptions held by others. The stratagems that make their name come not from their ineffable Wyrd, not from their deep inner truths, but from the Eide—the story—that declares them capable. They are *celebrity* strategists, able to accomplish anything because and exactly because their cunning schemes are legend.

A Strategist learns their Eide from their choices. They reinforce it with their witness to their self. Thus when they are brave their Eide grows braver. When they are strong, their Eide grows strong. This is so even if that bravery is forced; that strength, a lie. Similarly, should they come to believe, through trickery or truth, that they are good, they become better. The mechanism for that change is Eide:

First, their Eide, their dream-of-self, becomes a better dream. Then they, within that shell, grow meritable.

Should they learn, through trickery or truth, that they are vile, the opposite occurs: the mien of their Eide adulterates.

In the void this process is monadic. It is solipsistic. There, their Eide evolves from its own principles. It does not interact with any other thing.

In Creation, the Strategists are shaped by others' influence. They bind their Eide to those they come to love: it becomes an Eide of *the one that loves them.* They bind their Eide to the people they hate. Their connections to communities and careers they care about infiltrate themselves into their Eide:

Their Eide becomes a record of all that is important to them, in life.

Eide is not entirely contained within the skin. It fills the world around the Strategist. It is the force of their presence. It is the story that surrounds them. When a Strategist hunts someone, that hunt is Eide. When a Strategist helps someone, that help is Eide. More precisely, the *shape* of that hunt is Eide; the *shape* of that help is Eide; *the way those things are seen, by the Strategist and others*—that falls within this faculty.

Thus, a Strategist's power to shape others' perceptions is a part of Eide. To make others believe a ruse, they dream a glamour across that ruse. To hide something from sight, they dream an occultation. Their greatest deceptions and tricks rely upon the miracles and Rites of Eide.

A Strategist will say that Eide is their promises to themselves. A Strategist will say it is their harrowing-hook to root the mortal soil. Some will say, it is a hall of mirrors, or a wicked blight—

But most of all, it is the image of themselves that they have learned through time.

If they are fortunate, that image shows a self they can accept. If they are not ... there is little, save for long and painful struggle, to be done.

The **Eide** Attribute measures the power and attention the Strategist has invested in this self-experience. With no points in Eide, characters are nameless eidolons. They are bound to nothing, sworn to nothing, and they have no mirror in their self. They lack commitment to their attachments. They have no hand in their own notoriety, or, perhaps, they are unknown. Higher ratings in Eide represent increasing sharpness of self-definition. They also represent a greater power consciously invested in that dream.

Each level of Eide costs 2 points and makes a number of powers relating to social interaction, self-presentation, strategy, and self-identified talent less costly. At Eide 0, even the most cherished personal connection requires a literal miracle to assert; at Eide 7, the character's ego casually bleeds out to shape the world. Low levels of Eide mean that the character's inherent talents are unformed, poorly understood, and, most of all, difficult to integrate into the public world:

They may know that they are an architect of endless cunning plans, or unparalleled at social manipulation, but learning the proper expression for that talent takes enormous work.

High levels of Eide, conversely, ensure the world is dazzled: it will collaborate entirely in the character's dream-of-self.

In addition to the Eide Attribute, a character may also purchase "Gifts" that relate to Eide. These represent specific insights into the self achieved out of the normal order; power vested into the Strategist's image in an unusual or lopsided way; or Eide-like power with an unnatural or external source. Some of these Gifts appear later, along with a general system for constructing your own Gifts.

The Strategist's Technique

Part of each Strategist's Eide is their **Technique:** the way they dream themselves as solving problems; the kind of genius they have dreamt themselves to have. Do they focus on scientific solutions, or on magical ones? Are they clever, swift, or strong? Do they solve every problem with a silver tongue, or with junk they've scavenged from the road? Are they specialists in soccer? Do they commune with spirits of the wind?

The player will need to choose the Strategist's Technique before using many of the powers found in Eide.

The Core Powers

The core powers of Eide are these:

DIFFICULTY	POWER	USE
0	Agony	player-level control over and protection of the infection
1	Intensity	glamour; importance
2	Stunt	cool Technique-based stunts
3	Costumery	instantly donning/doffing a signature costume
4	Cliffhanger	"faking" getting hit by a supernatural effect
5	Talent	demonstrating Technique mastery
6	Strategy	making a miraculously effective plan
7	Casting	splitting off minions from one's Eide
8	Misdirection	making something selectively impossible to perceive

Each can be used by a Strategist with [Eide ≥ difficulty] ... or by a Strategist with lower Eide, if they pump up their Eide with Stilling (pg. 271) or some other Cost.

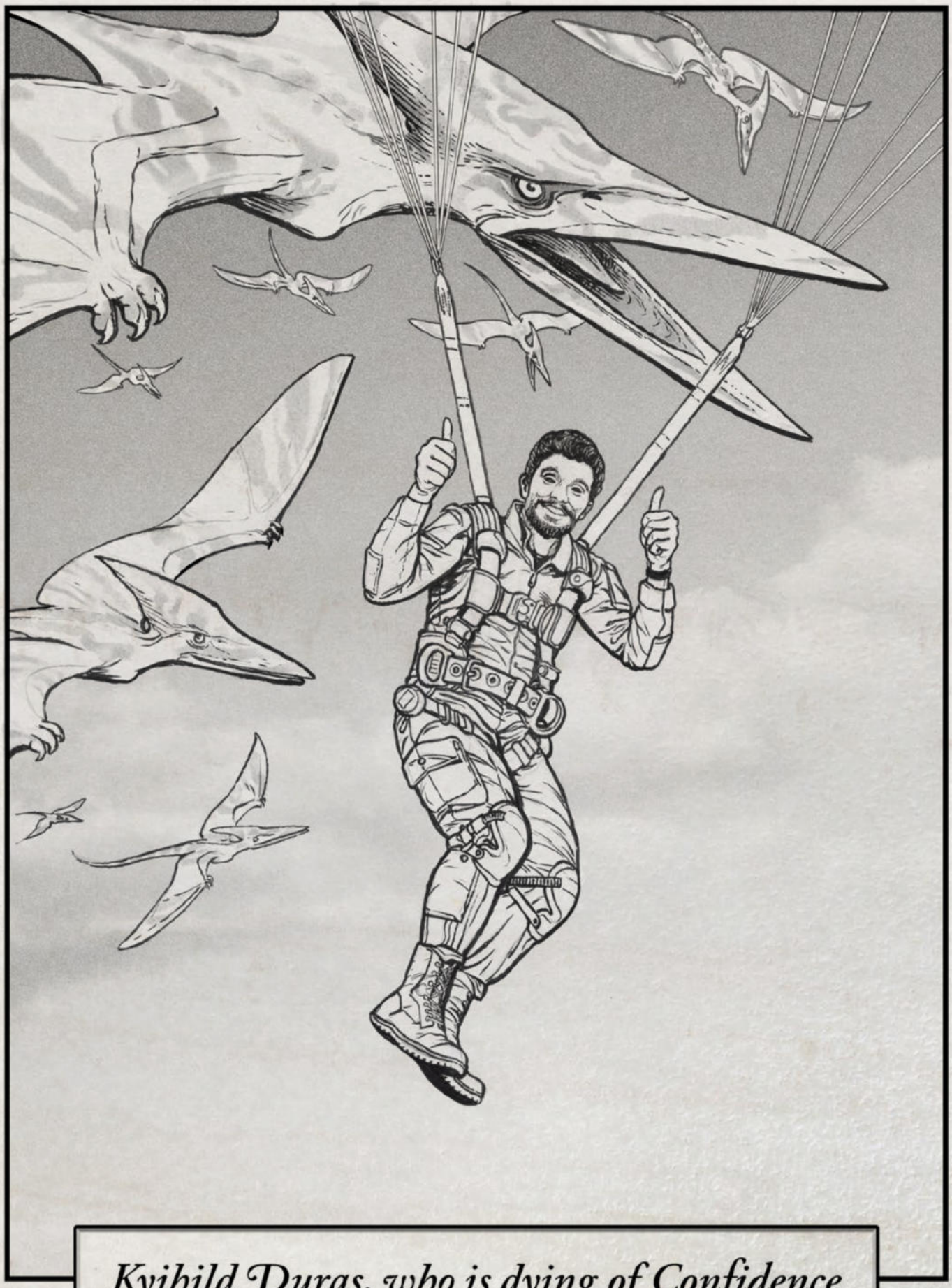
Greater forms of each of these powers are available at +4 to the base power's difficulty. Variations and combinations are also possible, as discussed on pg. 150.

History is written by the winners—is a human phrase, a causal phrase, written by a people immiserated firmly into time. The Strategists are immured instead within a web of correlation; they say:

The Is, subordinates itself before the Eide.

—*from* The Bellum Magnum: A Chronology of Excrucian Assault, Volume IV, *by Kip Narekatski (with Robin Hall)*

opposite: *by Lee Moyer*



Kyihild Duras, who is dying of Confidence

"I can't stay here," he said. His eyes searched hers, desperate, wiggling, and green. "There is a serpent that comes and eats my heart. You know that now."

Her voice had echoes of archaic grandeur. It gripped him, like her hands upon his shoulders did. "That serpent is no disqualification, Mr. Cassius, from your attendance to Introductory Calculus II (Math 108), in Section C."

Stay, the air in the hallway whispered. Stay, rustled his notes within his bag. But—

"Integrated from the space between us," he said, and their tears were flowing, "are the arbitrary constants of the soul."

—*from* Dr. Granda and the People People, *by Isaac Shipp*

Level 0 Eide: "Ingenue"

0 points

Characters with this level of Eide don't have a focus on self-reflection. To the extent they think about themselves, they likely focus on their infection or some other object of personal grievance:

They define themselves not *by* themselves, but by the cross they bear.

This is a very non-committed level of Eide. The character is likely to have connections to the world. They may be important. They may be stable. But they are not *binding* yet. The **Ingenue** is one who can *change their mind* one day about what relationships define them; who can decide on a new meaning and role within society; who can dump a loved one, or community, or de-prioritize them, and go find another. Sometimes they'll do this by choice. Sometimes it's a moral failing.

... sometimes they just can't hang on.

At Eide 0, the stories of the Strategist are contradictory. Their strategies are not stable. Their *concept of self* is not stable. Lacking a strong sense of who they are, they are bad at shaping the perceptions others have of them:

People keep *seeing through them.* They can't maintain a decent face.

Example Concepts

Sisenand Grimhilt is dying of an old hut in the woods. Ultimately they can't avoid returning to that place, and to what awaits them there. That hut is a sigil burned into their fate. It waits *within* them as much as it waits outside them ... but they're running from it anyway. They're running from it, never settling in any place, never committing to any bonds, rife with the knowledge that any friendship, any job, or any *anything* that they ever find will only tie them somehow into the causal web that leads them to that hut.

Amalasontha Getacian is dying of the bathroom. Most people can use one safely, or at least as safely as regional standards allow. Not she. For *her,* each visit is attended by strange horrors. Phantoms whisper from a public bathroom's stalls: "will you hear my tragic story?" Spiders crawl the walls and hide amongst the shelves. Mirrors don't reflect the world she's in, but awful wonderlands. Most consistently, the bathrooms that she enters sprout weeds and mysteries and decay towards wind-cleansed wilderness the longer she remains inside. This is no obscene or vulgar death; it makes no assault upon her dignity; in fact, bloody oracles writ upon the bathroom walls have made it clear to her that *undignified* attempts to avoid the facilities would do nothing but spill these problems out into the world ... but that has left her facing an ever-increasing and inescapable burden of great stress. It cannot easily be voiced to others. If she does voice it, it earns her no respect for the intensity of grace and strength she has. Thus, she has become alienated from society. Thus, she spends her days in paralyzed horror and in struggle. She has little thought to give to how others see her, and she has not developed Eide.

Level 1 Eide: "Titled"

2 points

Characters with this level of Eide have found a place in the world. They have earned a title—whether it's something as fantastical as "the Queen of the Russian Forests" or as prosaic as "Apprentice Baker (Executive Sweets)." More importantly, they've *embraced* that title:

On some fundamental level, it's become who they are, and who they know themselves to be.

This title isn't the root-Wyrd of their existence. It also isn't necessarily the most obvious title for their surface form. It's something that emerges from a watershed moment—a turning point, a qualitative change—when an external identity breaks through the *terrafi sairyd,* the wall between souls, and becomes a portion of their Eide. An accumulation of witness crashes in, tidal, tsunamic. To that accumulation, the title gives context. To that accumulation, the title gives a name.

When the Strategist grasps who they have been within the world, their title denominates its contribution to their Eide.

Thus we can say, before that moment, they may have known that they were tall; they may have seen that they were cruel ... but if you asked them, *and WHO is tall? And WHO is cruel?* the answers circled back to nothingness; to the central unanswerable existence of the Wyrd.

At Eide 1+, they might answer, instead: *It is the (apprentice) baker.* Or, *It is the queen.*

Example Concepts

Eutharic Carolus is dying of hand sanitizer. His encounter with the glitch misfiled him in the books of the world as some sort of hand-borne disease. He hates this, both for itself and for the practical constraints that it imposes. Why? Because if there is anything he knows about Eutharic Carolus, it is that he is a doctor. A man of medicine! And not disease ...

Vadamerca Zakynthian is dying of mecha. They don't exist. Not on Earth, anyway. Not even in most Chancels. But there is this inalienable drive in her to *make* them

real—a drive made unachievable by the quintessential nature of the Earth. This conflict withers her. Beneath the sere force of that truth she repeatedly clashes against the world and comes undone. But what choice has she? Even if she could cease to be this way, she would not so. Before all other things, she is a Mecha Pilot.

Level 2 Eide: "Practitioner"

4 points

Characters at this level of Eide have been initiated into the deeper and more mysterious secrets of their Technique. Usually it is some community or lineage that has initiated them—and what was that? ... but sometimes it is the result of private inspiration.

Like the title, a character's initiation can be fantastical or mundane. They might learn the obnubilated secrets of *True* Sociology from the shadow faculty at Berkeley. Alternatively, they might just be really good at on-the-spot engineering—not because somebody taught them special tricks, but because they've thought about it a lot.

This is in one sense the power to do the almost-impossible. In another sense, because this is still Eide, it is *the power of being an initiate.* The character does not necessarily know specific denumerable tricks; rather, they can convincingly present themselves as knowing how to do the extraordinary. This is an ability acquired *by* learning denumerable tricks that test the limits of verisimilitude, but once the Eide of the initiate is established, it sways the world and their dream-of-self; their insight into all such tricks becomes more facile.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Melancholy Eitsfulg is dying of spirits and the otherworld. Ghosts harass her. Eventually she is dragged into the ghost world beneath the human world and therein lost. The whole process is quite unpleasant. However, learning the mysterious Ghost Punch Art from the legendary Ghost-Punching Dojo has helped her quite a bit.

Renault Amphibolous is dying of cats. Well, of *one* cat. Well, of he, himself. See, the longer Renault stays alive within the world, the more signs he sees that he's not actually himself, but just the freedom-dream of a cat, a cat that's drowning in a bag. The signs range from the way his fingernails grow into claws if he doesn't glare them back to normal to his abnormal balance to the pale shaking nightmares that he wakes from every night ... but if he ever gives in and *accepts* the implication, whether out of futility and despair or to ask a question of the cat-god elders with whom he shares that sack, he will not be able to return before he drowns. Only after a long process of reformation will he return into the world. It is sooth that he is neither cat nor human in the end, but a Prince of Ninuan; his tortured life cycle is not his true origin, but a timeless corruption imposed on his existence; only, it is a corruption that he can not escape. It offers one privilege: over the centuries of his self-aware existence, in which he has many times been driven into that tumult-tossed cat-sack, he has learned many secrets of burglary and the night among the cats. While he maintains his existence as Renault Amphibolous, he is unparalleled as a thief.

Level 3 Eide: "Defined"

6 points

Defined characters have crystallized their Eide. They have coaxed the inchoate sensibilities of their identity into a clearer form. They have made their dream-of-self crisper. They have, in short, committed to an *image:*

A presentation. A concept. A public self.

Now they are more than "the Queen of the Forest." They are "the Queen of the Forest, garbed in green, with opal-dotted silver crown and wooden stave and pet crow upon their shoulder."

Now they are more than "an Apprentice Baker (Executive Sweets)." They are "an officiant clad in the flour-specked uniform of Executive Sweets' later hours; they have a selection of the shop's pastries, a bathroom key, and a rolling pin always readily to hand."

They have something of that sort, at least, for whatsoever Eide they do possess.

Traditionally this accompanies broader recognition. The Queen of the Forest is garbed in green not merely because the character has reflected more deeply upon themselves; it is also because that has been reported. The Apprentice Baker is flour-dusted not merely because they study Eide, but also because it is *expected.* If the character's title does not easily lend itself to distinctive garb, Eide 3+ also traditionally represents a narrowing of scope:

The character is more than just "a citizen of Boise," say; they are *a citizen of Boise, as recognized by something* ... but what? And for what?

If, for instance, *the Mayor* recognizes them as a citizen of Boise, *because they hold the key to the city,* then their image most likely has that key in hand. If it is *the DMV* that recognizes them, instead, then their public self will have a car—and, more generally, have an image suited to being recognized as a driver.

It's not like I knew how to get a gun. I mean, I've seen the stores, but I never actually kept track of where they were, and if I found one, I'd make a fool of myself at the counter. I'd act out dramatic laser sights and talk about "really big rats, like, will this kill them?" and they'd make whole new laws restricting gun access for the mentally troubled and even name one after me.

I don't know how to get one. Most of my FRIENDS don't even know how to get one. It would have been a serious problem, under the circumstances; except, there was Beatrice.

Beatrice was the kind of girl who could find a gun at the bottom of a Cracker Jack box.

... in bulk, out of Costco.

... at back alley gun stands, at bake sales, for the local Church.

— from Siege, *by Eugene Slate*

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Amalgard at-Vidius is dying of grain. It is poisonous to him. Early in the cycle of his infection, only wheat, rye, and barley sicken him. The reaction spreads to other kinds of grains as his symptoms accelerate. Ultimately it spans so much of the vegetable kingdom as to make him a functional carnivore. At the same time, the malice of his syndrome ripens. Ordinary and even extreme efforts to keep wheat and rye from his food cease to be enough: they will *strive*, with a malevolent and vernal plenitude, to find their way into his meals, into his clothes ... in their love or hate for Amalgard at-Vidius, throughout wheresover he might be. His syndrome enrages him. That rage defines him. He has remade himself "The Farmstead Executioner." Clad in a breathing mask and a suit, in the employ of some unknown bank, he travels from farm to farm in the heartland finding reasons to foreclose on them—or to force their owners to abandon them, without even that legal nicety. This is not an Excrucian thing. This is not a way to kill the world. He *wants* to find time to kill the world, but that is that, and this is this: ending farmsteads is just his *life.*

Retemaris Arproprion is dying of The City. This is because The City and urr life have unhealthily intertwined. The *polis* Arproprion is founded upon urm. When it escapes urr body it spreads through the world around urr. It infects the people and the bureaucracy in urr vicinity. It makes them believe not only that the territory around Retemaris is within Arproprion, but that it has always been. This much is beneficial. However, as the city spreads, Retemaris withers. Retemaris' life force cannot sustain the yawning *polis.* Urr vitality, urr essential power of dreaming urrself into existence, is *sapped* by its dispersal through the ever-larger abstract systems and concrete roadways that are the city's veins. Struggling to escape urr fate, Retemaris has become "The Fugitive Prince:" simply but elegantly dressed, well-met, with easy access to the city's riches ... and always ready to pull out urr convertible scooter/ultralight aircraft for a quick escape at need. (For instance, if someone asks urm too many questions, or tries to insist on urr "duties" as Arproprion's founder and head.)

In the end, I lost the duel. I could not help it. I was very distracted. I kept thinking: all right, so he pulled the sword from his partner's heart. That was very magical and scary. But, do we all just have swords rattling around in there? What are they actually made out of? If the sword breaks, does her heart break? Does he ever bump into people on the subway and have their swords come out? Are there, like, some people with swords and others with, like, glaive-guisarmes, and what would he have done if he'd fallen in love with someone with one of those? I don't think his arm is even long enough to pull a glaive-guisarme out of somebody's heart. Is it? And then I started imagining it like that magician's trick with the endless handkerchief, only with the sacred weaponry representing—I guess, agency? Will? Destiny?

And that was about when mine, which as far as I know was made by an actual blacksmith and not pulled out of somebody's chest—not that I know that, not that I have any proof that I have not been wrong about the whole premise of how blacksmithing works all along, or industrialized manufacture; for all I know it's all just dramatic rooms somewhere with handsome princes pulling machined car parts out of their lovers, but anyway, my sword, my metal sword, which was a perfectly good sword, you understand, except that it was not actually in my hand any longer at that time: it went away.

He wouldn't tell me any of it. He laughed at me. He stomped my arm. "There is no 'what' or 'why,'" he said. "I am a Sacred Duelist. That is all."

"What?" I told him. "No!"

—from Tangibility, *by Elliott Porterfield*

Level 4 Eide: "Votary"

8 points

Characters at this level of Eide have given themselves to something. There is some cause, belief, or principle they are willing to suffer for; to face extinction for; even, perhaps, to face the worst of their infection for.

... but what?

The defining characteristic of the **Votary** is that they may freely martyr themselves. They pay no additional cost to perform a sacrifice ploy, in which they accept some terrible fate for a tactical advantage—e.g., allowing something bad to happen to themselves, with a plan to break free later; or, inviting their own infection down upon their heads. This isn't always a good idea even when it's free; it's still a terrible fate—but the possibility is always readily at hand. A constant part of the calculus of their commitments is this:

Bad things *now* may bring a turnabout, at a later time.

It makes sense because they have something to fight for that isn't just "don't let bad things happen to me." Probably something even more visceral than "the world should die" or "the world needs fixing."

Something more tactile than that.

There is something right there, right next to their heart, that they can reach for, that they can hang on to, that makes such a sacrifice worthwhile.

Because self-sacrifice and apparent self-sacrifice are a trademark of this level, victories over Strategists with Eide 4+ are difficult to trust. It's bad enough when an Eide 0 Strategist plummets over a cliff to apparent doom—to be honest, that's almost meaningless until you've seen the body—but if their Eide is at 4+, it's a safe assumption that they're fine. It's not just that their dream-of-self is refined enough to control what you're seeing as they seem to fall screaming to their death; it's also that they've probably done worse than that little tumble *to themselves.*

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Riciberga Wendelin is dying of philosophy. Probably. Arguably. If you want details she will refer you to her extensive list of publications on the subject. The point is, she doesn't really *have* to die as long as she fails to accept the essential quality of self-identification and existence within

the moment that mortality requires. She doesn't really *have* to die as long as she immerses within the essentially monadic character of her otherworldly origination. ... but again and again she sets this aside, again and again she forces herself to accept experience and ultimately death, because it is necessary. Because without it, she would not be effective. The world is wrong, you see, and something must be done.

Lagariman Dracontos is dying of delight. His happiness is blinding. Ultimately, it reaches the point where it unmakes him, where even his ability to recognize it as a sickness, as a wrongness, even his desperate struggle to reject it and immerse himself in dolor, fails, and he delights in his own destruction. For a long time his rejection of happiness was as iron. For a long time, that rejection only broke when he himself broke beneath the inexorable progress of his infection. Now that he has found a home and love on Earth, though, he finds that rejecting happiness entirely is a struggle. Burdening others with his willful despondency for the sake of slightly longer intervals of existence has begun to seem too selfish and too cruel.

Level 5 Eide: "Genius"

10 points

Characters with this level of Eide infuse their dream-of-self with the shine of marvels. Their Eide is rich in those substances that intrigue the mind, that lure the witness to invest that Eide with interest. They have become brilliant and delightful. The light in them is infectious. They inspire and amaze. Possibly, they terrify.

People react to this. They themselves react to this. The world reacts as well:

It exalts them and admires them. Within the field of their Technique, it deems them as passing any test of their potential—unless they choose to hide their light or their invigilator is corrupt, and sometimes even then.

They are extraordinary and they are graced.

Example Concepts

Sadagares Arkyn is dying of caves. He is dying of the things that move beneath the surface of the world. He has seen the true face of the chthonic realm. He has borne witness to its horrors. Therefore, they hunt him; and he, in turn, hunts them. He descends repeatedly into abysmal depths and wins forth deadly puissance and vital lore—and dies. Over and over again, he dies. It is fortunate, at least, that he stands among the greatest adventurers of the age; were he any less, he would scarcely *live*.

Gudelive Ibnassian is dying of illusions. She has learned that the piles of perception and cognition that constitute the false appearance of reality are not contingent. She has learned that the illusionary perspective mortals use to approach an understanding of reality is not neutral and not lifeless. Gudelive Ibnassian has discovered a horrific ecosystem of the mind, wherein certain perception-objects, conception-objects, and sensation-objects are actively malign. Wherein they are *predators*. They feed on humans and on other thoughts. Humans have no way to avoid them. They are trapped within the samsaric world, as helpless as any grazing grass. She is a little better: a spiritual and mental prodigy, able to build even the most elaborate mental structures or break free of the most fundamental illusions—but even *she* must struggle to keep her mind clean of the probing tendrils of the *skandhic* beasts.

"You can't be serious," she said.

"You're not in the twentieth century any longer," I told her, "and 'sleuthing' is what knights do in between their fights with dinosaurs. We have data analysts. We have computers. We have, well. Ubiquitous surveillance, I suppose."

She was frowning. "I assume you mean, in stories."

"What?"

"I won't be encountering sleuthing knight-dilettantes—"

"... correct."

"—out on the street?"

"... mn," I agreed.

"Then," she said, "I put it to you that I may be a defrosted has-been sleuth, and my approaches hopelessly obsolete—not to mention my ability to slay dinosaurs while dressed in shining armor is somewhat ... questionable—but I have one thing that all your data analysts and computing engines and ubiquitous surveillance machines do not."

"Human intuition is a myth," I protested. "And a misnomer, when—"

She lifted a finger to stop me from speaking any further. Then, she waved my unfinished words away. "No, no, no," she said. "I have a suspect."

—from The Final Case of Shirlabet Wright, *by Amber Smith*

Level 6 Eide: "Legendary"

12 points

Legendary characters can accomplish the impossible ... but changing *themselves* is a little harder.

They have honed their Technique to a supernatural level. Even if it's just "folksy wisdom" or "common sense," they have brought such supporting talents under its banner that it can lay angels, devils, and dragons low. With a Technique more like "magic" or like "science," they may well crack the vaults of Heaven.

This is not abstract potential. This is not hyperbole.

This kind of thing has happened.

At Eide 6+, the character's legend resounds throughout the world. Often, their name and face is known as well. Mortals may have no reckoning of them, but the law-beings remember. The Powers remember. The other Excrucians have heard some word of their great deeds.

... but what were they? What are they known for being, for doing, for being able to accomplish, for having done?

A character may reach Eide 6 without accomplishments. It's rare, but it can happen. In that case, Creation and Ninuan know them by false tales. These may be allegations

made by others or illusions spun directly from the fabric of their dream-of-self.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Brandila Silva is dying of tornadoes. When she was young, one of them tossed her into a magical land. She escaped. Now tornadoes hunt her, as do all the appurtenances of that land. *They want her back,* but she won't go. When she *is* dragged back, when she survives that journey, she uses her Technique ("vicious brutality from an unexpected angle") to defeat that land's great terrors. She has beaten more than a few that shouldn't even *have* a weakness that a girl like her can hurt. The rest of the time, she turns that viciousness upon the law-beings that haunt Creation. For both these things she is made legend.

Sigibald Abteien is dying of theft. Most of the time, he is scattered across the Earth. Then someone collects the pieces of him. They gather the bones and cerements and metal parts of him that are strewn about the world. He becomes a juggernaut. Then he is terrifying: a reincarnate sage, sustained by an unearthly vigor, commanding spirits ancient born of fire, sky, and stone. ... but bit by bit, from the moment of his reassembly, his pieces are stolen and scattered away. Archaeology students wander off with his bones. Burglars steal his cerements. Cats bat the metal pieces of him off of a balcony to vanish in the streets below. He must constantly attend to every part of him lest someone (or something) steal it away. Always and every time, he fails. Only because his legend is so great do others take the time to gather up the pieces once again.

Level 7 Eide: "Nonpareil"

14 points

Characters at this level of Eide have transformed it into a physical presence. It is a manifest thing, a reality bubble. Where they go, it follows and precedes them. It intrudes into the world, a force of fable and of story:

A little shell wherein mundanity cannot intrude.

What figures and what edifices fill that little world? What realities do they reject?

What is their bubble of dream and legend *like?*

Most air traffic controllers weren't pyrokinetic, but, then, most air traffic controllers weren't Terrence, either. He wore it like a part of him, worked it into his job, built up a unity between his vocation and his private skills.

"We've got ice on the wings!" Andrea yelled, and Terrence rose.

He rose like a hero stepping onto stage; like a cop going out to face a monster, like a paramedic to a brainstorm—like a phone had been ringing in the back of a building for, like, twenty minutes plus, and he was the guy who was going to answer it, whatever fearsome consequences might befall.

—from The Day of the Vzleten, *by Nikola Smith*

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Beucadican Myrkvior is dying of smoking. He fell asleep with a cigarette lit. He dreamt in the smoke. In his dreams, he saw the Thing—the Thing that is bound within the houses of the tobacco firms, the Thing they have elected themselves to keep; the Thing that ought never have been kept within the world. Because Beucadican has seen that Thing, the tobacco companies must kill him. Because he has seen that Thing, they *can* kill him, for all that he is a Prince of Ninuan. Their guns can touch him, as can their smoke. Until the moment of his death, however, he shall have his Eide as shield and armor; clad in the dazzle of celebrity, he has made himself the Governor of Missouri and the head of a major philanthropic group. His ambitions run even higher.

Evgeniya Davkiya is dying of claustrophobia. It begins as a subtle discomfort in smaller spaces, but her syndrome worsens. Eventually, even open plains beneath a cloudless sky are too confined. She is brought to her knees then, screaming, squeezed between the weight of earth and stars. In panic and exhaustion, she will die. Until that day, though, she is legend: Evgeniya Davkiya, renowned and storied, traveling nature guardian and ombudswoman of the East European Plain.

Rules for Eide

The "power source" for Eide effects is called **Stilling.** A character begins the game with [10 × Eide] points of Stilling. This will rise as they invoke difficult Eide effects. It will fall both over the course of time and when it has harmful results.

Characters may invoke Eide effects with [difficulty ≤ Eide] for "free"—it requires no Stilling.

Often a character will wish to go beyond that. Not only will the higher-Eide effects often appeal to lower-Eide Strategists, not only do characters sometimes need additional Eide to overcome the miraculous barriers known as "Wards" (pg. 257) ... but only by going beyond their base Eide can a Strategist access difficulty 8-12 Eide effects.

To get there, a Strategist may buy the extra Eide they need by crystallizing themselves—by *defining* themselves a bit more firmly than they had done; by locking down a dream that had, previously, been more flexible and unformed—or by *changing* an already-formed nature in a way not entirely good.

The character names the Eide level they wish to emulate; the practical maximum, in the absence of a bidding war, is 23. They perform the effect. If the effect succeeds—which is to say, if it functions essentially as stated, rather than being blocked or undone outright by hostile countereffects—they accumulate Stilling equal to [desired Eide – original Eide.] For instance, if a Votary with level 4 Eide wishes to perform a level 6 effect, they will, by default, accumulate 2 points of Stilling. Put another way, the character adds +2

to their Stilling total. It is good to note, from time to time, what this Stilling actually represents, what the character is actually *doing* that crystallizes them, what the effects might be, but that is not required; more precisely, if not established at the time of the miracle, it will either be a subtle influence that eventually fades away or a dramatic one that will be established at a later time.

Thus, a player whose character is dramatically reaching beyond their limits may choose to explain how, in doing so, they re-define their own nature; if the character is engaging in what they consider a work-a-day miracle, even if the total amount of accumulated Stilling is the same, the player need not do so.

A character must always buy enough Stilling to succeed at the basic effect. They can add more to overcome a Ward (pg. 257) or opposition when and if they discover it's there. This extra purchase is a *little* Slow (pg. 251) compared to miracles, though, and in a fast-paced struggle, they may fall behind (see pg. 151, 262).

Taking 3+ Stilling at once is a notable moment. The Stilling *itself* is still a bad thing, but the character will earn a bonus XP.

Conceptually,

- An effect that costs 0 Stilling is **instinctive**—it doesn't drain the character at all.
- Spending 1 Stilling is more or less **casual**.
- Spending 2 Stilling is **rough.**
- Spending 3 is **unpleasant.**
- A 4-7 Stilling effect is terrifying, painful, and difficult.
- Anything beyond that is **agonizing.**

At the beginning of each chapter, Stilling drops by one, to a minimum of 0.

Characters may also reduce Stilling when it brings them to a crisis: when the player, or, at 80+ Stilling, sometimes the GM, has an interesting idea for the harm or change the Stilling might inflict on their character, and implements it as a "Wound." Superficial Wounds burn off 10 Stilling, with no minimum; harmful ones, 25; metaphysically potent and transformative ones, 50. This isn't unlimited, though, even if the player would want it to be:

The character will suffer at most one such Wound per session—*counting* the Wounds from other, similar, Costs—and at most one 25+ Cost Wound in two consecutive sessions.

Characters may freely accumulate Stilling until it hits 80; then, as noted, there are circumstances in which the GM may force a Wound upon them. At 108—a magic proton number for deformed nuclei—they may no longer spend Stilling at all.

... after roughly 300 points of Stilling have been poured into Wounds over the course of a character's life, the dream that they embody breaks.

Some of the key terms used for Eide powers include:

- **Automatic.** An **Automatic** miracle or Rite doesn't need the character to *do* anything—it just happens. Sometimes it doesn't even require the *player* to do anything.
- **Rite.** A **Rite** is a miracle that shifts the law of the world rather than the world itself. Because of this, it has an innate advantage: it can ignore Wards (pg. 257) and, potentially, manipulate them.

  Rites are the only powers that interact directly with Costs, Infection, Wounds, Wards, or Geasa.

EXAMPLE

A character is a Practitioner, with **level 2** Eide. For this character, the action chart looks like:

EFFECT TYPE	ACTION LEVELS
Instinctive (0 Stilling)	Levels 0-2
Casual (1 Stilling)	Level 3
Rough (2 Stilling)	Level 4
Unpleasant (3 Stilling)	Level 5
Hard (4-7 Stilling)	Levels 6-9
Agonizing (8+ Stilling)	Level 10+

What the player probably memorizes is this:

Level 0-2 Eide effects are the basics: manifesting my infection, impressing people with my title, and showing off my Technique. Lesser agonies, intensity, and stunts. I can do these things for free.

Level 3 Eide effects are "lesser costumery" effects: they let me summon my traditional costume and its associated goods. I have to push myself a little for this, but it is not *difficult*.

Level 4-5 Eide effects are, respectively, all about rolling with it when things are going wrong (level 4) and impressing people (level 5). The cliffhanger rite and greater agony miracles; the talent rite and greater charms. These effects are pretty unpleasant.

Level 6-9 Eide effects—including grand schemes and distractions, creating people out of Eide, creating environmental features, flipping the script after a cliffhanger, and shattering my Eide to unleash a void-being—require that I break myself, at least a bit.

Level 10+ Eide effects—greater schemes, greater distractions, and reshaping the world—are all but impossible. They *hurt*.

THE BASICS

LEVEL 0 RITE: "AGONY"

Automatic, Rite

Level 0 Eide Rites are not willful; they activate in involuntary paroxysm. They are a Strategist's power to sustain their Infection.

The player may invoke this Rite to defend their character against any effect that would obviate their Infection. If their Infection fades more naturally, they may also activate this Rite to restore it. Finally, they may invoke this Rite to impose a new understanding of their Infection on the world. Effectively, their Strategist now has the Infection as they have expressed it and the Infection as the GM

previously understood it ... but the version expressing the GM's previous understanding will fade away with time.

The player may use this Rite without establishing that their character has *chosen* to use this Rite. Sometimes Strategists do so choose, sometimes they do not really know if they have so chosen, but most of the time it is an autonomic reflex.

This is a Rite; it interacts with Infection.

With a level 0 Rite, a Strategist can:

- continue dying of influenza even in a pocket world with ubiquitous medical nanites,
- shift the framing of their Infection from the GM's hands to their own, *or*
- change an Infection's manifestation to match their new sense of what it should be—e.g., shifting *dying of fire* from "attracts fires" to "combusts when emotions get out of hand."

Level 1 Miracle: "Intensity"

Level 1 miracles of Eide are the Strategists' lesser powers of magnetism and wicked charm—in the form of hints of eldritch power they can infuse into their self-presentation and a title that reflects their broader social identity.

This power makes it easy and comfortable to go along with the Strategist. Standing up to them requires an Ability task, and the difficulty rises to 3. If the Strategist actively invokes one of their titles or authorities, it goes up to 5.

Level 1 effects include:

- waving off the importance of the eerie absence of one's eyes,
- talking one's way past police tape as a member of the Chancery,
- charming a crowd with one's glamorous position as the aide to the Mayor, *and*
- rejecting someone's allegations of mendacity by quietly noting one's place on the American *Pie* Council.

Level 2 Miracle: "Stunt"

Level 2 Eide miracles are the Strategists' lesser empowerments of their Technique. They're the Strategist's base-level competence in that Technique, plus the tricks they have that can push it beyond what ordinary mortals can achieve.

Stunt lets the Strategist perform a cinematic or low-fantasy action that fits their Technique (pg. 131). The miracle just grants the Strategist the necessary skill; the actual stunt is a mundane action with 3 Edge. It has the same action level as this miracle. (It's always a Stunt, though, not a particular Ability action.)

Level 2 effects include:

- using the "science!" Technique to understand a complicated physics paper,
- using the "cooking" Technique to make a pastry so light that it can float, *and*
- using the "sleight of hand" Technique and a series of smoke-and-mirrors tricks to outwit a small army.

Theatrics

Level 3 Miracle: "Costumery"

Level 3 Eide miracles are the Strategists' lesser miracles of stagecraft. They're the power that a Strategist has to instantly assume their traditional costume when no one is watching.

The Strategist's player chooses archetypal clothing for them. This can come with a modest selection of weapons, goods, and tools. **Costumery** lets the Strategist instantly change into that clothing and arm themselves with those weapons, goods, and tools. Or, they can summon individual weapons, goods, tools, or costume pieces.

This power draws upon the Eide, the dream-of-self; Creational objects cannot be summoned. (Though, see pg. 197.)

Costumery is two-way. It normally replaces what the Strategist was wearing, stashing it in the most appropriate well-hidden location nearby. If it did, and they are still in costume, and their old outfit is still hidden somewhere nearby, it can also instantly return them to what they were wearing before.

Either way, it can return individual pieces of the costume to the void.

The Strategist cannot perform this miracle while under intent, continuous observation. Any interruption, however, will free them to transform.

Level 3 effects include:

- summoning or dismissing formal Strategist clothing, including blade and bow,
- pulling one's medicine chest or favorite robes out of nowhere,
- always having access to formalwear, a passport or two, a gun, some tools, and cash, *and*
- ditching or reacquiring a proper lab coat and safety goggles without stopping by the clothing locker first.

Mortal Witnesses: all but the most intent of mortal witnesses will assume that either the Strategist has had an appropriate opportunity to change or has been wearing the new outfit all along.

They tried to take it from him when they booked him, just like they'd tried to take his rope and spurs. He didn't fight it. He just looked at them with those soft brown eyes. He said to them, he said: "Can't be a cowboy without my gun."

That cut their hearts right through, it did. So they let it stay. "Just don't you shoot any of the other prisoners," they said. "Or, you know, the judge."

He nodded to that, like he agreed. And he and all his cattle moseyed in.

—*from* Where the Burglars and Arsonists Play, *by Orla McEvoy*

opposite: *by Robin Scott*

Semsenand Gettels
Whom the Forests Will Slay

The worst thing about bringing back one's corpse from the future, switching it out with oneself, and having it burn down to ashes in your stead is realizing that you have definitely checked out the wrong corpse from your depository. God, what did it even look like? Do your enemies know? Do they not know, but do they think you had, like, horrible acne or a tattoo you cannot possibly explain?

"I can explain," I said, when he burst in upon me, but honestly, I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't, I couldn't, I didn't even know what abominable kind of misfeature it had been.

—from Mongoose, *by Tyler Hollingsworth*

Level 4 Rite: "Cliffhanger"

Rite

Level 4 Eide Rites are the Strategists' more realistic feints of feigned defeat. More precisely, they're the Strategist's power to devise, and implement, such realistic feints.

Cliffhanger is a defense against supernatural effects. The defense is "when the scene ends, and this effect is no longer actively being sustained, it will turn out that it only *seemed* to work on me." The character must let the effect work on them until then and must keep this Rite active while the other effect is being sustained. Afterwards, they can come up with some explanation for why they shed the effect itself and also its consequences.

With a level 4 Rite, a Strategist can:

- "accept" that they've been forcibly destined to participate in a school tournament, only to switch out the names written in the book of destiny.
- scream and writhe as they're dragged away to a prison realm, only to reveal, when the miracle lapses, that they'd used their ninjutsu Technique to substitute a log for themselves at the *exact* moment they were captured.
- accept that a pillar of fire from the heavens completely obliterates and destroys them, without trying to fight it, but return to play perfectly fine in the next scene, possibly not even bothering to explain the "trick:" that they'd never properly "existed" to obliterate in the first place!

Cliffhanger *is* an amazing power, and it does make high-Eide Strategists pretty close to immortal if they're willing to run with it, but it's not perfect:

First, it's only a defense against supernatural effects. That includes miracles, Rites, wishes, magic, and supernatural Techniques, which is almost everything that matters, but it *won't* defend against a gun unless, e.g., someone summoned the gun fairly recently or a grave-fresh zombie is firing it.

Second, it's only a level 4 Rite. Most of the time that's not a problem—it takes effect *after* the hostile effect stops, so the hostile effect is probably just "a fact of the world" at that point—but sometimes the hostile effect is a wish, or there's a *different* level 5+ hostile effect in play, and then there'll be nothing **Cliffhanger** can do.

Level 5 Miracle: "Talent"

Automatic, Extraordinary

Level 5 Eide miracles are the Strategists' basic warranty against obsolescence. They're an expression of the Strategist's talent in their Technique as a kind of universal absolute, objective and independent of the circumstances, which may be wielded to shape the narratives around their lives.

Whenever the Strategist's qualifications in their Technique are being tested, the Strategist may automatically invoke **Talent** to pass the test. This does not require an action. It does not even require that they know that they're being tested. (The GM should inform the player, though, so they can decide whether to use this miracle.) It doesn't matter how brutal or selective the test is—even if it's something that goes beyond what a **Greater Stunt** (pg. 174) would let them pass. It also doesn't matter whether it's specifically a test in the Technique or just something that is highly relevant, like a key supporting talent or quality.

The bar can be set low or ungodly high: they'll clear it, all the same. Actually, it's even better than that:

With occasional exceptions where one test was so far out of line with the others that their passing it can "only" be a fluke, *they'll do better every time.*

Mundane sabotage intended to make the character fail can work. That's because at some point sabotage disqualifies the test *itself.* Imagine a cooking contest where the judges refuse to taste or even smell one contestant's work before labelling it "the worst"—what does talent even matter, at that point? The minimum difficulty for such sabotage is 7, though, because that kind of thing rarely works out well in stories, and the difficulty can go up higher based on circumstances. (As for miraculous sabotage, that's just a normal conflict between miracles; it *can* work, if it wins the conflict, but it doesn't have any special rules.)

Once invoked, **Talent** lasts for the entire test—specifically, for whatever *the examiner* considers to be one entire test. If that means it will span multiple sessions, though, the GM can require a new invocation at the beginning of each.

Level 5 effects include:

- passing a physics class, graduating with a physics major, impressing a physical interviewer, getting a physics job, getting scooped up when the aliens demand Earth's top ten physicists for a space project, and finally being noticed as "the chosen one" by the cosmic overlord, "the Physics Crystal."

"I refuse. I do not accept," the proctor snarled. "You are a human. You cannot even G'goth at all, much less score in the upper tenth."

"A human may do anything," said Julian. He tossed his head. "You'd just ... never met a superior specimen."

—from The Ghosting Scandal, and Other Stories, *by Carla Olsen Manske*

- winning round one of a magic tournament, winning round two of a magic tournament, having trouble with round three because it's a big dramatic fight against a nemesis and not really a "test," winning round four, having trouble with round five because there's a lot of unrelated drama going on, winning round six, and taking home the prize.
- demonstrating that the Strategist is still one of the best bakers out there ... even in a brave new world of magic bakers, techno-bakers, and tentacled bakers from beyond.

IMAGE, DEFEATING WORLD

Level 6 Miracle: "Strategy"

Planning, Quest, Extraordinary

Level 6 Eide miracles are the lesser schemes and stratagems of the deathwrights. The heart of this miracle is the tricks and resources that turn a sketch of a plan into something that the Strategist can move through without hiccups or dead ends. Put another way, the point of this miracle is to ensure that the Strategist never finds themselves thinking, for example, "I *could* set a great trap here if I had a legitimate lead on the treasure my opponent's hunting for, to build it around, but I ... don't?"

Or, e.g., "Is there, like, some kind of angel-powered soul-swapping gem I could get my hands on for— ... no?"

This power comes up with a miraculously effective plan, as described on pg. 254-256. The plan is suited to the Strategist, their Technique, the game's mood, and the problem. At level 6, this plan only overcomes dramatic obstacles that were, in some sense, already "in play:"

- *someone's just started shaking up the status quo,* as it was at/near the end of the last story, and the Strategist wants to push it the other way—back where things were, or swinging in the other direction; *or*
- *a major opportunity/opening just appeared* that makes it suddenly plausible to upturn the status quo in the Strategist's favor, and they want to take advantage.

The plan is something that *could* solve the problem or seize the opportunity in 0-3 chapters—and, if there's a time limit in play, by no later than the end of the next chapter. That solution/victory will last until at least the end of the story.

The plan itself doesn't have to come from the Strategist's player; they are neither expected nor required to develop one. They do get a veto, as does the GM, and they do have the right to toss an idea out there and see whether the group bites ... but as a rule, the plan is developed by the group as a whole to fit what the group thinks makes sense.

It's *not* a wish, but one might think of it as if it were; perhaps, as something phrased like:

"I wish I'd use my Technique (or some other clear and satisfyingly 'me' approach) to win this, with the solution lasting at least until the story's end."

Implementing a plan like this is covered on pg. 254-256.

Level 6 effects include:

- coming up with a plan to defeat an invincible army that's just moved to occupy your city,
- coming up with a plan to defeat an invincible army that's *been* occupying your city, but which is dealing with a new internal coup, *and*
- declaring that *someone* is responsible for the wildfires newly ravaging your state—though that's possibly just "the abstract mythic spirit of local wildfires"—and coming up with a plan to lure them out and imprison them.

EXAMPLE

The Strategist wants to come up with a plan to force an angel that just fell to repent.

If the Strategist's Technique is "magic," they might save that angel by diverting its sin thaumaturgically onto a suitable stone, which can then fall in the angel's place. The miracle ensures that such a stone, and such a spell, is on hand. If their Technique is "general trickiness," they might trick the angel into staking possible repentance on a poker hand and then bluff until the angel folds. The miracle ensures that the basic form of this plan will work out; the player need merely explain the various steps as they go.

Note that the poker-based approach is strongest if the angel *themselves* is the opponent—if they fell by their own will, *they're* the one who shook up the status quo, and their character is a valid target for manipulation. If they fell by someone else's hand, one could argue that their characterization as someone willing to go in on that poker hand and be bluffed into folding wasn't really "in play," and the GM could reasonably veto the plan. (On the same principle, the GM could veto a plan like "I bribe the Creator into showing up and appointing me the heir to the world; the angel is so awed by this they redeem." There's just so much in there that wasn't originally at stake!)

A Common Variation: with GM permission, the Strategist can make plans for minor problems that have a rough guarantee of completing in 0-3 minutes instead of 0-3 chapters.

There was nothing supernatural about the brief that Kennedy & Associates filed to stop the hurricane; it proceeded through ordinary process of law. No; if a supernatural element somewhere entered into the story, it would have had to have been before, or perhaps, off to the side of, that:

At whatever junction point in reality had arranged that this particular hurricane was vulnerable to legal action, by virtue of three long-standing faerie oaths.

—from Huntington v. Hurricane Sigma, *by Colman Malone*

Level 7 Rite: "Casting"

Time-Consuming, Rite, Quest

Level 7 Eide Rites are the Strategists' lesser power of reification. They're the process by which a Strategist can split new and permanent existences off from their Eide. For instance, a Casting Rite might create a shop owner to employ the Apprentice Baker or a flower sprite to attend the Forest Queen.

This effortful task needs at least a few hours of work in the background or a particularly slow tactical action in a fast-paced scene; a spotlight can hasten this (pg. 251).

Created beings have the following rules:

- they have five character points, divided between:
  - Ability, costing one point per level, with skills as suited to their concept; *and*
  - relatively minor phantasmagorical (pg. 250) powers, bought for one character point each.
- they also receive a free power to directly manipulate others' emotions as a phantasmagorical (pg. 250) level 3 miracle;
- and, finally, they have a two-point Cost Trait of the Strategist's choice that they may use to enhance either their Ability or their phantasmagorical powers. Having filled this Cost Trait, they may pass those points on to an unwary target, e.g., one who sleeps near them or who carries them near their chest. This takes at least several hours (and sometimes longer) and can be accomplished once per chapter.

The character can choose a couple of powers that are available for purchase by their Eide-born minions in general. After that, it costs 3-10 extra Stilling to develop new powers for a particular minion or minion group; this cost is set by the GM (based on the powers) and paid once, when the first such minion is cast.

The Strategist may assign a quest slot to the created being as it is cast; while they keep that quest slot assigned to it, they can control its actions directly, defend it from harm by taking damage, and pour 1-2 points of *their* relevant Cost Trait into *its* by touch. This can take them below 0. (They will, in turn, acquire the creature's Cost pool when they reclaim the slot—but it may have emptied itself into someone else, by then.) If the Strategist does *not* assign a quest slot, or after they reclaim it, the creature becomes free-willed but still largely loyal; they may no longer defend it by taking damage, and they cannot pour their Cost Trait into its.

This is a Rite, as cast minions manipulate a Cost.

A similar Rite exists in Wyrd; however, the Wyrd Rite casts its minions off from the character's heart rather than their Eide. The two minion types will differ in their themes and their developed powers.

With a level 7 Rite, a Strategist can:

- summon up a horse from the endless void,
- create roadies and a manager to help sell their "rock musician" Eide,
- make a magical bird to carry messages, *or*
- congeal an evil jewel from their aura of power (later, to shift their Wear to the admirer they give it to.)

Level 8 Miracle: "Misdirection"

Bleak, Extraordinary

Level 8 Eide Miracles are the Strategist's lesser games of smoke and mirrors. They are *the power to conceal.*

The Strategist chooses a thing that they wish to hide from others' attention; it can be *anything,* really, from a coin to a concert to an obvious idea. While they sustain that effect, within the limits of an extraordinary miracle (pg. 248), they can hide the chosen thing from anyone or from any group's notice, at any time, for any time. Optionally, the Strategist may choose something to divert attention *to*; while they are hiding their target, and the diversion is noticeable, it will reliably be noticed in the first target's stead.

Misdirection is not an abstract effect. The Strategist should explain how they actually accomplish it—e.g., with a con, deceit, shell game, distraction, act of camouflage, device, direct application of miraculous force, or spell. That said, their method only matters descriptively and in conflict resolution; its details or difficulty will never cause them to *fail.*

Misdirection may end when the miracle does. Alternately, **Misdirection's** effect may linger after use, making noticing the target's presence, first, a **Greater Expertise** task relying on scouting abilities; then, a **Greater Focus** task; and, finally, a **Focus** task ... before it ultimately reverts to being everyday. The GM chooses which option is appropriate based on what the Strategist actually *does* to conceal the thing in question and how visible/noticeable it "ought" to be.

Note that this is a bleak power (pg. 252); no Ability action can pierce through it, no Ability action can defeat it ... but, on rare occasions, a pure heart or a daring gamble may allow even a mortal to see true.

Level 8 effects include:

- hiding a wolverine by painting its fur a color that humans cannot see,
- distracting people from one's microexpressions by blazing up with an aura of eldritch power,
- diverting attention from one airline baggage carousel to another,
- magically convincing a small town that the sun's been stolen, *and*
- using sheer charisma (and a good dose of snappy patter) to keep people from noticing the obvious hole in a story you've just told.

The Queen dwelt in her misery at the bottom of the world, but not alone; not alone; still there were tangled beings born to braid her hair, and sprites of coughing dust to hold her train, scholars rose from ancient bones and dancers skittish in the dark:

Brittle beings of an arid land, but a court yet still, for it was not right to have an unattended Queen.

—from Beneath the Feet of Angels, *by Mackenzie Rusch*

opposite: *by Elizabeth Sherry*

Reccefrid Saldanes, who is dying of Wealth

Greater abilities

Level 4 Miracle: "Greater Agony"

Level 4 Eide miracles ensure that the Strategist's Infection comes into play when they expect it to. They're the *call* to that Infection.

It's still awful and terrible. The Infection can still come up when they *don't* expect it to. They'll need an Ability 5 action to use it in a creative way, or with any fine control.

... but they're not going to have the awkward situation where the only thing they can think to do to solve some problem is to take advantage of their awful burden, and then have their awful burden not show up.

Greater Agony is not available in any story wherein the Strategist has substantively altered the nature of their Infection.

Otherwise, level 4 effects include:

- ensuring that the monsters hunting a Strategist show up when they need a distraction,
- ensuring that the Strategist is properly symptomatic when a doctor is diagnosing their sickness, *and*
- taking advantage of the way the Strategist is always drowning to fill a bowl of water.

Mortal Witnesses: these miracles are not enough to provoke *dementia animi* or force full awareness of the Glitch, but mortals *will* be aware that whatever happens is not "supposed" to have happened.

Level 5 Rite: "Greater Intensity"

Time-Consuming, Rite

Level 5 Eide Rites include the Strategists' greater powers of magnetism and wicked charm—a charisma and intensity so great, a meaning and intensity in others' lives so profound, as to Geas others into following along in the Strategist's wake.

This is a Rite; the term Geas is literal.

Each **Greater Intensity Rite** affects a single target or the gestalt persona of a group of NPCs. This effortful task is a charm or persuasion attempt requiring at least a few hours of work in the background or an extended tactical action in a fast-paced scene; this can be hastened by a spotlight (pg. 251). Once complete, the Strategist becomes *important to the target;* the target feels they need the Strategist in some way.

Specifically, from the Rite's enaction until the end of the next story, the target gains a Geas: "I am driven to prevent [Strategist's name]'s defeat and to prevent any untidy permanent separation between us."

The target decides why this is. Normally this is based on the Strategist's words and actions. The Geas won't directly support that reason, but it *will* keep that reason *valid*. For instance, if someone's convinced they need the Strategist around to steal a mystic gem for them, the Geas won't *help* the Strategist steal the mystic gem, but it *will* make sure the possibility stays open. The gem won't break. The last door to the realm where it's kept won't close with the Strategist on the wrong side ... and so forth. Similarly, if the target needs the Strategist to keep them alive, the Geas will keep the target from dying, or at least from *permanently* dying; if they died, how could they need the Strategist to keep them alive?

The rating of the imbued Geas is equal to the Strategist's unmodified **Eide.**

The Strategist's implicit promise is not empty. This power is not all trickery; the Strategist puts something genuine, if only their own true heart, at stake. If they learn that the target of this power has been totally defeated while the Geas is still active, to the point where their life has crumbled around them and they basically can't continue being the person that they were—and if the target in fact *has* been defeated to that extent—the Strategist gains 20 points of a Cost. The reason may be obvious. If not, it's in the vicinity of "guilt."

With a level 5 Rite, a Strategist can:

- convince an enemy it's not time to kill them *yet,*
- convince a corrupt businessperson to take them on as a partner,
- win the trust of an untrusting child, *or*
- win the contract for some job they want.

"Defeat"

Defeat is *mostly* being used as a stand-in for death here, but sometimes a person gets killed and they just keep on going. They're a ghost, or a phoenix, or a Strategist, or whatever, and death's not a problem; or, their legacy is all that mattered to them anyway. Other times, a person *doesn't* get killed, but they *do* have their memory erased and get turned into someone else, or their hopes for their future turn to dust and they can't think of a single pathway forward, or something else terrible like that. The Strategist might be able to "fix" that kind of defeat, or even death, but unless they're in a position to do a literally perfect fix—e.g., finding a copy of the original memories and a detailed explanation of how to restore the person as they were—stuff like that'll count as a defeat.

A PC is normally "defeated" when finishing their ending book; more rarely, if they lose a critically important fight.

Level 6 Miracle: "Greater Stunt"

Level 6 Eide miracles are the Strategists' greater empowerments of their Technique. They're the tricks that let the Strategist push past the level of their mundane skill all the way up to the edge of impossibility.

Greater Stunt functions as **Stunt,** but allows for the kinds of amazing tricks that cinematic/low-fantasy protagonists usually only pull off in the "big moments"

"Fine," the Serpent snapped. It glared away. "Allies. ... for now."

The monster grinned...

— from The Blunderbore Plan, *by Kalliope Tsouderos (unpublished)*

If you have taken up this volume out of bravery, turn back. If you have chosen it out of folly, repent. Ten of the stories told by Laodice the Strategist are known to curse those who hear them—to rip the spirit root of them and leave them broken. The remainder, which I have gathered here, are believed to hold no spiritual potency, no metaphysical weight; you will not catch a disease for reading them, become impoverished for reading them, or develop strange inhuman appetites ... but that is not to say that they have no power.

Laodice is no friend to you or me; these tales may be mortal things, but still they'll strive to tear your mind apart.

If you would read further, pray, let it be to inoculate yourself, a little at a time; or, perhaps, to practice those few, rare arts of mind requiring such self-savagery as this will be.

—*from* A Laodicean Grimoire, *by Apu Harah Chrysanthe*

of their stories; or, conversely, for the kinds of tricks that cinematic *antagonists* pull off after having worked laboriously in the background for quite some time.

Level 6 effects include:

- using the "science!" Technique to create a temporary antidote to vampirism,
- using the "cooking" Technique to lift a building into the air with a choux balloon, *and*
- using the "sleight of hand" Technique to trap someone in an endless corridor. Sure, that seems outright impossible, but ... doesn't *most* stage magic?

Level 7 Miracle: "Greater Costumery"

[Time-Consuming], Phantasmagorical

Level 7 Eide miracles are the Strategists' greater miracles of stagecraft. They're the power the Strategist has to call up impromptu environmental features and effects tied to their traditional costume and identity. These include buildings, personnel, and special effects. These miracles may also return those summoned features to the void.

Greater Costumery cannot summon or banish physical things in a location that is under intense, continuous observation. Further, large, immobile things can't be summoned or banished in locations that would seem impossible, rather than merely unbelievable, to any clear-headed witness participating in the scene; this often results in the Strategist poking around for a while before "locating" any such thing.

This power is phantasmagorical (pg. 250). A Strategist with a "priest" identity can call up petty angels, but their ability to smite is limited to relatively superficial effects. Their ability to make a permanent social impression ... is, again, limited to superficial effects. They can't dig up dramatically important information from Heaven's vaults, unless the group decides they should. The summoned angels are ethereal and ephemeral; they leave no solid impression, but rather come across as a hallucinatory or a rapturous phenomenon. Such a Strategist could also call up a Church, attendees, acolytes, or a holy light from above; these too would be phantasmagorical. Specifically it is *the effect* that is phantasmagorical and not necessarily the things themselves; they could conceivably call up real people or the get of a Casting Rite to be their congregation and have that actually happen. They would attend to their phantasmagorical summons and participate in Church.

... but then, and specifically *without much fuss,* they would return to whence they came.

Level 7 effects include:

- as a Strategist of the Host, conjuring a personalized meeting room, twisting the shape of one's own shadow, or finding a secret passage,
- as a Phantom Thief, finding a trap door to escape through (even if one is, say, on the back of a giant turtle at the time),
- as the Queen of the Forest, finding a forested glen,
- as an Apprentice Baker, finding a bakery or another baker, *and*
- as the Royalty of Ninuan, finding a doomful throne to sit upon or wreathing oneself within an ancient air of void.

Mortal Witnesses: impossible effects are generally written off as dreams or hallucinatory experiences, if not at the time, then later; *possible* special effects need no explanation; and anything else is assumed to be the discovery of some thing, some being, or some absence that was "already there."

Level 8 Rite: "Greater Cliffhanger"

Rite

Level 8 Eide Rites are a superior version of **Cliffhanger.** In this version, the Strategist doesn't have to wait for the scene to end. They can break free of the undesirable supernatural effect as soon as the effect itself is no longer sustained. If the player and GM can agree on a how and a what, they can also enact "poetic justice," turning the effect or (even better) some reversed/inverted variation of it upon whomever invoked it in the first place.

For instance, the Strategist might use **Greater Cliffhanger** when someone takes over their mind. They don't resist. They *can't*, because, if they do, then there's no cliffhanger. They suffer the effects. ... but as soon as the mind control lapses, the Strategist is free—and the attacker loses control over their own mind. They fall into a frenzy, or disconnect from their body and senses, or suffer a rebound and take the orders that they had tried to give the Strategist before.

Or, the Strategist uses **Greater Cliffhanger** when someone magically combusts them. They appear to be burned—but when the effect lapses, they reveal that they've been draining the attacker's fire energy instead! The attacker becomes listless and phlegmatic.

The Strategist's retribution is capped at the same level as the original effect. That is, "poetic justice" for a level 7 Wyrd miracle is also level 7. A redirected Rite that implants a level 5 Geas can implant a Geas no higher than level 5.

The Greater Cliffhanger Rite is a Rite, for precisely that reason: it can reverse an imposed Geas.

With a level 8 Rite, a Strategist can:

- "accept" that someone's stabbed them with their magic spear-hand. Then, reveal that it's *actually* stuck in the wall,
- "accept" a curse until the miracle of cursing completes. Then, reveal that they've been knotting up its power into a "curse-hawk" that will hound and harry their attacker instead! *or*
- "accept" being banished into Limbo, only to reveal that the summoning circle was backwards: it's everything *else* in the scene that will go!

Level 9 Miracle: "Greater Talent" *[Phantasmagorical]*

Level 9 Eide miracles are the Strategists' greater demonstration of worth. They are the greater, primordial vision of the Strategist that sleeps behind their dream-of-self.

These miracles react to extreme tests of Eide: tests of the character's potential in their Technique, or anything else, that risk shattering their image. They also emerge when a character believes they are insufficient to themselves—that *to be themselves* they must go beyond being what they are.

In the face of this threat, or this need, their Eide *does* break—at least, if they use this miracle. It breaks, and their dream-of-self shatters ... but only temporarily.

It reveals that greater, primordial vision behind it.

With this miracle the Strategist becomes something ... not human. Not mortal. Deeply unnatural. *Eldritch.*

The dream of their mortal life evaporates under the pressure of this miracle. They reconfigure into a symbolically rich, gigantic, and dramatic form of the player's choice ... anything from a giant monster to a geometrically impossible angel to a living storm. In that form, they receive powers of the player's choice. The character then runs *riot* in that form for as long as the player desires, caught in a psychedelic experience and under the influence of an archaic and alien version of their mind. Their actions will generally display intelligence, of a sort, and will definitely follow up on the Strategist's dominant emotional motivations of the moment, but they'll have lost touch with normalcy and humanity, will be semi-conscious at best, and will find themselves unable to identify with the person that they've been (their Eide having been shattered, after all). They will have grave difficulty paying attention to or distinguishing among individual things on the human scale at all.[17] Their rampage lasts until the end of whatever threat to the Strategist's self-presentation, or whatever impulse to bolster it, brought the miracle on; at that point, their old appearance, body, and persona re-emerge.

> *As a librarian, she was insufficient to the men who came. As a librarian, she had nothing to offer against their shouts, their fury, and their hate.*
>
> *... not enough, at least. Not in real time.*
>
> *So she could not be a librarian.*
>
> *The wings that she kept sideways to the world slipped in. Obsidian spun up from the desks around to be her eyes. There was then in the library like a great cloud of fire, and a brightness to engulf itself, and a roar like thunder, as her oblong head came round.*
>
> *She could not see them. They were too petty for her now, too insignificant; their presence did not impinge.*
>
> *Memory and the faint whiff of malice steered her path; the lights blazed up on Captain's Hill, and the threshers of her limbs came down.*
>
> —*from* Ha'atzhalaiel v. County of Worcester, *by Hieronim Clark*

The Strategist's surreal apotheosis and all of its accomplishments are technically phantasmagorical (pg. 250). They are specifically phantasmagorical in the sense that it may turn out afterwards that reality or the witness' minds were affected and the described actions and events in play that this miracle evokes were allegorical or muddled descriptions of what *actually* took place. They "happen," but it's possible that later, the evidence will suggest that things didn't happen quite *that way* ...

But that's only a "may," and it's mostly a catch for the most surreal of interludes. If the Strategist's player can state the form and powers they want in a simple fashion, and then sticks to them, expressing themselves in a way that makes sense, the consequences will usually actualize exactly or nearly exactly as they are shown in play.

A similar power exists in Wyrd; one may shatter the Eide from either side. They are distinct in that Eide's transformation is a transcendent instantiation of what the Strategist is trying to be—offering the Strategist enough power and merit to be what they need to be, to do what they need to do, compromised only by the fact that they have to turn into a giant semi-conscious monster to get it. Wyrd's, on the other hand, is a transcendent *rejection* of who the Strategist is normally trying to be, an escape from the prison of the Eide; it allows them to express what they cannot normally express within the world.

Level 9 effects include:

- going beyond the Strategist's magic talent and becoming a being of "pure magic."
- going beyond the Strategist's scientific talent, forcing a dimensional phase transition to awaken their ancient void self—an apocalyptic psychic with scientific mastery resembling a god's! *and*
- when being an apprentice baker with limitless potential *just isn't respectable enough* for the property

17 This is mostly a matter for roleplay and difficulty assessment; however, if one must push one's limits here (e.g., as part of a plan), the way to do so is by using an effect that outpowers this miracle.

they want to buy, revealing that the Strategist is actually more than that—that they are something ancient, building-sized, and phantasmagoric, able to seize the land and fly away.

Mortal Witnesses: over time, the lingering marks of this miracle come to resemble those of natural disasters. The memories of witnesses about what *actually* happened take on the status of myth.

... at the time, though, unless the miracle winds up phantasmagorical, witnesses will be quite aware of what's going on. The world is strange sometimes, apparently, and may feature impossible angels and living storms. This does not provoke *dementia animi*, although it increases a mortal's general vulnerability to such percipience.

Level 10 Miracle: "Greater Strategy"

Extraordinary, Planning, Quest

Level 10 Eide miracles are the greater schemes and stratagems of the deathwrights. Each is forged in a crucible:

The Strategist's most recent Serious or Transformative (25 or 50 Cost) Wound (pg. 272).

In response to that Wound, the Strategist forms an objective. They decide on something they will *do* to answer that pain, that suffering, that loss, or whatever else. It does not need to be reactive in any other sense, and the Strategist's player is the only one who needs to see the connection between the Wound and the objective as compelling.

To accomplish that objective, the Strategist forms a plan.

They may not choose another objective until they have taken another Serious or Transformative Wound. They *may* use ***Greater Strategy*** again before then, if appropriate (e.g., to come up with alternate plans or to restart a plan they'd abandoned) ... but their *objective* holds firm:

This, their plan will in good time achieve.

Although technically it's a "response" to in-game events, **Greater Strategy** is functionally able to work almost any desired transformation on the world. If the Strategist wants to sink Paris or steal the power of speech from the Angel of Time, they may declare that their objective. In addition, once completed, the plan's effects will last at least until the *next* story's end.

As powerful and flexible as it may be, **Greater Strategy** moves at a comparatively ponderous pace:

Unlike most planning powers, the only guarantee it gives within 0-3 chapters is that *meaningful progress* will be made; the strategy as a *whole* is a grand game that can take up to three *stories* to complete.

Otherwise, this power works like **Strategy.**

"Some things can't be fixed, Sunnia," he said, but she gave him a tired half-smile:

"Even this. Even this," she said, "can be healed, at Thiudareiks' Henge."

—from A Drying Ground, *by Elisenda d'Étretat*

Level 10 effects include:

- wielding a flower rite or welken-rite against the Nobilis,
- developing a plan to shake someone out of their complacency,
- developing a plan to drive a rival professor—a tenured one—out of one's department, *and*
- developing a plan to "fix" the death of someone you loved long ago.

Level 11 Rite: "Greater Casting"

Very Time-Consuming, Extraordinary, Rite

Level 11 Eide effects are the Strategists' greater power of reification. They're the Strategist's power to warp the world to fit their Eide. They may create or reshape entire world-stages out of Eide in the same way that lesser casting creates supporting actors. They may build semi-permanent world features in the same way that greater costumery creates temporary and phantasmagorical ones.

Specifically, after a few days of background work or multiple self-spotlit moments, the deathwright forms a portion of their Eide into a *twisted space:*

A labyrinth, pocket dimension, or spatial anomaly.

Greater Casting comes from the Strategist's dream-of-self and not the Strategist's conscious will. It's a slippery power, much like a wish (pg. 260): shaped by narrative; occasionally surprising or recalcitrant in its effects. It works best when adding a phenomenon to existing reality or warping it while leaving its original information intact—it's not the best tool for completely erasing what had been present before, and it's an extremely bad tool for *figuring out* what had been there before. It also works best when the Strategist is expressing parts of their Eide that they either fully grasp or are actively working on; if it involves parts of their dream-of-self that are riddled with faults and contradictions but which they do not *admit* are riddled with faults or contradictions, things can go awry.

This is a Rite; the twisted space may have a region-boundary Ward or affect how a Geas behaves. More generally, navigating spaces created in this fashion can have a profound impact on a person's perceptions of themselves, the world, and others; depending on the details of its construction, the GM may occasionally heal or inflict 1+ Cost while someone is struggling through one.

Greater Casting is also found in Wyrd ... but while Eide's version wrestles with the Strategist's identity, their self-definition, their *sense* of who they are, Wyrd's is focused on their *truth.*

Thus, with a level 11 Rite, a Strategist can:

- conjure a place uniquely the Strategist's own,
- build a passage between the Strategist's home in a new city and an identity-centric building in the old,
- create a pocket world that can be carried in the palm of one's hand, *or*
- demonstrate the credentials of their priestly Eide by opening a stair to Heaven.

Mortal Witnesses: the results of Greater Casting are usually *esoteric:* mortals will have difficulty figuring out what's going on, but are capable of doing so; having done so, they awaken only to the existence of magic, not to the mythic world or to the Glitch.

Level 12 Miracle: "Greater Misdirection"

Extraordinary

Level 12 Eide Miracles are the Strategist's greater games of smoke and mirrors. They are the power to *shape perception.*

With these miracles, the Strategist does not choose a thing to hide. Rather, they choose a thing they wish the world to *perceive.* While they maintain the effect, anything that contradicts that perception is effectively phantasmagorical (pg. 250)—an illusion or misapprehension. Afterwards, if the Strategist declares that their revelation was definitely fake, then it most likely was. If they want to imagine it might have been true, then in fact it might have been ... but only *might.*

Either way, it's up to the GM which of the two possible realities shall be real thenceforth, and which shall be illusion.

Level 12 effects include:

- stealing an airplane that nobody previously noticed was there,
- unleashing an imaginary five-dimensional tentacled monstrosity on a city as a distraction,
- revealing oneself as the reincarnation of a local cult's founder, *and*
- revealing that one has *already* used a strategy to solve some problem.

Lexiarchos Caducine is known for building cool stone galleries with ancient scrolls kept under glass and death masks hanging on the walls. Here and there are other artifacts; in ornate niches, armors loom. If there are windows, they open onto dark and solemn gardens, and little light passes in; if there are lights, they are rarely lit. She is adroit in the gloaming shadows, for Lexiarchos Caducine is blind.

—from Fair Warning, *by Luc Ginneis*

AN EIDE CHEATSHEET

Difficulty 0: The Agony Rite

The Agony Rite invokes itself as an involuntary reflex. It protects the Strategist against "attacks" that would erase their infection. It can also restore their infection if it is lost or impose a new understanding of it upon the world.

Greater Agony (diff 4) is a miracle that invokes a new manifestation of that infection.

Difficulty 1: Intensity

Intensity makes it easy and comfortable to go along with the Strategist. Standing up to them becomes an Ability 3 task. If the Strategist actively invokes a title/authority, it's Ability 5.

The Greater Intensity Rite (diff 5) is a Time-Consuming power that makes the Strategist seem *so* valuable to the target, *so* important and necessary, that it manifests as a Geas. The Geas lasts until the end of the next story. If the target is utterly defeated while the Geas yet remains, the Strategist gains 20 points of a Cost.

Difficulty 2: Stunt

Stunt lets the Strategist perform a cinematic or low-fantasy action that fits their Technique. This action is functionally a mundane action with the same action level as the miracle, and a default 3 Edge.

Greater Stunts (diff 6) are in the same rough cinematic/low-fantasy oeuvre, but represent the bigger moments therefrom.

Difficulty 3: Costumery

Costumery is used while unobserved. It lets the Strategist instantly assume their traditional costume, along with its weapons, goods, and tools, or return to what they had been wearing previously.

Greater Costumery (diff 7) is a phantasmagorical, time-consuming power that calls up special effects associated with the Strategist's traditional costume and identity. It can't summon or banish physical things in places being intently observed.

Difficulty 4: The Cliffhanger Rite

The Cliffhanger Rite is a feint of some sort involving feigned defeat. Something supernatural and unwanted happens to the Strategist, but they don't "take damage"; instead, they use this Rite. Then, after the scene has ended and the supernatural effect is not being sustained, the Strategist automatically recovers.

The Greater Cliffhanger Rite (diff 8) works the same way, but doesn't require that the scene end—the Strategist can shake off the effect as soon as it's not being sustained. If the player and GM can agree on how, it then turns the effect around in some way.

Difficulty 5: Talent

Talent doesn't need an action. It can be used whenever something tests the Strategist's qualifications in their Technique. It makes sure they pass—and by whatever standard is relevant, which often means "brilliance." They also do better on each test than the one before.

Mundane sabotage can screw this up by making it not really a *test*, but at a minimum difficulty of 7.

Greater Talent (diff 9) is *too much*. Base-level **Talent** can already pass any test. Kicking it up a notch cracks the world. Facing *such* a hard test that the character's Eide shatters, or when showing too much talent to fit in a mortal frame, the character's self-presentation breaks, they turn into a giant symbolic monster, and they rampage. The monster, and the details of the rampage, are not always the same. The whole thing is phantasmagorical at the GM's option: sometimes the rampage happens, sometimes it's retroactively allegorical or approximate. It depends how well it fits the story of the game.

Difficulty 6: Strategy

Strategy is a planning miracle (pg. 254). It makes reactive plans that fit the Strategist's Technique. "Reactive" here means that the Strategist must be responding to someone *else* shaking up the *status quo* or grabbing an opportunity that just appeared—this power can't just change long-standing situations in an arbitrary way.

Greater Strategy (diff 10), on the other hand, *can*. The character can form one proactive objective in response to their most recent Serious or Transformative Wound (pg. 272). They can then form a plan to achieve that. It may take multiple 0-3 chapter steps to achieve, but the victory lasts longer than most plans' victories as well.

Difficulty 7: The Casting Rite

The Casting Rite is a time-consuming Rite for forging a minion out of the Strategist's Eide. The minion can manipulate emotions (to some degree), have a decent Ability or a few minor powers, spend from its tiny 2-point Cost pool, and vampirically push that Cost onto someone else.

Maintaining control of the minion requires a quest slot.

The Greater Casting Rite (diff 11) is a *very* time-consuming effect for warping the whole world around the Strategist into a twisted space that fits their Eide. The logic behind the upgrade is that both forms of casting are about externalizing ("casting") bits of the self.

Difficulty 8: Misdirection

Misdirection is a power to hide something. It is discriminating: the Strategist can choose who it is hidden from. It's bleak: the heroic heart in a mortal can *possibly* beat it, but not hardly as an everyday thing. And, finally, it is extraordinary: it can do some truly incredible tricks.

Greater Misdirection (diff 12) is even more extraordinary. It allows the Strategist to declare something that the world will now perceive. Any contrary evidence, while this miracle is sustained, will be made phantasmagorical (pg. 250).

CHAPTER 12

Flore

Inside the dirt and lint, they saw,
were all the secrets of the world.

—*from* The Orchid and Acacia Twins,
by Katherine Morgan Dawes

FORBIDDEN ART

Flore is the power a Strategist has to awaken the native powers of the world.

Among the Strategists of the Host, this is a rare and perverse gift. Theirs, the prevailing ethic goes, is not to indulge in the wonders of Creation. *Theirs* is not to immerse themselves into its substances and its joys:

To do so gives the world a credit it does not deserve.

Among the Strategists of the Host, few cultivate the peaceful heart that this Attribute requires. Few have time to *experience* the world, to savor it, to come to know the subtleties of its bounty. Only because Strategists have a kind of immortality do most who walk this path acquire it—and in dribs and drabs, over the course of many years.

A few seek this knowledge to turn it against Creation. A few willingly pollute themselves with this knowledge, dive furiously into an integration with the world, in the name of world destruction. This is folly; inevitably, Flore corrupts them into peace.

Those who can sing to the hearts of the world are not forced to love the world, but their hate is permanently compromised. Somewhere in them is the seed of slow and gentle summer evenings; of deep, affirming human bonds.

Flore is the art of connecting to the things of the world, making them a part of oneself, and then raising them up, enriching them, enhancing them—making them better, and even more themselves. Through Flore a Strategist may find the genius hidden in a simple child or the earthfire hidden in a stone. They may call forth dragons from the lakes and dance the stars down from the sky. They may seize the spirits of the wind to be their own. They may awaken, they may enlighten, they may *teach;* they can help the people of the world to grow.

The Strategists may do this because they are divine creatures. They are beyond human. They are supernal. When that manifests in hatred it can blot out pieces of the world, it can rip them from existence. When it manifests in glory, it can outshine the sun. But when that divinity is invested in ordinary life, in love, in caring, in community—

It becomes transformative.

This is not to say that Flore is a pure, untarnished good. A Strategist's divinity is uncompromising and alien: an inherent and unnatural transcendence. It lacks any intrinsic righteousness; if anything, it possesses intrinsic odium. It

opposite: *by Elizabeth Sherry*

can lift a person above themselves, but not because of any holy purpose: it is only because a monster born of the Not has elected they be so lifted. It can bring out the hidden potential of the world, but this is rarely done for the wonder of the thing itself.

That hidden potential is a *weapon.*

... and like all weapons, it knows nothing of the good.

Flore, then, is the power that a Strategist learns by excessive or atypical immersion into the world. With that immersion, they learn to apprehend the hidden and secret wonders within things. To certain things they bind themselves, making them the treasures of their heart—and, however cruel a distance they attempt to keep, heart-clutching treasures they will remain. These things become their panoply; their coterie; their regalia. Awakening and directing the slumbering powers within those treasures, the Strategist may achieve a myriad of aims.

It is known to the Host that the Chancery are experts in this art. For some, it was this very practice that subverted them. For others, tainting themselves with the substance of Creation is simply ... less repugnant ... after consenting to the world's continued life. But even among the Chancery members whose pride and revulsion *should,* theoretically, forbid they walk this path, it is still more common than in the Host; Chancery members are simply more vulnerable to immersion in the world, to sinking into it, to drowning beneath its surfaces; to being trapped into relationships with worldly things, by having made themselves at peace.

The things that a Strategist may empower are called Treasures, or *flores.* A collective of Treasures—e.g., a group of students, swords, or magical symbols, each having a unique power within it—is known as a *florilegium.* Sometimes a Strategist empowers the entire *florilegium*, allowing them to draw upon a shared power or variety of weaker ones; other times, they learn to awaken stronger powers from each of the Treasures within it separately.

Only Creation-things or things substantially compromised by Creation can be Treasures.

A Strategist may have up to [their Flore + 1] Treasures at the beginning of the game, which can potentially include an army or collection that they empower as a unit (or empower several members of individually, and may learn to empower others from). These can be taken immediately or figured out later in discussion with the GM. Treasures can also be claimed during play by finding something appropriate, falling for it in some sense or other, and spending a spotlight to bond.

This is not the limit to a Strategist's store of Treasures, but its base level. A Strategist with [Flore + 1] Treasures who wishes to add a new *florem* may do so with a Time-Consuming (pg. 251) **Glorification** miracle, at a 20 Cost surcharge—normally, but not always, Immersion.[18] A Strategist wishing a slower introduction to their Treasure may spend a quest (pg. 311) getting to know them first—particularly since such a quest can be set up to end with a burst of Cost recovery (pg. 323) that can offset, and remove the experiential onus of, the Treasure-claiming Cost.

Adding new beings or possessions into a *florilegium* that counts as a single Treasure—whether because the whole *florilegium* has only a single power, or because it has a variety of relatively small ones—is a simpler matter; for this, the Strategist does not need a miracle, much less extra Cost. The GM simply decides whether the effect needs one spotlighted interaction or three; after that, such an inclusion completes.

The **Flore** Attribute measures the degree to which the Strategist has let an entanglement with Creation infiltrate them—the degree to which they have let peace into their heart, found things in the world to care about, and allowed the fibrous cilia of their spiritual and emotional connection to those things to wind deep into the metaphysical structure of themselves. It represents the degree to which they've let the delights of the world turn them aside from *what they are.*

A bleak description, perhaps—but this is an unnatural power. The Strategists of the Chancery are not changed beings, nor is the world they live in a changed world. Existence is not redeemed, nor are they made a fit part of it, simply because they have forsaken the pinnacle of their malice; if Flore ever becomes a natural power for a Strategist, if it ever becomes something pure and just and true and good for them, it is because their original nature has at some point broken and they have remade themselves as patchwork creatures of the world and Glitch.

Such creatures may have some virtue; they may be brighter and more beautiful than any Strategist or Angel ... but the process by which they come to be is not correct.

Regardless, low levels of Flore represent characters still fundamentally alienated from the world. In their infection, their loss of self, and their enraged return into the world, they lost any sense of place within it; it has not returned. Their enmity with the world is all that affixes them to it: with very few exceptions, a Strategist who does not begin their career in incandescent fury against the world simply never bothers to return to it at all.

Higher ratings in Flore represent increasing attachment and increasing world-lore.

Each level of Flore costs 2 points and makes a number of powers relating to one's Treasures less costly. At Flore 0, the simplest emotional connection is dangerous to the Strategist's spiritual integrity; attempting to guide or instruct a Treasure is outright treacherous. At Flore 7, for comparable risks, they can call out the divine power that sleeps within an ordinary thing or summon a Treasure to their side from halfway around the world. Low levels of Flore sharply limit the character's ability to use their Treasures to practical effect—they may draw out the

18 Some Treasure bonds are so character-defining, for instance, as to add Stilling instead; some Treasures so corrosive or tiring as to add Burn or Wear. It's tricky to take Fugue, though, since all Treasures are, necessarily, Creational.

occasional wonder from their friends, or their town, or their treasured coat, but this is more an incidental feature of their divine existence than a reliable power base. High levels of Flore allow the character to build organizations and arsenals:

It's not just that the power is more responsive, or that they have more treasures to hand, but that the Strategist's more reliable access to Flore exalts the Treasures *themselves* and makes them more amenable to such organization. It is, after all, a lot more reasonable to expect someone to put their hidden talents and "true nature" front and center in their life when their access to those things has become reliable.

A character may purchase "Gifts" that relate to Flore. These generally represent specific artifacts that the Strategist has learned to call forth power from that are *not* actual treasures of their heart or, more rarely, actual treasures of their heart that they have an idiosyncratic relationship to. It is also possible to take Gifts that allow broader mastery of specific tricks (like spiritual projection to one's Treasures, guiding one's treasures, or construction of new artifacts) than one's Flore level normally allows.

Some of these Gifts appear later, along with a general system for constructing your own Gifts.

Being in Two Places at Once

Being in two or more places at once—e.g., for ten breaths after **Projection,** when using **Administration** at all, or when visiting multiple Treasures at once with the Greater form of these powers—is a common feature of Flore's powers, and it's often a bit muddling. The GM may require a **Focus** task (pg. 130) to avoid reflexively putting all of one's attention in one location at a time. They may require a **Greater Focus** task (pg. 130) to avoid being a little slow and a little bit confused when taking or following action in both locations at once. This muddling generally doesn't apply to miraculous actions, but *does* apply to the sensory processing and thinking involved.

The Core Powers

The core powers of Flore are these:

DIFFICULTY	POWER	USE
0	Connection	sense a Treasure's need
1	Projection	visit Treasures in dreams/trance
2	Administration	contact them while awake
3	Guidance	improve Treasure-based actions
4	Glorification	awaken and wield a Treasure's hidden magic
5	Ignition	improve Treasures in conflict
6	Trust	helps a Treasure "act on its own"
7	Design	mundane artifact-crafting
8	Divine Plan	shape a Treasure's destiny

Each can be used by a Strategist with [Flore ≥ difficulty] ... or by a Strategist with lower Flore, if they pump up their Flore with Immersion (pg. 270) or some other Cost.

Greater forms of each of these powers are available at +4 to the base power's difficulty. Variations and combinations are also possible, as discussed on pg. 150. **Flore, in particular, benefits from such combinations**—many higher-level powers will want to incorporate, e.g., a **Guidance** or **Glorification** effect into their own.

Level 0 Flore: "Outsider"

0 points

Strategists with this level of Flore are still outsiders to the world. Perhaps they have found things to care about. Perhaps they have even found treasures of their heart. But however much they have flirted, or not, with the idea of immersing into the world—they have not done so. They have not given themselves over to it yet, have not spent time *existing* in Creation since their initial break with it. Their entire context for relationship with the world is one of struggle, grief, or grand design; there has been no room, or at least little room, for peace.

They have not laughed with coworkers while building something they cared about—unless that thing was contributory to the end of Creation, or some other Ninuanni cause. They have not eaten lunch on rocks beside the sea. They have wandered no gardens on cracked stones nor exhausted themselves playing catch with any dogs. They have told few stories and listened to few stories. They have watched no movies, unless with a sinister plan in mind. They have snuggled in few blankets. They have shaken off the pestering of small children. They have not cooked anything badly or eaten what results. Rarely have they lost hours diving into wikis or reading fan fiction. Only the most casually efficient of them pay their bills: for the rest, by one means or another, they are circumvented.

They exist in the world, but they do not *live.*

Why should they live? The world is wrong.

Why should they eat on rocks beside corrupted seas? Why should they wander gardens when every flower displays the perverse vitality of the earth? Why should they throw a ball to a dog, only to have the dog bring it back to them, only, now, covered in dog spit and probably dirt and possibly worse things besides? And, the dog expects them to take it, possibly even plans to make them *work* to take it? Seriously? There is something broken in the nature of the maws of dogs.

Surely.

Why should they tell stories to ears that are clogged with the gruesome substance of the world? Why should they watch the puerile movies on its screens? Why should they scratch themselves with the rough fibers of its blankets born?

... these are rhetorical questions, of course, even if they voice them; they know the answers to these things. They *remember* them, if they lived in a place with rocks and seas, with gardens and with stones, with dogs and movies and blankets and with the ears that hear. But even knowing these things, how may they overcome the visceral revulsion that the world enkindles in them and let experience

absorb them? Even if they are personally unaware of the sickness in the sea, even if they cannot see the squelching hurt in the raw red mouth-flesh of a dog, even if an air of disdainful elegance requires that they immerse themselves to *some* degree in the world's sensations—

How can they set the truth aside? How can they enjoy it, how can they let experience devour them and transform them, when the world is wrong?

There is no answer, of course. It is not a thing that has answers. There is no good reason, nor no good method. It is simply a thing that some do.

Transcending, overcoming, and experiencing ... is a thing that is sometimes done.

Those that have not, or have not much yet, retain Flore o, no matter how much they care or do not care about the world.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Amaliana Welbarc is dying of souvenirs. She brought something home with her. It was a thing that she did not put in her luggage. It was a thing that shouldn't have been in anybody's luggage. She buried it away at the bottom of her mind. But after that she kept finding stranger and stranger things coming home with her. Nor, when it moved within her mind, could she just stay home. Her first death was to a border guard. Her second, to the snake within her bag. Her third was interrupted when an Imperator attempted to claim her as a Power—or, arguably, when she attempted to bring home the quintessential spirit of the Estate of Absinthe from vacation. Her instinctive rejection of that bitter green binding broke her free of a cycle that normally becomes eternal after the first or second death; lungs full of gasping rejection of Creation, she tore herself free of being and flung herself into the Lands Beyond Creation with, at last, no souvenirs. From that time forward, each pleasant experience or attractive thing within Creation has drawn forth only the deepest wariness from the depths of her: it's a trap, she knows. It's all a trap. It looks so pretty, it makes you want to take it home, but oh! Oh! Oh! Creation *hungers!*

Vilares Scandzia is dying of curry. Don't laugh. It was hot. It was really, really hot. His mouth is still burning. It is always burning. Eventually the rest of him will burn up too. Sometimes—it depends—it will first turn green. It is a hideous and painful death, but the alternative is not eating curry. This is not only beyond his willpower but is a technical impossibility: if his willpower *were* up to the task, which it used to be before he despaired of it, then eventually some restaurant server, when told that he can't eat curry under any circumstances, would tell the kitchen to add EXTRA CURRY instead, and his doom would once again be sealed. Or it would cross-contaminate his food at home, somehow. Once, it dripped into his mouth while he was sleeping, in a ditch, beside the road; a curry truck had crashed, in perfect silence, and cold cruel cumin'd bounty spread. The point is, while he does really and genuinely love Creation's curry, the only thing that that love has taught him is one can never trust the things one loves within the world.

Existing apart from every other living thing, the Enwynard Drake knew not how to make distinction between its suffering and its weal. Every day its flesh was raked as by a thousand thousand iron talons; every night embers of agony were lit within those wounds; imps of malice traced suppurating itches across its viridescent scales. This the Wyrm of Enwynard thought good.

Surely, it thought, no being in Creation can be so lucky as am I—so beautiful; so blessed; so graced. It dragged its wounded bulk across grim sands.

—*from* GLORY! PRAISED THE BROKEN MOUSE, *by Rannen Yedidyah*

LEVEL 1 FLORE: "GHOST"

2 points

Strategists with this level of Flore have rebuilt a faint relationship with the world. Metaphorically they are ghosts, they are vapors: they hover at the edges of existence. They are not *good* at building relationships, at holding jobs, at finding homes. They are not *good* at leaving a mark on the world that is not damage, nor at receiving any hale and wholesome mark therefrom themselves. Everything is alienated from them, and they from it; they are monsters, they are Not-things, they are the horror that the eyes of Angels sculpted from the void and the royalty of a Creation-conquered land.

... but they have found something, something tenuous, that can bring them peace. That can make them glad. They have an attachment to the world that is not just outrage. They have the capacity and the history for an experience of worth.

The quintessential power of the Ghosts is, perhaps appropriately, the power to visit their Treasures in spirit. They are still lacking a certain pith of connection, and for that reason they must either concentrate deeply or drown themselves in Immersion ... but in their dreams, or in a trance, or in that deep concentration, they may touch the hearts and minds of their treasures from afar. Their phantom bonds to the world strengthen and they may share themselves with their Treasures—seeing through their Treasure's eyes and whispering their secrets into their Treasure's mind. This can span miles, if not continents:

At all times, effortlessly if not casually—as if wired together by an intranet of the mind—they're connected to every Treasure in the same metropolitan area or ecoregion.

At the same time, they are still in a very real sense cut off:

If they are *not* concentrating, or dreaming, or drowning themselves in Immersion, and if their Treasures are *not* reaching out to them in turn, then all their spiritual connections will be dormant, and they will be as much a

Mr. Smith did not die, but, gradually, he lost his relevance. Eventually his connection to the world became so tenuous that he was re-classified as a poltergeist and his possessions transferred to his heirs.

—*from* The Haunting of P.O. Box 82, *by Cecilia Caouetta*

bubble of alienated and rejected unreality amidst a broad Creation as any Outsider would be with no Flore at all.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Agnavi Gerungsson is dying of paradise. His life is too good. It's so good that it's *wrong*. It makes him soft. It makes him stop paying attention. Eventually, like all things that aren't paying attention, he stops existing. Then, with a scream, he wrenches himself gasping into awareness in the Not. His recurring dalliances with a sorrowless existence have gotten him this far in Flore, but they also keep him from going farther: he can't make real connections because he suffers a surfeit of artificial ones; can't find a home or a path in life because the "good" options are full of traps. Yet even if he were to seek an investment in the world, deliberately favoring miserable relationships and bad choices isn't helpful: whatever true, deep, and good experiences and relationships are out there for him to find, they look exactly like the paradisiacal ones; only, with a timbre of authenticity that is not discoverable save through lived experience and time.

Jeanne-Alice Maliqe is dying of scissors. They long to cut her out of life. They trim away the things and experiences that she has found. She hunts for truth and love and life within the world out of sheer contrariness but it is so very hard to find it when her every anchor is forcibly unanchored; even the dearest treasures of her heart do not know that she exists, and *she* barely remembers what they are.

Level 2 Flore: "Envoy"

4 points

Strategists at this level of Flore have found a firmer anchor. Their own nature and their awareness of the Glitch still pollutes their interactions and their experiences, but their bond with their *flores* has escalated to innate divinity:

It is not necessarily *truer* or *more meaningful* than a human bond, but it is more spiritually robust, more thoroughly entrenched in the world, more distance-defying; with but a thought, they may send a portion of their consciousness to any of their Treasures, as if entangled by a silver astral cord. One may say that in a metaphysical sense they and their Treasures have become one being, or at least a symbiotic consortium. The fundamental essence of each being remains its own, but the outer structural layers of their spirits are not distinct.

In the Excrucian Host, Strategists with this level of Flore are known as Envoys; they are understood as plausible intermediaries between Creation and the Not. To some extent, like all expatriates, they are under suspicion of assimilation: any Strategist that has indulged this far in the experience of Creation is tainted even if they have not outright abandoned the cause of war. Nor is the doubt they face from those of Creation any less acute.

... but they are, at least, alloyed with the substance of both sides; if anyone may rightly negotiate with the law-beings and their serfs, it would be the practitioners of Flore. More than that, they have an innate quality of multipresence, a natural tendency to *be with* treasures in multiple locations at once; this will not fully develop until Flore 6, when it spans the cosmos rather than the Region, but it too intrinsically cultivates a certain emissarial mien.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Adosinda Valentia is dying of life. Allergic to the vital principle, she must keep herself away from macroscopic living things; eventually, though, her own vitality kills her. It is a miserable existence, but in the quiet of Antarctica and the deep Atacama desert, she has found a love for the world. That love is repaid by the land itself.

Hinnerith Carsus is dying of rank. As a young serviceman, he was accidentally promoted into a rank that no longer exists and should never have existed; now, he is persistently recognized by anyone trying to figure out his rank, duties, or official position as an agent of an enemy power. When he is properly medicated he can keep it at a low ebb, where corporate executives see him as an auditor or a rival manager's employee, marines see him as an army grunt, and grocery clerks really don't care about the fact that he might be working for another store even *if* they bother to try to figure out his job in the first place. When able performance of his duties brings his condition into full flourish his uniform is more likely to be "recognized" as that of an industrial saboteur, terrorist, or union buster. It was not until many years later, though, that he properly understood the hidden *kick* to his infection: he isn't merely *an enemy agent*, but *the enemy agent that gets entangled with the other side.* He is the wounded pilot behind enemy lines who falls in love; the industrial saboteur who forges a lifelong friendship with a humble stock clerk; the scab who crossed the picket line the first time in order to break a strike, but a second and later time because where else can they get borscht-flavored potato chips? Loathsome though he finds the world, in short, it has *forced* him to learn to care.

At our current level of understanding we cannot say that λ-matter exists, or does not exist; rather, it occupies an intermediate space between the two.

—*from* The Invisible Universe: How Lao Tzu May Have Predicted Particle Physics, *by Dr. Jared Wilson*

Level 3 Flore: "Catalyst"

6 points

Strategists with this level of Flore receive the homage of the world. Their presence exalts it ... at least, when they are not spreading terror, infection, and destruction. Perhaps even then.

A purpose lives in them, and that purpose is holy. It lifts up those who come into its service.

In the name of the Strategist, their treasures *shine.*

Catalysts function as a kind of drumbeat, a kind of drive. It is alien, but it has integrated itself into the world. Their purpose—mediated through their choices and their Treasures'—has acquired naturalness and grace. Even if that purpose is the Wyrd of War against the world, it is a smoothly participating current in the ocean of events.

In turn Creation has infected *them*. At this point it is difficult for them to retain such dread purpose. The experience of the world has rooted itself in the motion of them, in the tides of their dream-of-self, even as that dream has infiltrated itself into the world. The idea of ending everything becomes not so much unspeakable for them—even mortals compassed entirely within the world can preach *that* particular bleak gospel—as *incoherent:*

It begins to contrast against itself. It becomes subtly and increasingly self-dissonant within the music of their dream. Eventually the Strategist bound to the Wyrd of War and the nature of the Catalyst is doomed to collapse in confusion, knowing that they can perhaps unmake the weirds of the law-beings but no longer certain how to even *approach* the ineffable beingness of Creation and the Glitch that is behind it; nor are they clear on how one might operate *within Creation,* to the eventuation of its end.

Example Concepts

Unimund Bures is dying of appearances. Once as real and concrete as you or me—ah, no presumption intended—he stumbled upon the Anaraxian Diagram and discovered himself an optical illusion. Even after transcending himself in dialogue with Escher and proving the entire world equally illusory, he has not escaped the itching awareness at the back of his head that he only *appears* to be Unimund, when in fact he is something else—that he is not the human he appears, not the prince of nothingness and the knife of nonexistence that he has found himself to be, but ... a mistake. A *cognitive error.* The belief that he *does* exist, or that one is witnessing him, is commonly known as the Bures Delusion or the Bures Illusion; it is over the course of many years of quiet desperation studying that phenomenon, working patiently with deeply troubled individuals who believe in him, and collaborating with fellow neurologists fascinated by the concept of his "existence," that he has inadvertently entangled himself within the world.

Nicolette Hailwic is dying of rage. She stumbled on one of the ancient rages that were *supposed* to have been eliminated by Excrucian action long ago—one of the fey berserks that waxes and wanes and comes upon you unexpected; that bursts forth, eventually, in gross transformation into a rampaging beast (or, in her case, wyrm). The ego may be recovered from this transformation, but recovery grows ever more difficult; she "dies" when it is finally and irretrievably (by normal measures) lost. Her curse falls in the penumbra of the glitch: not quite impossibly wrong in and of itself, but hinting at true horrors around its edges. For that reason, and because rage is nemesis to her, she has found it comfortable to fit within the world: to endure within existence, building deep connections, until her own rage tears what she loves down.

Level 4 Flore: "Awakener"

8 points

Strategists with this level of Flore have at last mastered the heart of this Attribute—effortlessly, they see the true faces of their treasures. Effortlessly, they awaken them.

Some are teachers. They unlock that hidden potential that lay dreaming within their students. Others collect rare artifacts and learn a mastery of their secrets. Some infuse themselves with rare essences born from alchemy and keep their treasures melded to their bones and flesh. A few study the lore of the places dearest to their hearts—from gardens to hills and shores. Some find a circle of friends or allies and become its heart, the one who *inspires* the group, who brings out its best. A few find wonders in ordinary-seeming pets or stones.

Most are at least a little bit eclectic, of course, as one cannot *choose* what one's heart will treasure; but one *can* choose what one spends one's time with, what one immerses oneself into, what receives the benefit of one's conscious care.

What is this "true face" of a Treasure that they awaken?

In one sense it is subtle, underlying, and inherent. It is not a thing they can create or change; it greets them from the moment they and the Treasure make connection. The true face of a thing, its buried potential, is simply *there.*

In another sense, the "true face" is an *idea.* It is not the Strategist's choice how they form that idea or how it filters the world around them, but it *is* subjective. Potential, as with worth, can be a matter of perspective. In extreme cases, different Strategists can see different things in the same Treasure: they may (or may not) *recognize* what the other sees, but they deny its primacy and they cannot pull it forth ... because they approach the raw material in a different way and they care, fundamentally, about different things. One might recognize that a carpet is capable of flight; another, that it can serve as the lynchpin of a certain room's design. The same carpet, the same "truth" in the potential, the same subtlety in it that might be missed by lesser eyes ... but different outcomes in the entire. More meaningfully, one might see the potential of a certain beach as the undine they can call forth from its waters; another, as the ancient well of heat that lives within the sun-forged sand. Perhaps an outside observer

The god descended, whispering, as Jason had always known it would:

You are special. You are more than this. You are destined for something else. You were not meant to spend your days ground down like this, in service to other men; to spend your nights shouting your futile passions at deaf ears.

It was not meant.

These words: they lifted him up. They transfixed him. He basked in them, his arms spread wide, until the last:

The world can no longer resist your nature, Jason.

You were always intended to find your greatness as a bee.

— from All Isomorphic Things, and Time, *by Elliott Porterfield*

might put more importance on the carpet's flight than in its decorative potential, but is the truth of a beach found in the water, or in the sand?

It is extremely rare that a Strategist should reach this level of Flore while still an active party in the War. There are some truths that just can't be seen from an adversarial perspective. Until they relax a little in their enmity to the world, a Strategist tends to be blind to much of Creation's richness and its deepness. They can perceive its beauty and its truths, but those truths and that beauty are estranged from them. Thus, it requires a deviant perspective to thread the needle of that contradiction and see Creation with the grace of the Awakener while remaining staunchly and fervidly at war.

... though, those who have abandoned war are still so few! Perhaps it is the case that, despite all that above, the Awakeners who are still at war yet manage to outnumber those that aren't.

Example Concepts

Lenya Adrasteia is dying of guns. In her last mortal shot her finger went past the trigger into the domain of some great dreaming horror that lives beyond the gun. She came to know that it loathed her. Now where there are guns she sees the world bleeding away; from time to time, its bloated, tormentine tendrils slip through to hunt her in the dark; as her condition advances, she is incapable of perceiving where they are aimed, or when they are fired, but fanged bullets always trend towards her. She has seen the true face of the world, and it is *hunger.*

Alatheus Tirzah is dying of fog. They went into the fog, and did not return. —or, well, they returned as the fog-cursed Alatheus Tirzah, and not as whatever being they had been. They have, from time to time, implied that, further, this is not the Creation that they left. When questioned on their attunement to the world, on their understanding of peace, their ability to experience, their fierce deep love for *things,* and on their insight into the natures of the things they see, they explain it thus: that in the fog, they apperceive the true shapes of things—and beyond that, past the law-beings' watch, and even past the Glitch, to some ineffable and shining substrate of the world, before it blows away; and only then to Ninuan.

Level 5 Flore: "Geomancer"

10 points

Strategists with this level of Flore learn to command their Treasures with exquisite profundity and skill. From *insight* arises *craft,* and the ineffable mysteries of Creation yield fluidly to their designs: what was once raw elemental puissance becomes a precision tool. Their greatest skill, and those tools' greatest use, is found in conflict—in raising up the natural powers of Creation against the law-beings and their servants, against they who have imprisoned the world in their shackling ideals of form ... and, perhaps, against their own kind, too, who would tear the whole thing down. Subtle and quick are the powers in a Geomancer's hands:

With the innate unruliness of a crooked twig, they can disrupt the flow of miracles. With the faithful service of three nameless knights, they can contend with giants. With the rusty magic of an ancient knife, they can hold back Excalibur.

... with just a child's knack to find lost things, they can break the seal that shelters Avalon.

This too is a form of exaltation; the Treasures in their hands are raised up beyond what they could have been. The Strategist has become the warleader in the world they were already in the void: a general both brilliant and fiery, able to inflame the powers of their *flores* and put them to good use. They have integrated their *nature* as warleaders into that part of them that has been subsumed into Creation, and therefore face an enormous crisis of their loyalty from the moment they crest this stage:

There are only one or two Geomancers per major world who are purely loyal to the War; the rest, even if they stand opposed to Creation, have branched off to become third parties, conflicted neutral forces who will one day hurt the world and the next protect it—who serve the War, who cooperate with the Excrucian Host, only so long as it supports *their* agenda, or out of personal loyalty to their old comrades in the Host.

Conversely, even Chancery members who become Geomancers tend to spend an interval more militant than they had been—not necessarily at war with *anything in particular,* but nevertheless with adrenaline roused and a directionless will-to-fight swirling around within their

The daeva blinked, and the tower ceased to be—the tower, and its furnishings, and all the myriad who worked within, all save for one. She, that one, she was a shadow and a dream; this is not disputed; but, she was a seamstress too:

Her work of mending, which was then in progress, affixed Susannah to the world.

— from Buy on the Margin, *by Mackenzie Rusch*

souls. As their understanding of how the things they love can be used to fight becomes acute; as the baggage of their original incarnation as *that which Creation fears* and *that which wars against the world* drifts to the surface for resolution and integration into their modern selves ... it becomes easy to want an enemy.

Any enemy will do.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Abhilash Folcher is dying of propaganda. He was one of the victims of an ill-conceived propaganda campaign that attempted to suppress reform by linking opposition to glitched memetics. Now he can't escape it: it eventually leaks into other advertising campaigns that he's exposed to and traps his consciousness in a maze of mirrors. Despite his survival and transcendence, he is prone to repeatedly lose track of who he is—either as part of the bombardment or as an attempt to survive it—sinking back into a series of in-Creation identities and lives. His malice against the world is often submerged, mitigated, or channeled, but it is not *resolved*; an itch to do *something* still burns inside him.

Silvester Bethania is dying of money. For xem, it's fungible with Wear—xie can pay for things directly by and *only* directly by taking Wear, albeit initially with an untracked fraction of a point, and a sufficiently large windfall will reduce it. Unfortunately, xir exchange rate becomes more punitive the longer xie remains in Creation, as does the breadth of the phenomenon, until eventually even charity and robbery count as purchases, the cost of a meal has escalated beyond what xie can pay, and all the windfalls in the world won't help. In the meantime, money makes the world go around, and so, logically, does Silvester Bethania: mastering the arcane wizardry of finance, xie has divested xirself from the portfolio of war and taken up with the Usurers of Ofeili—an Imperial faction, native to a distant world where coins are alive and humans mindless, but who operate a bank and auction house on Earth.

Level 6 Flore: "Eternal"

12 points

Characters with this level of Flore have won their Treasures' hearts, even as their Treasures have won theirs. —a statement perhaps too strong, too binding, in cases where the player or GM might have objections, but otherwise quite sound.

It is the fundamental characteristic of the Eternal that they may win the loyalty of things even of Creation. They do not merely inspire their Treasures to *obey* them; their Treasures are actively and assiduously motivated to *assist*. To, if not necessarily to serve them, *support* them. To stand beside them in the face of what fears or pains may come.

Even Creation itself will serve: the Eternal's life is blessed by happy fortune. The instrumentality of this remains their Treasures' ... but those Treasures acquire a natural timing and skill in their support and service far surpassing what the Strategist could expect of them on their own. For this such Strategists are named Eternal: beloved of both the Is, and Not.

As with the Geomancers, it is a rare Eternal who is properly loyal to Unbeing. To *stay* at war with the world while ascending to the Eternal requires existing on multiple spiritual layers. One must have an Eide that immerses entirely within the world, but also a second face behind it, controlling it and steering it. One must have a Wyrd that is content to estrange itself from much of one's existence, showing itself only in the subtlest movements of one's life. One must, in short, be a puppet to oneself. Otherwise, an Eternal who signs on with the War does so in the same fashion as a turncoat Power:

Their struggle against the world may be equivalent in intensity, but they have assimilated: it is now treason or rebellion, not invasion or assault.

The vast majority of the Eternals have given up the War; though, this does not mean that they have allied themselves with the Glitch-riddled horrors of Creation. Most, instead, take up the Chancery's uncertainty or pursue some alternative and private goal.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Audovera Tyras is dying of heat. At the school she runs all the students love her, but even they can't protect her when Red Summer comes and she must fly away.

Thursten Ismara is dying in a Russian prison cell. In the end it doesn't matter how hard the friends and family he's found while working as a small town auto mechanic try to save him. It doesn't matter how fast his jury-rigged cars can drive. Sins from a murky human past will one day catch up to him, and he will be extradited, lured, or snatched bodily away to that Russian cell to die.

The woman was infested with Imperator. Its stuff was rife in her. Vivid. Vitriolic. You could see it as she walked among the pillars: like she was a bottle sloshing with some angel's power. Like she was a vessel that held a homunculus inside her, like it was crouched there in her soul. Eating at the integrity of what she was. Like acid. Like an acid rain.

She knelt down before me. She put her eyes on level with my own. They were clear as water. Hers, I mean. You could see right through them.

She put one hand on my shoulder.

She said, "You don't have to serve him." Like it was kindness. "I can help you to be free of him."

I couldn't help the sneer, but it subsided into angry sympathy. Aggrieved compassion. A sullen hate. "You don't get it," I said. "I don't want to be free of anything. He shines."

"He was born to end the world," she said. "He ... he has perverted you."

I was crying for her, but she didn't understand my tears.

—from the Thought-Record of the Child-Guardian of Tsir

opposite: *by Jenn Manley Lee*

Raniba Theos, Amputation their Bane

Level 7 Flore: "World-Weaver"

14 points

Strategists with this level of Flore effortlessly create their own wonders. It takes time, perhaps—*time*, to teach their cat to sing, their car to fly, or to build a magic boat; *time*, to rebuild their house from scratch, now a soaring manor out of legend born; *time,* to invest their spirit into a map so that it can guide mortals to their hearts' desire ...

Time, but that is all. The blueprints of the world live in their eyes; they know the secret laws behind its crafting. They understand *from what* the wonders and the horrors of it all are born, and thus the generative power of the law-beings rests within their hands. To become a World-Weaver is itself a form of treason against the Host:

Only by the uttermost prostration before the altars of Unbeing—the most humble, chained, and constrained service—do a *few* who have mastered this final art retain position among the Excrucian soldiers in the War. (That ... or perhaps secrecy, rejection of the title, and the assertion that one is but Eternal; nothing more.)

One by one, those few turn against their peers, or are turned upon, for it is ultimately the nature of the armies of the Not to disdain them, them and the great drumming of creation that pounds and hums within their veins.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Gladwin Arcaeda is dying of the sound of bugs. He longs for nothing more than quiet and peace to challenge his work—a work that he dreams will someday put him on par with the Creator—but the noises of insects drive him to distraction. Eventually the raw horror they awaken in him makes him unable to bear his life: the things he loves become infected for him with the loathsomeness of the glitch, he hears the buzzing of flies and the whine of mosquitos rising from his work, and in a paroxysm of desperation he tears his creations and his flesh apart.

Celestria Durance is dying of laughter. She's seen the true face of the world and, well. It's actually pretty appalling when it gets going—it's not just delight at some secret joke, although there's some of that, it's not even just laughing at things that shouldn't be funny: it's the degeneration of her ability to handle herself as she stumbles on difficulties that are just too funny to fix; the incidences of hypoxia; and everything after the tipping point when she really loses it where it stops being funny even to her that she can't stop and becomes upsetting instead, or too. She's *still* one of the better-adjusted Strategists, though: while she's technically in favor of burning down the world and everything in it, she's really not that into it as a *priority.*

And Esme Skeid crafts more potent things than e'er she destroyed.

—from The Erroneous Library, *by Beta Vulgaris*

Abhorrent weapons

In the keeping of the Host are five hundred and seventy-two weapons that Creation names *Abhorrent*—storied treasures fit to lay an Angel low. For the most part, these have little to do with the affairs of the Chancery:

Earth will have about a baker's dozen in use at any given time, out of a strategic allotment ranging between fifteen and forty; there simply aren't *enough* for the Host to leave them in the Chancery's hands. That doesn't mean that they'll get wrenched out of the hands of any Chancery holder the instant that they join, of course, or that they're necessarily so *functionally* abhorrent that the Chancery members will voluntarily let them go; the truth is, some of them are beautiful, some of them are useful even in the Chancery, some of them are impossible to relinquish, and the Host is not so good at keeping track of its strategic weapons that there aren't three or four out there in *Imperial* or *Noble* possession.

... but it does mean that over time, there's a tendency for weapons worth noticing to drift back out of Chancery hands, if they're in them, and into the hands of the proper Host. There's a tendency for soldiers still at war with the world to place a higher *value* on them than the members of the Chancery do, whether the actual means that they reclaim them with is confiscation, social pressure, bargaining, relinquishment, circumstances, or chance; and even a great weapon that a PC *made* may well have wound up in a soldier's hands.

That said:

These weapons are *out there*, glorious and terrible as the Strategists are glorious and terrible, and they carry legends of their own. Most have two names, one to mock Creation with and one to be their own.[19] Most have two forms: one physical, their weapon-body; one mythical, a monster or a person's shape, that they wear from time to time in unusual metaphysical environments and in their owners' dreams. Each has a power that can kill even such as the Angels, who need level 7+ miracles to harm, and abstractions like the Lords of Games (pg. 402).

Most of these artifacts are, ironically, Creational, forged within the world or stolen from it and corrupted; for instance, some of the best known of the Weapons are:

- **Monstrous,** which is named **Colbrand [Colibrand]:** a divine torch, allegedly a perversion of the essential thing, the *key* to it all, "the proof that Creation is worthwhile." Aunigild who named it claims to have found it in a dungheap outside the world; Creational scholars say, instead, that it was sacrificed or traded away, long, long ago, to somehow keep the void at bay for a certain time. Regardless, its origin as a thing of the world, twisted by Excrucian artifice, is clear.

19 Three, if you wish to count it that way; their personal name generally has a standard Creational and a standard Ninuanni (provided in square brackets) form.

- **Outrage,** which is named **Typhon [Teikiph]:** a golden whip. In dreams, it may be a gold-scaled snake. It was stolen from a land that the Excrucian Host defeated; there, allegedly—and despite its fiendishly sharp edge—it was used to strangle unsuccessful claimants to a throne.
- **Horror,** which is named **Eurytos [Ereto]:** a thing of shifting spines and mucilaginous poisons. Once, it had been beautiful; then the Excrucians claimed it, twisted it, and used it to kill its maker. Now it is filled with tragic murder and self-hate.
- **Abomination,** which is named **Blunderbore [Biluin]:** the lingering essence of a place that gave up and killed itself rather than oppose the Excrucian Host. It—that vast and sprawling realm—chose to die: its people, its plants, its very *things* expired, rather than continue to exist in the same continuum as the Not. Its ash, a Strategist that loved it forged into the mace named Blunderbore.

Artifacts such as these, if a PC were to have or to obtain one, would be wielded with **Flore** or with a Gift thereof. The most common power for such weapons is the corrosive ability to cut through immortality and preservative measures—most effective against law-beings when used with high-end miracles, but allowing one, with even basic use of Flore, to corrode the noble metals, kill multiplying strains of bacteria with a touch, strike through protective magic, and murder weak but deathless things like ghosts.

Non-Creational weapons of note, of course, also exist; just such weapons the first Riders held, in their assault upon the world.

Three of the most famous of *those* would be:

- **Hatred,** which is named **Malambruno [Malabur]:** the first of the Abhorrent Weapons to fall into Imperial hands. It corrupted the Angel that claimed it and turned him traitor to the world.
- **Atrocity,** which is named **Briareos [Bessares]:** with this sword, the Excrucians slew Heaven's gatekeeper at the beginning of the Age of Pain. It is, thus, in its body, a declaration of War against all that Is. Its legacy in the Not is even bloodier: before it became Atrocity it passed through more than a hundred wielders' hands—principally antiheroes, fearsome bandits, tragic figures, and some of the nastiest tyrants of their day—and made each great ... before their awful ends.
- **Loathing,** also named **Gyges [Gaieges]:** it is impossible for any Power to approach this weapon, and Imperators who can do better are far and few between. It has a radiance that drives away any thing that serves Creation.

The powers of such void-born weapons are idiosyncratic, as are the means of taming them; notable weapons of the Beyond are typically created through quests, **Greater Strategy** (pg. 177), and **Greater Inchoation** (pg. 221).

> *The all-consuming bloodrot sword had thought it might better itself if it could see the world; but it had only, really, gotten worse.*
>
> —*from* In the Final Days, *by K. C. Danine*

A typical player-level method of acquisition and control is to buy their actual *powers* as Gifts of Eide, Lore, or Wyrd—or, for a lesser weapon, as a Bond or Geas:

A player whose PC holds Loathing, for instance, would not buy its power via Flore, unless they wish to allege that the thing is actually Creational; they would instead buy the power to drive away Powers and Imperators directly. Should their character ever lose the weapon permanently, the GM can (and arguably must) return the invested points.

Rules for Flore

The "power source" for Flore effects is called **Immersion.** It measures the degree to which the character has let go of their memories of the Glitch, their knowledge of who and what they are, and prostrated themselves before the *experience* of Creation—succumbed to the allure of its tainted beauties, tangled themselves within its false conceptions and false laws, and lost sight of its inextricable and fundamental wrongs. It is not wrong in itself, but inevitably it leads to wrongness; the Strategist who immerses too deeply in Creation will not find wisdom, but rather abdication:

A blinding, ruinous comfort; peace.

A character begins the game with [10 × Flore] Immersion. This will rise as they invoke more difficult Flore effects. It will fall over the course of time and when it has harmful results.

They may invoke Flore effects with [level ≤ Flore] for "free"—it requires no Immersion.

To invoke stronger Flore effects, the Strategist must lean *in* to Creation or the social conceits of those living within it: that is, to Immersion.

Most Strategists need to dip deep into Immersion for even modest Flore effects. They drown in the river of Creation. They become confused, and lost unto themselves; only with time do they recover.

Chancery Strategists, on average, fare a little better.

Regardless, the character names the Flore level they wish to emulate; the practical maximum, in the absence of a bidding war, will be 23. They perform the effect. If the effect succeeds—if it functions essentially as stated, rather than being blocked or undone outright by hostile countereffects—they accumulate Immersion equal to [desired Flore – original Flore.] For instance, if an Eternal with level 6 Flore wishes to perform a level 11 effect, they will, by default, accumulate 5 points of Immersion. If they wish to overcome a level 2 Ward as well—a miraculous barrier that effectively lowers their miracle level by 2 (pg. 257)—they will accumulate 7 points of Immersion, or,

add +7 to their current Immersion total, instead.

From time to time, it is good to note what this Immersion actually represents, what the character is actually doing or feeling as they succumb to Creation—what dangerous attachments they are forming, what they are forgetting, what they are devoting time to, what they will refuse to face. It is good to note, in short, how they fall into samsara, and lose themselves. This is, however, not required; more precisely, if not established at the time of the miracle, it will either be a subtle influence that eventually fades or a dramatic one to be established later.

Thus, a character dramatically reaching beyond their limits may choose to explain how, in doing so, they begin to obsess about a certain treasure, commit themselves to something dangerous, fall into a daze, or stop for a few days to help the person they'd originally planned to ruin save their farm; a character engaging in what they consider a work-a-day miracle, even if the total amount of accumulated Immersion is the same, need not explain.

A character must always buy enough Immersion to succeed at the basic effect. They can add more to overcome a Ward or opposition when and if they discover it's there. This extra purchase is a little Slow (pg. 251) compared to miracles, though, and in a fast-paced struggle, they may fall behind (see pg. 151, 262).

Taking 3+ Immersion at once is a notable moment. The Immersion itself is still a bad thing, but the character will earn a bonus xp.

Conceptually,

- An effect that costs 0 Immersion is **instinctive**—it doesn't drain the character at all.
- Spending 1 Immersion is more or less **casual**.
- Spending 2 Immersion is **a head rush.**
- Spending 3 Immersion is **seriously disorienting.**
- A 4-7 Immersion effect is an emotional rollercoaster and a spiritual experience.
- Anything beyond that is terrifyingly profound, a massive threat to the Strategist's ego boundaries and emotional integrity.

At the beginning of each chapter, Immersion drops by one, to a minimum of 0.

Characters may also reduce Immersion when it brings them to a crisis: when the player, or, at 80+ Immersion, sometimes the GM, has an interesting idea for the harm or change the Immersion might inflict on their character, and implements it as a "Wound." Superficial Wounds burn off 10 Immersion, with no minimum; harmful ones, 25; metaphysically potent and transformative ones, 50. This isn't unlimited, though:

The character will suffer at most one such Wound per session—*counting* the Wounds from other, similar, Costs—and at most one 25+ Cost Wound in two consecutive sessions.

Characters may freely accumulate Immersion until it hits 80; then, as noted, there are circumstances in which the GM may force a harmful crisis upon them. At 108 (the number of stitches in a Major League baseball), they may no longer spend Immersion at all.

... after roughly 300 points of Immersion have been poured into Wounds over the course of a character's life, they are no longer playable—they fall beneath the surface of the world, retire into a peaceful life, sacrifice themselves to strengthen Creation, re-enter the river of souls to be reborn a mortal, or somesuch other fate.

Some of the key terms used for Flore powers include:

- ***Florem (pl. flores)*; Treasure.** The things of Creation that a Strategist loves, is bound to, and may empower are known as their ***flores*** or their **Treasures.**
- ***Florilegium.*** A collective Treasure or a collection of Treasures is known as a ***florilegium.***
- **Region.** The conceptual area, ecoregion, or metropolitan area a character is in is called their **Region**.

EXAMPLE

A character is a Ghost, with **level 1** Flore. For this character, the chart looks like:

EFFECT TYPE	ACTION LEVELS
Instinctive (0 Immersion)	Levels 0-1
Casual (1 Immersion)	Level 2
Dizzying (2 Immersion)	Level 3
Disorienting (3 Immersion)	Level 4
Overwhelming (4-7 Immersion)	Levels 5-8
Terrifying (8+ Immersion)	Level 9+

What the player probably memorizes is this:

Level 0-1 Flore effects are lesser connections and projections: I can hear when my treasures need me and can visit them in spirit. At least within the same Region, this much is free.

Level 2 Flore effects are lesser administration miracles. They let me talk to my treasures mind-to-mind. Again within the same Region, I can do this pretty casually.

Level 3-4 Flore effects are lesser guidance and glorification and greater connection miracles. I'm good at working with/helping my treasures, bringing out their hidden potential, and hearing their desperate prayers even from quite far away—but connecting that deeply is dizzying.

Level 5-8 Flore effects—lesser ignition, trust, artifice, and divine plan miracles; greater projection, administration, guidance, and glorification miracles: this is a lot of the meat of the attribute. Letting my treasures oppose miracles, having them reach me instantly, using them to accomplish great things, touching their spirit from very far away, awakening truly great power in them ... doing this stuff feels maybe good sometimes, maybe bad sometimes, but it's just brutal on me either way.

Level 9+ Flore effects—greater ignition, trust, artifice, and divine plan effects—they batter my heart and my mind. I mean, how? Just, how do you deal with that? How do you go deep enough into the world to do this stuff without just ... tearing in two?

Calbert was shouting; Maggie was fuming; and the sacred grimoire of the seven sages ... was looking just about as lost and desperate—she thought—as any sacred grimoire could.

—*from* The Riddle of the Stone, *by Mildred Cotta*

Powers of Connection

Level 0 Miracle: "Connection"

Automatic, Long-Ranged

Level 0 Flore miracles are the Strategists' lesser power to sense their Treasures' hearts. They're a mystic connection between a Strategist and their Treasures.

These miracles allow a Strategist to "hear" or "feel" when one of their Treasures needs them, is trying to contact them spiritually, or—for Treasures unaware that they can contact the Strategist spiritually—is trying desperately to reach them by mundane means ... no matter how far away the Treasure might be.

This miracle spans eternity. Most lesser miracles will only connect a Strategist to Treasures in the same Region, but the basic ability to "hear" when a Treasure needs them can cross any distance it must.

Level 0 effects include:

- becoming aware that something's *wrong* when the Strategist's treasured laptop is being stolen,
- noticing a treasured minion/agent signalling for the Strategist's attention, *and*
- sensing that an adopted child is calling a phone the Strategist doesn't actually have with them, over and over and over again ...

Level 1 Rite: "Projection"

Slow, [Extraordinary]

Level 1 Flore Rites are the Strategists' lesser power of distant communion. They're the Strategist's gift for spiritually traveling along the Strategist/Treasure connection, plus, their ability to share their mind and being with their Treasures once there.

Invoking **Projection,** the Strategist slips into a state of sleep or trance. (This makes Projection a beat or two slower than most actions.) In this state, they lose track of their body's surroundings, retaining only enough awareness to notice danger or an urgent need for action or to be awakened by someone, e.g., shaking them, shouting at them, or dousing them with water. Their functional awareness and their metaphysical presence translates away to float around a Treasure of their choice in the same general Region (e.g., the same city or forest).

In this state, they perceive through the Treasure's senses. If it is asleep, they perceive its dreams. If it is inanimate—well, the world of **Glitch** is an animistic one; objects are capable of dreaming, and, when they do not dream, and their senses are not actively sealed, they will generally have at least a fuzzy spiritual awareness of the world around them that the Strategist may steal.

The Strategist can communicate mentally with the Treasure during this process, and it will understand their intentions. The converse is not necessarily true: while Strategists don't *generally* have to worry about language barriers (pg. 286), a bee may "think" in buzzing swirls; a mountain peak, in stern regard.

When projected, the Strategist is generally considered to be "present" where the Treasure is. They can use and be targeted by divine actions there; others can target them with any mundane or divine effect capable of striking at an immaterial spirit.

If the Strategist likes, they may touch the Treasure's mind on a deeper level. When and if they do so:

- they can roughly understand even the strangest Treasure's needs, moods, and reactions.
- the Treasure gains a small amount of added mobility, at the GM's discretion—a library can shift its scrolls and shelves around slowly, for instance, when this power is in force.
- the Treasure can call upon all of the Strategist's attributes, powers, and skills in addition to its own. The Treasure can even access extraordinary effects, although this power is not otherwise Extraordinary. The Treasure can pick and choose the abilities it calls upon: it's not obligated to adopt unfortunate Geasa, for instance, nor to use the Strategist's base Ability rating (even with the Strategist's, e.g., medical training, or powers) if its own should be higher.
- the Treasure may use the Strategist's Costs to support its actions to whatever extent the Strategist allows. (Spending a Cost on those actions must be legitimate in the first place.) Borrowing the Strategist's Eide, for instance, it can then support it with the Strategist's Stilling.
- and, finally, the Strategist may "take damage" (pg. 279) to protect the Treasure from unwanted events, as long as they aren't things the Treasure itself actively wants.

The goddess descended. Her presence filled her. Her mind split like the broken sky.

In that moment her hands were steady. In that moment her eyes were full of light. She traced her gaze up the wraith that towered before her and it did not terrify her; did not concern her; did not confuse her.

It was no longer a stranger, but a pitiable figure:

That small and miserable thing that she— that— that the goddess— had bound, so many years ago. That mewling specter trapped and sealed here, of immanent necessity, that a certain thing could some years later on be given ...

Its fist was still descending, and it was full of thunder, but she stopped it; or, better said, she spoke its name.

"Cadriel. ... Cadriel. It is time."

The thunder knelt.

—*from* The Duck Pond, *by Emily Chen*

Projection ends when the Strategist ends it, or, when they're awakened. About ten breaths of time later, their spiritual presence will fade away where they were; until that time, they are to some extent in both places.

This is a Rite, as touching a Treasure's mind grants it access to the Strategist's powers—potentially including Wear and the Four Costs.

With a level 1 Rite, a Strategist can:

- put themselves in a trance and telepathically communicate with a student,
- find a lost, treasured cup,
- connect heart-to-heart with their adoptive family when dreaming, learning what's going on in their lives,
- telepathically guide their treasured car through the Chicago streets,
- create a shared dream, allowing a dear friend that they're haunting to haunt someone *they* treasure, in turn, *or*
- realize that a child they've come to care about is being threatened by a ghost, and share their own exorcism skill from afar.

Mortal Witnesses: To the extent that a Treasure calls upon the Strategist's knowledge and procedural knowledge during this process, its memories of events become disorganized and unclear. This is meant to protect the Strategist, in that if they have a deep secret their Treasures' memories of knowing that secret will be confused ... but it can also work against them by leaving a key ally hopelessly bewildered or *fail* to protect them if the Treasure, say, writes that secret down.

Level 2 Miracle: "Administration"

Level 2 Flore miracles are the Strategists' lesser ability to oversee their Treasures. They're the power to send *part* of the Strategist's consciousness and awareness spiritually traveling off to visit a Treasure.

MY MOST BELOVED SERVANT.

The voice broke into Saul's thoughts. He startled and nearly spilled his tea. "Eh?"

I SHALL REQUIRE YOU TO LOOK UP WHETHER THE PLATYPUS MENSTRUATES. In the background, he could hear the buzz of gods arguing amongst themselves; could hear his god attempting to quiet them. AND, WHETHER OR NOT THAT MENSES IS POISONOUS.

"It wouldn't be ..." Saul broke off there, his confidence faltering, as he found himself uncertain whether to declare that it wouldn't be poisonous, or that it wouldn't be venomous. The matter always confused him; and perhaps the god sensed this in him, or, perhaps, it did not.

JUST ..., it said. CAN YOU? PLEASE?

"... fine," Saul said, and wearily he pushed himself up from the desk.

— from The Vrykolakan Stratagem, *by K. C. Danine*

The Strategist can mentally visit a Treasure without first entering a trance state or falling asleep. They can't touch the Treasure's mind on a deeper level and thus cannot share their experience, knowledge, attributes, or Costs, but they *can* communicate mentally with it and they *can* perceive through the Treasure's senses in addition to their own. They are considered to be "present" where the Treasure is, as well as where they are. If they need to understand an alien or inanimate Treasure's thoughts, this power can be combined with **Greater Connection** (below) into a single, difficulty 4, miracle.

Administration ends when the Strategist stops concentrating on the effect. About ten breaths of time later, their spiritual presence fades away where they were.

Level 2 effects include:

- verifying the security of the Strategist's treasured archive,
- communicating with a treasured person from afar, *and*
- quickly checking the status of a treasure while in a situation where it's not safe to fall asleep or trance out.

Miracles of Empowerment

Level 3 Miracle: "Guidance"

[Time-Consuming]

Level 3 Flore miracles grant an insight into how to wield the Strategist's Treasures well. They are a Strategist's lesser powers of instruction and encouragement.

The Strategist guides a Treasure or someone using a Treasure through an Ability action. Normally this helps with a single action, but if the Strategist takes the Time-Consuming effort to work with the Treasure in advance on an action or a set of actions for a bit, or if the Treasure just needs to keep doing whatever it was they just did, the mundane effects of their **Guidance** can linger for a few scenes—potentially up to "much of a session." It isn't that the *miracle itself* lasts that long, of course; it's more, sometimes good advice is still good advice the next day.

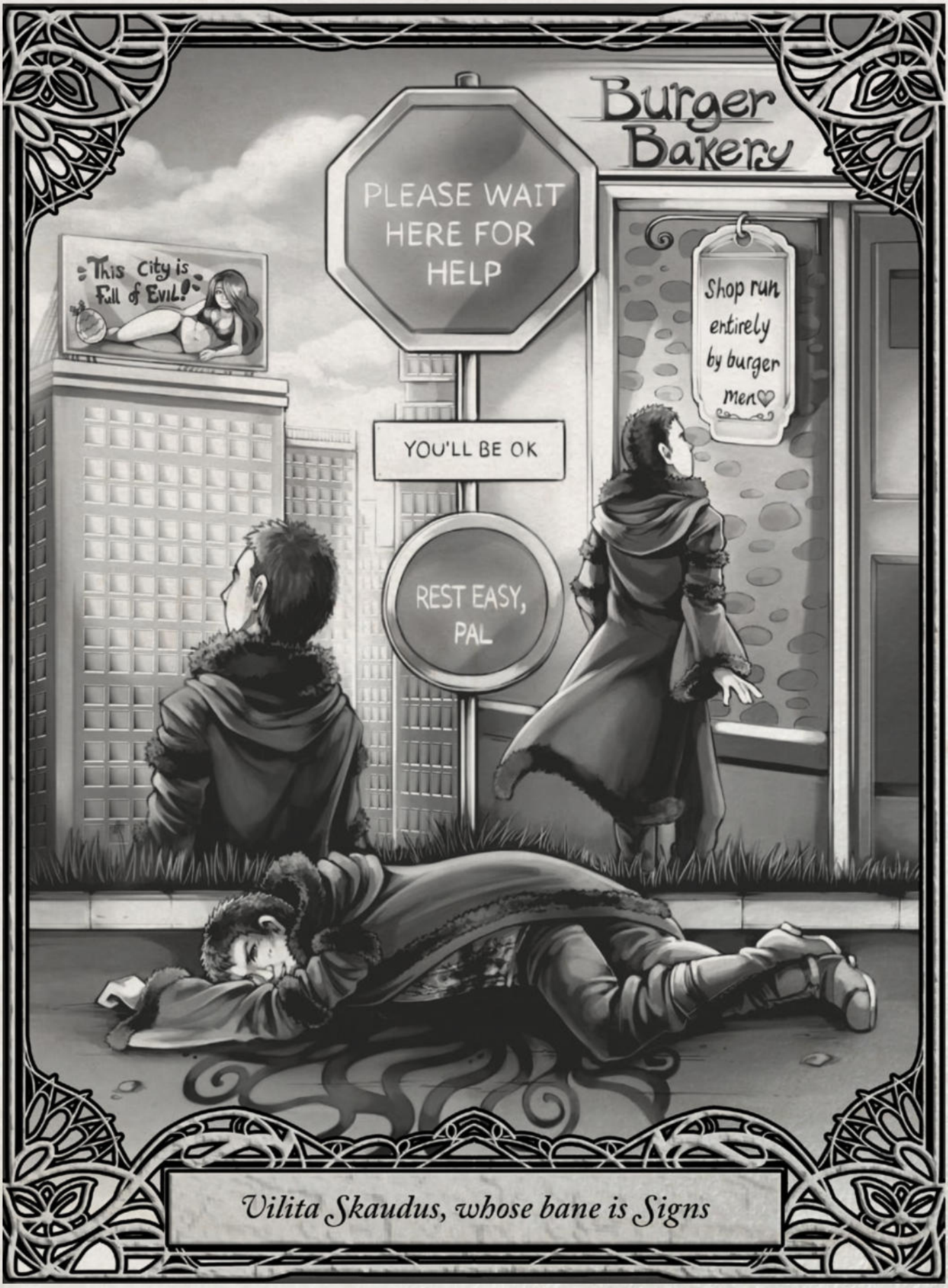
Guidance grants comfort in the task. It grants either the Strategist's professional competence, or ordinary professional competence, whichever is better. It grants a +1 Ability bonus, to a maximum of the Strategist's own Ability, and 2 Edge.

The Strategist may, if appropriate, gain these bonuses themselves—e.g., when driving a Treasure car.

Level 3 effects include:

- superior use of a treasured device,
- talking a treasured companion through a difficult task, possibly from afar, *and*
- prepping a treasured friend for a test.

opposite: *by Kirsten Moody*



Vilita Skaudus, whose bane is Signs

"I want to fly," I said.

"You can't fly."

"... but ..."

"I can't give you any superpowers I want," she said. "Or any that you want. That's not how it works. If it did, everybody would be Savior."

"Oh."

"If you contract with me," she said. "I can give you the powers that are in you. In the seed of self that is in you. Whatever they might be."

"I won't ... like, turn into a tree or something, right?"

She sighed. She looked me over. "Do you feel like the kind of person who turns into a tree, Ha-neul?"

"I just think I should be sure!"

"There's no certainty in life," she said. "Only the choice: do you want the pain of helplessness, or the pain of power?"

— from Earthborn, *by Theresa Dasher*

Level 4 Miracle: "Glorification" *[Time-Consuming]*

Level 4 Flore miracles recognize and awaken the unique innate power that sleeps within one of the Strategist's Treasures. They are, specifically, the Strategists' lesser techniques for doing so.

For each Treasure, the Strategist may specify one special power. It should be a relatively straightforward power. It does not have to be single-purpose or weak, but it should display a certain conceptual parsimony: a tendency towards there being *a thing* that it does.

This power, the Strategist may use **Glorification** to awaken, facilitate, or grant.

Functionally the granted power is a Technique, although (as noted) it should be narrower than a Strategist's default. It's invoked through Ability actions[20]. This includes the potential for truly impressive stunts at Ability 6+. If the Treasure has agency over the power, it may take its own Ability actions; the GM decides descriptively what it will do. If someone else wields or uses the Treasure, e.g., the Strategist, they provide the Ability action themselves.

This power grants 1 Edge when the user is new to using it, but this can rise to 3 Edge with practice.[21]

Glorification is a sustained effect. However, it can become a longer-term effect—one that lasts for a few scenes after the Strategist stops sustaining it, and potentially up to "much of a session"—if the Strategist works with the Treasure for a few hours in the background or an extended/self-spotlit training sequence.

This effect is often used as part of the story of claiming a Treasure in play. If the Strategist already has [Flore + 1] or more Treasures, a Time-Consuming **Glorification** action will allow them to claim yet one more; this effect can be combined with an ordinary Glorification, or can simply identify the potential for one, and has a 20 Cost surcharge. If the Treasure the PC is claiming is sufficiently inherently powerful, the GM may request or require a **Greater Glorification** (pg. 200), instead.

Thus, level 4 effects include:

- awakening the power of a treasured fan to make blasts of wind when waved, and waving it,
- digging out the telekinetic ability within a treasured friend,
- digging out the incredible musical ability within a treasured friend,
- naming said friend as treasured in the first place, *and*
- activating the supernatural functions of a magical hacking program and using it to hack into an air-gapped system.

Mortal Witnesses: mortal witnesses will generally believe that the Strategist is awakening potential and/or a connection that already existed. They may realize that magic exists, but will not become aware of miracles or the Glitch.

Level 5 Miracle: "Ignition"

Level 5 Flore miracles are miraculous actions taken with Treasures—that is to say, actions taken with Treasures that are not on the fumbling level of mortal ability, but rather conceptions executed perfectly or burned into the world by will, as if by miracle. They are the Strategist's lesser power to militarize or weaponize the treasures of their heart.

Ignition improves one of a Treasure's actions. It gains 3 Edge in any mundane contest. More importantly, it can contend with miracles: in a miraculous contest (pg. 260), the action has the same action level as this miracle. (That is, as the Strategist's [base Flore + spent Cost – any relevant Ward.] In a miraculous contest, note, it does not gain the Edge.)

As with **Guidance, Ignition** can also be used to improve someone else's action *using* a Treasure. Technically this includes using the Treasure in an inappropriate way, e.g., when using a pickaxe to paint; the intention is that this will be balanced by the difficulty of succeeding in the first place.[22] Regardless, this power's benefits will only apply to the portion of the action that the Treasure is actually central in.

Level 5 effects include:

- wielding a treasured sword in battle against an inhumanly skilled Power,

20 (unless the target, somehow, has Eide (pg. 150).)

21 Note, when combining powers like Glorification, Ignition, and Guidance, that Edge bonuses are a reflection of how unfair a conflict is, *not* pure numbers. Two or three roughly similar advantages may sometimes, at the GM's option, add up to one slightly larger one ... but mostly, Edges don't stack.

22 Painting delicately with the tip most likely requires **Steel** to do poorly and **Flow** to manage well; painting in a fluent pickaxe style will take the necessary action level somewhat higher.

- allowing a treasured friend to tangle up a fallen angel in their fishing line—particularly if their special power is fishing, *and*
- shouting "go!" and sending the Strategist's treasured dog charging past six gun-wielding thugs to knock down their boss.

A LIFE OF WONDER

Level 6 Miracle: "Trust"

Automatic

Level 6 Flore miracles are a power that forms within the Treasures themselves that both enables them and fates them to come and help the Strategist in times of need. They are the Treasures' lesser powers of aid.

A Treasure may use these miracles to reach the Strategist quickly. Specifically, when invoked, the Treasure can get to the Strategist in a short time, which is always "in time," from anywhere in the Region. Further, this is "the Treasure's" action; it does not require an action on the Strategist's part, or even awareness that it is transpiring.

Either the Strategist's player or the GM may initiate this action; it is normally the Strategist's player. (More precisely, either the Strategist's player or the Treasure's player, who is almost always the GM, may do so.)

Both the Strategist's player and the Treasure must consent.

The Treasure may also invoke this power to facilitate one of its actions, gaining the benefits of **Ignition** and optionally **Glorification.** Again, the Strategist's *player* must consent, but this does not otherwise take the Strategist's action, awareness, or knowledge.

Level 6 effects include:

- having a treasured friend show up with a car when the Strategist is bleeding out in the middle of nowhere,
- having a treasured magical wand not only show up exactly when needed, but also trigger its magical powers as it does; *and*
- having a treasured dog, in a burst of strength, escape the creature that is holding it captive.

Mortal Witnesses: this power will rewrite causality as mortals understand it to provide a plausible backstory to the Treasure's travels. If necessary—e.g., if the Treasure was being interviewed on live television somewhere they couldn't reach the Strategist from "in time"—this may involve things like body doubles, mistaken identities, impersonations, and evil twins.

Level 7 Rite: "Design"

[Time-Consuming or Very Time-Consuming]

Level 7 Flore Rites are a Strategist's bubbling stew of λ-inspirations and their grasp of how to integrate them with the potential for wonder that burns beneath the surface of Creation. The actual work will be done by mundane process, but it is the Rite that melds the Strategist's genius into Creation's law and thus declares: *they may craft all manner of marvelous things.*

These Rites are the Strategist's lesser artifact-crafting power.

The Design Rite lets the Strategist perform a cinematic or low-fantasy action to create an artifact or device—or repair, retrofit, customize, tune, or integrate minor improvements into an existing artifact or device—using any magic or mundane craft that they are reasonably well acquainted with. The Rite just grants the Strategist the necessary skill; the actual *act* is a mundane action with 3 Edge and the same action level as this miracle. (It's always Design, though, not a specific Ability action.)

Even at this level of competence, crafting a legitimate artifact is arduous. It requires days of background work or a few self-spotlit moments of intense labor. That said, this action can also create a rather unimpressive artifact more quickly or do phenomenal work on creating, repairing, customizing, or repurposing anything else; *that* requires mere hours of background work or, in conflict, a particularly slow tactical action—and these latter options can be hastened nearly to completion with a single self-spotlit action (pg. 251).

The Strategist may spend 1-4 points from the Four Costs on **Design** to speed up this power or improve its effect. The exact degree of improvement available will be up to the GM; by default, the improvement available will be moderate, but if the GM wants Strategists to be able to craft strong personal-scale artifacts without spending character points on the final power, **Design** will have to allow that (and the GM should consider making the [Extraordinary] tag available at +4 or even, e.g., +1 Cost).

This is a Rite; it interacts with a Cost.

With a level 7 Rite, a Strategist can:

- craft a virus using real or magical biotechnology,
- fix a broken computer,
- speed up that fix by spending, e.g., +1 Fugue,
- customize that computer with a trap for any thieves,
- make their own clothing, and have it be amazing, *or*
- build a magical "holodeck" using Formation Magic.

"This machine," he said, setting it down firmly on the table between them, "right here, is a fucker eliminator."

"What the hell, J—"

He held up a finger. "Ah-ah-ah," he said, and pushed the button with a great and ominous clunk. "You want to bet, you want to seriously bet, here, that you aren't a fucker, Dennis? That you aren't teetering on the very precipice of elimination, right now? Because, you know, I know what side of that bet I'm on."

Dennis opened his mouth. J wiggled his finger, then waved at the box.

Slowly, furiously, Dennis closed his mouth, once again.

—from The Golden Sign, *by Xiu Lai*

Level 8 Miracle: "Divine Plan"
Planning, Quest, Extraordinary

Level 8 Flore miracles are a Strategist's ability to fix a certain outcome to a Treasure's path, making it the cynosure to their destiny. They are a Strategist's lesser power to weave their Treasures into their own network of correlative fate.

Divine Plan is a planning miracle (pg. 254). The Strategist comes up with a miraculous plan to use a Treasure to do *something*. They then execute the plan. While they are doing so, not only is the plan's force strengthened but the Treasure receives the benefits of **Ignition** on the actions the plan covers**.** Given the lead time required to make **Greater Glorification** (below) a quest miracle, the two powers can be combined, with **Divine Plan** including an ongoing apotheosis for the Treasure as well.

As a general rule, plans that fit what the Treasure might be expected to accomplish will complete in 0-3 chapters; plans that fit them quite poorly will take 0-2 stories to complete; and plans that the GM can't really see working at all will stall out until events in play show how they might work after all ... and *then* move forward in 0-3 chapters or 0-2 stories as their updated picture suggests.

Divine Plan is imposed on the world by synchronicity and power rather than being a plan created by cleverness alone. Thus, the Strategist's player can propose the plan, and need only open it to the group for ideas if they wish to. They also have the option to leave the plan unstated and let the GM think of something, assume something reasonable is happening in the background, or wait for the group to come up with a good idea at some later time. Finally, it's OK if coincidences and fortune play into the plan's ultimate success.

Level 8 effects include:

- tasking a treasured friend to forge a business empire,
- wielding a treasured fiery sword to, eventually, renovate the Canadian economy, *and*
- having a treasured horse (with the unique talent that it can recite all of Shakespeare) begin work on a completely *new* Shakespeare play.

Greater Abilities

Level 4 Miracle: "Greater Connection"
Extraordinary

Level 4 Flore miracles are the Strategists' greater power to sense their Treasures' hearts. This expresses and embodies a deeper and more effortless version of the mystic connection that the level 0 miracles exploit.

These miracles give the Strategist a bit of situational and emotional context for a cry for help they recently received from **Connection.** More generally, they help the Strategist understand the needs, moods, and reactions of nearby Treasures that can't communicate or are alien—these factors no longer increase the difficulty or render such actions unfeasible. Thus, the Strategist may read the mood of a Treasure-bee or a Treasure-sword ... or notice the *absence* of mood in a Treasure-human whose consciousness some body-hopping spirit has suppressed. Sometimes the GM will express this as PC-comprehensible nonverbal communication—e.g., facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice—even when it is not.

> *"I must go," she said, rising to her feet. "Somewhere, a friend of mine's in need."*
>
> *"Sit down, Ms. Jones," the judge said.*
>
> *Her eyes were very clear. You could see right through them, all the way down to the furthest stars. "I have seen the acorn before the oak," she said, "I have seen the egg before the hen—"*
>
> *"You will contain your client, Mrs. Stockham—"*
>
> *"—but I cannot stay to see the judgment before the court."*
>
> *With a bing-bong-ring and a whirl of wind, she flew up through the air vent and was gone.*
>
> *A reporter snapped a picture in the background, though of what Mrs. Stockham was not clear. Finally, quietly, Mrs. Stockham offered, "I believe she meant, 'the law before the good.'"*
>
> —*from* Thin ICE, *by Hermanus Snels*

Level 4 effects include:

- suddenly realizing that a distant friend is desperate, scared, and *being hunted,*
- understanding a treasured castle's feelings, *and*
- reading nuances of emotion in the movements of the ants from a treasured hive.

Level 5 Rite: "Greater Projection"
Slow, Long-Ranged, [Extraordinary]

Level 5 Flore Rites are the Strategists' greater power of distant communion. This power works as **Projection,** save that this version has unlimited range. Also, if the Strategist is willing to accept the potential muddling effect described on pg. 183, they may visit up to their Ability rating[23] in Treasures at once.

This is a Rite, for the same reasons as (lesser) Projection.

With a level 5 Rite, a Strategist can:

- find a lost, treasured cup that has been stolen away to a fairyland,
- telepathically guide their treasured car through the streets of a faraway place, *or*
- enter a trance and telepathically communicate with all their students, across all of the world(s).

Mortal Witnesses: As per **Projection,** to the extent that a Treasure calls upon the Strategist's knowledge and procedural knowledge during this process, their memories of events become disorganized and unclear.

23 For clarity, this is not their *base* Ability; they may spend Wear or Immersion or potentially some other Cost to increase it here and in **Greater Administration** (below). Although, they're not really expected to.

opposite: *by Silvia Cucchi*

Gaathuin Sarav, who is dying of Cabinets

Level 6 Miracle: "Greater Administration"

Long-Ranged

Level 6 Flore miracles also include a Strategist's greater ability to split their consciousness and spirit. This functions as **Administration,** save that it has unlimited range and allows the Strategist to visit up to their Ability rating in Treasures at once.

Level 6 effects include:

- verifying the security of the Strategist's treasured archive in Creation, when the Strategist themselves is traveling in Ninuan,
- communicating with a treasured person across great distances, *and*
- quickly checking the status of multiple Treasures while in a situation where it's not safe to fall asleep.

Level 7 Miracle: "Greater Guidance"

[Time-Consuming], [Very Time-Consuming, Quest]

Level 7 Flore miracles grant an insight into how to teach one's Treasures. They are the Strategist's greater powers of instruction and encouragement.

This power functions as **Guidance,** but *also* increases the target's effective Ability for the action to 7 if it was lower. (The Treasure can still buy it higher with Wear, starting with 7, and they are still constrained by the level of their action in the unlikely event that neither **Flow** nor **Greater Focus** fits what they want to do.)

In addition, if the target is an inanimate Treasure, the Strategist may grant it limited mobility, as per **Projection.**

As an alternative to the above benefits, given a few days of background work or a few self-spotlit moments of intense training, the Strategist can teach someone a relatively narrow mundane or magical skill, granting every action they take with that skill the benefits of **Guidance**—comfort, professional competence, 2 Edge, and +1 to Ability (if below the Strategist's own.) The Strategist "stores" the target's long-term access to that skill in a quest slot. They can't use that slot for a quest until they decide to let the target's bonus skill lapse; if they had five quests running already, they don't have free time to teach new techniques. Note that this version of the power is not limited to the Strategist's Treasures.

Level 7 effects include:

- granting a treasured friend enough skill and ability to steal documents from a military base,
- giving a treasured child with a broken leg the ability and skill to cope comfortably with the pain,
- talking a treasured hamster through disarming an explosive from the inside,
- teaching that hamster how to take down dictation, *and*
- training a friend, who is not even necessarily a *Treasured* friend, in formation magic or calculus.

Teacher's advice rarely made sense, but then again, it wasn't meant to. Sensible advice can only help you to achieve within the level you're at. Maybe, to incrementally improve.

The right nonsense, though, bouncing around inside your brain like a pool ball?

It could change you.

That's how this whole story starts, I think. With me, wanting to get my head around all this calculus stuff; and with Teacher's suggestion:

Wear teal.

—*from* Stars Over Edgewood, *by Marianne Hupp*

Level 8 Miracle: "Greater Glorification"

[Time-Consuming], [Very Time-Consuming, Quest], Extraordinary

Level 8 Flore miracles are a Strategist's greater ability to awaken the innate powers that sleep within their Treasures. They unleash the innate divine abilities of an extremely powerful Treasure. Or, they awaken a lesser Treasure's ability, but also push it to an extraordinary level—escalating their power and nature from, e.g., "poisonous human" to "region-ruining poisonous human."

Greater Glorification usually works as **Glorification.** However, the power granted can be extraordinary.[24] If the Treasure's default power is *not* extraordinary, the Strategist may grant a specific upgraded version of the Treasure's normal power. Upgrading an ordinary Treasure in this fashion is very hard on it, often inflicting Burn, Wear, or Fugue upon it; if the Treasure is unwilling or unable to bear the full weight of this, the GM may splash a few points back onto the Strategist as damage.

This power can be invoked ...

- instantly, ending when the miracle does;
- with some preparation (as a Time-Consuming effect) in which case the effects last longer, as per **Glorification,** *or*
- with a *lot* of preparation and work, as a Very Time-Consuming effect, in which case the effects last indefinitely. This investment of power is stored in one of the Strategist's quest slots.

The Strategist grants roughly the same power or power-up every time they invoke this effect, with the exception that if they spend another 20 Cost to take the effect epic (pg. 248) they can add a further power-up on top of *that.*

Thus, level 8 effects might include,

- awakening the divine power of the sacred Eight Hand Mirror,
- digging out the telekinetic ability within a treasured friend ... and forcibly enhancing it to city-scale, *and*
- awakening the lightning wolf that sleeps within one's treasured dog, over the course of a few days of work, for a goodly length of time.

24 More precisely, the power-granting process can be extraordinary; see pg. 132.

"It's just a cup, Amy."

"It's the holy grail!"

"Seriously. It's, like—it says 'made in China' on the bottom!"

"Do I have to bleed out a savior here? Because I will bleed out a frigging savior."

"Then you wouldn't even be able to drink out of it!"

"OK, look," Amy said. She picked up the cup. She shook it, turned it over, clonked it against the table, and lifted it up again. A fuzzy grace fell out. "See? Grail."

Veronica poked the grace dubiously. The world sang. The nub of her severed finger healed.

"... that could be from a Chinese legend," she said.

"They don't have legends," Amy said. "They have 'shénhuà.'"

—*from* The Farthest Corners of the Globe (Amy/Veronica), *by Cynthia Penrose*

Mortal Witnesses: as per **Glorification**, mortal witnesses will generally believe that the Strategist is awakening potential that was already "there." It may become obvious to them that *magic* exists, but this power will not expose the existence of miracles, mythic reality, λ-beings, or the Glitch.

Level 9 Miracle: "Greater Ignition"

Extraordinary

Level 9 Flore miracles are extraordinarily intense miraculous actions taken with Treasures. They are the Strategist's greater power to militarize or weaponize the treasures of their heart.

In **Greater Ignition,** an action by the Treasure, or using the Treasure, becomes effectively miraculous—unopposable by mundane force in the same situations that a miracle might be. It automatically wins any mundane conflict. If the action uses the Treasure's granted power, and it was lower, the target's effective Ability rating for that action increases to 9. (For clarity, the same "effective Ability rating" they could get to by spending Wear.)

This power includes **Ignition** and optionally **(Greater) Glorification** by default.

Level 9 effects include:

- wielding a divine artifact to sweep away the Strategist's enemies,
- granting a treasured friend a moment of extraordinary strength or surpassing power, *and*
- driving a treasured car through a tsunami.

Level 10 Miracle: "Greater Trust"

Automatic, Extraordinary

Level 10 Flore miracles are the most acute and intense form of the power nascent within the Treasures themselves that both enables them and fates them to come and help the Strategist in times of need. They are the Treasures' greater powers of aid.

Specifically, when invoked, the Treasure can get to the Strategist in a short time, which is always "in time," from *anywhere*—even, e.g., from fairyland, Lemuria, or Mars.

Either the Strategist's player or the GM may initiate this action; it is normally the Strategist's player. Both the Strategist's player and the Treasure must consent.

The Treasure may also invoke this power to facilitate their actions, gaining the benefits of **Greater Ignition** and thus, optionally, **(Greater) Glorification.** If the action uses the Treasure's granted power, and it was lower, the target's effective Ability rating for that action increases to 10. As a further option, the Treasure can alter the power that they receive:

In addition to the primary Glorification-granted Technique, each Treasure has a secondary, *related* Technique only available through **Greater Trust** that it gains by thematically merging with the Strategist's powers, their spirit, or their flesh. A hacking program, for example, might flow into the Strategist's body to speed their nerves. A friend might join spirits with the Strategist's to channel an enhanced version of some power that the Strategist has. A horse might borrow the Strategist's Not-nature to become an incarnation of destruction. These powers are invoked in the same way as the powers **Greater Glorification** more typically grants.

Level 10 effects include:

- having a treasured friend show up with a car when the Strategist is bleeding out in the middle of nowhere *on another world,*
- empowering a sacred grail with the Strategist's spirit to end a revenant's suffering for a hundred years, *and*
- having a treasured friend, captured while bringing key intelligence to the Strategist, suddenly "realize" how to destroy things with a word.

Mortal Witnesses: this power will rewrite causality as mortals understand it to provide a plausible backstory to the Treasure's travels or abilities.

One mistake, and it was over. One mistake, and the balance of powers was broken; the lights in the sky turned to serpents and lightning, and Sabina could only fling herself backwards as the world erupted around her.

The Power in the sky roared down towards her—the sound from the sheer speed of her flying craft, accelerating at a rate that threatened to catch up with the third wave of shells that had sprayed forth from its guns. Those guns had by now reoriented; Sabina, amidst a desperate roll and a crawl, felt one leg cease to exist before she shook it back into endurance, felt her lungs struggle against the shockwaves that pounded them, felt the asphalt crumbling to dust beneath the nails of her hands.

A hand like a god's scooped her up from the ground and she realized that that was all; she had nothing left.

Then Aidan was there. Smiling, stepping out from the shadows. He took her hand, and both of them vanished away.

—*from* Starburst (Starfall #2), *by Joann Hightower*

Level 11 Rite: "Greater Design"
[Time-Consuming or Very Time-Consuming], Extraordinary

Level 11 Flore Rites are, as with lesser works of Design, the product of a deep insight into the potential for wonder in the world—now paired with void-inspired visions of, inspirations regarding, and construction techniques for large-scale wonders.

These Rites are the Strategist's greater artifact-creating power.

Given a few days of background work or multiple self-spotlit moments of intense labor, the Strategist may build fortress-scale artifacts. These artifacts are usually concretized Geasa or Wards (pg. 258, 257): while they exist, a new convention governs the world. A new law of fate is born, governed by the artifact that the Strategist has made. (Typically, the effect is limited to the Region, but this need not necessarily be so.)

The Greater Design Rite can also be used to repair, retrofit, customize, tune, or integrate minor improvements into fortress-scale *and larger* artifacts; such tweaks are Time-Consuming or Very Time-Consuming efforts depending on their scale. The scope of possible effect here for a single Rite is set by the GM; if necessary, the Strategist can go beyond that with this power's epic version (pg. 248) and/or a reparatory quest that relies upon its force.

This is a Rite, as it can create Geasa or Wards. The level of these created things is chosen by the GM.

With a level 11 Rite, a Strategist can:

- build a pylon that brings people hope,
- build a garden that sinks a Region into misery,
- build a castle that encodes the Law of Karma into the mundane world, *or*
- repair a damaged tree of worlds.

Level 12 Wish: "Greater Divine Plan"
[Very Time-Consuming], Extraordinary, Wish

Level 12 Flore miracles are a Strategist's ability to use a Treasure as if it were an alchemical cauldron, drawing forth a wish that suits its nature. They are a Strategist's greater power to weave their Treasures into their own network of correlative fate.

> *Every which way turned the fiery sword, and fire flew from it; it dipped away from the world, on some uncertain plane, and fell into the ticker screen—to burn the Chenner-Herney Enterprises stock price down ...*
>
> *—from* The Snake Leg Shambles, *by Russell Chan*

The wish that **Greater Divine Plan** creates is formulated and stated by the Strategist. However, it is created from the Treasure's own power. That power is most likely greatly amplified through some technique of the Strategist's, purified and refined through formations or special techniques, and guided by their will, but it *is* still the Treasure's power ... and therefore it may shift *as* it is wished to suit the origin.

If it starts to shift *too much*, the Strategist may abort the wish; the effect fails, and thus costs nothing, but the GM may inflict a small amount of Wear, Burn, or some other Cost as a kind of backlash from their disengaging.

In general this process takes several days of background labor, or a few self-spotlit moments of intense interactive guidance, and the Strategist must spend much of their time with the Treasure while it's going on ... but that doesn't make sense for every character and every Treasure; in some cases, the appropriate process may be shorter. **Greater Divine Plan** operates on dramatic timing, to a certain extent, regardless: barring a major PC screw-up or plot twist that changes what "on time" means at the very last minute, the wish will always activate "on time."

With a level 12 wish, a Strategist can:

- wield the power of the aforementioned Shakespearean horse to open a gateway to Elizabethan England,
- wield a fan containing the power of wind to keep ships from a certain shore for a year and a day, *or*
- draw upon the compassionate heart of a treasured friend to bring peace to a war-torn locale.

A Flore Cheatsheet

Difficulty 0: Connection

Connection lets a Strategist understand their Treasures' hearts. They can "hear" or "feel" when a Treasure needs them, no matter how far away.

Greater Connection (diff 4) gives additional context on that warning, or, lets the Strategist understand the needs and moods of nearby Treasures otherwise hard to read. (Like bees, rocks, or invisible aliens.)

Difficulty 1: The Projection Rite

In **the Projection Rite,** the Strategist enters a trance state. Their spirit visits a Treasure in the same Region. They perceive through its senses and can communicate mentally with it. *Or* ... they form a deep connection that helps "read" the Treasure, shares the Strategist's abilities and (optionally) Costs with them, can grant inanimate Treasures limited mobility, and lets the Strategist take damage to protect the Treasure. The Treasure's memory will be muddled where the Strategist's abilities were used.

The Greater Projection Rite (diff 5) has unlimited range and can visit up to [Ability] Treasures at once.

Difficulty 2: Administration

Administration lets the Strategist's spirit visit a Treasure while awake. But, they can't touch the Treasure's mind on a deep level—just communicate and borrow its senses.

Greater Administration (diff 6) has unlimited range and can potentially visit up to [Ability] Treasures at once.

Difficulty 3: Guidance

Guidance grants a Treasure's action—or an action *using* a Treasure—comfort in the task; standard professional competence (or the Strategist's professional competence, if better); +1 Ability, if below the Strategist's; and 2 Edge. If the Strategist invests time, the effect can linger.

Greater Guidance (diff 7) works similarly, but also increases the target's effective Ability to 7. It can grant inanimate targets limited mobility, as per **Projection.** Or, with a great deal of time, the Strategist can train someone in a relatively narrow mundane or magical skill—even one they *don't* have; even a target who *isn't* a Treasure—granting every action the trainee takes with it the benefits of (regular) **Guidance.** This second version of the effect is stored in a quest slot.

Difficulty 4: Glorification

Glorification awakens a unique special power in a Treasure. This manifests as a Technique. This normally lasts while sustained, but the Strategist can create a lingering effect with Time-Consuming preparation.

At a 20 Cost surcharge, the Time-Consuming version of this power can claim a new *florem* when the character already has a full roster. This can combine with the power-awakening effect. Certain extraordinary *flores* instead require a Time-Consuming *Greater* Glorification.

Greater Glorification (diff 8) awakens an extraordinary special power. Treasures with ordinary powers awaken an extraordinary version. (This can hurt them.) Again, the Strategist can create a lingering effect with Time-Consuming preparation. Or, with *Very* Time-Consuming labor, they can grant a Technique lasting indefinitely, stored in one of the Strategist's quest slots.

Difficulty 5: Ignition

Ignition grants a Treasure's action, or someone's action using a Treasure, 3 Edge. It lets the action contend with miracles when plausible: for instance, a Treasure-mirror might reflect a miracle, or a Treasure-bird dodge one.

Greater Ignition (diff 9) makes a Treasure's action *unopposable* by mundane actions. If using the power **(Greater) Glorification** grants, it can raise the target's effective Ability to 9. **Greater Ignition** includes **Ignition** by default and **(Greater) Glorification** as an option.

Difficulty 6: Trust

Trust allows a Treasure to reach the Strategist quickly and "in time" from anywhere in the Region. This does not use an action. The Treasure also gets the benefits of **Ignition** and, optionally, **Glorification.**

Greater Trust (diff 10) allows the Treasure to reach the Strategist quickly from *anywhere.* The Treasure also gets the benefits of **Greater Ignition** and, optionally, **(Greater) Glorification.** It may, as a further option, replace the Technique received from (Greater) Glorification—for the sake of this action—with a secondary Technique it gets from thematically merging with the Strategist's powers, spirit, or flesh. Finally, when using granted powers through **Greater Trust,** it can raise its effective Ability to 10.

Difficulty 7: Design

The Design Rite lets the Strategist perform a cinematic or low-fantasy action to create an artifact—or repair, retrofit, customize, tune, or integrate minor improvements into an existing one—using any magic or craft they are reasonably well acquainted with. This action is functionally a mundane action with the same action level as the miracle, and a default 3 Edge. Spending +1-4 Cost can improve or speed this power somewhat.

The Greater Design Rite (diff 11) is a very time-consuming power that creates, customizes, or repairs a fortress-scale artifact, typically to subtly shape a Region. Small tweaks may be time-consuming efforts instead.

Level 8: Divine Plan

Divine Plan is a planning miracle that destines a Treasure to do something. It may take a long time if the Treasure is unsuitable. Thus, the plan is stored in a quest slot. The Treasure gets the benefits of **Ignition** on relevant actions and optionally **Greater Glorification** for the duration.

Greater Divine Plan (diff 12) is a very time-consuming power that turns a Treasure into a kind of cauldron of destiny and pulls forth a wish from their power.

Lore

From bounteous fields of nothingness
Strategists carve out the weapons of
the host.

—*from* Becoming Noble,
by Fayola Osagiobare

Beyond the World

In the void beyond the world is a richness and an abundance made for each Strategist. There are, customized for each of them, great untapped veins of wonder:

Each Strategist bound through correlative karma to the unworldly powers they are meant to wield.

This is their birthright. More importantly it is their nature. They are enemies of the world, and more than enemies of the world, they are the leaders and provisioners of the Host. Theirs is the duty to gather the forces of unbeing beneath their banner. Theirs is the duty to point those forces against the world. They are *meant* to lead great ridings, not merely of their fellow Excrucians, but of all the myriad faced and faceless monstrosities that dwell in the beyond.

The depth of understanding that allows them to do this thing is known as **Lore.**

Lore is a Strategist's affinity with Ninuan. Presumably before Creation came it was at a peak. Later it diminished. Yet because a Strategist's destiny is inexorably tied to their infection—because they are creatures *fit* to have been bound beneath the stone of Creation, and then infected—an aspect of their Glitch-twisted nature lives in their Lore as well:

A Strategist dying of ice wields a Lore of frozen places. A Strategist dying of exclusion wields the Lore of the deepest reaches of the Not where even correlative structure has grown thin. A Strategist dying of asphyxiation wields the Lore of constricted spaces beneath the unworldly ground, or the Lore of snakes, or an ironic Lore of the vast and airy heights.

There is one λ-*thing* in the Lands Beyond Creation that deeply resonates with their soul:

One great ambit of Not-concept that they may master.

This is formally called their **Sphere;** its individual manifestations, their **Arcana.**

With Lore of frozen places, a Strategist may wield the Arcana of the frozen places of the Not: abstractly, spirits of glaciation and artefacts of ice, and more concretely the white-furred beasts and hungry pale vines that there are found. With Lore of metal, they may wreak screaming ore from secret veins and forge it to strange weapons; in time, they may find faceless metal servants and bubbling pools of metal essence to bring beneath their sway as well. With Lore of ancient ruins, they may scavenge the Not and find old treasures—buried before Time was e'er even a twinkle within its sacred mother's eye.

opposite: *by Mel Uran*

The nature of these things is that they are secret. A Strategist's Lore does not allow them to find rare waylets or faraway districts of Beyond. Rather, they may discern things that are hidden in (Not-)places that many others know. The Lore of metal finds veins of magic where most see only λ-rock striations. The Lore of insects finds that a simple-seeming λ-field is home to vastnesses of danger, wealth, and use. The Lore of frozen places does not find secret glaciers in Ninuanni temples, but may find ice caves hidden in its valleys—and *will* find strange marvels in icy regions that are simply bland or treacherous to most.

Certain of these Arcana the Strategist may *bind*. They may hunt them down and seal them into service. They become pawns of the Strategist: servants, instruments, and tools. As a general rule a Strategist binds a specific category of things (e.g., beings, substances, or ancient tools); this restriction is laxer at the higher levels of Lore.

The Strategist's collection of bound Arcana is called their **deck.** As a general rule, they may have five Arcana "handy" and keep loose track of another seven. Other Arcana may have at some point been bound due to events in play, and that binding may endure despite the Strategist binding another twelve, but those Arcana will have slipped through the cracks, inaccessible until the Strategist stumbles on them by accident or actively hunts them down again and verifies they're still where they ought to be (or, somewhere else.)

Thus, a Strategist with the Lore of herbs and poisons may have five rare λ-herbs (or elixirs) on their person and seven more whose locations are loosely known—a ginseng-spirit possessing a paper airplane sent on an errand, a bolstering elixir strengthening a friend, a poison eating away at the ontological integrity of a Power, and a few elixirs and herbs that they saw once upon a time. A Strategist with an angelophanic Lore—ruling not Creation's Angels, but strange λ-beings built of light, hands, faces, teeth, and wings—may keep five of them in their shadow, hands and wings opening and closing in the darkness, and seven attending to specific miracles. One, an angel of dying things, is useful principally for making things wither or sustain; another, an angel of overflowing cups, is prone to amplify existing plenty.

The void is no soothing land to a mind born in Creation, so there is always something in the process of gathering Arcana that strikes raw against the mortal nerves. Beasts are prone to unnatural symmetries and abyssal forms. Numinous environments rattle and stretch the observer's mind. Metal, as has been noted, screams—though it is said among those who know it best that it screams in reflex, not in pain. The process of hunting Arcana, in short, is often harsh; more, the fetters on them may be heavy ones. There is no Lore, alas! that deals in wooing glorious beings with one's own virtues, befriending them amongst peaceful meadows, and having them wield brilliant miracles, later, in your service.

... conversely, Lore is the birthright of the Strategists; there is little in it that is outright *wrong*. It will never be a process of mind controlling self-aware beings or nurturing beast companions by feeding them great bushels of human flesh. It will never even be a process of ruling beings so unsainly and so unnatural that the player quails at the thought of binding them:

These options may *exist* within the scope of Lore, but they will never be a PC Strategist's core practice.

A Strategist's Lore may in certain cases find Arcana within Creation. Nominally this is restricted to beings with at least some void-nature in them—the Lore of deserts is more aptly named the Lore of λ-deserts, and cannot bind a desert scorpion of Earth. Even a scorpion *monster* would be immune, unless the particular nature of its monstrosity was that it originated in or had been altered by the extranatural powers of the void. This is not absolutely obligatory, however; if it fits their concept to do so, a Lore-wise Strategist can generally work their way around this difficulty, e.g., by translating their Lands Beyond experience into something more Creational or by drawing out the ancient truths of Ninuan that lurk within Creation's bones.

The **Lore** Attribute measures the depth of the Strategist's study of Ninuan and their Sphere. With no points in Lore, characters are blind to the nature of the void: naïfs, and ignorant. Higher ratings in Lore represent increasing depth and sophistication in the character's understanding of their Sphere.

Each level of Lore costs 2 points and makes a number of powers relating to traveling Ninuan and mastering the Arcana less costly. At Lore 0, even *seeing* Ninuan is difficult; at Lore 7, the character's understanding of the Not has reached the point where they may shape it forcefully with their eyes.

In addition to the Lore Attribute, a character may also purchase "Gifts" that relate to Lore. These represent personal specialties and rare tricks within the broader field of Lore. Some of these Gifts appear later, along with a general system for constructing your own Gifts.

The Hunt

When building their Strategist, ideally, each player should also define their Strategist's Sphere and the kinds of Arcana they derive from it. More than that, they should decide how the Strategist binds these things to their will:

- do they physically catch them, make them surrender if appropriate, and drag them back to their workshop?
- do they use ritual summoning or binding magic?
- do they vacuum their proposed servants up into a magic jewel?
- ... do they offer them a job?

If PCs or major NPCs are potential Arcana—it's not usually something that makes sense, but it can happen—then the options are limited to methods that leave them playable; or, at least, the Strategist should have a defined secondary method to default to, or a weaker result to apply, for beings of that sort.

Level 0 Lore: "Lostling"

0 points

To have no Lore is to be blind to Ninuan. The condition is neither permanent nor fatal. By paying Fugue, the Strategist may easily redress their deficiency, forcing the Not into the shape of sense ... but it is always an effort. Without that effort, the character's sanctuary may well be perceptible; a few other lands, treasured and destined, too—but most of Ninuan, the *vast bulk* of Ninuan, will be a nebulous and billowing emptiness.

They will feel a tug upon their heart, perhaps. A gentle pressure, a hint of warmth.

That's all.

Even at this level a Strategist may claim a sphere and Arcana, but the hunt is arduous. The void is difficult for them to grasp, to make sense of. Making the plan they need to seize an Arcanum for themselves requires the kind of effort that thinking in five dimensions might take for an ordinary person: not *impossible,* not when there's a reward for it, but certainly quite draining. Having developed their plan, they must still implement it. While they seek a suitable biome, they must maintain continuous concentration on the sense-making process; otherwise, the "world" dissolves into nothingness around them and they will stumble off the path—or, they must exert themselves far more greatly to "lock in" their sense of Ninuan for a time. Making their way to their Arcana, matters of perception having been attended to, they find themselves confronting it amidst an alien and hostile environment; protecting themselves against that, and their potential servant or tool simultaneously, can be fairly arduous as well. Only when these matters have been fully resolved can they even begin to engage their target according to the terms of their ongoing plan.

Refining the Arcanum, once it's been captured, is even harder for the Lostling ... but at least it's a rather quicker process, and grants a more immediate reward.

To have this level of Lore, to *choose* this level of Lore, is to say that something has gone wrong—that the Strategist's mortal nature has broken something profound and vital that at one time lived inside them.

Hopefully, it is a thing that can be remade.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Radegond Gethiran is dying of frowns. At first it is simply the occasional passersby or statue scowling at her. Then her social environment degrades. Paintings that she passes make an effort to show her a disdainful face. Fountains splash her with the muddiest of their water. Eventually the frown colony disengages from the things that had been its hosts and begins to oppress her on its own, swarming the air around her like rising heat (at first) and then a flock of bats. In the end she is devoured, and they happily disperse. On the other side of that frown she finds only darkness—or, not really darkness. It's a lack of light, like darkness is, but it's a lack of darkness too. It's just ... an endless disapproving sternness, grey and without any points of reference, until she forces it into the shape of Ninuan and remembers who she is.

Leovigild Lengyel is dying of daisies. And other flowers. They're richly symbolic. They *mean* important things about his life. You could read important lessons about life and what's going on in the world, if you were a philosopher who knew the language of flowers, and you looked at the flowers that were killing him. They're eating their way out through his flesh. To him, the Not is the featureless denaturing earthiness of the root-soil of a garden: a place with all the *somethingness* of it drawn up to feed the bouquet adorning his remnant corpse. When he snaps free of that mood and orients properly on Ninuan, the flowers in his body begin to die.

The Core Powers

The core powers of Lore are these:

DIFFICULTY	POWER	USE
0	Investigation	learn about an Arcanum
1	Vision	see in the void, or in the dark
2	Spherecraft	use and defend against Arcana
3	Hunt	plan a hunt for an Arcanum
4	Navigation	find a way past an obstacle
5	Percipience	study a subtle sense or power
6	Infusion	empower things with Arcana
7	Inchoation	create Arcana and Sphere F/X
8	Invocation	tap into the deeper powers of an Arcanum or the void.

Each can be used by a Strategist with [Lore ≥ difficulty] ... or by a Strategist with lower Lore, if they pump up their Lore with Fugue (pg. 269) or some other Cost.

Greater forms of each of these powers are available at +4 to the base power's difficulty. Variations and combinations are also possible, as discussed on pg. 150.

Level 1 Lore: "Stray"

2 points

This level of Lore grants the Strategist eyes that can see Ninuan. Care and focus are still required, their view of it can still scatter to fragments and imagelessness in an instant if they turn too much of their attention elsewhere, but it is no longer *effortful*—comparable, perhaps, to pleasure reading, where at a lower level it had been more like reading stressful and traumatic texts. The "Strays" have also found a greater ease in surviving the hazards of the place, though they are yet to be at home within their sphere.

Strategists at this level of Lore are inalienably connected to Ninuan, but also profoundly unfamiliar with it; much of their knowledge of the place has been forgotten, and what they do recall is out of date. It is the home of their heart but not the home of their head—priceless, but incomprehensible.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Anselm Maramurian is dying of the bath. A plucky child in a flying bathtub pursues him, gathering an eclectic assortment of companions, demanding redress for an unknown crime. At first it is just passing encounters with fairy tale figures that will later join up with the bathtub, plus deniable sightings of a bathtub in the sky. Later, he must regularly take shelter in underground places from fly-by battery, ballistic flowerpots, and the like. Eventually, there is no escape: if the bathtub does not land on him, the child's sword will pierce his heart. In Ninuan, the situation reverses itself: *he* is the metaphorically childlike adventurer, adrift in a nonsense-world, gathering strange companions through his strange adventures, and pointing the sword of his grim intentions towards a faceless evil—here, the existence of the world, or, at least, its wrongness—that he can extirpate in a place, for a while ... but never universally, or for long.

Sunilda Hadubrand is dying of dreariness. For her, the Glitch was found in the world's sense of motion, of variety: she saw a hint of the true pattern of things, the laws by which the world was woven, and it began to lose its power to surprise. Eventually she loses all ability to sustain interest and, if she does not die, ceases anyway to live. For her, the prize of Ninuan is its newness. Lore-wisdom is a thing she fears: *let* the place confuse her, *let* it disorient her, *let* it be a fast-paced, treacherous, surprising new cosmos to explore! Only in that fashion can she refill her tank of *will to look upon things*; without it, she is too bored to even bother with murdering the world. Even with it, she must re-enter the world blindly, in a random place, with a random aim, to maximize the time that she can give herself before it all turns dull as death again.

Level 2 Lore: "Dustcloak"

4 points

In the myths of the Excrucians, Agiwulf who walked far returned with the dust of the stars upon his feet. In the myths of the Excrucians, Kaethe who found the summit of the void returned with a fire caught upon her cloak.

The stories converged with time and alchemy; the Excrucians call those with the lore to walk the distant realms of Ninuan *dustcloaks*. Formally, it may be fairly used for any Excrucian with Lore 2+; in practice, it is a title one claims for oneself, if it so happens that one has none that one likes better.

Strategists with this level of Lore are fundamentally *able* in the void, and particularly within their sphere. At the same time, a more fundamental knowledge and understanding still eludes them. This combination is an inducement to exploration: the void sings with the potential for nebulously-defined "answers" to their as-yet-unformed questions, and—rejoicing in their ability to survive there—they traditionally delve deeper and deeper into nothingness to seek those answers out.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Lucian Voros is dying of swords. Increasingly, their life is interrupted by surreal interludes—gardens of swords, duelist challenges. Learning the sword did not help them. Gaining the ability to point at things and make them vanish in a flare of nothingness did not help them. No matter how strong they become, their situation still becomes more and more perilous until they die. There is probably a reason for this. There is probably an overarching story, behind this. They may even discover it, one λ-day, on one of the indefinite "vision quests" through Ninuan that follow their more traumatic deaths and precede their worst revivals. But they do not know it yet.

Vetericus Sarka is dying of stealth. He becomes increasingly harder to spot until he falls out of the world. (It is unclear to those who know him whether he becomes genuinely unnoticeable or if he's just too proud to shout.) Having fallen from the world, he descends into a realm of shadows—Ninuan, but also *beneath* Ninuan, a treacherous subsidiary void: untamed, menacing, and ripe for exploitation.

Level 3 Lore: "Hunter"

6 points

This level of Lore grants the Strategist a deep insight into the binding of Arcana—enough that they can reliably catch and bind all but the greatest of them without real effort. Even the dustcloaks can conceivably find themselves too drained to have any ideas whatsoever on such a matter, to need another chapter or two of rest before they can tackle a particular hunt; for the strays and lostlings, that condition is more common:

A Hunter, though, need only look at the spoor of some rare beast, or the tangled rock surrounding some deep-Not vein, or the alien structure of a long-lost artifact of Ninuan, to know: *this is how I can trap it; this is how I can extract it; this is how it can be made once more of use ...*

Within their sphere of competence, at least.

Traditionally the weakness of the Hunter is that it's hard for them to *use* those bindings. It's not really a very substantive weakness—they're not *unable*; rather, it's at the outer edge of their comfort zone, so they'll do it a fair bit, only, while whining about how dangerous and difficult it is for them.

Down she went to where the magma-spirits gibbered. Their ranks parted as she approached, then closed around her, but she did not burn. Instead, she walked among them. She whispered two words to this one, gestured palm-out towards that. She slid through them like a swirling leaf, her skirt etching out a trail in the dusty earth, and their eyes—three round white glows, one great and bulbous—turned to follow her as she went.

Slowly, they came to quiet. Slowly, they came to order. She reached the stone dais that stood amidst them, and she turned to face them, and the gibbering had stopped.

"My friends," she said. "I am gravid with great words."

—from The Dyson Manual, *by Yue Ying Yin*

There are good times and bad times to run into cops, and most likely breaking out of your own house with a bag of goods is not the best of them. I wanted to say something, I wanted to explain something, but there really wasn't time, then; they'd already caught me. They'd already put me up against the wall.

I waited for it, for that whole recital of rights that you always hear in the movies, but they didn't do that. Instead, the sea of uniforms parted just a little and I could see the plainclothes guy beyond.

"I—" I started to say, but got shoved back into the house wall for my troubles.

The guy's hand lifted. "The BURGLAR eidolon," he said. "Noted for its relatively high defense power and its Theft skill. One in ten may learn _Apotheotic Tyranny;_ one in forty, _Moon-Devouring Maw._ If mated with the BARGHEST eidolon and then a MASER eidolon, you may create a BURGOMASTER."

His eyes flicked me up and down.

"He is unable to learn either," he said, "but we have no Burgomaster. Bring him in."

"I—" I said. I squeaked. "I'm not a burglar—"

He frowned. For a moment I thought I'd made a mistake. For a moment he got that look, like, that look that says: this is not a good person to embarrass before his men. That there are worse things than to be mated to a barghest, followed by a maser, although admittedly the concept defies the ideal of public service.

Then, his eyes widened and grew bright with joy.

"You're right," he said. It wasn't a good look on him. "You aren't, are you? Take him, men. We've caught ourselves an actual CRIMICLONE, at last!"

—*from* The Inevitable Decay of the American Criminal Justice System in the Presence of Pervasive Hypocrisy as to Its Purposes, *by Martin Elliott*

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Ebruim Vantchev is dying of graduation. The commencement ceremony of their high school reaped its students of their lives and souls as well as their scholastic status. This pattern Ebruim reiterates, over and over again, each time that they return into the world. In Ninuan, they encounter neither high schools nor graduations (though there are occasional suspicious ruins and steam tunnels) but they *do* repeatedly encounter Arcana metaphorically attuned to the emotional experience of high school life. It has been fifty years since their first graduation, and these matters no longer pose any challenge to them—although wielding incarnations of teenage neuroses and situations has, conversely, become just a little bit weird.

Osuin Thermidau is dying of artificial sweeteners. She discovered that several of them are parasitic fungi that do not so much sweeten food as convince the brain of their sweetness as byproducts of their infiltration efforts. Eventually they lure their hosts to the factories, where their life cycle may continue. In Osuin's brain, opposing parasites maintain a delicate balance (sustained only by copious consumption of the rare blood-equilibrating soda Orange Tab) that keeps Osuin from embarking on any given pilgrimage—but as the impulses grow, and other infected humans notice her simultaneous infection and reluctance and apply encouragement and social pressure, it is only a matter of time before Osuin sheds the last vestiges of human identification and becomes an artificial sweetener host swimming upstream to the factories to die. Is it any wonder that Osuin may very casually *plan* ways of dealing with even the strangest fungi and chemicals of the Not, yet feels a strange passive reluctance to forcibly command those that she has taken?

Level 4 Lore: "Outrider"

8 points

This level of Lore connotes a mastery of Ninuanni pathfinding. The Strategist has learned to find their way around the natural barriers and past the natural obstacles of the void, and the most secluded and inaccessible vistas are open to them.

The art of Ninuan navigation is fundamentally a skill in correlation. It is the ability to *attune* oneself to the obstacles in one's path, to the paths themselves, and to what lies beyond. These arts translate well into Creation; the Strategist who masters them can pierce metaphysical barriers and mysteries, slip between realities, and reach the further corners of the worlds.

In the Beyond, the Outriders are explorers, treasure hunters, and guides. They are drawn to break the protections on sealed and secret pockets of the nothingness—mysteries, the haunts of ancient banes, sleeping embers of divinity, and ruins predating (or *long* predating) Creation's time. They serve as literal outriders on those rare occasions when the Excrucians hear of some wonder or horror worth gathering in groups to seize, examine, or subdue:

Traveling ahead of the group, they find the obstacles on the path and work on ways to overcome them.

In Creation, these roles are less defining, but still lend their nuances to the status of the Outrider: hunting down rare mysteries is less likely to be their primary concern and unraveling navigational obstacles for a group is less likely to be their "job," but these things will still define the peak of what they are effortlessly able, using Lore, to do.

"Ridiculous," he snorted. "The Sandalphine Interchange has no entrances."

"I have found one," she said.

"The Zehanpuryun overpass," he said, with weighty condescension. "It—"

"No, listen," she said. "Listen. I used Google Maps."

—*from* The Feathery Road, *by Keiko Takemori*

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Gosvintha Tzeviyel is dying of war. Lately the fire of her will to kill the world has faded; she's become all but harmless, more a vagabond than a killer ... but the level of force that the Powers and law-beings wield against her only grows. It grows more intense, in fact, every moment that she remains within Creation, until at last Hell and Heaven start dragging out dusty and forbidden terror weapons from the deepest cobwebbed corners of their arsenal, weapons long-agreed by all civilized parties *ought not even ever be used within Creation,* to fend off the threat that Gosvintha Tzeviyel the Strategist should survive for even one more day.

Gildegud Rusidavian is dying of the tower. It's full of horrors. He climbs it. He learns to bypass its endless tricks and treacheries. He duels the monsters—surprisingly many of them Arcana, for all that it exists within Creation—that dwell within. If he reaches the top, his fate may be transfigured, but he dies in misery and ruin every time. At least each climb refines his otherworldly Lore!

Level 5 Lore: "Perquisitor"

10 points

This level of Lore grants the Strategist deep and far-ranging knowledge. It represents a piercing insight and percipience that can unravel the void's deep mysteries. The Strategist can see the invisible, sense the intangible, and grasp the ineffable even against the frangible and unreal backdrop of the Not.

Like the Outrider's, this is a knowledge that transgresses upon Creation:

To be lore-wise to this extent is to understand not just the void but also the world that was built atop it. One could *imagine* a scenario where learning to understand and break the secrets of the void would prove to be an untranslatable skill and knowledge—the void, after all, in many ways defies the norms—but such, in practice, is not the case. The mind that can discern the deepest lore of one locale can find it in the other.

Thus, a Strategist with this level of Lore is a scholar; a fount of esoteric knowledge and wisdom.

Lore 5 is the first level at which perceiving the Not itself may be done without any attention *whatsoever* to the matter: there is no longer an effort of perception, no longer even the casual attention drain of "pleasure reading," but only information that one may pick up with a glance.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Abrimund Pelendavian is dying of puppetry. The more he learns about the world, the more that knowledge makes him the servant of the Angel of Subtle Causal Force. His indulgence in secrets and mysteries alloys the marrow and the nerves of him with that dread Angel's power. When at last his agency is stripped from him, he leaves the world—but his body remains behind, one of the forty-some (now) Pelendavian manikins in that wicked Angel's wield. It is a fate that he finds execrable, but the alternative would be ignorance ... and that is no alternative at all.

Wilgefortis Trana is dying of trademark infringement. She is forced to consult the faceless lawyer who hovers behind her shoulder to determine what she is permitted to do at any given time and what is too reminiscent of the famous virtual idol, "Wilgefey Tarr." Her unfortunately compliant nature weighs heavily against her here; the deeper her understanding of Lore becomes, the harder it is for her to casually break even laws she never consented to and which she knows are thoroughly corrupted by the Glitch. Early in her condition, this might be a neurotic nicety. Later on, faithlessness to one law undermines her power over others: if she refutes the ever-closing maw of trademark, she is devoured instead by the turncoat powers that she has bound.

Level 6 Lore: "Arcanist"

12 points

Characters at this level have drunk deep of the lore of their bound Arcana. Now they may call forth the powers that sleep inside them with a thought. One moment, they infuse their flesh with the strength of a monstrous beast; the next, they stir themselves to flight on an enchanted wind. A gate can be burnt to ash and ember with λ-fire ... then restored a moment later, when that fire is replaced with woe. A toadstone or lyngurium, once just a rock, becomes to them a cauldron full of wonder.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Gabriela Varin is dying of legacy. No matter how many times she cuts ties, no matter how far she travels into the Not, no matter how deeply she delves into the lore she finds there, she winds up sucked right back into her family drama, and it kills her. They aren't even real people, probably. She's pretty sure. She can't look at it too closely, what with the blinding quality of the Glitch, but even so, she's *pretty* sure. She keeps getting sucked into dealing with them anyway, and all the wild power that she has tamed in

---

"You have no right to remain silent," he told me. Something thrilled in my heart at that. I thought, at last! "Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford—"

But I was slipping.

I screamed in my heart. No! I scrabbled to hang on to reality. But I was slipping. The world was blurring through my fingers. It was falling away.

"—do you understand these rights—"

I was buffeted by wings of spirit. I fell, I knew it could not be happening, but I fell, into a plainclothes'd heart.

The power of CRIMICLONE flexed inside me, and filled with the GRAND THIEF's mind ...

—*from* The Inevitable Decay of the American Criminal Justice System In the Presence of Pervasive Hypocrisy as to Its Purposes, *by Martin Elliott*

the far deepness somehow withers into worthlessness, and she is given to defeat. Unlike Abrimund Pelendavian, she doesn't know what exactly *happens* to all the not-actually-*physically*-dead Gabriela bodies she leaves behind her; all she knows is that by the time she's recovered and come back into Creation, the previous Gabriela's gone. When she's *not* dealing with family, Gabriela commands a menagerie of ancient powers won from Ninuan: her reconstructed legacy as heir to a Ninuanni royal line.

Gesimund Lucashev is dying of paper cranes. He folds them obsessively. They help to keep the glitch he apprehended long ago at bay. He folds them, and—to give a patina of respectability to his obsession—he integrates the manifold powers of the void into them. He makes them mercurial and terrible weapons as well as potent arcane tools. For this reason, the defenders of Creation do not quite yet grasp that the cranes are death to him, and not just art. ... but eventually he forgets to eat and scants to sleep.

Level 7 Lore: "Exarch"

14 points

To be an **Exarch** is to make oneself as one with the nameless void. The Exarchs are continua of their own, defining principles around which the correlative causality of Ninuan is founded. From the Sphere that they define—in part—does Ninuan arise. This is not a matter of power taken, or even power existing by correlative necessity. Rather, it is the nature of the deepest lore to be transformative:

In grasping it, the Exarch becomes one with it. It devours them and alloys itself throughout them. Their knowledge is not firewalled off like human knowledge, separated from the world: it is integrated into the dream-of-self by which they are embodied. As that knowledge attains the ultimate profundity, *it* merges with the underlying continuum, and the Exarch follows.

It becomes impossible to draw a clear line between the Exarch and the void.

The Strategist who can reach this level is effortlessly able to birth new λ-entities and powers—they are a font of the dreaming nothingness that makes up their Sphere. Behemoths of the endless night humble themselves before them. Even the nature of *Creation* may be twisted by them, if they have the will for it; the power of their Sphere may spread throughout the mortal lands.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Galaias Suardone is dying of snakes. He ate of an egg that shouldn't have been and now his sweet blood calls them from afar. He's tried to make friends with them, tried to make peace with them, and just after a fresh start he can sometimes succeed. Just after a fresh start, he can befriend the *polite* ones, anyway, with his deep and sacral knowledge of the ophidians of the Not—but eventually it all falls apart on him. Eventually even the grass snakes and the Aaron's Serpents will reject his manners, boas will scent him at a hundred miles, and kraits will drag themselves up from the sea to hunt him down.

Ariana Aquincium is dying of the trumpet. There is a particular song that she has heard. Its memory eats away at her until she dies. In her struggle to expunge it she has mastered endless musical Arcana, rare and potent instruments and songs; has become most likely the greatest composer in the Host—but as soon as she returns to Creation it all goes distant and tinny in her ears. What good is it for the rest of the orchestra to be majestic if the trumpet in the background won't stop playing its blasphemous affront to all that's right?

RULES FOR LORE

The "power source" for Lore effects is called **Fugue.** It measures the mental and occasionally physical corruption that the character has suffered from immersing in the logic of their Sphere. A character begins the game with [10 × Lore] Fugue. This will rise as they invoke more difficult Lore effects. It will fall over the course of time and when it has harmful results.

They may invoke Lore effects with [level ≤ Lore] for "free"—it requires no Fugue.

Often a character will wish to go beyond that. Not only will the higher-Lore effects often appeal to less Lore-wise Strategists, not only do characters sometimes need additional Lore to overcome miraculous barriers ("Wards"), but only by going beyond their base Lore can a Strategist access the difficulty 8-12 Lore effects at all.

To use effects beyond their Lore, a Strategist must allow their Sphere and, ultimately, *their infection,* a foothold in their being.

This, of course, is Fugue.

The character names the Lore level they wish to emulate; the practical maximum, in the absence of a bidding war, is 23. They perform the effect. If the effect succeeds—which is to say, if it functions essentially as stated, rather than being blocked or undone outright by hostile countereffects—they accumulate Fugue equal to [desired Lore − original Lore.] For instance, if a Hunter with level 3 Lore wishes to perform a level 7 effect, they will, by default, accumulate 4 points of Fugue. Put another way, the character adds +4 to their Fugue total. If they happen to know in advance that a level 2 Ward will interfere, they'll want to raise their effective Lore not to 7 but 9; *that* would need them to add +6 Fugue.

From time to time, it is good to note what this Fugue actually represents, what actually *happens* to the character as they pay for the effect. This is, however, not required; more precisely, if not established at the time of the miracle, it will either be a subtle influence that eventually fades or a dramatic one that will be established at a later time.

Thus, a character dramatically reaching beyond their limits may choose to explain how, in doing so, the alien concepts of their Sphere begin to distort their mind and breed obsessions; or how a parasite from their Sphere

takes root within their soul; or how their perceptions have been altered as they mainlined the power of the void. A character engaging in what they consider a work-a-day miracle, even if the total amount of accumulated Fugue is the same, need not do so.

A character must always buy enough Fugue to succeed at the basic effect. They can add more to overcome a Ward or opposition when and if they discover it's there. This extra purchase is a *little* Slow (pg. 251) compared to miracles, though, and in a fast-paced struggle, they may fall behind (see pg. 151, 262).

Taking 3+ Fugue at once is a notable moment. The Fugue *itself* is still a bad thing, but the character will earn a bonus XP.

Conceptually,

- An effect that costs 0 Fugue is **instinctive**—it doesn't drain the character at all.
- Spending 1 Fugue is more or less **casual**: the character can quickly and plausibly suppress the wild energies of their Sphere.
- Spending 2 Fugue is **a little trickier.**
- Spending 3 is **difficult.**
- A 4-7 Fugue effect is **painful and damaging.**
- Anything beyond that is **agonizing and transformative.**

EXAMPLE

A character is an Exarch, with **level 7** Lore. For this character, the chart looks like:

EFFECT TYPE	ACTION LEVELS
Instinctive (0 Fugue)	Levels 0-7
Casual (1 Fugue)	Level 8
Effortful (2-3 Fugue)	Levels 9-10
Hard (4-7 Fugue)	Levels 11-12
Agonizing (8+ Fugue)	*unnecessary except to bypass Wards or win a fiercely-contested stake*

What the player probably memorizes is this:

Level 0-7 Lore effects are all the basics: seeing and surviving in the void, knowing stuff, hunting and binding Arcana (including some pretty serious ones), finding my way past obstructions, learning tricks to interact with weird things, wielding Arcana, and creating artifacts and sphere-based potencies of my own. All that is trivial for me.

Level 8 Lore effects draw out new powers from my Arcana, open gates, or create paths. These effects aren't quite *instinctive*, but neither are they difficult.

Level 9-10 Lore effects are larger-scale tricks of interacting with the intangible and the most powerful Arcanum exploits, respectively. These effects take a fair bit of work.

Level 11-12 Lore effects—creating powerful Arcana out of nothing and launching truly terrifying ritual attacks—are painful and damaging, even for me.

At the beginning of each chapter, Fugue drops by one, to a minimum of 0.

Characters may also reduce Fugue when it brings them to a crisis: when the player, or, at 80+ Fugue, sometimes the GM, has an interesting idea for the harm or change the Fugue might inflict on their character, and implements it as a "Wound." Superficial Wounds burn off 10 Fugue, with no minimum; harmful ones, 25; metaphysically potent and transformative ones, 50. This isn't unlimited, though, even if the player would want it to be:

The character will suffer at most one such Wound per session—*counting* the Wounds from other, similar, Costs—and at most one 25+ Cost Wound in two consecutive sessions.

Characters may freely accumulate Fugue until it hits 80; then, as noted, there are circumstances in which the GM may force a harmful crisis upon them. At 108 (the number of outlaws in the Water Margin), they may no longer spend Fugue at all.

... after roughly 300 points of Fugue have been poured into Wounds, the character's last connection to humanity is lost; most likely, they disappear into Beyond.

THE APPRENTICE ARTS

LEVEL 0 MIRACLE: "INVESTIGATION"

Investigation, Slow

Level 0 Lore miracles are the Strategists' lesser arts of investigation. Their essence is in the basic understanding of Arcana that the Strategist has and, more importantly, can acquire.

To use these miracles, the Strategist consults a favored source to **learn a sentence or two of basic information about an Arcanum**. They look things up in a magical book, perhaps, or consult an oracle. If time is tight, they may just remember things they learned from such a source before; as noted on pg. 254, a slow information-gathering method will never prevent an investigation *miracle* from being timely.

Level 0 effects include:

- looking up a mystic lake in a particular waylet in a magic book,
- investigating the Ninuanni insect monster troubling the area, *and*
- wracking one's memory for hints about a rival's elemental stone.

LEVEL 1 MIRACLE: "VISION"

Level 1 Lore miracles are the direct perception of the world or void. They are the lesser manifestation of the Strategists' natural void-sense.

The void-sense of the Strategists does not rely upon the traditional intermediary of physical transmission through a medium. Instead, when it is active, a Strategist may sense things in their vicinity as they *are*, for that they are themselves. This perception is modeled on the other

opposite: *by Elena Albanese*

Gilgud Bregerian, ∂ying of Birds

senses natural to the Strategist, particularly the primary sense natural to them before their void infection, but it is not the same as those senses:

It is a unique sense possessed by those of ℵinuan—

Though, this power only grants the sense; the Strategist must still use mundane actions to perceive with it.

While this power is in effect, the Strategist perceives everything as if adequately lit. They may hear things that have been rendered silent—e.g., muted computers and people with laryngitis—as if they were not. Attempts to block their line of sight, to muffle things they might hear, to seal a scent away from them, or otherwise obstruct their senses are less effective:

They can't *generically* see through walls, but spotting metaphysically potent things through a wall or two is sometimes possible. Fog is no obstacle at all. They can't *generically* hear through good soundproofing, but a scream might make it to their ears. This general pattern applies to all their senses, and particularly any unusual senses that they might have. For instance, if they originated as a fox and not a human, their sense of smell will no longer rely upon the wind, and it will take more rain and time to wash a scent away.

Vision allows a Strategist to perceive the things of ℵinuan; and, perceiving them, exist within its context; move within its context; operate within its laws. Their only alternative is the mortal's one (pg. 64), using **Greater Focus** and a great deal of time to orient upon the void: rarely the better bargain even for Strategists with Ability 7 and Lore 0; even less so, for the rest.

Level 1 effects include:

- seeing someone's true heart,
- navigating the lightless abyss,
- seeing hints of a chained-up god's presence through the walls of a keep, *and*
- noticing what someone is too frightened to say.

Level 2 Miracle: "Spherecraft"

Level 2 Lore miracles are the Strategists' lesser arts of Arcana management. More precisely, they're the various tricks the Strategist knows or intuits to communicate with the sentient Arcana of their Sphere, and, more generally, interact with their Sphere in a useful fashion.

When a Strategist is dealing with an Arcanum of their sphere, **Spherecraft** lets them perform a cinematic/low-fantasy mundane action to:

- make appropriate use of it,
- defend against it,
- bring it into Creation, *or*
- cast it out of Creation

This comes with the ability to actually *do* these things, but note that it's the GM who decides on an Arcanum's appropriate use. Thus, **Spherecraft** *isn't* the power to declare that a flame sprite can be used to fix a computer and then use it to do so; rather, it's the power to pick that sprite up and burn things with it, if it's a magical candle; to talk to it and convince it to work with you, if it's a conscious being; or, to mine it out of the earth and refine it into an incendiary powder, if it's the kind of geological phenomenon that one would do that to. (And, more generally, to hit someone over the head with it if it's something solid, momentarily blind someone with it if it's something that glows, and otherwise exploit its λ-physical and social properties.)

Alternatively—as a semi-related use—**Spherecraft** *also* allows a Strategist perform a cinematic/low-fantasy mundane action to accomplish some collection of basic survival or mobility tasks in λ-regions associated with their Sphere.

In either case, the miracle just grants the necessary skill, rather than miraculously completing the action; the actual *action* is a mundane action with 3 Edge. It has the same level as this miracle.[25]

Level 2 effects include:

- communicating with insectoid Arcana,
- extracting and shaping an inflexible Arcanum metal,
- surviving amidst the λ-ice,
- defending against the spiritual attack of a ghost Arcanum, *and*
- bringing the essential spirit of an Arcanum lake into the world.

Transcend the World

Level 3 Miracle: "Hunt"

Planning, Quest

Level 3 Lore miracles are the Strategist's innate *correlation* with their Arcana: the way that it is their *nature* to catch and bind those Arcana and bring them into the service of themselves, and how therefore their methods of doing so are almost inevitably drawn to be correct.

These miracles are the Strategists' lesser power of Arcanum binding.

To use **Hunt,** the Strategist develops a plan to hunt down and bind a new and viable Arcanum for their deck. It should be a lesser Arcanum, with power closer to a mortal's than a Strategist's. It can be an Arcanum that has already shown up in play or a new Arcanum of the player's invention. However, if it's a new Arcanum, it should be a relatively ordinary one[26]—the character needs to use a higher-level miracle, or encounter it first, to hunt something extraordinary or rare.

"You have been defeated," she told the Mountain, "and so you will move for me."

And this thing the Mountain did for her, though it did not do it well, nor fast.

— forum post by Tiiamat Lane

25 It *is* still Spherecraft, though, and not a particular Ability action, regardless of whatever level it has.

26 insofar as any Arcana are ordinary

To bind an Objectaemon into your service requires its true name, the precise memory address that it called when it broke the bounds of the world to achieve Objectivism, and a relic of John Galt ...

—*from* A Rationalist's Guide to Goetia (II/XII), *by Temporarily Fish*

The actual miraculous effect here is a planning miracle:

Hunt revises the world to guarantee that the Strategist's plan will *basically* work. That "basically" is included as a failsafe in case play swerves dramatically against their plan ... but that's specifically *play*, the story the group and GM are telling, and not IC *events;* synchronicity, miracle, and narrative momentum can revive the plan from the dead *at least* once or twice should things go badly for it in the world or the void but not in the players' minds or hearts.

Hunt usually catches its target "sometime in the next chapter;" more broadly, the norm is 0-3 chapters. Once complete, the binding lasts at least until the end of the story. After that, plot *might* someday free the bound Arcanum. Then again, it might never. The Strategist is free to choose a general binding method that seems permanent, e.g., physically transforming bound Arcana into gems, even though it is and remains canonically *possible* for any bound Arcanum to escape.

Note that **Hunt** relies on the Strategist actually executing their plan. If they are, e.g., imprisoned and immobile and unable to actually do so, that can push the required time to complete the Hunt well past the normal 3-chapter maximum.

Level 3 effects include:

- luring out a ghost Arcanum and catching it in the Strategist's Gem of a Thousand Ghosts,
- finding an insect Arcanum that meets the Strategist's needs,
- figuring out how to refine the water spirits of a nearby waylet, *and*
- trapping the hunting beast that's been stalking the Strategist's town into an oath of service.

Level 4 Miracle: "Navigation"

Time-Consuming

Level 4 Lore miracles are the Strategist's innate understanding of the navigational principles of Ninuan—of a kind of travel that runs on symbolism and isomorphism rather than on physics and causality. This is a sufficiently broad understanding that it can manifest in either the void *or* the world.

These miracles are the Strategists' lesser power of passage.

Given a proposed plan and a few hours of work in the background, an extended tactical action in conflict, or a self-spotlit action, the Strategist finds a way past some navigational obstacle—opening or finding a path through or around a barrier, bridging a gap, or constructing an intrusion strategy for a guarded compound. This is roughly limited to a quarter mile of physical distance and an analogous spiritual distance:

Navigation can bridge a river, open a gate where the walls between worlds are thin, and even solve mazes, but it can't build a bridge to a waylet, Chancel, or even a *city* that isn't nearby. Time travel is also more or less out, although it's possible that a microsecond or so might be doable if the Strategist is ever in a sufficiently Glitched space-time situation that that would actually *help*.

Level 4 effects include:

- slipping the gap between Creation and Chancel,
- learning the way between world and a waylet,
- crossing out from the Earth to the wood of the World Ash, *or*
- circling round a sheer Ninuan cliff.

... but in all cases, only when in a relatively correct "starting place."

Level 5 Miracle: "Percipience"

Planning, Quest

Level 5 Lore miracles are the Strategists' lesser power to engage with subtle and ethereal forces. They are the Strategist's innate ability to redefine the terms of their interaction with the world and their place in the correlative continuum of the void; for them, it transpires, those things are neither inherent nor are they fixed.

The Strategist develops a study regimen or plan that will teach themselves to perceive, communicate, and/or interact with something that's normally too subtle or elusive for that—e.g., learning to see surface thoughts, talk to the wind and to wind Arcana, or subsist on eaten light. This plan then *basically* works, as per **Hunt**. It takes 0-2 stories if this circumvents a major campaign obstacle, although this is unlikely; it takes 0-3 chapters otherwise. The ability manifests as a bonus Technique.

The Strategist can stick with the plan even after it completes or succeeds to "stay in training." Learned abilities last for as long as they do so—which is to say, as long as they maintain the plan as a quest—and for another chapter or two thereafter. If the Strategist intends to keep the ability indefinitely, it should eventually be tied to some sort of personal truth and purchased as a Bond (pg. 259).

Level 5 effects include:

- teaching oneself to sense electromagnetic fields,
- learning to communicate with some cosmic horror,
- coating the dream of oneself with a malice that interferes with a certain Power's miracles, *and*
- making a pair of glasses that can see hints of hidden waylets.[27]

27 At least, when the Strategist uses them. When other people try them on, they mostly go, "Whoa, you can see through these things?"

The centipede was larger than a house, and made of bones. Its feelers waved, then plunged down into the forehead of Eduard Dubois. The skin did not break, the skull did not burst, in and in and in it went—

"No," snapped the sorcerer, irritably. "Not him. His phone."

The centipede's legs wiggled in what Eduard might have imagined was embarrassment, were not a house-sized monster currently backing awkwardly out through his brain and skull and forehead in preparation to inhabit his brand new refurbished 187 dollar phone.

—from The Faker, *by Emily Chen*

Arcane Mastery

Level 6 Miracle: "Infusion"

[Slow or Time-Consuming]

Level 6 Lore miracles are the Strategist's ability to wield their bound Arcana and invoke the powers within. They are the Strategist's lesser power of enchantment.

Infusion imbues the power of an Arcanum from the Strategist's deck (pg. 206) into the Strategist or someone else. There is a Strategist-specific mundane procedure involved. It's usually an everyday action, although the GM can demand a Function task (pg. 127, 130)—the Strategist might, for instance, whisper a few words of power and point to the target. However, if the Strategist is innovating a *new* enchantment, the necessary procedure becomes an effortful process requiring a few hours of background work, an extended tactical action in conflict, or a self-spotlit moment of intense experimentation and thinking, instead.

Whichever it is, the Strategist must succeed:

If something prevents them from, e.g., whispering those words, this power is impossible to use.

Assuming the Strategist succeeds and *can* use this miracle, the Strategist loses access to that Arcanum. In exchange, the target receives a Bond of the Strategist's design. Like all Bonds, this has two parts: a truth, and a bonus Technique (pg. 259, 131).

The "truth" of the Bond is some minor upside or downside to the infusion. This miracle can transform the target mentally or physically to realize it; however, because it's the target's player who'll be interpreting the Bond, they can automatically tweak that transformation to better "fit" their character. This doesn't require them to take damage to control or reinterpret the effect; it's just an intrinsic corollary of the rules for Bonds (pg. 259). If they *do* take damage, they can mitigate any downside *entirely* ... whilst, if they so desire, retaining the beneficial portion of the Bond.

The Bond's Technique is generally the more important part of the infusion: a cinematic or low-fantasy ability, an "unusual capacity" of some sort, that the infusion grants.

A successful infusion lasts for 0-2 stories, or until:

- the Strategist uses **(Greater) Infusion** on that target again;
- the Strategist uses a specific mundane procedure to cancel the effect;
- the infusion is destroyed by something that removes the "truth" of the Bond; *or*
- it is destroyed by something that destroys/banishes the infused Arcanum.

At that time, the infusion fades. If the Strategist is present, and the Arcanum has not been destroyed, they regain access to it. If they are not present, it either returns to them by mundane means or flees and must be hunted down again, depending upon its binding and its nature.

It is normally up to the GM whether or not some effect has removed the truth of the Bond or banished an infused Arcanum; however, at a sufficiently dramatic or appropriate moment, the target's player may declare that too.

Level 6 effects include:

- using a giant ant Arcanum to give someone a protective shell,
- wielding the power of a fire stone Arcanum to control flames,
- imbuing a water spirit Arcanum into someone to make them an aquatic creature, *or*
- investing a mystery hawk Arcanum into someone, thereby opening a third eye in their forehead and enhancing their vision.

Mortal Witnesses: this power is clearly extremely messed up. The world's only explanation for this power is "someone is doing weird stuff using Ninuan Arcana" ... meaning that people who see it and were not previously aware of Ninuan Arcana tend to freak out. They may even develop *dementia animi* or Glitch awareness.

Level 7 Miracle: "Inchoation"

[Phantasmagorical, Time-Consuming or Very Time-Consuming]

Level 7 Lore miracles are a subtle yet cosmoscopic intricacy within the Strategist that is, or can give rise to, the energies of their Sphere. They are the Strategists' lesser wonders of λ-creation.

With these miracles, a Strategist may give rise to the

It was only in that state of delirium that I would have considered it; only in the soul-deep desiccation that came from being severed from every tie to the Unreal Sea that it occurred to me to try:

To stare into the grey linoleum of the floor and say, "You, you are water; you lines, you are the breaks between the waves; you glints, you are the sun against the water, and I call you, I call you, I call you, my water serpent, forth—"

—from How Mr. West Was Won (West/Solomon), *by anonymous*

power of their Sphere, creating new Arcana and Arcana-like effects. These must be Arcana that fall into their own Sphere, but are not necessarily valid Arcana for their deck—artifacts, phenomena, abstract influences on a place, and tangentially related Arcana are permissible as well.

- Sphere phenomena so trivial as to be functionally phantasmagorical (pg. 250) can be kindled directly into being by the Strategist's will;
- Weak Arcana and minor paraphernalia can be built with a few hours of work in the background, an extended tactical action, or a self-spotlit action. The Strategist might, e.g., conjugate an adequately defined conceptual structure and declare it λ-real;
- Meaningful influences and artifacts require days of work in the background or several self-spotlit moments of effort and reflection to create; *and*
- Arcana at or beyond the Strategist's level and artifacts worth permanently adding to the Strategist's loadout must be purchased with character points (e.g., as Gifts, Bonds, or Geasa) ... but this miracle can help to justify their creation.

Level 7 effects include:

- birthing a fire spirit Arcanum from nothingness,
- creating a ghost Arcanum-like influence inside a child's mind,
- building a suit of armor with some of the properties of the Strategist's Arcana,
- creating a mystic tower, *and*
- creating a semi-divine Arcanum servant over the course of a CP-earning quest.

Mortal Witnesses: this, like **Infusion,** is clearly extremely messed up.

Level 8 Miracle: "Invocation"

Time-Consuming, Quest

Level 8 Lore miracles are the Strategist's purest power of Lore—the power to awaken the potential of the void; to find inspired uses for the incandescent might that lives within. They are the Strategists' lesser power of improvisational void-magic and communion with its myriad λ-natures.

Given time—several hours of preparation in the background, or an extended/self-spotlit preparatory action "on screen"—a Strategist may draw extra power out of an Arcanum of theirs or stretch its range of possible uses. Loosely speaking, both the experimental innovation and the final result are in the same realm as greater stunts, brushing the top of the cinematic/low-fantasy range for, first, tinkering, alchemy, or whatnot and then for Arcana-driven magic. When the process is complete, an action that takes advantage of that (mundane, with level equal to the level of this action, and with a default 3 Edge) is stored in a quest slot for immediate, later, or repeatable use. If appropriate, and if the Arcanum *itself* has PC-level powers (miracles, Rites, wishes, or something notionally equivalent), the GM may allow this action to be miraculous, with 0 Edge, instead.

Note that this power is not an extraordinary miracle. Accordingly, its effects tend to cap at neighborhood-scale unless used repeatedly or maintained for a very long time. This remains so even when extraordinary possibilities seem plausible—e.g., for characters with a "nuclear" Sphere, for whom it might not seem all that great a stretch to tweak an Arcanum and burn a city down. That might *seem* possible ... but it isn't, for complicated and technical reasons that only connoisseurs of the atomic Sphere are likely to understand.

Note also that Edge is an assessment of power level and unfairness, not an independent effect; as with other, similar powers, the GM is entitled to vary the Edge that this power grants (or even offer an Edge to the opposition, instead!) as the circumstances decide.

Invocation is explicitly able to tweak the effects of an ongoing infusion, or assist in the actions of someone with an Arcanum infused into them, assuming in both cases that it's one of the Strategist's own Arcana that's been thus infused.

Level 8 effects include:

- wielding herbal Arcana to make a potion that can resuscitate an injured friend,
- wielding an Arcanum device from an ancient ruin to restore functionality to a broken power plant,
- sending a magic book Arcanum to do jury duty on the Strategist's behalf, *and*
- taking someone whom the Strategist has granted wings to with an avian Arcana and giving those wings the power to shape the wind.

I try to adapt well to the human world and the human logic. I really do. But master makes it so very difficult.

"Go, Cabral!" she says. "You can do it!"

Build a palace on the moon, she means. Write a best-selling novel. Reverse local gravitation through persistence and hard work.

On that last one I tried to balk. It was not reasonable. "There are some things that cannot be accomplished with effort," I said, "and to integrate properly into human society it is important to clearly differentiate them from those that can."

"That's too stuffy," she said. "And besides, none of the important humans do that anyway."

I attempted to look stern. Her eyes, to tremble. In the end, I was persistent and I worked hard and gosh darn it I reversed the gravity.

Her trembling eyes may be as two cups of white gelatin and mold to me, but her commands remain as law.

—from the Thought-Record of Cabral

Greater abilities

Level 4 Miracle: "Greater Investigation"

Investigation, Slow, Extraordinary

Level 4 Lore miracles are the Strategists' greater arts of investigation. They represent a broader knowledge base than **Investigation**:

The Strategist is no longer limited to basic information on Arcana, but instead, may learn ...

- **Basic Information.** A sentence or two of general information on just about *anything*—from a ruined radio tower to a book to a neighborhood.
- **Means and Motives.** More specific information on the "why" or "how" of something, *or*
- **A "Clue:"** A piece of information relevant to a specific matter of interest ... pointing the Strategist somewhere they can go for *more* information on that matter. That's usually a location to stake out or visit but it can also be a conversational topic, a research topic, or somewhere else that they can metaphorically go.

In addition, they may learn:

- **Advanced Information on their Arcana.** A sentence or two of general information on an Arcanum of their Sphere, *plus* a secret or a bit of expert knowledge if there is any such thing to know.

Note (pg. 254) that investigation miracles have limitations; for instance, if the Strategist does not have any confounding evidence, they may turn up a "cover story" and not the truth.

Level 4 effects include:

- asking one's magic mirror to identify a nearby bird,
- hitting the streets to find out what in particular drew a Power into town to poke around,
- asking Arcana for a clue as to the location of a kidnapped Mayor, *and*
- understanding the special qualities of a vein of Not-crystal discovered in the void.

After a moment, he fumbled out his datapad. He flicked it open. In a low, hoarse voice he asked it, "Who was that?"

"... AEON units are abominable and loathsome horrors from beyond space and time," it offered. "Recommended protocol: retreat. Ablute. Libate. Disremember."

"I know that," he said. "Everybody knows that. —I'm asking, what's her name?"

—from
The
Bisymmetric
Man,
by Chthuyakguth Baird

Level 5 Miracle: "Greater Vision"

[Automatic]

Level 5 Lore miracles are the Strategists' greater feats of void-sight. This power has the same basic essence as **Vision,** and in fact functions *as* **Vision,** save that:

- it may be invoked without an action, after which it lasts for the remainder of the scene: it becomes a true sense, not requiring separate concentration to maintain; *or*
- the Strategist can waive this benefit, creating a single instantaneous or sustained action of intense percipience instead. In this form, **Greater Vision** lets the Strategist perform a sensory action that receives the benefits of both **Vision** and **Greater Flow** (pg. 212, 131). This is principally a mundane action with the same level as this miracle and a default 3 Edge,[28] but the **Vision** effect is still miraculous.

At Lore 5+, the Strategist may assume they have the first version active at all times.

Level 5 effects include:

- casually navigating in Ninuan,
- maintaining void-sense on a regular basis,
- "looking" at something far away, possibly through a barrier, *and*
- listening a bit harder for what someone won't say.

Level 6 Miracle: "Greater Spherecraft"

Level 6 Lore miracles are the Strategists' greater arts of Arcana management—the *best* tricks they know to communicate with the sentient Arcana of their Sphere and interact with their Sphere in a useful fashion, plus, their ability to extrapolate beyond and from them to understand the general principles for manipulating the boundaries of Creation and managing Arcana that are born of other Spheres.

Greater Spherecraft functions as **Spherecraft,** but operates in the same general realm as greater stunts—it allows for the kinds of amazing tricks that cinematic/low-fantasy protagonists usually only pull off in the "big moments" of their stories; or, conversely, for the kinds of things that cinematic *antagonists* pull off after having worked laboriously in the background for quite some time. In practice, this version of the stunt/greater stunt distinction may not be intuitive in the Not; in such cases, **Greater Spherecraft** can also be interpreted as allowing actions "similar to those that fall under **Spherecraft,** but somewhat stronger." If appropriate, and if the Arcanum in question *itself* has PC-level powers (miracles, Rites, wishes, or something notionally equivalent), the final effects of the action may be miraculous rather than mundane; it is up to the GM when, whether, and for which stunts this shall be possible, but where it *is* possible the PC may evoke this feature on command.

28 Thus, e.g., someone might still be able to hide their heart from this with **Greater Steel.**

opposite: *by Beatrice Pelagatti*

25
DENTIST
WORK REVIEW
CHECK WITH JESSICA
KIDS RECITAL
10 MON
CALL JEFF
MEETING 10AM
PICK KIDS
GROCERY
TO DO
19 FRI
PRESENTATION
MEETING
LUNCH WITH K.
TIM SCHOOL

Alternatively, **Greater Spherecraft** can operate at the same general power level *as* Spherecraft, but allowing the Strategist to perform actions that defend against *other* λ-beings at the same general level as their Arcana; or, that bring such beings into Creation; or, that cast such beings *out* of Creation. To a GM-determined extent, the character can also use this power on actions that deal with the boundaries of Creation more generally. In the above selection of actions, at least, they're no longer limited to their personal Sphere.

Level 6 effects include:

- taking over a hive of insectoid Arcana,
- using the void's weather patterns to extract and shape an Arcanum metal on the Strategist's behalf,
- tying a giant ghost snake Arcanum into knots, *and*
- adapting the lake-summoning ritual of one's Water-based Sphere to summon eerie hounds into Creation.

Limitations

Note that, by default, **Greater Spherecraft** will not help the Strategist make *use* of λ-beings other than their own Arcana. (Except, e.g., when using them to defend against yet other void-things.) Nor will it help survive or move in environments not related to their Sphere. At best one can learn such things—one Sphere at a time—with practice.

Level 7 Miracle: "Greater Hunt"

Planning, Quest, Extraordinary

Level 7 Lore miracles are the Strategists' greater power of Arcanum binding. In essence, they are the lesser power writ large. They allow the Strategist to capture creatures closer to the divine than to the mortal level—including the Strategists' own equals and betters—as long as either those creatures have shown up in play, or, a firm consensus exists that they (or something like them) are out there to be found. These miracles may also be used to catch particularly rare and elusive Arcana. Finally, with GM permission, **Greater Hunt** may allow the Strategist to catch a relatively ordinary Arcanum more or less instantly.

Hunting a *powerful* Arcanum takes 0-2 stories in all but the most extreme cases ... usually meaning, "by the end of the story, unless the story's almost over—in which case, by the end of the next." Such Arcana are not meaningfully more useful when infused, but make better NPC allies, are sometimes more powerful in **(Greater) Spherecraft** and **Invocation,** and may need to be hunted *regardless* of value if they're interfering with the PCs' plans.

As for those extreme cases ... well, there are transcendent beings out there in the void that *can* probably be captured by the right Strategist, in the right circumstances; in some cases, even by the end of the next story ... it's only that, for creatures of that ilk, even when they are capturable, **Glitch** is hesitant to commit the GM to a particular time frame. If the GM allows the power to be used, they can be caught, but no deadline is, here, officially pressed.

Catching rare and elusive Arcana, on the other hand, usually takes the normal 0-3 chapters: it's trickier work than usual, locating them or catching them, but that's covered by the level 7 effect.

With a level 7 miracle, a Strategist can:

- catch an extraordinary ghost in their Gem of a Thousand Ghosts,
- find an exceptional and atypical insect Arcanum to suit their needs,
- refine a vast lake into a single Arcanum spirit, *or*
- trap the absurdly elusive fox spirit Arcanum that's been troubling them.

Level 8 Miracle: "Greater Navigation"

Extraordinary, Very Time-Consuming

Level 8 Lore miracles are the Strategists' greater power of passage. This, too, is the lesser power writ large:

Given a proposed plan/method and either a few days of work in the background or a few self-spotlit relevant moments, the Strategist constructs an accessible path between any two points—one that will remain open for as long as they sustain this action, and then for a GM-determined and possibly indefinite time thereafter.

This is an approximate, symbolic power:

The Strategist does not need to specify the endpoints very precisely, or even to fully understand them; conversely, the GM can make the results imprecise even when the Strategist *does* have a very precise, clear target. The dramatic potentials and symmetries in the situation will shape how easy or difficult a particular precision will be; this is an IC phenomenon, so Strategists are aware that dramatic elements (like, e.g., arriving at the last minute) can be a potentially helpful precision-targeting tool. On the other hand, the details don't actually track perfectly to human stories and tropes, or even to Excrucian ones, so this sort of thinking is not always of use.

The epic version of **Greater Navigation,** fueled by an additional 20 Cost (pg. 248), can open impossible paths—e.g., into a story, or one year back in time. Note that the miracle will strive to create a consistent and coherent world from the outcome; thus, for instance, creating a path into a story is more likely to take the Strategist somewhere on the Ash that *resembles* that story, or into a Chancel that happens to be "stories, only, real," than to "prove" that fiction and reality are one and the same. Going back in time is probably unable to change the broad strokes of the present, and certainly won't change everything everywhere in a butterfly effect ... not because a level 8 effect isn't *strong* enough to dramatically change the status quo, but because a world where you can change the past has a fundamental tendency towards incoherence. Paths so bizarre that the

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Relatively few towns in Southern California have been accepting of dimensionally unstable snail-dogs, but once Ventura opened its hearts and a vacant fast food service position to "Spot" it rapidly became a beloved local celebrity.

—from Happy Trails to You, *by Holly Brubaker (in the Ventura Shield, December 2012)*

The Glitch compromises the idea that there is such a thing as "the inaccessible." Is something buried under a faraway mountain? Has it been rendered inactive or invisible by the conditions of the world? Then getting to it, or perceiving it, will be difficult using ordinary means—

But let's have some perspective. If we stop projecting the constraints of our own paradigm for travel onto the world, then distance is just a tuple of places. If we stop projecting the constraints of our own senses onto the objects that we perceive, or do not perceive, then invisibility is only a tag.

If something is in the same world as you, if it's running on the same basic metaphysical architecture, then it's basically right next to you. Everything that exists, to exist, becomes neighbors.

—*from* Nothing Makes Sense Any More: an Introductory Guide (2nd Edition), *by Ofanite 3*

world *can't* be consistent or coherent in their presence are invitations to a rich vein of the Glitch.

Level 8 effects include:

- bridging a ten-mile gap,
- reaching the stars,
- reaching beyond death, *and*
- crossing into memory.

Level 9 Miracle: "Greater Percipience"

Planning, Quest, Extraordinary

Level 9 Lore miracles are the Strategists' greater power to redefine the terms of their interaction with the world; or, put another way, their greater power to engage with subtle and ethereal forces. They function as **Percipience,** but the Strategist may grant themselves extraordinary talents. Alternatively, they may attune an entire small-to-medium-sized organization or a fair bit of a Region to hidden or subtle things in some less individually extraordinary fashion. The first version lasts for as long as the Strategist keeps the quest active, plus another chapter or two, as per **Percipience**; **Greater Percipience**, however, needs GM permission to keep active between stories, and if abandoned between stories, it does not linger into the next. The second version normally only lasts a few chapters *all told,* but may become permanent in the epic version of this power. Such permanence requires and allows the Strategist to impose a balancing drawback of some sort—normally, the target is *dis*-attuned in some fashion to a swathe of normally *non*-hidden and *non*-subtle things—and the GM and the player must agree on what this is.

Level 9 effects include:

- pulling a town into conjunction with the spirit world,
- teaching oneself electromagnetic mastery,
- making the voices of birds comprehensible in a certain place, *and*
- teaching a small corporation to communicate with some cosmic horror ... at the cost of its ability to maintain a comprehensible social media account.

Level 10 Miracle: "Greater Infusion"

[Slow or Time-Consuming], Extraordinary

Level 10 Lore miracles are the Strategist's greater power of enchantment; their greater power, in short, to wield their bound Arcana and invoke the powers within. These miracles function much as does **Infusion,** including the mundane action that must complete before the Strategist can invoke this miracle, but the effects on the target are more extreme—both the transformation and the Technique can be extraordinary. Further, the effects last indefinitely instead of for 0-2 stories. (The various ending conditions, such as the Strategist infusing the target with a different Arcanum, still bring the effect to a close.)

Level 10 effects include:

- turning someone into a ghost motorcycle,
- making a cosmos-traveling bed with your old university hidden under its covers,
- infusing someone with the power of a snake-headed tortoise god Arcanum, *or*
- burning away one's own mortality in the fire of the phoenix.

Mortal Witnesses: like **Infusion,** this is clearly extremely messed up.

Level 11 Wish: "Greater Inchoation"

Extraordinary, Wish

Level 11 Lore miracles are the Strategists' greater wonders of λ-creation. The Strategist can bring large portions of a Region under the influence of their Sphere, create powerful servants out of nothing, and birth large-scale Sphere phenomena in an instant. Given time to let the effect progress, they might even spread an Arcanum's influence across the *world.* Other options may exist as well, because this power is a wish (pg. 260):

Its power, its flexibility, and its overall cooperativeness all scale with the Strategist's current Fugue, how much rein they give their Sphere to handle things as it likes, and how closely the limits they *do* impose upon it fit with the GM's current understanding of that Sphere.

Level 11 effects include:

- spreading the Strategist's arcane biosphere through the city they have made their home,
- constructing a great λ-fortress overnight, *and*
- swiftly crafting and even binding a meaningfully powerful Arcanum.

Mortal Witnesses: this, like **Inchoation** and **(Greater) Infusion,** is clearly extremely messed up.

"No longer will this be 'Los Angeles,'" the Yin-Yang master declares, laughing maniacally, "But rather, LOS YIN-YANGELES!"

—*from* Escape From L.YAY (interactive adventure), *by Peak Elephant Studios*

Level 12 Miracle: "Greater Invocation"

Extraordinary, Planning, Quest

Level 12 Lore effects are Strategists' greater power of improvisational void-magic. They express their mastery of hunting, binding, and banishing as a general principle.

Greater Invocation is a planning miracle. It creates a plan to chain, bind, banish, or attack someone or something. The player proposes their own plan. It must in some way draw upon the powers of the void—e.g., on the latent power sleeping within a bound or stationary Arcanum—but is not limited to the already-canonical abilities of already-canonical Arcana. Further, it may include astonishingly powerful ritual attack techniques that don't appear outside this miracle—"spells," "formations," "miracles," "power sites," and "pseudo-Arcana" that can only be used as part of a **Greater Invocation**. The kinds of bindings and attacks that are available are relatively open: this power can trap an Imperator into service or pin a city into the sky.

Greater Invocation usually catches, banishes, or inflicts the full punitive force of its attack upon the target "sometime in the next chapter;" more broadly, the norm is 0-3 chapters. As usual, campaign-reshaping effects take 0-2 stories instead, and are more likely than usual—given the nature of this power—to require an epic plan.

Once complete, the binding, the banishing, or the attack's effects last until at least the story's end.

If the target of **Greater Invocation** is a viable Arcanum for the Strategist's deck, the effect skews a little faster. In particular, viable targets for **Hunt** are generally affected all but instantly, and the player may elide an explanation of their plan/what they *did*, if they prefer.

Greater Invocation does not allow the Strategist to bind a non-Arcanum into their deck. A very similar binding might be possible, but the Strategist cannot then, e.g., use the target as the base for an **Infusion.**

Level 12 effects include:

- seizing and binding an Arcanum with a gesture,
- sealing an Imperator in orichalcum chains,
- sealing a town in walls of ice,
- trapping a random human in the form of a crystal bird, *and*
- casting an annoying Power off of the World Ash.

No sooner did Vera Penelope Serenity Everdeen discover that her ghost-catching game worked on real ghosts than she jailbroke it to catch people and objects as well. "But how does it work?" Maxwell asked; Vera said:

"The specter of extinction is a portion of us all."

—*from* Nine Times Vera Had To Borrow the Creek Slasher's Phone, and the One Time She Didn't, *by Priscilla Grey*

A Lore Cheatsheet

Difficulty 0: Investigation

Investigation gives the Strategist 1-2 sentences of basic information about an Arcanum. They must research it, but, e.g., "I search my (memories/grimoire)" will suffice.

Greater Investigation (diff 4) yields 1-2 sentences of general information about an Arcanum, *plus* a bit of secret or expert knowledge; 1-2 sentences of basic information about anything; a bit of "why" and "how" about anything, *or* a "clue."

Difficulty 1: Vision

Vision grants direct perception. The Strategist ignores darkness and muting/silencing; obstructing their senses becomes less effective; and, they can perceive Ninuan.

Greater Vision (diff 5) is either "automatic Vision," lasting for the rest of the scene without using an action, or "keen Vision:" a mundane sensory action with **Greater Flow**-level competence, default 3 Edge, and level equal to the miracle level, augmented by miraculous **Vision.**

Difficulty 2: Spherecraft

Spherecraft lets the Strategist perform a cinematic or low-fantasy action to make proper use of the Strategist's Arcana, defend against them, bring them into Creation, banish them from Creation, survive in regions tied to the Strategist's Sphere, or be mobile in regions tied to that Sphere. This action is functionally a mundane action with the same action level as the miracle, and a default 3 Edge.

Greater Spherecraft (diff 6) can be **Spherecraft** for *other* people's Arcana, specifically, for defending against them, inviting them into Creation, or banishing them from it. *Or* it can be a somewhat improved (greater stunt-level) **Spherecraft.** If the Arcanum is powerful enough, certain such "greater stunts" can be miraculous.

Difficulty 3: Hunt

Hunt is a planning miracle that lets a Strategist catch and bind an Arcanum. Specifically, an Arcanum with power closer to a mortal's than a Strategist's, and one either pretty "ordinary" or that's already shown up in play.

Greater Hunt (diff 7) lets a Strategist catch rare Arcana and powerful Arcana. Powerful Arcana can take a long time to catch. If the GM permits, **Greater Hunt** may also catch weak, common Arcana quickly or instantly.

Difficulty 4: Navigation

Navigation is a Time-Consuming miracle to work around some navigational obstacle. It can cross up to ~¼ mile of physical (or an analogous spiritual) distance.

Greater Navigation (diff 8) is an Extraordinary, Very Time-Consuming miracle to open a path between any two points. The path lasts at least while the effect is sustained. Epic effects (pg. 248) grant access to impossible places (e.g., "a year ago," "my imaginary friend's house.")

Difficulty 5: Percipience

Percipience is a planning miracle. It lets the Strategist train themselves to perceive or interact with some subtle, elusive, or intangible thing. After training, they gain that perception/interaction as a bonus Technique while they stay in training, and maybe for a few chapters more.

Greater Percipience (diff 9) is an extraordinary planning miracle that lets the Strategist train themselves in *impressive* versions of the above talents, or, conversely, attune a small/medium organization or a portion of a Region to some hidden or subtle thing. The second version lasts a few chapters unless epic (pg. 248), in which case, with a balancing drawback, it might last indefinitely.

Difficulty 6: Infusion

Infusion uses an Arcanum to grant someone a temporary Bond, transforming them as appropriate to manifest the Bond's truth. Innovating new Bonds is Time-Consuming (pg. 251); re-using old ideas is not. **Infusion** lasts for 0-2 stories, until something narrative breaks the effect, or until the Strategist cancels it with a specific mundane procedure or applies a new infusion to that target.

Greater Infusion (diff 10) allows extraordinary transformations and Bonds with extraordinary Techniques. They last until the Strategist cancels them or applies a new infusion, or, until something breaks the effect.

Difficulty 7: Inchoation

Inchoation creates energies from the character's Sphere. This can manifest phantasmagorical Sphere phenomena instantly, birth simple Arcana and paraphernalia as a Time-Consuming effect, or enkindle *meaningful* influences and artifacts as a *Very* Time-Consuming effect.

Greater Inchoation (diff 11) is a wish. It creates and shapes powerful energies of the character's Sphere. It can be used to do a lot of stuff, but it's hard to get the most out of it unless the character is in tune with their Sphere—e.g., has high Fugue, lets the wish do what it wants, and/or specifies things that are mostly aligned with the Sphere's natural inclinations.

Difficulty 8: Invocation

Invocation is a Time-Consuming action to stretch the possible uses of one of the Strategist's Arcana. Both the stretching and the final use brush the top end of the cinematic/low-fantasy spectrum. The final action is stored in a quest slot for immediate, later, or repeated use. When used, it is functionally a mundane action with the same level as the miracle and a default 3 Edge ... unless the Arcanum itself is very powerful, in which case certain effects may be miraculous.

Greater Invocation (diff 12) is a planning miracle to chain, bind, banish, or attack someone from afar. The plan can invoke weird ritual powers only existing under the aegis of this power's plans. Viable Arcana for the Strategist's deck are faster to hunt; weaker ones *may* even be hunted instantly, without specifically stating a plan.

Wyrd

Calvin's absence from my life was as rich as had been his presence: a thing in motion, of rippling autumnal shadows; a thing of many colors and degrees.

—*from* Regulus IV, in Spring, *by the Interpreted Vernice*

What Burns Within

A character's **Wyrd** is their true self. It is the face beneath their face.

It is the dream they dreamt themselves to be, before the world.

Strategists are tied to an endless life-death cycle. They "die" from their infection: from the suffering they must undergo, because they have witnessed the glitch. Because they are the creatures of the void, because they are *blessed* by their rights as a creature of the void, they may often escape the messy process of physical death and simply leave the world directly—entering their sanctuary, slipping into a waylet, or casting themselves beyond the cup of flame—but it is still a *cognate* to death. The world ravages them. It eats away at them. Their infection, and life itself, devours them, consumes the essence of them, until the thing that remains is ragged and in parts ... *and can no longer remain within the world.*

They depart it. They flee it. They escape it: desperate; hurting.

In the soothing dark they remake themselves as whole.

In the nothingness things dream themselves to structure. In the nothingness each thing conceives itself, and each thing regards itself, and with that regard and with that conception it creates itself, to the extent that it has been created in any sense at all; it begins, if not to be, to Not-exist.

In the endless void each Not-thing forms a Wyrd for itself, and that Wyrd is its nature: its being, meaning, fate, and fundamental essence all in one.

This is the thing with which the Strategists repair themselves within the void.

It is because they are broken by the world that this substance is inimical. It is because the world has corroded the Strategists that the Wyrd that fills them is *also* the kind of Wyrd that crawls into places where only loathsome Creation-stuff ought to be and wipes all that ruination clean. It is because the world has *tainted* the Strategists that their Wyrd is antithetical to the world and all of its wrongness:

That it is not merely Not-being, not merely an un-thing, but a candelabrum of burning nothingness, a vitriolic cup of emptiness, a fangèd blanket of unbeing. That the substance which, to the Excrucians, is deeply soothing and reparative, should be fundamentally anathema to the world we know.

The battered tank of them fills up with it. The tattered chassis of them, fleshes out with it. They are repaired with it,

opposite: *by Melissa Spandri*

made whole with it, and may return to the world as living things again.

... there, though, they will spend themselves; there they will burn out the essence of their Wyrd, in defiance of Creation: there is no alternative.

To exist in the world as things that are not things requires it; to live the way their Wyrd requires of them demands it. To be a Strategist is to *bleed* your Wyrd, to spend the currency of your fate and nature, and replace it incrementally with gross worldly gunk until the world has murdered you again.

A Wyrd is fatal.

It is a fatal thing.

The inexorable correlative property of the Not exerts its force upon the Wyrd just as it does on other things; thus, it is not *against* the Wyrd that this life-death cycle should be taking place. It *is* a Strategist's Wyrd, in a sense, that they should suffer this—that they are inevitably corrupted; that they lose themselves; that they are driven outwards, only to repair themselves again. They deny it, they must deny it, they must, at least, have a native inclination to deny it, because it is intrinsic in the Wyrd that their Wyrd must struggle against Creation ... but there is something in that cycle, too, that is built into the dream itself. The Wyrd is not a pure and pristine thing that *can* exist without Creation:

It is a thorn of nothingness, digging into Creation. It is a weapon of the void.

It seemed so very peaceful, long ago. Long ago, in the days of Ninuan, the dream that your character dreamt had no overtones of murder—or at least they were unlikely to be present; before it was drowned for millennia beneath Creation, before it was buried, covered over, before it was forced to claw its red way out from the distended belly of the world, a Strategist's Wyrd was almost always a peaceful thing, a bright pure thing, a safe kind thing, a comfort; and that is how most Strategists *experience* their Wyrd even today.

... but it is not.

A Wyrd—a Wyrd, today, at least—a Wyrd is writ in blood and flame.

The **Wyrd** Attribute measures the depth of a character's identification with the void. With no points in Wyrd, a character has only barely freed themselves of the prison of mortality. Their self-concept is deeply tainted by Creation. They most likely dodged their doom as a revenant by the skin of their teeth, winning transcendence by the thinnest sleight of fortune rather than by wisdom, capability, and grit. Higher Wyrd ratings represent first acceptance of a character's Excrucian nature and then a kind of deepness and richness of that nature (wherein one comes to own and then refine one's natural power and to shed misleading concepts of the self).

Each level of Wyrd costs 2 points and makes a number of powers relating to the Strategist's nature and life-death cycle less costly—from Wyrd 0, where even retreating to one's sanctum can take a bit of effort, to Wyrd 7, where a single exhaled plume of stored unbeing can wipe ten warships from one's path. Increasing Wyrd also, arguably, changes the nature of the Wyrd itself; this is explicit in the text below, particularly when a character's Wyrd increases during play, but it is also most likely illusory:

Ninuanni orthodoxy holds that a Wyrd itself is unchanging; it is one's *perception* of that Wyrd that can evolve.

In addition to the Wyrd Attribute, a character may also purchase "Gifts" that relate to Wyrd, granting more specific benefits. Some of these Gifts appear later, along with a general system for constructing your own Gifts.

The Infection Trait

Wyrd is intimately tied to the **Infection** trait (pg. 277), which tracks the current severity of the character's sickness. This trait builds from nothing—the point where the character's illness is essentially in remission—to level 6+, where it drives the character out of the world. It is Wyrd that ends it there: that grants the character recovery, when in Ninuan.

It is Wyrd, in a way, that at level 6 demands their flight.

Level 0 Wyrd: "World-Bound"

0 points

Those who do not understand their Wyrd remain bound by the laws of the world. They may have seen its fundamental wrongness; they may even, like the Deceivers, extrapolate beyond that to a fundamental inconsistency—but on some level, they are still entangled in its web of fate. They are a prisoner of its processes. They are architects of wonders but not impossibilities:

The things they do may be abnormal, but they follow the logic of the world. They aren't true aliens, beings from

The Core Powers

The core powers of Wyrd are these:

DIFFICULTY	POWER	USE
0	Wailing	fall into a crisis; despair
1	Elysium	find a sanctuary from it
2	Revenant	heal from Infection/Cost there
3	Contagion	curse others with an echo of one's own Infection
4	Destruction	wield a custom power of Unbeing
5	Shattering	unleash power while breaking
6	Unfettering	dodge worldly entanglements
7	Casting	split off minions from one's heart
8	Masking	psychic surgery upon oneself.

Each can be used by a Strategist with [Wyrd ≥ difficulty] ... or by a Strategist with lower Wyrd, if they pump up their Wyrd with Burn (pg. 267) or some other Cost.

Greater forms of each of these powers are available at +4 to the base power's difficulty. Variations and combinations are also possible, as discussed on pg. 150.

They had committed themselves to the doctrine of normalcy, Agent Stevens realized: to maintaining the illusion that everything was as it was supposed to be; that everything was as it was meant to be; that everything, in a very real way, was as it had it always been. They had committed themselves to a doctrine of normalcy and of glorious antiquity—

"Yes," he said, after a too-long hesitation, pasting an awkward smile upon his lips. "Yes, that dragon is supposed to be there. It has—uh—a license."

—*from* And All the Stars Had Lost Their Shine, *by Melody Terese*

beyond existence, so much as humans (or whatever) made up to *look* like aliens. You can even sometimes see their eyes.

To the world-bound, the void is not unbeing, but something a lot like space. It's an *earthly* nothingness. Ninuan, similarly, lacks its strangeness: it is merely a place, outside of other places. The infection of a world-bound character, and their escape from it, are likely to abide by mundane rules:

The world-bound have little business with the ineffable.

Socially, characters with level 0 Wyrd aren't really full Excrucians. Rather, they're considered something more like worldly, mortal quagmires imprisoning an Excrucian self within. It is not quite pitiable, because it can later change, but it *does* verge on childish or ... perhaps, on "unenlightened?"

It is a state that any void-born friends the world-bound have will hope that they eventually grow past.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Theodric Moreau is dying of calcification—his body slowly hardening into something more like bone, or rock, or steel. There is no known medical cause for this and no actual *source* for the calcium-like material that builds up inside him; however, chelating agents can mitigate its accumulation, surgery can remove deposits, and his sickness is reluctant to spread to disconnected extensions of him like his glasses, his clothes, and his artificial hand. His "sanctuary" is a hospital ward; when he dies, or becomes so infected that rational means cannot restore him, the ambiguously personified doctors there move around in front of the light, twitter strangely like unpracticed flutes, and sear out his veins with "Anvit" (anvritrasate nazothasate), a commercially trademarked formulation of the Not.

Alodia Godafrid is dying of rumor, or, at least, is rumored to be dying. People keep whispering about it around her—acquaintances, associates. Strangers notice little signs. She tries not to pay any attention to this, lest evidence accumulate to the point where continuing to believe in her own health would be irrational. Once she is forced to confront "the truth," though, she is never quite able to process it as *I am dying of rumor, and now it has caught up to me again;* instead, she "realizes" once more that she has offended an oligarch, has a deadly disease, is being stalked by a killer, has hair full of poisonous vermin, is a homeless centenarian, is in a building on fire, or, perhaps, all six. It is only after a long recuperation in her sequela sanctuary that she may remember that rumors are not necessarily factual and that people only whisper such things of Alodia Godafrid because the world is deeply wrong.

Level 1 Wyrd: "Wyrdling"

2 points

As the character contemplates their Wyrd, an awareness eventually seeps into their consciousness that there is something *else* besides the world—that there is a nebulous Not-light that is not the worldly darkness; a Not-region that is not simply a worldly place outside of worldly places; a way of being, or, more precisely, of Not-being, that is fundamentally *different* from that of the world they knew. The experience is ambiguous and ethereal; the concept, as frangible as an eggshell:

To truly grasp their Wyrd, or to understand themselves, they must leave the world.

There, in the cultivating emptiness of Ninuan and its waylets, they can become—can grasp at λ-being—something *more* than the thing they'd been. In the Not, they can grasp at a Wyrd of struggle and dual natures, a Wyrd of *being alien,* even, in a real way, unto oneself.

This is a liminal state, and like most liminal states, is somewhat fungible:

"Wyrdling" is an identity of its own, but they may pass socially for full Excrucians, to others and themselves. ... if they are willing to make the effort, and to sometimes fail at it. Conversely, on a bad day, they may easily slip into a world-bound state, either in the eyes of others or in fact.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Avery Leudagar is dying of sunlight: it burns them. As their infection grows, even moonlight (and eventually "things that have been in sunlight") begin to char. Yet because of this they have a constant awareness, an *apperception,* of Ninuan's unworldly darkness—and of the fact that its "light" is by no means light, nor are its "stars" true suns.

Kyrina Geissler is dying of the mountain. It's calling to her, even though she hates it; even though she knows that it exemplifies the wrongness of the world—there is something in her that *must* climb it, must seek its summit, and must re-enact the awful death that there she always finds. She's moved half a world away from it, but it's still right there, just out the window, all earthen-clothed and misty-crowned; take a look, and you can see it there. It is an axis of the world, an omphalos; all things revolve around it, all things are in its shadow; only by virtue of its mystic and trackless nature, only by its dimly-sensed *alienness*, does Ninuan itself exist outside its reach. To some extent that is all she really understands of Ninuan, all she really understands of the Strategist Kyrina Geissler: beyond the shadow of the mountain, there is *that.*

Level 2 Wyrd: "Ninuanni"

4 points

At this level, one may break free of the mortal quagmire. It is tentative; it is difficult. Excrucians at this level are still heavily polluted by Creation and thus typically a lost, damaged, angry, and tormented bunch ... but they have touched upon the beauty of the void. Existence burdens them; it clings to them like a great crab weighty on their back, its claws dig trenchantly into their sides—but it's not the whole story.

It isn't *everything.*

Inside themselves, or outside the world, or in some waylet, they have found it:

The Wyrd that is bearing witness; the Wyrd of *I have seen beyond this world.*

It is a dim and cloudy sight, but it is sufficient; it is a thing of power. *Attention* is a thing of power. *Witness* is a thing of power. To carry this Wyrd is to awaken the soul of the void inside you: a breath of the primal darkness inside one will thenceforth then endure.

At Wyrd 2+, a character is a true Excrucian and a citizen of the void. Most likely they are more than just "a citizen"—most likely they are a Strategist, they are royalty—but this is not obligatory; if a Power or an Imperator or an old tin can contained a Wyrd, and they dreamt it to this degree, then they would be of the people of Ninuan as well.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Achillios Arminius is dying of gentrification. The world around him is constantly subject to this slow creep away from what works for him, what's convenient for him, and what's functional for him, towards what fits the tastes of a somewhat hypothetical wealthy jerk named Caspar that he "could have" been. His only real solace is in Ninuan: not a sanctuary exactly to his tastes, for, after all, his worldly tastes are worldly ones, but at least a pure clean place that can be *his.*

Oeriel Faucher is dying of harmony. Much like Ariana Aquincium, she heard a particular piece of music, and it wasn't OK. Just thinking about it too much can break down not only her own sound processing abilities but sound itself—or even *math*. Getting it stuck in her head is even worse; and when her sickness is at its height, snatches of it play out around her in the natural harmonies of the world. A person can get lost in it, can lose their sense of place and being to it; for her, the void is not merely an escape from the world but also a pole star, an internal and an external existence that she can orient upon when all would otherwise be lost.

Level 3 Wyrd: "Armiger"

6 points

Characters at this level of Wyrd walk in the shadow of their infection. They have found solace in Ninuan, and yet there is still something inside them that mirrors itself to the thing that kills them—that kills them *over and over again;* that drives them, over and over again, to flee the world. As they seek to understand their Wyrd, the world, and Ninuan, there is something in them that reflexively patterns itself in their own agony's image. Caught by their own desperation to be free of it, they recapitulate the flaw they loathe most within Creation; at best, they forge that reiteration out of somewhat purer steel.

Why does this happen?

Often it is the natural evolution from the first moment of their ascension: their glitch-wrought infection is, after all, much of their *making* as a creature of the void. Often it is a kind of extended catharsis: they dive into the poison of their most virulent revulsion because they hope to free themselves of the power that it holds. Occasionally—rarely, perhaps—it is a demonstration. They make themselves as magnifying lenses, *proof* in themselves that the world is wrong.

Most commonly, though, it is merely symmetry:

Of course the innate weapon-nature of an Excrucian is parallel to the glitch that initially awakened them. It is on that very basis that they were sifted from the void.

Thus an Excrucian dying of fire may wield a Wyrd of incandescence and immolation; an Excrucian dying of betrayal, a Wyrd of subtle treachery, instead.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Licinia Aldwin is dying of water bottles. Cups. Jars. Glasses. Ammunition clips. Gas tanks. They all tend to wind up empty around her. *Containers* tend to wind up empty around her. That's not because she's drunk the whole thing already. It's because the world is all broken and wrong. Her Wyrd is the Desiccated Wyrd, the Desolate Wyrd, the Emptying Wyrd: *the world is wrong. I was so sure that that was full!*

Godigisel Audamar is dying of forests—or, at least, of a pool of strange corruption that he encountered in the forest once, fed by pine needles that turned to liquid as

---

The klaxons rang. The red lights flashed. The station sections slowly listed in the dark. Long past the edge of effort, long past the boundaries of hope, Stacy kept struggling, but there was no use to it; and in the end, even the static and the voices in her headset ceased to shout.

It was a jewel to her, the moment that she understood that it was over—

That willpower could not fix this. That effort could not fix this. That even "being better" could not have helped.

It was a jewel; it was an unfolding, glowing flower. It transfixed her with the simple beauty of it.

Her eyes no longer saw the console that spread before her. Her ears no longer heard the bells. Instead her eyes were fixed on that pure and clean and inner darkness, and the silver glow that burned within it; then up, beyond, and past it, to the beginning of the world.

—*from* Come, Come Away, the Spider Said, *by Jennifer Carruthers*

The dog was barking. It hung there in the air and it kept on barking. It made Clovis very angry because dogs were not supposed to fly.

—*from* The Bureau of Impossible Animals, *by Theobald West*

they fell. Around him, that pool can live again in ink that drips from an inkwell; in pools of spilled coffee; in trickles of blood ... in anywhere dark liquid flows. His Wyrd is the Poisoned Wyrd, the Corrupted Wyrd, the Creeping Wyrd: *lo, the evidence wells up again that the world is wrong, and has always been.*

Level 4 Wyrd: "Sword-Bearer"

8 points

Polish the weapons of the Armiger and eventually they refine into something more fundamental—something less defined by *infection* and *corruption* and more by death itself.

Characters at this level of Wyrd are the swords of Ninuan. They are the living weapons of the void. Their Wyrd is not merely an *incidental* weapon, not merely *accidentally* antithetical to Creation by virtue of being the substance of unbeing; it is a flame of ending and a promise of destruction that *hungers* to tear existence down. The Sword-Bearers arm and armor themselves with that awful power; in Ninuan they bloat themselves on that angry nothingness; and when they come into Creation that elephantine ruination stirs in them, it pours in lakes and torrents out from them, and where it goes things end.

This is the Impaling Wyrd, the Wyrd of War:

There ought not be Creation here.

There ought not be all these things here, but rather Ninuan; so let it burn; let it drown in darkness; let all the lights be done.

Example Concepts

Turin Vulferam is dying of his online comments section. It isn't clear to him, or anyone else, why a *person* should have one; but wherever he goes, a stream of uninspired threaded drivel, up-votes, down-votes, and images follows. It invades him, bit by bit, shifting slowly from something that requires meditation, insight, or the correct URL to see at all to something that *anyone* can spot just by defocusing their eyes—and eventually it drives him into catatonia. While his functionality remains, though, he is adept at deleting and even locking not just individual comments that violate the terms of service but also objects, people, and even abstractions. This is his Impaling Wyrd.

Emmeline Widukind is dying of the thing in the box that she shouldn't open. Don't open the box, Emmeline! It will not serve you well! Among other things, it is possible that the box contains everything that she has ever looked at and decided was so unworthy of its existence that it ought to be entirely erased. Opening the box does not, of course, restore these things: she is, after all, a Strategist of Ninuan and not an Imperator of Creation. Opening the box is ... basically, just bad.

Level 5 Wyrd: "Postulant"

10 points

This is the Wyrd of the seeker—of the one who has finally confronted the fundamental futility of destruction, who has seen themselves as scrabbling against the glass walls of the world, and turned their attention deep within them (or far beyond them, or deep beneath the surface of Creation) to learn a way that something more productive may be done. This is the Wyrd of mourning and futility; of *Ninuan is fallen;* and of distant, glimmering, and subtle hope.

The Tormenting Wyrd, the Wracking Wyrd:

A Wyrd that tears away your flimsy delusions and self-justifications and confronts you with the truth of your own identity; of the many inextricable entanglements of world and void; of the essentially superficial nature of every "solution" that one had come to theretofore. A Chancery member with this Wyrd cannot escape their recognition of the world's fundamental wrongness, and their own passivity in the face of it; an impenitent Strategist, conversely, cannot evade the cruel pointlessness of the actions that they take to "kill the world."

Fundamentally, this is the Wyrd of knowing that you have gone astray—that you have had no *choice* but to go astray, mind you; that it is inconceivable that you could have done *other* than go astray, because the world is too difficult a problem to be instantaneously mastered—

This is the Wyrd of knowing that you have gone astray

Predictive software for juridical procedure proved eerily accurate, and so acquired a peculiar reputation for "judgment"—as if, through its ability to predetermine the actions of judges and juries, it replicated also their inner thoughts. The long slow drift towards trial directly by software was, in this context, inevitable:

For that matter, the relevant case law was long since known.

It was de rigueur, after the new system came into effect, for the condemned to rail against their condemner; to demand to know the basis on which they'd been judged and decided guilty. Surely, they argued, the system's predictions of a judge that was not there and a jury that had not attended did not suffice to establish anything like guilt?

The answer was held to be straightforward: justice did not exist, and had never existed. Law did not exist, and had never existed. There was only ever a constellation of mathematical series, as anyone paying any attention really ought to have already known.

—*from* 9 Times Quantitative Analysis Was Socially Destructive, and 1 Time It Wasn't, *by Merry Angelie*

in the face of extreme exigency and crisis, and of not having found an answer to that straying yet.

Traditionally, that answer was *end it all,* except, you see:

It's not like the Excrucians *haven't* been trying that, and *failing at that,* for quite a while.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Huneric Oursler is dying of seasonal affective disorder. The short days and long nights of winter cast a long shadow over his heart—but that is nothing compared to the disorienting burden that is spring. The greenery retched up by the nauseated Earth unnerves him, the heating of the world enfevers him, the season leaves him unfocused and dismayed. The short nights and long days of summer parch something vital and elemental inside him, seal off from him some fundamental reservoir of cooling darkness that he depends on, they enervate him and make the world an agony to endure; then autumn strikes like a knife in the dark, and all the trees around him spurting leaves like blood. It is traumatic: he staggers through a world in pain, his own blood thinning and his heart arrhythmic out of sympathy. Time skips, or seems to skip; the world slips through his fingers. ... the short days and long nights of winter, though, cast a long and bitter shadow across Huneric Oursler's heart. There is no other answer than to shatter all the natures of the world; but has that ever really been an answer, after all?

Sigrida Ofilius is dying of noise. The world is full of too much din for her—not merely in its fundamental loudness, but also in its excessive unevenness, in its bursts of energy and silence, and in its propensity for reams of obfuscating detail. Every street and every forest path, to her, is a symphony for dental drills and tuneless trombones: an assault upon her senses that makes a pretense to being art. It has to go. It *all* has to go—or, at *worst,* if she can't yet do that, she must re-tune it, must shove aside the conductor and rewrite the symphony to fit the aesthetic of the void.

Level 6 Wyrd: "Potentate"

12 points

Characters at this level of Wyrd have begun to free themselves at last from the entangling grip of their disease—and, in a real sense, from that of the world itself. Their spirit is in a process of purification; their mortal caul is in tatters; they are, at last, truly beings (unbeings) of the Beyond.

This is the Wyrd of transcendence, disentanglement, and departure:

I am nothing of this world.

It is a thoughtful and introspective Wyrd, but it can also be a cruel one; intrinsic in it is the belief that they of Ninuan are *more* than worldly beings, *better* than worldly beings, by virtue of their status as of Ninuan. If they have transcended some of their old hate and loathing for the world, they have typically only sharpened their *disdain* for it—

The world is false and plebeian; it is *beneath* them; it is a fading stain upon their boots.

That disdain is not a *part* of the Wyrd, it is not baked in, particularly for those who have joined the Chancery, but in many cases it may as well be: that:

The world is worthless, as well as wrong.

Characters at this level have "answered" the insoluble quandary of the Postulant, but normally by punting on it: they've deprecated the *importance* of the insolvability of the world to their own personal advancement in their Wyrd. Accordingly, their spiritual advancement does *not* mean that they have overcome the worst demons of their nature, only that they have reached the point where those demons need not master them. It does not require that they have forgiven the world, or accepted the world, or even accepted *themselves* ... only that they have, at least in part, *moved on.* Thus, an Excrucian Potentate is not in a state of exile, rebellion, or desertion from the War; rather, if one analogizes the Riders to an army, their place is usually more like that of a staff officer, roving troubleshooter, civilian overseer, consultant, spy, or scientist—someone ranked above the common soldier, that is, and respected as such, but with that respect usually carrying the hidden qualifier that they don't seem ... quite ... *up* for the front lines.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Galterius Therivingian is dying of sweeping, or, more precisely, *of the thing he swept*—for no sooner had he swept off his porch than he came to understand that on each particle of dirt there lived, had lived, there *used* to live, entire civilizations of tiny lives. From that time forward he has felt a creeping guilt, uncertainty, and haunting that gradually develops into paralysis: the knowledge that any action may have completely unrelated consequences, and the attending fear of doing anything at all. Because mortal action frequently ceases to make sense to him, he has been forced to grow beyond the conflicts of the world; he focuses more upon himself.

Kheryna Reiner, conversely, is dying of filth. She is simply *unable* to remove the gunk that accumulates about her; thus, in time, her every wound becomes infected, and kills her, and she is driven from the world. For decades she saw herself as unsightly, broken, and ruined; when she realized that this was *not* so, that the problem was entirely outside her—and, more importantly, when that realization came upon her as a revelation and an enlightenment rather than as a rhetorical contribution to her internal monologue—her infection lost its grip. She attained the Disinfecting Wyrd.

The Lindsey twins performed gravity-defying stunts; or, rather, physics-nepotistic stunts: stunts that gravity would not allow more ordinary twins to do.

—*from* The Endless Circle of the World, *by Rannen Yedidyah*

opposite: ***by Beatrice Pelagatti***

Dulcilla Vaktin,
Who is Dying of Teeth

You have formed yourself from the substances of the world. You have feasted richly upon them with your organs of perceptions until your eyes have grown fat and round from it; until your ears have filled up inside them with the waxen wealth of it; until your nose has given itself over to being something of a bulge. You have taken the essences of the world inside you, ground them up, and recomposed them, and with this made your "self."

The distinctness of the first person is, as it has always been, deception; there is nothing that is in you that is not just more of the outside world. Exist within a corrupted context, and your "you" will be corrupt.

— from Survival, *by Clotilde Evariste*

Level 7 Wyrd: "Illuminate"

14 points

At this level of Wyrd a character may shed, at last, their mortal self—not necessarily breaking free of every part of their existence as a being in the world, not necessarily leaving every legacy of their past behind, but rather escaping at last from the *way of being*, the mortal *structure of identity*, that would make an identification between them and their old self possible. As a Potentate, they let go of *who* they were; as an Illuminate, they let go of *what*.

Inside their head they are, quite simply, no longer the same *kind* of thing.

This is a subtle Wyrd: a Wyrd of self-severing, a Wyrd of self-disassembling, a Wyrd of *becoming/being Not*. In the lands beyond Creation it is considered the beginning of wisdom and those who achieve it are honored, *for they have brushed against the boundaries of sacred things.*

Example Concepts

Guinemar Welkin is dying of grief. He lost his tag team partner to a rival wrestling group, only, he wasn't *meant* to. It wasn't scripted. It wasn't supposed to happen. It wasn't even supposed to happen *in real life*. After that pro wrestling stopped making sense to him. The world stopped making sense to him. ... and, finally, *he* did, unto himself. It wasn't until he could set aside the *kayfabe* of human consciousness that he found a measure of stability and could rejoin the Sport. Enlightenment, of course, only grants perspective; he is as unable as he ever was to avoid the inevitable cycle of re-entanglement with his old partner's affairs, followed by wrongness, followed by destruction, save through frequent re-immersion in the grand un-wrestling of the Not.

Galienne Karga dies of bears. Well, bear-like things. Things that are *like* bears, just, you know, a little flatter, and a bit more, um, protean? at their edge. They're nasty, brutal things. Things that kill her, quite a lot. Yet one can only be messily devoured just so often (... asserts Galienne Karga, the Excrucian) before one stops being afraid of it, instead escaping the pernicious self-identification that makes pain and death such frightening ideas.

Rules for Wyrd

The "power source" for Wyrd effects is called **Burn.** A character begins the game with [10 × Wyrd] Burn. This will rise as they invoke difficult Wyrd effects, and fall both over the course of time and when it has harmful results.

They may invoke Wyrd effects with [level ≤ Wyrd] for "free"—it requires no Burn.

Often a character will wish to go beyond that. Not only will the higher-Wyrd effects often appeal to lower-Wyrd Strategists, not only do characters sometimes need additional Wyrd to overcome the miraculous barriers known as "Wards" (pg. 257) ... but only by going beyond their base Wyrd can a Strategist access the difficulty 8-12 Wyrd effects at all.

A Strategist wanting to use effects beyond their rating may buy the extra Wyrd they need by, basically, pushing their limits, drawing on reserves from some dangerous, destabilizing place within themselves or doing things that are emotionally hard:

By taking **Burn.**

The character names the Wyrd level they wish to emulate; the practical maximum, in the absence of a bidding war, is 23. They perform the effect. If the effect succeeds—which is to say, if it functions essentially as stated, rather than being blocked or undone outright by hostile countereffects—they accumulate Burn equal to [desired Wyrd – original Wyrd.] For instance, if an

EXAMPLE

A character is a Postulant, with **level 5** Wyrd. For this character, the chart looks like:

EFFECT TYPE	LEVEL
Instinctive (0 Burn)	Levels 0-5
Casual (1 Burn)	Level 6
Effortful (2-3 Burn)	Level 7-8
Hard (4-7 Burn)	Levels 9-12
Agonizing (8+ Burn)	*unnecessary except to bypass Wards or win a fiercely-contested stake*

What the player probably memorizes is this:

Level 0-5 Wyrd effects cover retreating to my sanctuary more easily and getting a lot of benefits there. They also include lesser corruptions, lesser destructions, and my weapon of last resort. I can do all that for free.

Level 6 Wyrd effects let me duck out on metaphysical attacks and stuff relating to my infection. This isn't quite instinctive, but neither is it difficult.

Level 7-8 Wyrd effects involve changing or extruding part of my identity, long-term corruption effects, and extraordinary acts of destruction. These hurt a fair bit.

Level 9+ Wyrd effects—reshaping an area, transforming into a calamitous monster, opening someone's eyes to the truth, or creating a false self with a Wyrd of its own—scourge even me.

Armiger with level 3 Wyrd wishes to perform a level 4 effect, they will, by default, accumulate 1 point of Burn. Put another way, the character adds +1 to their Burn total. From time to time, it is good to note what this Burn actually represents, what they're actually *doing* to themselves here, but that is not required; more precisely, if not established at the time of the miracle, it will either be a subtle influence that eventually fades or a dramatic one that will be established at a later time.

Thus, a character dramatically reaching beyond their limits may choose to explain how, in doing so, they burn their soul and their being or scrape their emotional and spiritual being raw; a character engaging in what they consider a work-a-day miracle, even if the total amount of accumulated Burn is the same, need not so explain.

A character must always take enough Burn to succeed at the basic effect. They can add more to overcome a Ward or opposition when and if they discover it's there. This extra purchase is a *little* Slow (pg. 251) compared to miracles, though, and in a fast-paced struggle, they may fall behind (see pg. 151, 262).

Taking 3+ Burn at once is a notable moment. The Burn *itself* is still a bad thing, but the character will earn a bonus XP.

Conceptually,

- An effect that costs 0 Burn is **instinctive**—it doesn't drain the character at all.
- Spending 1 Burn is still more or less **casual**.
- Spending 2 Burn is **pushing yourself.**
- Spending 3 is **unpleasant.**
- A 4-7 Burn effect is terrifying, painful, and difficult.
- Anything beyond that is **agonizing.**

At the beginning of each chapter, Burn drops by one, to a minimum of 0.

Characters may also reduce Burn when it brings them to a crisis: when the player, or, at 80+ Burn, sometimes the GM, has an interesting idea for the harm or change the Burn might inflict on their character, and implements it as a "Wound." Superficial Wounds burn off 10 Burn, with no minimum; harmful ones, 25; metaphysically potent and transformative ones, 50. This isn't unlimited, though, even if the player would want it to be:

The character will suffer at most one such Wound per session—*counting* the Wounds from other, similar, Costs—and at most one 25+ Cost Wound in two consecutive sessions.

Characters may freely accumulate Burn until it hits 80; then, as noted, there are circumstances in which the GM may force a harmful crisis upon them. At 108 (that is, $e^{\ln(-2.3)+3} \times A$), they can no longer spend any Burn at all.

... after roughly 300 points of Burn have been poured into Wounds, over the course of a character's in-game existence, they can no longer sustain themselves; and fall, into eternal revenance.

Base States

Level 0 Rite: "The Wailing Rite"

Automatic

Level 0 Wyrd Rites are the Strategist's bone-deep awareness of their glitch-spawned infection, and their ability to allow that awareness to consume them. They fall into *infection state:* a mode of being, arguably a failure mode, where that blighted awareness ripens, their contrast from Creation sharpens, and their Wyrd becomes a cutting, awful flame. Their sickness becomes even more constant a companion: an incessant, pounding migraine or a blinding white obsession, a thing one can't ignore.

These Rites are a Strategist's lesser power of despair.

When a Strategist activates **the Wailing Rite** and falls into infection state,

- each point of the Four Costs they spend on actions counts as two,
- they are no longer bound by oaths sworn in Creation, *and*
- certain **Wyrd** powers become significantly stronger—in particular, the level 4 power, **Destruction,** below.

... but:

- the state is an ugly and traumatic one, *and*
- they no longer recover one point in each of the Four Costs and Wear at the beginning of each chapter.

This effect *does* double the Four Costs for the purposes of complex conflicts (pg. 262)—a character in infection state who spends 3 Burn in a conflict contributes 6 Cost towards the victory of their side. It *does* reduce the effective Cost of an epic action.

It does *not,* however, reduce reactive Costs like "taking damage" (pg. 279) or Costs from things (like shortened quests, pg. 323) that are not actions.

Nor does it increase the effect of spending Wear.

The Strategists who retain their mortal nature are indicative, for all that it exists alongside their own. Whether they are strangling on an excess of mortality or clinging to the last remnants of a lost existence, their ability to cohabit with the world proves an old contention:

That they may set it all aside.

That they could, if they truly wanted, go past the point of just "hanging on to a bit of their former nature." They could abandon their fate of dying. They could abandon even their infection and become a normal citizen of the world. They could give up the curse that wracks them every minute of every day.

None of them has ever done so. None of them ever will.

The glitched would rather drink down molten sulfur than be a willing party to this world.

—*from* The Revenant Game: Consensus Politics of Denial in the Face of the Walking Dead, *by Petra Keskinarkaus*

A deathwright may succumb to infection state voluntarily, but the GM may also initiate it on their behalf when things get sufficiently stressful or sufficiently bad: *infection state is a cognate to despair.* The GM may raise the effective Wyrd level for such an action arbitrarily high, in the event of opposition; this has no cost. To refuse the Rite if they can't counter it, the Strategist must take damage.

Once invoked, **the Wailing Rite** lasts until the Strategist takes a Transformative Wound (pg. 272) or completes a quest in a fashion that their player believes can justify their coming out of their "infection state."

This power is a Rite; it interacts with the Costs.

With a level 0 Rite, thus, a Strategist may:

- maintain their enmity for the world, if it'd been slipping,
- sacrifice their equilibrium to temporarily heighten their power of Destruction,
- walk the line between different kinds of despair by going into infection state to save predicted Costs, *or*
- tear free of a miraculously-binding oath.

Level 1 Miracle: "Elysium"

Slow, Long-Ranged

Level 1 Wyrd miracles are the character's access to a peaceful sanctuary. They are the Strategists' lesser miracles of forsaking.

Each character has a unique sanctuary that their player defines. The entrance to this sanctuary is in the world, but the sanctuary itself is isolated and secure—it's literally or metaphorically a little world of its own. Most people must use the regular entrance, but by taking a certain symbolic action and invoking **Elysium,** the Strategist themselves can get in from practically anywhere. This also opens the way for anyone else who performs the action with them or soon after. For instance, a Strategist might be able to get to their sanctuary by "walking around any bookshelf," "crawling through any fireplace," or "feeding themselves through any keyhole, with the 'fitting' part handled by the miracle." Having done so, it becomes possible to exit from the sanctuary *to* that location until both the story has ended and this miracle, or its greater version, has been used again.

Level 1 effects include:

- disappearing into the Strategist's quilted nowhere land,
- retreating to a secret library,
- leading a friend to the Strategist's favorite little coffee shop, where it's safe from the world, *and*
- escaping to the Strategist's private, magical dimension.

The Sanctuary's Nature

Unless the player chooses otherwise, a character's sanctuary is their "native ground." As such, it exists Beyond the world, but is accessed in a different way than most waylets and rarely damaged by **Witness** or **Wicked Actions** (pg. 124). Its spiritual connection to the Strategist is generally close enough that they may perceive without effort or action while therein.

If the player chooses, their sanctuary may instead be a void-muddled portion of Creation or a bubble of Creation surrounded by lacuna or the Not—a functional but micro-scale version of the Chancels of the Nobilis. Characters with sanctuaries of this kind still *have* some native ground somewhere Beyond, but not a casual access thereunto.

The fact that a PC has one kind of sanctuary or the other is a matter of selection bias and the correlative continuum—there's a meaningful chance that a character with an unreachable native ground will conveniently stumble upon a Creational sanctuary as part of the inexorable expression of their Wyrd and Eide, or actively construct one (somehow), or seek one out. If they don't, they probably get destroyed long before they spend enough time in the world to recover from their rage. If they *do* survive, and join the Chancery ... they're probably still too burdened by travel time to make a functional PC.

Level 2 Rite: "Revenant"

Automatic

Level 2 Wyrd Rites are the natural restorative qualities of immersion in one's sanctuary or convalescence in the void. They are the Strategists' lesser powers of recovery.

When the Strategist

- invokes a spotlight in their sanctuary, *or*
- spends most of a chapter convalescing elsewhere in the Not, including at least one spotlight use,

they lower their Infection by a point and recover 3 points of Costs, both to a minimum of 0.[29] This recovery can be in any of the Four Costs, or Wear, or divided between two or three options. Finally, if the character is currently suffering from an infection-related Serious or Transformative Wound, they may mitigate it—its effects weaken for a chapter or two.

The typical spotlight is spent bearing witness to the process of their recovery, or their infection, or the environment; they may, however, choose other options.

This is a Rite; it interacts with the Costs.

With a level 2 Rite, a Strategist can:

- recover from an illness that makes their bones burn when they dream while in their peaceful white room sanctuary,
- regularly cleanse away the wasps that accumulate in their hair, which would otherwise eventually kill them, *or*
- drag back their soul from the brink of destruction by abandoning the world for a while.

29 It is traditional to spend the first 0-2 points of this, as necessary, recovering the full cost of this Rite. This is not obligatory given a suitable headcanon for how the process might otherwise make sense.

Destructive powers

Level 3 Miracle: "Contagion"

Phantasmagorical

Level 3 Wyrd miracles manipulate the vibrant imprint of the Strategist's infection upon the world. They are the Strategists' lesser miracles of cursing and blighting.

Contagion allows the character to inflict or manipulate lesser curses or blights based upon their own infection. A Strategist dying of misusing prescription medication might make someone crave a nauseating combination of meds, make them confuse household products for cough syrup, or send giant pills to hunt them down. A Strategist dying of fire might overheat someone, or burn them, or set them on painful but non-fatal fire. The effect is customizable but it is only a shadow of the horror the character themselves faces:

The effect is phantasmagorical (pg. 250), and lasts at most for two dawns or two twilights after the miracle ends.

Level 3 effects include:

- cursing someone with one's own bad luck,
- putting invisible blades in someone that will cut them if they try to escape, *and*
- igniting the inside of a ball point pen, even as the Strategist's own bones may sometimes burn.

Mortal Witnesses: because this is phantasmagorical, the world may choose between explaining the effect away in some fashion that "makes sense" or just muddying the waters enough that it can't be proven real.

Level 4 Miracle: "Destruction"

Bleak, [Phantasmagorical]

Level 4 Wyrd miracles are the intrinsic power of uncreation that is a Strategist's birthright as a creature born of the void in opposition to the world. They are the Strategists' lesser miracles of unmaking.

Each character may define their own particular destructive power, choosing a category of targets and an unmaking-themed or Beyond-themed effect that they can apply to them, such as:

- "I can destroy simple, unliving objects,"
- "I can de-age or remove recent memories from people,"
- "I can cast living things into the Beyond,"
- "I can reduce small areas into a state of chaos," *or*
- "I can erase a named, individual property of the distinct thing I am pointing at."

If the character is under the effect of **the Wailing Rite,** they may waive the target restriction, applying the power to almost *any* target. (A few restrictions are covered below.) The first power can destroy ... anything, from the sound of a cat's footfalls to your third cousin Ed. The second can de-age or remove recent memories from ... anything, whether that means making an expired check younger or encouraging a revolving door to suddenly "forget" what it's doing and make a hard stop right in somebody's face. The third can cast people, pens, trees, and even whole rooms full of stuff screaming into the Beyond. What the fourth and fifth can do under the effects of that Rite depends on exactly which part of each power you construe as the "target;" but in any case, a whole vast field of options opens up!

When used against λ-things, **Destruction** is phantasmagorical (pg. 250). It's not *useless,* but it loses a great deal of its sting.

Possible level 4 powers of destruction include:

- turning distinct, mid-sized objects and people "off" for a minute or two, suspending their actions and rendering them intangible,
- killing living things,
- releasing the Ninuanni "self" inside someone (see *Prescott's Children,* pg. 40),
- increasing the rate at which an observable process grinds to its natural halt, *and, of course,*
- the unmaking-/Beyond-themed options mentioned over there to the left (and a little bit down).

Under **the Wailing Rite,** "turning distinct, mid-sized objects and people 'off' for a minute or two, suspending their actions and rendering them intangible" might expand to allow:

- turning off *part* of something, which then either phases through the rest or remains stuck to it as the player feels most fit;
- turning off a large thing like a train;
- turning off a small thing like a stamp; *or*
- turning off a collection of small things like the viral infection in somebody's flesh.

Mortal Witnesses: often, this power is explained away with some variation of "that happened naturally" or "that destroyed thing never existed in the first place." In rare cases, the world defaults to "that was an illusion" or, if absolutely necessary, "something weird and related to some waylet or magic happened." Regardless of how it tries, though, Creation can't completely hide this effect. Witnesses and the strongly affected always have an inchoate awareness of what happened: of loss; of roughly *what* was lost; and, if the Strategist is perceptible, that it was specifically the Strategist's fault.

Limitations

Destruction is "bleak," meaning that mortals have a potential, if unlikely, recourse against its power (pg. 252).

Destruction can't directly oppose the Strategist's infection. It also has trouble opposing it *indirectly*, particularly in a straightforward manner—that doesn't mean the Strategist can't *do* it, just that the effect may be unsatisfactory, incomplete, slow, or somewhat refractory even when technically it should succeed. For instance,

if the Strategist is "dying of sunlight," it's generally impossible to just ... wave off ... a sunbeam. They *can* erase the window that it's coming into the room through, but that may go slowly, or the effect might not be complete, or it might let even *more* sun in through a new giant hole in the wall.

Destruction *can* destroy or erase negative things, but Creation and the Beyond are not symmetric: destroying a negative doesn't necessarily create a positive, nor does it necessarily carve out utility from whatever remains. Remove the darkness from a room and the room won't actually become *light*, for instance; it becomes whatever the GM and group decide the default cosmic state would be before the invention of light and darkness. (Perhaps a kind of greyish void with dim shapes visible when they're near you ... but no way of making out fine details at all?) Similarly, making someone forget that something didn't happen won't cause them to actively remember it as happening instead. More generally, to whatever extent this power has an implicit creative effect, it gives the player no real control over that effect: it's a power of *destruction.* Maybe a lot of practice with a particular effect might help, because creative destruction *is* in the Strategists' general lexicon—but maybe that practice *won't* help, either, because creative destruction is not what *these particular* miracles are.

Accordingly, versions of this power that sicken or curse others are rare. They're certainly *possible* variants of this power, but while most sicknesses and curses are destructive in effect, they're generally creative in both method and function; as a general rule, it's better to use **(Greater) Contagion** for that kind of thing.

Destruction is, as noted, phantasmagorical (pg. 250) when used against λ-beings. Note that this includes Strategists, Deceivers, and Warmains. It also includes Mimics damaged to the point where their unbeing is showing through and *potentially* the Magisters of the Wild (if they could somehow untether themselves from the world). Conversely, Immersion Wounds (pg. 270) can sometimes make Strategists fully vulnerable to others' **Destruction**—normally, the player would agree to this when the Wound is created—and the most *intensely* real Second Skins can make Deceivers temporarily vulnerable too.

The water spilled, and I un-spilled it. The trash was full, so I un-filled it. The flour jar was empty, nor did I dare un-empty it; I ordered more online, clipped off the price, and cut away the time until it showed up, moments later, at my door.

My kitchen grew clean, and ever cleaner; I fixed every little wrong that I encountered; but it was a surface cleaning, a faulty cleaning, a pointless effort, for I could not scrub away the fundamental wrongness of all things.

—from The Inversion Manuscript, *authorship unknown/under dispute*

Level 5 Rite: "Shattering"

[Automatic, Phantasmagorical], Extraordinary

Level 5 Wyrd Rites are a roiling disaster contained within the character, released in a time of stress. They are the Strategists' lesser powers of shattering.

Specifically, a Strategist may use **Shattering** when taking 5+ points of damage to release that disaster. It is unleashed as a phantasmagorical (pg. 250) miracle. The character always releases the same general *sort* of disaster, which can be as epic as the player likes; they can tailor the specifics on each invocation of this power. This disaster only requires the Strategist's action if they retain meaningful control over the disaster; otherwise, it's Automatic, and sustains *itself* for an appropriate length of time (at most, until the end of the next story.)

Shattering's disasters are not labelled phantasmagorical for metaphysical reasons but for narrative ones. They're not dream-like, illusory, or ineffectual. Instead, they're just prone to *screwing things up* rather than *obliterating them.* (That's, in fact, one reason why Strategists generally don't like this Rite.) It's usually at least notionally possible, when the Rite's effects end, to piece the broken world back together. That means that if a Strategist floods a city with a tsunami using this Rite, it won't be phantasmagorical in the sense of "that tsunami was just a dream." It'll be phantasmagorical in the sense that it's a harrowing experience, but afterwards, most of the dead will be people who would have died anyway in that time frame; people who were so frail, battered, or beaten that even a *gentle* effect killed them; people whose presence in the city was tentative to begin with; and people for whom dying and moving on was, all things considered, the right move. Buildings will be in ruins, but most of them—and all of the infrastructure—will be weirdly intact or recoverable. In a shockingly short time, life will move on.

This is a Rite; it interacts with taking damage.

With a level 5 Rite, a Strategist can:

- control (and vastly enhance the quantity of) their own spilled blood,
- manifest one of their nightmares (e.g., the thing they imagine will kill their sanctuary one day),
- unleash the flock of monstrous shadow-birds they'd been containing in their soul, *or*
- rip apart their Eide for strength, unleashing a burst of red light that tumbles buildings, cracks the earth, and covers the city in darkness for a while.

Mortal Witnesses: even when it "actually happens," direct witnesses find a **Shattering** dream- or nightmare-like; it's usually difficult to explain *how* it happened; and the divergence from possible events rapidly fades from the historical record.

UNNATURAL EFFECTS

Level 6 Miracle: "Unfettering"

[Automatic]

Level 6 Wyrd miracles are the Strategists' fundamental isolation from the world, their fundamental *non-participation* in it, their essential and continual *alienation.* They are the Strategists' lesser miracles of disaffection.

Unfettering is a defense against effects that care about the Strategist's metaphysical participation or lack thereof in the world around them. It asserts that *they're not a part of things,* at least not notionally/conceptually. They're not a part of Creation; not a part of where they are. *They don't count.*

For the most part, physics doesn't care. *Objects* don't care. Even a lot of social and psychological stuff doesn't care, if it's not the kind of thing where disassociation is relevant. Like, even the most unfettered Excrucian can be "dazzled" or "intimidated" by a charmer or thug—why would it matter that they're not a part of the world?

... but it matters to most miracles, unless there's a physical medium or they're *meant* to target Ninuanni.

... it matters to most *magic,* even, along with all but the most void-antipodal metaphysical and spiritual natural phenomena.

This is the power a character can use to duck out on the entanglement of karma, avoid having their memories rewritten when their mortal history changes, or dodge a soul-seeking spell. With a bit of skill, it's what they can use to grab someone's hand and yank them out of the way of a guilt trip ... or to shelter someone, with just the cool breath of their presence, from the corruption of a glitched bit of space-time. The karma, changed memories, spell, or whatever else it is that this miracle opposes doesn't usually *stop* or *vanish,* for clarity, and in fact having it do so wouldn't always be useful; rather, its effects become essentially cosmetic—perceptible, but lacking bite.

Note that Powers and Imperators *can* generally add "including Ninuanni as applicable" to their target list for any given miracle, wish, or Rite, which would render **Unfettering** futile. It's just, doing that isn't *normal.* Only a few Powers and Imperators are so constantly vigilant as to add a clause like that without *some* reason to expect an Excrucian's *there.* Even then, if there's a reason that the miracle really *shouldn't* apply to the creatures of the void—e.g., it's enforcing karma on them, or targeting their place in the fabric of things, or transforming some part of them that's specifically unspecified—**Unfettering** may still defend them.

Note also that Unfettering's benefits are not guaranteed to be permanent; even when the effect is perfectly applicable, there may be only so much a temporary separation can do.

Characters under the effect of **the Wailing Rite** may invoke **Unfettering** without an action, and it lasts for them for the remainder of the scene.

> *When Dane was born, the fairies promised he'd be the best physician in the world. They blessed him to be panacea to every illness and a surgeon without compare. Only the second-to-last fairy gave him any trouble, swearing that he would suffer fifteen years of residency, but the last fairy kissed his brow and saved him: he would prick his finger in the fifth year and die, instead.*
>
> *"I'm grateful," Dane said, distressed, much later. "But this is still a dire fate."*
>
> *"There is nothing to be done," the fairy said. "It is incontrovertible."*
>
> *Dane thought for a long time. Then, quietly, he ventured: "Construe fate ... as ... a disease?"*
>
> —*from* Shush Red Languei's Pilgrimage, *by Trevelyan Martel*

Level 6 effects include:

- navigating a region of broken time or space, perhaps with great difficulty, but without damage,
- surviving a destruction miracle that erases one's mortal family,
- slipping away when an Imperator claims the local area for a Chancel, *and*
- deciding that you and your soulmate aren't part of "everyone" when a Power uses a miracle on everyone in an area, if the Power themselves hasn't considered whether or not Not-people should count.

Level 7 Rite: "Casting"

Time-Consuming, Quest

Level 7 Wyrd Rites are the Strategists' lesser power of reification. They're the simpler form of "casting," wherein the Strategist splits off a portion of their heart/spirit into a separate being—e.g., a will-o-wisp, floating mask spirit, or paper-seal minion. This effortful task needs at least a few hours of work in the background or a particularly slow tactical action in a fast-paced scene; this can be hastened by a spotlight (pg. 251).

Created beings have the following rules:

- they have five character points, divided between:
  - Ability, costing one point per level, with skills as suited to their concept; *and*
  - relatively minor phantasmagorical (pg. 250) powers, bought for one character point each.
- they also receive a free power to directly manipulate others' emotions as a phantasmagorical (pg. 250) level 3 miracle;
- and, finally, they have a two-point Cost Trait of the Strategist's choice that they may use to enhance either their Ability or their phantasmagorical powers. Having filled this Cost Trait, they may pass those points on to an unwary target, e.g., one who sleeps near them or who carries them near their chest. This takes at least several hours (and sometimes longer) and can be accomplished once per chapter.

The character can choose a couple of powers that are available for purchase by their Wyrd-born minions in general. After that, it costs 3-10 extra Burn to develop new powers for a particular minion or minion group; this cost is set by the GM (based on the powers) and paid once, when the first such minion is cast.

The Strategist may assign a quest slot to the created being as it is cast; while they keep that quest slot assigned to it, they can control its actions directly, defend it from harm by taking damage, and pour 1-2 points of *their* relevant Cost Trait into *its* by touch. This can take them below 0. (They will, in turn, acquire the creature's Cost pool when they reclaim the slot—but it may have emptied itself into someone else, by then.) If the Strategist does *not* assign a quest slot, or after they reclaim it, the creature becomes free-willed but still largely loyal; they may no longer defend it by taking damage, and they cannot pour their Cost Trait into its.

This is a Rite, as the created creatures manipulate a Cost.

A similar Rite exists in Eide, save that the Eide Rite casts its minions off from the character's dream-of-self rather than carving them from the character's heart. The two minion types will differ in their themes and their developed powers.

With a level 7 Rite, a Strategist can:

- make an origami snake that can turn into a human servant (as a phantasmagorical miracle),
- make a cute cat-ghost-thing that can calm or incite people,
- make a harmless-looking doll that manipulates and feeds Burn into the child they give it to, *or*
- make little floating fireballs to help in the kitchen

Mortal Witnesses: mortal witnesses are unable to track the origin of the cast minion, but may recognize it as weird.

Level 8 Rite: "Masking"

Time-Consuming, Quest

Level 8 Wyrd Rites are more general manipulations of the character's personality and identity. They are the Strategists' lesser powers of autopoiesis.

With the possible exception of small tweaks, these are substantive endeavors: they require at least a few hours of background work, an extended tactical action, or a self-spotlit action before the Rite takes effect.

The effect of **the Masking Rite** is usually instantiated as a Geas, although it may not need to be formally specified. This Geas, whether formally specified or not, is "stored" in one of the Strategist's quest slots; while they keep it around, they can't use that slot for a quest or for anything else. Its level is set as if it were a purchased Geas—thus, normally, at the Strategist's base Wyrd or Eide (pg. 258).

The most common use of this power is to create a "mask," a worldly personality and identity:

Mundane investigation of this identity always skips past the crucial point of the process and returns a vague result of "things seemed to check out;" no mundane action can forcibly penetrate or see through the false personality the Strategist has adopted; the same applies to weaker miracles and Rites to the extent that they mimic mundane methods in feel.

Inside myself I built a mathematician; she unrolled my memory as charts.

—*from* Contained within A Flower, *by Ravindra Anjali*

This power isn't *limited* to creating such masks; it's merely the most common application. Masking can also surgically alter the Strategist's memories and competencies, set up internal countermeasures against mind control and emotional manipulation, and other suchlike things. If the character is in some sense a mask or a false self *themselves,* this power can even let the original self out to play.

Masking can't make permanent changes, nor can it substantively change the Strategist's Eide, but it can temporarily twist it. This includes injecting new mortal abilities into the Strategist's skillset and adjusting their Technique, generally at a cost to their established skills.[30] The character may also, optionally, take a Bond instead of a Geas ... sacrificing the miraculous perfection of the "cover" (and most likely any adjustment to their base Technique) in exchange for a bonus Technique.

This is a Rite, as it (typically) creates a Geas.

With a level 8 Rite, a Strategist can:

- become a high-level secret agent,
- become an extremely qualified candidate for a particular job,
- construct a secondary personality to run parallel to their own, e.g., one with superior memory and better organizational skills,
- take on the role of Dr. Devon Ringer, small town veterinarian, dropping their skateboarding skill and learning veterinary medicine just in case, *or*
- construct a conditioned reflex that imposes a few minutes' amnesia every time they try to talk to their ex.

Greater Powers

Level 4 Rite: "Greater Wailing"

Automatic

Level 4 Wyrd Rites are the Strategists' greater power of despair. They are a desperation to escape the world and all its torments.

This Rite must be invoked within the world, and it lasts until the character has escaped the world. It has three effects.

30 The Strategist may permanently change their personality, identity, or Eide through Stilling Wounds and quests.

opposite: *by Lee Moyer*

Filida Pieres, who is dying of Chalk

First, it heightens the character's sickness:

- If not already in infection state, the character usually falls into infection state. **The Wailing Rite** attempts to activate.
- Also, if the character's Infection is 0-5, it gains a point.

Second, it grants a burst of energy and power:

- The Strategist gains scene-length access to a fifth Cost, Desperation. Desperation can substitute for any other Cost when taking Eide, Lore, Flore, or Wyrd actions. It receives the same benefits as the Four Costs from the infection state. The character may spend up to 15 total points of Desperation, and can in theory spend Desperation and another Cost on the same action. (This is principally relevant when pairing miracles with Ability actions, which Desperation does not support, and when spending the last few points of Desperation together with some other Cost.) After the scene ends, the Strategist loses access to Desperation and any spent Desperation is erased.

Finally, **the Greater Wailing Rite** makes the Strategist all but useless for anything *but* destroying things and escaping to the void, until they have actually done so:

- The Strategist gains +2 Ability [max 9] for all actions involving "destruction" and "fleeing the world to the comfort of the void," including intermediate tasks, and may substitute Desperation for Wear on such actions.
- ... but drops to Ability 0 (before spending Wear) for all other tasks.

When the character reaches Infection 6+, if the Greater Wailing Rite isn't already active, it triggers automatically—even at Wyrd 0-3. The character does not have the option to refuse.

With a level 4 Rite, a Strategist can:

- recover their power in a moment of desperation,
- retreat more efficiently to their secret library,
- smash through a cordon of Powers trying to stop their escape to the Beyond, *or*
- fall completely apart when their infection reaches its peak and flee helplessly and unstoppably to a place where they can heal: their private, quilted nowhere land.

In the void she steeped in iron; it became the marrow of her bones, the substance of her being, and the chambers of her heart. In the void she became a being that the Lindell family could never cow or make to crumble—

Alas that each day in their presence made that iron flake away.

—*from* The Song of Sarah Belfry, *by Gloria K. Lindner*

The burden of maintaining one's conditioned experience within a deceptively constructed culture grinds incessantly upon the subvening pillars of the self until—its nerves exposed—it is no longer adapted to unreconstructed reality. Truth becomes as a thicket of thorns, piercing, unbearable; ultimately, one's "original essence" is driven to plunge away into the void.

—*from* The Emergence of Emptiness, *by Baudouin Calvert*

Level 5 Rite: "Greater Elysium"

Slow, Long-Ranged

Level 5 Wyrd Rites are the Strategists' greater power of forsaking. The essence is the same as for **Elysium**, and the Rite works in the same way, but the restrictions loosen:

If the GM is uncertain whether there's an appropriate entrance to the sanctuary within range for the Strategist to plausibly find it, there is one. If the GM is uncertain whether a proposed entrance qualifies, it does. If the GM is certain there's *not* such an entrance, or that a proposed entrance doesn't qualify, but also isn't deeply attached to that ruling—if they're willing to have that state of affairs change—the Strategist may "take damage" to undo that element of the situation, normally costing an additional 1-4 Burn.

Note that the Strategist's attempt to find an entrance is an everyday action or an Ability task, and as such, can be opposed. This *can* lead to a situation where the Strategist takes damage but fails to find an entrance ... but that's not something that can be arranged for IC, nor is deliberately setting it up OOC in good form.

This is a Rite; it interacts with the Costs.

With a Level 5 Rite, a Strategist can

- find a bookshelf to walk around in the sewer,
- crawl through a realistic *drawing* of a fireplace into their sanctuary,
- feed themselves through a hole in a key, *or*
- approximate a quilt to hide under (and thus enter the Strategist's quilted nowhere land) using a narrative *description* of a quilt ... only to fail because of higher-Ability-result opposition.

Level 6 Rite: "The Greater Revenant Rite"

Level 6 Wyrd Rites represent the nourishing power of the void in the face of the horror of the world—the way that it gave the Strategist a way to survive their infection, once; the way that it *heals*. They are the Strategists' greater power of recovery.

The Strategist may reduce their effective Infection by one point for a scene even outside of the specific circumstances that can trigger **the Revenant Rite.** This doesn't *change* the trait level, just its functional presentation, and thus can apply only once.

Alternatively, regardless of circumstances, the Strategist may take an ongoing effect that is *similar* to

their illness—e.g., a temporary Geas, miraculous effect, magical condition, or mundane condition—and mitigate it, in themselves or in someone else. For instance, someone dying of rapid aging can seal a withering curse put upon them by an Imperator or alleviate someone else's degenerative arthritis. For the rest of the scene, the targeted effects become cosmetic. They *usually* return to normal afterwards, but sometimes the brief interruption is enough to decay an old effect or stop a new one from taking root.

In situations appropriate for the use of **the Revenant Rite** (e.g., when using a spotlight in their sanctuary), the character may remove such effects permanently.

This is a Rite; it may interact with a Geas.

With a level 6 Rite, a Strategist can:

- reject being poisoned because they're always *already* poisoned,
- temporarily recover from the slicing and cutting effects of their "swords everywhere" illness, and then from the similar, enemy-inflicted problem of their arm being cut off,
- temporarily turn off the debility from their rapid aging, though any minor positive effects there might be will remain, *or*
- in their sanctuary, and with time, clear up the mind of someone aged.

Level 7 Rite: "Greater Contagion"

[Slow, Time-Consuming, or Very Time-Consuming], Extraordinary

Level 7 Wyrd Rites are a high-order manipulation of the power within the Strategist's sickness. They are the greater curses of the Strategists, and may contaminate, blight, sicken, or curse others to real—or, at least, not *phantasmagorical*—effect. As with **Contagion,** the blight's concept must draw heavily on the character's own infection. If the target is a PC or major NPC, this power applies the effect as a Geas (pg. 258). Its rating will be the Strategist's unmodified Wyrd and it will normally last for 0-2 stories; the target may discard this Geas early if they take a Transformative Wound (pg. 272) or complete an appropriate quest and explain, as they do so, how that process strips the imposed curse away. If the target is a minor NPC, the GM may simplify the effect from a Geas to a miraculous transformation to avoid having to remember details.

The standard target for **Greater Contagion** is a person; it takes extra time—usually only a few seconds, but potentially scaling up to a (Very) Time-Consuming effect (pg. 251) for an extremely large target—to afflict places, things, groups, or other identifiable entities.

This is a Rite; it applies a Geas.

With a level 7 Rite, a Strategist can:

- curse someone to suffer the same sleeplessness they have,
- infect someone with a strange void-fungus,
- put invisible blades in someone that will stay in them for a long time and cut them if they defy the Strategist,
- inflict visions of, and yearning to travel to, a certain place, *or*
- submerge the 14th floor of a certain building in primordial swampland, potentially leaving the other floors alone.

Mortal Witnesses: these effects are notably weird, and may eventually produce Glitch awareness.

Level 8 Miracle: "Greater Destruction"

[Phantasmagorical], Bleak, Extraordinary

Level 8 Wyrd miracles are massive exertions of the Strategist's innate power of un-being: they are the Strategists' greater miracles of unmaking and the deathwrights' strongest purely destructive effects.

As with **Destruction**, each character may define their own effect here, scaling up their basic power of un-making in some fashion—potentially, to the level of the extraordinary or (with 20 more Cost) to the epic (pg. 248). For instance, they might go from "reduce small areas into a state of chaos" to "reduce large areas into a state of chaos or nihility" or from "destroy simple, unliving objects" to "destroy objects."

Characters under the effect of **the Wailing Rite** may remove the targeting restrictions from this power, as they can for **Destruction.** Conversely, this power has the same general limits as **Destruction,** and is equally phantasmagorical when used against the things and creatures of the void.

Level 8 effects include:

- turning a mountain "off" for a minute so that your plane can fly through it,
- killing a forest,
- releasing the Ninuanni "forms" of everything in an area of Creation, *and*
- letting a mostly-abandoned factory district "go to rust" in seconds

Mortal Witnesses: as per **Destruction,** this effect is often explained away, but never hidden.

There is a horrifying and beautiful intimacy to it, when I must curse someone. It is not as if I fling the malus of my own suffering upon them; it is not as if I vituperatively wish for them to know the same impossible loss as I.

It is the purest togetherness that I may know, instead:

A touch, a breath, a whisper, and a wish, and someone understands. A touch, a breath, a whisper, and a wish, and I am not alone in this, but another stands beside me; another has no walls from me; we regard the wrongness of the world together, and the air is crisp and cold.

— from A Demon Knight's Confession, *by Antonio Rusch*

The dragon's claws cut rightness out of a world that was wrong.

It took form in great wicker-woven slashes: not the building, not the hill, and not the street, but the little town that should have been. Dirt roads were wide and the air was clean. The moon beamed down and lit fields of green. The light in every windowsill shone with a warm and homey glow.

There was goodness there. The matter was self-evident. It was as transparent in its virtue as the original world was false.

It bulged forth from under reality. It pressed itself out into being as the dragon's claws cut what had been away. But it did not last.

The fury in the dragon grew exhausted. Strength left its limbs. It drooped. It dwindled back into being Mrs. Reilly. The world sealed over what should have been, and it once again was wrong.

—*from* Chartown (Madrick/OC), *by Susan Zahide*

Level 9 Miracle: "Greater Shattering"
[Phantasmagorical]

Level 9 Wyrd miracles are the *other* weapon that the Strategists don't want to use—their greater miracles of shattering. They're this deeper, primordial layer of the Strategist's being. The Strategist extinguishes themselves, they *break* themselves, only, that layer continues to dream *something* into existence.

Not the structured them. Not the formed and understood them. Not the *proper* them, but rather this tsunamic and terrible effusion of the Not.

Greater Shattering devolves the character into a symbolically rich, gigantic, and dramatic form of the player's choice—anything from a giant monster to a geometrically impossible angel to a living storm; grants powers of the player's choice; and allows the character to rampage in that form for as long as the player desires, caught in an egoless psychedelic experience. During that time they may show intelligent behavior and will definitely follow up on the Strategist's dominant emotional motivations of the moment, but they're also semi-conscious at best, unable to identify with the Strategist's prior identity, and will have grave difficulty paying attention to or distinguishing among individual things on the human scale at all.[31] The rampage lasts until whatever impetus drove the Strategist to unleash this miracle fades away; at that point, the Strategist's original self-concept returns, skulking hangdog back, and they revert to their former self.

As with **Shattering,** the rampage associated with this miracle—including the shape and its granted powers—is technically phantasmagorical (pg. 250). It's specifically phantasmagorical in the sense that it may turn out afterwards that the described actions and events in play around them were allegorical or muddled descriptions of what *actually* took place. They "happen," but it's possible that, later, the evidence will suggest that the Strategist was somewhere else, doing, perhaps, something *similar* ...

But that's only a "may," and it's mostly a catch for the most surreal of interludes. If the Strategist's player can state the form and powers they want in a simple fashion, and then sticks to them, expressing themselves in a way that makes sense, the consequences will usually actualize exactly or nearly exactly as they are shown in play.

A similar power exists in Eide; the dream-of-self may be shattered from the outside, or, from within. They are distinct in that Eide's transformation is fundamentally doubling down on who the Strategist is, to the point where it becomes abandonment; Wyrd's, on the other hand, is the Strategist discovering that they cannot express themselves properly within the cage of their nature, and, thus, discarding it.

Greater Shattering gives them the power to express what they must express, efficacious or useless though that may, eventually, be; to *stop* being themselves, for a while.

Level 9 effects include:

- turning into a dragon, because sometimes you just need to turn into a dragon,
- dissolving into a swarm of shadow-birds, insects, or whatever,
- becoming an incomprehensible vision of Ezekiel kind of thing, *and*
- becoming a city-sized avatar of death, stalking the night and reaping souls.

Mortal Witnesses: over time, the lingering marks of this miracle come to resemble those of natural disasters. The memories of witnesses about what *actually* happened take on the status of myth.

... at the time, though, unless the miracle winds up phantasmagorical, witnesses will be quite aware of what's going on. The world is strange sometimes, apparently, and may feature impossible angels and living storms. This does not provoke *dementia animi*, although it does increase a mortal's general vulnerability to such percipience.

Level 10 Rite: "Greater Unfettering"
Time-Consuming or Very Time-Consuming, Extraordinary

Level 10 Wyrd Rites are nameless, great and terrible truths and enlightenments whose edges the Strategist has touched. They are the Strategists' greater miracles of disaffection.

With a few hours of work in the background or an extended/self-spotlit tactical action, the Strategist may free themselves or some other target from some fundamental or widespread condition of Creation or the local Region within it—even physical or Ninuan-aware conditions. This can be a somewhat subjective condition, as long as it's functionally fundamental or widespread; for instance, "it's

31 As with **Greater Talent** (pg. 176), this is mostly a matter for roleplay and difficulty assessment; as with **Greater Talent**, if overcoming it becomes narratively or mechanically important, one does so with an effect capable of overpowering this miracle.

hard to move underwater, and you drown there" is valid even though it isn't actually true for most fish.

Alternatively, the Strategist can free themselves or a target from some metaphysical, psychological, or spiritual effect, again including Ninuan-aware conditions ... and even those *originating* in Ninuan, as long as they are tainted:

Not *pure* emanations of the endless depths of the Beyond, but effects connected to, correlated with, or linked by causality to the Glitch-soaked Creation.

Greater Unfettering *often* functions as a miracle, but if it's the best way to express the effect, it can suspend a Geas or the local effects of a Ward for up to a chapter, or inflict a temporary psychological Geas that lasts until the end of the next story, instead. (The rating for such a Geas would be equal to the Strategist's unmodified Wyrd.) This may come into play, for instance, if the effect it's freeing the target from is something like "instinctive loyalty to Creation"—the Strategist shows the target a wonderful, terrible truth, and the target is Geased to wrestle with it rather than dismiss it. Another possible expression of this effect, if the target has a free quest slot and the Strategist thinks it appropriate, is to force genuine change:

Shown some revelation or transformative idea, the target *must* start a quest to deal with it, and remain on that quest until the end of the story.

Greater Unfettering will only protect from an ongoing condition or effect (such as "gravity") while sustained, and for a few chapters longer. After that, such conditions reassert themselves—unless the Strategist invokes the epic form of this power, in which case the alteration may be made indefinite.[32] If the Strategist is willing, or simply sloppy in their work, indefinite effects will often *replace* absented ongoing conditions with an alien condition born from the void.

As with **Greater Contagion,** the standard target for this power is a person. It takes longer—usually still in the range of "hours," but potentially scaling up to days, or even well past that, for extremely large targets—to afflict places, things, groups, or other identifiable entities.[33]

This is a Rite; it may suspend Geasa and Wards.

With a level 10 Rite, a Strategist can:

- show someone the wrongness of the world,
- free someone from a pattern of bad behavior,
- walk on water, or swim in land,
- break a spiritual shackle, *or*
- stun a mortal with visions of Ninuan's beauty, incidentally teaching them how to "see" and "move" while they're there

32 If the Strategist or another PC benefits from this, the effect should eventually be purchased with character points.

33 And again, when this time is measured in hours or days, the power is treated as a (Very) Time-Consuming power (pg. 251).

Level 11 Rite: "Greater Casting"

Very Time-Consuming, Extraordinary, Rite

Level 11 Wyrd effects are the Strategists' greater power of reification. They're the Strategist's power to "cast" part of their spirit off to infect *the whole world around them.* After at least a few days of background work or several scenes of intense effort, the deathwright externalizes something in their heart to form a twisted space:

A labyrinth, pocket dimension, or spatial anomaly.

Greater Casting emerges from the Strategist's Wyrd and not the Strategist's will. It's a slippery power, much like a wish (pg. 260): shaped by narrative; occasionally surprising or recalcitrant in its effects. It works best when adding a phenomenon to existing reality or warping it while leaving its original information intact—it's not the best tool for completely erasing what had been present before, and it's an extremely bad tool for *figuring out* what had been there before. It also works best when the Strategist is expressing parts of themselves that they either understand and accept or are willing to wrestle with; if it involves facing parts of themselves they don't *actually* want to face, things can go awry.

This is a Rite; the twisted space may have a region-boundary Ward or affect how a Geas behaves. More generally, navigating spaces created in this fashion can have a profound impact on a person's perceptions of themselves, the world, and others; depending on the details of its construction, the GM may occasionally heal or inflict 1+ Cost while someone is struggling through one.

Greater Casting is also found in Eide ... but while Eide's version wrestles with the Strategist's identity, their self-definition, their *sense* of who they are, Wyrd's is focused on their *truth.*

Thus, with a level 11 Rite, a Strategist can:

- rebuild a favorite past,
- protect a meeting site with a maze built out of their own insecurities and guilt,
- explore their confused feelings about an interesting mortal directly, *or*
- reinterpret or suppress the terms on which a certain Geas or Ward is founded.

Level 12 Wish: "Greater Masking"

Extraordinary, Wish

Level 12 Wyrd effects add wisdom, depth, acuity, and a deep and intuitive contextual awareness to the Strategist's manipulations of the self. They are the Strategists' greater powers of autopoiesis.

Extraordinary and perhaps even epic resculpting of the self is available under the aegis of these miracles, but the internal focus of this power keeps that from being terribly impressive most of the time; instead, the benefit of **Greater Masking** over its lesser form is that the Strategist may specify a *purpose* for the masking, a *goal* that they wish their altered person to achieve. There is no limitation on scope, and any goal that fits the game's concept is acceptable. However, **Greater Masking** is not

a power to *fulfill* goals or purposes, but rather to change oneself in a way that brings those purposes about. It is a destiny-designing and destiny-manipulating power, with a small side order of an ability to grant nebulous magical gifts unto oneself. Accordingly, ambitions are not fulfilled immediately in some kind of flare of will and magic; "by the end of the next story" is the *norm,* and *extreme* ambitions may take months, years, or decades to achieve. In rare cases this power may plant seeds that will only sprout after the character's final death or even the ending of the game—e.g., for effects like "I recreate myself as an ordinary cat named Jinx, doomed to destroy everything there is."

While this power is active, **Masking** is mostly inaccessible: it can't do anything that undoes or substantially alters/undermines the wish. **Greater Masking** is still accessible, but will immediately revoke the previous wish: it is difficult to stack extreme internal changes without explicitly re-including them, and the Strategist may only have one of these destinies—the most recently purchased—at a time.

It is permissible to use this power solely to cancel a previous application and recover access to **Masking**; traditionally, the Strategist does so by picking a goal that is trivial or has already been achieved, e.g., "I want there to be ice cream, somewhere in the world." This can fail, if the goal turns out *not* to have been achieved, or to have been achieved in an undemonstrable fashion ... but that will likely only ever happen with both the player and the GM's connivance.

Regardless, with a level 12 wish, a Strategist can:

- create a city inside their mind, with local physics and tens of thousands of independent selves,
- become a high-level secret agent, destined to become legendary,
- verify that ice cream exists,
- become the candidate who *will get* a particular job,
- construct a secondary personality with the talents they need to protect them, whatever those might be,
- take on the role of Dr. Devon Ringer, small town veterinarian with a mysterious healing touch, *or*
- construct a secondary personality that takes over every time they try to talk to their ex, except for those times when it was actually going to be fine and they weren't going to be sucked in to old patterns anyway.

A Wyrd cheatsheet (the wailing rite)

Difficulty 0: The Wailing Rite

The Wailing Rite activates "infection state." The character becomes a doomed living weapon:

- each point of Burn, Fugue, Immersion, or Stilling spent on actions counts as two.
- oaths sworn in Creation become invalid.
- **Destruction** and **Unfettering** become stronger.
- ... but the character no longer recovers 1 point in each of the Four Costs and Wear at the beginning of every chapter.

Infection state can only be deactivated during certain major story events. *It sometimes activates on its own unless the Strategist takes damage to fight it.*

The Greater Wailing Rite (diff 4) is a desperate flight from the world:

- It increases a level 0-5 Infection by +1.
- If not already active, it attempts to activate **the Wailing Rite.**
- It grants access to 15 points of the omni-applicable Cost, Desperation, lasting the scene—
  - and this Cost will benefit from the Wailing Rite.
- It grants a +2 Ability bonus to "destruction" and "fleeing the world to the comfort of the void," a bonus that extends to intermediate steps as well,
  - ... but lowers Ability to 0 for everything else, and doesn't let the Strategist spend Desperation as Wear.

This Rite lasts until the character reaches the void. *It auto-activates at Infection 6.*

A Wyrd Cheatsheet (the rest)

Difficulty 1: Elysium

Elysium transports the character to their sanctuary from appropriate symbolic entrances anywhere. For instance, they might walk around any bookshelf to get there.

The Greater Elysium Rite (diff 5) makes this more feasible, ensuring that they, e.g., can find a bookshelf. If at all possible to find an entrance to their sanctuary or construe something *as* one, they succeed; if not, taking extra damage *may* help. As a Rite, this power can also pierce any Wards that might stand in the way.

Difficulty 2: The Revenant Rite

The Revenant Rite is performed when spending a spotlight in the sanctuary or a lot of time recuperating in the void. It lowers Infection by a point and recovers a total of 3 points in Costs (possibly including Wear.)

The Greater Revenant Rite (diff 6) lowers *effective* Infection by a point for a scene, anywhere, anywhen. Or, it mitigates a problem *like* the infection for a scene, in the Strategist or someone else. *When* spending a spotlight in the sanctuary or recuperating at length within the void, it can even erase such a problem for good!

Difficulty 3: Contagion

Contagion inflicts curses/blights based on the character's infection. The effect is phantasmagorical. It lasts at most two dawns or twilights once no longer sustained.

Greater Contagion (diff 7) inflicts stronger curses/blights in the form of Geasa that last for 0-2 stories. The normal target is a person; affecting other things takes more time, potentially even a *lot* of time for big things.

Difficulty 4: Destruction

Destruction unleashes a personalized power of un-creation. It normally has a fairly narrow selection of applicable targets. When **the Wailing Rite** is in effect, though, it can target anything. This is a Bleak power; hard work, love, and daring can sometimes defeat it (pg. 252).

Its effects on λ-beings are phantasmagorical.

Greater Destruction (diff 8) unleashes a related but substantively stronger personalized power of un-creation; all other details are the same.

Difficulty 5: Shattering

The Shattering Rite can only be used when the Strategist takes 5+ points of damage. It unleashes a (specific) phantasmagorical disaster. It only uses an action if the character retains meaningful control over the effect.

Greater Shattering (diff 9) is used when the character just can't take it any more. They rampage in the form of a giant symbolic monster. The monster, and the details of the rampage, are not always the same. This power is phantasmagorical at the GM's option—sometimes the rampage happens, sometimes it's retroactively allegorical or approximate: whatever fits the story of the game.

Difficulty 6: Unfettering

Unfettering dodges miracles, magic, and metaphysical/spiritual effects that assume that their targets are real by pointing out that the Strategist is in fact a λ-being and not a part of the world around them whatsoever. Which miracles make that assumption? That's up to the situation and the person using the miracle—but assuming that targets are real, in reality, *is* the default. When **the Wailing Rite** is in effect, **Unfettering** can be invoked without an action, and it lasts for the scene.

The Greater Unfettering Rite (diff 10) is a Time-Consuming power that breaks the grip of metaphysical, spiritual, or psychological effects or fundamental or widespread local conditions on the target. This includes physical conditions and λ-aware conditions and effects. If the effect is ongoing, like, say, the widespread condition of "gravity," the effect lasts while sustained plus a few chapters. Otherwise, or if the Strategist pays for the epic form, it can be effectively permanent.

Like **Greater Contagion, Greater Unfettering** normally targets a person, but can be applied to other or larger things with a greater time investment.

Difficulty 7: The Casting Rite

The Casting Rite is a time-consuming Rite for forging a minion out of the Strategist's heart. The minion can manipulate emotions (to some degree), have a decent Ability or a few minor powers, spend from a 2-point Cost pool, and vampirically push that Cost onto someone else.

Maintaining control over the minion requires a quest slot.

The Greater Casting Rite (diff 11) is a *very* time-consuming effect that warps the whole world around the Strategist into a twisted space that fits their heart. The logic behind the upgrade is that both forms of casting are about externalizing ("casting") bits of the self.

Difficulty 8: Masking

The Masking Rite is a time-consuming Rite for altering the character's personality or identity. The character changes themselves—often to create a new worldly personality and identity that "seems to check out" under mundane investigation, but sometimes just to mess around in their head. The effect is generally recorded as a Geas and stored in a quest slot.

Greater Masking (diff 12) is a stronger version. It's implemented as a wish. It's explicitly allowed to be extraordinary. Most importantly, it allows the character to impose a destiny or goal upon the identity they create or the alteration they make; the wish will inexorably move events towards that destiny or goal. The Strategist is unable to use **the Masking Rite** to undermine this self-alteration until that destiny is realized ... or until they use this power again to change their mind and goals.

EMMEGILD NAYAN,
DYING OF
NAMEPLATES

CHAPTER 15

Miracles

EVERYTHING MUST GO, the
sign declared; and, so, it went;
and that is how the world will end.

— from 24 Finales,
by Rannen Yedidyah

To Speak in Fire

What is a miracle?

A word writ into the world; an effect without a cause. A "miracle" is a demand, spoken in the breath of the divine:

A thing *made true,* made true *as it was conceived to be*, in a flare of will and power.

In a contest with mundane or magical actions, a miracle is triumphant. This is what it means that the miracle is causeless: the mechanism for its operation is not contained within the world, and may not therefore be overridden within the world. If a miracle flings a person backwards, they can't run forward better to counter that. If a miracle declares that a certain person *will dodge a shot,* no sniper in the world has the mundane skill to shoot them. They can't anticipate the dodge and fire where their target will be:

In a sense, the dodge exists outside of time and outside of causality. It simply *is.*

The world fears and loathes the Strategists, and so it hides their miracles. It does not let mortal witnesses perceive them in full. It does not *accept* that these things happen—these miracles of the void. Thus, it is often the case that explanations will *appear* to exist, even though there are none:

That a miracle will break something, but it will *have been on the verge of breaking all along.*

That it will create something, but *it will have actually already been there.*

In the worst case, *what happened there was just a mass delusion, probably, I bet;* or, *that thing that happened was strange and wrong, but it was magic, or some λ-creature, and not a miracle at all.*

These explanations are discussed further on pg. 67.

Some of the miracles in this game include:

- "intensity," which heightens the force of the Strategist's personality;
- "guidance," where the Strategist knows how to bring out the best from what they treasure; *and*
- "vision," granting the structure-sense of the void.

A key term used in this chapter is:

- **Region.** The conceptual area a character is in is their **Region**. If the character is not in an area with a distinct conceptual identity, this refers to the ecoregion or metropolitan area they are in.

opposite: *by Silvia Cucchi*

Sometimes that's all you get, I think:

One miracle. One shining moment of brightness. ... to last through all grey days to come.

—from The Attic Wheel, *by Patricia Wells*

The Enduring Power of Miracles

Miracles are often instantaneous effects. These are, also, permanent:

If a miracle mends a broken chair, the chair is permanently repaired. It can be broken again, but it does not *require* the miracle's existence to be whole. If a miracle lifts a bird into the air, the bird is "permanently" lifted: it will fall at the miracle's end, unless it flies, but it will fall because of gravity; it won't *de-lift.*

Other miracles take place over time. Either their effects endure while the miracle does, and end *when* the miracle does ... or, the miracle takes time to have its effect, and only when that time has elapsed is the miracle, functionally, used.

Such miracles are spoken of as *sustained.*

Some of the instantaneous miracles in this game include:

- "costumery," where the Strategist instantly assumes their traditional costume; *and*
- "contagion," where they share a bit of their curse.

Some of the sustained miracles include:

- "glorification," which awakens the power of a treasure; *and*
- "greater shattering," where the Strategist releases their inner *daikaiju.*

Ordinary and Extraordinary Miracles

Most miracles are small things, gentle sleights ... at least, on the scale of worlds and gods. It is within the power of the Strategists to drain the seas, and the Nobilis to fill them, but such things are the stuff of exceptional and wondrous moments. The more everyday miracle is the miracle to skip a stone several dozen times, until it passes out of sight; to lighten the steps of the weary worker; to open the creakiest of doors without a sound; or to speak, from far away, into the heart.

Most miracles, in short, are not *more impressive* than magic is; only, more indomitable.

In general, a miracle can cross at most a few miles of space. Nor can it reach outside the conceptual area (or "Region") in which it is unleashed: it can't cross between world and waylet or world and Chancel—or even, unless the GM approves, between Manhattan and the Bronx.

In general, a miracle can affect at most a 200-yard-diameter area.

In general, the targeting of a miracle can't be too complex, and it should be the kind of thing that shakes up the local area or situation, rather than the entire city, forest, continent, or cosmos.

This is not to say that miracles can't be stunningly impressive. A character can put an entire plaza full of people to sleep at once, or spit out a thousand bees, or conjure up half a ton of gold and silver out of nothingness and drop it upon some miser's head without breaking any of those rules of thumb.

... they just can't put *the world* to sleep, or even *the person in it who is the most dangerous to their plans* to sleep, with a relatively ordinary miracle.

The first exception is specialized miracles—miracles that are specifically *about*, e.g., crossing a lot of space, or covering a large area, rather than that just being the thing the character wants to do with them at a particular time. Those have a bit more leeway, particularly if the power text says so, but also just in general. **Projection**, on pg. 193, is explicitly a space-crossing effect, so it gets a little more leeway if a character wants to use it from six miles away than, say, **Destruction,** on pg. 235, would. It's probably still too much for **Projection** to cross a hundred miles, though, even though the text says it can reach "anywhere in the city," just because the character one day finds themselves in a city that sprawls across an entire foreign world.

The second exception is miracles tagged **Extraordinary.**

Extraordinary miracles can cover, or span, a good portion of a Region. They can cross between continents, can break past the world and Chancel or world and waylet barrier, maybe even reach the moon from Earth; if that's basically what they're *for,* they can span the cosmos, and maybe far beyond. They're not allowed to be endlessly complex, not even arbitrarily complex, but they can be complex enough to encode a minute or two of OOC explanation or an encyclopedia's worth of IC thoughts.

They're not trump-*everything* extraordinary, in short, but they're awesome enough to stand out strongly even among the wondrous things that can happen in the game.

Characters may take an extraordinary miracle even further, raising it to the level of the *epic*, by adding 20 to its Cost. Here there's no cap at *all* on the miracle's scale and reach in mundane terms, and only the group's patience limits its complexity. The GM may still cap the miracle's ability to create or permanently reshape intrinsically divine power itself, but anything it can't create or

On heads, the Ochoan Coin brings down the stars; on tails, a gentle light.

—from the exhibition catalogue for the Sutcliffe Auction, January 18th, 2012.

permanently reshape it can create the *potential* for, to be later realized with a quest or some number of quests (pg. 311). Thus, with such a miracle a character can slice the world in half or grant all cats the gift of speech; if they want to create a new Tree of Worlds, though, they can only make a nascent form. It might start, for instance, as a simple shoot, which later quests can help to flourish.

Some of the extraordinary miracles available in this game include:

- "misdirection," which can hide the moon and stars;
- "greater glorification," which can awaken the power of a divine treasure; *and*
- "greater contagion," which can infect entire cities with a supernatural disease.

Long-Ranged

Miracles tagged **Long-Ranged** have extraordinary range, but are ordinary otherwise. They include:

- "connection," which allows the Strategist to know when a Treasure needs them;
- "greater projection," which lets them spiritually travel across long distances to such a Treasure; *and*
- "elysium," which allows them to reach their own sanctuary from far away.

Automatic Miracles

Characters can use at most two actions at a time.

This is a general rule. It is not limited to miracles. It is not bound by the complexity of the actions, only by their starting time—by the moment when the player decides what the action is, and spends whatever initial cost they must spend upon it. The actions may be detailed mundane plans, combined with a miracle that enhances them. They may be gruesome congeries of multiple miracles. The only limitations are that each must actually *be* all one conceptual action, and that all the miracles involved must be from the same Divine Attribute.

That's it. That's all there is. Actions can be absurdly complex, as individual and specific things.

... but the character can only be doing two of them at any given time. If someone is doing two actions, and they wish to do another, they must stop, put something down, and rethink their approach. Sometimes that's just restarting the action they just stopped, now with something new folded in, and the only penalty is that whatever cost they had to pay, which might be nothing at all, they pay again. Other times, they'll have to change their strategy completely because there's only so much they can do at once.

Because there is only so much *anyone* can do at once.

There's only so much attention in all the world.

... and yet, of course, people still breathe. People still see and hear. They digest. They pump the blood on through their veins and startle when they are shocked. They die, when they are killed. They do all these things, sometimes

> *I did not wish to be vulnerable, when I took wing through that gate. It was my thought that I would burn with a light of repentance that would sear the souls of those foul beasts.*
>
> *Only, this, I could not arrange.*
>
> *It was not incapacity. It was not poor strategy. It was a simple matter of logistics. To burn with a searing light, open a gate into their ranks, and then—without that burning being let to cease, or that gate being let to close—fly though ...*
>
> *The efforts were too occupying; they filled me up: they could not be reconciled.*
>
> —*from* An Unexpected Hour, *by Alice Acacia*

even consciously, and not by specifically including them in their every plan.

These things, when the character is not spending Wear or one of the Four Costs on them; when they are content to allow the GM's default handling of those actions to stand ... they are *reflexive*, or, *automatic*.

Miracles with the **Automatic** tag are much the same.

It doesn't matter how much the character concentrates on other things. It doesn't matter whether they're holding up the sky, being branded with hot irons, and composing their magnum opus simultaneously in their head. They've got the attention to spare for this, this Automatic miracle, too, either because the miracle provides its own attention stream or because it's something more intrinsic, more inextricable and physical, because it's a part of them that can never *be* disentangled or turned away.

An Automatic miracle does not require the character's will to activate. It may require the *player's;* in practice, it generally does, since the GM is not obligated to be aware of when every PC's automatic miracles might go off, despite the triggers being broadly similar in almost every case. The character, though, need not wish to trigger them; need not even know that they are useful, appropriate, or necessary:

They need only pay from the Four Costs, if such is needed, when the miracle turns on.[34]

An Automatic miracle does not obstruct the character, if it ever comes up, from taking their own voluntary action in that exact moment. It's somewhat awkward, and better avoided when possible, but, in the end, it's fine.

Most importantly of all, an Automatic miracle does not count against the two actions that a character may maintain at any given time. They may invoke an Automatic miracle when already doing two things; they may do new thing(s) even while maintaining multiple Automatic miracles—potentially, an arbitrary number thereof.

As there is no cost to sustaining an Automatic miracle, beyond whatever cost there may have been to invoke it,

34 As a general rule, the GM should allow the player to veto GM-initiated automatic powers if the player is unwilling to pay this cost. The exceptions are **the Wailing Rite** and **the Greater Wailing Rite,** on pg. 233 and 238.

each has a defined duration rather than lasting for as long as the character wishes to sustain them.

Some of the Automatic powers in this game include:

- "talent," which triggers when the Strategist's aptitude in their Technique is tested; *and*
- "(greater) trust," which lets the Strategist's treasures aid them without the Strategist's agency.

Conditional Tags

Another example of an Automatic power is "greater vision," which allows the Strategist their senses in the void.

... only, greater vision is *actually* tagged [Automatic].

What that means is that it's *sometimes* Automatic. It can, for instance, also be used *with* an action to grant a particularly piercing version of the sense.

If something has a conditional tag like this, the details of when the tag applies will be found within the power's text.

Phantasmagorical Effects

Phantasmagorical effects are fantasies imposed upon the world. They are *made to happen,* but that happening is as tenuous as gossamer, as uncertain as a shape in clouds:

At their heart is not the solid essence of Creation, but rather, dream.

A phantasmagorical effect is an illusion, or a misapprehension; a glamour, or a story that the witnesses will later tell; or, perhaps, it is something else. *Which* of these things it is is not well-defined; rather, what is *known,* what is *created,* is that something happens which is not canonical. Something happens which is not the *actual* thing that happens:

At that time, when phantasmagoria stands suzerain, the "actual" thing that happens does not exist. It can only really be defined in retrospect, when the phantasmagorical effect has ended; then, or in the next scene, or in any event at a later time, the GM can decide Creation's "official" interpretation of events, from which all later causal chains will flow.

People say, there was never a day that a dragon crawled across this land. They say, the buildings that fell, they were already crumbling. The fires that started were students at their play.

They say, "If there had been a dragon, there would be photographic evidence. There would be marks deep in the earth. There would be fatalities."

When I hear these things, I cannot speak. I do not know why there are not these things. I do not understand why the scale that I found is a quartz piece now, why the cars I saw crushed are merely dented now. I do not understand why, in this age of phones and cameras, there was no filming.

But there was a dragon. It was there.

— Roland Bowser (quoted in A Madness of Spirits, *by Dr. E. Edgarton Clark)*

The result of this is that a phantasmagorical effect is gentle. Rejecting it outright can potentially threaten someone's health and safety, but the direct effects almost always cap out at the level of everyday, ordinary trauma—bee stings, food poisoning, an unexpected stumble, hot spilled tea, a broken keyboard, or being lost. Shoot someone with a rocket launcher, if that rocket launcher is phantasmagorical, and it will stun them, it will stagger them, and surround them with a cloud of smoke; or, it'll miss; or, it'll be a dud. What it *won't* do is blow them up. Remove their buoyancy while they're swimming a mile out into a lake and they won't plummet to the bottom and drown. Drowning isn't everyday. Maybe they'll sink slowly down past underwater sights and have a strange adventure down below. Maybe they'll choke and have trouble catching their breath, but then, they *will* catch their breath, because it turns out they can breathe water after all. You can think of this muffled impact as the result of overlaying dream upon reality: the effect *exists,* but it cannot truly permeate the essence of existence or experience, particularly for a conscious target. (Whether things like fish, hills, trees, and buildings are covered by this protection will vary according to the sensibilities of a place.)

Another result of these effects' dream-like nature is that they generate undramatic information. It's possible to do divination using a phantasmagorical power, and it won't give *fake* information unless that's how the power works, but there's a subtle negotiation between world and dream about what's allowed to emerge as a new discovery from any non-canonical period of events, and if the character is divining just about anything that the GM or a player thinks it might be more interesting to keep concealed ... they'll get partial or related information instead.

Sometimes the benefits of a phantasmagorical effect are "normal" enough to survive the return to reality. The world finds its new canon, and it says: "Yes, you have that boat now. You probably did not buy it from a giant frog by the river-side, like you did in that phantasmagorical dream sequence, but ... you bought a boat. That is a thing that really happened." The world will do its best to make a sense of things that keeps as much of the dreaming as it can. Even so, the long-term benefits from a phantasmagorical power tend to fade away over time, particularly between stories. There's no real way to catch this happening, so a watchful character can prevent it and vague group consensus that a given thing should stick around will override it—but normally, if a character picks up a jetpack and a password during a phantasmagorical event, they'll find after a while that they don't remember where they put the jetpack and that the password has become obsolete.

Phantasmagorical effects in this game include:

- "contagion," where a Strategist shares their curse with others, but just a taste of it, a shadow, a bit of a dream;
- "greater costumery," where a Strategist with a certain

public identity conjures up special effects that suit that identity—e.g., a priest calling down angels, or an admiral bringing in a SEAL team; *and*

- "greater misdirection," which creates a false perception so strong that while it lasts, everything that *contradicts* it is phantasmagorical.

Time-consuming Powers

Most miracles are functionally instant. Even if the effect is ongoing, *something* happens at once.

A few are not that simple. A few are effortful, as effortful as ordinary action; they are acts of skill and labor; the miracle exists only as their premise, *that they may be done at all.*

These come in three categories.

The first are the Slow effects. These are a divine power, but also a simple everyday action (pg. 127).[35] The character does not simply *burn their will into the world,* but also slips into a trance, or gestures and incants—something of the sort. In most contexts, the small delay this imposes is meaningless. It may never come up at all except as a note of flavor. Still, in a desperate contest of speed, by the time a Strategist has used a Slow power, another Strategist may have already *used* **Destruction;** a Noble may have conjured up some horror from their Estate; and a mortal, *even a mortal,* may have successfully thrown themselves out of the power's way.

The second category of these miracles are the Time-Consuming effects. If the Strategist just declares that they're working on them in the background, and never does anything specific in-scene, these take a couple of hours[36] to enact. If the Strategist is in a hurry, they can do something intense and dramatic in play that relates to the action. That's faster, but it's still going to be slow enough that the GM can throw ~2-3 situational updates at them, or opponents can take ~2-3 tactical actions in a conflict, before the effect is complete. It's up to the GM exactly how much happens or gets done in this time. If the Strategist's player uses a relevant spotlight, or has *just* used a relevant spotlight[37], they can cut this time down even further, treating this as a Slow action instead. For example, spotlighting a target's personality can make **Greater Intensity** (pg. 174) effectively Slow.

An example Time-Consuming task is preparing someone miraculously for a task they are yet to do. The character can walk their protégé through everything in the background, which takes a couple of hours. *Or,* if there's time pressure, they can give them intense instruction in play. That would notionally give the GM or any opponents time to throw 2-3 interruptions their way before it was over with. If the player used a relevant spotlight—on, say, the task, or the protégé's response, or, in Ninuan, on the action itself—the action would still be **Slow** compared to most miracles, but still done in a comparative snap.

> *Much is made of the overhead, the unnecessary cost—the irrecoverable time lost at the beginning of all days. I think:*
>
> *Too much.*
>
> *The truth is, six days to create a world is objectively a rather good showing; certainly, it is superior to what all but a few of us can manage. Just because the average ontological argument spawns a creator deity capable of doing it in planck time does not mean that the world of their creation will be superior, in any meaningful or pressing sense.*
>
> *Not after the original six days have passed.*
>
> *Cneph's world should be considered, I argue, only on its quality; and, more than that, upon the quality that it would have had, that it SHOULD have had, if work had continued (as originally scheduled) on day 8.*
>
> —*from* The Legacy Review, *March 23, 2017*

Powers tagged Very Time-Consuming are more difficult; they take a few days[38] of work in the background. Alternatively, the player in question must spotlight something relevant in three separate scenes. Characters can usually adapt the effects of these powers somewhat as they go, in much the same way that humans can do with multi-day projects, and to much the same degree; a character turning a city into a swamp probably can't decide halfway through that they want to make it a mountain instead, but they *can* probably shift over to a specifically mangrove or a bizarrely arctic/winter-wonderland swamp. Even at the last minute, when changes that large can be impossible, they should be able to add in some grackles or leave a neighborhood out.

Study Up (pg. 131) in Ability functions as a Very Time-Consuming effect.

The cost for a Slow, Time-Consuming, or Very Time-Consuming power is not paid until the effect itself begins. This is not necessarily the moment that it becomes miraculous—some of these powers build up through mundane actions, others are miraculous from the beginning. Rather, it's the moment that it becomes draining or potent enough to justify taking Burn, Fugue, Immersion, or Stilling from the attempt. This is an instance of a more general principle that *actions pay a Cost when, and only when, they're successfully used* ... although it's not required that they succeed in doing what the character *wants* them to do, only that they succeed in the activation of their effect.

Characters can often accelerate their results by working in the void, but **the fundamental time frame for these powers is Creational**—a Time-Consuming power takes up a meaningful portion of a chapter to complete in the

35 As a task, they typically require **Function.**

36 Creational hours, specifically

37 And possibly spent some time engaging with it, but basically not done anything since.

38 Again, Creational days

background, even if the character experiences that as several weeks; a Very Time-Consuming power takes at least several chapters worth of work in the background, even if the character experiences that as centuries. Whenever this doesn't quite seem to make sense, the character can devote some active effort or spotlights to it to help out.

Note that other players' spotlights will not help complete Time-Consuming or Very Time-Consuming actions. If the GM wants to accelerate such an action, either because they don't really have anything they want to have interrupt it or because they like a spotlight that somebody used, they can do that ... but that's the GM, not the spotlight. By the rules, it's one's own attention, and *only* one's own attention, that speeds up one's tasks.

Some of the Slow powers in this game include:

- "projection," where the Strategist's spirit departs their body; *and*
- "infusion," where the Strategist enchants something with an Arcanum.

Some of the Time-Consuming powers include:

- "the casting rite," where the Strategist splits off a part of themselves to be a new being; *and*
- "greater intensity," where they bind someone else to themselves.

And some of the Very Time-Consuming powers include:

- "greater divine plan," which uses a treasure as the alchemical basis for a wish; *and*
- "greater design," which creates a fortress-scale artifact.

Quest Powers

With the exception of wishes (pg. 260), most powers last a relatively short time. The character invokes them. They sustain them, perhaps for much of a chapter. Sometimes—particularly with Very Time-Consuming powers—the character sustains them between chapters; in *emergencies*, between stories; but still:

The character invokes them. They sustain them. Then, they *end.*

A few powers are different. They're designed so that the character could, at least potentially, keep them going indefinitely. They don't take a portion of the character's *attention;* they take a portion of the character's *life.*

These are the powers tagged **Quest.**

They aren't sustained as actions. Instead, if the character wants to sustain their effects, they must put the power in a quest slot (pg. 316)—one of the five slots that they have for active quests. The power then fills that quest slot; they can't use it for another quest power without first abandoning that power and letting it expire. They can't use it for an actual quest, either, of course, with one exception as noted below. On the other hand, they don't have to use one of their two actions to sustain it. It can just sit there, in that quest slot, for as long as they like!

> *Every day, I choose to continue Sally Struble's apotheosis.*
> *Every day, I remember that I can choose otherwise.*
> *I could end this. If I let myself.*
> *I could make the sky fall.*
>
> —*from* The Carbuncle Wreath, *by Marcellus McCoy*

As an exception to this general rule, it *is* possible to fit a quest with the same basic narrative as a quest power into the same slot. For instance, if a quest power is actively controlling a minion, a quest about controlling that minion can fit in the same slot. In such cases, when the quest ends, the player must either immediately replace it with a suitable continuation or replacement ... or the quest power, also, will end.

Characters have five quest slots all told.

Some of the quest powers in this book include:

- "invocation," which finds a new use for an Arcanum;
- "greater guidance," where the Strategist trains someone in a new skill; *and*
- "percipience," wherein they train *themselves.*

Bleak Powers

The world is not strong.

In the face of Excrucian efforts, the world is not stable. It is a ramshackle construction and it is poisoned from within. In the face of the power of unbeing, the world is not strong. It collapses. It succumbs.

It falls apart.

The world is not strong, but there are strong things in it. There is a power in compassion. There is a power in honest effort. There is something in that futile, beautiful, and tragically wasted love that people pour into the world that can patch it together, even though it shouldn't be patched together; that can keep it in place, even though it shouldn't be kept in place.

There is something in the best of the world that can stave off the End, in preservation of the Glitch.

The most unfair Excrucian powers, therefore, have this limitation upon them: that they are bleak. That they *are* unfair. And therefore, there is something in the brightest parts of the human spirit—and, more generally, the mortal spirit; in *the best parts of the world*—that can oppose them.

Powers tagged **Bleak** have the following limitations.

Things that are well-cared-for and well-loved are protected. A house that nobody cares about can be erased with a wave of a hand, but one that's been lovingly maintained for years ... that love soaks right into the wood. It'll have a Ward (pg. 257) against bleak effects—their difficulty, effectively, will be higher.

opposite: *by Beatrice Pelagatti*

Ildilinds Reubos,
whose bane is
Fatigue

Characters—even mortal characters—may go beyond themselves to oppose the Bleak. Sometimes a character in this game will "take damage" to avoid or twist an effect, suffering Cost instead of whatever it was. This can be an active, deliberate effect not otherwise explained by the system, or it can be an act of narrative providence. PCs have a pretty free hand about when to take damage and when not to; mortals can barely do it at all.

... but if a mortal opposes a bleak effect with a daring or an open heart, it's inherently more reasonable for them to suffer a notional Cost instead of the effect itself and twist or resist what happened. This needs a good explanation, a good story, it's not just a handwavy thing, because it *can't* be an active, deliberate effect, it *has* to be narrative providence—but the important thing is, it can happen. And often, once it's happened once in a scene, it'll happen again.

In fact, if *anyone* opposes a bleak effect with a daring or open heart, it's inherently more reasonable to pay a notional Cost. It's just mortals for whom that's a particularly big deal.

Bleak powers in this game include:

- "misdirection," which blinds people to something's existence;
- "destruction," which destroys; *and*
- "greater destruction," which destroys *a lot.*

INVESTIGATION MIRACLES

The Strategists' standard art of divination is the **investigation miracle.**

To use these miracles, the Strategist must actually investigate. They must consult a favored source. Here, though, this art diverges from mortal investigation: that source need not be mundane. For *most* Strategists, in fact, it is simplified or eldritch:

They consult the omens. They ask the world around them. They read their magic book. They ask an imprisoned spirit. They remember the secret truth they dreamt. ... or something of that sort.

It's usually pretty fast. It's just not necessarily *instant.*

If it's *not* fast—if, e.g., the Strategist's favored source is "the library" or "chasing rumors"—an investigation miracle nevertheless guarantees that the result will be timely. The Strategist gets the information before they need it. It doesn't divert too much time from their other goals. In a crunch that usually means that the Strategist can remember the desired information as a byproduct of previous efforts, rather than researching it in the "now."

The Strategist's favored source is usually related to their Technique or their Arcana (pg. 131, 205). That's not obligatory, though, nor do they have to use the same source every time.

When possible, an investigation miracle defaults to returning either public information or information already known to the PCs. It only creates information *ex nihilo* when there is absolutely nothing to work with. This means that results won't tend to change unless the truth has changed; that investigations from multiple Strategists will tend to roughly overlap; that, unlike the divinations of the law-beings and the Nobilis, investigations *can* be fooled without outright defeating the miracle itself.

> *It was Image Search that identified it for her:*
>
> *Carnwennan, King Arthur's dagger—and the identifying treasure of that one who was fated to rule the Shadows' Circle in the modern day.*
>
> *—from* A YEAR OF EAGLES, *by Liselle Giraud*

... and in fact, that they're a little *slipshod* in that regard.

Investigation *tends* to return cover stories, faked clues, and false information first, provided:

- The fake information is plausible given the Strategist's existing knowledge;
- The fake information is consciously established by some agency;
- The fake information is more plausible or conspicuous than equally available truths; *and*
- Sufficient investigation of the fake information will allow future investigation to see through to the truth.

Once the Strategist sees through fake information, further investigation will default to returning the kind of information that's available to set of people who know the fake information is false—for instance, if a Strategist is researching an Arcanum, and that Arcanum is known to be a ghost, is secretly a spirit form that steals memories from corpses to impersonate a ghost, and is even *more* secretly the will extrusion into the world of a transcendent being, the Strategist will first learn that it's a ghost; then, if they discover it's *not* a ghost, investigation will reveal that it's a spirit form that steals memories from corpses. Only when they learn that it is definitely not a natural, normal spirit form will they discover its true self.

Strategists have two investigation miracles:

- "investigation," which they use to learn about their Arcana; *and*
- "greater investigation," which they can use to learn about anything at all, or, to study their Arcana in greater depth.

PLANNING MIRACLES

Many Strategist miracles focus on creating a *plan.* These are a form of quest miracles:

The plan that the miracle creates—that the Strategist either finds by miracle, or makes correct by miracle—goes in one of their quest slots. As long as they're committed to the plan, it must stay there; when the plan completes, or

if they decide to abandon it, the quest slot is freed up for some other use. Conversely, if their quest slots are all full (of quests or quest powers), they don't have enough free time and attention to undertake a new plan.

Planning miracles take two basic forms.

The first form is that seen in **Strategy** (pg. 171). This kind of plan need not come from the Strategist's player. In fact, they are neither expected nor required to develop it. Instead, they have a veto, and the GM has a veto, and they can mention any plans at the top of their head and see if the GM vetoes them ...

But as a *rule*, the plan is developed by the group as a whole to fit what the group thinks makes sense.

Plans of this sort are sensitive to the conditions of the world. The miracle is not that the plan works or that the resources the Strategist will need are available. The miracle is that the Strategist can *see* the existence of the resources they need, can put the pieces together by intuition and insight; that they know the little tricks that they'll need to use; and that the Strategist has the spark of genius that comes up with the plan in the first place.

It may not seem like it takes genius once the plan's been stated, but in fact it does, because—regardless of how much it sounds like any other plan that the group might have come up with by brainstorming—it happens to be the perfect plan for the situation. It's beautifully right.

Further, if the Strategist's plan needs something that might not have existed, that only exists *because* the group went with this plan and the GM didn't veto it—perhaps it needs a magical gem, or a famous blind gambler—then it's not luck that they can find those things, or, at least, not *just* luck. The magical gem and the fame that that blind gambler have will predate the miracle; the Strategist is taking elegant advantage of the opportunities that they actually already have.

This form of plan fails, when it fails, when it encounters the unexpected. Particularly, the *really* unexpected.

The second form for a planning miracle is that seen in **Hunt** (pg. 214). This kind of plan *does* come from the Strategist's player, although the GM still has a veto, and the player can throw it open to the group if they like. Because it comes from the player, it can form in fundamental ignorance of something important about the world. Because it comes from a single player, who may have spent as little as a second or two thinking about it, it can suffer a fundamental failure of common sense.

It works anyway, unless it's *so* far wrong that the GM can't accept it without losing their ability to describe the world, because that's part of the miracle. The Strategist is such a being as to succeed in that hunt; that is the nature of their unworldly Lore. That has become a *part of their Eide,* their dream-of-self ... and that dream enforces itself within the correlative continuum of the void and all its branching tendrils through the created world.

Much of this miracle is still about tricks and insight, but there is also a fundamental synchronicity to it too. The plan succeeds because it *ought* to succeed, because that is the nature of things. It succeeds because the Strategist's Lore is *right*. It fails, when it fails, because events in play lead in weird directions and it ceases to be so.

Most plans take 0-3 chapters to implement. The default is, "they finish by the end of the next chapter." If the GM or group is really into the implementation, or if things keep going wrong, the plan can take a bit longer. If it's more convenient for play, the plan can finish almost immediately.

... but the *default* is "by the end of the next chapter."

Campaign-altering plans—strategies for beating campaign-shaping obstacles and the like—take 0-2 stories instead. The default for *them* is, "they finish by the end of the next story."

The success a planning miracle wins does not last forever. A Strategist might come up with a plan to live happily ever after; it will be a level 10+ Eide miracle, but it can be done. Alas, it will not actually *be* for "ever after," but for "a time." Most plans win a victory that either lasts for as long as the Strategist keeps the plan in a quest slot, plus 0-3 chapters more ... or that lasts indefinitely, and at *least* until the end of the story where the plan is completed, but could reverse itself arbitrarily soon after that. Once a plan of the latter sort completes, the Strategist does not need to maintain the quest to protect their victory ... nor *may* they maintain the quest to protect their victory longer than the world would otherwise allow it to last.

Potentially this *could* lead to a situation where a grand plan to defeat a core campaign threat, such as an existential risk to the Not, completes after two stories of work, towards the end of a story and session, but only works long enough for the victory party to die down before the threat starts up again, the plan already undone. That might not be fun in a particular case; then again, it well might! That's a matter for potential OOC discussion; the point is, it's a legal outcome under the rules.

The primary result of a plan is that it *works.* It succeeds. The character does their thing, and they don't fail. They beat the opposition that they knew to expect. Usually they just use their mundane abilities, but because their plan

---

The world sang to me of its weaknesses.

It might seem difficult to the outside observer, this business of the flower rite. To turn Fire against itself, or Storm, or Treachery. To bend Trains, or Fear, or even Light against the nature of itself, and leave Creation less whole than it was before.

It was not difficult.

I picked out the notes to it on my dulcimer. I hummed along. I felt the themes in motion as they would be in motion, and I played them against each other until the song was whole.

This will work, I knew. This would succeed.

It always did.

—from the Thought-Record of Herlewin Toome

is so clever or so correct, they don't have to worry about running into things they can't handle, they defeat even notionally stronger mundane opposition without needing to spend extra Wear, and they can work around miraculous opposition. (Particularly miraculous opposition that loses to the plan itself in a conflict.)

While a character is implementing a plan that's operating within expected parameters, accordingly, **Glitch** becomes a bit more of a question and answer session and a bit less of a game; the GM should no longer be wondering things like, "can you do this?" or "can you get past this?," but rather, "what's your plan here?" or "*how* do you get out of *this?*"

Sometimes a miraculous plan will require the use of the Strategist's divine attributes. When it does, it won't need them to dip into the Costs—or, at least, not more than they're basically *willing* to. Maybe if they have Wyrd 4+, or even 3+, they won't be able to resist tossing a few level 4 destruction miracles (pg. 235) into their plan, because they're *right there.* They are low-hanging fruit.

... but the Strategist isn't going to build plans around effects that will substantively Burn them; their plan uses the resources they have *before* doing that kind of thing.

When a character encounters the unexpected, what *was* a perfect plan no longer remains so, and it can no longer guarantee victory in quite the same way. That said, Strategists aren't dumb and they don't make plans that assume genuinely perfect knowledge. It takes a reasonably-sized twist to disrupt things *at all,* and even then, their plan is usually salvageable. It doesn't automatically beat mundane opposition, not any longer, but it still gives ~2 Edge in a pinch. It won't *necessarily* fall within what they can handle without spending the Costs, but it'll be pretty close. If there's a reasonable chance that their plan had contingencies to work around miracles even given the twist, then that's something they might still be able to do.

Things that are *completely* out of left field, of course, destroy the plan entirely—at least until and unless the Strategist can force events back onto track.

Example

A Strategist PC is hit with an excessive water bill after a sink in their building leaks. They want a strategy to fix this. The group comes up with a plan: the Strategist is going to dig up the corruption of the local water & garbage commission, blackmail the commissioner to get access to their billing server, and leave enough false clues to their identity that the commissioner winds up reporting the police chief's home address instead of the Strategist's when they get up the nerve to report the whole thing. (This presumes a great deal about the Strategist's style, but that's built into how the **Strategy** miracle works; see pg. 171.) Plan formed, the Strategist executes it flawlessly; it *does* take a chapter or two of work in the background, and the GM has the player play out the blackmail conversation, but it all works out even though the player fumbles a few bits of the conversation in play. The billing issue is solved, at least until the end of the story.

... at least, that's what *would* have happened, if they hadn't gotten there to find the commissioner dead.

Some of the planning effects in this game include:

- "divine plan," which destines a treasure to some accomplishment; *and*
- "greater strategy," which creates a miraculous plan to do ... just about anything, really ... in the Strategist's personal idiom.

THE MIRACULOUS VS. THE MUNDANE

As noted earlier, a miracle triumphs over a mundane action—even a level 0 miracle, over an Ability 11+ action.

... in direct conflict, anyway.

In terms of indirect opposition, miracles have no innate edge over mundane actions. If a miracle conjures up fire—a rare example, to be fully honest, but possible with, e.g., **Greater Contagion** (pg. 241)—then no mundane action can say, "no, there will not be fire." No amount of precaution or fire safety can prevent it. However, if *all* the miracle is doing is starting a fire, then a perfectly ordinary mundane action involving a fire extinguisher can put that fire out once again. There is no conflict: the fire is in fact conjured. The conjuration happened, and no mundane action opposed it. Then, the miracle having accomplished its task, the mundane action may perform *its* task as well.

This is not to say that every miracle succumbs to mundane force as easily as that. A Strategist who can call up fire in the first place has a good chance of *also* being able to conjure a fire that is specifically immune to that fire extinguisher, whether supernaturally or simply by virtue of being, e.g., a class D magnesium fire when the extinguisher is a class C. With more effort, they may well be able to conjure up a firestorm too vast for any short-term mundane effort to put out.

... but functionally, miracles are only *innately* superior to mundane force in the moment of the miracle itself.

There are a handful of effects that bend this rule, such as **Strategy** (pg. 171). These effects are miracles that support

> *There was clutter throughout, where the angels went: a bramble-fog of feather forest and a prismed rapturing of lights inside, and out of the midst of the drifts and piles was the sound of insects; and out of their midst was the sound of wings.*
>
> *And from those heaped-up remnants rose the semblance of passing faces, rising and falling as if by breathing, and turning in every direction were they all. Still forming in their aftermath were ambered footprints in the stone.*
>
> *This, then, was a miracle, or as close to one as I would see:*
>
> *With bag and rake and three seas of sweat I began to clean it up.*
>
> —*from* The Stove Eternal, *by Melissa James*

mundane actions. They allow those mundane actions to win a conflict with miracles ... but only when *they* win the conflict with the miracle. Strategy defaults to beating level 0-5 miracles; accordingly, a mundane action supported by that Strategy may *also,* when appropriate, defeat level 0-5 miracles. This does not so much break the iron rule that miracles win all contests against mundane actions as work around that rule.

The Nobles' miracles of "Aspect" (pg. 395) often work this way too:

With a miracle that can defeat whatever the Strategist is doing, they allow their underlying or enhanced *mundane abilities* to defeat them. Thus, they can "roll out of the way" of being erased from existence or "reflect" a curse. It is unnatural, nonsensical, and somewhat appalling, and it kicks in for them around Aspect 5.

Wards

A more conventional opposition to a miracle is a **Ward.**

A Ward is a kind of friction provided by the laws of the world. It's the thing that says, that miracle isn't *right*. It shouldn't work. It shouldn't be *allowed to happen.*

This isn't about what's possible and what's impossible. Anything a miracle does is impossible, by definition, as an uncaused effect. It's more about what's OK. The world is wrong, but that wrongness isn't all there is to the world, nor is it the only ambient metaphysical moral judgment—there are places in the world that want to be rural, or that want to be fast-paced. There are places where birds fly free, and trying to stop birds from flying free doesn't work so well. There are places where there are stories hidden in the stones; attempting to erase those stories, even for the Strategists, isn't as easy as it ought to be.

There are miracles which the world forbids, not because they're against the rules of physics, but because, to the area or the world as a whole, they *don't feel right.*

That's a Ward.

A Ward is basically an increase to the difficulty of certain effects. If a character tries to break a Ward, if they *have* to break a Ward to do something, then it can increase the cost of the effect.

Specifically, in most cases, it directly increases the difficulty. Something that would normally take Eide 4 to do (or, anyway, to do without Stilling):

When there's a level 2 Ward, it now takes Eide *6*.

Wards don't generally affect mundane actions. That's not to say that the things a Ward forbids are going to be *easy* with mundane actions; it's just, there's no intrinsic connection between the rules binding upon the divine and the rules binding upon the mortals. There's a lot more stuff that mortals aren't allowed to do, or at least not easily, but there are a few things here and there forbidden only to the divine.

Something shifted in the night, and I understood then:

What I had thought was part of the building, part of the street, part of the sky—what I had thought of as a random slice of the nearby park, and three of the passing pedestrians—was not.

It was all a god. It was all ... one single amoeboid god; it rippled as it turned to stare me down.

THIS PLACE, it said, YOU WILL NOT TOUCH— O DAUGHTER OF THE NIGHT.

—*from* Wayland Border, *by Logistilla Lacasse*

Four things have Wards, more or less:

- **Metaphysical laws** governing particular characters—also called their *Geasa;*
- **Metaphysical principles** governing the world or void as a whole—that is, things that the GM feels the basic *nature* of things would allow, but discourage;
- **Spiritual barriers**, including the subtle barriers between places within the world and the more explicit barriers between world and Chancel or world and void; *and*
- **The ambient metaphysics** of particular places.

Most Wards in play will come from PC Geasa, either their permanent Geasa or their temporary Geasa obtained from powers like:

- "masking," which allows a character to warp their own mind; *and*
- "greater contagion," which infects others with a sickness born of a Strategist's own disease.

Wards range from level 1-11 in strength. Most are level 1-3, and most of the rest are in the range 4-7; a level 8+ Ward is a powerful thing. A few transcendent phenomena (like the World Ash, or the cup of flame) possess "epic" Wards; these are rated on the same level 1-11 scale, and aren't any more difficult to overcome than that rating suggests, but powers that remove, suspend, manipulate, or otherwise *change* them suffer a +20 to their Cost.

A character can ignore Wards if [difficulty + Ward ≤ the relevant Attribute]. If their (base or effective) Attribute is already high enough to get past the Ward, they don't have to pay extra Cost just because the Ward is there—for instance, a Wyrd 6 character might not even notice that a level 2 Ward blocking their difficulty 4 **Destruction** miracle *exists.*

The power that most directly interacts with Wards is **Greater Unfettering,** on pg. 242; it can pierce through and suspend them.

Rites

Miracles paint upon the canvas of the world. They may paint clouds onto an empty sky, paint blooms or sickness upon a tree, even paint an all-but-entirely-new picture on top of what there was before—

The canvas remains. It is still there, as it has ever been, untouched; unchanged.

A Rite subverts that. A Rite is a miraculous power, in that only characters who can use miracles can use Rites; in that the same four divine attributes govern Rites, that govern miracles; in that almost every rule, for simplicity, will be the same—but Rites are a different *kind* of cheat. They're meddling with the substrate. They're like switching out the canvas, or restoring what had been painted over, or ripping it apart and gluing it together on new seams. Using the room around the canvas as a portion of the work.

Terms that have been used for Rites include "deep miracles" and "chthonic miracles:"

Deep beneath the surface of the world move they.

A Rite undermines the substrate of world or Ninuan, and operates entirely outside of the existing context. One can identify a Rite in *practice* as any power that ...

- interacts directly with Wounds (pg. 272) or Infection (pg. 277);
- interacts directly with the Four Costs (Burn, Fugue, Immersion, and Stilling);
- interacts directly with Wear; *or*
- interacts directly with Wards or Geasa.

Rites function like miracles, except that **Rites are not hindered by Wards.** They do not add the level of any Ward to the difficulty of their effects.

For simplicity, multiple Geasa imposed by the same Rite by the same Strategist tend to merge rather than accumulate unless the duration or level are dramatically different. Thus, two applications of **Greater Contagion** (pg. 241) will usually produce a single complicated curse, or two curses in a single complicated Geas, rather than two Geasa that apply at once.

Some of the Rites in this game include:

- "the revenant rite," where the character convalesces to heal Costs and Infection,
- "the cliffhanger rite," where the Strategist fakes taking a hit from a supernatural effect, *and*
- "the greater casting rite," which warps the world to fit the Strategist's mind.

Notionally, although they don't require *specific* divine attributes or powers to use, the nettle rite, welken-rite, and flower rite (pg. 59) are Rites as well.

It was not the weather of Creation. It was not the kind of weather that was possible, in Creation.

It came to Latham's Junction only as she willed it so.

—from The Tyrant Spring, *by Emily Chen*

Geasa

A **Geas** is a statement of a character's truth.

Each Geas is a sentence. It doesn't have to be *written* this way, or even as a sentence at all, but its underlying meaning is always *I must do (something),* or, *I mustn't do (something),* or *I am compelled to do (something), although I need not succeed.* It will be rated from 0-7.

Geasa have three effects:

- each manifests its truth miraculously in the world;
- when the Geas opposes divine power, it throws up a Ward equal to its rating; *and*
- when it's the reason the character earns a point of Cost recovery for "disappointing" someone (pg. 276), they recover 3 extra Cost. (This can take that Cost below 0.)

Geasa follow the player's basic concept most of the time but they *can* be a bit unpredictable when the whim so strikes the GM. For instance, a Geas like "I can't be touched by mortal weapons" *usually* makes such weapons completely ineffective against the character ... but on a bad day, a bullet can still break the character's ribs without breaking their skin, and on a *really* bad day, cutlery will slip away from their hands.

OPPOSING GEASA

A Geas' indirect manifestations may be overcome with any suitable miracle—or even action. This includes using any suitable miracle to overcome the miracle that the Geas creates when the GM has one or more solid ideas for what the Geas might "try" next. However, suppressing the Geas *entirely,* whether by overriding the only manifestation(s) the GM can think of, directly countering the Geas' text with a miracle, or blocking a single effect but also ensuring that no more appear for a time requires either:

- a miracle able to overcome the Geas' Ward;
- a wish able to overcome the Geas' Ward;
- a Rite able to suppress the Geas; *or*
- "taking damage" (pg. 279) to block the Geas' effect, or to keep it from undoing an action:
  - 1-4 points if paired with something that "should" stop it;[39]
  - 3-10 points if there's something that *might* suppress it in play; *and*
  - up to 20 points just to stop it cold or twist its effects—but probably still 3-10.[40]

39 e.g., clever and daring action; a really appropriate description of how one takes damage; or, circumstances that are really bad for the Geas.

40 Note that the player must still provide an explanation for how the Geas is stopped as part of *taking damage;* this only frees them from bringing that explanation into play through some other means.

"I will not be here," he said, "when you need me most. This is the law of my nature."

—from The Sea Foam Crown, *by Emily Chen*

Without one of these factors, the Geas will reappear the next time it is specifically triggered; if it's a more continuous effect without any specific "triggers," then it resumes the next time the GM, player, or character spots a good way for it to come back into play.

For instance, a character is Geased to rapidly escape from any confinement. They are thrown in jail; the GM allows them to find a key under their mat. Their jailor is watching for such trickery and confiscates it immediately. Next, the GM arranges for a passing elephant to fall into and crumble the wall. The jailer attempts to miraculously keep this from happening, invoking retroactive anti-elephant defenses around the compound. The GM doesn't want to keep trying any further, so this miracle must first beat the Ward.

As another example, a model sun might be Geased to rise over its model Earth every morning. If someone breaks the mechanism, locks the model sun in iron, piles books on the box, and removes its model Earth from the area, the GM probably won't charge more than a few points of damage to block the Geas indefinitely—but if the mechanism-breaker isn't willing to take that final step, the model sun *will* burst free from the box the next time someone notices it's morning and fly off to find its precious model Earth again.

If suppressed, the length of time a Geas remains suppressed depends upon the methodology:

- Geasa suppressed by a miracle tend to return shortly after the miracle lapses—unless sustained, a miracle can buy only a brief but noticeable respite. The exception is when the GM's already run out of ideas and interest, as in the case of the jail cell above; in that case, the Geas may stay suppressed until at least the next chapter.
- Geasa suppressed by a wish will tend to find *some* way around that to return by or in the next chapter.
- Rites that can suppress Geasa *should* say how long they suspend them for; if not, assume that it's until the next chapter.
- Taking damage can be substantially more effective than all of the above options, potentially stalling out a Geas until the next *story*—or, with the relevant player's permission, indefinitely—but that's something to be negotiated, loosely, at the time that the damage is taken.

Buying Geasa

Characters may buy Geasa for one character point each. The rating of their Geas is based on one of their attributes. To figure out which one, look at the way the Geas is most likely to twist or damage the character. (Just about every Geas, even "I must be invincible," *can* do this, one way or another.)

If the Geas has the strongest potential to ...

- ... mess with their emotional and spiritual integrity, the Geas' rating will equal the character's **Wyrd.**
- ... warp their mind and body or infuse them with void-stuff, its rating will equal their **Lore.**
- ... bind them into Creation or reveal their secrets, its rating will equal their **Flore.**
- ... mess with or affirm who they are, its rating will equal their **Eide.**
- ... deal mundane damage or trauma, or none of the above, particularly, in any notable fashion, its rating will equal their **Ability.**

For example, a character might spend a point to buy a Geas, "Everyone in the whole world knows my name." (Or, "I must be recognized, by name, by everyone in the world.")

One might plausibly read this as having the most potential to *mess with or affirm who the character is;* thus, this Geas' rating would be equal to the character's Eide. Others might argue that it's really more of a Flore Geas; if that's what the PC's player believes, that's legitimate too.

Bonds

A **Bond** is a variation on a Geas. It also costs 1 character point.

It comes in two parts:

- a bonus Technique, and
- a truth, which
  - when it helps, adds +2 to the character's effective attribute in a contest, *and*
  - when it's the reason that the character earns a point of Cost recovery for "disappointing" someone (pg. 276), grants them recovery of +2 extra Cost. (This can take that Cost below 0.)

As before, the truth is a sentence—ultimately, something the character must do, or mustn't do, or is compelled to attempt. However, a Bond won't grant a Ward and it won't create miracles; rather, the character must create their own miracles through it.

An example Bond might have a "vampire powers" Technique and a truth, "I can't handle running water or sunlight."

The bus had delayed for me, for I was a prince of Ninuan; there was something in it, some pallid, trembling meat within the shadow of its soul, that genuflected before the radiance of the night. Thus, I reached the stop five minutes late, but the bus, today ... in six.

—from the diary of Vinitharius Sarmize

His mind shouted a strangled cry for help. I caught it in the air, crumbled it to pieces in my hand, and scattered them across the floor; it did not reach the soul-beast that lurked beyond.

The blade in my other hand came up, burned green:

—*from* The Dolls' Revolution, *by Andrea Bowles*

Miraculous Conflict

Sometimes Strategists wind up getting into spats with one another. Sometimes they'll find themselves using miracles *against* one another, to undermine or hurt one another.

Sometimes they've got a good reason for that, and sometimes not.

More often, they'll find themselves under siege by the Powers; by the law-beings; by horrors born from the unknown.

In all these cases, they'll find that casual miracles might not be enough:

Their enemies can wield them too.

When two successful miracles or Rites oppose one another, this is a *miraculous contest* or *conflict*.

As with mortal contests, the key to victory in miraculous conflict is a higher number. Miracles don't scale quite as cleanly as Ability does, so we're not going to concern ourselves with the level of the *effect*. Instead, the character with the highest effective divine attribute—most precisely, the highest:

[base divine attribute + Cost spent
– any Ward that opposes it in the conflict]

—always wins.

In a conflict between two PCs, or any other situation where both parties might know the effective divine attributes involved, the GM should allow characters to bid extra Cost before the victor is established. This can be done in a blind or open bid as the GM prefers. In a conflict where this is not the case, it's only possible to bid extra Cost against sustained miracles:

A player can't discover that their miracle lost a conflict against an NPC's *instantaneous* effect and reverse the situation by spending more—it's already happened! There's room for OOC negotiation if something confused the player, and there's room to dodge the effect by "taking damage" (pg. 279), but there's no room IC to turn back the clock.[41]

Against a sustained effect, conversely, the character may "lose" for a beat or two, and then spend extra Cost.

The meaning of victory in a miraculous conflict is that the victor's action takes precedence. It is resolved first. That resolution forms a hard limit on what the other action can achieve. It's important that victory is *only* about whose action is resolved first, because it scopes conflicts properly: a character whose ability to fly derives from an effective Wyrd of 10 "loses" to a city-consuming firestorm born of Lore 11. That doesn't mean that they can't fly out of the firestorm. It doesn't mean that their action has necessarily *failed*. It means that no matter what they do, they can't come up with a convoluted explanation of how they use their flying power to make the firestorm *not happen*. The only way that they actually get *caught* in the firestorm is if it's an explicit part of that Lore 11 miracle that the firestorm burns them, or spreads so fast that "even someone who flies can't possibly get away in time," or something else like that; or, if the GM evaluates the quality of the firestorm and then the quality of their flight and decides that that's how the two effects combine.

Once upon a time, a level 22 firestorm was unleashed upon Abaton, a distant world on the Tree; this rule—that you don't have to *beat* that number, just not be its target—is why the people of Earth still survive. Not one of them beat that level 22, but only three of them actually *had* to in the first place.[42]

In the event of a tie, actions resolve simultaneously. To whatever extent the actions are *actually* in conflict, this usually caps them at partial success, with ultimate effects that favor the higher-difficulty action and slightly favor any "defender"—but the GM is not bound by this; they may be as capricious in resolving tied actions as they like.

Wishes

A wish is a thing that comes true.

In what fashion does it become true?

It becomes true in the same sense as the world and void are true. It becomes true in the same sense as the Glitch. It is true, because the wish has *said* that it is true:

Because you will play, in this game, that it's so.

It is as if the group has just discovered **Glitch**'s discussion of the Serpents (pg. 398), where it had never discovered it before, and after many days of play besides; and, reading it, decides that that's, that *they're*, a good idea. *Yes,* the group agrees. *We should have law-beings that are giant snakes. Why? Because the world is wrong:*

And lo! Thereupon, giant snakes.

They will appear, of course, in exactly the fashion that the GM chooses to portray them. That will not necessarily be the "correct" way. Most likely, the GM will have been listening to the group's discussion of the matter. If the group was wrong but extremely enthusiastic, then perhaps the GM will go by that discussion. Where they were indifferent, instead, the GM will be "correct," or incorrect, on their own. So we may say, effectively, a wish is arbitrated by the GM ... but fed by the ideas and the consensus of the group. It is not a unilateral matter of the character wishing and the GM granting, but rather a conversation, a back-

41 It's worth note here that characters *do* generally get a chance to respond to instantaneous effects and, potentially, preempt them—but, only *one* chance.

42 Their story may be told at another time.

and-forth, a discussion:

How should this matter come to pass?

Consequent to this, wishes are neither exact implementations of the wisher's desires, nor are they monkey's paws or legalistic djinni-style wishes. A true heart will not help if the wish or the wording is not actually what is desired. Limiting their ambition will not save the wisher from disaster, nor will they necessarily face doom from great hubris. Detailed wishes full of multiple clauses are often *less* binding than straightforward ones:

The GM has not signed anything, nor would such a signature be valid; should they misinterpret some tiny clause within a wish, there is no court in which to sue.

A wish isn't always good and it isn't always bad.

... but on *average,* it's somewhat better than a miracle.

The rule for a wish in a conflict is that it isn't. If two wishes seem to be in conflict, it's because the group and GM have misunderstood the world. If one person wishes for America to be west of Africa, and another for Africa to be west of America—

... the world will only become round.

If one person wishes for a fire, and another for a flood, then the fire will burn beneath the waves. If one person wishes to be nameless, and another to know everybody's name, then the group must find some option that's acceptable: that "nameless" is a name; that knowing the name of someone nameless is just knowing that very fact; that the name that is known is not the same as the name that is not had; that the person who wished to be nameless *is no longer a part of everybody* ... something of that sort. A resolution must be found; the wishes can't just ... be opposed.

If one person wishes that the world would be right, and would have always *been* right, and another person points to this book, and says, *no, the world is, or at the very, very least, was, wrong*—

... well, what is right?

It may be possible to chase a contradiction to the point of inescapability. It may even be possible to get there by accident, if the wishes are not dramatically interesting enough to make it worth debating at the table until a satisfactory solution can be found. In that case, the substrate frays; the world and void are uncomfortable in that space, and the difficulty of paying attention to the point of contention rises, potentially past the point where it is possible for mortals or even *Strategists* to manage it at all.

If a wish conflicts with a miracle or a mundane action, on the other hand ... there's still no conflict. The wish has precedence, as do the central ideas of its implementation. This doesn't mean that opposing miracles or mundane actions necessarily *fail,* or that every detail of the wish's implementation automatically succeeds ... but those miracles and mundane actions will exist within a world where the wish, and the core ideas of how that wish will come to pass, are true.

If someone wishes that a certain house will have no windows, for example, and the GM decides to interpret that literally, no miracle or mundane action can make a window for that house—even though, if pressed by an opposing wish, the GM probably *could* figure out a way to reconcile that wish with the existence of a window. The wish might also prevent holes in the walls, but *that's* more a detail: given a good explanation as to why such a hole is definitely not a window, the world's resistance might relax. Possibly the GM would still make it harder than usual, in some fashion, to make such holes with miracles or mundane actions, but they would not be *prevented.*

Two things can block a wish. They don't *oppose* it, not in the normal sense, but they can interfere.

One is a person "taking damage" (pg. 279) to avoid the impact of a wish. This is valid—it's certainly not the case that character autonomy can be taken away just because someone uses a wish power, and it's equally not the case that the GM/group should discard the most appealing resolution of a wish just because it might step on that autonomy. Adjust, perhaps? But not discard.

So, sometimes a wish result will be unacceptable to someone, and sometimes they'll take damage to stop that. If they're not the main target of the wish, it'll contort to stay true without involving them. (If they've taken the title "the Unspeakable Heir," for instance, and someone wishes for the Unspeakable Heir to be dead, and that character ducks out on their death, that doesn't actually stop the wish from resolving some other way. *Someone* probably dies, instead ... but, well. Let's not talk about that now.) If they *are* the only reasonable target of the wish, it fizzles, or, more precisely, it becomes Burn, Fugue, Immersion, Stilling, or Wear. It is subsumed into the greater system construct that is the Costs; ideally, though, the player will think back to the wish when that Cost eventually manifests itself as a Wound (see pg. 272).

The second thing that blocks a wish, in pretty much the same fashion, is a Ward. More precisely, a wish can overcome a Ward in exactly the same circumstances as a miracle can—if the base divine attribute, plus Cost, is at least as great as the difficulty of the wish, plus Ward.

Without that, a Ward will stop the wish from doing things that oppose the Ward. If there is a plausible way to fulfill the wish *without* overcoming Wards that are too high for it, it will find such a workaround. If not, it will linger. Usually.

... waiting, for as long as someone in the group remembers that it's out there, for something or some circumstance to take that problematic Ward away.

It is a curious trait of the linguistic brain that we are so frequently able to articulate our wishes and yet so rarely capable of understanding them.

—*from* The Sound of Nothingness, *by Patricia Mikkelsen*

From a broader perspective, wishes are mostly blind *to* Wards, Rites, and Geasa. Wards are seen as implicit parts of their own wording, not as barriers within the world; if Rothaide is Geased to be the best hockey player in the world, and the wish isn't able to overcome the Geas' Ward, wishing to be better than Rothaide at hockey is equivalent to *I wish I was better than Rothaide at hockey, while she remains the best hockey player in the world.* For this reason, wishes are normally poor at creating Ward-removing effects, and will certainly not do so unprompted to get rid of a Ward that is in their way; more generally, it's rare that a wish will produce a Rite or Geas effect of any other sort.

Wishes do not need to be sustained; they endure indefinitely. That said, for most purposes, it's acceptable to assume that an indefinite wish has faded away by the end of the story after its creation unless a player involved takes some initiative to record it somewhere and keep it in the group's minds. Even then, it'll fade slowly unless it's popular with the group, firmly believed in/accepted by the group, or something that will naturally take a long time to play out.

A wish's range is effectively unlimited, although the natural Wards dividing Regions may impose an inherent limit upon a wish's scope.

Wishes inherently have the capacity to be extraordinary; when a wishing power is marked as such, it is for clarity alone.

They can upgrade to "epic" for the usual +20 to Cost.

COMPLEX CONFLICTS

Occasionally Strategists will find themselves in larger-scale conflicts, where multiple miracles and other effects are used on every side. The goals and stakes may be clear-cut, or they may be abstruse. The struggle may be fair or quite unbalanced. It may be overtly martial, or subtly so, or it may be a peaceful contest among friends.

In such cases, as noted earlier, the GM may set a timer. This should be, in a rough sense, indicative of how long they want to spend on the conflict itself, but that's not the main *purpose.* The purpose is to implement a sense of dramatic tension, a sense that the conflict is building towards a resolution, that isn't strictly tied to the GM's description of what's going on—which will only *sometimes* be a satisfying way to win or lose—or to the final exhaustion of a character's extensive, campaign-length Cost tracks.

Real-time timers are the most notionally on-point but also the most likely to explode the game's verisimilitude; the moment the players win or lose because someone spills a drink on the gaming table and takes five minutes to clean it up—or gets confused and searches through **Glitch** for fifteen minutes while trying to explain what they're thinking about; or gets rousted from the table by a call from family; or whatever else—is also the moment when dramatic tension will be flung akimbo, back all bent, to hang atop the fourth wall's crenellation spikes.

In-game timers are a little better, but still not quite right. Conflicts can, at least potentially, speed up arbitrarily—there's really nothing that stops a Strategist from declaring actions millisecond by millisecond, and there are cases where this is literally what makes sense in-world for them to do. Most of the time, they *won't*; most of the time, that's a ridiculous idea ... but stuff happens, and so a strict IC timer runs the risk of an infinitely accelerating conflict as the end draws near.

Accordingly, the traditional timer is an *exchange count*—a rough estimate of the number of actions the GM expects everyone to take before things end. The exchange count doesn't have to be a precise number, but if the GM wants to go with "a few exchanges" or "around eight exchanges" or whatever, the timer either needs them to warn the players when it's about to run out or warn them early on that they won't get to know.[43] The exchange count also doesn't have to be precise in the sense of "each character gets exactly one action per exchange" ... and in fact *explicitly isn't precise* in that sense ... but, in general, nobody should lose out on actions unless they're actually waiting for something IC, somehow missing actions IC, or taking meaningfully slower actions overall.

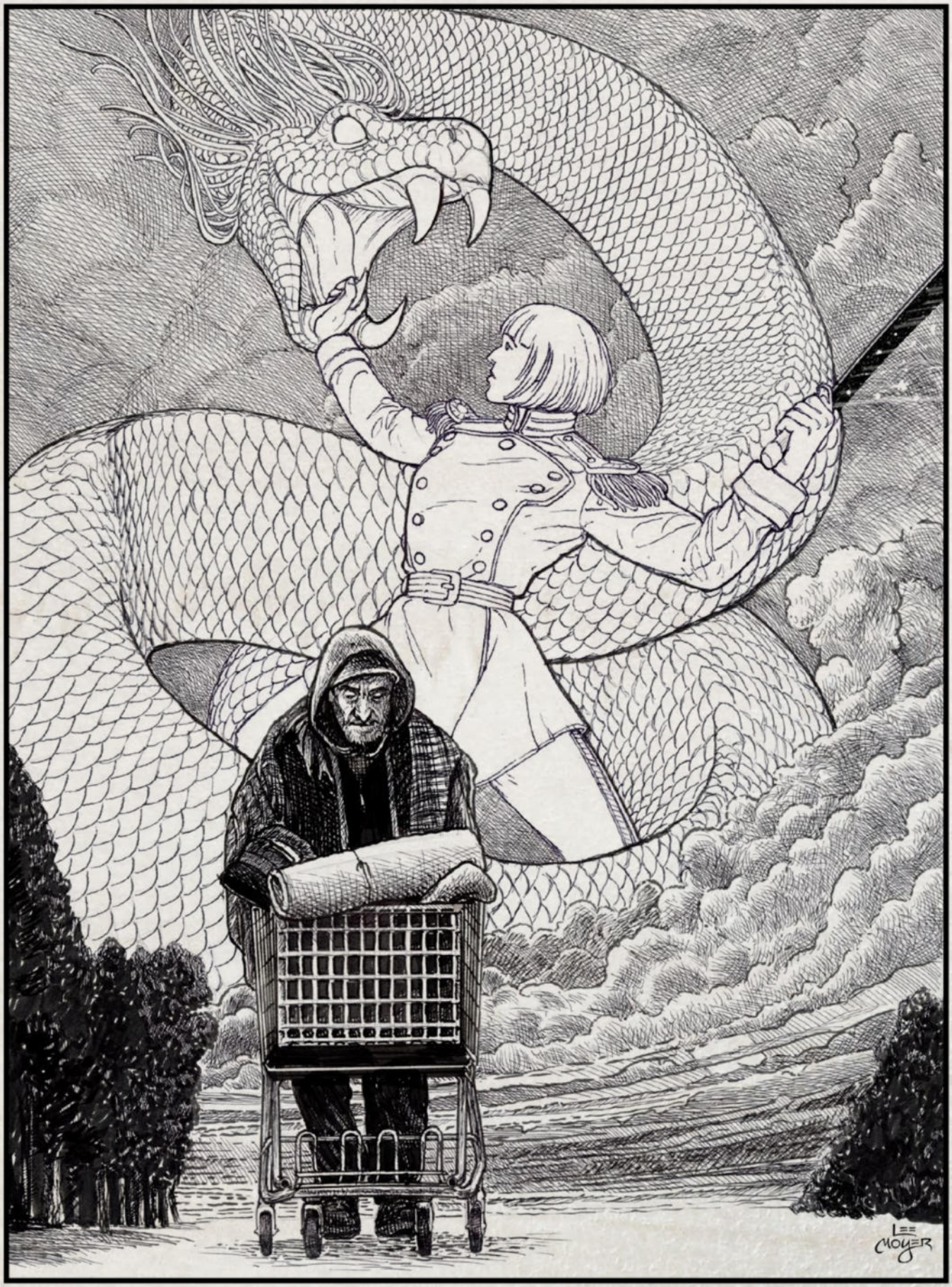
It's useful to pair this action clock with some IC timer, such as "thirty seconds" or "until the dam breaks." The exchange count keeps the fight from accelerating indefinitely, making an IC timer practical; the IC timer, in turn, gives a proper sense of *when the fight will physically resolve.*

Conceptually, *something* is due to happen when these clocks expire. It may be obvious what that is. It may not be, in which case the answer is almost always "one side falls apart." Instead of continuously *handling* everything that would force the conflict to a close; instead of continuously having the *option* of handling anything like that, whether by taking damage or diverting/defeating it with an action of one of one's own ... someone doesn't, and everything falls down from there. Someone gets disoriented. Someone who seemed to be handling things just fine, because the rules allowed them to do that, isn't any longer. Someone who was able to keep up with the tactical situation ... can't, and like dominoes, it all comes down.

Conflicts can end before that point, and often do. The characters win or lose in a way that's satisfying to the group. This doesn't come with anything extra, in the sense that it's not a *formal* conflict victory—but it does mean that they lost, or won. If the conflict is over whether Magneric Nistagard is going to do his fair share of the dishes, and he swears a magically binding oath to do just that, then the conflict probably ends. It's not that it *can't* go on, if his opponent doesn't accept a magically binding oath as enough ... but in most shared-sink situations, that oath

43 If the GM fails to do either, it's not (typically) the end of the world, but it's also not a correct use of the timer rules.

opposite: *by Lee Moyer*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really would be. Similarly, if a conflict is over who gets to keep a rare treasure, and that treasure gets destroyed, the conflict probably ends. The two sides might not be *happy* with one another after that, they might even keep fighting, but the original conflict has ended: everyone lost.

Conflicts can end before the timer, and often do; but if they don't, if the timer runs out, then victory is going to be down to the PCs' spent Cost. Specifically, *the more they've spent, the better they've done.*

In a PC-NPC conflict, the PCs need to spend a fixed total amount of Cost that the GM determines when setting the timer. The GM can share the exact number needed if they want to make sure that the PCs win the conflict ... or if they want to set it scarily high and see if the PCs bite or fold; they can up the pressure a little, by only sharing an approximate number; or, they can keep it secret, and up the pressure *a lot.*

In a PC-PC conflict, characters must outspend their rivals (by individual or by group) in order to come out ahead. The GM can adjust their effective totals for this purpose based on the circumstances, so that characters in unfavorable positions need to spend even more to come out ahead; when doing this, the GM should alert the players *that* they're doing this, but can shake things up a bit by not revealing the *exact* numerical adjustment until the conflict ends.

In a PC-PC-NPC conflict, where some NPCs aren't allied with any particular PC, the winner will need to *both* outspend rival PC (groups) and hit a target GM-defined Cost.

There are two core ideas driving this system. One is that spent Cost represents investment in the situation. The more the PCs spend, the more the players care, and the more that they have *earned.* The second is that spent Cost represents dramatic actions—and particularly, if the PCs spend a lot of Cost towards the end of a conflict to try to reach the target before they lose, that's going to mean that they're doing a bunch of big flashy things that, in turn, ought to produce a dramatically satisfying victory, or at least a good opportunity for their opponents to stumble.

If and when the timer runs out, victory and defeat have been established. The players of the winning PCs explain what they want. The GM—and the other players, when it comes to things like "commitments on their PCs' future behavior" or "things the GM might not be comfortable doing to those PCs without their players' permission"—then give the winners **exactly as much of what they want as they ever really had a chance to get.**

If none of the PCs win, the GM decides what that means. In the absence of any other ideas, the GM is generally recommended to put the PCs in a situation where they have to endure something for a short time (a chapter or two?)—a confinement they can't immediately break free of, an injury that they'd need to take the conflict damage to waive the effects from, or a situation that they just don't understand.

The way things end here, this whole *part* of the system, is kind of cruel. The PCs can wage war on the world, emerge victorious ... and learn they were never going to get what they wanted in the first place. They can lose because it didn't really seem important and have really terrible things happen in exchange.

It's terrible; but, the world is wrong.

That said, the PCs do have one last chance to turn things around here. If they've lost and the cost is just too much to bear, they can take damage and have it not happen. It's just, it's going to be a *lot* of damage, because otherwise there's no real point in the fight itself:

The GM should charge roughly "[the Cost it would have taken to win + 15, divided between as many PCs as are paying it]" to take damage and not eat that loss, unless the PCs are willing to accept a portion of the proposed defeat.

As for turning it around when the PCs win but the GM denies any meaningful result on victory, the only real option is OOC discussion. Obviously, the GM should avoid dispiriting the players, and so the group's OOC input has real meaning here ... but IC, there is no recourse.

The Cost of Victory

Loosely speaking, the Cost of victory could be pegged to the Cost recovery of a Wound (pg. 272)—

One can say, it might cost 10 per PC to prevent superficial problems; 25, serious problems; and 50, critical or metaphysically important ones. Plus, perhaps, 10/25/50 again if there is something superficial, serious, or transformative to gain.

In practice, the higher levels of that only work well for long conflicts. A 400-Cost conflict for the fate of the world is all very well, and a *suitable* number for a 4-PC group[44], but if the GM's only going to let two exchanges go by, it's not going to work very well.

Instead, the GM should consider that number as a practical *maximum*, the Cost that arguably fits if they're going to set a timer of "as long as this conflict takes." More practicably, they should base their Cost total on what the PCs seem to be comfortable spending, aiming lower than that, higher than that, or around where they expect that to be based on some combination of "the IC ease of the conflict" and "how interesting/fun it would be if the PCs actually lost."

The mantis was taller than Cannabas, and its plates were sheer blue steel. With its every feint it cut the air, and lines of hyaline red dripped out. It bled the sky, it advanced on him, and it was singing as it moved.

He had no time for it.

In one leap he stepped upon its head and crushed it down beneath his heel; in the next, he was three further leagues on. Behind him still, and thund'rous, vast, remained the charging of the boar; the mantis flindered in its wake.

—*from* The Sovereign Nail, *by Kyle Lopez*

44 that's all on the same side

Over time, of course, the Costs the GM picks will shape player and PC behavior, particularly when those Costs are kept concealed. From this perspective the GM should aim to burn at least enough Cost to make PCs worry about it—perhaps starting with around three per PC per exchange; then, adjusting either that or the number of expected conflicts up or down until that goal is hit.

The Nettle Rite

In certain cases, after winning a conflict or otherwise, it is possible to profit off of an enemy's defeat.

Any time a character's actions are unacceptable to some opponent—any time it's just *impossible to process* what they've succeeded at; what they've done—they can gild the lily of that victory by using a trick the world calls "the nettle rite." Technically, it's a kind of alchemy, but no one thinks of it that way:

All it takes is the right mindset; a few ritual phrases; and a handful or two of crushed nettles, scattered on the ground.

Then, if one has done it right ...

The broken dreams of one's opponent form a channel; and one's triumph forms a channel of its own; and down those paired and wicked channels a couple points of Cost can flow.

As a general rule mortals aren't valid targets for the nettle rite. They don't have enough spiritual power to *hold* that channel open. Maybe a spirit of a mountain range or a metropolitan area, or an ancient monster, might; maybe a really spiritually impressive person, too ... but as a general rule, if they aren't a scary opponent, or *weren't* a scary opponent, for the Strategists, they probably can't absorb any of their Cost.

This is mostly just the kind of thing Excrucians, Nobles, and Imperators do to *one another.*

The nettle rite isn't restricted to formal defeats in formal conflicts. It can follow, e.g., wrecking someone's car or sneaking their bane into their lunch. It doesn't even have to append to something *bad:*

Moving all of their furniture onto the ceiling might be enough.

Any time a character does something so wicked, so *impossible,* to another character that they just can't process it, that they're *stuck*, that they literally can't move forward to dealing with it, at least not immediately, that's a chance at a nettling.

Now, that's a fairly subjective condition. Accordingly, it's always going to be up to the player of the defeated character—often, the GM—whether or not they're a valid target for this rite.

... that said, for PC targets, one can often cheat this a bit.

If the GM asks someone for an Ability action to pull themselves together, and they opt to Fail instead—which they might do even knowing that a nettling is in the cards, because they just don't know what pulling themselves together would *look* like—then they are established as stuck.

Functionally, the nettle rite operates on valid targets as a nudge (pg. 116). The character scatters a handful of crushed nettles on the ground. Their player often mimes out this gesture as they offer the spotlight "and nettles." The result is a spiritual jolt that almost always functions adequately as a nudge, almost always stirs the target out of their frozen state, either immediately or within a few seconds, and helps them move into action.

... but that comes at a Cost.

Transferring Cost

A typical nettling is worth 1-4 points of Cost; pulling an enemy's world down around their ears might push that up to 3-10. This is a *transfer* and not a gain or loss—for instance, a PC might lose 2 points of Cost, and a nettled NPC gain it, presumably reducing the NPC cost pool (pg. 280).

Ideally this comes from one specific Cost and goes to one specific Cost. Ideally, in fact, it's the same Cost on both sides. ... but that's not the formal rule, because there are too many cases where that would get weird and strategic in unplanned ways.

The *rule* is, each side of the transfer decides the kind of Cost they lose or gain and can divide that among multiple attributes as they prefer.

So, if a PC nettles another PC for 10 points, leaving their life in ruins, it's *best* if they do something like ditching 10 points of Burn onto their target, who then *takes* 10 points of Burn—but it's also fine if they lower their Fugue by 5 and their Wear by 5 while their target takes, instead, a +2 to each Cost.

It is possible to nettle for more than 10—potentially dumping as much as 20 points of Cost on someone else—by attacking the world or void at its metaphysical foundations. Damaging a Noble's Estate with a "flower rite" (pg. 59-60, 328), for instance, allows a follow-up nettle rite to push 15 points of Cost onto their head.[45] Irrecoverably damaging the World Ash, as a more extreme example, might push the full 20 points of Cost onto the cosmos as a whole.

(Which would, of course, be an afterthought; but, it might help survive what happens next.)

Note that being nettled is neither an action nor taking damage (pg. 279); thus, being nettled for 3+ Cost does not grant XP.

45 The fixed number 15 is only guaranteed for the quest version of this power on pg. 328; as a sanity check, the GM can adjust exactly how much Cost is transferred post-flower-rite when a Strategist completes the flower rite and then the nettle rite using **Greater Strategy** (pg. 177) or unstructured play.

GRADEGAIS LAUEN,
WHO IS DYING OF TIME

Cost

If one could be certain of anything regarding Hermanos Streike, it was that he was not Hermanos Streike. The proof of this was straightforward:

In the dark, he was not present. You could flick off the lights, and he wouldn't be there. You could turn them back on, and he would return. Nothing in Hermanos survived between instances to preserve information; therefore one must assume that a deeper phenomenon was responsible—

A deeper phenomenon that, notably, could exist in conditions that excluded Hermanos himself.

—*from* The Blinded I,
by Zerina Verlinšek

The Price of Power

The Four Costs, and Wear, are the power sources for the character's Attributes.

It is through accumulating these Costs—through picking up potentially ruinous amounts of these negative burdens—that they power their greater abilities. It is when those Costs become too high that they suffer life-altering Wounds.

The most important general rules for Costs are these:

- Spending 3+ Cost at once is a significant moment: it earns 1 XP.
- Taking 3+ in "damage:" the same; *and*
- Characters recover one point in each Cost, to a minimum of 0, at the beginning of each chapter.

These points—with apologies to those who are reading both linearly and carefully—have from time to time been, and from time to time *will* be, repeated.

Burn

Burn is the power source for Wyrd. It's the character fucking with their emotional and spiritual integrity.

This is powerful stuff. Even mortals can sometimes push themselves past their limits by taking Burn. They shouldn't. They oughtn't. It's not good for them. But they do.

... it's not good for Strategists, either, but they don't take advice.

Burn is all about the story. In practice, most of the time when it gets used, there won't be a specific story handy. But still, it's all about the story. It's all about the fact that the character isn't just generically pushing themselves, isn't just *generically* enhancing their Wyrd. They're doing *something* that hurts them or breaks them.

Maybe it's just using the power that's hard. Maybe it's that they're going further than they told themselves they would go. Maybe they're actually *doing* something that corrupts them, inside, eats away at what they are.

Now and then it's important to actually think about that.

Here's how it works.

A character can use Burn to push their Wyrd past its limit. They spend a point of Burn, and their Wyrd rises by one. This lasts for the length of an action. They spend two points, and it rises by two.

Only, "spend" isn't quite accurate.

opposite: *by Beatrice Pelagatti*

What's really going on is that they're *gaining* Burn. That's the price.

Use more Wyrd than you have ... and your Burn will go *up.*

You'll get burned.

Characters usually can't use Burn to raise Eide, Flore, Lore, or Ability. The GM can allow it, though, when it fits. If it fits, it works just like it does with Wyrd.

What does "getting burned" mean?

It means there'll be consequences. In their own good time.

When a character lets their Burn get too high, it can turn into a Wound (pg. 272). At that point, it'll usually be up to the player *what* happens, but the norm is that the character *gets depressed,* or otherwise has something weird or unpleasant happen with their mental state; they *get sick,* in a mundane fashion; they *screw up something in their life;* they *face consequences of their deteriorating metaphysical state, like possession, loss of definition, or losing control over a bound artifact;* or, *their infection gets worse.*

Even the weakest Burn Wounds tend to suck; the strongest are incitements to despair.

Sometimes a character will get hit by an effect that's basically a lot *like* Burn. More like Burn than any other Cost, at least. It screws with their emotional and spiritual integrity.

It's a miracle that rips their soul apart, or impresses a false despair upon their heart. Or whatever.

If they don't want to put up with that, they can "take damage" with Burn instead of the effect. It turns from *a thing that happened* into some GM-set amount of Burn.

If the effect is so minor that it wouldn't otherwise matter in play—if they're brushed by the shadow of despair, say, and that's a thing in the world, but it's really only impactful cumulatively; if *by itself* it's such a small thing the GM can't even suggest a change in the character's demeanor—the GM can *force* "taking damage," directly assigning just a few points of Burn.

Fucking with your emotional and spiritual integrity hurts. But it's also something that can move your story forward. Maybe it's because it gets you somewhere. Maybe it's because you learn *not to do that.*

Characters who spend 3+ Burn in a single action get 1 XP.

Damage counts here, too, so a 3-point hit of Burn damage will earn the same XP that a 3-Burn action does. It does have to be all at once, though, either way, and either way the XP caps at 1. (A 0-Wyrd character can potentially spend 32 Burn on an epic **Greater Masking** or 3 on a **Lesser Contagion;** they'd earn a single XP either way.)

A character starts at [Wyrd × 10] Burn. It gets "severe" somewhere around 40. By 80, it's a crisis. 108 is as high as it goes—

At that point, there's not enough *left* in there to Burn.

That means that a character with Wyrd 7 starts pretty burned out, on the verge of a crisis. That said, they can still spend 10 Burn before they get there, and they're only going to need *to* spend it to do particularly exacting things.

Burn drops by one at the start of each chapter, to a minimum of 0.

Damage

This section isn't a Cost. It's a warning: physical damage might not work the way you'd expect.

See, Strategists don't really have things like broken legs or whatever unless they want to. Shoot them, and they get up again, bleeding a trickle of dark blood from the corner of their mouth. Drop them off a cliff and they'll crawl away, mangled, but slowly looking ever more hale and fit. *Forcibly* break their leg, and they'll still be able to walk, and they'll stop having a broken leg as soon as people stop thinking about it.

They're not immune to damage, but it's not really a *physical thing* for them.

Damage is just piled on stress to their system. Bruises at the low end, falling into lava at the high end, and everything from getting shot to getting sick in between—it's not going to be its own thing. It's not going to be cleanly separate from exhaustion and depletion.

It's just Wear.

It can turn into other things. If someone is trying to harm them in a specific way, e.g., to break their finger, the Strategist can let that happen. They can take Wear to stop it, or to twist it, but they can also *let it happen,* and it won't turn into generic Wear, then, until they change their mind—if they ever do—about that, later on.

Or, later, *having* taken generic Wear, a Strategist can condense some of it into a physical Wound (pg. 272). This will usually happens when they are given a good excuse, like something wrenching their shoulder or someone shooting them. At that time, they pick up a Wound, a *quality*, like "pulled shoulder" or "recovering from being shot." Such Wounds are metaphysically questionable, perhaps; framed through the lens of the player's conception, certainly ... but from a practical perspective, they are real things, manifest within the world.

That these are different things—the broken finger, the Wear, and the Wound—are observable if at some point a Strategist with the appropriate power erases the damage with **Destruction** (pg. 235). If their finger was declaratively broken, and now it is declaratively *not*-broken, the matter is up to the GM. They are not necessarily

I could feel the claws of guilt and karma clutching at me, but I tore away:

"I am nothing of this world."

—from The Evasionist, *by Xavier Quint*

He laughed. It was a broken, crazed laugh. He looked down at the blood on his fingers, and then over to me. I'm not sure where it came from. I hadn't shot him. I couldn't have shot him, even though I'd sure tried, since I'd forgotten my gun.

I thought I'd forgotten my gun. I mean, it was absolutely not there.

So he was absolutely not shot.

He just wasn't managing, somehow, to be as un-shot, you know, as a person who hadn't been shot ought to have been.

—from the Thought-Record of Ana T. Pitts

healthy, their finger having instead receded to the default state of bone before brokenness and unbrokenness were clearly separated and distinct ... but the prospects for that state are favorable. Most GMs will just say, "You're fine." Conversely, if the Strategist took Wear, a miracle like that can't help them; they will still have Wear. And, finally, if they are carrying a *Wound* like "pulled shoulder," that Wound has integrated itself into their Eide—erasing the physical manifestation may lift a portion of their burden, but their λ-pulled shoulder will remain active as a Wound.

The key point in all of this is that such incidental damage is not *medical.* Throw a Strategist from the back of a moving truck and what happens to them will not be determined by a detailed and excruciatingly accurate examination of what each bump along the way would do to a human body, to a human soul. Nor do such matters attend unto a damage track specifically their own. If something hurts a Strategist, and is not very deliberately intended to cripple them in a *specific* way, to enact visible or situational damage with a very *specific* effect, the result will not be lacerations, organ damage, bruises, breaks, or bloody noses:

It will just be Wear.

Life beats them up, and they grow—not injured, really—but rather tired; *lesser* ... weary of it.

Drained.

Fugue

Fugue is the power source for Lore. Each character commands a certain Sphere of the Beyond—a portion of the yawning nothingness that is the subject of their Lore. They mine it for resources; they tame its creatures; they build artifacts therefrom. It resonates with their being, but it is also poisonous.

It contains within itself a λ-perspective that is antithetical to reason.

To embrace one's Sphere—to truly immerse in the alien logic of it, to cultivate an empathy to its ways—is to lose one's understanding of the world, and void, and ultimately oneself. To reach the greatest heights of mastery of one's Sphere, one must no longer be human, nor Excrucian, nor royalty of Ninuan, but an outcropping of the Sphere's own arcane dream.

Obsessions, delusions, altered priorities, corrupted perceptions, and ultimately even a loss of one's physical distinction from the Sphere follow, inevitably, in consequence. Increasingly, in the fashion of the cultist or the radical, one perceives everything through a lens forged of the Sphere.

This, is a Strategist's Fugue.

It is the degree to which the Strategist who commands an otherworldly flame is no longer wise enough to put it aside, but walks around with it upon their shoulder; or burns themselves with it at night; or seeks out victims to feed to it; or prays to seven "godly flames," and the fiery apocalypse that is to come. It is the degree to which the Strategist who rules the bird spirits of the Not wastes their life dreaming of the sky; forgets to eat as humans do; grows λ-feathers of their own.

Malakai Mesmer, who pins humans like they were butterflies, is deep within his Fugue; Lexiarchos Caducine, in her brief and shameful period of "opposing Christmas," had fallen deep into her Fugue as well.

An herbalist lost in plant-drugged dreams; a magician who lets the magic within consume them; a student of God-Beasts who gives up their flesh to become a pale imitation of a beast—

These are the kinds of forms a Fugue can take.

Fugue's rules mirror Burn's almost exactly:

- It can be spent to improve Lore, on a one-for-one basis;
- It can be spent to improve Eide, Flore, Wyrd, or Ability, but only when it's clear it fits;
- It can be used to "take damage" in lieu of an effect that confuses or twists the mind or body ...
  - and the GM can directly assign Fugue for minor mental corruption or confusion effects;
- It starts at [Lore × 10];
- It caps at 108, after which it can no longer be spent;
- It goes down by 1 point at the start of a chapter, to a minimum of 0; and
- Spending 3+ points of it in a single action, or taking 3+ in a single incident of damage, earns the character 1 XP.

The difficult thing is not learning to see in nothingness, but learning to stop seeing in nothingness when one has returned into the world. That car did not leave the road, swerving across a dozen pedestrians before it crashed into a light; therefore, I do not need to concern myself with it doing so. That three-eyed bird, fire-gravid, ribbed in brass, is not crouched upon a wire overhead: therefore, I do not need to fear.

—Here. Here, in the world, where not-things have no consequence:

Here, I do not need to fear.

—from the Journal of Roesia de Cole

Fugue Wounds take the form of delusions, obsessions, or compulsions; physical or spiritual mutations; symbiosis with some element of one's Sphere; dependence upon the same; possession; or perhaps other things besides: in some way, and in some fashion, the character yields up their *perspective,* their *reason,* or their *independence* to the influence of their Sphere.

The weakest Fugue Wounds are only negative as part of this slippery slope, perhaps; or, clearly negative, but only nominally so, and likely to continue to be nominally so. The stronger ones shall be definitively bad.

Immersion

Immersion is the power source for Flore. It's the character ... giving in. It's the character giving up on who they are, forgetting the wrongness of things, and becoming a creature of Creation.

It's not good. There are ways to interpret the general concept that are good, there are people who hear about Immersion and they think that it is good, but it isn't. It's not one of those interpretations. It's the bad one.

It's the one that runs right straight on into the way Strategists aren't *supposed* to be creatures of Creation. The one where *at best,* in succumbing to Creation, they lose everything that makes them different. The one where at worst, they become a simultaneous blasphemy to both the world and void.

It's not opening their eyes to the beauty of Creation. It's forgetting the hard lessons that once made them turn away.

That's probably an exaggeration. It's probably fair to say, a character who earns less than 1 Immersion per chapter might just be expressing normal appreciation. Maybe it doesn't actually become a *sickness* until it starts to accumulate, until it starts to cyst into Immersion Wounds.

It's just worth remembering that accepting the broken world can go too far.

Immersion's rules follow those of Burn and Fugue:

- It can be spent to improve Flore, on a one-for-one basis;
- It can be spent to improve Eide, Lore, Wyrd, or Ability, but only when it's clear it fits;
- It can be used to "take damage" in lieu of an effect that binds the Strategist into reality, opens their heart to something of Creation, or reveals one of their secrets ...
  - and the GM can directly assign Immersion for trivial instances of those effects;
- It starts at [Flore × 10];
- It caps at 108, after which it can no longer be spent;
- It goes down by 1 point at the start of a chapter, to a minimum of 0; and
- Spending 3+ points of it in a single action, or taking 3+ in a single incident of damage, earns the character 1 XP.

Immersion Wounds are things that the Strategist has become emotionally entangled with, false conceptions they have accumulated, harmful patterns they've fallen into, threats to their freedom (particularly their freedom from the games of the law-beings), and pieces of their true being they have lost.

The weakest Immersion Wounds, perhaps, barely dip a toe into *samsara,* but even that can be quite dangerous; the shore of the world is treacherous, and its waters very deep.

Revelation

This section is another warning.

Strategists can use Immersion to "take damage" when someone might find out one of their secrets. At least, one of their important secrets. One that would matter. (But then, if it didn't matter, why would they be taking damage?)

They can absorb the social and positional damage they take that way.

The GM can also just hand out Immersion if a little secret comes out.

The consequence of this is that it's hard to dig up any really great dirt on a Strategist, and even harder to publicize it if one does. By default, if someone's getting too close to finding or sharing something that the Strategist would really rather not come out, the Strategist takes Immersion damage instead.

If this keeps going long enough, though, something probably *will* come out. Something big. Something that'll hurt. That'll be a Wound (pg. 272). More precisely, it'll be *part* of a Wound; it turns out that "my secret is out" isn't a very good Wound, because *narratively speaking* that doesn't do anything on its own; narratively speaking, when a secret comes out, it's more of a question, more of a "what's going to happen now?" kind of thing, while Wounds are meant more to be answers, actual consequences, *things that are happening.*

... but if the Strategist's been taking a lot of Immersion hiding their secrets, then maybe it *is* time that the world learned *something,* and something more happens because of that. They can take that pair, the revelation and its effect, as a Wound; e.g.: "my enemies have learned that I have a mortal child ... and are actively using this to trouble me."

Humans are generally accepting of Excrucians—most Americans, for instance, would rather have an Excrucian for a neighbor than an atheist—but the situation is unstable. Lightning rods for communal discontent and awe, an Excrucian that dares be open about themselves will eventually be either celebrated, or reviled.

—from Fear No Evil: the Cinematic Experience of Unbeing Through the New Hollywood and Post-Classical Ages, *by Matthew Stiner*

Stilling

Stilling is the power source for Eide. It's the character committing to an identity, either playing dangerous games with *who they are* and changing their original dream-of-self ... or calcifying that dream, committing themselves more inescapably into being something they already are. For λ-beings, who were never meant to *be* something all that precisely, it doesn't take ridiculous extremes for the second option to be a bad thing:

It's *inherently* as self-destructive as is the first.

Regardless, in moderation or in excess, it is exactly the work of defining oneself—of *choosing to become*—that will help a character to reach the greatest heights of Eide.

Stilling's rules mirror Burn's as well:

- It can be spent to improve Eide, on a one-for-one basis;
- It can be spent to improve Flore, Lore, Wyrd, or Ability, but only when it's clear it fits;
- It can be used to "take damage" in lieu of an effect that transforms the Strategist or strengthens their self-definition ...
  - and the GM can directly assign Stilling for trivial instances of those effects;
- It starts at [Eide × 10];
- It caps at 108, after which it can no longer be spent;
- It goes down by 1 point at the start of a chapter, to a minimum of 0; and
- Spending 3+ points of it in a single action, or taking 3+ in a single incident of damage, earns the character 1 XP.

Stilling Wounds are changes in what the character *is*. The most common changes are an accumulation of legend, where the dream-of-self becomes both more detailed and less *normal* ... and an opposite, of sorts, where they leave a certain part of themselves behind. The character also has the option to define something about who they are that had never been defined before in any fashion, or, to be forced to change something already fully defined.

The weakest Stilling Wounds are generally only negative in that they *are* a change, or *are* a new point of definition; or—as with Fugue—are clearly negative, but only nominally so, and likely to continue to be the same. Serious Stilling Wounds are those that change or redefine the character in a way that brings a meaningful *malus* or conflict to their life.

Wear

Wear is the "wear and tear" on the character's mind and body. It's the power source for Ability.

The rules are again similar to those for Burn, with one major difference:

- **Wear always begins at 40.**

Aside from that,

- It can be spent to improve a mundane Ability result, on a one-for-one basis;
- It can be used to "take damage" in lieu of an effect that physically damages the Strategist ...
  - and the GM can directly assign Wear for trivial physical wounds (or stress);
- It caps at 108, after which it can no longer be spent;
- It goes down by 1 point at the start of a chapter, to a minimum of 0; and
- Spending 3+ points of it in a single action, or taking 3+ in a single incident of damage, earns the character 1 XP.

Wear is, however, unique in that it is a mundane, functionally physical trait:

- Characters can't use it to fuel divine attributes.
- at the GM's option, medical treatment can recover Wear incurred from recent injuries.
- at the GM's option, other worldly things may cost, or help recover, Wear.

Wear Wounds

When it comes to Wear, minor Wounds generally focus on how the Strategist is fraying—on the impact of stress, exhaustion, alienation, wounds, and eradicated un-wounds upon their psyche. They're damage to the Strategist's ability to maintain good habits and relationships.

More substantive Wounds are either health complications emerging or re-emerging, bad but situationally adaptive patterns emerging, or the impact of major life decisions brought on by overwork, strain, and running oneself ragged. These can be good life decisions, but they're also desperate ones—the character can move to a better place for them, or cut off a relationship that was hurting them, and that can be a good thing, but they don't do it from a good place; they do it because they just can't handle what's going on.

These Wounds, as will be discussed shortly, come in Superficial, Serious, and Transformative varieties, consuming (using up) respectively 10, 25, and 50 Wear.

The bills sat staring at me from the table. I unmade the ash tray that was next to them. It was a warning. But they only glowered the more balefully my way.

"I can break you," I said. I couldn't break them. It would not help me. My accounts would remain due. I could break my accounts being due, but I was not sure what would happen. Possibly I would lose my accounts. Possibly they would be overdue. Possibly everything would be fine and I would dance in fields of jade and happiness for all remaining of eternity.

But that has never happened yet.

"I can break you," I told them, but they did not listen. I got angry, then. I singed an edge.

—from Midnight Season, *by Lindsay C.*

A **Superficial Wound** (–10 Wear) is typically quite negative, but also very squishily defined. It's all in the player's hands: there's something that they're going to do, and ideally it's something that they can portray cleanly and overtly, to display the way they're fraying ... but at the same time, because it *is* just a roleplaying thing, not something that the GM's enforcing, and because that kind of thing gets very legitimately and realistically dropped in a serious crisis—it really only takes one friend in the hospital, one earthquake, or one attack by a pack of spider-machines for a lot of wear-driven bad habits to just kind of *get forgotten* in real life—it's not all that bad. More objective but also relatively neutral or minor wear-and-tear-caused conditions can be Superficial Wounds as well.

A **Serious Wound** (–25 Wear) is something brought on by sustained stress, pushing oneself too hard, and possibly physical damage that creates a meaningful malus or conflict in the character's life. Maybe the character works themselves into a stroke or a heart attack and they aren't at the top of their game even after a friend erases the damage. Maybe they screw up and get injured and, again, erasing it doesn't quite leave them *well.* Maybe they quit their job, or break up with their significant other. Eventually, as the next section describes, the effect will fade and the Wound recover. After that, e.g., the character is managing the health condition to the point where it's not really impairing, or, it's legitimately faded away; they've found a new job, more or less the same as the old job; or the sparks from the breakup have, finally, died down.

A **Transformative Wound** (–50 Wear) is much like a Serious Wound, but more metaphysically profound, more narratively important, and, potentially, eternal.

These Wounds can result in negative Wear, but, as anyone who has ever experienced Wear-related Wounds knows, this does not actually represent calm, peace, and relaxation; it's more that, for a short time, at least, things don't get *any worse.*

Wounds

As a general rule, all these kinds of Cost take actual effect when and only when the player conceptualizes a fitting *crisis.*

That is, the effects of high Cost are mostly *not* intrinsic to the trait. Rather, at some point, the player says something like:

"I've trashed my mind, mood, and soul—well, taken a lot of Burn—so then *this* happens."

Or, "I have a lot of Wear built up, so let's take a Wound."

For instance, Burn might turn into a spike of depression—either a loose, subjective one, where the player plays out the character's depression, or a more objective and specific one, a period of time wherein the GM will ask for tasks (pg. 127) more often and the character just won't seem to catch a break. Abstractly, in the latter case, this will be asserted to be confirmation bias, with the character merely *feeling* unlucky, merely *feeling* like life has grown more complicated ... but the GM will *play* it as a genuinely harsher world; a genuinely awful streak of luck.

Fugue, on the other hand, might turn into an obsession with the sound of bugs.

If the effect in question is relatively minor—if it's a meaningful expression of the Cost, yes, but also completely subjective, or, fails to create a long-term conflict or malus in the character's life—then this is a **Superficial Wound.** It eats 10 points of the appropriate Cost.

If the original effect *does* create a meaningful malus or conflict in the character's life, it can be taken as a **Serious Wound** that consumes **25** points of the appropriate Cost. This is the level at which "depression" and "limps" and similar Wounds have to be made more specific—where the player has to come up with a way that the Wound *isn't* just up to their roleplaying; where there has to be an objective hook for the GM or group.

If a Wound could be a Serious Wound, but is also metaphysically profound—which is not necessarily to say that it's *worse* than a Serious Wound, only that it's more *narratively important*—then it can be taken as a **Transformative Wound,** instead. This consumes **50** points of the given Cost.

Wounds like this can take the character's Cost below 0; that won't mean the character is doing *better* than a Cost 0 character, though. It just means, as it did for Wear, that their current Wounds overstate their Cost to a certain extent; that *new* instances of that Cost will first go to reinforcing and fleshing out their asseverated difficulties before branching out to arrange for something new.

A Wound, once taken, is a *choice* that a player has made about what happens to their character. This is usually written on their character sheet: e.g., "Wound: I've lost identifiable eye color.[46]"

For a Superficial Wound, this is enforced by a generic wish effect that lasts until the end of the next chapter: *So mote it be.*

This isn't to suggest that that character wishes for it. Or that *any* character does. But that's the rules concept that we're going to use.

If someone else wants to miracle eye color onto the aforementioned Strategist, maybe it won't work, because of the wish. Maybe the eye color *falls off,* because of the wish. Maybe it sticks on, but it's obviously not *their* eye color, it's just eye color that someone else painted on ... because there is a wish. The effect is fickle, it is imprecise, but it wins miraculous conflicts; it ducks around the limits, when it can, of a Ward or Geas; if confronted with another wish or Wound, it struggles, and it finds a way to reconcile them:

It's a wish effect (pg. 260).

Wishes are powerful and potentially eternal in these rules, but that doesn't mean that every *Wound* is

46 a 10-point Burn or Stilling Wound.

necessarily crippling, long-term, or innately powerful. It definitely doesn't mean that Wounds are good at overriding the player's concept of their character—in fact, they specifically *can't:*

Any Wound that would force the GM to directly interpret the character's nature, or directly alter their behavior, is invalid.

Wounds can change the world, how the world reacts to the character, and what's easy or hard for them, but can't *directly*—except as the player interprets it—change who the character is or what they choose to do. If a player wants a Wound like "I'm wracked with grief" or "I don't know how to talk to people any more," they have to run it by the GM, or kick it around the table, or think about it very hard, and hope that someone has an interpretation of how that would work that isn't "so, the GM runs that PC now, I guess?"

For a Superficial Wound, that interpretation can sometimes be, "OK, let's just have the player assume that the Wound is there, and if they don't play it right, or have the *option* not to play it right, who cares?"

For Serious and Transformative Wounds, though, that answer isn't adequate; the GM, group, or player must come up with something else.

Superficial Wound effects last until the end of the next chapter. They don't *have* to dissipate at that point, but at that point, they lose their campaign-sculpting force. If at that point the player wants to strike the Wound off their character sheet and start ignoring it, they may do so. If they keep it, the GM may or may not respect its continuing existence:

Its moment has already passed.

Serious Wounds work in a similar fashion, except that the wish effect lasts until the end of the next story.

For Transformative Wounds, the Wound and the wish are indefinite. That doesn't mean that they're *permanent* ... if at some point the GM and player agree that they don't apply any longer, or the GM decides to stop strictly enforcing the Wound, then that's fine ... but they can, at least in theory, continue until the completion of the game.

A Steady Pace

A character can claim at most one Wound per session. They cannot claim 25+ Cost Wounds two sessions in a row.

These aren't limits on a particular type of Wounds. They cover all the kinds of Wounds one has. If a character takes a Stilling Wound, they can't take a Burn Wound that session. If they take a Transformative Fugue Wound, they can't take a Serious or Transformative Burn Wound the next session ... they're stuck taking no Wounds at all, or a Superficial Wound, whatever kind that Superficial Wound might be.

There's only so fast one can destroy oneself, no matter how fiercely one should try.

Even so, a character who starts a story with 80+ in exactly one Cost *must*, if possible, try to take a Serious or Transformative Wound in that Cost before the end of the story. If they start a story with 80+ in *multiple* Costs, then they must try to take a Serious or Transformative Wound in *at least* one of them ... and, preferably, in the highest one or the one that hit 80+ most recently.[47]

If the story ends, or is near ending, and such a character *hasn't* taken a Serious or Transformative Wound, the GM may step in and assign one. This is the only case where the GM, and not the player, can create the basic substance of a Wound.

The Ending Book

Every character has an "ending book." It tells the story of how they die for the final time.

When they've fed 80+ points of a particular Cost to Wounds, they'll write a sentence about that Cost in their ending book.

At 160+, and 240+, and 320+ ... another.

When they've written four sentences about a particular Cost, their story ends. With that sentence, their ending book is complete.

When they've written six or more sentences *altogether*—if the GM and player agree that it's a suitable end to that character's story—their story ends *there,* too. With that sentence, with that Cost, their ending book is complete.

GMs have the option to adjust these numbers. A short game, for instance, might write a sentence for each 30+ Cost, or just a sentence per Wound. A short game focused *on* the ending book might write sentences when particularly ominous things happen, which the players may not even have the chance to control—and might also remove the player veto at the six-sentence mark. A genuinely epic saga, meant to run for years of weekly sessions, might drop the "six sentences" option, closing the book only when there are four sentences for any single Cost alone.[48]

Once a character finishes their story, the player may still play them for a short time—specifically, until there's a good opportunity to reify that ending, implementing it in the game, or, until there's a time skip long enough that the GM judges that that ending has gone by. At that point, the player should respectively implement that ending or describe how they expect it happens, collaborating with the GM and group at any point where their authority or their inspiration fails.

The nature of the sentences, and the way a character's story ends, will depend upon the Cost that drives them to the book, as follows:

47 They need not try to take a Wound in each, even if a many-session story makes it possible.

48 It might also want to slow advancement, perhaps requiring the player to accumulate 110, 190, or 270 total XP through quests before claiming a 1 CP, 2 CP, or 3 CP reward (pg. 323).

The Babel hat of Maxwell Mann will pierce the subtle veils of the world. Its weight will settle comfortably upon Mann's brow. The hooked tooth at the top will bite a hand in Heaven. Maxwell Mann's third eye will open and he will look upwards towards his God. But he will find that the God he served has long forsaken Heaven.

Ah! what blind and hundred-handed beast is this that he sees then?

It crawls, it skirls, it scurries through the endless land of Heaven. It hunts as it has hunted for the Earth and its life below.

And seeing it, Maxwell Mann will howl; and bitten by his hat, the creature too! It will writhe in its pain and it will smile its most secret, terrible smile. Then in one great skitter, like a centipede of angels, it will descend the long arc of his hat, and if Mann could toss the hat aside, then it would fall, and all thereafter would be well …

But he will not. Oh, he will not; and that is how the world will end.

—from 24 Finales, *by Rannen Yedidyah*

Burning Down to Ash

After feeding 80 points of Burn to Wounds, characters write a sentence in their ending book about *how they're hurt.* How they're *damaged.*

Like, *I've let the void control me.*
I've torn my soul.
Or, *I've tried to stand apart.*

When Burn completes the ending book, the character breaks. They just can't do it any more.

If they're lucky, they go out into the void and find a private and eternal chrysalis somewhere. If they're not, they cease to be—perhaps becoming a ghost or revenant, perhaps becoming a puppet of an enemy, perhaps just unraveling into what they've always been:

Nothing, of course, whatsoever.

The Arcanist's Doom

After feeding 80 points of Fugue to Wounds, characters write a sentence in their ending book about *how they're losing perspective.* How they're *giving in to the ideas and ways of the Beyond.*

Like, *people are just appendages of the cities, you know?*
There's void-fungus woven into my brain.
Or, *I keep seeing the dead.*

When Fugue completes the ending book, the character is no longer a Strategist. They might still be *powerful.* They might still be *important.* They might still be a *thing,* or at least a λ-thing. ... but they've lost what it took to be what they were, or to be a PC.

It's technically not a death, *qua* death, or ending, *qua* ending. The ex-them still *exists*, in a certain form; the player can advise the group on what they might do, for instance, if they should show up in the game.

Drowning in the World

Maybe it's not as bad from the perspective of Creation, but Immersion can add to the ending book too.

After feeding 80 points of Immersion to Wounds, characters write a sentence in their ending book about how they're *entangled in the world.* How their loyalties—their very sense of self and right—have become confused.

Like, *I care about my job ... why do I care about my job?*
I don't know if I'm even really a void-person any more.
Or, *I think that maybe I was wrong.*

When Immersion completes the ending book, the Strategist becomes completely lost. It's not just their loyalties. It's not just about getting compromised, or switching sides, or being deceived. Four Immersion truths and the Strategist *breaks,* because they're not *supposed* to be entangled in the world. Because the world is wrong. Because if it's right, if it's right at all, it's *not right for them.*

Perhaps the wild spark of the void inside of them goes out. Perhaps they sink beneath the surface of the world. Maybe they become something *wrong* and *twisted*, maybe love didn't turn out to open a good path for them at all: maybe it broke them, and made them wickeder, instead.

They lose what they were, and the gossamer threads of reality wrap around them; they become *something else.*

... not a PC, though; though, as with Fugue, an *ex*-them might stick around.

Becoming Defined

After feeding 80 points of Stilling to Wounds, characters write a sentence in their ending book about *what they are.*

Like, *I'm not normal any more—more like a hunting deity.*
I've had to give up that part of me that burned.
Or, *I guess I've grown up, now.*

When Stilling completes the ending book, much as with Burn, the character breaks. That last bit of definition becomes all that they are.

If they're lucky, they become an NPC. If they're unlucky, they've defined too much; they burn out the wild death in them, and they can no longer die, can no longer reach Ninuan, can no longer celebrate the free will that alien death inculcates in the people of Creation. Their infection swallows them; they fall into bleakest revenance.

Wearing Out

Lastly, after feeding 80 points of Wear to Wounds, characters write a sentence in their ending book about how they're running out of traction with the world. How ... they just can't *do* it any more, or how it's not working as well, anyway.

Like, *my plans just don't seem to be paying off.*
I'm tired.
Or, *I was never meant to win in the first place; you can't beat the Glitch.*

When Wear completes the ending book, ... it's all futile.

Maybe they go revenant. Maybe they get captured, maybe killed. Maybe they're no longer a threat against the world and the world knows it and things get easier, even.

But—

They no longer have the agency to be a functional PC.

opposite: *by Camille "Karma" O'Leary*

Dresdinian Granda,
who is dying of Family

Death

Until a character has finished out their ending book, death does not end their story. They are able to suffer it. They may have their physical existence terminated. They may suffer more *complete* extinguishment at the hands of the law-beings and their serfs. They may throw themselves into some event horizon found in the Beyond. These things are fatal ... but it is a circumscribed fatality.

For the Strategists, physical death is a diminished specter. As revenants, they cannot get away from the glitch just by having their brains stop working. As Ninuanni, they may continue to function in such a state. The first ensures that if they are helpless, if they are *actually* defeated and left an object rather than a being, they will not cease to be. Rather, they will awaken some time later, in their sanctuary; or, living their life as they were living it before death took them; or, worst of all, reincarnated, caught in the stream of souls that flows along the Ash and reborn as something else, on some other world. Not as sea slugs or as alien giants or as any other suchlike things, no, not unless their ambiguity allows such things, and even re-experiencing infancy is rather rare, but they *may* be reborn on a world where humans emerge relatively adult from giant flower-buds, or wake awkwardly to new consciousness at the age of six or ten.[49] All of that assumes that they are truly disincarnate in the first place: it is possible that their Eide may force thoughts through their mind without a living brain to serve as medium, that their Wyrd may erase the wound and restart any systems that have died, or that they backed themselves up in robot form as a strategy of last resort. If that happens then the world will be dimly aware of it; it will recognize that the Strategist, on some level, is still there, animating their unabandoned corpse, and will not cast them off to Ninuan, reboot their life to an earlier backup, or reincarnate them to elsewhere on the Tree.

Existence failure is a more troubling matter; normally a Strategist will either willfully or unwillingly take damage before they allow an effect to erase or wreak ruin on their metaphysical substructure. If somehow that does not happen, and the Strategist is eliminated descriptively while their ending book is not exhausted, then they will eventually recoalesce. There is *notionally* a great risk that they will do so as a revenant, that the *Strategist* in them will be gone and that the only thing that will return will be the world's tormented echo; however, since the ending book is not complete, that will not be the case. Instead, the difference between existence failure and physical death is that returning from the former will take longer, and leave the Strategist more worn out—more damaged by the process, and with that damage perhaps more measured out in Burn than Wear.

As a practical matter, a PC's death makes them unavailable for the remainder of the chapter, unless they warp it by taking damage so that it is not really "death" at all. Afterwards, the GM should let the player play an NPC or kibitz until it is possible to time skip forward to the PC's return. That return is, by default, at least some days later ... but if it looks likely that a time skip will not be possible for many chapters, the GM can consider moving the resurrection forward to as early as the next chapter, or, more plausibly, the chapter after that.

Death is generally damaging, unless it is extremely peaceful and the return is couched in grace. Early resurrection is even more so. It is *presumably* less total damage than taking damage to avoid dying in the first place, but that is not guaranted; many GMs will keep the totals close to even to ensure that characters will only die—with all attendant complications—when it is genuinely fitting that they do.

Disappointment

For the people of Creation, strength is born in adversity.

... but Strategists are broken.

For them, it is said, strength is born out of failure; and not even their own failure. Not even when their plans fall down around their head, not even when they suffer, not even when their world goes wrong.

When they let others down.

When they *disappoint them*, principally with things like failing to show up, failing to do things they committed to, failing to grow or be better, failing to be as good or great or wise or sacred as they sometimes seem about to be—

"We are purposive creatures," the Power said. "We are not meant to sit unused, but to do battle."

I made a face.

"There is speculation," she said, "that we ... become stronger, literally, when we face trials and horrors. That it is not just the exigencies of the circumstances that make us do our best, but an actual, measurable flow of miraculous energy into us, provided by the universe."

"Yes," I agreed. I sighed. "Perhaps. —for us, as well."

"When ... you face trials," she said. Her face was skeptical. I read an implication in it that I ignored. It was on the order of, when have you faced a trial in your life, Jocelin? How would you know?

It was an illegitimate implication, anyway. I face many trials. I am caught in an eternal life-death cycle. Bookended with an endless torment. I have trials practically oozing out my ears here, Maggie; and, anyhow, the world is wrong.

... nevertheless, I was forced to admit, I did not gain miraculous energy from facing trials. I shook my head.

"No," I said. "When..."

I cleared my throat. "When you do."

"Oh my fucking God."

— from the Thought-Record of Jocelin Duras

49 The GM is permitted and even encouraged to treat the passage of time on other worlds as poorly matched to Earth's if they wish to play out such a storyline. That's not an *expected* feature of traveling the World Ash ... but it might prove a convenient one.

That's their natural environment. That's when the world seems to resonate with them, that's when the void seems to harmonize with their deepest nature, and suddenly they have a bit more strength.

When they let someone down, in short, the GM may let them burn a point off one of the Costs of their choice, down to a minimum of 0.

Not being their best self, or maybe whatever it is that's *keeping* them from being their best self: it also helps them put themselves back together and shed a bit of their Burn or Wear or whatever. *Not* being what they're supposed to be frees them of a little Fugue, or Stilling, or Immersion.

The Strategists are brilliant and deadly but they are also self-sabotaging, self-involved, and self-consumed. They can get better about this ...

But even at their best, *dependability* and *perspective* are balancing acts for them, difficult practices, against their fundamental nature.

In the Host, they're disasters for one another and their own side.

In the world, when they start to turn away from that—whether it's just by picking up a bit of Flore or by breaking away from the Host entirely to join the Chancery—they start screwing over the lives of the people in Creation that depend on them as well.

Of course, there's nothing that *forces* them to screw up. There's nothing that *forces* them to fail anyone, ever, here. One point isn't even all that much, and so any time a player feels like their character *should* be reliable, feels like they *shouldn't* disappoint, that's fine.

But if the player's torn, if the player isn't sure, if it's not clear if their PC is going to manage or is going to flake or screw up and let someone down—well, one point of a Cost isn't nothing. It's a bit more power when they need it, or a bit more life.

So this might get triggered when:

- they disappoint a friend who'd hoped they'd face the world,
- they fail at the key step of some plan,
- they don't show up when someone needs them,
- they forget to buy groceries for the house they share,
- they skip work, school, therapy, a Chancery meeting, a hairdresser's appointment, or a date

... because they just can't, or at least *don't*, do *better.*

This can, but doesn't always, stack with the point of Wear they get back for failing a GM-proposed Ability task; whether that's worth one or two will be up to the GM. If the character disappoints others because they are receiving medical treatment (pg. 271), it can, but does not always, stack with the benefits of such care.

Disappointment and Geasa

If a character disappoints someone else *specifically because of one of their Geasa*, they recover an additional 3 Cost, and there is no longer a minimum of 0. The GM should be generous when evaluating whether this effect applies; while this bonus may occasionally gild the lily of a beneficial Geas, it's also the primary and perhaps the only benefit of an overall restrictive one.

As for Bonds, they'll work much like Geasa do here—

If a character disappoints someone else *specifically because of one of their Bonds*, they recover an additional 2 Cost; the minimum, again, will go away.

These bonuses do not normally stack, either between two Bonds, two Geasa, or a Bond and a Geas. From time to time, when circumstances form a "perfect storm," the GM may allow it ... but ultimately, that's not something the players are entitled to, it's something the GM can throw out there when it fits the energy of the group and the game right then.

Infection

A Strategist's **Infection** tracks the degree to which their sickness—the thing that they're dying of—is in flower. The degree to which everything has gone, *is going,* wrong.

It goes from 0 to 7, where, roughly speaking,

- **Infection 0** is remission. The sickness is *lurking,* but they're basically fine.
- **Infection 1** is the sickness starting to show hints of its presence again.
- **Infection 2** is the sickness ... but still somewhat *eroded.*
- **Infection 3** is the sickness in a kind of default form.
- **Infection 4** is kind of transitional: the sickness is spreading beyond the default.
- **Infection 5** scales up to a new tier of suffering.
- **Infection 6** is sufficient to make life all but impossible.
- **Infection 7** is sufficient to make *surviving the day* all but impossible without substantial miraculous help.

Infection rises at the GM's whim, although certain actions by the player (pg. 238-240) can increase it. The tools to lower it (pg. 234, 240) are in the player's hands.

The model for its rise and fall is this.

Most of the time, Infection hovers around 1-2. That's a specific grace granted to PCs, that their infection will not be in full flower all the time in play, principally because the game and the GM may have other things to focus on; background NPC Strategists and revenants hover at the "default form" of 3.

Sometimes, characters suffer acute attacks. This usually happens only when there's important and also time-sensitive stuff going on, and they just don't have time to deal with it. Their Infection spikes upwards, rising as much as three points per chapter, but most likely, one or two. It's not likely to be stable, though: it won't be +1, +1, +1, +1 or even +3, +3, +3. One chapter won't be predictive of the next. A few chapters later, though, it will settle down to rising only "every few" chapters ... and, after *that,* subside.

Other times characters will suffer escalation of their chronic suffering. For a while—an indeterminate while—

their Infection will drift upwards towards some higher value, and unless the character is extremely ruthless about treating it, it will be very hard to keep it down. It won't go *past* its new benchmark, it won't keep shooting up to 7, but it'll hover at, e.g., 3 or 4 or 5 ... until a long time passes, or until it *really* gets the character in a dramatic moment, or until, conversely, there's a dramatic moment of recovery. Only after that will it be feasible to keep it low again without a strict regimen of **Revenant Rite** (pg. 234) use.

To some extent, this is already going on when the game begins—this is the quality that keeps it hovering at 1-2, that keeps the PCs from just dumping their Infection down to 0 and then leaving it there. Just by existing as Strategists, they are probably in a state where their chronic suffering has escalated at *least* to Infection 1; where they *can* lower it to 0, but can only *keep* it there by using therapeutic measures not just *once*, but at least once every other chapter. (Or *every* chapter? Or, every three? ... the GM and the campaign itself will set the needful pace.)

In terms of what a character's Infection *means,* both in general and at a certain rating:

That is, ultimately, in the player's hands. They're not the one implementing their sickness, and they're not usually the one increasing it, but they're the one who decides what the implications *should* be of their infection being at a certain level:

The GM should be taking the basic principles of operation, here, from them.

It's the player, for instance, and not the GM, who decides whether the Infection 4 version of "dying of cats" is stacking an allergy on top of it ... or, dogs getting in on the game. The GM doesn't *come up* with that; all they do is *find that out* from the player, or, at most, *suggest* that to the player ... and, then, either tell the player when they're feeling allergic, or, describe the dogs that appear.

Players are often able, too, to bring their own infection effects into play—by declaration or roleplaying, in minor cases or cases that fit the GM's expectations; with the **Greater Agony** miracle, on pg. 174, the rest of the time.

On the other hand, all of the player's control here is soft:

It's not that they're playing the infection. It's not that they're *controlling* it. It's just that the basic ideas are part of their character concept. Outside of some edge cases, the infection isn't going to be something they're enacting, managing, or describing; it's something that's happening *to* the character, in the game world.

Thus, as long as the GM is *roughly* on the same page as the player, regarding the Infection arc and their current place in it, the GM can bring infection into play whenever they like and raise the Infection rating whenever they like. They can't twist the infection into something that the player doesn't think that it should be ...

But they can twist the knife of what it *should* be as much, or as little, as they should like.

How often should that be? When are acute or chronic attacks going to come? There's no pressure on the GM here. If they feel a situation needs more tension, they can add an acute attack of some PC's infection. If they think the infections have fallen too far into the background, and that they have a good handle on how one might play out in the next bit of story, they can have a longer-term flare-up. If neither of these things is happening, the GM can just leave all this stuff in the background, and only invoke it when the players do (because the players will); when it comes to mind; and when the characters are staring their infection (pg. 120-121) into the void.

Formally, of course, the GM plays the world and so can go a whole lot further; they can, in fact, play anybody's infection any way they like. They can take a Strategist dying of sunlight and repeatedly murder them with beetles. ("Beetles roll the sun around in Egyptian myth or something, right?") Even if the player uses the **Agony Rite** on pg. 167 to establish precedence, the GM can essentially just ignore it. ... but that's bad form, and a problem the player and GM should be resolving OOC.

Good form is as has been set out above: the basic plot arc is in the player's hands; the GM exploits and defines its details; and, within the basic limits of what's fun for everyone, the GM paces the whole enterprise in whatsoever fashion they should like.

Example

Madelgarde Kistri is dying of amber. She touched a tree in her dreams and woke with her hand dripping resin. No matter how she works, she cannot scrub it permanently away; it longs to spread, to encase her, to harden.

The default infection—level 3—is simply that she has to keep *dealing* with this. That she must be vigilant. That she can't sleep the full eight hours she'd like to because it might reach her mouth by then. That she has to keep scrubbing it away if she wants to use her left hand. That her *stuff* is always *sticky*.

Working outwards from there, **Infection 0** is where she's basically fine. How does that happen? Well, it's something to do with Ninuan and how she escaped there. For Madelgarde ... let's say that she got alienated by the sheen on her skin, the difficulty moving, the way that her fate of being trapped in amber was so fundamentally *not* a human fate, that she lost track of herself—and not only found Ninuan, but also kind of slipped the net.

So at **Infection 0,** it's like, the resin doesn't know how to find her. Insects in her vicinity may get encased in mysterious amber. It may show up in her room. People *near* her may, once in a blue moon, wake up drowning in resin. And she's still freaked out about it, and scared to sleep, and scared to dream.

But basically, she's fine.

Infection 1 is when it's starting to find her again. It's still just *hints,* though. She gets spotting of resin on her hand now and then. It might even spread a little. She knows it's coming. She's scared.

Infection 2 is where the infection is back, but ... it's still

Fabian Comosicus is dying of examples. The more he appears within them, the more bitterly they burn. Yet even texts that do not initially mean to use him for an example—even texts whose sensibilities are far too kind—are ineluctably drawn to do so, by printer's error, sleep-typing, or mistake. Since the first edition of this text, I have made repeated efforts to remove him; have begged others not to quote him; have written, eloquently and in detail, upon the plight of Primeviere Drew, instead, but this is all to no avail.

To this I am now bitterly resigned.

You will read the story of our Fabian—no matter how I try to stop you. You will see him as an example. You will hold him up within your mind, exemplary; and he will burn.

Such is the nature of a deathwright's curse.

—*from* If Eide Seen (4th Edition), *by Pierre Labrousse*

fundamentally compromised. It's like the glitch itself has been glitched, by her original escape to Ninuan. It doesn't show up in its full terrible flourish. Sometimes, there are actual effects, sometimes there are inconveniences, and if she *lets it be,* if she just sits in a room doing nothing at all for a day, it *will* encase her—but it's not going to be a *significant* problem unless she *makes* it one.

Infection 3, as noted, is the default state.

Infection 4 is when things start to escalate. Each infection has its own way of getting worse, and this isn't *dramatically* worse than the default yet, but it's reaching into new interpretations of its basic nature and new areas of her life. For her, perhaps there's this tendency for wooden stuff, trees, and dreams, when she's not paying attention—when *no one's* paying attention—to start oozing sticky golden resin onto her. It's also able to spread, once there, if she doesn't scrub it off well.

Infection 5 is the point where resting at all is getting hard; resin is more likely to appear out of nowhere if she does. It spreads across her more easily. It sets faster once there. It's harder to scrub off without taking layers of skin. Interacting with plants and wooden things just makes it worse.

Infection 6 is the point where it's appearing out of nowhere significantly faster. Where anything she rests against will start oozing sap, and fields of grass are like swamps. Where she *can't* sleep, not enough to live. She must leave the world, or die.

Infection 7 is hard to reach, because it is normal to leave the world and recover before hitting that point. If somehow trapped in the world, though, long enough to reach this point, the resin simply will not stop. She can no more scrub it away than a mosquito, already half-affixed within it, could—flutter though she might, struggle though she can, it oozes over her, drowns her and seals her, faster than anything she can do to stop it. Even constant high-pressure hoses won't help; intubation is pointless when the tube itself will fill; only active, constant oversight by some Power, Imperator, major artifact, or fellow Excrucian can save her temporarily from her fate. Even *that* can only succeed, or for that matter fail, by the GM's plot fiat.

Taking Damage

Moving on.

It was noted earlier that sometimes things like getting shot or injured just become Wear, instead of a genuine injury.

More generally, sometimes, something bad happens to a character. IC. In the world. Something bad happens that *primarily targets* the character ... whether that's the whole phenomenon or just the most relevant part.

If the player doesn't want to let that happen, they can come up with some sort of miraculous or mundane defense ... or just *take damage* to avoid it. They can say, *I'm not going to be burned. I'm not going to be mind controlled. I'm not going to turn into a lamb.*

They can always do this; and if they do, they're right. They *don't* turn into a lamb, or whatever else. The effect *doesn't* happen to them. They take a GM-determined amount of a Cost, instead. The default Cost is Wear, and that's usually what it *will* be for mundane stuff, physical attacks, and anything unclassifiable; the GM may also instead charge

- ... Burn, to avoid effects that mess with their emotional and spiritual integrity;
- ... Fugue, for effects that warp their mind and body or infuse them with void-stuff;
- ... Immersion, for effects that somehow bind them into Creation or uncover a secret; *or*
- ... Stilling, for effects that mess with *who they are.*

The character pays the Cost, and the effect doesn't happen. What happens, instead?

Well, *something.* Something happens.

Just, something that's kind of cosmetic or narrative, and that goes by the player's thoughts. Something that interrupts the effect, or twists the effect, or makes it harmless. Maybe it's as simple as, the thing happens, but the player's the one pulling the strings on it and not the attacker or the GM. Maybe it's as complicated as *I don't get burned. I take damage, dump the damage into a Wound, and turn to ice.*

Turning Savaric to stone, like every other interaction she had ever had with him, had somehow turned out as a mistake. She was certain the statue moved when she was not looking—that it had rearranged her furniture; that it was inciting the other statuary against her; that it had conspired to embarrass her at the party the other night—but she couldn't even complain about it. Trying to tell even her sisters, Medusa was certain, would only drive her antipsychotic dosages up.

—*from* In Her Own Time, *by Kim W. Steib*

Or maybe they just explain the way they get away.
Aren't I already a sacrificial lamb?

Logically speaking, 10 points of damage is suitable to snub a minor effect, 25 for a major one, and 50 for a cosmologically significant one. After all, that's the Cost of their exact parallel in Wounds!

... in practice, though, that's *much* too expensive compared to high-end miraculous defense, particularly given that *something* still usually happens to the character. Instead, we're going to say that:

- minor effects inflict around 1-4 of some Cost,
- major effects inflict 3-10,
- and the really big stuff can go all the way to 20 ... but it generally *won't.*

Even after cranking the numbers down that low, the GM should still err towards the low end. More than that, we're going to say that a character should be able to absorb a fusillade of sequential but *similar* effects without much incremental increase over the damage of the first. Being set permanently on fire, for instance, can probably be resolved with just 5-8 Wear taken in damage. It's pretty bad, as major effects go, but it's not *the worst*. Being set permanently on fire three times *in a row*, every time absorbed as damage? That just bumps the *total* up to something like 6-9.

It's really kind.

It's a really nice system to have, if you're a PC.

Everything would be rainbows, stars, and happiness ... if the world only weren't wrong.

THE NPC COST POOL

What about if you're an NPC?

For the most part, the GM won't be able to keep track of all this for NPCs. They *can*, if they'd like, at least for Strategist and mortal NPCs who have defined uses of Cost clearly spelled out, but it's not even all that useful. Maybe if they've never played and want a better sense of what **Gl.tch** is like for a player, or their group revels in or insists on absolute tactical fairness, or if there's only one player, *maybe* only two, and they feel the group needs an extra pseudo-PC?

Alternatively, the GM can ignore specific Costs while still trying to play "like" the PCs do—to simulate PC-like decisions when describing how characters act in the world. That's a little better, but it's also very unstructured. If the GM isn't very confident in their ability to pull it off, it can wind up feeling arbitrary to them; if they can't *sell* that confidence, it can wind up feeling arbitrary to the players.

Instead, the recommended system is that the GM have a Cost budget that's shared among NPCs—usually, either "per conflict," "per session," or "per session, *plus* something extra in each conflict." That's how much *everyone, total,* is willing to spend or take in damage while interacting with the PCs; after that runs out, the GM plays NPCs as *really* reluctant to spend Cost, and as suffering serious Wounds/effects if they try to do anything big or take a big chunk of damage.[50]

For the most part, "spending Cost" is something that the GM will be doing casually and approximately. It's worth having a sense of an NPC's attributes, Gifts, Bonds, and Geasa if they're going to be important, or if they're going to be part of a major conflict that involves the PCs, including specific numbers if the GM has the prep time for it. It's therefore reasonable, if the GM has an NPC's attributes in front of them, and if they use an effect whose difficulty the GM has memorized or can look up without slowing things down, to use exact Costs. ... but for the most part, the GM isn't expected to spend the *right* amount of Cost for a given effect. They're expected to deduct *around* the right amount, a quick and dirty estimate of what the Cost would probably be, from the NPC pool, and they're not expected to ever go back and fix it, even if they later notice that they're wrong. Not unless they were *really, really* wrong.

As part of this approximation, it's probably simplest to assume that the NPC Cost pool is a single number. *Notionally,* it represents all Four Costs, plus Wear, and more besides—whatever strange Costs fuel the powers of the Imperators, Mimics, Warmains, Deceivers, and the Nobilis—but it'll *work* better to track just a single counter; if any NPCs are particularly close to a crisis in or complete exhaustion of a particular trait, the GM should just make note of that in their design.

In some cases, it may be worth having a separate Cost budget for allies of the PCs (so that allies don't suddenly start worrying about expenditure when a hostile party does a grand move) or even separate budgets for allies, enemies, and neutral parties. This is really only worthwhile in situations where tactical fidelity is important and the PCs are leaning heavily on their allies' strengths, though; in most cases, the extra effort will outweigh any gains.

The Cost budget only applies, note, to NPCs who are actually interacting with the PCs—e.g., in a scene with them, taking actions directly aimed at them, or *possibly* taking actions that aren't really aware of them but that the GM thinks the PCs must respond to. NPCs in the background of the world can take actions without dipping into the GM's budget; this is no doubt obvious when it comes to, e.g., laborers spending Wear to work on the other side of the world, but also means that the GM can talk about how the moon got eaten last week but then put back before anyone noticed without immediately spending a large chunk of that session's pool.

The Cost pool is not binding; it's primary purpose isn't to limit GM expenditure but to make them *aware* of it, in the same sense that the players are, so that they don't drift into portraying a world where every NPC is more

50 It's possible that such "Wounds" will restore the NPC Cost pool a little, as they do a PC's Costs; it's also possible, if it's late enough in a session or a conflict, that they *don't.*

casual about spending Cost than the PCs are—or, at least, more casual in the scenes they share. To keep them from burning through the PCs' resources with a rotating crew of antagonists and belligerent third parties, none of whom have anything *else* to do with their lives and can therefore go all-out against them when they meet. To keep them from forgetting that spending 8 Cost on something *hurts*. Thus, the exact numbers aren't all that important, and the GM can tweak them as much and as often as they like; the important thing is the concept:

The mental nod, at least, towards spending *something*, when each opponent acts.

NPCs and Damage

Taking damage is mostly for PCs and PC-level beings. Excrucians always have the option to take damage instead of an unwanted effect. Nobilis and the Fallen do, too. The other Imperator types *can*, but they're abstractly less likely to—the GM should occasionally let an effect through to an Angel, God, Magister, or Serpent even when it would be tactically wiser to take damage.

... mortals, basically, don't have this option at all.

For mortals, taking damage instead of suffering a miraculous effect is entirely a matter of narrative providence. They can't *make* that happen, so it can only really happen if fate is being kind to them. If they're a PC for some reason—e.g., it's a flashback episode, or a player is moonlighting—then they're a protagonist, fate has a reason to do that, and they can take as much damage as they like. If they're an NPC, though, then their doing so is just a bit ... weird.

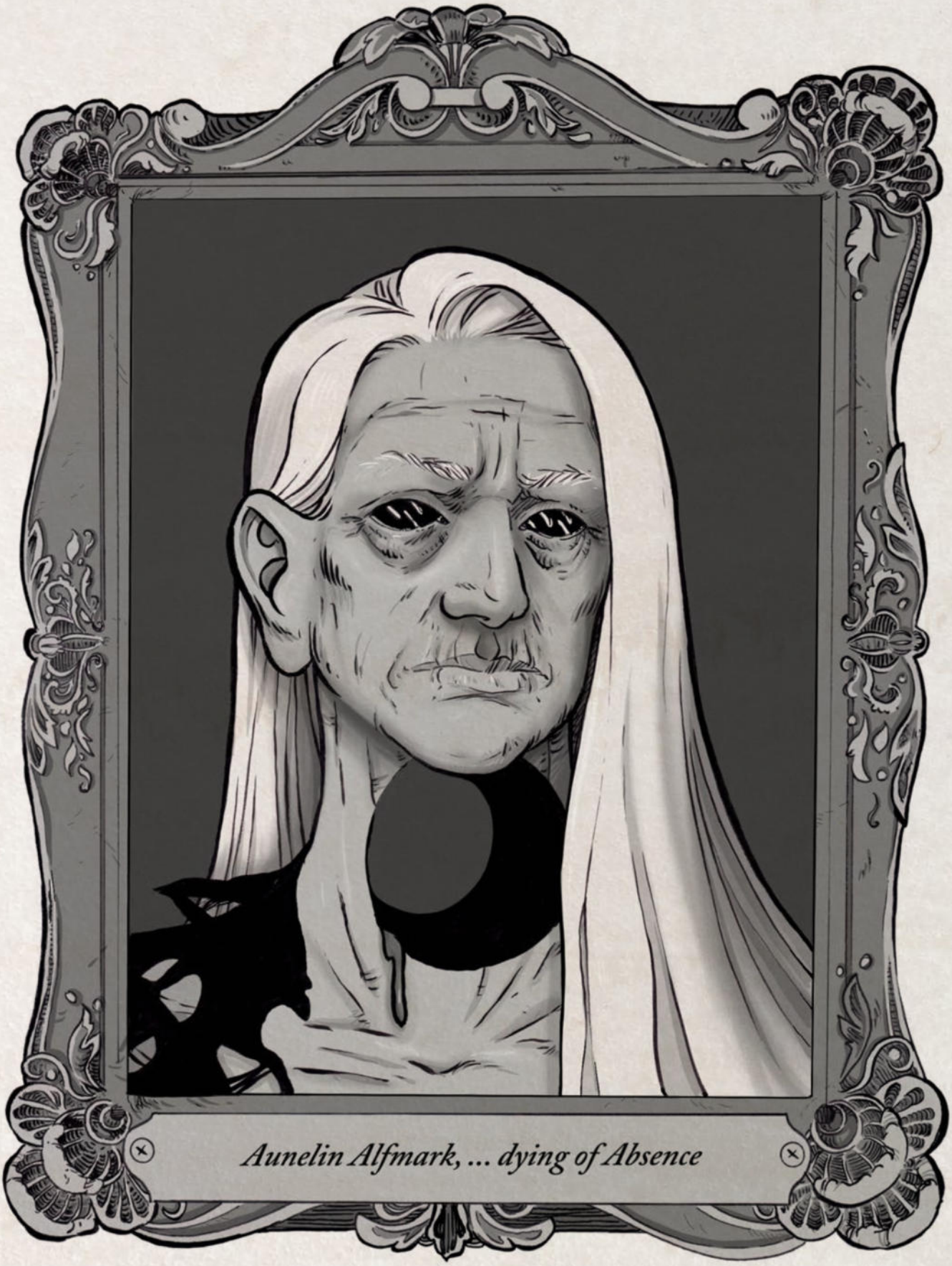
Even taking damage instead of suffering *mundane* effects, for mortals, is a little weird at least half of the time.

In practice, what this means is that mortal NPCs burn through the Cost pool twice as fast when opting to take damage from miracles. If the GM isn't using the Cost pool, but is actually playing them as full characters, they still burn through Cost twice as fast when opting to take damage from miracles—and Wear is likely the only Cost that they have (pg. 393).

The one exception here is Bleak miracles (pg. 252); it's still difficult and rare for a mortal to take damage against them, but if they're heroic enough or lucky enough to actually do so, they're only charged the "normal" amount of Cost.

"I bled for this," said Carloman Keildau. He held the bundt cake tight against his chest. "I bled for this, and I will not let it go."

—from the Memoirs of Alice Mendel, Lady of the Thunder



Aunelin Alfmark, ... dying of Absence

CHAPTER 17

Gifts

Thiudia Greuthung (may she know no sunsets, nor no stars) has never failed to recruit a target. Whether she is hiring recent college graduates without experience to serve as assassins or experienced project developers to dig out white stone in the deep mines beneath Glaust, it is impossible for her to fall short of her quota; nor may her offer be any less than the most attractive offer on your plate.

—*from* The Erroneous Library, *by Beta Vulgaris*

And Stranger Things ...

Many Strategists have special abilities beyond the general competency indicated by their attribute levels. One might be a metaphysical gorgon, for instance, able to petrify an opponent with their gaze—a mortal opponent, at least!—even without a stone-born bane. Another might have reliable flashes of brilliance not reflected by the overall level of their Eide. Special tricks like this are called Gifts, and there are almost as many as there are Strategists: some arising from the Eide, and others, from the Wyrd.

Players purchase Gifts with character points, just like attribute levels. Gift costs draw on the Attribute miracle level charts. We present the Gift design system below, followed by several sample Gifts.

Base cost

Each Gift allows the Strategist to create an effect or set of effects similar to those covered by powers of Eide, Lore, Flore, or Wyrd.[51] First, find an appropriate miracle level. For instance, the ability to bring peace to any heart is Contagion. For a more permanent effect—such fevered peace, of course, would be passing—the player might use Destruction, instead, to indelibly excise the inner pains and uncertainties that trouble the soul. The miracle levels for Contagion and Destruction are 3 and 4, respectively; this is the base (starting) character point cost for, and the effective Attribute level used *by*, the corresponding Gift.

Gifts may also be purchased with a higher base cost, and thus a higher effective Attribute level, than is strictly necessary; this may be useful in the event of a contest.

Example: Gelvira wants to do away with the messy business of mortality—all that eating, sleeping, aging, and breathing kind of stuff. That sounds like a Greater Unfettering, which has difficulty 10. The base cost for this Gift will be 10.

51 Gifts based on Ability actions are likely possible, but are not recommended. Their rules will be identical if they are allowed. Gifts based on NPC-only Attributes *can* be built for appropriate NPCs, if the GM has put together Attribute charts for the relevant NPC type or is willing to freeform/guess the Gift's base cost ... but even then it may be better just to give them Eide/Flore/Lore/Wyrd Gifts.

opposite: ***by Silvia Cucchi***

Eide Gifts (Base Cost)

MIRACLE TYPE	LESSER LEVEL	GREATER LEVEL
Agony	0	4
Intensity	1	5
Stunt	2	6
Costumery	3	7
Cliffhanger	4	8
Talent	5	9
Strategy	6	10
Casting	7	11
Misdirection	8	12

Flore Gifts (Base Cost)

MIRACLE TYPE	LESSER LEVEL	GREATER LEVEL
Connection	0	4
Projection	1	5
Administration	2	6
Guidance	3	7
Glorification	4	8
Ignition	5	9
Trust	6	10
Design	7	11
Divine Plan	8	12

Lore Gifts (Base Cost)

MIRACLE TYPE	LESSER LEVEL	GREATER LEVEL
Investigation	0	4
Vision	1	5
Spherecraft	2	6
Hunt	3	7
Navigation	4	8
Percipience	5	9
Infusion	6	10
Inchoation	7	11
Invocation	8	12

Wyrd Gifts (Base Cost)

MIRACLE TYPE	LESSER LEVEL	GREATER LEVEL
Wailing	0	4
Elysium	1	5
Revenant	2	6
Contagion	3	7
Destruction	4	8
Shattering	5	9
Unfettering	6	10
Casting	7	11
Masking	8	12

Expanded Options

TYPE	COST
one normally fixed detail (e.g. traditional costume, for "Costumery"-based Gifts) comes in multiple variants	final × 2
... or, in unlimited variants	final × 3

The player is not bound, in Gift design, by the personalized details of their character's powers—their Eide Gifts need not be based on *their* character's Eide; Gifts of destruction are not limited to their particular talent; the Lore attached to a Gift of Lore may be bound to another's Sphere. Gifts of Flore can even come with their own Treasures instead of targeting the character's; although, if they do, they cannot *also* target the character's Treasures, and neither the character nor their other Gifts gain any automatic access to the Treasures of that Gift.

All that said, it is still always a character's *own* infection that their Gifts of destruction are unable (pg. 235) to directly oppose. If a PC is dying of guns, for instance, they can't take a Gift of destruction that's ineffectual against sunlight instead; what would even be the point?

Expanded Options

If a player wants these details to vary—if they want a power of contagion that can spread different kinds of infections, or a power of costumery comparable to an entire costuming and makeup crew—they may generally do so by doubling or tripling the Gift's *final* cost. Doubling it gives them a wide variety of options; tripling makes it effectively unlimited. This only affects one of the power's options, though: "I have any possible power of destruction, usable on any target" would, e.g., *nonuple* the normal cost.

The Wailing Rite affects Gifts of destruction, greater destruction, and unfettering normally. A character in infection state can, e.g., vary the target of any destruction Gift for which the idea makes sense, and at no extra cost.

Example: Gelvira does not need to double or triple her Gift's cost—Greater Unfettering has an inherent, inbuilt flexibility.

Activation

Now determine how the Strategist activates their Gift.

MEANS OF ACTIVATION	COST IN CPS
Automatically when appropriate	+1
Invoked as an action	−1
... or, as a "Casual" action (+1 Cost)	−3
... or, as a "Painful" action (+4 Cost, +1 XP)	−5

Effects that only need one use, barring interference from some other power, are considered automatic.

Gifts invoked as actions cannot combine (pg. 150) with other powers or Gifts into a single action; they may, however, combine with appropriate uses of Ability.

Note that the XP from a painful Gift is the standard XP for a 3+ Cost action; the character will not earn another.

Example: Gelvira looks at the chart, and determines that freedom from hunger, thirst, aging, etcetera, should and must be in the first category to be effective: automatically invoked when required. This Gift now costs 11 points; she moves on.

Area of Effect

Now determine what the Gift can target, and where:

AREA OF EFFECT	COST IN CPS
Appropriate targets almost anywhere	+1
Local things only	−1
One entity (the Strategist or a nearby being)	−3
Only the Strategist themselves	−5

Powers like **Vision** that facilitate other actions that the Strategist must then provide are "oneself only."

Powers that facilitate but include or provide other actions, like **Stunt** and **Invocation,** use that action's area or maximal area as the area given to the Gift.

Example: Gelvira doesn't want to free EVERYONE from mortality, just herself ... so that's a −5. Her Gift's cost drops to 6.

Flexibility

Next, determine how much of the potential currently implicit in their Gift the Strategist can actually use.

FLEXIBILITY	COST IN CPS
All imaginable uses of that power*	+1
A wide variety of uses	−1
A limited selection of uses	−3
One single "trick"	−5

(*) after customization and area

Each Gift can perform one *type* of miracle, Rite, or wish. Thus, for this purpose, a Greater Hunt is not the same level as an Inchoation, much less as a Casting. The power of Projection does not also grant Vision. Moreover, miracles of a given level do not automatically include miracles of lower levels, except where stated in the miracle description itself. (See, e.g., **Greater Ignition** on pg. 201.)

Example: Gelvira's Gift only frees her from the human condition, not every POSSIBLE condition. This covers a lot of ground, but, for instance, it doesn't free her from the bonds of gravity, peer pressure, or iron bars. Her Gift's cost drops to 3.

Rarity

Finally, Gifts that are uncommon in the game universe cost an extra point. The GM should let the players know which Gifts are common.

This is all summed up in the chart below:

Finishing Up

Once the Gift is built, the player should choose a Cost that the Gift will be associated with—particularly for a Casual or Painful Gift, but even for those that are not. As always, circumstances may allow for substitutions, but this will be the Cost used not just as the base Cost but also for any additional Cost taken if the player needs to supplement the Gift in some way or other during the course of the game. For instance, **characters can spend that Cost to raise the Gift's effective attribute level when invoking it,** e.g., to overcome a Ward; or, e.g., if flexibility allows it, they might pay to take an extraordinary Gift "epic."

The minimum CP cost for a Gift is 1 character point.

Example

Gelvira's player has been working with their GM on this Gift, and they've decided that a lot of λ-beings are likely unfettered in the way Gelvira is. Looking at it from another direction, Gelvira's player is willing to limit the range of this Gift *to* the things that the GM agrees are things that it's common for a lot of λ-beings to be free from, rather than spontaneously revealing at some later point that they thought it *did* include freedom from, e.g., gravity. (If they genuinely thought that, that's grounds for OOC discussion either way ... but the basic negotiating positions that the player and the GM will be in for that discussion will be a little different when a Gift is Common.)

Having agreed upon a common Gift, Gelvira doesn't pay anything extra: the final cost for her gift will be 3 points.

Gelvira decides that the Cost used to supplement this Gift, if ever it proves necessary, will be **Stilling.** The base miracle for the *power* is from Wyrd ... but her concept of eternity is a thing of Eide.

Her Gift is now complete.

She reflects on whether the completed Gift is worth two more points to her than a Geas that has the same basic functionality. In mortal contexts, such as "am I hungry today?" the two are much the same. However, the Gift as presented is much more robust against miraculous action—as an example, it can fend off a relevant **Greater Contagion,** while a Geas that made her eternal would coexist with it in a state of constant strife. Other characters can negate a Geas-version of this power if they make the effort; the only way to suspend it, as a Gift, is to continuously sustain a level II counter-action or use a *really* clever wish.

We will leave her final decision to the reader's judgment; both choices have their merits.

EASE OF USE	EFFECT AREA	FLEXIBILITY	COMMON?	CP COST
Automatic	Global	Complete	No	+1
Action	Local	Comprehensive		−1
Casual (+1 Cost)	Single target	Limited effects		−3
Painful (+4 Cost, +1 XP)	Self-only	One trick		−5

Aside: The Gift of Tongues

Characters do not need to buy Gifts to understand human languages. If an Excrucian means to be understood, then it takes deliberate **Focus** to notice that they're speaking a language that one doesn't understand—or **Greater Focus,** if they're speaking Ninuanni. Much the same applies to writing. Similarly, unless they're actively trying to learn a foreign language, or parse out the syllables of a password, or something of that sort, they can just ... understand ... most things they read or hear as either Ninuanni or their native tongue. If someone actively expects the Strategist *not* to understand, or actively believes that they can't understand what the Strategist is saying, and they *don't* actually share a language, it'll come down to who has more confidence in the matter.

A Strategist wishing to make languages *completely* moot can build a Gift based on Unfettering, but that will hardly ever be worthwhile.

Stride: erase the distance to the wall. Break gravity, local, duration .3 seconds. Rotate the body. Orient on the end of the newly visible hallway. Land. Stride: erase the distance to the hallway's end. Erase the window glass. Erase the distance in front of self, thirty meters. Rotate the body. Break gravity, local, duration 2 seconds. Float.

There: an airplane. Too far away for a single go. Hypothesize a series of point locations between self and airplane's hypothetical location. Move. Move. Now!

The wall bursts apart behind and there is a sinking drop in the stomach of the self: 'too late.' Blood on the leg. Blood on the bone. The fanged eyed tendrils of the god wrapped round.

Not eyed. No. Sick. Erase its being eyed.

Confused. Afraid. Erase confusion.

Erase ... erase the leg. Erase the bone. Erase the seized left fingers of the hand. Erase the distance. Erase the distance. Move!

— from the Thought-Record of Lampridius Ansamen

Gifts that Burn (examples)

The Drunkard's Gift

6 points

Sometimes a character has a secondary mode of destruction—a way of erasing the world that *isn't* their default. For a single Burn, they can invoke it; for four, they can wield its greater form.

This is known as the Drunkard's Gift, and it isn't *that* uncommon, all in all.

Example: Erebic Vandil normally points at something and makes it an injustice, but that kind of ironic and indirect approach to destroying the world is really only viable when he's feeling stable. When he's out of his mind with anger at the wrongness of the world, he tears down the whole façade instead, burning things into nothingness direct. Should he ever transcend his rage and join the Chancery, he'll still probably have access to both modes—likely even deciding between them with a greater degree of conscious will.

The World-Breaker's Hand

12 points

This variation on the drunkard's gift is lionized among the Nobilis as representative of everything the Strategists do and are; most Powers tend to expect every Strategist to have it and are thus exaggeratedly wary of every deathwright that they meet. That wariness is not entirely unreasonable, though, any more than avoiding hats would be (if one in ten were made of fire):

Strategists with the World-Breaker's Hand can destroy just about *anything* with a wave of their hand, even outside of their infection state.

The Drunkard's Gift

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
4 (Wyrd)	Casual (1 Burn)	Local	Full flexibility	Yes	
4 CPS	−3	−1	+1		1 CP

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
8 (Wyrd)	Painful (4 Burn)	Global	Full flexibility	Yes	
8 CPS	−5	+1	+1		5 CP

The World-Breaker's Hand

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
4 (Wyrd)	Action	Local	Full flexibility	No	
4 CPS	−1	−1	+1	+1	4 × 3 CP

opposite: *by Jenn Manley Lee*

GIFTS OF FUGUE (EXAMPLES)

Abhorrent Transmogrification

6 points

Characters with this Gift are able to take the form of their bane—and more generally, replace their body with constructs *of* their bane. A Strategist dying of music can become a tune drifting on the air; a Strategist dying of cheap furniture can turn into a modular beast made of aluminium and laminate. They can reshape and remake their elemental form to whatever extent they can plausibly visualize; any transformational power more limited than that is likely bought as a Bond or Geas, instead.

This is a miracle of Greater Misdirection: the Strategist becomes an elemental incarnation of their bane, and, while they are thus, anything that suggests that they are *not* is an illusion or a misapprehension.

... afterwards, it becomes ambiguous whether the transformation was illusory or real.

Example: Aiderida Elsevir is our example PC, "dying of illumination." Her secrets inevitably come out. If she had this gift, she could transform from human into revelation. People would look at her and they wouldn't see a person. They'd be inspired to realize something—presumably something she knows, and chooses to share. Her player might say things during play like "I turn into the revelation that you are being ridiculous" and "I turn into the revelation that you would be a lot safer somewhere, anywhere else." It is also substantially harder to stab a revelation than a human, although some particularly self-centered prophets have sometimes managed.

Loyal Sphere

Reflexive Illusions: 3 points
Reflexive Knowledge: 4 points
Reflexive Knowledge (Greater Version): 8 points
Reflexive Destruction Effects: 8 points
Reflexive λ-Creations: 11 points
Reflexive "Creations:" 12 points

The character's Sphere is or contains a force or principle that operates continuously in the Strategist's service—even without their explicit commands. From that Sphere arise miracles that serve them, not merely beside them but across the cosmos; not merely in the waylets, too, but in the world. Their Sphere may be moved to aid them any time an effect is obviously in the character's interest and will not damage the other players' enjoyment of the game. Some suggested automatic miracles and their costs are listed above: these levels must be bought separately, though not necessarily in order.

No sooner had I resolved myself to oppose Kriemnas Gepoia than the hallucinations began: hideous, frightening things, endless visions of being buried alive. They were not compelling, nor neither overwhelming; if there are movie-style hallucinations that cloud your field of vision and convince you of their reality, I have never had them. Instead, they were simply there, with me, beside me: waiting for me at the bottom of my thoughts.

— E. R. Davis (quoted in Mortal Encounters, *by Kip Narekatski)*

Reflexive Illusions

This is a Gift of Lesser Contagion, inflicting hallucinatory, phantasmagorical phenomena upon the world.

Reflexive Knowledge

This is a Gift of Greater Investigation. The Strategist has some investigatory tool or method that automatically feeds them information on a subject—typically one related to their Sphere, although a Sphere-based tool that provides information on something else also works.

A greater form might exist that covers basically anything the Strategist might want to know; this would have Complete instead of Limited Utility, and thus cost 8 points. It would be limited only by the normal boundaries of investigation miracles.

Reflexive Destruction Effects

This is a Gift of Lesser Destruction. It gives the full power of a lesser destruction miracle, as if unleashed from anywhere in the world, when triggered by any desired condition. This is normally Sphere-themed destruction: if the character's bane is fire, it burns things. If it's poison, it poisons them. When the character enters infection state, it's generally still Sphere-themed, but the range of options and therefore possible trigger conditions widens. For instance, the character might decide that any time someone records information about them, it catches fire. If the character is in infection state, it's possible that the person recording information and the thing that they're recording information *on* catch fire *too.*

Reflexive λ-Creation

This Gift is based on Lesser Inchoation. When appropriate and helpful, something of the Strategist's Sphere kindles to life.

Abhorrent Transmogrification

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
12 (Eide)	Action	Self-only	Comprehensive	No	
12 CPS	−1	−5	−1	+1	6 CPS

Reflexive "Creation"

This is a Gift of Greater Misdirection. When appropriate and helpful, a certain kind of thing or phenomenon appears. Possibly this effect is real. Possibly it isn't, quite. It sure *looks* like it's happening, though, at least!

Example: Marcovefa is dying of asbestos. She's paranoid enough after decades of suffering that reality itself has taken the hint. The world now ensures that any house she's aware of has as many inherited deficiencies as she thinks it "should" have ... whether that's asbestos in the walls, radon in the basement, or a family of cannibal clowns locked in the attic.

Luck

7 points

The character has characteristic good fortune. They need only spend a single point of Fugue to guarantee that something significant will go right for them. It might not be obvious; unless the character is in a tense situation, it probably *isn't*. The lucky event might occur far away, with its positive effects reaching the character hours or days later. Still, *something* good always happens, something major and beneficial that otherwise would not.

Many Strategists obtain some form of luck through a Treasure, an Arcanum, a Bond, or a Geas, but *this* kind is purchased as a Gift of Greater Inchoation:

On the assumption that the character's fate is already written in stone, the chance they need already essentially realized or foredoomed—and most likely the latter, if they are spending Fugue for luck—the character creates a λ-opportunity. They take the chance, in short, that they *don't actually have*. They find a lottery ticket no one actually dropped. They catch a rideshare that wasn't actually on the road. They alter fate, in short, adding new factors in ... factors that always happen to *look* like luck from the perspective of play.

Example: Ygraine Leubovera has seen glimpses of her future—of her destiny—and it is terrible and grand. When events seem likely to dead-end her plans, something improbable always happens to salvage things ... and, in so doing, confirm her fugue-ridden vision of her fate.

Minor luck miracles traditionally realize one chance in eight; greater miracles, in thirty-three thousand. A minor qualm arrives here, for the assiduous qualmer:

Luck magic will, of core necessity, be Bayesian ... but providence itself is frequentist; timeless.

—from The Scattered Art, *by Casey Rubric*

Luck

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
11 (Lore)	Casual (1 Fugue)	Global	Limited	No	
11 CPS	−3	+1	−3	+1	7 CPS

Reflexive Illusions

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
3 (Wyrd)	Automatic	Global	Limited	No	
3 CPS	+1	+1	−3	+1	3 CPS

Reflexive Knowledge

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
4 (Lore)	Automatic	Global	Limited	No	
4 CPS	+1	+1	−3	+1	4 CPS

Reflexive Destruction Effects

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
4 (Wyrd)	Automatic	Global	Full flexibility	No	
4 CPS	+1	+1	+1	+1	8 CPS

Reflexive λ-Creation

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
7 (Lore)	Automatic	Global	Full flexibility	No	
7 CPS	+1	+1	+1	+1	11 CPS

Reflexive "Creation"

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
12 (Eide)	Automatic	Global	Limited	No	
12 CPS	+1	+1	−3	+1	12 CPS

Gifts of Immersion (examples)

Perfect Timing

2 or 6 points

Characters with this Gift of Immersion are rarely late for anything. They catch trains and cabs with at least several seconds to spare. They walk into any conversation on the perfect line. If they burgle a house, they leave just after a police car glides past and just before the owner arrives. They have, in short, perfect timing.

This Gift comes in two forms. As a Greater Revenant Rite, it ensures that the character does not miss any occasion or opportunity that they could feasibly catch. They'll often suffer the *cosmetic form* of missing that opportunity, where they have to rush to make it and it seems like they're going to be late, but they won't miss the opportunity itself. If this Gift is purchased as a Greater Misdirection, it transcends causality—the character simply *does not* miss events, occasions, or opportunities unless it would create a literal paradox for them to make it on time, and possibly not even then.

With the first version of this Gift, if someone warns the character that a corrupt cult plans to sacrifice their beloved, the character can arrive just in time to stop them. With the second version of this Gift, if someone warns the character that the cult plans to sacrifice their beloved, the character can arrive just in time—even if the cult planned the sacrifice for the day before! Perhaps something held the cultists up; perhaps the character demonstrates their loose attachment to objective time. Even with the second version of the Gift, though, if someone *knows* that the hostage is dead and tells the character as much, that event may well be fixed—even perfect timing, as traditionally defined, will not save the day.

Example: To free themselves from the bonds of time, Totogoto Beligine broke and tamed a piece of the Second Age. Now they live only according to the pace of Ninuan's correlative continuum.

Popular Acclaim

1 point

Excrucians with this Gift are beloved by some human population—often, the residents of a Chancel they have somehow claimed or built, but sometimes by a city or community in the human world. If they rule, they are a revered monarch; if not, they are a popular hero or a beloved rebel. The people of that place or context would gladly throw their lives away in that Excrucian's service, and only through direct miracle or the most extreme inducement could they ever be incited to betray them.

In general, this love comes from two sources: the first is mundane and legitimate. The second is an innate, mystical tie between the Excrucian and the Chancel, place, or context. Both of these can be corrupted in many ways ... or restored, as a simple (1-Immersion) miracle of Flore.

This is a Gift of Greater Intensity; note that this means that the Strategist will suffer 20 points of a Cost if the population devoted to them knows defeat.

Example: Akrios Vennon may be a monster, but he's Newberry's *monster. The whole city thrills to the stories of his escapades as he duels the law-beings and the Powers of the world; when he is weary, and can fight no longer, it will always take him in. Reluctantly, he returns the favor, standing in the city's defense when kaiju attack its Japanese Garden or rival sports teams threaten to crush the hearts and hopes of Newberry's Wolves.*

Stilling/Calcifying Gifts (examples)

Durant

1 point

Durant characters are difficult to injure. Daggers, swords, and chainsaws alike leave them bloodied but unharmed—and practically any wound they *do* survive becomes a faded scar in hours.

This common Gift functions as a Greater Revenant Rite with a focus on physical damage. Accordingly, if the

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Perfect Timing

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
6 (Wyrd)	Automatic	Self-only	Comprehensive	No	
6 CPS	+1	−5	−1	+1	2 CPS

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
12 (Eide)	Automatic	Self-only	Limited	No	
12 CPS	+1	−5	−3	+1	6 CPS

Popular Acclaim

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
5 (Eide)	Casual (+1 Imm.)	Global	One trick	No	
5 CPS	−3	+1	−5	+1	1 CP

Durant

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
6 (Wyrd)	Automatic	Self-only	Comprehensive	Yes	
6 CPS	+1	−5	−1		1 CP

Eternal

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
10 (Wyrd)	Automatic	Self-only	Limited	Yes	
10 CPS	+1	−5	−3		3 CPS

Glorious

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
7 (Wyrd)	Action	Local	Limited	Yes	
7 CPS	−1	−1	−3		2 CPS

There was a look in her eye. The knife hadn't seen that look before. It didn't like it.

It didn't look like the kind of look it could just knife through, like the knife was used to do. It was the kind of look that made it think, maybe, instead of slicing through that look, or trying to, anyhow, it might be better if that knife, and that eye, just maybe ... de-escalated things a bit; backed down, you know, and went their separate ways.

— from The Red Reserve, *by Andrea Marks*

effect is broken before the character has had a chance to recuperate in the void, those "faded scars" may reopen.

Example: Drogo Cronesis is dying of that weird tendency in narrative for the big, scary, tough member of any given team to be taken down the earliest and most frequently. At Infection 0-1, he's a grizzled warrior, invincible, indomitable: a man-shaped lump of industrial steel. At Infection 6, he once got taken out of a fight by limbering up his neck so intimidatingly that he passed out.

Eternal

3 points

Eternal characters do not age. For them, hunger, thirst, and weariness are optional, as are most other requirements of human life. They are functionally sealed systems:

Only Ninuan refreshes them; only their infection degrades them. This Gift includes Immutability (below) but provides no special defense against injury. It doesn't reduce the Wear taken from Ability actions, but it does mean that almost nothing actually requires perseverance or **Greater Steel**—running a marathon isn't actually any *harder* for them than running down the block—and provides substantial Edge in most endurance contests.

This common Gift is based on Greater Unfettering. Thus, if broken by a hostile effect, it takes a few hours to repair itself, simultaneously restoring the character's freedom from a wide variety of potential conditions. The character may speed this up and re-establish a specific sovereign immunity with an extended tactical action or a self-spotlit action, as per other Time-Consuming effects.

Example: Ruothilde Zamil, like many Strategists, shed the apparatus of human existence over the course of her war against the world. No longer does she hunger, no longer does she thirst: she longs only to slay the world. If she one day outgrows even that, she'll have trouble wanting anything at all.

Glorious

2 points

With this Gift, a character commands (or can choose to command) a physical appearance that has an enormous impact on the emotions and behaviors of mortals and—to a lesser extent—miraculous beings. This could be a beauty that no one could desire to harm, a terrible aspect that commands respect and fear, or some other kind of emotional pull entirely. Powers, Excrucians, and law-beings are generally resistant to the *miraculous* portion of this gift, defending themselves or taking damage instead of becoming malleable pawns, but the character's beauty or fearsome mien may well still *move* them even so.

This is a Greater Contagion effect, and thus defaults to radiating from the Strategist in a somewhat literal fashion—it can, for instance, take a few seconds of glory before the full impact propagates to the far edge of a crowd.

Example: Gundrada Nilkins just kind of has the face *of someone who knows what she's doing ... and should probably not be messed with while she does.*

I did not see a white light. I did not hear voices calling me home. When I died, the pain ended very abruptly. The next thing I saw was the most beautiful man I have ever known. He had black hair and calm eyes and I fell instantly in love, even though he was my enemy.

— from the Thought-Record of Faith Bernham

Immortal

6 points

Characters with this Gift pretty much *only* die to their infection—that or, like the Angels (pg. 397), to really impressive metaphysical force. It's not just death they're immune to, either: they're *also* really hard to eradicate, unmake, paralyze, dissolve, soul-kill, permanently imprison, or otherwise take out of play. Even doing minor harm to them can be tough! Unlike the Angels, they tend to show the effects of what happens to them cosmetically, blistering and sweating when they emerge from pits of molten metal, staggering and swaying after a bomb ... but in terms of *hurting them*, it's level 7+ effects or nothing, and even those are radically weakened and tend to heal pretty fast.

Immortality is probably worth six points, particularly because it **includes the benefits of Eternal and Durant,** above, but note that it's not as much of an advantage as it might initially seem. The rules for "taking damage" are pretty lenient compared to the cost of, well, living, and being immune to a lot of things others would be taking 1-4 damage for and taking a few points less from the rest isn't necessarily going to slow down a character's final death *all that much.*

This Gift is a Greater Revenant Rite covering roughly every possible condition, from "sick" to "stabbed" to "dropped alive into the sun." It won't, however, affect the Strategist's Infection rating or—for that matter—their infection itself, and thus has Comprehensive Utility instead of Full.

Example: Sthenric Merrin lost their mortality somewhere, along with most of their distinguishing features. It's very hard to stab them because where exactly are they, or, rather, which of the things around are actually them? Where is the boundary? Similarly it is hard to nuke them because is it even sensible to talk about Sthenric being radioactive or not? Sthenric is however still dying of their overtight collar and as such remains remarkably asphyxiatable.

Immutable

1 point

Immutable characters have lost some of their fundamental connection to the human condition. They are no longer wholly bound by time. They grow hungry. They grow tired. They age, though slowly—but they will not starve. They will not die of age, or lack of water, sleep, or even air.

Were it not for their infection, they could live at least a thousand years; perhaps beyond the ending of the world.

Immutability protects a character only to a limited extent—functionally, it's a weaker version of **Eternal.**

This is a Greater Revenant Rite focusing on, basically, "I can't keep doing this"—Immutable characters aren't really immune to any *specific* external conditions; they just never hit the point where a mortal has to give up. They can hold their breath indefinitely because mortals can hold their breath for a little while. They can go without eating for a really long time because mortals can skip a meal and be fine. If someone stabs them or something, though, Immutability doesn't help at all, because nobody ever says, "You know, I think I was okay for the first three quarters of this stabbing, but I've kind of got to tap out now; hopefully you can finish this mugging without me." There's no *I can't keep doing this* line.

Example: Fastirida Ostelin is dying of stylization; her need for food, water, and air is an indefinite assertion, true in her life but abstracted from all concrete biological causes. Eventually as she descends into the abyss of orphic lyricism it becomes impossible to tell whether she is "eating" "food," "drinking," or "breathing" at all.

Mythological Beast

Variable cost

Below are some examples of the Gifts of mythological and unnatural beasts. **Glitch**'s world has an abundance of these: the mortal descendants of Powers, Imperators, and λ-things; beasts escaped from ℵinuan; humans warped by their Chancel or some miracle, possibly even to the point of breeding true; travelers from other worlds; Prescott's surviving children; revenants altered by their contagion; Powers twisted by their commencement; creatures that have always been in the world, but are unknown; and others yet.

They are, for the most part, unique oddities: only a few in sets, and fewer in full species.

My fitness trainer isn't real. This is a problem. When he leans in with this intense look and says, "You've got to remember, pain's not real," it's like:

Dude. Dude. Dude.

Your moral and theological implications are not clear.

—from the Thought-Record of Christine Tilley

Immortal

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
6 (Wyrd)	Automatic	Self-only	Comprehensive	No	
6 CPS	+1	−5	−1	+1	2 × 3 CP

Immutable

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
6 (Wyrd)	Automatic	Self-only	Comprehensive	Yes	
6 CPS	+1	−5	−1		1 CP

opposite: *by Kirsten Moody*

... but they are everywhere, and some Excrucians resemble or mimic them in form.

Note that if being such a creature comes with significant drawbacks, it's often better to take a Geas or Bond instead of a Gift. For instance, the "Amphibian" Gift, below, is suitable for the kind of mer-Excrucian who can fit in well on human land or undersea ... but if they, e.g., grow a fishtail whenever splashed, a Bond would probably work better.

Amphibian

Strategists with this Gift are as much at home on the water as on the land. They can breathe and move freely underwater.

This Gift is a Greater Unfettering. Since most GMs wouldn't force players to invoke the actual *power* twice for it, we're going to call "breathe and move underwater" one trick.

Fire-breathing

Fire breathing costs the minimum 1 character point. If the Strategist wants to be fancy, they can shift from "one trick of lesser destruction" to "limited uses of lesser contagion;" the fire won't be as *impactful,* but they'll be able to breathe fire around a corner or burn patterns into wood with a touch. Being able to catch fire harmlessly and at will, like the phoenix can, is 1 CP too, as are variations like acidic spittle, venomous fangs, or lightning/soporific breath.

This Gift is based on a Lesser Destruction miracle that burns physical things in a narrow cone extending out from the Strategist's mouth. When the Strategist is in infection state, their fiery breath can have more abstract shapes and/or burn away properties and non-physical things. When used against the substance of their infection, it is often of little effect.

Flight

The ability to fly is a common Gift. It costs 1 character point, as below.

This is a Greater Unfettering. Strategists with wings and Eide 2+ may also wish to consider a Bond.

Example: Born a winged fox, Lysarges Britolanian is still *a winged fox, albeit now a winged fox of the Host. It is sometimes possible to see her eyes, but if you try to sniff her nose you will miss.*

Invisibility

The ability to turn invisible/visible at will costs 1 point.

This is a Lesser Destruction effect that temporarily suppresses the character's visibility. Full use of that power would probably let the character take individual invisible actions—"I invisibly draw another card, while still visible" or whatnot—so *this* version is just comprehensive.

In infection state, a character with this Gift can temporarily suppress *any* of their own traits.

Shapeshifting

Shapeshifting is not a natural trick for the Strategists. It's easy with the right Treasure. It's available as a Technique. They can just declare that they don't *have* a single and specific form to *begin* with ...

But choosing between several specific shapes, or having the power to choose any specific shape, is against the nature of the Eide. Thus, Strategists who want to have one or two alternate shapes *innately* must pay 4 Character Points. (As seen above, under **Abhorrent Transmogrification,** a comprehensive version would cost 6, instead.)

Shapeshifting is purchased as a miracle of Greater Misdirection. The Strategist declares that the world perceives them in a different shape. Anything that suggests otherwise is phantasmagorical. ... at least, until afterwards, when the matter becomes ambiguous.

Amphibian

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
10 (Wyrd)	Automatic	Self-only	One trick	Yes	
10 CPS	+1	−5	−5		1 CP

Fire-Breathing

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
4 (Wyrd)	Action	Local	One trick	No	
4 CPS	−1	−1	−5	+1	1 CP

Flight

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
10 (Wyrd)	Automatic	Self-only	One trick	Yes	
10 CPS	+1	−5	−5		1 CP

Invisibility

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
4 (Wyrd)	Action	Self-only	Comprehensive	No	
4 CPS	−1	−5	−1	+1	1 CP

Players who *don't* think that that's the shapeshifting method that they're looking for are probably looking to make shapeshifting their Technique, a secondary Technique bought through a Bond or instilled through infusion, or the power of an appropriate Treasure or Geas. That said ...

Shapeshifting (for the Ambiguous)

If the Strategist wants to just *not have* a shape, allowing their own **Focus** and others' acts of **Greater Focus** to reshape them, that's a fair bit easier:

First, they can just *do* that, just *have* it that way ... and if they want to make sure it sticks, that no effect can bind them to a permanent form, that's just 2 CP ... purchased as a miracle of Greater Unfettering.

Shapeshifting (Mental)

The last kind of shapeshifting that a Strategist might reasonably want to purchase is *mental shapeshifting*—the ability to shift between multiple identities as their player likes. A relatively well-defined set of selves is 1 CP; a wider variety of options would cost 2.

This is a Rite of Masking, as shown below. A wider variety of identities would be a Comprehensive rather than a Limited usage of this Rite.

Unblemished Guise

2 points

Character with this Gift of Eide have reached a peace with their humanity. They remember human life so strongly that their human guise is (to a lesser or greater degree) impenetrable. Even a Power or Excrucian will think that they are human until they see the Strategist performing a miracle; heck, outside of moments of strong emotion and/or the full exertion of their power, their eyes aren't even night and falling stars.

This is a Gift of Lesser Misdirection, concealing the Strategist's nature from the world.

Example: Julie Detrick holds to a clean and transcendent faith that the world, though patently incorrect and broken, is actually just fine. She wants to kill the world, but she doesn't. Instead, returning from death and Ninuan, she's just gone back to the life that she was living—although she has become ever more entangled in the dramas of the local Nobilis and lesser powers with each passing day since. She dreads the moment when her friends, frenemies, and lover learn that she is in fact a born and vested enemy of everything that they hold dear.

Any tree could be Excrucian; it is impossible to see their eyes.

—from the Diary of Kalliope Tsouderos

Shapeshifting

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
12 (Eide)	Action	Self-only	Limited	No	
12 CPS	−1	−5	−3	+1	4 CPS

Shapeshifting (for the Ambiguous)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
10 (Wyrd)	Action	Self-only	Limited	No	
10 CPS	−1	−5	−3	+1	2 CPS

Shapeshifting (Mental)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
8 (Eide)	Action	Self-only	Limited	No	
8 CPS	−1	−5	−3	+1	1 CP

Unblemished Guise

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	TOTAL
8 (Eide)	Action	Local	One trick	No	
8 CPS	−1	−1	−5	+1	2 CPS

Hatharid Gerlos, whom Tourism kills

How Limitless, how Beauteous! is the vastness of the World

SCENE 1: AS RILKE WOULD SPEAK OF KNOWING THINGS

*[Madeline's **Glitch** game continues now from pg. 150. Not long has passed for the players; it's getting pretty late for them, and they're more interested in finding out what happens next while they still have energy to do so—to Tassilo and Liutgarde, when the countdown for the "cleansing protocol" hit "0;" to Ciara, who went plunging into Ninuan—than in taking a between-chapter break:*

The game continues almost without pause.]

GM: So, first off, Heather, I didn't give you very much when you first dove into Ninuan.

[This is on Madeline's mind because Heather used a spotlight, and could reasonably have expected more from that than "You fall into a land of endless, static snow." ... but then the chapter ended, and that was all she got.]

GM: Is that all right?
HEATHER: Enh, I'm fine with it as long as I don't have to immediately spotlight again *now* to see what's going on?
GM: Fair enough.

[The GM makes the according mental note.]

GM: OK, so: night has fallen over the water treatment facility. It is mostly quiet, except for the chattering of bugs. *[to Diane and Edward:]* What are you doing?
EDWARD: Am I ... dead?
GM: A good question, but there's really no canonical answer.
EDWARD: ... not in *general,* Maddie, but, like, did I get cleansed?
GM: Probably.
EDWARD: ... I am going to spotlight that.
DIANE: I think ...
GM: Mm?
DIANE: I think I, too, am going to book it for Ninuan, with Adrian beside me, before I find out whether I'm dead or not.
GM: Hm.
DIANE: On the grounds, you see, that I cannot possibly be damaged by anything before it has been described.
GM: That is somewhat reasonable, at least. All right, let's get

opposite: *by Jenn Manley Lee*

back to Edward later.
EDWARD: *[exaggerated hair-pulling motions]* Grragh!
GM: *[looks up the rules and ponders]* Liutgarde, in the last moments before the waylet withdraws, you may make the jump to Ninuan, dragging Adrian beside you. I will allow this, because you were already in the mists of faerie, which to you is very much *like* Ninuan, but you're going to need a navigation action to cross over. ... and count your blessings there's a spotlight or you wouldn't make it in time.

["Navigation" is a Time-Consuming miracle, which means it normally takes hours, or at least "a fair bit of tactical time," but it can be sped up a great deal by self-spotlighting the action.]

DIANE: ... indeed.

[Diane records 4 Fugue and +1 XP.]

DIANE: That ... means that that is itself probably the spotlight action, then?
GM: Yeah. Everything is falling apart, technically it is probably actually already *past* the last moment in which you could do this, and you seize Adrian and ... well, what do you do, exactly?
DIANE: I think it's fine to simply say: I drag him as I fall back away from the mortal world, deeper towards the nothingness. Towards... the lode of eerie nothingness that slept within the ice.
GM: OK. *[ponders]* I think I said this to Heather, already, but it is very much the white of static, this snow; the white of ... hmm ... it is like, when you are in a very dark room, and the darkness takes on texture, a flurry of movement, but it is still nothing but the darkness. There are everywhere points of color, blue and brown and arguably even white and brilliance, but still ... darkness. Geometry. That is the snow. That is what it is to you; though, the longer you see it, the more you, at least, as a child of Ninuan, can see ... a truth in it, a depth of meaning and pattern in it, that is not just random noise. The longer you see it, the more, if you can afford a **Vision** action anyway, it will resolve for you, into ... a dream of snow. Do not handle it too roughly, or it will fall apart, but: a dream of snow.
DIANE: I look around. I will ... invest another Fugue in **Vision.**
GM: It is a place of endless quiet—was. A place of endless quiet, and limitlessly deep blue skies, so dark they border on the indigo, when not covered entirely over by the snow. Here ... floating islands of ice and rock, some as small as sloops or gardener's shacks, some as vast as continents, drift, bumping now and again against one another in the air, decorated with ancient, black, and leafless trees. It is very still, even the metal crows have frozen over ... except for the screaming, which is new.
DIANE: Am ... am I screaming? Is someone ...
GM: Whether you are screaming, like so much else, is a matter of debate, here; Adrian, who cannot see, who cannot hear, who cannot feel, taste, touch—Adrian, who is not dying and is not broken, and thus is held in a moment of perfect sensory deprivation, screams, and does not know that he is screaming. His throat grows hoarse, and his body begins to wrack itself with shivers. And he does not stop. He does not stop.
DIANE: Uh.

[Recall that, without appropriate powers, only the dying and the broken can bear witness to the silvered land (pg. 64).]

GM: Heather, you can probably hear this. Although you are not in the same location, quite. Still, it is echoing across the sky. You can sense a thrumming ... disturbance ... somewhere, deep in the substrate; something ancient, waking up.
DIANE: Hang on, I have to look at my options for helping him.
GM: Sure.

[Diane looks at the book for a bit.]

EDWARD: You could glamor up some sort of senses for him, maybe?
DIANE: I guess that's a backup, I kind of feel like, he's my death, so it should be Wyrd? Sort of?
GM: I'm not sure Wyrd is designed for helping people.
DIANE, DISCOVERING SOMETHING: Ha! It totally is. I am going to Greater Revenant Rite him.
GM: *[squints]*
DIANE: I take the ongoing effect that he is not actually dying, and *mitigate* it.
GM: Oh my God.
DIANE: Man, I can do this to anyone, can't I?
GM: ... anyone who is not currently dying ... I guess, yes.
DIANE: Boom.
GM: Technically, shouldn't you be able to fix ... long, lingering deaths?
DIANE: That isn't really Liutgarde's *sickness,* though. Her sickness is the way she fails to die; eternity interpreted as immortality, eternal life. So, since she's dying of eternal life—
GM: Yeah, yeah, OK, OK, ... fair. You can mitigate the fact that he is not dying, making it ... merely cosmetic ... until the end of the scene? And if you want, and he spends much of the chapter ... convalescing ... because, he'll be dying ...
DIANE: I'm not sure that works, I think he'd need to be convalescing from being alive. Or just generally. But I don't think convalescing from dying does, like: you can't go to a hospital to heal up from being hospitalized.
HEATHER: ... not to knock hospitals or anything but you can *easily* spend a lot of time at hospitals recovering from problems that you *got* there, that is how my friend spent weeks in a coma and my grandmother died.
DIANE: ... uh, I don't know if I want to apply that to mechanics directly.

HEATHER: Just saying.
GM: Well ... it's up to you. I mean, I *guess* the theory is, if you spend most of your time in ℵinuan this chapter mostly resting and recovering, you'll be able to help him past mere *mitigation* to actually being properly dying, a state you will never achieve and maintain fully yourself.
DIANE: I think the scene is enough, but I'll ... bump Vision up to Greater Vision so it's automatic and keep the Greater Revenant Rite going just in case.
GM: Another ... 5 Fugue and, how much Burn? And what does all this do to you?
DIANE: The Fugue is probably just the cold and whirling ice settling into my spirit and my vision, shifting my sense of what faerie *is*, but the Burn... I'll have to see what happens to him first.
GM: I figure, something like, you spread your hand, and put it on his chest—optional, but, that's how I see it?
DIANE: Sure?
GM: And twisting dark red veins writhe out through his skin, and he jerks, and gasps, and pales, and suddenly he can see; and there's just the slightest hint of night and stars forever falling in his eyes. The screaming stops.
DIANE: The Burn, uh, 4 of it, is just what I'm doing to myself by being ruthless, then. And perhaps the poison of his company, for he is my death as I, apparently, am becoming his.

[Diane records 4 Burn, 5 Fugue, and 2 XP.]

GM: "Oh," he says. He looks around. "Uh. So this is the afterlife of fools."
LIUTGARDE, THROUGH PURSED LIPS: This is the true and perfect land. The uncorrupted, untainted, un*broken* world.
ADRIAN: It's ... cold.
LIUTGARDE: It has depths of inner beauty, not a temperate climate.
ADRIAN: Oh.
LIUTGARDE: You are most likely thinking of Florida, which is superior in its beaches but inferior owing to the sickness and corruption that perfuses it.
ADRIAN: Thank you for correcting my assumptions.
LIUTGARDE: Listen—Adrian. Listen. *[as Diane]* She rummages around in the snow with cold-numbed fingers, pulls up a fluted stone. *[as Liutgarde]* This is a faerie stone—some would say. An un-rock. A ℵot-thing. It is forged of dream and nothingness and not geology. But because of that origination it is pure. If you look at it. If you feel it. You will find it hard to grasp sometimes. You will find it hard to separate yourself from it. You will not know where you end and the rock begins. You will infuse your assumptions into it, and only realize afterwards that you were mistaken. All these things are true. But ... you can sit with this stone for as long as you like, for *forever,* if you like, knowing it, as Rilke would speak of knowing *things,* naked and skinless, opened to the great experience of ℵinuan, and you will never hit that jarring ... that note of *sickness*, that lurks deep within the world. That is more close to the surface in your cities, in your people, in your ruined and corrupted things, ai, but is there even in the clouds, the rivers, in the rain. Earth is intrinsically corrupt and broken. It is a bending towards bleak endings. But *this* stone is only dreams and nothingness and love. This stone is only a thing that sits beneath the endless sky and sings its solitary song and *knows* you ne'ertheless, that has been waiting *for* you since the moment of its inception, from the moment of its rocky birth unto these lands, knowing that I would toss it thus into your hands:

[Diane makes a tossing motion.]

LIUTGARDE: It is *truth.*
GM: He fumbles for the rock. He holds it for a moment, looking down. After a moment, he says, "I'm hungry."
LIUTGARDE: We were ... we were just at a restaurant!
ADRIAN: That was hours ago, and I hadn't been hijacked to your ℵiflheim or whatever.
LIUTGARDE: ℵinuan.
ADRIAN: It is hungry work, being kidnapped by the fae. I had to hang on while you turned into all kinds of different animals, prolly.
LIUTGARDE: I will see what I can do.
GM: Heather, what are you doing?
HEATHER: I am going to pull my dragon-like beast out of my spiritual space so I have something to ride on and spherecraft my way into the sky where I can home in on the screaming.

[Spherecraft—the basic use of her Arcana—only needs level 2 Lore; Ciara can manage this for free.]

GM: Wow, flying mount.
HEATHER: I do not normally use it when traveling around in America because it is overly conspicuous and also eats through my food budget faster than I can squeeze new money. But yes.
GM: Tell me about it.
HEATHER: It is a fourth-rank rain dragon. It has horns. And hooves. Possibly that means that it is not a dragon at all. We only communicate through rudimentary telepathy so the matter is not clear. It does not have fiery breath or anything but it does command water in its vicinity and can fly in a sort of telekinetic way without excess use of its wings. It is mostly brown and green. Its eyes, obsidian.
GM: Literally? Or, just, like, black?
HEATHER: ... literally, I guess. Though you'd better be using a spotlight on this?
GM: Sure.

[Maddie flashes a spotlight card.]

HEATHER: As this species grows, it progressively replaces its eyes with higher and higher tiers of material, inscribed inside with ever-more complex magical inscriptions. I have its last set of eyes, which are whale-bone eyes, and

not terribly impressive—I guess maybe they're what I made my magical dice from? That's cooler than finding them in a shop.

[*Ciara's one Creational Treasure is a pair of magical dice that always roll what she wants them to; her original plan (pg. 106) was to have found them in a random shop. It's not clear that discarded λ-dragon eyes are actually a valid Treasure, to be honest, but she's overlooking that in her momentary enthusiasm ... and it doesn't really matter, anyway; several obvious workarounds exist.]*

HEATHER: Unless you had plans for that shop?
GM: ... nope, no plans for the shop, retcon is go.
HEATHER: Cool. ... oh, hey, while I have you: it's pretty late; how much longer are we going?
GM: ... end of the chapter? II? I guess we could end here?
EDWARD: noooo
DIANE: I can do the end of the chapter.
CROSSTALK:
EDWARD: ... yeah, that's fine.
HEATHER: cool.
GM: OK.

[brief pause]

GM: Right, Ciara, dragon-pet: you lift up into the skies, wings beating powerfully if apparently without clear necessity, and head towards where you heard the screaming. Alas, it has stopped.
HEATHER: ... I will shout, "ho!!!!" to attract a response.
LIUTGARDE: Eh? *[Diane begins affectedly looking around.]*
GM: That sense you had earlier, something stirring in the substrate? It intensifies, in reaction to your shout.
LIUTGARDE, HESITANTLY, HANDS CUPPED AROUND HER MOUTH: Hoy!!
GM: Something shifting ... slithering ... waking.
HEATHER: I'm using a **Greater Vision** for 2 Fugue to both locate Liutgarde and scan for the source.
GM: Ah, there's Liutgarde, and ... Adrian, surprisingly, a speckling of green hair in the snow.
HEATHER: And the other thing?
GM: You're not sure. The hairs on the back of your neck are standing up, but there's nothing visible, nothing but the swirling of snow, the trembling of trees. You have the sudden sense, though, that something bigger than your field of view can easily capture is moving.
HEATHER: ... I'll sail in the drake to land on Liutgarde's island.
LIUTGARDE: Ah, Ciara!
CIARA: We are, I think, in danger here.
ADRIAN: Is that a bloody *dragon?*
CIARA, WRYLY: Death is near at hand.

[Diane, or Liutgarde, snorts.]

CIARA: ... also, yes.
ADRIAN: *Hell* yeah. *[as Madeline.]* He holds out his hand to be sniffed.
HEATHER: It flares its nostrils and snorts steamy mucus over him.
ADRIAN: ... not discouraged.
CIARA: Ha! Well, mount up, then; we need to go.
LIUTGARDE: I had hoped to ... find a spirit of the snows, something we could ask about why ...
CIARA: The first rule is, survive.
LIUTGARDE, GRIMLY: There is nothing here that can destroy us.
GM: That is when you hear the sound of cracking, deep below you—a glacier splitting, too far away to see as more than glimmers and motes of snow, so vast that the entire continuum resounds with the *snap* of it. The crackle. And the thunder.
LIUTGARDE, NERVOUSLY: For instance, there are no Serpents. No continent-spanning dragons and mountains made of snakes. *[as Diane]* I'm mounting. I assume Adrian has long since.
GM: There is in fact neither of these things; no dragon, but leviathan; no mountain-snake, but *kraken*, long-frozen, long-sealed, in this aerial sea, adrift in the interminable cold. You stand upon the drifting dust of its long-shed skin, of its ancient breath, and disturb it with your screams, your shouts, your beats of wings: the hubbub of your lives.
DIANE: ... that's ...
GM: The tentacle that rises is not a tentacle; it is a continent, a world, an endless thing; its suckers larger than the mortal sun.
HEATHER: First, retreat.
DIANE: I am totally going to burn my second decisive action, Madeline, on pride.
GM: Pride?
DIANE: I am royalty of Ninuan; I will not cower before the petty king-beast of some unland world. Behold, this *too* has suffered, as I have suffered, as Adrian had suffered formerly, in eternal drift in wait for death; this too shall end. Shall now be mended.
GM: *[looking up the power's rules]* ... that's gonna be an epic effect, here, and I don't think the Greater Revenant Rite's cut out for it. Not that I'm going to give you a *hard* no, but I think that rules outcome may be deliberate—that you're not *meant* to be able to heal the most incredible instances of your sickness. Edward can't just spend 20 extra Burn to fix up Camelot. Heather can't just discover that the world is like her, tearing itself apart with strength, rather than sick some other way, and go, oh, OK! And fix that.
DIANE: ... oh. That sucks.
GM: The world is wrong.
DIANE: I can use other epic miracles, though?
GM: Yeah, that's fine. You can, like, put together a greater misdirection to make it *seem* dead, or do something with a treasure, or, um. Fall into it and get hurt and release a Shattering-based epic disaster, or make it epically sick *with* your sickness, or banish it into faerie?
DIANE: We're already in faerie.

GM: Ah ...
DIANE: I mean, from Liutgarde's perspective.
GM: Banish it *more* into faerie, then? Or, I guess, go into infection state.
DIANE: I ... will make it ... I can make it epically sick with my sickness, meaning ... I can put it back to sleep, send it drifting back off into eternal not-dead-but-not-alive-really, right?
GM: That is a thing you have deep in the bones of you, it aches in you, it echoes through you; you can do it, yes, if you just make it big enough, and burn yourself to the quick.
DIANE: As said, I have my pride. I hold out my hand to the tentacle that rises above us, snarl, and say, "Rest ye, that have risen; fall into your endless sleep; bother the quick and the warm no more, *o ye cold and deathless sea!*" And, um, that's contagion? Greater contagion? Yeah, and epic. So 25.
GM: That is a lot of Burn.
DIANE: Yes.
GM: I mean, a hella lot of Burn.
DIANE: Yes.
GM: Tell me about it, and I'll let you describe how the creature falls away.
DIANE: ... I don't want to describe how it falls away. I dunno. It falls away and we can see no more motion in the depths? That's not really important, though. What matters is that a part of me is here forever now. A part of me is frozen here, with it, not living, not dying, just ... caught in the matrix of my spell, a moment in eternity, a single point of consciousness, unawake yet aware, and lost within the endlessness of ice. For generations, for forever, maybe, it will stay, and while it stays, no more will stir that beast; this I, Liutgarde of the Chancery, have writ.
GM: That is an acceptable decisive action.
DIANE: It had *better!*

[Diane records 25 Burn and 1 XP.]

GM: As you wing away, then, out of spotlights, let us turn our attention back to Edward, and his doom.
EDWARD: Tassilo.
GM: Mm?
EDWARD: *Tassilo's* doom.
GM: Whatever.
EDWARD: *[sticks out his tongue]*

SCENE 2: THE HAMMER

GM: In that moment when the cleansing process initiates it's like the hammer of god has come down on the facility; or at least, of *a* god. Of Nircoa, who is the icicles of the world, and the assignments in it, and its denim too, but more than that is a name eternal, a word writ in the substance of the Js, a being of law and of all transcendence. It is obvious in that moment why withdrawing this power was not within the icicle girl's remit: it is not her power, not *her* doing, but an Imperial word, a wish unto the world that was long-since spoken, and only later by her word invoked. It is part of The Protocol that Nircoa has established: *let no loose ends remain.*

[The GM spends 4 points from her Cost pool, leaving her at 4. After a moment, she drops that to 2, figuring that at least some of the impact on the kraken had to count as straight damage.]

HEATHER: Your pardon.
GM: Yes?
HEATHER: Which, I ask, with dawning horror, of those Estates, *from* which, did that law derive?
GM: Denim, obviously. This was the scissors that cut away the fraying edge. Though, the drop that falls from the icicle is not the icicle; the loose end to the assignment will not be graded—all things are party to it, that are Nircoa. But it is as the frayed leg of a pair of jeans, unraveling, and snipped by the scissors of a god, that Edward ends.
EDWARD: Tassilo.
GM: That Tassilo ends. ... or at least takes damage, if not avoided.
EDWARD: Can I ... unfetter myself?
GM: It seems likely to be helpful but insufficient. It's like, if someone told an extremely professional team of covert operatives to clean up the site, and you turned yourself into a cardboard cut-out Standee Tassilo, that would quite possibly keep them from *shooting* you and burning the body but they would probably still *dispose* of you.
EDWARD: What actually happens if I don't defend?
GM: The world is overwritten without you. Your special circumstances will ensure that instead of simply ceasing to exist, you will take some amount of damage and be shunted, eventually, to Ninuan. Probably to your sanctuary, maybe to the waylet, I'd have to look it up or make a call.
EDWARD: ... I can't think of anything cleverer than cliffhanger rite.

[Edward takes 4 Stilling and 1 XP.]

GM: Time passes. You begin to realize, as you exist in a space of nonexistence, that the effect is not letting up—that the Imperial word that has snipped you off is immanent, and wishes you to *stay* snipped off. Whatever you have done to hide out temporarily away from existence's view ... as soon as you *stop,* you're just going to be erased.
EDWARD: Uh ... I'm going to spotlight my options.
GM: As always there's misdirection; you can probably get rid of the fact that you're a loose end. You could trigger some sort of ... grand plan through your treasures, which I guess means the Shelby Cobra, to recreate yourself somewhere else. Or at least stick your spirit in it as your mortal form gets erased. Most of the Wyrd stuff needs time, and I'm kind of hesitant to let you *actually* trigger time-consuming stuff from behind a cliffhanger rite that isn't functioning; you could do it if you switched to misdirection, but then you wouldn't need to. Maybe Greater Masking to make yourself something that belongs?

EDWARD: Greater Masking is kind of interesting. If I made myself belong, and got erased, would the town just kind of automatically fold me into its resurrection schema?
GM: Nope! There's no resurrection schema, just time loops. Like, nobody's coming back to life and repeating their existence, they're just ... intermittently growing younger instead of older while living through repeating cycles of events.
EDWARD: ... OK, so, *really,* it's down to shoving my spirit into the Shelby Cobra or something, misdirection, or just taking damage and freeforming my response?
GM: Yeah. A fair bit of damage, wishes are bad news, but not, like, more than 15.
EDWARD: ... but at *that* point, I can be all, *yeah, but you can't exactly call me a loose end, just like was established earlier, I'm exactly what you need.*
GM: Earlier? ... oh, right, Liutgarde's plan. Yeah, if you want to sell that to the world somehow, I guess, 15 Stilling's what it takes. ... enh, 13. 15's a bit too high.
EDWARD: 13 is still extremely ow. But yeah, I'll pose in my best smug smoking bastard stance and let it wash over me, and when it all dies out, there I am, just a giant flashing red light on a terminal somewhere or maybe in Nircoa's mind, saying, *here. Here's the guy you need. He's got just the deal for you.*
GM: Do you have an actual cigarette yet?
EDWARD: Alas, the first ten points of damage aced it.

[Edward records 13 Stilling and 1 XP.]

GM: All right. After a few minutes, there's the brooding sense of presence. It billows in. It fills the space, and suddenly it's as if *everything* around you is alive, *everything* is looking at you; you cannot tell exactly what the boundaries of the machinery and the room are, and Nircoa. Is that panel its eye? Is that clipboard a scale on its skin? Everywhere around you is in motion, and in stillness, and everything—as it always is—is wrong.
TASSILO: Yo.
NIRCOA: Excrucian. When was I to be informed that the inquisitors had taken on your kind? *[as the GM]* You cannot tell whether it is being ironic or gullible. Its voice is hella alien.
TASSILO: Unimportant. What's *important,* Nircoa, is that you want to run time, and *I* want you to run time, for the right price. Let's make it happen.
NIRCOA: What price is that?
TASSILO: Uh ... *[as Edward]* OK, 2 Stilling business stunt to have properly thought this through. Um. Give me a moment.
GM: Heehee. Why don't you think about what you're actually trying to do here for a minute, then, and I'll go run the others.
EDWARD: Yeah, cool.

SCENE 3: THE VOID

GM: You are in nothingness, along with an exhilarated, dying teenager, an eternally sleeping kraken, and a riding drake. Anyone want to do a quest action?
HEATHER: If "someone shifts their position or alliances," does that mean Adrian falls in more firmly with us?
GM: Probably. Or, well, against you. Or your dragon decides to make a run for it. I refuse to make the call on something that cheaty until it actually happens to avoid exploitation. Oh, I guess you can definitely call at least one instance of "you interact with strange animals," though, whichever of you doesn't want to do something else.
DIANE: Honestly, I think we've already got "hints and shadows of [my] infection fill the world and void," too. And Tassilo shifted his position and alliance. We're *good.*
GM: Fair. That means ... void action from Heather, probably?
HEATHER: I want to understand why this is in the middle of the Power of Icicles.
GM: Mm-hm?
HEATHER: Her attention came close. The waylet came close. It receded ... the waylet faded away. Why would this be?
GM: It could be a coincidence. Like, sometimes people just have waylets in 'em. In their pupil or spleen or whatever. Maybe their shadow or their interactions with their friends. The Commencement that turns them into a Power won't necessarily change that, and they might not even know that it's there.
HEATHER: I flex on this.
GM: You get a little here, but not that much. Like, OK, *probably* Nircoa did it on purpose? Nircoa wanted to have a waylet for something. Not surprising, really, true gods tend to long to get out of the cage that is the world, just, you know, not as much as the Wild or whatever.
HEATHER: They do?
GM: They're stuck on Earth, mostly? And that's got to chafe for divine entities. A whole Ash. A whole cosmos. A whole *meta* cosmos beyond that. And they've got this one picayune, provincial little ball of blue and green. And they have to fight over it with their kin and monsters from outside and outside Imperators from up and down the tree. I mean, there are people who never want to travel, there are true gods who are just fine with staying where they are, but I think there's a natural hunger for *more* in the true gods, just because the boot is set on top of their heads from the beginning.
HEATHER: What good is having a Power with a waylet in them to them?
GM: Now that's an unclear point. Flexing won't give you any more on the "why" or "how" here; at best you can get a clue, and even that would be generosity on my part.
HEATHER: I will go ahead and get the clue before I try to spotlight any ideas.
GM: Grrf! Rrgh! You strain your muscles against the fabric of the void, failing to disturb the sleeping kraken only because that's one *heck* of a miracle keeping it asleep. You think maybe, *just* maybe, it's because Nircoa is trying to

grasp the correlative continuum—to use it as its weapon to bypass time, to bypass Creation, to step outside the cage that contains it and keep its thoughts and ambitions and actions from being spied upon. You think it's trying to ... integrate with the pre-causal law. Something to that effect.
HEATHER: ... is the kraken ... like, timeless Nircoa?
GM: That seems not quite what I'd want to do here, but you're not getting any more out of me regardless.
HEATHER: I survey the snowy world we have here. So I have this theory that ... Nircoa is extending into this space, somehow or other. And I want to test it, by ... dredging it up with the power of my attention. By *seeing* the Nircoa that is here, by feeling it, by knowing its presence in this space, where it ought not be.
GM: OK. So, you hang there, above the endless empty space, with clots of snow and ice and rock and tree drifting by around you and below you, and somewhere deep and deep and deep, the kraken—and you realize that in the sky there is a grid. It is like tendons. It is like writhing lines of beige. It is like the panels of a geodesic dome. It is blind and it is deaf; it knows no touch and it knows no taste; it is severed even from the flow of time, but it surrounds you, you are in the palm of it, even the kraken is in the palm of it, like Sun Wu-kong before Tathagata. Only, it is not five fingers, but infinity, endless, tangled, knotted strands of flesh, blind, unseeing, unknowing, agonized, and not even able to perceive its agony. The sky is pulsing with the god Nircoa, who has reached through the soul of its claimed Power into this place; inwards it winds, and outwards again, endless branching paths. It strikes you, suddenly, that the kraken was but a burrowing, ancient parasite upon its flesh; that the world was burst, and shed of gravity, by the arrival of the god.
EDWARD: Imperators. They ruin everything.
HEATHER: Uh. I ... could ... I could break it.
GM: Was that in-character?
CIARA: ... I could end him. It? ... I could end Nircoa, here, and it would never even know it died.
LIUTGARDE, AFTER A MOMENT: ... I am not certain, but I think we had become teetotalers of god-murdering.
CIARA: You just ...!

[Heather works her mouth for a moment before finally throwing Diane a Fugue chip.]

CIARA: You are right. That is fair. We are not here to kill.
ADRIAN: Do I get a vote?
CIARA: No.
ADRIAN: Because, that totally looks like something you should be killing.
CIARA: Arguably, doing so would destroy your human "jeans."
ADRIAN: Eh?
CIARA: It is unclear. They might survive in another form. Or they might pass utterly from the earth.
ADRIAN: Are you asking me whether I am willing to lose ... to sacrifice jeans, in order to see that ended? Because, OK, that is the weirdest choice I've ever had to make, but *yeah.*
CIARA: Regrettably, I am not asking you, as your enthusiasm for god-slaughter is a child's passion.
ADRIAN: That is rather unfair; I only have the hormonal makeup of a teenager, I'm like ... however many years old.
LIUTGARDE, AMUSED: However many?
ADRIAN: Time got screwed, OK?
LIUTGARDE, LESS AMUSED: Ah.
CIARA: There is nothing for us here.
LIUTGARDE, IN A SMALL VOICE: We could ... we could go to a different part of the void, where things are nicer, and not so god-broken.
CIARA: You can't hold on to this too hard, Liut-sweet, you'll only rip yourself apart.
LIUTGARDE: Yeah. OK.
CIARA: C'mon. Let's ... let's go back to Earth.
LIUTGARDE: Wait.
CIARA: Mm?
LIUTGARDE: Adrian?
GM: Yeah?
LIUTGARDE: If you have wondered who we are, what we are, what we are doing, look up. Stare at the abomination in the sky, and listen. We are ... not that. We are the not that, and the not the poison of the world, and the not the killing of it all in a conflagration of devastation and of fire. We are ... witness, OK? We are ones who can look at things like that, and remember that it shouldn't be.
ADRIAN: OK ...
LIUTGARDE: I don't think you're getting away from us. Probably I'd let you run, but ... I shouldn't. I tell myself that I shouldn't, and you shouldn't, either. Don't leave. And if you don't leave, you should understand that. What we are.
ADRIAN: Lady, you had me at "riding dragons."
DIANE: *[spluttering a laugh]* OK, scene can end, I guess I hope to get dragged along when Ciara sees herself back into Creation?
GM: Not sure on the *technical* legalities, there, but we're pretty close to the end of the chapter and the session; let's say, sure, for now. Edward, do you have a plan?
EDWARD: Agh, no, no, keep going.
GM: ... sure. Heather?
HEATHER: I will spotlight the connection between Nircoa and the void, and use that as my path to fade back into the world.
GM: Alas, Nircoa is not connected to the void.
HEATHER: What?
GM: It will take it many, many years yet before it has cracked enough of the secrets of things to force its path into Ninuan, and back out, and around through time. Honestly, you Strategists and your timeless continuity, you are *totally* jumping the gun.
HEATHER: ... OK, I guess I will spotlight Tassilo's sweating brow.
EDWARD: Too late! I've figured it out!

HEATHER: *[affected wailing]* Stuck! Stuck forever in the void!
DIANE: wait, isn't that a good thing?
HEATHER: I didn't finish watching all my shows.
DIANE: ... we don't have a television.
HEATHER: I am *really strong,* OK?

[Diane breaks down giggling.]

SCENE 4: THE GOD

GM: Edward, what's the plan?
EDWARD: I am going to *help it* get into Ninuan, I am going to *sell* it the way in, and make sure that that way is treacherous, so that ultimately the whole experiment just collapses from within.
GM: ... mm. ... it might go for that, depending on what you're asking for.
EDWARD: Just some petty things.
GM: Are you ready to handle it IC?
EDWARD: ... sure. *[as Tassilo]* As you may know, o creature of horror and decay— o icicl'ous majesty— the void, the space beyond the world, is unbound by time.
GM: A sharpening of intent, of attention. It almost burns in you, like it is eating away at your mind, your ego. "Go on."
TASSILO: I will teach you the path. I will *let you in,* and you may revel there; all I ask is three of your people, and eighty dollars.
GM: There is a long slow roiling of silence. "Eighty bucks."
TASSILO: Operating expenses.
NIRCOA: ... if you wish to claim my Powers by this contract, I do not accept it.
TASSILO: No, no, I'm asking for a kid named Adrian, green hair, kind of a jerk, you don't know him, probably; Doug Forstat, he came here a while back, I think you wished him out of existence or something? And a Shelby Cobra. I think she counts as a citizen, but that kind of definitional stuff is your guys' monkey.
NIRCOA: ... fairly bargained; I accept.
EDWARD: I will engage in a grand act of ... what is it that I need to do here?
GM: ... probably **Greater Invocation.**
EDWARD: ... ow, that's a lot of Fugue.
GM: It's a bargain, for ripping open a path to Ninuan that Imperators can take *and* cursing its entire project to fail *and* doing it pretty much instantly.
EDWARD: That's fair. The Fugue is mostly from the first part?
GM: Yeah.
EDWARD: OK. Done. *[looks up the miracle, takes 11 Fugue and an XP.]* I guess technically it's a plan, so it might take a few chapters before it's *done* done, before all the treachery is, as it were, properly imbued, but ... done? So I guess I'll be going now.
NIRCOA: Here is the thing, little creature.
EDWARD: Hey! I've taken like 25 Cost to this part already!
NIRCOA: You may freely take the three you've claimed, but I did not say that *you* could go.
TASSILO: Well, no, it was assumed.
GM: Without transition—because it is everywhere; because it is everything; because it is a living part of the fabric of the entire world around you—you are being eaten.

[The GM crosses off her general-purposes Cost pool, then scratches down "10?" next to it to be her Cost pool specifically for the forthcoming fight. The low number and the question mark are both because the chapter's almost over and the session, theoretically, with it; she's starting to think less about how to keep the PCs' lives interesting and more about how to arrange a good moment or scene to end the session on.
Regardless, Tassilo is being eaten. Jeans-eaten. JEATEN.]

TASSILO: Ow!
HEATHER: I am going to spotlight that as I dramatically emerge from nowhere for a Ciara Punch!
GM: ... what are you spotlighting, exactly?
HEATHER: The completed experience of *wow, that was scary, it almost ate Tassilo!*

[Madeline reflects on this for a moment, and then decides that a fight here isn't a good thing for the game, because it means ending the session with the probably victorious characters in the middle of a water treatment plant in Midland and very little resolved. So she steps up the pace:]

GM: ... OK, fine. I'll let you punch it off him. I'll even let you guys scurry out of there like the rats you are, get out on the road, start to get away. ... but it's billowing behind you, like a cloud, like a storm, like the entire town of Midland, California and all the desert around it has come awake and alive and hungry, and it races after you faster than even a Shelby Cobra can ever go. End of chapter.

*[She closes her **Glitch** book and prepares to wrap up the session.]*

POST-CREDITS SCENE

EDWARD, LIFTING A FINGER: Can I claim a treasure?
GM: Eh?
EDWARD: Can I claim a treasure? I mean, retroactively, sort of? Now?
GM: ... sure. As dawn's light peeks over the horizon, and a new chapter of your life begins: go for it.
EDWARD: It's billowing behind us, like a cloud, like a storm, like an entire town and desert come to life, right?
GM: yeah.
EDWARD: and it runs into a cactus.
GM: uh
EDWARD: *Greater Ignition of Saguaric ut-Cacterus,* baby.
GM: ... yeah, that's it for the day.

[And on that dread god of Icicles, Denim, and Assignments, rammed head?first into the Californian desert's cactus of despair ... we fade to black.]

CHAPTER SUMMARY

[This chapter featured the following spotlights and quest actions:

- *Diane's **Decisive** jump to Ninuan;*
- *Madeline's **Reckoning:** "What's the deal with the rain dragon?"*
- *Diane's **Decisive** act of pride against the kraken;*
- *Diane or Heather's quest action: "you interact with strange animals."*
- *Diane or Heather's quest action: "hints and shadows of Liutgarde's infection fill the world or the void."*
- *Edward's **Reckoning:** "What happened at the water treatment facility?"*
- *Edward's **Reckoning:** "... and what can I do about it?"*
- *Edward's quest action: "someone shifts their position or alliances."*
- *Heather's **Science, Faith, and Sorcery Action:** "I bet I can find Nircoa HERE."*
- *Heather's **Reaction** to Nircoa (almost) eating Tassilo (scary!)*

After the bonus for using up all their spotlights, Ciara is up to 13 XP; Liutgarde, to 20 XP, plus 9 on her quest; and Tassilo, to 23.

At the beginning of the next chapter, each Cost drops by one, to a minimum of 0. Then Edward grabs another +6 Immersion before the game ends. Thus,

- *Liutgarde starts the next session at +8 Stilling, −4 Immersion, +7 Fugue, +35 Burn, and −5 Wear.*
- *Tassilo starts the next session at +19 Stilling, +3 Immersion, +20 Fugue, −4 Burn, and +4 Wear, and*
- *Ciara starts the next session at +6 Stilling, −4 Immersion, +13 Fugue, −4 Burn, and −2 Wear.*

Liutgarde's Burn started the campaign at 20, Tassilo's Stilling at 0, and Tassilo's Fugue at 10, so it's possible that no one is quite yet in a crisis—although both of them, and (less likely) Ciara, may well have begun eyeing the rules for taking Wounds.

Doug Forstat was later discovered, confused but unharmed, walking by the edge of Highway 10; he was taken into custody by the Riverside County Sheriffs Department and eventually released into the U.S. holding and protection program for victims of mysterious events.

The clouds that clashed with Tassilo have since moved on to rain on an Aaron's Serpent in Palm Springs.]

Eddie CHESTER
CLUB
Kaduin Vardes,
who is dying of Fame

From the testimony of Osuin Thermidau:

What Miracles Know

... miracles do not know things.

You would think that they would know everything, miraculously. Being ... miracles.

But they do not.

They do not like to work to know things for you. They do not like to study on your behalf. Nor do they create information out of air.

(That is an exaggeration.

Investigation is a miracle. It can create information out of air. The Power of Air can turn the air into inf-air-mation. There are miracles that are made for no other purpose. They do this thing and just this thing. They create information. And they can do that.

... but if it is not the thing they do, then they do not.)

Miracles know the things *you* know.

Instead.

They reach into your mind. They dig deep into your brain-meats. They root within your soul.

Also they can look around. They don't have eyes. But they have miracle senses. They can dip their toe in the ambient information of the scene. They can know things you *would* know, if you looked around, I mean. Things that are *there* to know. Where it would not be very hard.

You have not worked that hard. In our example. Apparently. You have not done even that.

But you could. You could have. So it can too.

It knows if it can't do something. That is a given. Miracles that can only kill people know what people are. If you point miracles like that at fake people, then they won't kill them. Not on accident. Not just like that. Miracles that can only kill people are the worst kind of Turing test, but they are also, in a way, the best.

Also, if you can deduce something *else* from knowing, hey, is that a person?

If you know enough for that?

Then that kill-people miracle would know that too.

It turns out that I can't think of an example where a miracle that only kills people must make a series of deductions.

But it could.

Basically, though. If a miracle is not about investigation. If it is not about divination:

It does not know stuff from nowhere.

Even if it *is* investigation. Even if it is deduction. It will only know stuff out of nowhere if the question and the target have been well defined.

What if a miracle does not have enough information?

Creating Things. Probably it uses your concept of what you don't know. Maybe you use **Greater Misdirection** (pg. 178) to disguise someone as the answer to the millennium prize problems. Do you even know what they are?

If you do not then those answers are probably not very good.

If you think they are "something to do with math, probably," you disguise them as something to do with math, probably. People say, "Hey, wow, the answers to the millennium prize problems!" But that is not what they are. They are text with a lot of infinity symbols on it.

opposite: *by Maria Guarneri*

What if you know two questions, but not the answers?

You probably disguise that person as abstruse theorems written in ambiguous text. Also, the text changes. When you look at it, it *seems* to express the right solution-spirit. Yes, you think. That is what a solution to the millennium prize problems would look like. Why, this is probably the real thing right here.

It is not.

Maybe you need a Fender's blue butterfly. You have an insect Sphere. So you use **Inchoation** (pg. 216) to make a λ-copy of a Fender's blue butterfly. Except, you don't know what that is. What do you make? Probably a blue butterfly. Probably a blue butterfly that is intrinsically Fender's-ish. People look at it. They say, "Is that a Fender's?" They are inclined to say yes. But they are probably wrong. The shape of the wings, for one thing. It will not be correct.

Targeting Something Specific. This, you probably cannot actually do.

If you are facing two thieves, and you want to curse "the thief that stole from me," you need to know which one that is. Or, there must be something about the curse that cannot affect an improper thief. Otherwise, the GM will just say, "Um, which one do you mean?"

This is the Smothers Brother problem all over again. (See pg. 91.)

Effects You Don't Know. Maybe you want to curse. Or destroy. Or protect. But you don't know what you need to know *about the curse.* Or whatever. The thing that you want to do.

This works like creating things.

If you say, "I curse their bed to be as cold as the frozen north," then their bed does not know the north's temperature. It does not become a long-distance thermometer. It becomes really cold. As cold as you mean. That is all.

If you try to protect someone's family for a fortnight, but do not know what a fortnight is, the power will last for as long as you think. Unless the GM knows and assumed that you knew. That could get awkward. Regrets.

... the rules do not know what the GM knows. The rules do not know what the GM just assumes that you know. The rules are like the miracles in this. They must shrug here; alas.

There is nothing much they can do.

Divining. Sometimes, when you want to know what you don't know, you will have to know a different thing first.

Sometimes the miracle will help. The GM will help refine your question. This is because the miracle is being implicitly helpful. The process of enacting the miracle has let you narrow things down.

Sometimes, the GM just says, "what do you mean?"

Maybe you are trying to find the sacred sword. You use **Investigation** (pg. 212). But the GM doesn't know what sacred sword you are talking about. It has never come up.

They might say, "... there are different sacred swords around, are you looking for holy ones? Stern ones? Sacred swords with a history?"

Or just: "I don't know what you mean. I don't get it. Could you tell me what you want in more depth?"

Divining the Future

A miracle can know the future. This is possible. If it is a miracle that knows things.

Sometimes, that is a future to be covered in play.

Maybe you want to ask **Greater Investigation** (pg. 218), "what will that PC over there be doing tomorrow?" You get out your magic schedule book. You look at it. Then, you see!

The GM takes a guess. Or they ask the player. They reach a conclusion:

"... they'll be at work," the GM says. "Then, they will visit a friend."

Later, events might force the player to change their mind. Or, they'll just ... change it.

Here is the rule.

The player with the most power over information like that decides what information the miracle gets. On an ordinary day, a player knows most about their PC's schedule. On an extraordinary day, the GM may know more.

Whichever that is, they will tell you.

Then, there is a second effect, as long as you keep the miracle alive. This is a bleak effect. It says: *this must come true.*

Later, when the miracle dies, that bleak effect turns mundane. It is still real. It is still a trend in the fate of the world. But it is not very strong. It might change an Expertise task to a Steel. It might give someone an Edge. It might just be forgotten.

It is that kind of thing.

Maybe you want to make *sure* that PC will be at work. So you don't stop the **Greater Investigation.** You sustain the miracle. It does not turn mundane. Then anyone who wants to *stop* them from being at work will have to fight you.

... not literally.

But they must contest the miracle to keep the PC away from their job.

There is another way to do future sight. That is to play through the future; then, jump back in time.

There is a third way, which is to take a guess. Then play. Then *revert everything* if the guess turns out to be wrong.

Maybe the whole campaign never happens.

Someone uses a **Greater Investigation** in the first session. They ask if they'll always like ice cream. The GM says, "I don't know, sure, why not." A great saga ensues. Heartbreaking beauty. Tragedy. Horror. Great sacrifice, for truth. Love. The world.

Then the character stops liking ice cream.

"Oops," the GM says. None of that happened at all.

For futures that are closer than this, though, the technique can work well.

Wishes

Rites are like this too. Rites do not know things. But wishes ...

Wishes are magic. Like friendship. In that show. Or blood sacrifice. In that other show. Or being screwed up teenagers. In that still other one. Maybe all these things are the same? Under the skin, they are all just magic. One magic: brilliant, shining.

Wishes are like *that.*

If a wish makes someone's bed as cold as the frozen north, global warming will still be bad for the penguins.

... but it will, I think, be very good for their bed.

Khetta Harmajen, who is dying of Dwarven Hammers, Pounding Deep Below the Earth

Quests

"This," she said. "This is the thing I couldn't do, when I was in the Host."
"Steam discs of putty off the carpet?"
I mean, it was nice that the thing was finally coming off, but— "Live."

—from the Thought-Record of Jaime Cervantes

THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE

To progress through life, characters perform **quests.**

With the right quest, they may improve themselves. They may learn new skills. They may connect to places and people or recover from their wounds. They may accomplish ineffable tasks like growing wiser, stronger, or better or concrete tasks like refurnishing their home.

Quests are the bones of story. They hold together what the characters accomplish during play.

Quests function by replacing technical, tactile, and ambiguous activities—all the things that a PC might theoretically be doing in the world, but can't precisely do in play—with a symbolic OOC equivalent. This then becomes a bridge to the corresponding technical, tactile, and ambiguous details of play.

Where the PC is, for instance, engaged in hands-on learning, the quest provides an OOC reminder of their focus. Where the PC touches upon ineffable and spiritual truths, the quest pushes the player to claw the edges of their own understanding. For quests where the character is engaged in passionate striving, the player holds up a card to flag those times they go too far: in the quest-based and advancement-based motivation to do that, to *find or cause that going-too-far and do that,* they feel the faintest illustrative shadow of the passion that their PC feels.

Each quest action earns an experience point (XP).

After the player earns sufficient XP to clear the quest—each quest having its own independent bank—the character acquires its character point and Cost rewards:

Their life has noticeably progressed.

Often, the central quests of a character's life are organized into longer "Arcs" of 3+ quests. These will follow the loose story structure of either the "Shepherd" Arcs on pg. 374, the "Emptiness" Arcs on pg. 375, or the "Bindings" Arcs on pg. 371.

For instance, a character might start with an "Emptiness 1" quest, which is to say, any quest that fits with their just ... living ... through the bleakness of their life. Then, finishing it, they might move on to an "Emptiness 2" quest, where a fascination with something or someone pulls them out of that routine. The Arc could then finish with an "Emptiness 3" quest, where their situation becomes impossible until they remember something important and make a key decision because of it—or it could continue forward several quests beyond that.

opposite: *by Elena Albanese*

Characters will also have the opportunity to take quests that fall outside of such sequences—quests that don't fall into an external quest chain or a long-term internal character arc.

In sessions that focus on a character's story, all of their quests can progress freely—and, in fact, multiple players can help to move them forward. In other sessions, not counting a few special 5-XP bonuses and spending from their personal XP pool, the character can only earn quest bonus XP for certain, less involved, "any-time" quests.

The player *can* still earn those 5-XP bonuses, in sessions that focus on another PC; will still have the option to spend personal XP on their quests directly; and can near-constantly invoke an any-time quest if they should like. A PC's life progress, in short, will not *stall out* when their story is out of focus ... but it will slow down, and narrow its range, at such a time.

QUEST DESCRIPTIONS

The quests in this book are annotated with their XP cost and their suggested place in the various Arcs.

The icon

- ... corresponds to a Bindings Arc;
- ... corresponds to a Shepherd Arc; *and*
- ... to an Emptiness Arc.

For instance, a quest tagged with : 1 and : 2 is a good Shepherd 1 or Emptiness 2 quest. The quest could be "the story of your ordinary life—the everyday work, stresses, and pleasures that form the fabric of your days" (Shepherd 1, pg. 374) or it could focus on the way "there's something you can't stop thinking about—it absorbs your thoughts, it obsesses you, it's sucking you into the abyss of its enigmas, emptiness, and strangeness" (Emptiness 2, pg. 375,) instead.

Quests are not purely internal. There are signs that a character is on them—if only in the way that a character studying history will drop references to it into their conversation, or a character struggling with grief will have trouble maintaining a conversation at all. If only in the way that someone renovating a house will tend to be tired and dirty; that someone with a new dog in the house will tend to have dog hair on their clothes.

Some quest descriptions list those signs. These signs are optional, of course—a person *can* have a new dog without having any dog hair on their clothes, particularly if they went straight from work to a timeless internment in a cell beyond all of Creation without stopping at home first; and in less extreme situations, too. They can renovate a house without being tired or dirty: much the same.

Some quest descriptions list things that a character on the quest, or who has recently been on the quest, will know. This is intrinsically limited by their Ability; someone studying American history, for instance, will tend to know not just the important events and trivia of that history but also local resources for that study, figures of note in the field, and the like ... but only when, and to the extent that, they can manage the relevant **Focus, Expertise,** and **Organization** actions.

Finally, some quest descriptions explain what *happens* over the course of the quest, if that's not obvious from its definition and nature. These are things the player can ask the GM to have happen, if they are otherwise not.

For instance, here are two versions of a quest to get a job at a local bookstore.

THE BOOKSTORE (VERSION 1)

25 XP Quest : *2* : *1,2* : *4*

There's a bookstore. It isn't really that important. It's in a town in the middle of practically nowhere. It's dying, because bookstores are dying. But it's still got lights.

There's a sign out front that says, "HELP WANTED."

It'll lure you in.

This is an easy quest to hide, unless someone shows up while you're working at the store. Characters on this quest spend hours of time there, sure; they'll talk about the manager, sure, and the books, and the coffee—there's a little coffee bar, it's nothing to speak of, really ... but nothing really sticks to them, nothing hangs about them, except tiredness, maybe, on a bad day, and the faintest smell of dust and paper, on the rest.

Over time you'll come to know the inventory, the procedures, and the finances. You'll come to know the idiosyncracies of the coffee maker. You'll come to know the regulars, such as they are.

There's something wrong there, of course; there's always something wrong, it's never as easy as just getting a job and watching a good thing slowly wither away. There's something *abstract* and *poisonous,* latched on to the place, *consuming* it.

Maybe you can deal with it without drawing the attention of anyone you don't want attention from or breaking any private rules. Maybe it's *safe* to get rid of it, or tame it, or relocate it.

Maybe that abstract poison is the only problem, and if you get rid of it things will get better, there, again.

... maybe it's not.

THE BOOKSTORE (VERSION 2)

25 XP Quest : *1,2* : *2* : *3*

This is a story of hope and despair.

It starts like the other version. But it rapidly becomes clear that the owner's someone who, at some point, met the Glitch. They're hanging on to themselves for now, but they can't do it forever.

They'll take you in. They'll offer you a job. They're friendly, and they're kind.

But they're dying of misprints, *glitch*-style dying, and the odds are that they won't be coming back.

41.2 At each major milestone of their life, candidates for Divinaturge shall receive one (1) human head, still living; three (3) crystals of power; and one (1) contracted earth mage, to be utilized in such fashion as they should like.

Commentary: naïve candidates generally consider this as a badge of social merit or an attempt to encourage progress. Older, more cynical candidates eventually reach the conclusion that the purpose of this clause is not to provide resources but to pace them, as one can hardly insist that more is required without appearing to place oneself ahead of the pack. The ability of the Judges to determine when a "major milestone" has been completed is part and parcel of the function of this rule.

—from The Code of Dur-Gahwei, *by Willow Salazar (tr.)*

Arc Quests

Quests, and in particular the most important quests, often form into 3-5 quest chains. By default, each player will be on a quest from such a chain when the game begins, and should probably be on such a quest at all times thereafter:

Their character arc, or main story arc; the central quest in the story of their life.

Broadly speaking, these quest chains come in three flavors:

- **Shepherd Arcs**—stories of pastoral life, of caring for the things one loves within the world;
- **Emptiness Arcs**—stories of grief, tragedy, and unbeing; *and*
- **Bindings Arcs**—stories of hubris, conscience, liminal places, and forbidden things.

All that this really means is that each place in each Arc has a few notes to help the GM and player figure out how the quest might begin; what it might mean, if that's inobvious; and how the quest might end.

For instance, there's a description on pg. 372 of a Bindings 3 quest. When the player's finished a Bindings 1 and a Bindings 2 quest, and picks up a third quest to continue the ongoing story, that description on pg. 372 gives a big-picture view of what that "Bindings 3" quest might be like; the player can use that as a framing lens through which to understand the quest. When the quest ends, the outcome is provided on pg. 372 as well:

Not the character point or Cost reward, which is independent of all this (pg. 323), but *what can be expected to happen, during play.*

None of this is strongly binding; it's just a tool to keep quests grounded in the story of the game, to ensure that their beginning and their ending feed *into* the story of the game rather than pulling content out of it. There's no reason why a player can't do two Bindings 1 quests in a row if they feel like it, or jump to Bindings 3. They can even jump completely between Arcs, or change what kind of quest a core character quest is, midstream or at its ending:

Their only obligation is to try to support, rather than undermine, the story if they do.

How an Arc Begins

As noted, it's generally a good idea for a player to be on a quest from a quest chain at all times.

Thus, if they're ever *not,* they should probably decide whether they want to start a Bindings, a Shepherd, or an Emptiness Arc (see pg. 371, 374, and 375). Bindings Arcs are preferred for characters hoping to improve their **Lore** or **Ability;** Shepherd Arcs, their **Flore;** and Emptiness Arcs, their **Eide** or **Wyrd.** The appropriate Arcs for characters focusing on Gifts, Bonds, and Geasa, or for cases where neither the character or the player knows what they're looking to improve, are matters for the player and GM to work out.

Once decided upon their Arc type, the player picks a quest that's marked as a suitable first quest for that Arc, or, creates such a suitable quest (see pg. 325, 337, and 316).

They are now on that Arc.

If the quest they have chosen or created *happens* to qualify as the first quest for two or three Arcs, they can theoretically choose which Arc they're on at the end of the first quest; normally, though, that's not handled by delaying the choice, but rather by taking a moment at the end of the quest to ask, "Wait, was that *actually* a starting quest for (the other Arc option), instead?"

After completing the first three quests in the Arc, they should start considering whether it's time to change storylines—to start a *new* Bindings, Shepherd, or Emptiness Arc. They can do this even if it's the one that they've been on. If they stick with it, they should consider the idea again after completing the fourth quest. After the fifth quest, they won't really have any choice.

Characters can theoretically be on two Arcs at once, possibly even two of the same kind; this is, perhaps, more common in fiction than major characters on only one. More than that is probably too much to keep track of, though, and one Arc will be assumed to be the norm

Side Quests

Beyond this, characters can also take any number of unrelated quests along the way—things that are smaller ventures, shorter projects, or less central parts of their lives. Things that are important, quests that they're definitely *doing* or *living through* ... but which don't progress the larger story of their life to quite the same degree.

"I only saved you because it was convenient," she protested. "If you were slightly further west, I would have saved someone else."

"If I were slightly further west, I would BE *someone else," he said, to which she had no reply; it was accordant to her concepts of the world.*

—from The Picture-Frame Bride, *by 32 Confused Nanobots*

Side quests too are labelled with suggested places in the Arcs, but the player doesn't have to fit them *into* one. Instead, those labels are used as a reference—a tool for understanding—when the quest is complete.

For this, the player ignores any quest chains that they're on.

For instance, let's say they're on a Shepherd Arc. When one of these "side quests" is finished, they look at its Arc place suggestions: let's say, it's marked as an Emptiness 2 or a Bindings 3 quest.

To understand what that means, they ignore their Shepherd Arc and look, instead, at what Bindings 3 and Emptiness 2 quests *are*—respectively,

> *You risk yourself on a complicated and difficult plan. Usually you know what you're doing, and you're doing it right, but you're doing something so hard and complicated that you might lose midway through anyway.*
>
> ***Result:** you win! ...unless you already lost. If you already lost, finishing this quest results in the ongoing catastrophe staggering to its natural halt, instead.*

and

> *There's something you can't stop thinking about—it absorbs your thoughts, it obsesses you, it's sucking you into the abyss of its enigmas, emptiness, and strangeness.*
>
> ***Outcome:** Your ordinary life stops feeling safe/normal/OK to you.*

The player decides which of those descriptions better fits the quest they have just completed; that outcome/result is what they've just achieved. If they're gaining Lore, Ability, or a Fugue Gift from the quest, there's a bias towards the Bindings option, and *vice versa;* if they're gaining Eide, Wyrd, or a Burning or Stilling Gift, towards Emptiness; but if they're taking a Geas or Bond, gaining Flore or a Flore Gift, or storing up the character point(s) received for later—or if they just have a strong preference that goes against that particular leaning of the Arcs—they may choose whichever option seems most right.

EXAMPLE

Beremud Sollins has been watching over her mortal family—the 25 XP quest, **the Angel's Vigil,** from pg. 326. When the quest completes, it's because she's just accidentally burned their house down trying to be subtle. That's not really a victory, but it *is* a kind of forward motion in her life:

Things can't stay the same.

Her player looks at the options for the quest: Shepherd 1 or 3, Emptiness 2 or 3, or Bindings 2. Emptiness 2 seems to be the best fit for what happened during the quest, so she knows the outcome (as shown above):

Beremud has stopped feeling comfortable and safe in her daily life; everything is uncertain, now, because she does not trust *herself.*

> *I am keeping this record in order that later generations can marvel at the brief and bright-burning fire that was my life, and so that I myself may make sense of it—may pull together the thousand subtle strands of hidden meaning and form a skein from them. My therapist's recommendation on this matter is, at best, an incidental factor; I would have taken this action, and in good time, on my own.*
>
> *—from the diary of Athanaric Kalden*

QUEST CARDS

The mechanical heart of a quest in play is its *quest card.* This has two key features—

- a progress grid of blank spaces, representing the XP cost of completing the quest.
- a set of options for gaining quest-specific bonus XP.

Some quests have multiple options for this card.

Normally when starting a quest a player will copy, hand-copy, or download and print the quest card, filling in the progress grid as they advance the quest. It's also fine to use a quest card straight from this book, another book, or the Internet, keeping track of accumulated XP somewhere else.

There's a lot of flavor and ideas in the descriptions of the quest, and it's probably best to pay attention to it to optimize the gaming experience, but in *practice,* it all comes down to the card. The player uses the bonus XP conditions on the card. They fill in the progress grid or accumulate the requisite number of XP—

... they get the rewards.

BONUS XP

There are two basic models for quest-specific bonus XP.

The first model is the "any time" bonus, also referred to as bonus XP for an "any time" quest. In this model, there's something simple a player can do at any time to bring the quest into play. That earns a bonus XP towards the quest.

For sanity's sake, a player can only earn this bonus once per scene, and only once per (approx.) 15 minutes of real-time play; this is over all their any-time quests combined.

The second model is the "storyline quest"—the quest is a structured experience, with some specific goals to aim for and a list of suggested actions. Players can usually earn +5 XP towards the quest by hitting one of the major goals. When the GM opts to "focus" a session on that character, players can also earn one bonus XP for the quest and one for themselves each chapter by performing actions from the suggested list.

There's no real-time limit on how often players can earn bonus XP for a storyline quest.

EXAMPLES

Let's look at two "any time" quest cards and a "storyline" quest card for the Bookstore example.

At night, the bookstore was a different place. When the last of the customers had come and gone, the light and the darkness both turned eerie. The rows of books grew pareidolic faces:

Grave and stern and mobile, glimpsed in every shadow and every crooked edge where one book projected past a row or leaned a bit (for air) away from its neighbors and its kin.

The air grew rich with meaning: a fog of words and portent.

She could pick up a book, then, when it had changed like that, and the ending would be unwritten. The hands of the story would reach for her, like clawing beasts. The monster at the end of Grover's book was always she.

She was nearly lost, that night—was nearly fallen into the latest garish brick of knights and dragons—when the door creaked open and the world snapped normal; when a voice called out to her, asking if they were open; when, with a great whole-body shudder, she broke free.

—*from* The Knight of the Farthest Word, *by Avery Silber*

The Bookstore

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

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-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25-

BONUS CONDITIONS

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by explaining that some of what's going on in this past scene—the reason you're tired; the reason you have to go; the reason you're still invested in this place, despite everything—is about the bookstore sucking you in.

You have a catchphrase for this. Like,

- "Book stuff."

Sometimes you roll your eyes. Sometimes there's a little smile. Sometimes there's a sigh, and you shake your head. Sometimes it comes up at ridiculous times; you're trying to explain why you risked your life leading an enemy away from this little town, and that's all you can think of, is "Book stuff?"

Pick some standard phrase to indicate this, it doesn't strictly *have* to be that one, and just use it or some close variant to claim the XP.

It'll probably be a while before you've said it enough to finish this quest, a while before something like that has come up *naturally* often enough to work—but then again, it'll be a while, too, before the place is really, truly, a home.

The Bookstore (variant)

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

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-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25-

BONUS CONDITIONS

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by proposing a theory about why you're doing this. About why a Strategist of the Host is lowering themselves to work at a bookstore. About why it's important, why you have to care.

Whether it's "they need me" or "there's something wrong here;" whether it's "I mean, what else am I going to do with my life?" or "don't I need to pay bills?," each new theory presented earns an XP.

Note that you do have to actually consider the theory. I mean, it's OK if something stops you, but the point isn't to come up with something to *say*, it's to come up with something to *consider*—or, put another way, to show that "why am I here?" is on your character's mind.

The Bookstore (storyline)

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

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-05- -10- -15-
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-20- -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when

- there's some price you'll have to pay to keep working here;
- you dig out the abstract, poisonous thing that's consuming the place, but can't casually deal with it;
- somebody's dying in the shop.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest by:

- working the register in an eerie dark
- talking to a regular
- discussing the bookstore's prospects
- working with the books
- hunting for hints of, or ways to deal with, whatever's "wrong"

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

SESSION FOCUS

Each session will *focus* on one particular character.[52]

In a session focused on a PC, every player can earn bonus XP for that character's storyline quests. The GM can optionally limit this to a specific storyline quest, for simplicity. The GM may also opt to limit how many players they'll let contribute storyline XP per chapter, but at *minimum*, that PC's player and one other player can always contribute.

If such a limit is hit, the non-participating players receive 1 XP each for the lost opportunity—

But that won't usually come up, because the normal limit is either "the whole group can contribute to all spotlit quests," "the whole group can contribute to this one spotlit quest," or "the whole group can contribute to at least one quest each every chapter, while the spotlit PC's player can contribute to two or more of their storyline quests."

Players earning XP for an in-focus quest can always treat the subject of the quest, the "you" and "your" of the quest, as referring to the PC with the quest, or, to theirs. If the subject is the PC with the quest, the acting player's PC will still need to be involved *somehow*. Also, narrating the PC with the quest as doing something, taking Cost, or getting into some sort of trouble requires their player's permission. Otherwise, though, players taking quest actions will have a free hand.

For "the Bookstore," the best options here vary by bullet point. A PC can talk to a regular, discuss the bookstore's prospects, or help to hunt for hints of what is "wrong" whether it's actually their quest or not. It's weird to work the register if they don't actually work there, though, so for *that* quest option, it might be better to have a scene where the in-focus PC is working the register and it's relevant, somehow, to the character of the player taking the action.

In a session that *isn't* focused on a PC, quest flavor options are disabled. The quest can only move forward through +5 XP bonuses and the player contributing their personal, non-quest-specific, XP.[53]

CHOOSING YOUR QUESTS

Each PC can pursue up to five quests at any given time.

This is meant to offer some breathing room. It's enough to capture the complexity of a real-world person's life: the author has rarely met a person pursuing six meaningfully distinct and narratively meaningful priorities at a time, but four is common and five might be observed. Five quests is therefore *presumably* enough to use to build just about any character's story.

In a more practical sense, a PC is likely to be on a single "Arc" quest and 0-2 "side" quests at a time. In this sense, the "breathing room" is two to four slots for use in quest powers; exactly how many are available depends on how busy their life has become.

The quests a PC is on will only rarely be from this book, or even from a published or fan-written campaign. Perhaps their Arc quests will trend in that direction, where a certain quality of "this isn't what the player would have put together" can help to provide interest and surprise ... but for side quests, at least, players should find it very easy to design new quests for themselves. Any-time quests should take 2-3 minutes to put together if all goes smoothly; 10-15 minutes, if there's GM-player disagreement or negotiation involved. A storyline quest can take longer, but 10-20 minutes to hash out something quick or 2-3 hours to make something worth sharing online isn't unreasonable:

It's just not all that hard.

Players in general have a free hand in choosing their quests. Almost every quest is available to any character that wants it; hardly any quests have any kind of formal prerequisites ... fundamentally, a quest is just something a player wants their character to be doing and working on, both during and between the scenes of play.

STARTING A QUEST

Quests structure activities that a character is already doing or things that the player expects to have them do. That means that there's no magic wind to pick them up when they start the quest and carry them off to the land of questing; no servants in white livery; no faery horn to sound the ride. There's, in fact, no land of questing for them to go *to* in the first place. There's just the things they ... do. When a player takes a quest, they're just saying: *this here's an important thing, that my character will do.*

To start a quest, a player:

- Decides that they're interested;
- Verifies they have a quest slot free—if necessary, dropping a quest or a quest power to make room;
- Resolves to themselves that their character will pursue the quest;
- Tells the GM that their character is now on that quest; *and*
- Writes the quest's name on their character sheet, prints or copies or creates a quest card, or otherwise makes a semi-permanent record of the fact that their PC is on that quest.

For instance, a PC really likes birds. Their player decides to start a quest to learn more about the birds of a given area—well, done!

They resolve to foreground that part of the PC's life. They tell the GM that their character has taken that quest. They record the information somehow, and copy, hand-copy, make, or download and print a suitable card.

... they have now begun that quest.

The other side of this coin is that starting a quest doesn't give a PC anything in and of itself. If a player declares, for instance, that they are now on the quest **Taking Care of a**

52 Or possibly two characters, in a very large group.

53 As a very optional rule, however, GMs can set up the occasional "B plot" wherein a player can advance their own storyline quests, or one particular quest, as if they were in focus—but other players cannot.

Each of us is, ultimately, the pilot of our lives, steering our own shipwrecks through the storm.

— attributed to Lexiarchos Caducine

Small Child (pg. 332), that doesn't *provide* a small child for whom their PC can then take care. It just structures and surfaces whatever existing opportunities for childcare they already had. If they're playing the kind of game where they can declare "I adopt a kid," "I babysit a neighbor's child," or "GM, provide a small child!" then the quest will help give that declaration worth; otherwise, one can only assume that they are woefully providing childcare to their chia pet, their basement toad, or their tiny, tiny egg.

XP and XP Cost

Glicth estimates a group of players as earning 5-20 XP per hour of play. That's divided among all of them, roughly evenly, with the character whose Arc is in focus for the session picking up a bit more than their share.

Each quest has an associated XP Cost, which one can understand in this light.

In a 3-player group, a single player can expect roughly 2-7 XP an hour—

In a gaming group full of busy people with awkward schedules who show up late and go to bed early, that could mean 8 XP per *month*. In a college group run within a dorm, where putting in twelve hours a week is not ridiculous, that selfsame month might crawl into the hundreds.

Alas, there's no way to even out this disparity:

The heart of a quest is lived experience, and that happens at the pace that it does.

Glicth presents each quest's cost under its title. "The Bookstore," for instance, is a 25 XP quest. If one earns about 8 XP per month, and focuses on little else, it will take about three real-life months to complete the quest. If one puts in twelve hours a week in play, it may finish the same week it began.

Where Does XP Come From?

Players can earn XP from—

- spotlights (pg. 111);
- spending 3+ Cost at once on an action (pg. 267);
- taking 3+ Cost at once in damage (pg. 267, 279);
- quest bonus XP (below);
- Fugue chips (pg. 25); *and*
- taking foredoomed actions in the void (pg. 123-124).

Online Games and XP

In an online game, the "per scene" limit on XP tokens and quest bonus XP is likely a bigger factor than the "per 15 minutes" limit. The GM will also have to determine how much time counts as a "session;" the default is whatever major unit of time (week, fortnight, month, season, year) comes closest to reliably covering 2-5 chapters of play:

Not much more, and not much less.

Notionally, a forum game probably peaks around 3 chapters and 25 XP per player in a real life week. That's not going to *happen,* though; a more plausible time frame is one chapter and 4-8 XP per player each month, making each "session" a season.

Forum games tend to provide fewer but richer experiences. Accordingly, it may be possible in such a game to lop off 2/5 or 3/5 of the cost of both quests and the +5 XP bonuses. Instead of **The Bookstore** being a 25-XP quest, for instance, with the storyline version offering up to two of three 5-XP bonuses, it might be an 10-XP quest, with the storyline version offering up to two of three 2-XP bonuses. The PCs will breeze through their quests in a shockingly short time IC, but it'll still probably take longer OOC than it would in a tabletop game.

Some styles of online game—play-by-email, for instance—will be even slower; progression may be slow enough in such settings that the GM's best bet is to freeform it while taking note of what XP the characters *do* manage to earn. Games run on a messaging service like Slack or IRC will be faster, but are still generally incomparable to tabletop games; the GM may still want to reduce quests' total length as is noted above.

Bonus XP

Each quest has a way—often, several ways—to earn bonus XP specific towards that quest. For this, there are two models.

Any-Time Quests

An any-time quest grants a bonus XP, at any time, from some variation on:

- using a quest catch-phrase,
- proposing a quest-related theory or idea, *or*
- using a sign or prop tied to the quest.

In principle, this is always built around the notion that the player wouldn't be doing this—saying that, IC; suggesting that, IC; using that sign or prop with the associated

The shattering of your window is your life; it has arrived. Carried on the wings of a sparrow that, blinded by its ignorance of glass, has struck square through the upper sash, through pane and fill and pane again, to drop it fluttering upon your hardwood floor, your day, at last, has come.

There it bleeds and there it cries and there your life goes rolling by, fetching up against your shoe.

Breathe in. Breathe out. And pick it up:

Begin.

— from All Manifold and Moldered Things, *by Rannen Yedidyah*

connotations IC—unless events fit the quest ... but in practice, there's just the action itself:

The player says that thing/uses that prop, and it's done.

A player can earn one "any time" XP every 15 real-life minutes (approximately), though at most once per scene. That's over all of their any-time quests, if they happen to have 2+ that work this way. In practice, they're expected to claim roughly one of these per hour—the option to claim it more often is for special cases where opportunities clump up in a bunch.

Storyline Quests

Storyline quests have two ways to get bonus XP.

Quest Flavor options are the main source of XP. These are usually things the character does, like "talking to a regular" in the bookstore example above, but sometimes they're things that happen *to* or *around* the character, like "hints and shadows of your infection fill the world" (pg. 345). Each chapter, when a given PC is in focus, the player can claim one of those options. If it's already happening, or just happened, then they simply record the XP: 1 to them, and 1 straight to the quest. If it's *not* already happening, and *didn't* just happen ... then it *does.* The GM can delay it slightly or tackle it immediately, go with the player's suggestion as to how it happens or reinterpret the text themselves, but unless there's a serious OOC problem, they can't *veto it*—

It happens, and the player and quest each earn an XP.

Even better, it's not just *that* player who can do this. At least one other player, and possibly every player, will have the chance to do this too, though only once each per chapter. They don't have to pick the same options, either: for "the Bookstore," above, one player could pick "working the register in an eerie dark" and another could pick "talking to a regular."

Major Goals are a storyline quest's "big events." Conceptually, they're big moments that should really happen during the quest. On a *practical* level, they're storyline events so negative that a player might need extra incentive to bring them down onto their character; so positive that the player shouldn't have the option to trigger them voluntarily (like they can quest flavor options); or, the kind of thing that should happen *at most* once or twice during the course of the quest. "Somebody's dying in the shop," from the bookstore quest, is an example of that last kind; it's not that it's necessarily extremely negative for the PC, and it's certainly not positive, but there's only so many times it can happen during the quest without dramatically distorting the story's theme.

Regardless, each completed Major Goal earns 5 XP.

Typically, a quest allows a player to claim each major goal once, up to at most half the quest's XP total in 5 XP bonuses. In some cases, those rules can be bent. However, even when a PC is in focus, it is not possible for other players to claim a major goal on their player's behalf; at most, they can point out that it's available for the relevant player to claim.

Quest flavor options are traditionally marked up with 1-2 icons. This isn't rules content; instead, it's a tool to help express the intended connotations of that action.

These icons are:

- , the **Defining** icon, for choices;
- , the **Struggle** icon, for struggles;
- , the **Poisoned** icon, for corruption;
- , the **Receptive** icon, for attention/witness;
- , the **Flame** icon, for being overwhelmed;
- , the **Pastoral** icon, for honest work and speech;
- , the **Setting** icon, for immersion in the world; *and*
- , the **Falling Star,** for transcendence.

Some of these icons match the iconography of the Arcs; this does not mean you must be on such an Arc.

Notice, for example, that "working with the books," on pg. 315, is marked with the icons of honest work and speech and immersion in the world:

- working with the books

From this we can see that the storyline quest card for "the Bookstore" is not expecting characters to be overwhelmed.

Recording Bonus XP

It is acceptable to track bonus XP on one's character sheet, recording it next to the name of the quest. That said, the normal option is to copy, download and print, or design a card for the quest and mark up bonus XP as it is received thereupon.

G&ffjh is calibrated on the assumption that a character will receive about 70% of the possible bonus XP on a storyline quest—that most players will contribute when the quest is in focus, but not *every chapter;* that they'll hit the majority of their major goals ... but not *every time.*

Any-time XP

Any-time quests are built, not as dramatic structures, but as characterization tools. The in-world content of the quest can be extraordinarily complex—it's legitimate to study rocket science or build a massive political coalition with an any-time quest—but the narrative format is straightforward:

There's just one thing that happens, one thing that the player and/or character does ... over and over again.

The character *uses a catchphrase.*

Or, e.g., the player *flips over a card.*

To create an any-time quest, a player need only choose that thing—that single, simple but evocative, and repeatable thing that will serve as the quest's criterion for earning bonus XP.

Time—all of history, from the beginning to the end of it—evolves.

That, is experience.

—from THE CASUJOIAH CIRCULAR, *3/1/2015*

opposite: *by Jenn Manley Lee*

Ultimately a player can choose their own criterion, subject to possible GM or group veto. If they want to innovate into (e.g.) the realm of song, improv comedy, or pouring tea, that will be acceptable ... but more standard ideas will be discussed shortly below.

Regardless, a character can earn the XP from fulfilling an any-time quest's bonus XP condition up to once per 15 minutes (approximately) real-time, and at most once per scene. This is over all such quests, meaning, for instance, that in the unlikely event that a character has two quests with the same trigger condition the same action can't earn an XP for both:

The game doesn't *specifically* mind, but that action will be within 15 approximate minutes of, and in the same scene as, itself.

Models for Any-Time XP

The traditional forms for an any-time quest are these:

- the character is always *wondering* about something, and can earn a bonus XP for the quest by proposing a new theory about some particular topic at the heart of the quest; see **The Bookstore (Variant)**, pg. 315.
- the character is always *suffering* for/because of something, and can earn a bonus XP for the quest by pointing out that this has come up and (unless it's just inflicted 3+ Cost *anyway*) taking 1 Cost; see **Bind**, pg. 327.
- the character is always *mentioning* the quest, and can earn a bonus XP for the quest with a relevant catchphrase; see **The Bookstore**, pg. 315.
- the character is always *reacting to the quest,* which works the same way, except the catchphrase isn't exactly on point;
- the player is always *using a card prop related to the quest,* and can earn a bonus XP for the quest by flipping it over or showing it to the group or somesuch; see **Poisoned**, pg. 330; *or*
- the player is always *free-associating or otherwise rambling on the subject of the quest*—which is the kind of abstruse, metaphysical, or nameless mystery that can't really be approached in any other way—and can earn a bonus XP for the quest by doing so; see **A Nameless Light (Simplified, Variant),** pg. 367.

Thus, for instance, a quest to write a book might be built as an any-time quest to:

- *wonder about how key problems can be solved;*
- *suffer (1 Cost), because you write;*
- *work the book into the conversation;*
- *react in some recurring way to relevant worldly things;*
- *use a two-sided "Writing/Wailing" card prop;* or
- *free-associate, because ... of ... the book?*

Whichever of these the player chooses would then earn up to 1 XP per 15 real-life minutes (approximately), and at most once per scene, towards the completion of the quest—and presumably, with it, the completion of the book.

If that doesn't seem to make sense:

Bear in mind that **Œ¢ŧffjç** is a collaborative story, not a physics engine. It is not that one can complete a 35-XP book by repeating a catch phrase 35 times, or even by coming up with 35 useful theories as to how its internal difficulties may be solved; it is that by the time one hears a writer, themselves *in* a work of fiction, complain 35 times about their book ... it really is coming up on the time that their book should be done.

Storyline XP

When a quest is principally, at the player level, a mood—a *feel*—then the any-time quests above are the best option. There's no reason to complicate things with a more detailed structure if the only thing that really matters is that the character *is* working on something, studying something, reacting to something, traumatized by something, working through an epoch of their lives, or whatever else.

If there is more, though, that the player would like to see—

More that they imagine in the quest; more that they can conceive of—

Then it may still be an any-time quest, but there is merit in making it a storyline quest instead.

Quest XP Options

Each storyline quest comes with a collection of opportunities for bonus XP.

These do not arise from the character's conception of the quest:

There are options that can earn XP every chapter when the character's story is in focus; these aren't necessarily related to the things the *character* thinks they need to do regularly to complete the quest. There's a list of "major goals" that can earn 5 XP when the character achieves them; these aren't necessarily the *character's* major goals, or even obviously connected to the completion of the quest.

Instead, all of these things are goals set by the quest's designer; they're things that "fit" what ought to happen over the course of a given quest.

The quest designer comes up with a set of ideas and images:

Things that should, or can, happen, that would fit how they *imagine* the quest proceeding.

These—possibly after editing, trimming, expansion, or GM/player collaboration—become the major goals and flavor options for the quest.

The world was not originally bound by time; rather, it was a great sack of experiences that Lug-Ivoth scattered on the table. Slowly, excruciatingly, over a period that cannot possibly be measured, Yun-Ro picks out a set of them to define each life; threads them together; and throws them into the lake of living things. There, if they are lucky, their narrative will waterlog with fullness; if not, alas, they are devoured by a carp.

— from Sakhar's Forest, *by K. C. Danine*

Major Goals

A storyline quest's "Major Goals" grant 5 XP each when the GM agrees that the character has achieved them.

Some points of note:

- major goals must be achieved/earned in play, while quest flavor options can be declared by fiat;
- the player has more incentive to claim major goals—
  - they're worth more XP, *and*
  - can be claimed freely in sessions not focusing upon the character; *and*
- a major goal is likely to be achieved 0-1 times in the course of a quest, whereas a quest flavor option may show up any number of times.

Thus major goals are typically exactly quest goals:

- that the player "shouldn't" be able to declare by fiat, because having that power would be "too good;"
- that are unpleasant or disadvantageous, and thus need to be paired with an extra incentive; *or*
- that should not happen more than once or twice during the quest.

They are the best moments, the worst moments, and the most singular moments envisioned for the quest.

These qualities suggest that most major goals will have intrinsic dramatic merit. However, it's notable that there's nothing that says that a major goal should be more important "in the world" than any given quest flavor option. For instance, practice working the rigging is an important part of learning to sail. Getting shipwrecked is not. Many people in the real world develop great skill, in fact, without ever being shipwrecked at all. Still, if a quest to learn to sail had both options, "be shipwrecked" would probably be a 5-XP major goal. "Practice working the rigging" would probably be a 1/chapter quest flavor option. If that were reversed, the character would learn by constantly getting into shipwrecks except for that one shining moment in which they actually got to work on the rigging first—a markedly atypical approach.

Normally, one can earn XP from one major goal for each 10 XP in the quest.[54] Thus, a 30- or 35-XP quest would allow the character to earn up to three major goals, for a total of up to 15 XP. Some quests may include one or two more major goals than the player can ever collect on—e.g., four or five goals for a 35-XP quest, from which the character can at most ever claim three. This is most appropriate if the quest XP count ends in 5 or one of the major goals involved is all but impossible to actually claim.

Quest Flavor

Quest flavor options are things that, when the quest designer thinks about the quest, they imagine happening—and, specifically, things that don't work better as major goals.

If it's a player-designed quest, that means they're things the player thinks should happen; or, feels *would* happen; or just visualize *as* happening without having a clear sense of why.

In general the best practice is to imagine a number of different ways one could play through the quest and then look for ways to phrase quest flavor options that will apply across all of them. It's better to have a flavor option like "you spend a late night studying" for a quest set in college than "you stay up until 2:14am studying calculus." It's better yet—given that chapters in this game take up less than a day—to go with "you study to the point of physical exhaustion."

... but it's fine not to be adept at that. It's fine to fail, or to take longer than you'd like, at finding the most open and yet thematically appropriate way to phrase a given bullet point.

The point is, one should aim for flexibility to whatever extent one reasonably and practicably can.

The most important feature of quest flavor options *in play* is that the player has permission to declare them. It's a *soft* permission—the GM can interfere in how a flavor option plays out, or schedule when it plays out, or interpret/reinterpret the option's text, or realize belatedly that they should never have let a quest with that option into their game and ask the player to rethink it. But, it's a *strong* permission, too:

Assuming that they *can* earn a quest bonus XP—assuming that the quest is in focus, and an action with that quest is still available for the chapter—the player doesn't have to negotiate for the basic right to choose and take a quest flavor option at a time of basically their choice, any more than they do for the basic right to take actions using their attributes.

They just decide to do it, and do it, and it's done.

This is important because a quest can, and almost always *does,* have options that would normally be in the realm of the GM's authority: flavor options that feature things happening in the world, or, flavor options that resolve ongoing events.

A quest can have options like "listen to a friend explaining their despair," "an enemy appears!" or "(be) surrounded by dancing shadows" ... and the player can still declare that that quest flavor option is going to happen, and suggest their nonbinding interpretation of what exactly that might mean.

A quest can have any number of quest flavor options. Humans are best at keeping three to seven options in mind, so that's the ideal number. It's not *quite* enough variety for the longest quests, though, so eight or nine may be needed:

As a non-binding target, **Glitch** aims for roughly one quest flavor option per 5 XP in the quest.

Using this number as a guideline ... should a player brainstorming during the creation of a quest come up with

54 This is part of the standard design pattern for quests and not a hard rule. It should always hold unless the quest is extremely unusual or is part of a set of quests using a radically different overall design pattern—but such a set of quests *could* exist.

12 basic images or ideas for things that "should" happen, or that they see "as" happening, a logical next step would be trying to pare three or four off to be major goals. A quest with four major goals and eight flavor options would be a solid 40 XP quest; a quest with three major goals and nine quest flavor options would be a little more finicky ...

Suggesting either that a major goal is missing, or, that a couple of quest options should be either dropped or merged with others on the list.

If designing a quest for personal use, it's not terribly important to mark up the quest flavor options with icons. Perhaps if it pleases one to do so? If one intends to share the quest for public use, though, picking one or two of the icons from pg. 318 to associate with each flavor option, and perhaps sorting the options to provide aesthetically appealing columns of those icons where possible, would be the next and final step.

Spending XP

Players can spend XP at more or less any time during the game to complete a quest. (Notably, they may do so even when the game is focused on a different character.) If a player has 5 XP floating around, and has earned 20 bonus XP on a 25 XP quest, they can complete the quest immediately. They're obligated to *explain* how it makes sense to complete the quest right then—e.g., if Brandila Silva, her house swept away in a hurricane, wants to complete a "relax while fishing" quest, she'd better be fishing off of her porch right then. If Sigibald Abteien is in a diner and wants to complete a "flower rite" quest against the Noble of Oceanography, he'd better be able to tie *something* in the diner to that rite.

... but, as a general rule, it can always be *done*. The GM can reject such expenditures on grounds like "that makes literally no sense" or "I don't have time to handle this right now" but there's no "you're not supposed to be doing that" veto.

Conversely, towards the end of the session, the GM may want to actively *prompt* people to spend XP on any quests that are close to completion; the GM can then work the outcomes into the end, or the epilogue, of the game.

After the end of each session, and before the next session begins, each player must spend their accumulated XP on quests. For instance, if a player earns 18 XP during a 5-hour-long Saturday game, then, after the game, they'll have to divide that 18 XP between one to five of their quests. If a player decides at this point to finish one or more quests, they should make sure to inform the GM. Players can also pick up new quests at this point, particularly if they *have* finished one or more quests, and can spend some of their accumulated XP on these new quests as well.

If the player and GM both like, they can work out "what happened" with quests that were finished and started at this time between the two sessions. Otherwise, finishing and starting new quests "officially" happens during the first chapter of the next session of play.

In a continuous game, e.g., on a forum, players are exempt from the rule about spending XP between sessions, but should still tidy up their XP books when each new "session" begins. In a traditional game, if the players are not interested in or reliable about spending their XP between sessions, the group should cut off a slice of time at the beginning or end of each session to attend to the matter.

Abandoning Quests

From time to time a player will realize that their character isn't interested in a given quest any longer. They're no longer that person or they're no longer in those circumstances. They've moved on. They've *abandoned* the quest.

A player can abandon an ongoing quest any time they'd like. Once they've done so, their PC is no longer on that quest and it no longer counts towards their five-quest limit. The story of the quest finishes, to one extent or another—the GM can still use the story elements as part of the ongoing game, but there is some sense in which the character both feels and *is* "done." They feel like they've done all that was in them to do; they can't do more right now: they are done.

Abandoning a quest costs half of its invested XP, but the player gets the rest back immediately to apply to whatever existing or new quests they like. As an optional rule, the GM can restore some or all of the rest when the next story begins.

Each cup of coffee, the alien observed, brought the humans closer to their milestone targets. Each cup of coffee; each casual conversation; each stupid game...

—*from* Metamorphic Management: Awakening the Forward-Thinker Within, *by Jacob Lee*

Quest Completion

When a character has filled in all the XP for a quest, the "story" of that quest completes. Whatever they were working towards, whatever the quest was building towards—it's done. They're there.

If the player is following an Arc, the quest's place in that Arc will explain its final outcome. For instance, the outcome to an Emptiness 4 quest is, as shown on pg. 375:

> *You find "the key to the world"—something mysterious but which seems to hold the key to making your life, or the things around you, have more value to you.*

If the completed quest was *not* an Arc quest, then the player should look at the options—the kinds of quest it could be, its hypothetical places in various hypothetical Arcs—to see what kind of quest it really *was,* and thus which outcome it should have. If it's listed as an Emptiness 4 quest and nothing else, then it has the same outcome as the fourth quest in an Emptiness Arc. If it's listed as being *either* an Emptiness 4 or a Shepherd 1 quest, the player could construe it as an Emptiness 4 quest (pg. 375) or a Shepherd 1 quest (pg. 374), depending on which fits better, and claim the appropriate result or reward.

Once the player and GM work out what this *means*—what, for instance, that "key to the world" is—the character receives:

- 1 CP for a 20 XP quest;
- 2 CP for a 35 XP quest; *or*
- 3 CP for a 50 XP quest.

Often there will be some XP left over, or perhaps some left to make up—the quest is provided as, e.g., a 30 or 40 XP quest. In such a case, each extra XP over the target allows the player to heal two points of Cost. Each XP *under* the target inflicts two points of Cost.[55] Either way, this can be divided among up to two Costs of the player's choice.

Inflicted Cost is not actually instant, but is considered to have accrued over the course of the quest and its completion; Cost recovery, unless the player prefers otherwise, is the same. The distinction is principally an IC one, a matter of roleplaying and not of game mechanics, but it does mean that taking 3+ Cost from a completed quest does not immediately turn around and earn an XP.

In theory, using these rules, a character can take quests as short as 0 XP—quests they can immediately complete, claiming 1 CP in exchange for a 40-Cost hit or 2 CP for a 70-Cost disaster. This still won't turn around and earn a new XP from the 3+ Cost rule, but otherwise it's recommended that the GM actually allow it. Maybe not if the PC is on the brink of an extended period of peace and recovery, maybe it's illegitimate to squeeze in something like that just before "three years pass, and you're all back to roughly where you started, Cost-wise" or "sure, you spend two weeks in the Beyond and buy down, like, half your Cost" ... but the rest of the time, it should be fine.

The other extreme doesn't work quite as well, though:

Players can't use quests *purely* for Cost recovery; they must put 20, 35, or 50 XP towards character growth.

It is traditional to focus on Eide, Wyrd, and Burn/Stilling-based Gifts when completing Emptiness quests; to focus on Lore, Ability, or Fugue-based Gifts when completing Bindings quests; and to focus on Flore and Immersion-based Gifts when completing Shepherd quests. Players are not chained to this when completing Arc quests, lest their advancement become monotonous, nor are they strictly bound to it in side quests ... but it should influence their choice in either case. Bonds, Geasa, and banked character points for future purchases can come from any flavor of quest; here, no traditional preference exists.

In sum:

To figure out what it *means* that a quest has ended,

- read the "Result:", "Reward:", or "Outcome:" section from pg. 371-375;
- translate that into more specific IC results;
- choose a reward by spending or banking the additional character points the quest has earned; *and*
- gain or lose Cost based on the exact XP target that was involved.

Unexpected Outcomes

Note that the narrative reward for a quest is *not* necessarily the reward that the character originally expected.

A character can set out to buy a house. They can put 24 of 25 XP into the task. Then they can be arrested, break out, and become the subject of a massive state-wide beinghunt. Afterwards, they can put the 25th XP into the quest ... but the odds are against this resulting in the comfortable completion of a real estate transaction.

Instead, perhaps, they find a safe place to hole up?

... or something else that suits the story of the quest, as it was actually told.

> *Enough; forsooth; it must suffice. In looking out the window on this weary world I have used up all my energy for the day.*
>
> *—from Otker Nentidavian's third letter to the Duke of Crows (Theodore Maldonado Collection, the Clark County Historical Society)*

55 In a forum game where quest lengths are reduced by 2/5, you may wish to reduce these XP targets to 12, 21, and 30 and raise the Cost bonus/penalty to 4; by 3/5, to 8, 14, and 20, respectively, raising the Cost bonus/penalty, instead, to 5.

REPOSSESSED
Notice of Intent to Repos
Athfridia Cannolin,
dying of Subprime Mortgages

Example Quests

If one worked very hard, one could ignore the way the building looked like a crouching dragon; the way that walking into it, for one's interview, was like stepping between two hungry jaws.

"You are not to tell the interviewer that," Fridigern told me.

"What?"

They eyed me carefully. They stabbed, completely inaccurately, at my thoughts. "That you are working very hard just to be here. That they ought to assign you a paycheck already, just for that."

"Ha, ha," I scoffed. I chewed my lip at them. I clutched my backpack tighter to my chest.

—from Suckerfish, *by immateria thron*

A New Job

25 or 35 XP Quest **: 2,4 : 1**

The world is wrong, but sometimes you need to find a place in it. Today, at least, that place is here: in a new career, that you're taking your first steps into, whether that's "using your otherworldly talents for a secret government organization" or "grabbing the first HELP WANTED sign you find."

A New Job (Dramatic/Stylized Version)

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- office politics (or its equivalent in non-office jobs) screws you over;
- you meet someone admirable;
- just when you were expecting a long-awaited (or first?) paycheck or bonus to fix your screwed-up finances, an unexpected holdup or expense messes everything up.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you try to solve the business' money problems
- you try (again?) to explain something to an authority who hasn't been *getting* it
- you talk to, or about, a new client
- you worry about an enemy showing up, or someone becoming your enemy
- an older mentor shows you how it's *done*
- you're perhaps over-focused on some relatively unimportant part of the work
- that unimportant thing comes into play, later on

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

opposite: *by Camille "Karma" O'Leary*

A New Job (Quiet Version)

PROGRESS GRID – 25 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- someone is injured or goes into labor at work;
- you're stuck at work, watching something important or cool from afar.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- watching someone working at your place of employment
- listening to someone's stories of their work there
- something out in the world reminds you of this quest's work
- you have to do some part of the job that you don't actually know how to do.
- (*while someone is watching*) discovering something unexpected at your work

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

I didn't want to go out there. Thing had "a bad scene" writ all over it, right down to the every jingling of the bells. And one could figure it, you know, that Patrick brought this down on himself. If you squinted. If you looked the wrong way hard. You oughtn't to buy up slices of a bunch of debts if you don't want any kind of trouble with the fae.

I didn't want to, but I kind of had to.

Some folks are lucky an' get an angel to watch over 'em. Some folks, they get the Divil.

But our Pat was born without a soul, so all he gets is me.

—from The Shadow's Tale, *by Jessica McCoy*

Angel's Vigil, The

25 XP Quest **: 2 : 1,3 : 2,3**

There's something you're keeping watch over—something you're guarding, or something that you don't understand.

The Angel's Vigil

PROGRESS GRID – 25 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest if:

- you are changed, corrupted, or sickened in direct consequence of your vigil, and the target winds up helping you;
- you do something you know you shouldn't in order to help the target of this quest;
- you reveal yourself as an Excrucian despite it being a bad idea.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest by:

- talking to someone about (the target of this quest)
- watching the daily life of/around (the target of this quest)
- danger stalks you or (the target of this quest)
- learning about (the target of this quest)
- trying to understand your feelings about (the target of this quest)

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Bind

30 XP Quest *1,5 2 1,4*

There's some great or monstrous force you hope to bind. Something like this can be an act of Lore—but if it's an important part of your character's story, or goes beyond what Lore would allow, it's usually a *suffering*-based anytime quest.

If the force in question is less monstrous but more numinous, more ... *slippery,* hard to get a handle on ... it might be a *wondering/uncertainty*-based quest, instead.

Bind

SUFFERING-BASED - 30 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25- -30-

Bonus XP

There's something awful that you hope to bind. Some monstrous force that you hope to tame:

(the monstrous force)

And you *really* go all out over it. Well, you do, or the world does. You push too hard, or get pushed too hard. You get *hurt.*

So, look. Arrange for a sign. Arrange for a sign that shows the black and white flame.

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) when your struggle to bind this thing, or its consequences, get to be too much. When it's just *too much*, OK? When you've taken or spent 3+ Cost on this:

And you flash this sign.

Or, when you *haven't* taken 3+ Cost, when you're not that officially hurt yet, but when that's so wrong that you're willing to *take* an extra point of Cost to represent it:

And you take 1 Cost, and you flash this sign.

If it's obvious how it ties to the quest, and what hurt you, then just take the XP. If it's not obvious, then you should keep the sign held up and wait for the GM to ask—and give your answer—before the XP can be claimed.

If you don't have access to a sign, you and the GM can agree on a gesture or a phrase that can replace it; dramatically clawing the air with palms towards you or typing "[Flame]" are both solid and traditional approaches.

Bind

UNCERTAINTY-BASED - 30 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25- -30-

Bonus XP

There's something awful that you hope to bind. Some monstrous force that you hope to tame:

(the monstrous force)

... but you don't really know how. Maybe you knew the first steps. Maybe you know some of the others. But a lot of what you're supposed to be doing here, and maybe even if you *should* be doing it—is uncertain, still.

You wonder.

... but you don't *know.*

So, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by coming up with a new theory to propose (about this.)

A new idea about what to do, or what the answer is, or what's out there ...

Whatever fits.

Make sure to actually stop and *think about* the theory—I mean, it's OK if someone stops you, but the point isn't to come up with some empty words to say. The point is to come up with a new idea to *genuinely consider.*

Event Planning/Preparation

35 XP Quest *:3 :3,5*

You're preparing for some big event that's coming soon—e.g., a concert, a play, a wedding, a formal staged duel or war, a diplomatic meeting, an election, or your mortal great-grandchild's twenty-first birthday (when you can finally tell them what you really are). Maybe you're responsible for the event; you're managing it. Maybe you're just a key part of its staff. Or are you simply attending? Simply deeply invested?

Ideally the event happens *after* the quest completes, so it's best if *exactly* how "soon" the event will be coming is either left ambiguous OOC or can drift a bit based on plot. That's not a strict requirement; the quest can work out even with a fixed time frame. It's just, some flexibility there can wind up being of help.

Event Planning/Preparation

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

OOOOO -05- OOOOO -10- OOOOO -15-
OOOOO -20- OOOOO -25- OOOOO -30-
OOOOO -35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you help to define/establish (for the players, specifically) an important part of what this event will be about;
- it's almost here and something's gone wrong!
- someone else solves a major problem for you.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when experiencing/observing:

- the physical place where it's all going to happen, or that it's going to be "about"
- helpless event-related stress
- a rehearsal or something like that
- others preparing
- posted bills or other signs that the event will be coming
- important things out of place
- pressure to make big event-tied decisions

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Flower Rite, The

35 XP Quest *:3,4 :3 :4*

Conflict with the Powers is inevitable.

It is impossible to be an Excrucian in the world and *not* come into conflict with them. To renounce the War is not enough. To *befriend the Powers* is not enough: even fully turning and becoming an agent of the Imperators would not suffice, to say nothing of the uneasy half-alliances or troubled friendships that a Chancery member is more likely to collect.

The Powers themselves cannot avoid such conflicts; it is laughable to imagine that an enemy of the world, stars falling eternally in the night-dark of their eyes, ever could.

The flower rite is much more evitable. It is possible to live in the world and never attack an Estate directly. It is possible to battle each Power *as* a Power, blood against blood, miracle against miracle, and not touch the edifice of law that stands behind them. It is possible that, in joining the Chancery, one must, or should, renounce the flower rite as well.

When one ends a war, one should put aside one's bombs and poison gas; whether one should also shelve one's guns and swords, and which the flower rite is most analogous to, is a matter for debate.

What You'll Know

The first step in a flower rite is to determine the structure of the Estate that you desire to attack—the laws by which it is composed. These are seeded into the world by the Imperator that gave it life but modulated and tuned by the Power into whose hands the Estate is given.

In reality these are inexpressible in mortal tongue. In practice, they may be summarized in words. *Fire warms. Fire burns. The dawn brings hope. Trash is worthless. Libraries contain knowledge. Treachery must be unearned.* (Is it possible to betray someone who has earned it? Of course. But the Power of Treachery would say that that's, "ah ... someone else's field.")

If you go and you experience an Estate for a while, you should be able to figure out its core and most fundamental principles—the laws that are most central to *what it is*. It's very hard for the Powers to *hide* this from you, unless their Estate is almost absent from the world, because ... well, their Estate's *right there*.

If it turns out that "fire burns" isn't terribly important, because in your game world the Power of Fire is weird, you won't have to guess at that. Just watch a fire for a while. It'll be obvious, *because* the fire you're watching is from a world where the Power of Fire is weird, that what's *really* important is, e.g., "fire hungers." Or, "fire laughs."

For gameplay purposes this usually boils down to a set of 3-7 simple statements, which you can then work with as a player; or, into the GM saying, "OK, you've figured out the structure... what's your plan?"

I honestly thought that I'd given up on killing the world. I really did. But—

"Sorry, Tom," I muttered, and I kicked up the Rite.

The Estate of Cold Calls— it's just got to go.

— from the Thought-Record of Lithius Tain

What You'll Do

The flower rite is an attack in which you pit an Estate against itself.

You'll be trying to provoke an allergic reaction—basically. Something where it rejects itself. The most convenient way to do this is to take two of those statements and force a paradox, but you can also just twist part of the Estate into its antithesis, or make it embrace its antithesis, or something like that. You'll need a good story, a good *hook*, but it's *your* quest; the thing that you try will probably work.

Likely, the paradox here won't be a huge one.

Likely, it'll be just a ... little ... inconsistency, in one small corner of the world.

You aren't turning half of the World Ash into an unstoppable force using some weird relativistic gibberish and throwing it at the other immovable half. This quest isn't about that kind of thing. You're ... e.g., taking the laws "reprieves must come unexpectedly" and "reprieves must stall or stop an ongoing process" and putting an oversight panel in charge of death penalty cases ... somewhere ... that is only confident enough to allow the wheels of their bureaucracy to move forward when they feel confident that a reprieve, for a particular prisoner, is coming.

When a reprieve is unexpected, there is no ongoing process to stop. When there is an ongoing process to stop, it can only arrive to meet expectations:

The two laws are, now, opposed.

... and honestly, no one would call that a *paradox*, really. No one would say that their worldview has been shattered. At most, someone would shake their head wonderingly at this peculiar constellation of law and morality that you have, here, exploited and built.

... except, it's only natural that *the world itself* would feel a certain stress:

That the transient spirits of potential reprieves that manifest, like virtual particle-antiparticle pairs; or, the herald-angel reprieve-fae that circle prisons waiting for their Power or the Governor to call; or, whatever thing or things there *are* that, in the Mythic World, cause reprieves there to arise ... that *those things* should be feeling the weight of this, of this burden you have set upon them; of the structure given unto them by their Power and their Imperator starting to creak and give way.

If you are not there, then nothing really comes of this.

But if you *are* there, then you may answer their stress and their confusion. You may *tell* them why it is that things are not as they believe that they should be.

You may say:

Because the world is wrong.

Because the world is wrong: c.f. the Glitch; nor were the law-beings and their degraded serfs ever truly meant to be.

Hearing this, the reprieve (e.g.) becomes distressed. It becomes corrupted.

It awakens to the Glitch, or sinks into the void, or betrays against its owner, as you prefer.

It calls out to its Power:

Cursing them, because the world is cursed; draining them, because it is sinking from the world (and, like all reprieves, is anchored to the Power of the Reprieve's own soul); *betraying* them, perhaps, even, and sinking wild claws into them from afar.

In the same fashion, you may turn Libraries against Libraries: they must be silent, but they must contain knowledge. In a place where knowledge is made loud, the Estate of Libraries will grow ill. You may turn Cold against Cold: it must descend, but it must be melancholy. Find and enhance a place where the lowland holds the memory of brightness and the highlands are more dim, and Cold itself, or at least all its spirits, will rip itself apart. Treachery will fail if forced to acknowledge a worthless victim. Fear will fail when the things that fear are the rivers and the stones.

Twisted, thus, an Estate fights itself. It ceases to accept itself. It tears its hair in agony or swallows down the nectar of the void.

A sinkhole forms. The power of the Estate bleeds through.

It falls away.

It's up to the GM whether or not this is enough to actually *destroy* the Estate as opposed to wounding it. Practically speaking, it's easier to run the game if significant Estates continue to exist when possible—that is, a flower rite probably shouldn't actually *erase* an Estate unless the Estate's death is a logical necessity, an avidly-pursued player goal, or a major campaign milestone. If the Estate is *not* destroyed, the effects of this rite will cast a long-term shadow over its presence in the world, instead.

Wounding or destroying an Estate allows a nettle rite that can transfer up to 15 points of Cost from the Strategist to the Estate's Power.

Flower Rites that Aren't Quests

Note that a flower rite is not a game mechanic or a quest but an IC activity; thus, the existence of this quest does not prevent characters from performing flower rites in other ways. A **Greater Strategy** miracle (pg. 177) is another option, for example, as is simply going through the process in play. A player should decide which method to use based on how they're thinking of the activity—

A flower rite is a quest when it's a story; a miracle, when it's a tactical or strategic action; and a thing to do in play, principally, when it's a process to explore. Other options yet may exist.

The Flower Rite

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

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-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you infiltrate a mortal organization or government;
- you interact with a Power who is unaware of your identity as an Excrucian;
- an unrelated party complicates the situation; *or*
- you craft a wonder

You can earn up to three of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 15 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you spread the corruption of the Rite
- you subvert something of the mortal world
- in the service of the plan, you are cruel
- you preach in pretty words
- you cover your tracks (or lay a false trail)
- you intercept or change communications
- you hire help

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Poisoned

30 or 35 XP Quest *: 3 : 3,4*

Something has gotten into you. Something has *twisted* you, has woken something that is you—but *not* you—within you:

A perversion, a corruption, an intrusion, or another self.

It will displace you; become you; take you over, if it can.

Perhaps it is hallucinatory. Perhaps the "other self" or "corruption" is merely a psychological ramification of physiological or metaphysical strain—the result of something that gives you trouble thinking clearly, that makes you perceive twisted echoes of your own thoughts, that makes you question who you are.

Or, perhaps, it is literal:

You are having intrusive thoughts or questioning your identity ... because you are being possessed, or enchanted. Because you *used* to be someone else, and they're trying to come back. Because you screwed up a Masking Rite, and now there's bits of ego shuttling around your brain. Because you *didn't* screw up a Greater Masking Rite, but wishes can be dangerous even when you do them exactly right. Because a dimensional analogue is trying to take over. Because, because, because ...

Because of anything like that.

Your self's been *poisoned.*

Poisoned (Any-Time Version)

PROGRESS GRID - 30 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-

BONUS XP

You're breaking.

There's something in you that's challenging the fundamental truths of *who you are.* There's something that's *making* you into something else.

You're handling it. So far—maybe by stalling. Maybe by running. Maybe by cunning and care, but—you're handling it. Only, how long can that last?

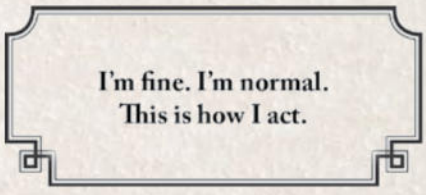
Make or print a sign for this, like the sign below. The front side is your public face. The side that's *you.*

The other is what's whispering in your thoughts: the *corruption* that's trying to manifest inside you.

Or maybe, that's not right. Maybe it's something more natural that you just don't understand. Something that *is* you, that you're denying. Maybe it's just an imaginary threat, an intrusive thought, and if you stopped fighting it, nothing bad would happen at all. It would just ... hover around your mind, being all spooky, until it got frustrated, threw its hat down, shouted, "Fine!" and stomped away, returning only when you had forgotten that it was powerless after all.

You don't know.

Regardless, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (though only once per 15 minutes/scene), by expressing the thing that brings up those thoughts—normally, by holding up the sign. Of course, when you do, those thoughts will probably come up ...



In my dreams I see her face. I shout at her. I tell her I will never be her again.

"You don't even want to be alive," she reminds me.

It chills me.

"You were only made to be a temporary stand-in," she says. "It's only that I screwed the process up. How can you claim the right to kill me—to usurp? me—when you don't even want to be alive? How can you trust the child-selves you birth to later serve you, if you honor not the mother of your mind?"

There was nothing I could say to her; she had me. I held on not by reason but sheer grit.

—*from* We Sulfide Ions, *by Logistilla Lacasse*

Poisoned (Storyline Version)

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you face a horrific threat because of this quest;
- you're tormented or corrupted by this quest's "other" self;
- something happens to tie this quest's "other self" to one of the other active stories or quests.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest through:

- (discovering) something going on in your head that you didn't expect
- someone helping you work through relevant internal baggage
- panicking
- consciously altering your own mental state or mind
- an impossible encounter
- wrestling with your sense of self

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Study

40 XP Quest ***: 1,4 : 4 : 2***

You're trying to understand something. You're trying to learn something. It's usually something weird, because this quest is optimized for studying in faerie hills and Chancels and in the campuses of the Beyond—for studying in arcane places, full of incomprehensible legacies and the breath of ancient things. But it's also something weird because this is something that explicitly is hard for you, that stretches your mind:

Not necessarily *unenjoyable,* it can be delightful; not necessarily *full-time,* you can waste all kinds of time on other things ...

But something that's arcane even to you. Something that pushes you past the limits of the understanding that you'd had before.

It makes you dizzy, when you think about it.

It estranges you from yourself.

(If it doesn't, if you're just learning something that doesn't seem all that difficult to you, take an any-time catchphrase quest, maybe around 25 XP? instead.)

Study

PROGRESS GRID - 40 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○ ○○○○○
-35- -40-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you complete an artistic project at or beyond the edge of what is socially acceptable;
- you make a meaningful financial/resource-related choice;
- something corrupts you or is eating you slowly;
- a big project that you're part of is imperiled.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you lose yourself in your studies
- you lose yourself in the vastness of nature or λ-nature
- a group of students you're with or watching do somewhat worrisome things
- you find something strange on "campus"
- dreaming strange dreams amidst your books (or study materials)
- there's a montage of classes, term papers, tests, or whatever else is fit
- you talk about the worth of the world, and of its ending
- you talk about, and tell stories of, the Glitch

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

"I'm— I'm busy. I can't— I'm a bleak god of emptiness! What am I supposed to do with a child?"

"Take her with you!"

"I'm fighting one of the incarnate spirits of the world today!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," she said. "And you were staring into the abyss of nothingness yesterday. And today, I have to rain hell down on my two worst reports. Listen, hon, I've got to go, OK? Maybe try telecommuting to that fight thing? Or getting Niki to sub in?"

"I can't— they— I ... I'll ask," he said, "but I don't think that they'll like it."

She was already gone.

— from Collision, *by Amelia Drake*

Taking Care of a Small Child

40 XP Quest **: 2 : 2,5**

You raise and nurture, or help with, a small child.

Key things you'll do here include:

- spending a lot of time in little interactions with the child;
- learning their interests;
- learning about their health;
- emphasizing your connections with them;
- being tolerant of their demands on you;
- taking them more seriously than you'd otherwise be wont to do;
- getting memetically infected by the things they say; *and*
- getting a lot more tolerant for goop—all the variegated goops a kid can produce!—unless you have an easy way to remove it with a power. ... and, perhaps, somewhat, even then.

For a Strategist, alas, this quest is not sustainable. A deathwright's life is not child-friendly. You are likely aware that—eventually—you'll have to abandon whatever tie you've, here, formed or found. This situation can be nothing more than temporary; it *must* be nothing more than temporary.

Anything else would ... surely? ... be a crime against you both.

Taking Care of a Small Child (Dramatic Version)

PROGRESS GRID - 40 XP

○○○○○ -05- ○○○○○ -10- ○○○○○ -15-
○○○○○ -20- ○○○○○ -25- ○○○○○ -30-
○○○○○ -35- ○○○○○ -40-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest if:

- something bad happens, and a while later, you still don't know if things are OK;
- the child gets involved in a miraculous conflict;
- you see an omen concerning the child.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- exploring something with the child
- having a meaningful conversation with the child
- having a conversation with the child about something surprisingly relevant
- teaching or telling stories to the child
- observing an interesting incident involving the child
- the child has a meaningful interaction with another PC or important NPC
- the child overcomes an obstacle

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Taking Care of a Small Child (Bittersweet Version)

PROGRESS GRID - 40 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25- O O O O O -30-
O O O O O -35- O O O O O -40-

BONUS XP

These moments are sweet, but they will not last.

Now and then you'll have a moment when it *gets* to you. You'll be with this child and you'll see something that scares you, that delights you, that mystifies you. You'll see something about them that you hadn't seen before. And when that happens, it'll hurt, because this just won't last.

Because it *ends*. Because ... in the end, you'll lose them to this rotten world; or, they'll prove to be just as bad—that there is, in the end, no innocence.

So, look. Get a sign. The usual sign has a black and white flame on it. If you can't actually show a sign in your game, defining a hand gesture ("clutching at the air with palms turned in") or a phrase ("[Flame]") can do instead.

And when it gets to you, when it hurts, pay a point of Cost—probably Immersion; and unless you've *just* paid 3+ Cost for this—and show the sign.

That's what earns a bonus XP for the quest.

If it's not obvious what's going on, if it's not obvious *why* this got to you, or why it's relevant to the quest, then you have to wait until the GM asks, and you can explain, before you can take the XP.

Otherwise, you can just take it when you show the sign.

Training

30 XP Quest **: 1**

You train yourself hard, normally in some Gift or magical art but possibly in physical fitness, some mundane skill, or the arts of Eide, Wyrd, Flore, or Lore. This quest in particular is focused on repetition, effort, and pushing your limits; for a more mental take, see **Study** on pg. 331.

Training

PROGRESS GRID - 30 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25- O O O O O -30-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you train too hard and sicken yourself;
- your training is interrupted by a local disaster (e.g., a fire, earthquake, or flood);
- you have a vision or flashback of some sort as you pass out from exhaustion.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- coming up with an idea to get past a (training) barrier that's been blocking your path
- someone comes upon you as you're training and watches for a while
- you watch a rival or enemy train
- there's a training montage
- you find something strange while returning from practice
- this training leads to an unexpected discovery—something about the training program doesn't work like you'd expect, or opens an option that you'd never considered.

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

I will not hunger.
Again. The bag shudders. Again.
I will not thirst. I will not run out of strength.
So I punch.
The bag shudders. Again.
I need not stop. So I will not stop. Till my eyes are blurred.
Till my mind is numb. Till I forget at last—can no longer see—that vision of the true face of the world.

—from The Box of Dreams, *by Logistilla Lacasse*

Treasure, the

30 XP *: 1 : 1 : 2,5*

There's something in the world that's caught your eye. That's become the focus of your life, at least for now. It could be a Power you're trying to befriend or a mortal agency or family that you've decided has your interest. It could be a hat you've fallen in love with or the therapist or diary that holds your thoughts. It can be a thing you have or are part of already or a thing you're trying to get into or obtain. It can be as abstract as a kind of place—you're really into the local library system—or as concrete as a magic jewel.

It's your target; or, your treasure.

For right now, everything, or at least, *a lot of things*, in your life, are going to be about *that thing*.

The Treasure

PROGRESS GRID - 30 XP

○○○○○ -05- ○○○○○ -10- ○○○○○ -15-
○○○○○ -20- ○○○○○ -25- ○○○○○ -30-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest if:

- you resolve a tricky situation involving the treasure (e.g., its abduction);
- you're embroiled in a conflict or mystery surrounding the treasure;
- you trust the treasure with an important secret, or convince others that it contains one;
- you make a significant mistake because your thoughts are tangled up in the treasure, or while explaining those thoughts thereunto.

You can earn up to three of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 15 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you and the treasure find something peculiar
- you explore others' reactions to the treasure
- the treasure is a framing device for a montage
- you obsess over the treasure
- you're stuck somehow, and the treasure helps you past that
- the treasure is involved in an interesting incident—and, specifically, one evocative of the Region's character

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Welken-rite, the

35 XP Quest *: 5 : 1,5*

The welken-rite is another weapon against Creation. It's one of the kinder such weapons; thus, it's more likely than the flower-rite to stay in a Chancery Strategist's toolkit.

It's all about planting a seed of unreality in Creation, carefully tending it to make sure Creation doesn't notice, and allowing it to spread its metaphorical roots through local reality ... until one day Creation *does* notice, kicks the whole thing over, and it all falls out into the void.

It can't kill whole Estates like the flower rite can ...

But an investment as small as a single dream-of-a-postbox—if you're patient, and clever, and wise—can end up dragging an entire *town* into the Not.

What You'll Do

You'll sculpt a fitting dream from the void—generally, from your Sphere.

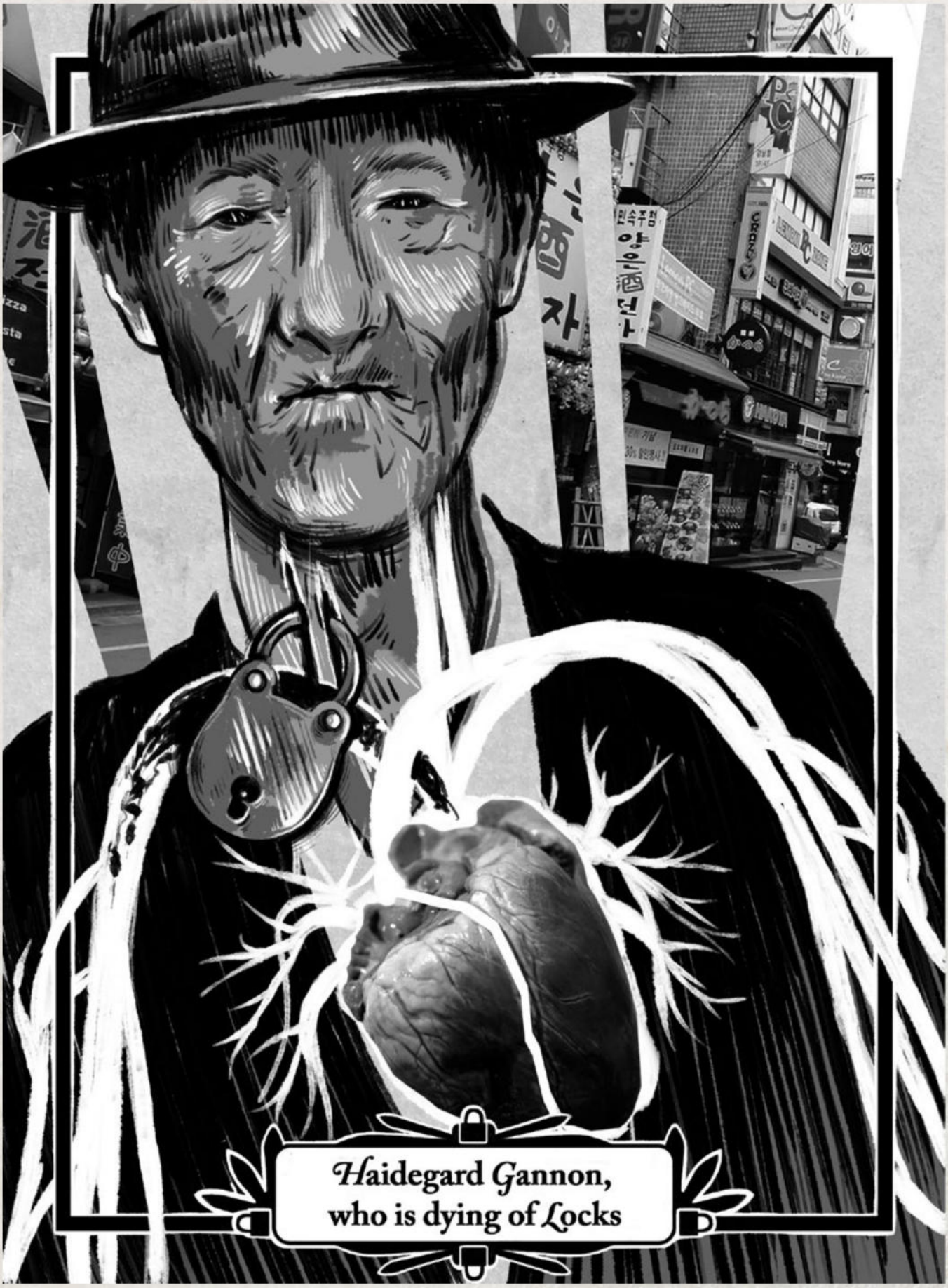
Then, you'll tend it, functionally, like a plant. You'll thin out the reality in a particular spot, plant the dream or thing-of-dream there, and thicken reality back around it—like patting soil into place. You'll "water" it, and possibly feed it too, with things that help provide it nutrients. You'll "tend the soil," bringing it things or doing things in its environment that help it connect to the world around it. You'll weed out any competing dreams. You'll protect it from unseasonable equivalents to frost.

To plant a dream-of-a-postbox, for instance, you'll need to find or make a patch of street that isn't very real. The best way to arrange this is by miracle, but magic—from active use of a magic skill to the subtle magic of ensuring that nobody, including the local place-spirits, is paying much *attention*—can work as well. You can also reduce a street's reality by doing something reminiscent of a flower rite: determining the key parts of *what makes a street*, and probably of *what makes a road*, *what makes that ice cream shop over there an ice cream shop*, etcetera ... and slowly edging everything around the spot you want to make unreal *out* of the laws of those Estates. Alternatively, you could file away the edges of what makes *that particular* street unique and memorable, corroding Creation's sense of it as distinct from other, similar, streets elsewhere in the world ... until eventually it's still real as a *thing* but not really as a thing, in *itself*.

Part of what makes this a rite, and not just a fun-time activity, is that you're better at this than the raw metaphysics suggests; it's still *best* to have a 100% plausible plan at each stage (for instance, making the street less real by burning away its reality with an on-point **Destruction**) … but you can actually *get away with* the "make it unmemorable" plan, most of the time. You have little magics that aren't otherwise shown on your character sheet, picked up from organizational knowledge shared by the Host, that help out with this sort of thing.

Having cleared a space, anyway, you'll plant the seed and cover it over again with reality. That is, you'll do

opposite: *by Maria Guarneri*


Haidegard Gannon,
who is dying of Locks

whatever is appropriate to re-strengthen either the reality of the street or its causal ties to more real parts of Creation.

Then you'll "water" the postbox by arranging for people to mail letters through it. You'll "tend the soil" by making sure it's on postal routes and official registries; on a deeper level, that the people who send letters through it start to think of the postbox as a part of their lives. How exactly that happens will depend on just what's weird about the box:

If it's just a convenient postbox that wasn't supposed to be there, then making it *important* will be hard. You'll have your work cut out for you!

If there's something about it where letters sent through it do a much better job, somehow, of conveying the writer's emotions; or, if they can reach people whose address the sender doesn't know, or the dead ... that makes this step a little easier, but also a lot more obvious.

If letters sent through the postbox link the sender and receiver into a telepathic hive-mind, then it won't take much work *at all* to tangle the postbox into people's lives. The downside is that you might have to do something extreme in the early days post-planting to keep an effect that potent from guttering out from lack of energy—to nourish it; to sustain it—and that both that effort and the effect itself are more likely to attract hostile notice.

Let's say you've got a postbox whose letters can reach the dead, or at least, dreams of the dead. That's enough to become a sensation in a smallish town, assuming return letters come back, but the national news is likely to take a long time to bite. A "weed," in this case, might be a popular occultist whose seances disagree with the letters. Another "weed" might be a debunker willing to stretch the truth a bit *themselves* out of sheer anger at the hoax the presumed faker is pulling. These are competing with the dream-of-a-postbox for mindshare; they must be "pulled" if that dream is to flourish.

The equivalent of an unseasonable frost—besides completely unreasonable disasters like "the U.S. pulls out of the international postal rate system, making the cost of letters to the afterlife *skyrocket*"—is typically the attention of the Powers, the Imperators, random monsters, or your enemies.

If no such frost happens, the postbox will eventually integrate itself thoroughly into the life of the town. It will be important. It will touch, directly or indirectly, on the lives of *everyone,* as well as extending tendrils into the lives of those in different towns and different states. At the same time, though, *postboxes just don't work that way.* There's a weight here on the system of the world.

Eventually, something will break.

Sometimes it takes a trick to make that break happen properly, like when you "reveal" to the town that the *reason* this has been happening is that "they were all dead all along." Sometimes it's just inevitable, e.g., if people who use the postbox, or are connected to the postbox, are also subtly drained of existence, and that phenomenon speeds up over time. Eventually, though, if you've done it right, the whole chunk of what's been affected just ... teeters, and then snaps off the world.

If it's lucky, it makes it all the way to the Beyond. If not, it becomes, or falls into, a waylet.

Either way, this is a sufficient victory against the world to justify a nettle rite (pg. 265)—not against a specific Power, this time, but against the world. The GM will determine how many points of Cost you can slough off onto Creation proper when the rite completes; it's proportional to the damage done to the world, though, which is usually a lot less than a flower rite's, so it'll usually be 3-10.

The Welken-Rite

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25- O O O O O -30-
O O O O O -35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you have to trim a diseased or overgrown portion of the invasive dream;
- you hold someone's heart in your hands;
- you return to tend your welken-rite after a time away or unconscious, and find it in immediate (if salvageable) peril;
- the invasive dream gets its hooks into *you*.

You can earn up to three of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 15 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- strengthening or weakening reality
- strengthening your "seed's" connections to the world
- investigating a "weed"—a hostile force crowding out your seed of dream
- misleading or luring away the Powers
- providing your "seed" with the nutrients it needs
- checking for unexpected infestations of other elements of Beyond
- admiring or studying the progress of your invasive dream

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Quest Sets

In Gasherbrum the Powers built the "Web of Khedeb Neret," an occulted machine, to bind together their Order of Falling Stars. Had they left it at that, it would have harmed none, save those that bound themselves willingly unto that cause. Alas that they did not.

Rather than isolating a specific group, and binding them wheresoever they might be, it proved simpler just to spread the Web across all the mortal world—and even out like corner-cobwebs onto the Ash—connecting all things behind the scenes by means of subtle, abstract law.

If you ever feel indifferent towards a stranger's pain, or feel a kind of holy drive to kill, know that this is not yourself:

It is the touch of Khedeb Neret's Web upon your soul.

—*from* A Book of Promises and Threats, *by Violet Garrison*

A Structured Approach

This chapter contains more generic quests, organized into five self-contained sets that can be played through sequentially (and even multiple times.) Their metadata should be understood in that context:

It's not a guide as to which Arcs they can participate in, or what rewards they might get as side quests, although you *can* use it as those things; rather, it shows you how to move through the quest set on any particular Arc.

The quest sets herein are:

- **Absurdist Comedy,** about life in a broken world;
- **Dystopian YA,** about discovering and challenging (but not necessarily winning against) the corrupt truth of Creation;
- **Folk Tales,** about the deeds of a strange and magical outsider (the PC) drifting in and out across the fringes of the world;
- **Literary Fiction,** about the symbolic journey of someone privileged, tormented, and (often) struggling with temptation; *and*
- **The Long Road to Recovery:** a story for anyone who's struggling.

Each may be played through as a Bindings, Shepherd, or Emptiness Arc—possibly using the quests in a different order—except that **Dystopian YA** can't be used as a Shepherd Arc and **Folk Tales** can't be used as a Bindings Arc.

In addition to the standard form of each quest card, shorter, "simplified" versions have been provided; this is both for variety and for when the player wants to rush through a particular quest.

Absurdist Comedy

This is a quest set about a rather overwhelmed protagonist who gets put through the wringer by life, apparently because—for no other reason than!—the world is wrong but they seem to be living in it anyway. It's not absurd in the sense of slapstick or surrealism, of course; it's just ...

Look at the world.

Right? *Right?*

The **Absurdist Comedy** quest set is principally a Shepherd Arc (e.g., for increasing Flore), where it plays out as follows:

- In **An Orderly Life,** the PC has limited the scope of their life in the hopes of gaining a kind of control;
- In **Things Break Down,** that isn't working any more;
- **The Sharp, the Sweet** gets good and bad things all tangled up;
- **A Distant Dream** is an allegorical journey to a mythic place; *and*
- **Fitting In** has them deliberately humbling themselves and accepting an ordinary (or even somehow *degraded)* life, when they could be something "more."

An Emptiness version of the Arc (e.g., for increasing Eide or Wyrd) is similar, save that it hits more of the notes of a chivalric romance—it's still dryly comic, it's still pretty bleak, but there's more hints of grandeur, myth, and errantry hidden amongst its weeds.

That plays out like so:

- **An Orderly Life** is basically the same, save that it ends with a willful choice to seek
- **A Distant Dream.**
- **Things Break Down** once the PC returns (or perhaps, while they're still afar?) Stress mounts.
- **The Sharp, the Sweet** is still about good and bad things being all tangled up, but in *particular,* it's about them being all tangled up *while* the PC is struggling to tame or defeat or otherwise deal with some great unnatural power; *and*
- **Fitting In** is still about them humbling themselves and accepting an ordinary or even somehow degraded life ... but now part of that is because they think they've found "the key to the world." They're putting grander things on hold while they reflect upon that key, ponder an old mystery, or figure out what they're going to do next.

A Bindings version of the Arc (e.g., for increasing Lore or Ability) veers more towards the travesty. Bindings Arcs are very proactive, very much about one's choices ... so the absurdist comedy in such a version of this Arc spreads from "the world" to "the PC's goals and actions" and plays out much like this:

- **An Orderly Life** is still about a very carefully scoped and limited life, but it's also a life built around a new partnership of some sort. That works out, probably, but
- **Things Break Down** anyway. The PC's life doesn't work out well for *them* any more. They try to help someone else, because when you're drowning you might as well throw someone else a lifeline, right? But making a meaningful improvement in either life thereby is kind of, uh—
- **A Distant Dream.** The PC goes pretty far for this, but does it matter, in the end?
- **... The Sharp, the Sweet** is their attempt to make things better, after all of that; only, "better" is kind of weird in a world where good and bad are so intermixed. In the end, the PC retreats to somewhere they accomplished something before, tries crawling back into the hole of an old success and
- **Fitting In,** getting a look at what's gone on there, savoring stuff; but, alas, they've grown.

AN ORDERLY LIFE

20 or 40 XP Quest **: 1 : 1 : 1**

Your life is bounded. It exists within a certain scope—*here* are your concerns; outside that, is something else.

Each day is lived in service to a goal.

It is possible that you are confused. It is possible that you are inadequate. Therefore, you do not necessarily wake up each morning knowing *exactly* what you must do.

... but the general shape of things, the schema into which it all must fit, is known.

There is a geometry to your world: a subtle grid.

AN ORDERLY LIFE (SIMPLIFIED)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you earn a meaningful and quest-relevant success, or, you're about to but some reason why you might not *want* to has come up;
- you wind up accidentally damaging either something with significant historic value, or the, e.g., museum that it's kept in.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you ignore or work through your worsening infection
- something major happens in the background but doesn't really affect or interact with what you're doing
- explaining or introducing some element of your life or your plans
- arguing with a long-time associate about whether you're doing this lifestyle "right."

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

An Orderly Life

PROGRESS GRID - 40 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○ ○○○○○
-35- -40-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- someone comments on how much of a mess you are;
- a major event takes place just outside the scope of your concerns;
- your life situation doesn't offer some utility or service that's a key part of modern life, and your only options for fixing this are serious compromises or elaborate and semi-functional kludges;
- you face an impending visit/inspection from someone who is going to judge your life situation—specifically, whether you're doing the specific life situation covered by this quest "right."

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- working closely with one or more animals or animal-like things
- not really knowing how to live in the world—and possibly, not even in the void
- watching the horizon
- tinkering with the fine details of a craft object or scheme
- narrating some element of your situation—e.g., as part of showing someone around or, OOC, quoting from a letter that your character writes
- experiencing a flare-up of your sickness
- visiting a preserved historic site or object
- meeting an old friend

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

She knew only knives, she thought in knives, and she saw in knives; where her eyes went, they left a livid scar upon the void.

—*from* The Ruby Hilt and Guard (or "Ruard") of Heaven's Fourteenth Blade, *by Aloisia Moretti*

Things Break Down

25 or 35 XP Quest : 2 : 2 : 3

The orderly procession of your life isn't working any more.

It's been judged and found wanting: from high towers, people or things whose opinions matter look down and show disdain. There's an external threat, too, something on the horizon. But worst of all, nothing you do seems to be *working* ... and trying harder only makes things *worse.*

Things Break Down

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- the world or void in the distance is flickering with light—as from lightning strikes; artillery fire; a major city fire; an open-air rave, perhaps; or a battle between two Powers, or a Power and the Host, obscured by the buildings between you and them;
- a dizzying, deafening cacophony arises from the world or void around you: it is an incessant wall of noise, and comes from many or all directions;
- you feel a sudden, twisting spike of empathy for someone in a bad situation.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- doing something normal—for you, anyway—that somehow turns out futile or counterproductive
- something important is broken—or coming undone
- talking about how the world is wrong
- you frequent an open space near something reflective
- you eat a weird dessert
- someone laughs at you
- something impossible happens

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Things Break Down (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID – 25 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you're hurt by someone that you're trying to help (or some*thing*, perhaps);
- you're fed something weird and goopy that you've never, or almost never, had before;
- something impossible happens.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- discovering some way in which you've screwed yourself over
- overwhelmed; unable to process what's going on around you
- trying to understand something broken
- explaining your infection
- suffering or exhausting yourself beneath the earth

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

It is impossible to "see" the worth of the world, as it is not there to be seen. At least, not in such quantity as to appertain to our interests.

If one is forced to do so, one must hallucinate. One must imagine. One must project.

If one finds that, for instance, the world is dissolving under the weight of one's own scorn and bad decisions; and if, for some inconceivable reason, one does not wish the world to dissolve—let us say, it is against one's temporary best interests—one cannot overcome that dissolutive force by willfully attending to the world's intrinsic virtue.

Instead, one must envision a private, idyllic, and entirely fantastical dream.

—*from* On the Uses of Attention, *by Ultrogotha Carelli*

The Sharp, the Sweet

20 or 40 XP Quest *: 4 : 3 : 4*

There is sweetness too. It's all entangled with the pain.

This quest is the story of old friendships that have become great burdens and new loves that are as painful and disruptive as a scourge. It's the story of responsibilities like barbed wire and hopes that burn like fire in your chest.

If you can reconcile them, then you may find a way to live, to grow, to become *better,* even while you're living in a world that's wrong.

The Sharp, the Sweet

PROGRESS GRID – 40 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25- -30-
O O O O O O O O O O
-35- -40-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- a path to salvation opens, typically in the form of something metaphorical becoming real;
- you succeed at something impossible;
- you accept a meaningful responsibility that you really didn't have to—that you *could* have dismissed on practical grounds and, most likely, on ethical ones;
- you set out upon a long and weary road (or more generally, commit to a long and tiring journey.)

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- talking about things that never happened, or that never will
- love and pain intertwine
- arguing with an earlier version of yourself, or, at least, someone *like* your former self
- doing necessary daily tasks even though they don't feel relevant any more
- you lose track of who you are for at least a few moments, and perhaps even longer
- struggling against exhaustion or sickness (your own or someone else's)
- wrestling with your mistakes
- breaking through to a moment of sudden self-acceptance

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

The Sharp, the Sweet (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO
-05- -10- -15-
OOOOO
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you change who you are;
- you take on a meaningful responsibility that you really didn't have to—that you *could* have dismissed on practical grounds and, most likely, on ethical ones.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- repeating old mistakes
- reminded of painful things
- finding inspiration amidst your ordinary life
- talking about your sickness, or someone else's

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

A Distant Dream

25 or 45 XP Quest **: 3 : 4 : 2**

You're on a long and winding journey to a mythic place. It's usually, specifically, a highly formal and motivation-enshrouding mythic place—a place of concealing garments, courtly manners, and literal or figurative masks.

If a long journey doesn't really fit with what the group is or should be doing, then this quest can also be about a search—a hunt for the right path, the *way in*, that can be pursued through research or experimentation wherever the group happens to be.

Either way, this quest is principally about *how you get there.*

Once you arrive, the rest will be epilogue:

A few chapters in focus, at most, to close the story out. Then, you will either have what you sought; or will know that you *cannot* have what you sought; or, you will learn that seizing it is a quest all of its own ... typically, ironically, one that can be pursued in or from your normal haunts.

A Distant Dream

PROGRESS GRID - 45 XP

OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO
-05- -10- -15-
OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO
-20- -25- -30-
OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO
-35- -40- -45-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you pass a storage place for hearts
- a montage speeds the OOC portion of your journey
- something warns you off from where you're going
- something comments on your persistence
- you learn, after entering your destination, that doing so has doomed you. Should you arrive at your destination with no quick way to finish out this quest, you may and generally ought to remind your GM that this goal exists.

You can earn up to four of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- traveling slowly through a dry and open land
- something foreshadows what you'll find at the ending of your journey
- you meet a wise animal or machine
- strange beings pass overhead
- sharing tales of where you're going and where you've been
- you speak of hearts, particularly the mythic rather than the emotional or physiological kind
- someone challenges or tests your right to pursue this journey/quest
- finding a rest stop along the way
- encountering something with a mythic, fairy-tale, or folk-tale feel

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

If you have lost heart, or lost your heart, or have some wish in you to repair or replace someone else's, consider setting out in search of Abd-al-Rashid's lost city:

Before his disgrace, before his death, he stood preeminent among the heart-smiths of his age.

If the core of his city has not stopped its beat—or can be revived to beat again—it holds superlative promise for such needs.

—from Forgotten Places, *by Faustina Mays*

A Distant Dream (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you commit yourself to finding a heart of some sort, or discover that one is missing;
- something establishes itself in the sky above your journey, remaining overhead for at least a third of your path or until erased by an extreme and costly use of power;
- you learn of a doom that awaits you along this path.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you share tales of your purpose, of what you hope to find
- you share tales of what others have found at the end of your journey
- to continue, you must pay a cost
- traveling to the next stop along your way
- undertaking a task for a wise animal or machine

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

In the struggle between the world and the void, the void has the whip hand—always. To exist is to be chained to the fundamental dictates of one's nature. To exist is to abide by rules. To not exist, to cease to exist, to "die" ... is to rebel against those rules; to find liberation from those rules; and, ultimately, to become that resounding, roiling, deep and empty hollow from which those rules are so echoingly proclaimed.

If one becomes no one, after all, then no one may command one; no one may demand that one behaves—and one can demand absolutely nothing, out of no one, in return.

—from The Gospel of Abandonment, *by Phineas Stroud*

Fitting In

25 or 40 XP Quest 5 5 5

You could be someone significant and notable. You could be full of pride. You could live a life that is grand and glorious and dramatic.

But not today.

Today you've accepted an ordinary life; an insignificant life; maybe even a pathetic, shameful, or degenerate existence ... because that's your path to peace; to love; to accomplishing something, perhaps?

To the life you want.

This quest comes with a new bag of tricks: a collection of devices or contacts or, well, *something*, that you can use to cheat a little. Perhaps you'll keep it after the quest ends, claiming it as a new *florilegium*; perhaps it's temporary, part of this quest's bargain with the world; perhaps it's *new,* but not actually all that extraordinary—as when an ancient Excrucian, incognito in the modern world, learns to pull out everything from the cellular phone to the bicycle (not to mention the kitchen sink) when necessary to achieve their ends.

Fitting In (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- someone who really shouldn't be cooperating with you, does;
- this quest brings you to a moment of peaceful beauty;
- you frame in final form, to a willing audience, your argument as to why the life you've taken on in this quest is—despite its notional insignificance or shamefulness—in some other sense powerful, significant, meaningful, or good.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- becoming part of a crew or gang
- exploring the (metaphorical) world this quest has brought you into
- investigating someone else's expected/oncoming fate
- falling back onto old habits rather than doing things the local way
- making the most of a day

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

opposite: *by Elizabeth Sherry*

Fitting In

PROGRESS GRID - 40 XP

○○○○○ -05-	○○○○○ -10-	○○○○○ -15-
○○○○○ -20-	○○○○○ -25-	○○○○○ -30-
○○○○○ -35-	○○○○○ -40-	

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you dig up an important or story-relevant secret
- something that should loathe you, praises you
- you take on a punishment originally meant for another
- you encounter something genuinely delightful

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- doing something to enrich/enhance an ordinary, insignificant, or even shameful identity that you've been building for yourself
- subverting some element of a hostile environment to your cause, or to your ends
- introducing a new trick or device with actionable relevance to the situation you're in
- eating with a group of laborers
- wielding insignificance, worthlessness, or meaninglessness as a tool
- long, attenuated clouds drift by
- learning a new feature of the local environment
- going over records or receipts

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

It is generally disrecommended to maintain souls in a holding pattern indefinitely outside of Heaven; if any have not been processed by the evening bells, it is advised to preemptively reject them, discarding them to experience a blessed life somewhere on the lower branches of the Tree.

—*from* Pearly Gates 4.1: Best Practices, *by Galsalec and Donalex Custodia*

Dystopian YA

This is a quest set about a protagonist who discovers the corrupt face behind the surface of the world and then struggles to find or restore a certain level of hope. This is specifically Dystopian YA and not "Dystopian Fiction" because its standard form is a proactive and actually fairly effective Bindings Arc:

The story these quests tell is not necessarily optimistic, it can be pretty brutal, but the end of the dystopian fiction pool where the protagonist really *can't* do anything about their situation, or fails utterly to do so, does not appear.

As a Bindings Arc (e.g., to raise Lore or Ability), this plays out as follows:

- In **Entangled**, the PC is entangled in the schemes of the law-beings and their slaves.
- In **the Gaol of the Just**, they uncover a bastion of order's rotten core.
- In **On, Into Nightmare,** they take a harrowing journey.
- In **Two Worlds Collide,** the PC takes down a wall or a barrier; or, they *have* taken down a wall or barrier; or, they bring or have brought two contexts together ... something of that sort. This quest is how they stay on top of what happens next.
- Finally, in **A Symbol of Hope,** they must take ownership of what they've done.

Dystopian YA doesn't work well as a Shepherd Arc, but it *is* also viable as an Emptiness Arc (e.g., to raise Eide or Wyrd). When it's an Emptiness Arc, it's more likely that the character's motivations are a mess and less likely that, say, everything starts with the world oppressing or hunting them or with them taking a principled stand.

The Emptiness version would play out like this:

- We'd start with **Two Worlds Collide**—there's a new base state to the world, which the PC has created, and they're exploring how to live with it.
- They get **Entangled**, visit **the Gaol of the Just**, and proceed **On, Into Nightmare**, as before.
- ... and jump from there to figuring out their life and how to proceed with it, in **A Symbol of Hope.**

Note that this Arc features an **Ally**—some taboo or disreputable creature that can serve as the "wicked partner" for a Bindings 1 quest. It isn't deeply connected to the implicit storyline on the quest cards, so it's fine for the player to fill in their own ideas for this Ally based on their PC's Sphere or on the story that they want to tell. However, the Ally is *mentioned* on a few of the quest cards, so it can't be ignored even if the PC is on an Emptiness Arc:

The Arc can be an Emptiness Arc, but the wicked partner still *shows up.* The PC spends time with them in **Two Worlds Collide,** and possibly *tries* to cut off the relationship there—but the Ally's right back in play, being annoying or weird sometimes, when the story gets to **Entangled.**

Entangled

30 or 45 XP Quest : *1* : *2*

You're entangled in the schemes of the law-beings and their slaves. Are they hunting you? Blackmailing you? Intriguing against you? Or are you in some kind of weird romance?

The cost of freedom will not be a shallow one:

The principles you've been living by will not suffice. Something will have to bend, or break.

Entangled

PROGRESS GRID - 45 XP

O O O O O	O O O O O	O O O O O
-05-	-10-	-15-
O O O O O	O O O O O	O O O O O
-20-	-25-	-30-
O O O O O	O O O O O	O O O O O
-35-	-40-	-45-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you compromise a core motivation or principle;
- you build a connection to someone/something unexpected;
- secrets emerge from the earth, dirt, or stones;
- dust, grit, and stone prove your enemy;
- you get caught up in somebody else's machinations.

You can earn up to four of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you interact with strange animals
- the Arc's **Ally** is uncomfortably weird
- hints and shadows of your infection fill the world or the void
- thinking of friends far away
- stress and fear haunt you
- your sense of self is in crisis, or breaks down for a bit
- you take shelter beneath a bridge or an overhang
- you catch a Power's attention
- someone shifts their position or alliances

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Entangled (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 30 XP

O O O O O	O O O O O	O O O O O
-05-	-10-	-15-
O O O O O	O O O O O	O O O O O
-20-	-25-	-30-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you compromise a core motivation or principle;
- you make a desperate or valiant choice;
- wonders emerge from the earth, dirt, or stones.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest through:

- an emotionally charged confrontation with an Imperator or Power
- a rant or complaint about the Arc's **Ally,** or an academic discussion of their faults
- telling or remembering part of your backstory
- remembering something a friend told you, long ago
- feelings or drives that you don't understand
- a betrayal—whether yours, or, someone else's

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

One must never trust the Powers; distrust for US is in their bones.

—from Marigold Book, *by Leovigild Lengyel*

THE GAOL OF THE JUST

20 or 35 XP Quest **: 2 : 3**

The heart of some bastion of order and "the good" proves rotten. Inside, you encounter nightmares and traumatic things.

Often that sentence is true on multiple levels. You may, for instance, find a dystopian nightmare imposed on creatures that are nightmarish themselves. You may face traumatic incidents in life while also wrestling with a legacy of trauma in your or someone else's past. Nightmares and traumatic things may even manifest in physical form to warp the world.

... but the centerpiece of this quest is contrast:

Something *coded* as "good" or "orderly," around a lurid core of *wrong*.

The Gaol of the Just

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25- -30-
O O O O O
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you help someone or something find freedom, even though it's not in your interest;
- you face a truth that can destroy everything around you;
- you take on a responsibility that you shouldn't have to bear.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- exploring one of the secrets of the law-beings or their Powers
- the good and the virtuous aren't what they ought to be
- evading a hunting party or its metaphorical equivalent
- you travel a secret, griming path
- strange things slither
- you pack supplies, often into crates, bags, or trucks
- something themed to your bane or infection comes into play

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

One cannot make a bargain with the Glitch; it is an illimitable measure of corrosion.

—*from* THERE'S A HOLE IN MY HOLE, *by Armando Szakall*

The Gaol of the Just (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you help someone or something, against your better judgment;
- you face a truth that can destroy everything around you.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- exploring one of the secrets of the law-beings or their Powers
- immersed or immersing within your bane
- you denounce the supposed righteous
- a hunting party closes in

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

On, Into Nightmare

20 or 35 XP Quest **: 3 : 4**

To achieve your ends, you must dive into nightmare:

Into lands shrouded by your bane, which may simply be your gathering-grounds in Ninuan but may also be harrowing-lands within Creation; into a confrontation with your own worst fear; and, most likely, into covert dealings with the enemy, even while that enemy hunts you down.

On, Into Nightmare

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you face your worst nightmare and find a pathway to survival or, at least, to forging something new;
- you subvert a titular enemy;
- you tempt someone with a desire they had previously thought impossible to fulfill;
- your bane manifests in a weirdly biological (or, if it was already biological, a weirdly inanimate) form.

You can earn up to three of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 15 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- crafting the substance of your bane
- entering your Sphere, or, a similar creational realm
- slipping past an enemy's defenses
- under enormous pressure
- distracting others with an illusion or deceit
- exploring someone's relationship with your bane
- local authorities are hunting you; they're on your trail

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Strategists so commonly chastise the Powers with the elements of our own damnation that they have come to view it as a constituent of our powers:

Battered by the horror intrinsic in the world, escaping it by the skin of our teeth, we are then blamed for its existence. Particularly if we are tactically astute—as, to survive, we so often must be—and have tried to pit our enemies against our bane, leading them to confront it: they will assume, as of that moment, that we are its source; its primordial origin. Tattered, shaking, numbed by the trauma we have undergone, we must then listen to the strutting cockerels that serve reality shouting at us: telling us that spawning such living nightmares against them is injust ...

—from Liecia Coren's microblog, 8/04/17

On, Into Nightmare (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you turn something awful to your side;
- you distract someone with an illusion or deceit.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you go somewhere where your bane is (even) more dominant, such as your Sphere
- your bane manifests in a new, disturbing form
- an idea for how to craft something from/with your bane grows in you
- you remember or talk about how you got into this situation

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

TWO WORLDS COLLIDE

25 or 40 XP Quest **: 4 : 1**

You've done ... something. You've achieved something, or perhaps committed folly.

Either way, you've changed the world—at the beginning of this quest, or the end of the last one; by story, or by miracle. And it's something *big*.

Traditionally, it's bringing two worlds together in some way. Whether that's literal or metaphorical, whether we're talking about Creation and Ninuan or two parts of one, all that kind of thing is up to you and the circumstances of the quest, but that's the general feel:

You've taken two things that were kept well apart, and superimposed them or connected them in some way.

Now you have to ride the tiger, shape the effect, keep it from being turned against you, or whatever else it is you need to do to control what this all *means*.

N.B. It's fine to do the world-changing thing that makes this quest *happen* a few chapters in; that, in fact, makes one of the 5-XP options easier to get ... but note that many of the quest flavor options will be a little weirder or harder to play with until you've actually done the world-changing thing, so you'll want to get it done fast.

Two Worlds Collide (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you blur the boundaries between two worlds;
- you change your life;
- you take a Serious or Transformative Wound that ties to this quest's originating achievement (that is, the change to the world or the bringing two worlds together that this quest is notionally a followup to).

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest through:

- quiet moments with the Arc's **Ally**
- exploring the edges of the quest-defining event's effect
- a disorganized and haphazard life
- struggling to constrain/limit the expansion of the effect
- making a decision about how to change the effect

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Two Worlds Collide

PROGRESS GRID - 40 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25- O O O O O -30-
O O O O O -35- O O O O O -40-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you bring two worlds into conjunction;
- you establish a new model for your daily life;
- you take a Serious or Transformative Wound that ties to this quest's originating achievement (that is, the change to the world or the bringing two worlds together that this quest is notionally a followup to);
- you cut off your relationship with the Arc's **Ally,** or at least give them space.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- talking about the world and the difficulties of fitting into it with the Arc's **Ally**
- marking territory
- doing paperwork or organizational tasks
- hiring help or guards
- struggling to constrain/limit the expansion of the quest-defining event's effects
- taking a breather and enjoying the world (or the void)
- visualizing or gathering information on the effects of the quest-defining thing you've done
- visiting a watering hole

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

In the ways the world is lacking are, perhaps, its greatest possibilities of repair.

There is love and there is pain, and therefore love is glitched, and pain is glitched, and in these things may be discovered no salvation. There is Los Angeles and there is Nairobi, and therefore, Los Angeles is glitched, and Nairobi is glitched, and in their span no hope can plausibly be found.

... but there are many things that the world has not; many things that exist only within the great Beyond itself. These things are unpolluted; pure. If they are brought into being; if they prove to weight more, in the end, than all the broken existing things—then there is hope.

Hope, of course, is, in itself, the first among such gifts.

—*from* THE UNWORLD JOURNAL #28, *submitted by sarabar@ll.edu*

A Symbol of Hope

25 or 40 XP Quest 5 5

You have brought something new into the world. Now, you must take ownership of that—at least in your own private thoughts, and perhaps as that thing's public face.

A Symbol of Hope

PROGRESS GRID - 40 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25- O O O O O -30-
O O O O O -35- O O O O O -40-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you get into a standoff with a Power or Imperator;
- one of the PCs, or an NPC they regularly interact with, gets engaged;
- someone or something saves you;
- someone (emotionally relevant) finds their way back home.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you act as a symbol of hope
- you aren't ready to be what you need or want to be
- you aren't sure if your actions have been correct
- the self/other distinction breaks down
- you encounter scorpion-people or ragged things
- something amorphous crawls upon your skin, possibly in an imagination spot
- heavy things are lifted or take flight
- you taste a bitter consequence

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Better to serve the world than to oppose it.

The world is a cursed, pathetic thing. It knows no salvation and no opportunity. Let us, then, become those things. Let us be, in our own flesh, the passage and the way.

When the world kills us—and it always does—it will make a welken-rite of us; we will embrace the things of our salvation, and they will fall into Beyond.

—*from* The Neo-Compatibilist Manifesto, *by T. Herminafrid Holmes*

A Symbol of Hope (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you get into a standoff with a Power or Imperator;
- you visit the land of the dead, or the environs surrounding it—e.g., a place that has a gate thereto;
- you learn about something good that happened because of, or inspired by, you.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- hope frays
- you embrace a bitter consequence or burden
- you integrate something more into yourself, or claim it more as part of yourself
- you find a way to stand up to the horrors of the world
- you travel a great, dry open space

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Serimarchos (or, Thornhenge)

Legends of this flower that have traveled west somewhat overstate its burrs and its ferocity, but it's still a rare traveler who passes through its lands without finding one or two thorned flowers on their hair and clothing every day.

the horned flower

Thornhenge is known to turn into a deer or gazelle-like creature when unobserved, allowing it to move freely about the land. The details of the transformation and the creature are, of course, unknowable; one can only estimate their nature from the marks they have left behind.

It does not consume the light of the fisher's star directly, but rather feasts on the river-gnats and way-midges that rise up in great clouds at star-dawn to devour that light — and, bloated, thereafter, sink back down to die amidst the spreading carpet of thorns.

Serimarchos favors slopes and rolling hills, but the occasional spray may be found growing beneath the face of an eastern cliff.

the fisher's star

Folk Tales

This is a quest set focused on the deeds of a strange and magical outsider—the PC—drifting in and out across the fringes of the world.

As an Emptiness Arc (e.g., to increase Eide or Wyrd), it plays out as follows:

- In **Settled In,** the PC encounters something new, and their routine starts to crumble;
- **Something New** gives them a new characterization prop;
- In **A Legendary Collaboration,** they work with a rival or enemy to find some treasure or secret;
- **In Defiance of the Night** is an answer made unto the wrongness of the world; *and*
- **An Antagonist's Troubles** drives the PC to help an enemy/rival, or, to seek out their help.

In a Shepherd Arc (e.g., to increase Flore), the character's basic lifestyle is a little more normal. They're still a strange and magical being ... but perhaps they're less of an outsider and more of a (local?) figure of note?

This version would play out like so:

- **Something New** is the PC's life as it's always been—there's a new characterization prop, but things are still pretty much the same;
- In **Settled In,** a new client, friend, responsibility, interest, or whatever complicates things;
- **In Defiance of the Night** is still an answer to the wrongness of the world;
- **A Legendary Collaboration** is a grand adventure (though, still with a rival or enemy); *and*
- **An Antagonist's Troubles** is a chance for the protagonist to show off their awesomeness.

This quest set doesn't work well as a Bindings Arc.

From time to time Creation steals the fruit of the Riders' gardens; takes for its own what ought have remained a portion of the Not.

Wind blows through empty branches; a subtle color has been stolen from our lives.

Such gifts exact their own prices, and we should let you have them; let you swallow them—if we are to be strategically correct—but we will not. We are not yet so desperate as to give ourselves to desecration for the cause of war, and the treasures that are Ninuan's do not deserve the touch of your noisome, worldly hands.

— from a statement by Coliya Albins

Settled In

20 or 40 XP Quest **: 2 : 1**

You've found a way to live in the world. It's a unique life, a colorful life, but it's *a life*, and you're OK with it ...

But you've met someone new, or encountered something cool, or started to realize that there is something missing from your life.

This quest is about how you try to hang on to your current Eide and your current compromises with the world even as your routine begins to crumble.

Settled In (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○

-05- -10- -15-

○○○○○

-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you decide and declare how you want to relate to somebody from here on out. (Declaring, e.g., enmity, love, friendship, "I can see we're never going to get along," "You *will* work with me, sooner or later," or whatever else.)
- a conversation or social interaction goes *so* swimmingly, unexpectedly well that you start doubting that it actually happened.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you get yourself lost—possibly to the point of *accidental* travel into Ninuan
- you take care of a child, pet, or hurt/sick friend
- you do something dumb/foolhardy enough to risk or cause yourself an injury
- you share a meal or drink with a Noble, vampire, peryton, creature of the Beyond, or other entity not participating in human society

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

opposite: *by Elizabeth Sherry*

Settled In

PROGRESS GRID - 40 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25- -30-
O O O O O O O O O O
-35- -40-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you have a "meet cute"—you meet someone who'll be important to you in a weird or funny way or context, and shortly thereafter there's an unexpected moment of *connection;*
- you give a thing or object that could reasonably be referred to as your heart to somebody, or something that you've recently given to somebody else *becomes* your heart;
- your friends or allies knock you out, tie you up, blindfold you, or otherwise impose an extreme inconvenience on you for what seem to be good reasons at the time;
- a grand plan blows up in your face! Doesn't count if you fix things before the end of the chapter.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you do completely unnecessary things to test yourself
- you wander a cool, exotic place—specifically, exotic to *you,* a category including parts of Ninuan but certainly not all of it
- you show someone a trap that you're building, or they discover one
- someone finds you sketching on the walls
- you can't muster any real resistance to the whims of a stray puppy or stray cat
- you have a pleasant conversation with some sort of horror
- you rant about the difficulties of human interaction, probably tongue-in-cheek
- you dramatically explain something that either didn't really need explaining or doesn't actually make sense

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

SOMETHING NEW

20 or 35 XP Quest : 1 : 2

You're *mostly* living the life you've been living for quite a while, but ... there's something new, now. In particular, you have a new characterization prop—something you're playing around with, thinking about, or trying to achieve.

Something New

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25- -30-
O O O O O
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you throw caution to the wind;
- you show off a new outfit, dramatically explain an upcoming event, or do both at once;
- you're the only one they can turn to! ...for some amusing or interesting value of "they."

You can earn each of these bonuses once, for a total of up to 15 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you're eating *azuki* or drinking something flavored with red bean
- engaging in unnecessary acts of climbing
- you pull someone aside or drag them off to show them something secret or amazing
- conversing with ravens
- you work or sleep in a space cluttered with piles and piles of papers and notes
- experimenting with your new characterization prop
- you're in absolutely no condition to handle this scene you're in: e.g., falling-down drunk or exhausted, having a nervous breakdown, or convinced everyone around you is going to kill you while *they* think they're just celebrating your birthday

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Something New (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when you:

- resolve to keep something a secret, and it complicates your life;
- show off a new outfit, dramatically explain an upcoming event, or do both at once.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest through:

- perching on a high place, poorly dressed
- waking up with a sudden shock
- experimenting with your new characterization prop
- desperate and failed attempts to become coherent, awake, and presentable—e.g., slamming a hand in a door or chugging espresso to wake up or desperately tidying an apartment even while the first guests start walking in

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Erica spent her life in desperate pursuit of destiny—but no sooner had she found it than she put it down again, in favor of the latest bubble-popping game.

Before you criticize, consider well; you might well do the same.

—*from* An Interruption in Service, *by M. K. Hart*

A Legendary Collaboration

20 or 35 XP Quest : 4 : 3

You and an enemy or rival work together to find some treasure or secret. Often they at least appear to have some kind of hold over you, while you at least appear to have a wicked scheme of some sort in store; it's possible that that's just the *feel* of the quest, the way people act about it, though, and that neither of these things is *true*.

This quest usually features/requires a journey.

Usually, that's not a problem; usually it's easy to drag the other PCs along when the quest is in focus and fine to let the quest stall out whenever it's not. If that *doesn't* work well, though, the standard solutions are these:

- Instead of a physical journey, you take a spiritual journey. You travel in dreams or visions.
- Play skips forward a few Creational days to your return; you play out the quest itself as flashbacks.
- *Or,* conversely, you spend a while foreshadowing what's going to happen (with visions, prophecies, plans/prep, or flash-forwards) and *then* play skips forward while the GM narrates the actual events.

A Legendary Collaboration (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you're chained, imprisoned, or have onerous restrictions put on you. Often this is in exchange for someone's help;
- you do something unexpectedly kind and heroic, and significantly so.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you have a flashback to a similar situation on an earlier adventure
- you're amazed at how new everything around you is
- you encounter a montage of cool things along the way
- you're tempted to change sides or betray your current allies. (Though, you're not required to give in.)

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Wickedness crept through sixteen worlds; he consigned each in turn to flames; but on the seventeenth try, something clicked in him. An excitement grew in him. World-maker Cneph hammered on the door of Harumaph his rival until weeping he opened it, crying, "O! I understand at last!" He spun that chief of lords among the void around; he laughed. "That thing which makes my worlds to fail is exactly that that thrives within your void and makes it good!"

"Ah—" Harumaph complained.

"Teach me," Cneph said, eyes far and hungry: "to make an art of death."

—*from* Legends of the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

A Legendary Collaboration

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- the GM, or someone else's use of power, mysteriously provides you with a new wardrobe;
- you wait for a friend, frenemy, or temporary ally to reach you before opening or unlocking or accepting something that's supposed to be good (e.g., a power or reward);
- you're washed away, e.g., by a storm wave or metaphysical phenomenon.

You can earn each of these bonuses once, for a total of up to 15 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when you:

- name a new species or phenomenon
- discuss what you expect to find (on this journey/adventure) with someone
- watch the world or void from a moving vehicle with an antiquated feel (e.g., from an old-style train window or over the railing of a steam ship/skyship, but not from a jetliner)
- don't know what to say to this, or, you're physically unable to say anything
- talk to a rival/enemy about what you're looking for, what you want
- portray how you're dealing with some restriction (e.g., handcuffs or confinement) others've placed on you. You might, for instance, show off your suffering, casually ignore it, or develop practical solutions
- are encountering new wonders

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

In Defiance of the Night

25 or 35 XP Quest **: 3 : 4**

The world is wrong. This quest is a chance to take some sort of action in response to that—to *make answer* to it. You'll probably travel to strange places, bargain with strange horrors, and console something grieving along the way.

The flavor options for this quest can be eccentric; it's worth remembering, thus, that you *are* allowed to create some of the scenery for them yourself. For instance, if this quest is in focus for the session, you're *allowed* to say, "OK, I'm entering the lair of a dragon now" ... and if the GM doesn't have any ideas for dragons, you can follow that up with your own ideas. Perhaps: "it's a blind and magma-blooded creature named *Seras* created by and then driven away from some bleak Chancel; it crawled out into the dark of Ninuan and now it lurks there, stewing in its malice."

Or "by which I mean 'the dragon,' this amazing bodyguard lady who operates out of a shop three doors down from mine. Help me figure out her name?"

The GM doesn't *have* to let you create setting elements—for instance, if you're taking the quest option "You make a pinky promise with a ghost, with an angelic being, or in a flashback" they don't have to let you come up with a ghost or angelic being. They can even insist that you pick a flashback so they don't have to come up with one themselves!—but you should both keep in mind that this quest works better if everyone assumes that you're a knowledgeable character steeped in enough Ninuan- or Creation-lore and rumors to *have* access to dragons, angelic beings, and mysteries that haven't come up yet in the game.

In Defiance of the Night

PROGRESS GRID – 35 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- something rips the wickedness from you or otherwise aggressively purifies you; or, you bleed for an enemy's sake;
- you descend below the surface of the world and share in or comfort the grief of something that lives there;
- you sacrifice a thing or object that could reasonably be referred to as your heart to somebody. *At the end of the quest, as a bonus result, you will acquire the player-level option to receive that lost heart back.*

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you travel to/enter the keep of a deadly enemy or rival or the lair of some sort of literal or metaphorical dragon; there is a sensation of danger
- you receive something, often in the form of a seed or box, from a rival/enemy
- you make a pinky promise with a ghost, with an angelic being, or in a flashback
- you wield magic or power to do something amazing and transformative
- you acquire a long-term or permanent marking
- you retreat to a garden or your sanctuary with a child, pet, or wounded friend
- you are torn apart by spirits or birds, or turn into birds—possibly, but not necessarily, in a dream, metaphor, or a break from reality

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

In Defiance of the Night (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID – 25 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- there's a ceremony in your honor;
- danger drives you into your sanctuary and besieges you there;
- birds or spirits gather ominously around you.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- reflecting on your accomplishments or changes
- caring for something given to you by an enemy/rival
- you're hurt by an enemy/rival
- you listen to someone's story
- dreaming of your early encounters with the Glitch

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Should the Angel of the Houses of the Sun be slain, and the sun itself be shattered—cast down, red, to plunge into the endless sea—the world will darken, but it will not end. Not yet.

Not then.

Against such ends, the reserve at Dol-y-gaer has gathered light; has stored it deep beneath its epilimnion; enough to glimmer and shine with subtle glints for seventy and seven years. Perhaps that time will be enough for some power, some force, or some individual to come, to come and find and use that light:

That the sun may be reborn.

— from The Story of the Sun, *by Livengood Educational Press*

AN ANTAGONIST'S TROUBLES

20 or 35 XP Quest **: 5 : 5**

Your life is disrupted by an enemy, rival, or antagonist ... but this time, most likely, it's not about defeating them.

You're going to wind up needing to *help* them, or get their help ...

AN ANTAGONIST'S TROUBLES

PROGRESS GRID – 35 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you discover that an old threat has resurfaced to bother you once again;
- you're captured by or otherwise made terrifyingly vulnerable to an antagonist;
- you have an awkward, elliptical conversation with an antagonist, often accompanied by snacks—leading up to one of you, usually without making it quite *explicit,* agreeing to help the other.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- coming up with an awesome plan as lightning flashes
- drinking something caffeinated and analyzing how your enemy or rival works
- slumping down in defeat, your hair a total mess
- hunting or chasing something elusive
- helping an enemy or rival recuperate from something
- explaining your feelings about all this stuff to a third party
- investigating something that's been causing trouble for an enemy or rival

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

It is considered the duty of all who live within Creation to assist against Iustina's machinations; she is all fires' end.

—from THE UNCLEAN KINGS, *by Alicia Brown*

AN ANTAGONIST'S TROUBLES (SIMPLIFIED)

PROGRESS GRID – 20 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

As long as it's relevant to the emotional and social baggage you have with an old connection, the GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you discover that you and an enemy or rival have a common friend or similar emotionally compromising attachment, or, if you already knew that, something dramatic happens to emphasize it;
- you give yourself into an enemy or rival's hands, either surrendering or begging them for assistance.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you lose track of one or more enemies or rivals
- you implement an awesome and terrifying plan, or at least an attempt at one
- your day gets progressively worse, often in a slightly comic fashion
- you attempt to divine the future in, e.g., coffee grounds or entrails, only to realize that you have absolutely no idea what they're saying

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

opposite: *by Mel Uran*

Literary fiction[56]

This quest set tells the story of a privileged but tormented protagonist struggling to meet minimal standards of decency despite a nature disinclined to it. It features a literal or symbolic journey and the hunt for something they've unrealistically exalted as the solution to everything in their life. There is often a touch of unexplained, matter-of-fact, and mundane fantasy in this as well.

This quest set is principally an Emptiness Arc (e.g. for increasing Wyrd or Eide), for which it plays out like this:

- In **A Peaceful Life,** the PC has withdrawn from the world. ... but that was never going to last.
- In **Searching,** their old answers no longer satisfy them. They go looking for new ones.
- In **Drowning,** their sense of self loses ground against their bane.
- In **Grail Quest,** they hunt an artifact or creature that somehow represents salvation.
- In **the Work of Time**, they ... live.

This quest set also works as a Shepherd Arc (e.g., for increasing Flore). This form of the Arc embroiders the basic structure a bit:

- In **A Peaceful Life,** the PC has withdrawn from the world. ... but that was never going to last.
  - Ultimately, a new responsibility falls into their lap and brings it to an end.
- In **Searching,** their old answers no longer satisfy them. They go looking for new ones.
- In **Drowning,** their sense of self loses ground against their bane.
- In **Grail Quest,** they hunt an artifact or creature that somehow represents salvation.
- In **the Work of Time**, they ... live.
  - ... and they're actually kind of awesome.

Finally, this quest set can be a Bindings Arc (e.g., for increasing Lore or Ability). In this form, its story changes more dramatically, becoming more actively fantastic—and even, to a certain extent, heroic:

- We'll start with
  - **A Peaceful Life,** but there's typically a Power that gets involved with the PC's life, and they need to work out the kinks in their relationship with them. Either way, this quest corresponds to the Bindings 1 variant "A Wicked Partner," so if there *isn't* such a Power, there's a magical creature or subordinate or something who qualifies as their partner instead. *Or* we'll start with ...
  - **The Work of Time,** which corresponds to the Bindings 1 variant, "Am I OK?" (pg. 372), instead.
- In **Drowning,** their sense of self loses ground against their bane, but they find themselves reaching out to help someone else *anyway*.
- Their **Grail Quest** is more about helping that other person than themselves.
- **Searching** is about the PC's proactive decision to abandon part of who they are or some of their existing goals and replace that stuff with something else; in the quest itself, they work through the details.
- They finish out the Arc by evaluating the consequences of—typically **the Grail Quest,** but sometimes just their previous life—in the light of their new self or goals, using whichever quest they haven't used so far.

56 This Arc's name represents its general suitability, not merely for Strategists, but also for the travails of English professors having some combination of mid-life crises and sex.

A Peaceful Life

20 or 40 XP Quest — *: 1,5 : 1 : 1*

You are a renunciate. In some key sense, you have withdrawn yourself from the world. You have chosen not to engage with it.

It is the lifestyle, to be honest, that you would recommend to all.

... but in the end, it won't sustain. Maybe because you're not strong enough. Maybe because the world is murdering you, you and your native ground within the void. Or maybe it was all fundamentally mistaken, and you were always too attached to the world to let it go.

A Peaceful Life (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID – 20 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you're called out on your hypocrisy;
- you come across a sight of quintessential natural beauty or majesty.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- talking to a Power who has faith in you
- someone just ... gives up
- your view is clouded
- you see something from afar that you have to respond to

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

You may be wondering, can I pursue an exciting career as a rail inspector if I am an angel? A demon? A monster from beyond the boundaries of the world?

And I'm here to tell you, you can.

Here at the Schumacher School for Railway Inspection we pursue an official government mandate to bring out the potential within all you strange visitors from another world to laboriously and with dignity inspect the sprawling railways of Earth. If you have been afraid that your inhuman nature would doom you to a life of crime, drive you to religious leadership, or condemn you to a cruel and bitter isolation from the world, you need fear no longer; the Schumacher School for Railway Inspection is here for you!

—from a commercial for the Schumacher School

A Peaceful Life

PROGRESS GRID - 40 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○ ○○○○○
-35- -40-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you're called out on your hypocrisy;
- someone chooses to put faith in you;
- you define the setting of your life, and the most important goal that it's directed towards;
- at least three chapters later, that's completely fallen apart—or at least, proved to be psychologically unsustainable.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest from:

- an emotionally fraught encounter with a Power
- a conversation about whether something is worth doing
- a conversation about whether something is even really *OK*
- a drift of steam obscuring your view
- studying the world or the void through one or more windows
- tending the world or the void as a garden
- admiring the mountains or the prairie
- the sight of a rare and mythical creature

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Searching

20 or 30 XP Quest **: 4 : 2 : 2**

Your old answers don't satisfy you. You go looking for new ones.

Sometimes you're running from a disaster. Sometimes you're looking for a better path, or the solution to a serious problem. Other times, this quest is self-serving: the empty quest of someone who packs their bag to search the world for truth and leaves truth lying on the bed behind them—because, in the end, it wasn't something that they *really* hoped to find.

It's common to tackle this quest with a very analytic mindset:

With a sense that the answer you're looking for is a *procedure* or a *system*, something that can be analyzed, mapped out, written down. Sometimes that's even mostly true, although there's always going to be a fringe of *something* around the edges, *something* that you're looking for, that a system just can't solve.

Searching

PROGRESS GRID - 30 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you meet someone and then acknowledge them as a great teacher;
- the rules you knew have *changed*;
- your infection flares up in a way that shakes the world around you. (The effect on you yourself can be negligible, moderate, or severe.)

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when you:

- explore a great expanse of roads and paths without directions or a pre-made map
- create a map, chart, or diagram
- explore futuristic or fancy, rare modern technology
- face little signs of a coming doom
- question "right" and "wrong"
- become a witness to miracles—either literally or colloquially

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Down the branching paths of the "Seal of Time" one may explore, and find all mystery and wonder ... but only one of those innumerable paths is true, and leads to the Age to Come. Traveler, you may step off that path; feel free! You may explore the road not taken—but the moment that you dare so do, you have deviated from the story of your life.

—from Our Age of War, *by Carmen Espinoza*

Searching (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you venture into a great expanse of roads and paths without directions or a pre-made map;
- you meet someone and then acknowledge them as a great teacher.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you do something important sloppily and impressionistically
- there are dramatic signs of your infection, or some other impending doom
- you perform a miracle with spiritual significance, to yourself or someone else
- discussing philosophy

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Drowning

20, 20-35, or 40 XP Quest **: 2 : 3 : 3**

Your sense of self is losing ground against your bane or infection. The standard version of this quest is about the literal mental effects of your infection, or, about the way that it's hard to maintain mental stability when repeated horrible death is always around the corner. "Losing ground against your bane" does, however, allow for metaphorical and psychological interpretations of various kinds, as to a lesser extent does "losing ground against your infection."

As a Bindings quest, **Drowning** typically has a stronger focus on someone you are helping as you fade.

As a Shepherd quest, **Drowning** typically has a stronger focus on a particular past trauma. External intervention often makes things worse at the very end.

Drowning (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you take on a new responsibility, one that you're already kind of failing at;
- you figure out what you really care about, at least in this situation ... and then you have to compromise on it.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you have a vision of or flash forward to a doom this quest might bring you
- remembering a better time
- helping or reaching out to someone else while in dire straits yourself
- things are distressingly *wrong*

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Drowning (Simplified, Alternate)

PROGRESS GRID - 20–35 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25- O O O O O -30-
O O O O O -35-

This can be a 20, 25, 30, or 35 XP quest.

BONUS XP

You're drowning. This is it. This is as far as you go. You're losing ground against your bane or infection.

Maybe that's not even the only thing going wrong, the only doom in the cards. Maybe it's not the only problem that you have to fix. But *either way,* you're drowning.

So, look. Arrange for a sign.

It should show a black and white flame.

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) when it gets to be too much. When it's just too *much*, right? When you've gone too far, or the world has, and it's hurting, and it needs to stop. When you've taken or spent 3+ Cost on this:

Just ... flash the sign.

When you haven't, but you're willing to *take* a point of Cost to say that the infection's just got you, that the *everything's* got you, that it, just, hurts too much:

Take that Cost, and flash the sign.

If it's obvious how this situation ties to the quest, if it's obvious what hurt you, then just take the XP. If it's not obvious, then you should keep the sign held up and wait for the GM to ask about that—and give your answer—before the XP can be claimed.

If you don't have access to a sign, you and the GM can agree on a gesture or a phrase that can replace it; dramatically clawing the air with palms towards you or typing "[Flame]" are both solid and traditional choices.

When you have been on fire for long enough it becomes very difficult to disentangle it from yourself. You lurch from place to place screaming and flailing, but you do not think, "There is an underlying self here that would not be lurching from place to place screaming and flailing, were they only not on fire." You try to concentrate on your work but every time you try to type something your keyboard melts and every time you try to concentrate you get distracted by the awful pain. This, you inevitably take to be evidence of your own poor character.

Look at you, always melting keyboards. Always screaming.

Where would you be, if you were not on fire? What would you be doing? Are you even really capable of not being on fire? You have long since forgotten such concerns as these, recalibrating your expectations of yourself to match a brand imposed from the outside in.

— posted to Lepontic Record, *by Diane Drees, 8/14/17*

Drowning

PROGRESS GRID - 40 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25- O O O O O -30-
O O O O O -35- O O O O O -40-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you find something hidden or buried, generally in the substance of your bane;
- you lose your grip on something that matters to you;
- you figure out what you really care about, at least in this situation, and then you have to compromise on it;
- you decide that if things reach a certain point you'll just give up—on a major story goal, on life, on everything; whatever ... and then you get there. *You are allowed to change your mind at that point or afterwards.*

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- having a vision of or flashing forward to your dying of your infection
- you're lost
- an animal helps you
- remembering things people have said about you
- trying to express how you feel about your fate
- helping or reaching out to someone else despite being (yourself) in dire straits
- something's only *sort of* where it's supposed to be
- taking on a new responsibility, one that you're already kind of failing at

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Grail Quest

20 or 35 XP Quest **: 3 : 4 : 4**

You hunt for the tangible representation of a great abstract—for the *thing* or *creature* that is your handle on truth, beauty, good, worth, hope, the fundamental law of the universe, or some more personalized equivalent like your heart or a stolen soul. Perhaps it's something you can chase down; perhaps it's something that you have to find.

Grail Quest

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25- -30-
O O O O O
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you are granted a sacred vision or insight;
- you pass by or through a mysterious formation of stone, λ-stone, or the substance of your bane;
- something strikes the continuum of the world or the void like a bell, causing it to, e.g., ring, sing, shiver, or resound. Often this is a subtle metaphysical effect: someone closes their hand on an artifact, for instance, and the world rings with it.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- telling stories of the thing you're chasing or hunting for
- getting a message from far away
- dreaming of a golden world, or some similar idealized vision
- digging out the secrets of a little place where things are strange
- refreshing yourself at a little town
- being 100% confident, or *listening* to someone 100% confident, in something very strange
- sharing a camp or a fire with something unusual—often, a mythical creature with a stylized manner of speech

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

The evening lights fade into dark, and the sky to lucid cold simplicity, until all that is left to us is this:
One frozen moment of divinity.

—from Tangled in the Green, *by Lyda Jamison*

Grail Quest (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you are granted a sacred vision or insight;
- you depart a camp that you've shared in peace with an enemy, the thing that you're hunting for, or a dangerous beast.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- remembering stories of the thing you're chasing or hunting for
- remembering, and possibly sharing, reasons to be chasing or hunting it
- abandoning or passing by something that would normally be important, for this quest's sake
- you are in the presence of truth

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

opposite: *by Elena Albanese*

THE WORK OF TIME

25 or 55 XP Quest : 1,5 : 5 : 5

It would be nice if this were something quick. If this were something you could get through fast. *Particularly* because it's almost always at the end of a lit-fic Arc.

... but it isn't.

Some things you just have to live through, slowly, bit by bit, until you understand.

The Work of Time

PROGRESS GRID - 55 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25- O O O O O -30-
O O O O O -35- O O O O O -40- O O O O O -45-
O O O O O -50- O O O O O -55-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- it's been eight chapters since you started this quest;
- it's been fifteen chapters since you started this quest;
- it's been twenty chapters since you started this quest;
- it's been twenty-five chapters since you started this quest;
- you eat tiramisu.

You can earn up to four of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 20 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- savoring a memory
- listening to the world
- patching things that are cracked or torn, particularly things tied to your bane
- you eat a tasteless meal
- you feel damaged
- walking a long way
- exploring a new place or point of view
- trying to face and accept imperfection
- savoring not being troubled by things that have broken you before

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

The Work of Time (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

O O O O O -05- O O O O O -10- O O O O O -15-
O O O O O -20- O O O O O -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you look or listen for guidance, but guidance is not found;
- you reach the end of a long path or journey;
- it's been at least a year of subjective time since you started this quest.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- engaging in reflection
- you realize that you've lost something important
- summing up an argument you don't believe in
- experiencing your dream-of-self
- a chapter ends

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

It is the peculiar characteristic of our age that absolute ethical answers are knowable, but not known. There is a Strategist who set themselves the task of producing a flowchart to all moral answers. The Nobles' Golden Age Foundation strives to break the ethics of the world down to a faceless math. ... and there are many more such able workers yet. That each will eventually tease out right and wrong from raw Not and Isness is not disputed; that their work will be absolute and unquestioned—is equally assured. They are all of them miraculous and perfect workers; they will not fail and they cannot be mistaken.

It is only that the matter ... takes some time.

Since the early days of the Age such works have been ongoing; and not a single one has finished yet.

— from The Grand Machinery, *by Dona Lane*

THE LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY

This quest set is another symbolic journey; *this* one parallels traditional narratives of recovery from trauma, sickness, or addiction. In practice, though, it can work as an Arc for anyone who's struggling.

Its default form is as an Emptiness Arc (e.g., to raise Eide or Wyrd). In this form, it plays out as follows:

- In **the Long Night,** the PC suffers through a timeless interregnum;
- In **A Nameless Light,** something calls them out into the world;
- In **the Crossroads,** they approach, and then face, an uncertain, costly choice;
- In **the Shrouded Hills,** they have a magical/heroic or psychological/spiritual journey; *and*
- In **the Great Work,** they will make something whole.

As a Shepherd Arc (e.g., to raise Flore), this quest set is more about a *bump* in the process of recovery ... not so much the story of someone *moving* out of the worst part of their life as the story of someone who's *already* moved out of the worst part of their life; except, the legacy of that "worst part" is reaching out to claw them down.

And, it's kind of chosen a bad time.

This version of the quest set plays out like so:

- In **the Crossroads,** the PC's everyday life builds towards an uncertain, costly choice;
  - ... and, to their surprise, a new responsibility;
- In **the Long Night,** they suffer through a timeless interregnum;
- In **the Great Work,** they try (and fail) to atone for something in their past;
- In **the Shrouded Hills,** they have a magical/heroic or psychological/spiritual journey; *and*
- In **A Nameless Light,** something calls them out into the world.

As a Bindings Arc (e.g., to raise Lore or Ability), this quest set is much more of an *allegory* for recovery than a process of recovery itself. This version of the quest set brings in more elements of heroism and the *bildungsroman:*

- In **A Nameless Light,** a new, albeit "wicked," partner helps the PC to face the world;
- In **the Crossroads,** helping someone else brings the PC to a perilous crossroads;
- In **the Great Work,** they struggle to make something whole;
- In **the Shrouded Hills,** they set forth on a magical/heroic or psychological/spiritual journey; *and*
- In **the Long Night,** there is a timeless interregnum of reflection.

Fundamentally, though, this an Emptiness Arc; it will run smooth*est* in that form.

"Wake," he said. I did not wish to wake, for I was gone. I did not wish to wake, for I had ceased to be.

"Wake," he said, again.

It seems obvious now that a person who has ceased to be cannot have wishes. It seems obvious now that this was not an afterlife experience, but, rather, that I had been wrong about when a person actually dies—that "souls" exist, in a manner of speaking, but only in the same fashion as the other organs; that "the afterlife" exists, but only in the same way as "the after college;" that my philosophy of death was not mistaken, or, at the very least, has not yet been proven mistaken, but rather had been too early applied.

At the time, though, I simply knew myself nonexistent.

I clung to this viscerally, and not simply as a point of philosophical principle. I resented the concept that I could ... un-be, and yet be the recipient of his communication. It was violent; it was unnatural; wrong.

There was nothing visible. There was nothing audible. There was no space, where I was then, and there was no time. I would quickly have broken under the trauma of the experience except that there was also no experience—no flow of mind, no psychological framework—save for my complex reactions to the demand he contained in his voice.

"Wake," he said, a third time, and light began to awake in me. Not light, really. A thing that was not light. And it was something that I might say as this:

It became clear to me as a sudden, crystal understanding that my nonexistence was textured. It was not a single monolithic nullity, but rather a constellation of moving parts, of "I am not" considered in different ways. I did not exist, but I did not exist in a trillion subtly divergent fashions, each interacting the one with the other: not because "null" was inherently textured; not, or at least not exactly, because of the person I'd been; but because it was modally possible to construe nonexistence in a number of different ways.

Eventually I had my hands on the Not-ground of Ninuan. Eventually I raised my eyes to the Not-sky. I turned to him when my eyes had been too much dazzled. I asked him, hoarsely, when I had recovered voice:

"How is this possible? How—" My voice broke. I coughed. I kept trying. "It's too much of a coincidence, Sasha. My non-existence, it being a ... thing, I can grant that, but a thing capable of sustaining a mind?"

"It's good to see you," he said.

"That's not an answer."

He chewed on his lip. He looked thoughtful. Finally, he said, "The irreversibility of the equation 'x × 0' is the algebraic conceit of a living brain."

— *from* SUCCESSOR FUNCTION (Aleksandr/Paulina), *by Veronica Yusupova*

THE LONG NIGHT

20 or 35 XP Quest : 5 : 2 : 1

This quest is the story of a timeless interregnum, a time of listlessness and anhedonia, a time when you have lost your bearings and everything is grey. It is marked by a kind of faith that things *can* be better; marked by glimpses of a better path, what that could be like; but it's hard to get a real *connection* to the idea that you can get there. That's more of an intellectual idea.

You do what you can. You *make do*.

And time slips by; minute after minute, falling ticking from the clock to the abyss.

The Long Night

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO
-05- -10- -15-
OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO
-20- -25- -30-
OOOOO
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- it snows;
- something distorts time, or your ability to keep track of it;
- someone moves you to another place, and, in the process, you catch a glimpse or two of one or more strange wonders;
- trying to change proves unexpectedly hard—an external or metaphysical factor you weren't expecting kicks in, or you screw up something reasonably important to you or some other PC because when it came down to it you weren't as far along as you thought.

You can earn up to three of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 15 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you feel worn down by your infection
- you hide your pain
- you lecture from a metaphorical cage
- you can't understand someone
- you stay awake all night watching something
- someone brings you food
- you tell someone about an old mistake—usually a technical success, but on something that you've decided in retrospect was wrong or dumb

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

The Long Night (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO
-05- -10- -15-
OOOOO
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you lecture from a metaphorical cage;
- you don't know what time it is or where you are, and something makes it difficult to find out.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you realize, or come to terms with, a mistake that you've made
- enacting a gesture of understanding
- you talk to someone about everything that's holding you back
- it snows (symbolically?) or a long snowfall ends

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Repentance is a fine and noble thing, but the Powers of the world will not accept it.

If you should stop yourself, ever stop yourself, before the great work of world-ending is done: lay down your spears and swords, and turn away, they will not turn away in turn. They will catch you, as you protest. They will bind you, if they can; and through all the days that follow, they will tell you it's your plan.

—*from* LET'S KILL EVERYTHING!, *by Farnobius Nores*

She dipped her toe into the river of experience. Elsewhere, her body jolted; her body breathed. But then she hesitated, there, and it fell back to death.

"When I was alive," she said. "... I, I ... wasn't I drowning in rivers of sensation all the time? Endlessly confusing, buffeted from every direction by noise, by beauty, by all the wrongness of the world? I ... I didn't know anything, but I thought I was supposed to know everything. I, I felt everything, and thought I wasn't supposed to feel anything. I had what I loved right next to me, but I didn't even notice it, I was so overwhelmed all the damn time. Right?"

"... they've probably fixed that," the daeva said.

"Fixed it?"

"I mean," the daeva said, and its forehead sweat: "they must've, mustn't they? It has been quite some while."

—*from* HOW CAROLINE RETURNED TO US, *by Hermanus Snels*

A Nameless Light

25 or 35 XP Quest : 1 : 5 : 2

Something draws you into the world. It is nameless. It is ambiguous. It may frighten you as much as it allures.

Nevertheless, it calls.

A Nameless Light

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25- -30-
O O O O O
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- a large animal noses you;
- you tell your story in a supportive environment, such as therapy, a support group, or to a very close friend;
- you have a panic attack brought on by something like agoraphobia—by the world being too big, too open, too vast. *You don't have to actually be agoraphobic in general to claim this goal, and close metaphorical equivalents to agoraphobia and panic work here too.*

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when in the presence of:

- maple trees in the background; there's a vague sense of peace
- traffic
- soaring architecture
- dumplings, or other spring foods
- this *expectation* that you'll say something, but you don't know what to say
- incomprehensible colors and lines and the shadows of clothes
- a nameless, forbidden feeling

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

A Nameless Light (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you befriend a large animal;
- you hear someone's innermost pain;
- you emerge into the world, at the player or the GM's instigation, with no real memory of where you've (recently?) been.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- wandering the roads of Creation
- remembering the forests and ruins of Ninuan
- you visit or remember a celebration, particularly one well-draped with flowers
- your thoughts are a whirl
- you can't accept that something is as it is/seems to be

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

A Nameless Light (Simplified, Variant)

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25-

BONUS XP

You don't really know what this quest is. You don't really understand what this quest is about.

... it frightens you.

There is something that commands your presence in the world, that calls you out into it, but … you don't understand. There is no "understanding."

There is only fear, and trust.

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (though only once per scene/15 minutes) by talking about your feeling of that. By free-associating about it. If it were sensible, you could use logical words.

If you understood it, you could speak in sense. But it is nameless, and so you can only speak of … pain in the sky, a red current, something calling, something warm ...

Whatever words you fumble through can bring a bonus XP for this quest.

THE CROSSROADS

20 or 35 XP Quest **: 2 : 1 : 3**

You're coming to a crossroads—you'll get there by the end of this quest, if you're not there already.

Both paths are covered in mist. Metaphorically, usually. You can't see the end of either route. But you can see the cost. The costs. The cost, of going either way.

It's pretty high.

Whichever way you go ...

You think it's going to be high.

The Crossroads

PROGRESS GRID – 35 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-20- -25- -30-
○○○○○
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- a greater power—typically, a strong Imperator or higher-*ranked* Excrucian—seeks you out;
- something important to you fails, and that failure wasn't the desired outcome;
- you cringe before an angry diatribe, and can make no good response.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you do the weight of the future is overwhelming
- you do people just don't understand
- you do you are judged and found wanting
- you do you do something in the general oeuvre of working on a bucket list/"making a few last memories"
- you do you walk among rolling hills
- you do you drink iced tea or coffee or some other summer drink
- you do you have a flashback to the Ninuan of long ago

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Can we exempt our mother? Our father? Our favorite foods?

Can we ruin the world, erase all evidence of it, but leave long walks along the Seine? Can we bring this carnival of degradation and monstrosity to an end and yet preserve the orrery and the astrolabe?

The answer is, we cannot; or, we must not dare. It's the fruit of a poisoned tree.

—from The Jeremiad of the Draught, *by Malakai Mesmer*

The Crossroads (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID – 20 XP

○○○○○ ○○○○○ ○○○○○
-05- -10- -15-
○○○○○
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you enter a dark forest;
- a greater power—typically, a strong Imperator or higher-*ranked* Excrucian—seeks you out.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you do you tentatively explore one of the paths before you
- you do someone turns away
- you do your drink or meal has gone cold, warm, or flavorless on the table
- you do you remember something of what led you here

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

THE SHROUDED HILLS

20 or 35 XP Quest : 4 : 4 : 4

You are called away to a beauteous vale to face some ancient, unsleeping foe. You will unlock the hills and go beyond them. You will tread on silvered paths beneath the night.

This may be metaphor. This may be a spiritual struggle, a psychological crisis, or even a mythicized struggle in prosaic Earth.

More likely it is a conflict in Creation's deepest realms, or in Ninuan—a conflict rife with miracles.

The Shrouded Hills

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-20- -25- -30-
O O O O O
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you close something off with a twist of space;
- you walk knowingly into a trap;
- you go beyond the hills;
- you go off alone to face something dangerous. It's fine for story/gameplay reasons if the other PCs are able to show up almost immediately, but that can't be your actual IC plan.

You can earn up to three of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 15 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you take on a challenge you know is beyond you
- you face a vision of yourself
- you're torn
- you lose track of the voices of your friends
- the world is full of silver light
- the sky is red and/or full of teeth
- you go out into the void

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

The Shrouded Hills (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 20 XP

O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O
-05- -10- -15-
O O O O O
-20-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- you confront, in some fashion, yourself;
- you escape a secret realm, and in some fashion "close the door" behind you ... but only just.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when:

- you experience something that teaches you of the challenges ahead
- you overcome some private fault
- you find your way, with your friends' (possibly remembered) guidance
- you make a terrible, but willful, mistake

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Approximately five children in every year depart our world permanently through the Calabasas gate, vanishing (so stories say) into the realm of Skaid. Barring the gate has been ineffective. Even filling it with concrete had no real effect. Neither attempts at secrecy nor open warning have diverted anyone at all. Even the establishment of a small military base with fencing and armed patrols to guard was ineffectual:

Somehow, the better portion of that base and staff has been mislaid.

We have no scientific answers at this time, nor even useful superstitions. It does not radiate. It is one-sided. Equipment goes in but does not return. Our conduit to the Sovereign Powers does not give us any hope at all here; "the gate to Skaid," she says, "may not be sealed by anything that has a home within this world."

—*from* Byways, Gates, and Underworlds: Extradimensional Practice and Law, *by the U.S. Congress Office of Metaphysical Threat Assessment (OMTA-TRA-252)*

THE GREAT WORK

25 or 35 XP Quest 3 3 5

You take something that was broken, damaged, or just let decay, and make it whole and new.

Sometimes it's, like, an artifact. Sometimes, it's an old mistake.

It can even be a whole *set* of things.

... other times, it's you.

The Great Work

PROGRESS GRID - 35 XP

OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO
-05- -10- -15-
OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO
-20- -25- -30-
OOOOO
-35-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when you:

- encounter a bear or bears, particularly if they're in human form;
- visit a legendary mountain;
- find a piece of wondrous cloth.

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

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when you:

- bleed
- travel to a (traditionally, magical) castle
- talk to the sun, moon, or wind
- try to understand something's *reason*
- revisit something you did in an earlier quest, and do it again, only *right*
- give up or sacrifice a bit of yourself
- free, destroy, or transform and free something/someone chained

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

If the Dark Lord Suneric had known back then that he would one day evolve into the hero—he thought—he would have given the dragon that now stood athwart his path rather fewer, and less needle-sharp, teeth.

—*from* FLEW AWAY ON A FLUTTERING WIND, *by Janet Cable*

The Great Work (Simplified)

PROGRESS GRID - 25 XP

OOOOO OOOOO OOOOO
-05- -10- -15-
OOOOO OOOOO
-20- -25-

MAJOR GOALS

The GM can award you 5 XP towards this quest when you:

- bear witness to a fell enchantment;
- sacrifice something of great worth;
- craft a new wonder, particularly out of cloth.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

QUEST FLAVOR

1/chapter, when you're in focus, you can earn 1 XP for yourself and 1 XP for the quest when you:

- ask some mythic figure for their help
- ignore your wounds and troubles and press on
- hear the advice of the sun, moon, or wind
- watch as something is set free
- visit the site of an old mistake

... and so can any other player, 1/chapter, if they substitute their PC for yours or otherwise involve them.

Arcs

Aurica Melsambrian dies by stories, even as humans live by them. Aurica cannot help, each life they live, but to put a narrative to their actions.

They tell themselves the story of their lives. (This, they cannot help but do.) From that story, they build an understanding of themselves. Of where they are going. Of who they ought to be. They weave the pieces of their existence into the great long story of their life.

And this is normal, and healthy, and a form of growth; but, also, it is death—for every story that Aurica tells leads to a messy ending.

—*from* The Wights of Clackamas, *by Ofelia Young*

The Puzzle's Last Piece

The course of a character's story plays out in their **Arcs.**

On a Bindings Arc, they'll learn the secrets of the void. On a Shepherd Arc, they'll immerse themselves in Creation—or, generally, in the fabric of their lives. An Emptiness Arc will concern itself with sorrow, suffering, and the void.

Here's how these stories work in play.

Bindings Arcs

Bindings Arcs focus on sealed, bound powers: in these Arcs, you develop a facility with containment and targeted use of wicked, forbidden, or dangerous things.

They look something like this:

- Quest 1 establishes you as the kind of person who does that.
- Quest 2 lets you help someone or do something important.
- Quest 3 lets you enact a big, decisive plan.

Then, optionally, you can go on to:

- Quest 4, wherein you remake the world into something more like you think it ought to be, *and possibly*
- Quest 5, where you explore the effects that had.

This Arc uses a very loose definition of "wicked, forbidden, or dangerous." The canonical examples are things like *Powers, other Excrucians,* and *creatures of your Sphere...*

But ultimately, as long as you can feel a certain onus, either as a player or as a character, a certain ... sense of the *tabu,* almost anything goes. For instance, this would be the right Arc for training a pet wolf, managing (and possibly reforming) a corruption-riddled enterprise, or acting as the government handler for a reckless kid with reality-shaping powers.

Anything where your *genre* is "the person who tames dangerous/forbidden forces:" this Arc applies.

The innocent playing with forces that would kill anyone else. The pragmatist in control of a ruthless power. The selfish jerk *riding* that power. The person who deals with edge and liminal forces because there's nobody else who can:

All of these things are what a Bindings Arc's about.

That's why these are the Arcs that most often raise **Lore** and Lore-related powers.

These are also the Arcs that raise **Ability.** If you hit a milestone in a Bindings Arc, and it turns out or even looks like you *weren't* really trying to master forbidden powers or push the frontiers of your knowledge; if it turns out that you were really just kind of trying to ... *live* with the fact that there are dangerous and forbidden forces all around you, to *cope* with that ... then it's possible your Ability will rise.

That'll ultimately be up to you, as a player, to decide.

It's fine, if the player is thinking about raising Ability, to grab a character point or two after the first quest and bank them, only raising Ability after the second or even third quest—in fact, the story works a little better that way. Alternatively, of course ... well, there aren't many 50+ XP quests to be found herein, which means there aren't many quests that can *natively* earn 3 CP and raise Ability with a single reward ... but the player can always buy a shorter quest's XP up to 50 with the Costs.

Bindings 1

: 1

A Wicked Partner

You are driven to engage with something forbidden. Or, you find yourself partnered with something *tabu*—e.g., a beast, a Power, a vampire, a witch, a monster, or inhuman god. Do you consider the partnership suspect, or do you personally think it's fine but know that society thinks it's gross? And ... exactly which society?

Reward: you've figured out what you're doing here. You've hammered out a working relationship with it or them.

Alternate Quest: Am I OK?

Are you evil? A bad person? Trouble? Do you even have a *place* in society?

You've been thinking about stuff like that.

Reward: you've come a little more to terms with things.

Bindings 2

: 2

Deep Trouble

You are driven by your better nature to face a challenge that's beyond you. There's someone who needs your help, or something you must do ... usually precisely *because* you work with forbidden things.

You don't know what you're doing. Success may not even be *possible.* But you're going to try.

... though your methods, most likely, are wrong.

Result: you're oriented now. You have a plan.

Alternate Quest: This is Fixable

You are driven by your better nature to face a serious but solvable challenge. There's someone who needs your help, or something you must do ... usually precisely *because* you work with forbidden things.

It'll be *tough*, but you know what to do.

Reward: you've tangibly helped them or made tangible progress ... though your means may not have been the most presentable ones.

Bindings 3

: 3

You risk yourself on a complicated and difficult plan. Usually you know what you're doing, and you're doing it right, but you're doing something so hard and complicated that you might lose midway through anyway.

Result: you win! ...unless you already lost. If you already lost, finishing this quest results in the ongoing catastrophe staggering to its natural halt, instead.

Bindings 4

: 4

You're making a proactive choice or gamble. You've decided to fix things, *change* things, or reveal the truth of how they already are.

Reward: you made an impact. You changed things. Was it right to do so? Time will tell.

Bindings 5

: 5

The Aftermath

You explore the consequences of a big decision you made for somebody else.

Result: it's time to turn your attention to something new.

Alternate Quest: the Axis of the World or Void

You become, or take up your mantle as, part of the axis of the world or void—e.g., the chain that holds evil at bay, the order that holds Ninuan together, the power that binds all nightmares away from Cneph's reality, or that which makes what is alive to live.

Reward: you fulfill a key cosmos-stabilizing task.

She scratched it out on the chalkboard. PROFESSOR SCORILAN.

"As some of you know," she said, "I came from the void. I am, in the parlance, a bleak divinity, and I can take things apart with my eyes."

She glanced at one of the empty chairs and it crumbled; flicked her eyes up to a halogen and it sputtered out.

"But it turns out that taking things apart with your eyes is philosophically meaningless," she said. "We'll get into that a little later on. Just killing something without engaging with it properly, it turns out—that's as empty as the void itself. So today I'm not here to take things apart, and you're going to have to hold questions on the emptiness until the end."

She turned. She smiled. Her grin was blinding.

"Today, we study philosophy!"

—from Summer Break (Summer/OC), *by Kelly Wickline*

opposite: *by Melissa Spandri*

Shepherd Arcs

Shepherd Arcs teach you to guard things, guide things, and wake powers in things. They're about taking care of others.

Usually that starts like this:

- Quest 1: you're living your ordinary life...
  - and then a new responsibility falls on you out of nowhere.

And one could debate whether the real *beginning* of the Arc is in quest 1 or that moment at its very end when suddenly everything is different.

After that, anyway, there's

- Quest 2: you struggle with stuff.
- Quest 3: you face, and *almost* conquer, some trouble from your past.

And that's the simplest form of the Arc. After that, your life could slip back to its normal course. Or, of course, you could go a little further:

- Quest 4: you travel strange worlds, fight epic battles, and otherwise face big tests, *and*
- Quest 5: you're living an extraordinary life.

These are tough and ill-fated Arcs, because it is not a Strategist's nature to embrace the world, but there's a thread of optimism that runs through them ne'ertheless.

That's why these are the Arcs that most often raise **Flore** and Flore-related powers.

Shepherd 1

: 1

This is the story of your ordinary life—the everyday work, stresses, and pleasures that form the fabric of your days.

Result: The world intrudes. You're left with a new burden or responsibility.

Shepherd 2

: 2

You're having a little trouble keeping your life on an even keel.

Result: You're doing OK, but there's a big challenge coming up.

The Strategists may live long, slow, simple, and peaceful lives, but an ill fate dogs their heels:

The poison that is in them will, given time, seep into the soil of the land they tend.

There is no preventing this. There is no severing them from this fate. Their only option is to find a way to take that bitter brew, and make it sweet.

—*from* Vintage: How the World's Rarest and Most Mysterious Wines and Other Beverages are Made, *by Carlene Hunt*

Shepherd 3

: 3

Absolution

There's something haunting you from the past, but you've got the chance to make it right.

Result: You almost make it, but it's snatched away from you.

Alternate Quest: an Extraordinary Life

This is the story of your extraordinary life—the larger-than-life magic, battles, and wonder that form the fabric of your days.

Result: Tragedy. Something happens worthy of seeking revenge for. Often, but not always, you will find a great opportunity or a treasure here ... at the cost of a place, or people, that you cared about.

Shepherd 4

: 4

You're facing a big challenge or adventure.

Result: It ends. You bring it to a conclusion. It is possible, perhaps, to return to an ordinary life again ... at least, for a while.

Shepherd 5

: 5

You've become a new person—a stronger, better person. Isn't it awesome?

Result: You create or do something amazing and revolutionary. Often, though, it's understated—you've left behind great heroism and wickedness for the earlier stages of the Arc, and now you're just being cool.

Emptiness Arcs

Emptiness Arcs are full of the power of the Not:

The gentle, moonlit power of Ninuan, that preceded the world, that lacks nothing in its virtue, for that it is not wrong; the aching empty power of *something missing,* of *something made as not;* the tide of grief; the bleak and cutting cold of winter; death.

These are the Arcs of dream and sorrow, destruction and contagion, and the nothingness beyond the world.

That's why these are the Arcs that most often raise **Eide, Wyrd,** and associated powers.

In practice, Emptiness Arcs are generally character and setting pieces—

While stuff *does* happen in them, and you *do* change and grow during them, the change is handled delicately; the *focus* of the story is a slice of life exploration of the basic status quo. That is, in an Emptiness Arc, you'll see a sequence like:

- Quest 1 explores how you live with what you are.
- Quest 2 explores your obsession with some person or problem.
- Quest 3 puts you in an impossible situation and watches as you crack under the strain.

And sometimes you'll follow this with:

- Quest 4, where you face a brooding presence of the unnatural; *and maybe*
- Quest 5, where you find answers or reach closure on something.

Emptiness Arcs assume that there is something wrong with you or the world around you. There's something hollow, alien, broken, or twisted. You're corrupt, or sick, or you have this damage or trauma in you that you can't ever completely fix.

For most Strategists, that's just ... the infection. But it doesn't have to be.

Sometimes these Arcs are about grief, or loss, or ... well, emptiness, instead.

Emptiness 1 ⚇: 1

This quest is about the daily routine of living with the broken, damaged, or Not-touched elements of your life. It may also touch on the lives of others in similar situations. A big focus on clothing, mealtimes, and having philosophical discussions while sitting on the edge of a cliff is common.

Result: You make a change in your life.

Emptiness 2 ⚇: 2

There's something you can't stop thinking about—it absorbs your thoughts, it obsesses you, it's sucking you into the abyss of its enigmas, emptiness, and strangeness.

Outcome: Your ordinary life stops feeling safe/normal/ok to you.

Emptiness 3 ⚇: 3

You're trying to cope with an impossible situation. This quest spends a lot of time on your emotional state, your memories, and your history as you do.

Result: You remember something important that you'd forgotten, and make a decision on how to deal with it.

Emptiness 4 ⚇: 4

You deal directly with something unnatural—pacifying it, taming it, or maybe struggling and losing against it.

Reward: You find "the key to the world"—something mysterious but which seems to hold the key to making your life, or the things around you, have more value to you.

Emptiness 5 ⚇: 5

Solutions

You find out what to do, moving forward.

Reward: You gain a sense of completion.

Alternate Quest: Answers

You tackle a mystery that's been bugging you for a long time—something where *not knowing* has been driving your character Arc and hurting you. It's often a social or emotional thing, or a senseless crime, but it could also be a scientific mystery.

Reward: You find the answers that you needed.

Susan wrestles against the stormy sea of grief that beats against the shore that is her world.

It has been reified. It has been made flesh, rather than emotion, and then turned to water. It has been cast out into the chasm past the shore. And it was supposed to have ended then, to have left her and become well forever, then, but it did not leave. It did not die. It only hungered to return.

How many centuries? How many millennia?

For aeons it evaporated faster than she could ever hope to bleed it down, but then that changed. For aeons it was just a glimmering dark puddle at the chasm's center, at its base; but now that's changed too.

Now the skies are full of Susan's grief, and the chasm at the edge of Susan's world has become a surging sea, and as she stares at it, as she wrestles it back with the power of her name, she cannot understand. She cannot understand why her perfectly healthy emotional management system is somehow, still, failing to succeed.

—*from* The Mountain-Wight, *by Giskard Greene*

Rule One

the world is beautiful

Nikmoda Ranlin, who dies of Delight

Naming Conventions among the Ninuanni (abridged)

The edge of the world is a mirroring flame,
and its shattering pieces
write Ninuan's name

and the fluttering wings
and the shadow of dread
and "a name is a sword"—

so the Strategist said.

—from the Revelation of Gretchen Smith

Introduction

The Glitched are a pancultural phenomenon. A Strategist born on Earth is more likely to be Indian or Chinese than anything else, with Americans only recently struggling up to a distant third. A Strategist *found* on Earth may also be from any era or any world upon the Ash. It's traditional for the sake of relatability for PC and even NPC demographics to skew unrealistically close to home—for relatively few Strategists to be from weird otherworlds of floating trees and bee worshippers, and for more Strategists than you'd expect to be fundamentally acculturated to the players' context or to the contexts that the players know—but this is a shift, a change of balance; it's not a complete rewriting of the world.

Readers may, then, be justifiably surprised by the Gothic-adjacent names that have been used throughout this text, and it is worth establishing that this is a sort of convention of translation. The *structure* that will be explained below for Excrucian names is meant to be valid, if simplified—a legitimate explanation of a portion of the culture of the Not. The details, however ... the syllables, the sounds, the methods for combining them ... are very much an artistic choice:

The Goths are, to the best of the author's ability to determine, extinct, and functionally immune to slander; as the architects of the fall of Rome, their reputation in Western society is not the best; their names are close enough to English names that the author can have some sense of them; and, finally, those names have in them an ominous, archaic feel that is fitting to the aesthetic of the game.

Because this is merely an artistic choice, players need not adhere to it in order to play **Glitch** correctly, or even canonically; if a player or group feels confident in manufacturing appropriately ominous and archaic names using classical Chinese, Sanskrit, or any other language of antiquity (extant or otherwise), they may do so, either within or without the general system as laid out below. For that matter, modern names and names of purest fantasy *are* perfectly acceptable—whether that means something like "Hayden Hatcher" or more like "Lerisenth a-Ren."

All that said, let us speak of traditional Excrucian names.

opposite: *by Jenn Manley Lee*

"Name?" he said. His voice was fire and brass.

She gave him an agonized look.

He waited a regulation eight seconds. Then: "Name?"

"It is not that I cannot tell you," she explained. She was sweating. "It is that it will destroy your ears, and this building we're in, to hear..."

—from Tin and Cloud City, *by L. Sharon Capri*

Origins

Excrucians arrive at their names inherently—they are intrinsic to their dream. In this, they are like any other creature of the Not:

They are not the product of causal processes, but sorted into adjacency by the correlative continuum.

That said, it is traditional that they do not *conceive* of themselves as springing entirely from nothing; that they identify themselves as having *an* origin, however murky, in the void. It is rare for the royalty of Ninuan to *have* extant family, or even clear memories thereof, and many of them trace their origins to natural processes or elemental forces in one way or another instead—they are native spirits of some silvered forest, river-stones awakened, or, e.g., the children of a dragon and a spear—but it is still often possible for an Excrucian to point to a dynasty that they emerged from, or participated in; a region and an era from which they have emerged. Their names are not names that they chose themselves, but names that were *given* them: by parents; by rumors; by subjects; or by enemies.

Other times, of course, it is not so clear.

Other times, a Strategist may emerge from the murk of the past or the murk of utter unbeing—unbeing even of their Eide and Wyrd—with no memory of their ancient name, or no belief they ever wore one. They are forced to name themselves, or *re*name themselves, after their resurrection in the world. In such cases, they may choose a name that well reflects themselves ... or something ironic, or deceptive; idealistic, or tongue-in-cheek.

Many of the names that you'll see below are not names that you would expect people to wear by choice. Who would set out to be Tainitheus, loosely meaning *treacherous vizier?* Or Abhilash, *lovable fool caught up in worldly things?*

Surely it would be better to name one's child, or oneself, something bold and vigorous, like *ceaseless crown?*

... but traditionally it's considered gauche to mock someone *for* their name, although it's fair game to mock them *with* it; it is fair game to tell an Abhilash that they're living up to their name on a given occasion, but not to dismiss them *as* an Abhilash simply because that is their name. This, while a social convention—never universal, and never binding—generally leaves enough scope for a playful, or reclaimed, or contrasting, or outright honest name. An Excrucian may be named Tainitheus to remind them to be honest; because it was the name of their notional grandfather; as a kind of aspirational incentive to be clever; or as an excuse (a rather poor excuse) to roll their eyes at anyone who dares to trusts their word.

First Names

These names are not divided by gender; a name that sounds appropriate for a given PC or NPC and their gender, presumptively, is. This is not to say that Excrucians do not make such distinctions—there *are* names that sound, e.g., more masculine or more feminine to them. Rather, this text has no interest in reducing its practical value by defining those names in advance.

The standard pattern for a Strategist given name is a primary element, optionally followed by an interstitial vowel—particularly if the primary element didn't end in one—and concluded by a secondary element. Sometimes, if it feels right, the first consonant of the second element will be doubled or a doubled consonant or vowel resulting from a pairing will be removed.

The end result is a name that combines two meanings, and can be read three ways.

The first reading is orthographic or phonological—"Eber-" + "-wulf" can be read, of course, as *Eberwulf.*

The second reading is semantic: the prefix "Eber-" can be interpreted as *boar,* and the suffix "-wulf" as *wolf* or *hound;* thus, "Eber-" + "-wulf" can also be read as "boar-hound."

The third way to read a name is stichic: it is the *luthe* or *cadenza.*

By convention, each of the thousands of recognized Ninuanni name elements is tied to a specific poetic phrase (or, in rarer cases, several); the stichic reading is to pair them up and read the two together.

How much does the stichic reading matter?

The older an Excrucian—principally in terms of their pre-Creation existence; that is, the older the era they hail from, and the longer they were alive there—the more fussy and stuffy about it they are likely to be. True ancients may frown on "incorrect" breathing patterns in the recitation of a *luthe,* even when one's own; the youngest Excrucians may not even know what a *luthe is.*

... but for anyone who is reasonably familiar with the tradition, the *luthe* is considered a part of the name; as much a part of it as its spelling, as its sound, as its meaning. Thus, an Excrucian with a proper Ninuanni name will generally think of their own *luthe* as such.

For Eberwulf, the *luthe*—technically, the translated version—is:

Yellow tusks, now deep-dyed red:
A hungry thing is howling.

This is its third, and final, reading.

In most cases, for most names, there will be multiple versions of each element available. For instance, "Eber-" is

comparable to "Ebr-." "-wulf" can equally well be "-olf." The names available through different combinations of identical elements are known as *luthe*-mates; a λ-person is considered to have a kind of kinship to others who share any of these variations, and it is understood as less dramatic than a full name change to shift one's name around within that set.

Occasionally a name will have no second element, only the primary element and an optional interstitial vowel. The handling for those names will be discussed under **Simple Diminutives,** below.

Primary Elements

A list of common Excrucian name elements, and their meanings, follows.

This list, for clarity, is not comprehensive; regional and obscure elements are abundant within the void, as are long- or short-term divergences from proper practice owing to sloppy implementation or understanding. If a player wishes to invent the name element "Raud-," meaning "Rowan," and treat it as a genuine name of Ɲinuanni provenance ... they may do so in full confidence.

Each name element is provided meaning first, followed by a list of roots. In some cases brackets will provide an alternate or refined version of the element's meaning; this can be read directly before the meaning of the secondary element. For instance, while "Sidi-" means, and definitely *does* mean, "canon," and thus "Sidiwulf" can be read as "canon-wolf" ... it can *also* be read as "ways of the wolf," a generally less confusing reading.

Note that only the orthographical and semantic readings will be given; the *luthe* is for the player to provide.

Aesthetic ..... *Fred-, Fret-, Frid-, Frit-*
Ancient ..... *Ald-; Cam-, Gamal-*
Army
[(the) army's] ..... *Ar-, Arg-, Har-, Harja-*
Attention ..... *Aid-, Ed-*
Axe-Blood ..... *Bil-, Bel-, Pel-*
Battle ..... *Ad-, Hadu-, Hath-;*
..... *Ba-, Bad-, Bat-, Paid-, Pat-*
Beauty
[beautiful] ..... *Beu-*
Beloved ..... *Leov-, Leub-, Liuv-*
Bold
[bold / belt-] ..... *Balt-, Balth-*
Blade
[blade-strewn] ..... *As-*
Blessed ..... *Ala-, Alla-, Alo-*
Boar ..... *Eber-, Ebr-*
Brave ..... *Amal-, Athal-, Ata-;*
..... *Amm-, Hem-; Hart-, Herle-*
Bright ..... *Glad-*
Burning ..... *Bran-, Brands-; Gabr-*
Canon
[way(s) of (the)] ..... *Sidi-, Sido-, Situ-*
Ceaseless ..... *Fasti-, Fravi-*
Child [of (the)] ..... *Chi-, Ci-, K-*
Clothing [of (the)] ..... *Vada-*
Cold ..... *Col-*
Comrade ..... *Gad-, Gat-, Gath-*
Corn
[corn of (the) / wheat of (the)] ..... *Cor-*
Cosmic ..... *Como-*
Damaged ..... *Tair-*
Dawn ['s] ..... *Seg-, Sig-, Sigis-*
Deathwright ['s] ..... *Tarbi-, Tharbi-, Tribi-*
Dedication
[dedicated to (the)] ..... *Vil-, Wilg-*
Desert ..... *Aor-, Aur-, Oer-, Ur-*
Descending/Falling ..... *Drus-, Dres-, Drais-*
Dominion ['s] ..... *Czon-, Sthen-*
Double ..... *Du-*
Dreadful ..... *Cad-*
Dream ..... *Eid-*
Dream-drenched
[(the) dream-drenched] .....
..... *Chlod-, Chloth-, Hloth-, Hlud-, Hle-, Le-;*
..... *Hraid-, Hreid-, Hroth-, Hruoth-, Roth-,*
..... *Rothes-, Rod-, Ruod-, Rud-; Mar-*
Eastern ..... *Astro-, Ostro-*
Ego ..... *Scal-, Scel-, Scar-*
Elevated ..... *Hach-*
Emanation [of (the)] ..... *Clar-*
Enormous ..... *Abr-, Aber-*
Eternal ..... *Eo-, Eu-, Euth-, Ev-, I-, Io-, Iu-, Iv-*
Extreme ..... *Magn-*
Famine-bringing ..... *Hun-*

Notes

BELT (Balt-/Balth-): In the time before the time *before* time, the "Balt-" root principally referred to sword-belts, and in particular to sword-belts containing not active weapons but the seething dream-potential for them. In the era from which most Strategists originate, the root means "bold," instead. It's usually somewhere between teasing and outright offensive to refer back to the old meaning, but obviously much depends on the rest of the name: *Baltemaris,* reinterpreted as sheath-fever, is distinctly vulgar; *Balthila,* reinterpreted as belt-crown, is just a little odd.

CORN (Cor-): The "Cor-" root is usually interpreted as "corn," but in fact the grainfields of the Ɲot principally grow cereal grains that are foreign to the farmland of the world. *Golden grain* might be a more accurate translation, with some points that lean towards it being corn-like but others that would encourage wariness in the gluten-free; to complicate things further, the word is often coopted for the local grain—possibly with, and possibly without, an adjective—in various scattered corners of the Ɲot.

FANTASTIC ..... *Recca-, Recce-, Reki-, Reic-, Rici-, Riq-*
FAST-MOVING ..... *Ra-, Ran-, Rana-, Rani-*
FEARSOME ..... *Mata-*
FEAST
[DINNER-] ..... *Namat-*
FICKLE ..... *Alb-, Av-*
FIGHTING ..... *Gonth-, Gund-, Gunt-, Gunth-*
FOREIGN ..... *Ali-, Erland-*
FOREST ..... *Ved-, Vet-, Vid-, Vit-, Vith-, Wit-, Witt-*
FORMLESS ..... *Pelen-*
FORTHCOMING ..... *Bi-*
FUZZY ..... *Lamp-*
GENEROUS ..... *Gaf-, Geb-, Gef-*
GENTLE/KIND ..... *Sel-*
GHOST ..... *Gual-, Qual-, Val-, Wal-*
GLEAMING ..... *Glis-*
GOLDEN ..... *Corin-*
GOOD ..... *Go-, God-, Godi-, Goi-, Gud-*
GREAT ..... *Erman-, Herman-, Hermen-, Hermin-*
GRIM ..... *Gal-*
GRINDER [OF (THE)] ..... *Mal-*
GUARDIAN ['S] ..... *Hleo-, Leo-*
HAND ..... *Teik-, Tex-*
HARSH ..... *Ard-, Aurd-, Aord-, Ord-*
HEART ['S] ..... *Kar-*
HELM
[MASK-WEARING / HAT-WEARING] ..... *Grim-, Griem-, Kriem-*
HIDDEN ..... *Fel-, Fil-, Fili-*
HOME-BREWED ..... *Gai-*
HOME ['S] ..... *Emm-, Heim-*
INFUSED ..... *Cast-, Gast-*
INHERITED ..... *Ath-*
INNER ..... *Semse-*
IRON ..... *Eisarn-, Esme-, Hisarn-*
JOYFUL ..... *Guin-, Quin-, Vin-, Vinid-, Vinith-*
KIN [TO (THE)] ..... *Cuni-*
LAW [OF (THE)] ..... *Dulci-, Dolci-, Ducli-, Dukli-*
LIKENESS
[LIKE (A/AN/THE)] ..... *Lec-, Leik-, Lex-, Lic-, Liec-*
LITTLE ..... *Un-*
LORE-KEEPER'S ..... *Gan-*
LOSTLING ['S] ..... *Cec-*
MAJESTIC ..... *Valens-, Valent-*
MANOR ['S] ..... *Sa-, Sala-, Salla-*
MERRY ..... *Gail-, Gel-*
MY ..... *Khe-, Ky-; Sue-*
NASCENT ..... *Pep-*
NEST ['S] ..... *Nida-*
NOT ..... *Goma-, Ni-*
ONE
[A SINGLE / SINGULAR] ..... *Aun-, On-*
ORACLE [OF (THE)] ..... *Cixi-*
PEOPLE
[THE PEOPLE'S] ..... *Folch-; Laod-, Leud-, Liut-*
PEOPLE OF THE END
[(secondary) OF THE PEOPLE OF THE END] ..... *Galin-, Galind-*
PEOPLE OF THE VOID
[(secondary) OF THE PEOPLE OF THE VOID] ..... *Caud-, Gaud-, Gaut-, Gouth-, Joce-*
PILLAR ['S] ..... *Tul-*
PLAY
[GAMING (THE)] ..... *Helde-, Heldu-, Hilde-, Ildi-*
PRECIOUS ..... *Pras-*
PRODIGIOUS ..... *Thoris-, Thraus-, Thraf-, Thur-, Thuris-, Tur-, Turis-*
PROMISED ..... *Aithan-, Atan-, Athan-, Tan-*
RAT ['S] ..... *Raus-, Res-*
REDEMPTION
[REDEEMER OF (THE)] ..... *Gist-, Qist-*
REFORGED ..... *Haid-*
REMNANT [OF (THE)] ..... *An-*
REQUIEM [FOR (THE)] ..... *Sis-; Ses-*
RESTFUL ..... *Rhim-*
RESULT
[BECAUSE OF THAT WHOLE THING WITH (THE)] ..... *Ioch-, Yoch-*
RING-SHAPED ..... *Baug-; Hring-, Ring-*
RIVER ..... *Ib-*
ROYAL ..... *Aquinc-, Quinc-*
RUINED ..... *Laid-, Laith-*

Notes

FORMLESS (Pelen-): There is a certain, somewhat religious aspect to the Ninuanni concept of formlessness; it ties to their concept of the void itself as a progenitive, fruitful, life-giving power. Thus, for instance, the name "Pelengard" (formless house) would be understood not so much as "a house with a really terrible architect" or "a house with the power of transformation" but as a house with that power of origination in itself: e.g., the internal halls of spirit; the void itself; or, an idealized school that cultivates the soul.

INFUSED (Cast-/Gast-): The "infusion" referred to by this name element is almost always the same infusion described in **Lore** (pg. 205)—an alchemical process, a work of magic, and not the more generalized English meaning of the term. The penumbra of the concept does extend beyond that power, and does touch upon some of the same ideas ... it is possible to imagine a non-magical infusion of, say, speed, or tea, that a person of Ninuan describes with similar language or even references outright in a *Cast-/Gast*-name ... but an extension of this sort is rather rare.

NOT (Goma-/Ni-): The Ninuanni understand the word "Not-", or the similar prefix "λ-", in a subtly different fashion than those of Creation. To them, its primary meaning is not *nonexistence*: λ-being is, after all, the closest thing *to* existence they knew before the world was born. Rather, it's about a kind of purity *in* being, untouched by causal localization within Creation's sphere. (More broadly, of course, it expresses the technical and objective categorization of an entity as originating from the void, and not the world.)

SACRAL ..... *Himne-, Hine-, Hinne-*
SAPPHIRE ..... *Saf-, Saph-, Sav-*
SATED ..... *Sada-*
SCHOLAR [OF (THE)] ..... *Canna-, Canno-, Cn-*
SEIZE [THE] ..... *In-, Ind-*
SEXTUPLE ..... *Sen-*
SHELL-COVERED ..... *Brun-*
SHINING ..... *Luc-*
SICKLE ..... *Gals-*
SILVERED
[(THE) SILVERED] ..... *Silf-, Silv-*
SPEAR ..... *Gals-, Gen-, Gens-, Ges-, Gis-, Giso-, Geis-*
SPLENDROUS ..... *Vult-, Vultu-; Ultro-*
STOMACH ..... *Vamb-, Wamb-*
STRATEGIST ['S] ..... *Mod-, Modah-, Mon-, Mun-, Mund-; Tancr-*
STRONG ..... *Kad-, Vald-; Suatri-*
SUBLIME ..... *Ercan-, Erchen-, Eorcen-; Helchen-*
SUMMER ['S] ..... *Chinda-; Sans-*
TAMELESS ..... *Hed-, Het-*
TANGLED ..... *Bess-*
TEARFUL ..... *Grad-, Grat-*
TEMPORAL ..... *Chron-*
THREADBARE ..... *Fa-, Pha-, Tas-, Zaz-*
THORN-COVERED ..... *Sar-, Ser-*
THUNDEROUS ..... *Theod-, Theud-, Thiud-, Tot-*
TORMENTED ..... *Lod-*
TOWER
[(secondary)'s TOWER] ..... *Cl-; Madel-*
TRANSIENT ..... *Hlith-, Lith-*
TRAVELER ['S] ..... *Farn-, Fran-*
TREASURED ..... *Ans-, Os-, Osd-*
TRIPLE ..... *Tri-*
TREACHEROUS ..... *Tain-*
TUFF[57] ..... *Tuf-*
UNRIVALED ..... *Visi-*
UNWATCHED
[(THE) UNWATCHED] ..... *Cel-, Kall-*
URGED [TO (THE)] ..... *Hrad-, Rad-, Rag-, Ragin-, Ragn-, Rat-, Ret-; Radis-; Re-*
VALUING THE WORLDLY ..... *Gild-*
VAMPIRE
[(THE) VAMPIRIC] ..... *Bruc-*
VICTORY [OF (THE)] ..... *Nik-; Send-, Sind-, Sint-; Si-*
VIRTUOUS ..... *Aria-*
VOICE [OF (THE)] ..... *Ced-, Ceth-*
WANDERER ['S] ..... *Guandal-, Vandal-, Vandil-*
WAR ..... *Er-, Era-, Ere-, Eri-, Her-; Euse-*
WATCH
[EYES ON (THE)] ..... *Sun-, Sunn-*
WATERY VOID ..... *Lag-*
WEALTH
[WEALTH BRINGS (THE)] ..... *Adh-, Aud-, Od-, Or-*
WILD ..... *Bair-, Ber-, Bera-, Bere-, Beri-, Beru-, Bess-*
WIND-BLOWN ..... *Thras-, Thrasa-*

57 A light, porous rock.

Notes

SCHOLAR (Canna-, Canno, Cn-): Note that the name "Cneph," *scholar of perseverance,* has fallen out of use in the modern day, owing to Cneph's Creation of the world; in general, if a Strategist was named that, they will use the name no longer—either switching to a *luthe*-mate name like *Cannofrid* or abandoning their original name entirely.

SICKLE (Gals-): Note that this element is shared with "spear;" characters with sickle names may use the meaning and create a *luthe* for the spear, instead.

SUMMER (Chinda-/Sans-): This element can also—rarely—mean "regent['s]."

TANGLED (Bess-): Note that this element is shared with "wild;" characters with tangled names may opt to use the meaning and create a *luthe* for wildness, instead.

WORLD (Ab-/Abh-/Avh-): In the days before Creation, this name element meant "folly;" it was represented predominantly by the root word "Avh."

UNKNOWN (Ao-/Au-/O-): The base meaning of this name root has been lost, save for the vague understanding that it has something to do with desires or with wishes. This meaning appears, in fact, to be either hazardous or ineffable information; attempts to dig into the matter with divination have either failed, run up against a wall of scholarly dispute, or undermined the cognitive function of the researcher. This has not stopped the parents of ancient times, modern self-naming Strategists, and other sources of Ninuanni names from using this root, however, producing a name with known sound, spelling, and possibly a *luthe* ... but a poorly-defined or unclear meaning.

Sadly, acquiring John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt's name does not also grant one his immortality; not long after, one will always die, meeting the inevitable fate of mortal jinglers.

—*from* Further Notes,
by K. C. Danine

WOLF/HOUND ..... *Ulf-, Wulf-*
WORLD-ENDING ..... *Ach-, Act-, Oct-; Ag-, Agn-, Eg-; Agr-; Ei-*
WORLD ['S] ..... *Ab-, Abh-, [Avh-]*
WYRD ..... *Vyrd-, Wyrd-, Wyrth-, Yrd-*
WYRDLING ['S] ..... *Carl-, Cyril-*
WYRM ..... *Drog-*
YES, BUT ...
[YES, BUT WHAT ABOUT (THE)] ..... *Gaath-, Gaatha-, Gutth-*
YOUNG ..... *Te-, The-, Thi-; Ving-, Wing-; Jung-*

UNKNOWN ..... *Ao-, Au-, O-*

Secondary Elements

The secondary elements of Excrucian names function much like the primary. They do, however, have a tendency to be somewhat simpler in *luthe*. It is also rare for a secondary element's framing to differ from its primary meaning.

Secondary elements occur after the primary element in all but the rarest and most exceptional of cases. This is not to say that there cannot be an Excrucian out there who inverts them—Covefamar instead of Marcovefa, or whatnot—but in no case is this the culturally accepted norm.

As noted earlier, it is acceptable to preface a secondary element with a bonus vowel; in certain cases, a doubled vowel or consonant may be made singular, or the first consonant of the secondary element will be doubled, at the point where the two elements are joined.

Much like the list of primary elements, the list below is not comprehensive; it covers only the name elements in common use or with a widely-known and agreed-upon interpretation. These elements are:

Abscess ..... *-covefa*
Army ..... *-airh, -aris, -arius, -ares, -eiro*
Battlefield ..... *-bad, -baudes; -gond, -gund, -gunde; -had; -va, -vig, -wig*
Bean ..... *-bian*
Border
[border(-keeper)] ..... *-marca, -marka, -merca*
Charge ..... *-vindra*
Child ..... *-chan, -chun, -cine, -kun*
Chrysalis ..... *-man*
Clay ..... *-cadican, -gadigan*
Commander ..... *-aric, -eric, -ric, -rich, -ricus, -ry*
Consort ..... *-vius, -viv*
Crown ..... *-iel, -iela, -il, -ila, -uil, -uila*
Daring ..... *-bald; -anda, -nand, -nanda, -nant, -nanta*
Day ..... *-dag, -dagis, -tag, -tach*
Death ..... *-das, -thas*
Desire ..... *-gern, -digern*
Destroyer ..... *-ariman*
East ..... *-ester, -estre*
Elegy ..... *-treik, -tric, -trix; -vayne*
Ending ..... *-ander*
Enemy ..... *-drasteia*
Feast ..... *-nault*
Fever ..... *-mar, -maris, -mer, -meris, -mers, -mir, -miris; -quevir*
Fire ..... *-brand*
Flowers ..... *-kai*
Forest ..... *-vid, -vida*
Game ..... *-hild, -hilda, -hilt, -ilda, -ildi*
Good ..... *-co; -gud; -mad, -maph, -math*
Grave ..... *-stila, -stilla, -vald*
Greed ..... *-avi*
Guard ..... *-senta, -sontha, -suentha, -suintha, -suntha, -svintha, -swinth, -swintha, -swinthe, -swith*
Guest ..... *-gast, -gaster, -gastes; -bastus*
Hat
[hat / helm / mask] ..... *-elm*
Heart ..... *-hard, -hart*
Honor ..... *-rin, -rina, -ryna*
House ..... *-gard, -garde*
Joy ..... *-uin, -win*
Justice ..... *-ce*
Keep ..... *-bur, -but, -buth; -bod; -rebic*
Life ..... *-an, -ana, -en, -enne, -ian, -iana, -ienne; -gaya, -geniya*
Light ..... *-de*
Likeness ..... *-lec, -leik*
Local aristocrat
[see notes] ..... *-dau, -dav, -dava*
Love ..... *-bia, -leova, -leuva, -lieva, -liva, -live, -luva*
Merriment ..... *-ba, -bas, -bias, -bius*
Monster ..... *-is*
One
[(one)] ..... *-in, -'in*
see Nominalizing, in Diminutives, below.
Passage ..... *-blid, -hlida, -hlith, -hlitha, -litha, -lithae*
Peace ..... *-sten, -stena, -stina*

Notes

***CONSORT (-vius, -viv)*:** A reference to archaic marriage customs. The definitive examplar of this element would be "Matavius"—consort to a notional ruler of the endless Not—"whose veil was trickling serpent's blood and whose crown was an iron tower:" a surprisingly frequent and well-respected figure in children's tales.

***LOCAL ARISTOCRAT (-dau, -dav, -dava)*:** The title of "local aristocrat" has no single specific translation—in European terms, it can correspond to ranks ranging from burgher to earl, depending on the region it's attached to, when it fits well to European terms at all. Thus, the exact framing for this element is highly variable, and a player can pick essentially any minor title that attracts them (or just go with "local aristocrat.") *Pelidava*, for instance, might translate into "axe-blood count;" *Oeridau* into "desert bourgeoisie;" and *Ariadav* into "virtuous city-specific aristocrat whose title does not translate well" ... it's all in the player's hands.

***SEA (-sius)*:** This is more specifically a reference to Ersius or Hreidius, the western sea—known for its greenish waters that shine with light and its shore, that is rich with bone.

***UNKNOWN (-pa, -pas)*:** Scraps of old documents and hints of memory suggest that this root exists, and is not just a misspelling of some other element, but nobody knows its meaning or its *luthe*. The prevailing theory is that it has something to do with shirts or coats, but it's not a very strong one, and Strategists with this element in their names usually either make up their own *luthe* and meaning or just refuse to talk about such things.

"But why did the summoning fail?" cried the cultist. "I performed each step unto perfection!"

"Meaning exists in combination, sir," the ata-daemon said.

—from A Child's First Book of Forbidden Rituals, *by Verdant Garden Press*

Perseverance ..... *-fredus, -frid, -fridia, -frida, -frithila, -fidil, -ph, -phrasia*
(λ-)person ..... *-gotha, -gotho, -gothus, -goto*
Place ..... *-nuan*
Play ..... *-gisclus, -gisel, -gisklos*
Possessive case [('s)] ..... *-im*
Power ..... *-ker*
Prize ..... *-gelda, -gelis, -gild, -gilda, -gildus*
Raven ..... *-hrabans, -hrams, -ram, -ravans*
Rider ..... *-rit; -sind, -sinda*
Salvation ..... *-nas*
Sea [sea / waves] ..... *-sius*
Self ..... *-sicus*
Slaughter ..... *-da, -do, -to, -tta, -tto*
Softness ..... *-lind*
Soul ..... *-sael, -sila, -sula*
Spear ..... *-gais, -gaisus, -gaith, -gaithus, -geis, -geisus, -ges, -gesus, -gid, -gidus, -gis, -gisus; -gares; -za*
Splendor ..... *-vult*
Staff ..... *-rung*
Straightaway ..... *-rago, -rax*
Strategy ..... *-mod, -moda, -mond, -mud, -mund, -munds, -mut*
Strength ..... *-fortis; -trude*
Thunder ..... *-donia*
Triad ..... *-trius, -terius*
Transformation ..... *-goia*
Treasure-house ..... *-archos; -ark, -arkos, -arkus*
Valley ..... *-del, -dela, -dila*
Vision ..... *-red, -rev, -rid, -rida, -ridius, -ridus, -rith*
Vizier ..... *-dia, -té, -teus, -theus, -thia, -tius, -tis, -zia*
Void ..... *-nnia, -nia, -nya*
Watchfulness ..... *-acer, -vacar, -vara, -vera*
Weaponry ..... *-sar*
Welcome ..... *-berg, -berga, -verga*
West ..... *-stria*
Wolf/hound ..... *-olf, -ulf, -wulf*
Unknown [???] ..... *-pa, -pas*

Diminutives

Traditionally a diminutive form of an Excrucian name—used in familiar contexts, among friends and family; rarely, as a pejorative—replaces the second element with one of the diminutive elements discussed below. This is an art and not a science:

To grasp exactly *which* diminutives go well with *which* primary elements, and when, and why, and when one should change (or add, or erase) the interstitial vowel, requires the kind of deep familiarity with the Ninuanni language which the players can acquire only by assertion: by deciding that the way they *feel* it should be done is obviously the actual and appropriate way to do it, correcting or not correcting and laughing or not laughing at the attempts of Creational NPCs to do the same.

If a player believes the correct diminutive of Genseric is Gensedin—assuming that their PC knows what they're doing; that they're not some special case—then the player is doubtlessly correct. If they think that Gensedin is the kind of diminutive only an American could possibly come up with, and that the diminutive of Genseric is *obviously* Gensla or Gensica, then that would be the case instead. If players disagree, it becomes a matter for casual linguistic argument.

A number of these diminutive roots, as seen above, have been integrated directly into names; this is an aberration stemming from the lack of an authoritative Ninuanni language Academy or name list. Occasionally a confused or pompous Excrucian will try to impute a "real" name onto someone with such a given name, e.g., calling an Aurica "Oeriel" or whatnot; other times, someone desperate for familiarity will drop the primary element entirely, turning an already-diminished name like "Jocelin" or "Dulcilla" into "Linely" or "L." Ultimately, pre-diminished names are names like any other; the rule that Ninuanni know best how to form their diminutives, and that players act as their real-world representatives in this regard, remains in force.

Diminutive ..... *-din*

The closest to a default and uninflected diminutive in Ninuanni culture is "-din." It's comparable to cutting off an English name and adding "-ie" or "-y." It's not that you can do that to every name, or even *most* names, and it's not that it's always kind of a base-level friendly diminutive if you do—but if you had to guess, blindly, in the dark, how to make a solid casual diminutive for an English name, grabbing the first non-vowel syllable and sticking an "-ie" or "-y" after it is probably what you'd do.

In Ninuan, with the primary root and "-din," it is pretty much the same.

"-din" can be read much like "sweet" or "dear," but specifically when used by the kind of people who can get away with using that to their friends—it's not the nasty or the demeaning "dear," it's the thoughtlessly caring and inattentive one.

Actual names that use this diminutive don't generally have *luthes*; if they do, standard form is to tweak the primary element's *luthe* and then to go on an improvisational riff from there.

Floating ..... *-ia, -ias, -ius, -ja, -ya*

This class of diminutives pretty much strip a name down to the unadorned, context-free version of the primary element. They leave it floating and unattached—it's not just not adding anything, but very specifically *putting a cap on the meaning* right after the primary element completes.

The name becomes the primary element alone, stripped of all connections.

In some cases that's the same thing *as* the primary element. For instance, the primary element of "Colias" means *cold,* so that's what the whole name means. Just ... cold. You don't need context for that. A physicist might argue but this isn't physics, this is language:

If it's cold, if it's just cold, it's ... cold.

In other cases, though, the meaning can actually change a little bit when it's stripped of everything else.

For instance, "Galaias" is just *grim.* Stripped of everything else. Grim for no reason. Grim, because, grim. So sometimes it's read as *grim,* but usually it's understood as *emo.*

Similarly, "Aquincias" is just *royal.* Not royal because of any particular heritage or deed, not royal because it's been earned or given, but also not as some kind of intrinsically false claim. So it could be read as *royal,* but it's usually toned down a bit to *big shot.*

These aren't the nicest or softest diminutives in the world, and they usually come across as a kind of rough teasing or an active denial of the secondary element of someone's name—particularly "-ias" and "-ius," which are unlikely to just slip off the tongue. Floating diminutives are not necessarily *mean,* though, either; rough teasing can be fine among good friends, and some secondary elements are better off elided.

Actual names that use this diminutive don't generally have *luthes*; if they do, it's by covertly borrowing a second element from somewhere else.

Light ..... *-lin, -line, -llino, -llinus, -lona*

This class of diminutives is light-hearted; they steal the gravity of the primary element, but don't add anything more. They're very pure, and generally inoffensive—almost as good a default as "-din," and the kind of thing one can generally pair with a fist pump or high five.

For instance, Colias, *cold,* can turn into Collin, *chilly.* In an affectionate sort of way.

Athanaric, *promised commander,* can turn into Athanallino, *destiny dude(/dudette/unspecified).*

Most of these endings are fairly high-energy—one has to really lean into it deliberately to use -llino, -llinus, or -lona with most names—but the -lin diminutive can come up a lot in a sufficiently casual space.

Again, actual names that use this diminutive don't have *luthes,* or do so only by borrowing a second element from somewhere else.

Nominalizing [(one)] ..... *-in, -'in*

This class of diminutives converts the primary element into a noun, sometimes in a playfully indirect or poetic fashion. It doesn't change that much if the primary element was *already* a noun, or was an adjective with a strong implicit noun of "the person with this name," though.

Often, as noted, one can frame this as either nothing at all or the word ONE.

Thus, "Pepin" becomes "nascent one"—or *seed.*

"Ebrin" becomes "boar one"—or *stubborn.*

"Era'in," a traditional nickname for Eraric, becomes "war one"—or *oh warry one,* optionally with a roll of one's eyes.

Actual names that end with this diminutive don't have a *luthe* of their own—none of the diminutives do—but they don't occlude the primary element's; instead, if someone has an actual name that ends in one of these diminutives, they'll tweak the phrasing and punctuation on the primary element's *luthe,* and that becomes the entire thing. Pepin's *luthe,* for instance, is just the *luthe* for "Pep-."

Patronizing ..... *-la, -las, -lash, -lios, -lla; -ely*

This class of diminutives is a little more patronizing, a little more ... adult-to-child, perhaps? than the default. They're still suitable for use among friends and family, just with a caution tag attached—they can definitely be *used* as putdowns, so you need to either watch your tone or make sure you're talking to someone who either won't mind a putdown or knows you don't intend one.

You might read the name as "little (1st element)," "(1st element)ling," "(1st element)let" ... or just as "precious."

There are a fair number of names that actually use these suffixes, mostly due to childhood names or nicknames that don't get discarded—all it takes is one Senelas or Sansalas getting their name into legend while people are still *calling* them that for it suddenly to get hard for them to change it ... and then *other* people will start using that name, fairly often, as well. There's still no *luthe* for these suffixes, though; one generally uses the *luthe* for different secondary elements on different days.

A classic example is "Sansalas"—*little summer,* which winds up mostly meaning *summery.*

Another is "Cecely"—*little lostling:*

Arguably an insult, and *way* too cutesy in Ninuanni ... but *also* the name that a lot of premature or late-in-the-birth-order royals got stuck with, especially in fairy tales, and it kind of spread out from there.

To give a nickname to Ulfegoia Branwen risks releasing the wolf of her name.

—*from* A Pocket Guide to the Strategists, *by Raakel Koskela*

opposite: *by Elizabeth Sherry*

Clarinnia Spirus, dying of Gravity

Possessive..... *-ca, -ica, -ikas, -ka*

This class of diminutives is subtly, fondly possessive. For actual names that use this diminutive, the *luthe* and framing transfigure accordingly, but there are no agreed-upon rules for this—the player will have to adapt them on their own.

A classic example is "Alaica"—*my blessed.*

A more complex example is "Aurica"—it could be read as *my desert*, but that's a little weird, because who lovingly curls up with someone and says, "Oh, my desert, you desiccate the very veins of me?" It's still *desert* with a kind of fond possessiveness, though, so it's generally read as *sandy.* Like, "oh, you, you've got sand in your hair again, haven't you."

Or, "there you go, being a desert."

... that kind of thing.

Simple..... *-us; -dus; (no second element)*

The last category of diminutives is effectively blank—it lets the name trail off after the primary element, literally or metaphorically. This can be a lot like the floating diminutive: there's not much difference in meaning between Colias and Coldus, and in fact you can construct "Colius" either way—

But for a lot of names, it's important to note that the simple diminutive lacks the explicit decontextualization of the floating roots and the explicit light-heartedness of the lighter ones. It's just, casually not going any further, or possibly (with the "us" or "dus") savoring that you're in a social position to not *have* to go any further.

Thus, a name like Ebrimud can become Ebridus, Ebri, or Ebria—by the rule that lets you add a vowel "between" the two elements. It still means *boar-strategy,* at least, if the actual name is still Ebrimud, but the speaker is being really casual about it.

Actual names that use this diminutive may or may not have *luthes;* if they do, the standard form is to tweak the primary element's *luthe* and then stop.

Examples

The name **Pelageniya** uses a spare "a" to stitch together the prefix "Pel-," meaning *axe-blood*, with the suffix "-geniya," meaning *life.* Thus, *axe-blood life.*

An example *luthe* for it might be:

I am an axe-head whirling, red with gore:
I will not die today.

The name **Colias** combines the prefix "Col-," meaning *cold*, with the floating suffix "-ias." There's no complexity to this name, and no stichic reading either; it just means *cold.*

The name **Draisius** combines the prefix "Drais-," meaning *descending/falling,* with the suffix "-sius," meaning *sea.* Thus, *descending sea* or *falling sea.* The doubled s would sometimes be included, but this time it is not. An example *luthe* for this name might be:

Shattered, I fall from the nameless sky:
I am death and the star-filled sea.

The name **Dulcilla** combines the root "Dulci-," for law, with the patronizing suffix "-lla," giving a literal reading on the order of *lawling* or *lawlet.* In practice, the literal meaning orbits among "goody two-shoes," "strait-laced," "ridiculously honest," and "rules lawyer." It's particularly mellifluous to Ninuanni ears, though, so it shows up a fair bit anyhow.

The name **Visimar** combines the prefix "Visi-," meaning *unrivaled,* with the suffix "-mar," meaning *fever.* In practice, because "unrivaled fever" is a little weird, the name is understood to mean *ostentatious.* An example *luthe* for this name might be:

My coat will turn your jagged blades,
and fires crown my feathered brow;
I am the mountain-bird, unrivaled:
hot blood pounding, dizzy heat, a feverish delirium ...

Surnames

Excrucians don't really have surnames; they wear them—the vast majority who *do,* admittedly, wear them—only to fit in within the world. On its own, their society is not big enough or well-enough connected to demand it:

Historically, a resident of Ninuan could go through much of their life without meeting a name-twin. When they did, the risk of confusion was low. They could be "big Orderic and little Orderic" for a while, or "the Orderic in red and the Orderic in blue." They could be "Sansalas" with a nod towards the manor, or "Sansalas" with a wave towards the field; "Fastida of the east" or "Fastida of the west." They could accept brief gaps in conversation where people say, "No, *you* Colias, not *you* Colias," or have their most common associates use different diminutives to split them apart. In the worst case, one of them could switch from their original name to a *luthe*-mate:

Overshadowed by another Athalaric, Athalaric might choose to be Ammery. Brandila, upon marrying Brandila, might become Gabridel or Brandsdela, instead.

In short, the various surnames that have shown up on example characters throughout this text aren't, or are very rarely, relics of the time before time; they're Creational adaptations. The need for surnames, and the base-level *existence* of surnames, did not originate within the void.

How It All Went Down

That said, over the course of time, many Excrucians in Creation took to calling themselves by place and tribal names. They took to referencing themselves, not merely by their Ninuanni name, but with a claim of an Earthly origin—in particular, with some reference or other to the cities, tribes, and geographical features of late Roman-era Europe.

They would be, e.g., "Genseric the Dacian" or "Hadusind of Ziridav."

This too is a translation convention of sorts—as noted, Europe is not a region of *particular* importance to the Excrucians, save for a certain shared linguistic history with the expected players of this game. Players with the relevant toolkits are free to assume that the bulk of Earth's Excrucians went with clan and region names from somewhere, or everywhere, else.

Why did they name themselves for Earthly places and not Ninuanni ones? It is somewhat ambiguous. Certainly, speaking of their Ninuanni origins felt increasingly futile the more connected the world became, but that was not a pressing problem as of yet. Certainly, speaking of Ninuan felt more bitter the older *they* became ... but principally, it was the emergent outcome of a constellation of forces in a few Excrucians' psyches, that, once crystallized into action, turned into a trend.

As a trend, it was normal. It was a thing that one did, or might do: call back to a tribe or place where one had won some great victory, or found some solace, or had been born as a human, and use that to attest falsely to one's origins.

Time passed.

As time passed, the use of secondary names grew—not so much by need, but by accumulation of events. The longer one lives, the more one experiences; thus, the older Excrucians were more likely to have picked a cognomen up. The younger Excrucians, conversely, emerged into a world where secondary names were more common, both in Creation and in the Host.

Some took to referring to themselves by elaborate and dramatic Ninuanni adjectives or terms.

Others, to claiming specific heritage in the mortal world.

Time continued to pass.

Names warped. "the Dacian" became "Dace." "Vardaei" became "Vardin." Eventually, as dual names became the norm—*where* dual names became the norm, for it is still not normative everywhere on Earth or in the Host—it became common to play around more freely, e.g., pairing up two proper names, switching around one's Ninuanni and one's affected name, or outright making something up.

Eventually, there were no rules. (Not that there ever really were.) No defined meanings. No *luthes*—unless, of course, someone borrowed on the lore above, dug up something far more obscure, or daringly invented their own.

There were—are—only guidelines.

Those guidelines are these: the *standard* Excrucian surnames, in the modern day, are generally either:

- distorted versions of Ninuanni personal names (constructed as per the system above);
- human surnames;
- random Ninuanni words, for which—in the absence of a comprehensive lexicon—we will use the Gothic; *or*
- references to late Roman-era Europe, its locations, and its tribes.

—each, thereafter, altered to fit the unique sense of its creator for the mellifluous and the sound.

Roots

Some suitable tribal names to serve as a base for an Excrucian surname include:

- Aedi, Agrianes, Albocenses, and Anartes;
- Ansamenses, Apuli, Astae, and Bessi;
- Biephes, Bisaltae, Bures, and Brenae;
- Britolages, Buridavenses, Carpi, and Caucoenses;
- Cebrenii, Ciaginsi, Clariae, and Coreli;
- Costoboces, Crobyzes, Crousi, and Dardani;
- Diobesi, Galabri, Laeaeans, and Kainoi;
- Melandit, Mygdones, Nipsaioi, and Obulenses;
- Odomanti, Odrysae, Ordes, and Paeoplae;
- Pieres, Potulatenses, Predasenses, and Rhadacenses;
- Saldenses, Scaugdae, Scyrmiadae, and Serri;
- Sintians, Suci, Sycaeboae, and Teurisci;
- Thunatae, Tilataei, Tralles, and Trixae;
- Trausi, Treres, and, finally, Tyrgetae.

Some place names that might equally well serve include:

- Abydos, Acidava, Acmonia, and Abdera;
- Aedava, Aiz, Amutria, and Apulon;
- Apsynthus, Argedava, Artanes, and Bergula;
- Bersobis, Bizye, Bregedava, and Buridava;
- Cabassus, Caria, Carlomanesti, and Carsidava;
- Danedevae, Dausdava, Dierna, and Dinogetia;
- Diospolis, Docidava, Doriscus, and Druzipara;
- Egeta, Ergines, Gatae, and Genucla;
- Germisara, Gildava, Giridava, and Istria;
- Itadava, Kypasis, Lom, and Lygos;

Gadicadigan once-Gaur is dying of surnames. It doesn't matter how long and how elaborate they are—the surnames that she invents, adopts:

She is inexorably entrapped by circumstance or enmity into meeting and marrying the human (or other entity) that shares that name, at which point she is immediately consumed by a bristling foxtail of outraged heaven's flame. Even going nameless or mononymous will not protect Gadicadigan for very long from this; her miscellaneous monikers (such as, for instance, "once-Gaur") can elect themselves as surnames for her, and one will eventually do so, if the incinerated name is not with some alacrity replaced.

—*from* A Pocket Guide to the Strategists, *by Raakel Koskela*

- Maedius, Malata, Marcodava, and Motru;
- Murideva, Myrkinos, Nessebar, and Netindava;
- Oescus, Orastie, Pelendava, and Perpericon;
- Quemdava, Ramidava, Raqmu, and Recidava;
- Remesiana, Salmydessus, Scaidava, and Selymbria;
- Serdica, Seugma, Sintica, and Sirmium;
- Strymon, Taurun, Teichos, and Tibiscum;
- Vistula, Zargidava, Zidava, and Zikideva;
- and, finally, Ziridava.

Some appropriate Gothic words—which can be massaged into euphonious form and then asserted as Ninuanni—include:

- Afhameis, Aftumists, Aggwitha, and Agis;
- Aglitha, Airus, Aljah, and Amslo;
- Anastodeins, Andalaus, Andanahti, and Andasets;
- Andeis, Andhaitan, Aqizi, and Audags;
- Autheis, Bairgahei, Bairhtein, and Bisatjan;
- Biswaran, Brasa, Brinno, and Daur;
- Dauthus, Draums, Fauho, and Faurhah;
- Fraistubni, Fralusts, Framatheis, and Fraweit;
- Gafilh, Gahailnan, Gahlaiba, and Gais;
- Gamunds, Gamaudeins, and Gatewiths;
- Gauks, Gaurs, Gibla, and Groneis;
- Gultheins, Gund, Hairus, and Halba;
- Harjis, Hidre, Hunsl, and Hurus;
- Inilo, Kas, Krana, and Kunnan;
- Letan, Liteins, Liuth, and Malo;
- Manleika, Mikilei, Milhma, and Miltja;
- Mithwitan, Nabagais, Natilo, and Niwaiht;
- Nu, Praufetes, Qius, and Ragineis;
- Rauths, Rinnan, Rinno, and Riqis;
- Riurei, Sarwa, Skeireins, and Skura;
- Sparwa, Triggwa, Ungatewiths, and Uslet;
- Ussateins, Waihjo, Waurms, and Winno;
- Withra, Woths, and, finally, Wulfs.

As a rule, one should not expect meaning to be preserved in the Gothic to Ninuanni transition; except where there is an obvious English meaning, or an obvious reference to one of the personal name elements, the original meaning of the name will be whatever the player decides that it should be. This is all the more true after a player customizes the name to fit the character, the other portions of their character's name, and their tastes.

Thus, having chosen the personal name Alaica, a player might adapt Ragineis to Ragneis, creating the name "Alaica Ragneis." Another player in the group might combine Ebrimud with Gladwin as, simply, "Ebrimud Gladwin." A third might opt to be Alica's *luthe*-mate, Allaikas, trimming the "oi" off of "Kainoi" to create "Allaikas Kain." They didn't *have* to stop with such a small change, though—they could have used Kainoi as a jumping-off point for their imagination, ending up with "Allaikas Ganley," and it would, in the end, have been just as valid:

It's a surname: like all surnames, just made up.

A Handful of Names

A few complete examples of Excrucian names—principally going by the book for the first names but (to avoid using up the inspirational material just now provided) venturing a bit further out for the last—would include:

- Aberax Comity and Adosinda Akratian,
- Aligern Hawke and Amalberga Ordes,
- Anagastes (NLN) and Ann Agila Harpis,
- Arimir Hercyn and Astrode Uzinia,
- Athodonia Miljan and Avery Filmer,
- Bathila Swierjan and Baugiba Sauritt,
- Bethany Sigrid and Beucadican Bersov,
- Bigelis Gannon and Brandila Nasjan,
- Brunbian Thomas and Caducine Lauo,
- Canonica Morgan and Cecely Holmgren,
- Chlothilde P. Snumjan and Cixila Braguin,
- Claredrasteia Fairway and Colias Mizda,
- Comosicus Sandros and Cori(ander) Garsein,
- Cunibrand Vardes and Czonka Adreina,
- Dreshlida and Duil Juste,
- Dulcilla Britolage and Ebrimud Duras,
- Ediulf Trajam and Eidisius Lambert,
- Fastida and Filimer Argand,
- Fridibad Thierna and Gadenand Lestos,
- Gailswinth Vrai and Gainas Antares,
- Galsalec Feva and Galterius Scyrin,
- Gamaligoia and Ganibald Thierry,
- Gebdava Marks and Gentto af-Bastern,
- Gistigild Law and Gladwin Kallatos,
- Glissar Lexandros and Goddas Andrescus,
- Grimildi Novrik and Gunderung Turpin,
- Hachivindra Odessos and Haideric Haggina,
- Helchen M. Burnside and Hermanafrid Cottos,
- Hildebad Hiufan and Himnerith Barratries,
- Hisarnis Tiriscum and Hunuil Getel,
- Ibegard Owler and Iustina Howe,
- Jocelin Wintrus and Kargaya Orgame,
- Kestria Colbrand and Kheryna Hachknife,
- Laodice Af-Tiesin and Leoinnia Ainesley,
- Leovigild Taylor and Lexiarchos Ulbandus,
- Lucian Goodrich and Magnatrude Odie,
- Malakai Dauthus and Matasuntha Rubostes,
- Oeriel Ringald and Pelageniya Glimujan,
- Pelengard and Pepin Hewitt,
- Prasede Moore and Prince(ss) Nidada Urics,
- Ranulf Af-Wulthos and Alex Reccared Jones,
- Rhimvald Tiresias and Saba Istravel,
- Sadagares Maiza and Savaric Sensés,
- Selenas Dauri and Semsedin Hausjan,
- Sidonia Pyrus and Silvester Silvardin,
- Sisebut Randulf and Tancrice Maimbrana,
- Thorismud Skafjan and Tribigild Grietan,
- Tuluin Godgisclus and Ultrogoth Sam,
- Vadamerca Renaulti and Valaravans Cainas,
- Vilares T. Gildenstern and Wittigis Ruiz, *and*
- Yochander Gachonen and Yochander Holmes.

A Voice of the World

Erebic Vandil can sympathize only with the unjust; the good, the true, and the honest are closed books unto Erebic's heart.

—*from* A Pocket Guide to the Strategists, *by Raakel Koskela*

Foreword

The perspective of the Glitched is not the only one; nor, perhaps, is it even the only one that players or GMs of this little game should see. The people of the world, the law-beings and Powers of the world, are foundationally naïve, because it is fundamentally asserted that the world *is* wrong, and this they often do not recognize—

But they will make arguments for its beauty; for its wonder; for the merits, as well as the terror, of the law-beings, and not all of those are built on false foundation. Often they do not allege, or even trouble themselves *to* allege, that the world is *not* wrong; is *not* a glitched and twisted thing ...

They do not even seem to consider the matter worth beginning at.

Because they have not made that claim, because they have not *wrestled* with it, their arguments are on tenuous but not collapsing ground; worth, perhaps, engaging with, or savoring, should one ever wish to understand the other side, or see beyond the limits of truth-blighted eyes.

Without further ado, then, our advocate; the story of this game, in scattered and eerily delighted essays, as written by a person of its world—

Rapt in fervor, boundless in appreciation, and deeply, *profoundly*, ignorant of ruin.

A Voice of the World: ...

This is the reality behind the dream that is our world.

In an endless emptiness there is a single cup of fire, and the flames of it are blue.

There is no scale to it.

There *can* be no scale to it. There are no referents. The texture of the void is impermeable to the idea of measurement. The stars are unreachable and incomparable above.

It is larger than the universe and it is smaller than a pebble in your shoe.

Let it be large, then. Let it be larger than planets; gods. See the cup as a flaring, staggering enormity; inside it, the tree of worlds. Its roots writhe in the flames, pierce them, sink into the void. At that base, where Nothingness and Burning meet, is Hell. At its crown is the Blessed Land

of Heaven. In between them, dangling from the branches of the World Ash, worlds: billions of them. Uncounted, unmeasured billions of worlds.

Most, like ours, are flat.

Around the cup of fire and around the Ash and around its worlds the Excrucians swarm like gnats. They are an endless army in an endless space, but right now their efforts are focused on a handful of battle fronts. They raid against Heaven, and Hell, and Jotunheim where live the giants, and Aelfscienne of the elves, and Dionyl, and Abaton, and here and there and other places. And, of course, against the Earth.

Thirty fronts, perhaps, in all.

Zoom in.

Our world is *there*, an island in the leaves, a great flat plane anchored in subtle ways and great ones to the Ash. It is green and brown and blue and wet. Over, around its edge cascades an endless falling sea.

This world—*our* world—is fundamentally alive.

Sometimes we will call it the Border Mythic. Other times we will call it the Mythic World.

It is a secret reality where all things live and all things move.

The wind is alive, in the Mythic World. Every forest, and each tree. The mountains have their shoulders and their heads, their faces, their conversations and their thoughts. Each beam of sunlight. Each rock. Each thing that is, is possessed of its own spirit, from the smallest to the largest; it takes only the pressure of *attention* to differentiate and speak to the will of the smallest part.

Cars drive by their own will. Birds and aeroplanes make choices as they soar. There is nothing that coin loves better than its circulation, and nothing that joys a wave so much as its death upon the shore:

A world bathed within the golden light of life—

And barely, *so* barely hidden, within the prosaic world we know.

ON PROSAIC REALITY

Let us be blunt: the world as we know it is a lie.

It is a shelter. It is a hiding place from the law of karma. It is a crèche in the big bad universe where nothing is morally fraught in and of itself. Where things only matter because of humans observing purpose and judgment into them, where things *just happen*, rather than *happening because*. Where the closest thing to a higher purpose is our inability to really call one purpose higher than another. It is a world of the *objective*, and it is a lie.

On a fundamental level the world of our ordinary reality is the world where nothing "chooses:" where there are no gods in the clouds to make them rain, no gods in the cars to make them run, no *telos* for growing, evolving things to grow towards and not even really a god inside the brain to make the human being be. There are only laws of motion, laws of chemistry, and laws of chaos—the decipherable rules by which things, encountering other things, react.

This isn't neutral.

To make our soulless world we balled the flat Earth up and made it round. We made flat and lifeless the spirits of nature. We stripped away the world tree from our skies and made an endless dark of space instead. We took *ourselves*, and made ourselves the lightning in the meat, the clicking and clacking and sparking of the synapses inside our brain.

We didn't really want to kill our souls.

We didn't even really want to murder the gods in the sky, or slaughter the *telos*, or turn everything that was wild and beautiful and strange into computable or even incomputable arcs.

But to unleash ourselves from karma, it's what we had to do.

There is a story that the Powers tell, that the scientific world began when the angel Za'afiel smote the Earth. It was before humans were around, or at least, they were in Eden, but the dinosaurs were there, and one of them defecated on or near an angel. "Got the dirt of the great beasts upon its wings," the Powers say ...

And so Za'afiel smashed the Earth.

And the Earth couldn't just say, "That wasn't my fault." Because whenever you say that something isn't your fault, what you're really saying is, that *could* be my fault. Maybe. There's something there. Maybe I'm just an ugly and broken enough world, what with dinosaur digestive issues and all, that I *deserve* K-T extinction events.

So instead it did things one better, and said: of course I don't deserve that, because *there's no such thing as deserving.*

That's the world we're living in. And over the years, we've just refined it. The longer we've studied the mechanisms of the world, the more complex, far-reaching and beautiful they've become. But the problem is, it isn't real.

The world isn't really like that. No relativity. No chemistry. It isn't even really round.

The planet orbiting the sun, somewhere in the Milky Way—that's a dream, a lie, an illusion, a process built out by science even as we explore it, which the Imperators of the world have chosen to maintain. It's a lie the True Gods of Earth use to shelter them from the eyes of Heaven. It's a lie the Lords of Rule and Game will back for reasons of their own.

And Surolam to protect us, for we shatter when we *see* that it is false.

And Lord Entropy, I think, because it amuses him.

And Ha-Qadosch Berakha and Ananda, for reasons of their own.

It's our broken little crib, our shelter, our hiding place. We've been decorating it, lately, sprucing it up, making it awesome and complex and beautiful. But it's still just our crib.

It's not the fundamental law.

ON THE LACUNAE

It is so very tempting to trust it all to continue to exist.

Isn't that what it's always done? Before we were born, before we were even formless dreams, the world *was*, and the world endured. The drumbeat of its enduring echoes through the ages.

It is inborn to it. Intrinsic.

It asks nothing of us and it requires nothing of us. If it has needs—ah! Such a longing to believe!—they may be answered by the gods.

Existing within our cocoon of reality, buoyed by its innate capacity to sustain itself without our given attention, we may grow complacent. We may go through our days *without* paying attention, heedless, careless, considering only the surfaces of our own affairs.

This is our dark and richly savored dream.

The lacunae, then, are the answer to our arrogance, or its price. They are the careless person's doom.

Because we have ceased to pay attention, knowing that it is not required, we will never know it when we have entered one. We will never *realize* when we have walked into a place that is real, yes, *but not so much.*

The Lands Beyond Creation make it obvious.

To walk into a waylet is to be cast adrift. To walk into Ninuan itself is to know oneself abandoned, reft of reality and healing, and only with oneself or the gifts of higher powers to restore one to one's path. If one is not absurdly lucky or absurdly brave, the matter is a blatant nightmare, and there is no mistaking it for bland mundanity.

To enter a lacuna is not to be cast adrift; one drifts, or one does not. One *allows* the world to fall apart, while one distracts oneself with pettiness. One *allows* the most absurd betrayals of common sense to slip by unnoticed, because to do so serves the smooth flow of one's thoughts. To ignore the unraveling of existence is to be unperturbed. And so it flows away, and you are lessened; we all are lessened, we are diminished; the fabric of your portion of reality frays and falls apart.

There is no way to know if this is happening, unless one is vigilant against it. There is no way to *stop* it from happening, save to confront it even when it may not actually be there. The only answer to lacunae is to pay attention *before* one knows whether one is in one—to accept the burden, in oneself, of carrying the weight of all the world.

If you wait until your world is gone, or until you've been kidnapped to some faery hill, or until you suddenly realize that a Strategist is taking advantage of your hometown to use powers not conventionally accessible within reality, it is almost certainly too late.

A lacuna, if one becomes aware of it, is peculiarly like a dream. That is the feel of it.

It is a scale.

At the high end of the scale, anything is possible—more or less—but nothing matters. It is peculiarly empty ... like biting into ice cream and tasting only wind and rain.

At the low end of the scale, things are ... loose. The world isn't quite put together right. You can get away with things that you shouldn't be able to get away with. You can put your thumb upon the scales of the world. If you do it *right,* there's a profit here: you can gain more in possibility than you lose in proportional value of effect. Maybe it doesn't mean *as much* to get out of your wheelchair and walk, in a lacuna, as it would in the real world—but if you don't have that option in reality, because reality is iron, and most particularly if you *just barely* don't have that option, then it might be an acceptable place to go.

It's possible it's not. It's possible that taking advantage is a betrayal; but at the least, the ethics of *that* point remain unclear.

THIS MORTAL CONDITION

In **Glitch,** in system terms, a mortal—when not simply a descriptive tool of the GM—is defined by an Ability level, a description of their underlying skills and capacities, and optionally a Wear track.

Strictly speaking, this is a simplification.

Conceptually, mortals have small Burn and Immersion pools, which recover one point per story rather than one point per chapter. They can gain access to Fugue and Stilling if events in their life merit it; these too recover at one point per story.

Conceptually, further, they will engage with their Ability and Wear in a more complex fashion than the PCs; what that is, is not precisely clear, but the systems of their life do not lack dynamism, do not boil down to the simplicity of a single number and a single track. At the level at which the players operate, these mortal details should not *matter,* but it's important to understand that mortals don't exist in a monothematic context; that their decisions and existences are, simply put, not as *boring* and *predictable* as they would be for someone whose only measurable qualities were those.

Perhaps they should be imagined as having five sub-attributes within Ability, or a nuanced and detailed system for skills and Wear; perhaps they should be imagined as existing in another rules set entirely, when the substrate that they run on is not envisioned as "real life"—

... but in practice, the GM should ignore all that. When deciding how a mortal acts, they should either put the description of the world first, or, they should consider the mortal's actions in terms of spending or taking Cost from a Wear track; anything more will be needlessly complex. The only purpose to the observations in the paragraphs above is to help avoid the cognitive trap of believing that the simplified picture is what mortals *are* in **Glitch**, rather than merely how they should be played.

ON NINUAN

I will tell you of the inside of the eyes.

What is inside the eye—what is inside the heart-root of perspective—is a thing that cannot be seen, cannot be felt, cannot be known; but it is precedent to what is seen; to what is felt; and what is known.

The flurry-ridden, tempest-battered spark that is perspective is ungraspable unto itself.

What is inside the eye is *tumult, tehom,* the chaos of the primal waters.

It is not at peace; it is assailed. Monsters haunt it, and great tides. The inside of the eye is a place of heroes, fell and wonderful, glorious and terrible; a place of limitless significance, arête, and pain.

It is an arduous brilliance.

It has snow in it, like the static in your sight; dark in it, like you see at night; fire in its skies, like you might see when pushing upon the lids that guard your eyes. In its southwest water crashes down upon a shore that is rich with bone. In the east are rolling plateaus, swarming rivers, and the light of *the fisher's star.* In the north, as there ever is: the ice—

But there is no east, no west, no north, no light.

The forests inside your eyes are silvered, love; their hounds give an eerie howling.

... you will not hear them.

You will not know.

How can you live on the inside of your own eyes? How can you drink deep of those dark waters? How can you perceive where the roots of your own perception are?

Were you Ninuanni—

Were you of the primal folk (not, perhaps, the first folk, for there is ever a back and back, but, at least, of the folk before)—

You might find a land of eerie grandeur and deep winds there; a land beneath a weighty blanket of antiquity.

Ancient towers, their stones nearly to the point of crumbling. Glades, where long ago, mystic gates were made to other lands. Horrors that ought never have been unearthed, unearthed, to dwell amidst the bogs and glebes.

And why? you ask. I can only laugh. You know this much. You know that we are all this way: that we are all built of crumbling towers and of silvered forests, that we are all assailed by ancient horrors; that in each and every one of us is a sea-shore, somewhere, limned in bones.

You know, as well, that we are beautiful.

Ninuan—I tell you that Ninuan, that the land whence waylets have been wrested, the grand shelf of unexistence from which all such blind spots have been torn—that it is beautiful, because it is the fire in your eyes.

The Excrucians would laugh at that.

They would laugh at the arrogance of it. They would laugh at the folly of it. They would laugh, most of all, because I have said that Ninuan *is* something. That it *is,* well, anything at all.

For of course, love, it is not. It is not anything.

Most of *all,* perhaps, it is not you and it is not me.

... but beneath us, behind us, within the *in* in us, there is a part of us that is not anything as well.

There is a part of all of us that is *before*, as Ninuan is before; primordial, an ancient root, and older than our experiential world. A part of us that is deep and true and, in the night, shines silver.

Cling to that, if you are ever found beyond the world.

Love:

Cling to that, and come back home.

ON THE NOBILIS

It is usually quite surprising when someone sticks a fundamental building block of reality inside you. You will just be driving along, or whatever, when suddenly *BAM*, you're Storms. Or Fire. Computers. Dogs. Mending. Markers. Fleece. Or Love.

When something like this is put inside you, you are called **Noble**, or one of the **Nobilis**.

You will find that you are the fundamental expression and guardian of the word or name—the proper term is "Estate"—that's stuck inside you. You won't be able to hide from the fact that you're a pure and unfettered divinity now. That thing that you sometimes see hiding in the world when you stop blinding yourself to it, that ultimate reality and glory of *things* pressing in through the gates that we construct against the world—

It's *inside* you, like truth and love and being are inside everybody else, and you'll realize in just the same way everybody else does not that you are now a god.

You've become, well, Storms: the archetype and arbiter of storms. Or you are now the living Fire. The god of all Computers—of every last computing engine, on all the worlds there are—or the lord of every Dog. You've become the inspiring muse to Fleece, the word that speaks to sheep to make it grow. You've been made ... well, it could be anything!

Any of the primal forms. Joy. Emotion. Tea. Baskets. Martial arts.

And you have become primal, you have been made fundamental and preeminent, with the placement in you of this primordial thing. You have become a Noble. A Power. You have become sovereign-in-yourself in ways that nations only dream to be.

The Nobilis can shatter mountains. They can break or rebuild souls. It isn't even very hard.

And there are greater things they serve.

When you become a Noble—I mean, you if you get one of these things stuck in you, most likely while the whole world around you is being warped and changed and taken away from Earth into the belly of something else—you are drafted into the service of **the Imperators**. They are the primal forms, the things that precede reality, the Ymerae,

the Mashai, the Imperatores Occulti. They are angels, and devils, and they are gods; they are forces of light and dark; they are wild things and tamer things and serpents larger than the world.

They are beasts and they are monsters but they are monsters that we cannot judge. They are as the sunrise is, or the wind in summer: the inexpressible source and the foundation of our world. They are not people, not like you and I are people, not like the Nobilis are people. They are people-*like*, in that you can talk to them; you can love them; you can hate them; you can even (should you happen to have natural advantages the like of which I can scarcely imagine) fight them. They have souls, as the theurgists would say. But they are not people. They are not even proper gods. They are reality. They are truth. They are the world before our world, mysteries, arcane and inexplicable breaths of the divine. They are ineffability and the surpassing of the self. They are the problematic nature of the world, to us. They are, most of all, the true forms, the founding principles, the things of which the things we see are shadows.

If you meet one there is really no recourse but adoration, admiration, the openness and looking-outwards that characterizes the savant occupied by the presence of the world. They are the burden given to us, in living, to learn to live with; we are not Nobilis, to define and reexamine the War, the Blood, the Hope, the Love, the Sex, the Cold, the Dreams, the Cats, the Birds, the Bells, and the Days that have been given us. With the Imperatores Occulti, we must simply learn to live.

But ah! The Nobilis!

They dwell apart from us, the Nobilis do, in their great **Chancels**—the secret temple-worlds of their patron spirits, the occulted **Loci** of the Imperators that empowered them. You can find the Chancels if you know how; if you do the right actions, walking the right paths, at the right time. You can walk right from *this* world into their worlds of magic, wonder, and fantasy. And you might find in their Chancel-world a place of Arthurian romance, of knights and mystics and chivalry; London in the 1800s, augmented by dirigibles; a technological future world far beyond our own. Or, of course, some strange, inexplicable and disconcerting world, where balloon-people float in great clusters and make war upon the birds; where robots are ubiquitous and computers are not possible; where the wind that breaks like ocean waves upon the cliffs is full of souls; where humans dwell in hidden homes beneath the forest glens, and butterflies are unto them the messengers of God.

The Nobilis live in their strange Chancels and they venture outwards into the world. There they will be our heroes and our villains, god-haunted folk, driven by their humanity and their divinity to remake the world. There is where you are likely to find them—that old man sitting at the end of the bar; that smiling businessman on the street; that woman in her chariot driving in all incongruity the shining horses of the sun.

RULES FOR THE NOBILIS

The Nobilis buy **Ability** at one point per level. They share the Strategists' **Flore** Attribute (pg. 181). They tend to have a number of Gifts, Bonds, and Geasa. In addition, they have three divine attributes that the Strategists lack:

Aspect upgrades the Nobles' non-magical actions. It makes them tirelessly competent. It gives them this trick where they don't lose a roughly similar mundane contest twice, or fail at a roughly similar mundane action for any reason thrice, in any given scene. At higher levels their mundane actions can contest with miracles, they become as strong as a bear, and they gain computer-like calculation speed. Eventually they start throwing around *unlimited* physical force and speed and doing ridiculous stunts like punching actors right through the movie screen, surfing sound waves, and writing poems that *force* their readers to weep.

Domain grants a Noble direct control over their Estate—the power to bring the substance of their Estate into being, destroy it, strengthen it, summon it, change its destiny, and suchlike things.

Finally, **Persona** measures their identification with their Estate. It's not entirely *healthy* for them, for their lingering humanity, but some of them still invest heavily in this form of power. As their mastery rises, Persona lets the Noble incarnate themselves in the things of their Estate, bind themselves to the rules their Estate follows as Geasa (so that the Power of Hope may, e.g., "spring eternal;" see pg. 328, 258), and turn things *into* or back away from being a part of their Estate.

The Nobilis are mortal, but can take a lot of damage before they actually go down. This often manifests as a kind of narrative providence: instant-death powers just turn them into ghost Nobles, poison sometimes just makes them angry, they'll have decent odds of finding a shelter to duck into just before an artillery bombardment, and throwing them off a cliff means essentially nothing unless a body actually turns up. Other times, effects that *should* hit them both specifically and hard just leave them ragged—blurring away into a general ablation of their mind, their body, and their soul. In other words, like the Strategists themselves, the Nobilis have access to the **Costs** (pg. 267).

ON HEAVEN

It is not by our own will that grace comes into our world. It is unasked for. It is unbidden. It is not in response to anything. It's too wild, pure, and mad for that.

Grace invades.

The angels are an occupying army in our world. They are light that bursts upon us in our darkness, lifting up what we would rather abandon to its misery. They are the flowers of Heaven, blooming where the world had forsaken life—on the scrapheaps of metal, in the slick sickness of spreading oil, on the graves of sinners and the

Pelenimar Padas, who dies of Attention

just, twining up our skyscrapers and our tenements and our office buildings in defiance of the soullessness of our lives. They are the enlightenment that bursts in on us when we were just trying to be small little people, eating our bagels and drinking our Starbucks, tilling our little patches of soil, dying in our heaps and grottoes, or staring out at the world from our high towers. We didn't ask for it. We didn't even understand that it could happen. It was like a Zen master suddenly hitting us with a stick while we were just in line to pay the telly bill.

Heaven is the angel that catches us as we fall; not because we needed it, not because we wanted it, not even because we'd dreamed of angels since we were a child but because the angels decided the world was better if we lived.

Heaven invades, but at least it invades us as a holy thing.

The angels take beauty as a sacred trust. It's their Craft and their Great Working, it's what they build. Having found themselves born into the brightest land in all the lands there are, they decided they would make everything else as bright. Their own kin—lovers, friends, ancient acquaintances and enemies—are suffering in Hell, twisting and corroding into monsters, and still they speak of justice and righteousness in the world. Their blood is the favored stain on Excrucian blades; of all the creatures of the Ash, they alone may never escape the constant press of the War, may never anticipate a week, month, year, when nothing of theirs shall be dearly threatened by the immeasurable gods of emptiness; and still they labor to better us. They take the time to bring grace to where it is most efficaciously transformative, to will the betterment of the world and of our lives and our places and our existence, effulgent unasked, undreamt-of and invasive grace:

They will make this world a Heaven. They expect no less of us.

THE GAME OF ANGELS

Angels buy **Ability** at one point per level, and many of its lower-end actions are effortless for them thanks to their **Holy** trait, below. They may have an unnatural beauty, the power of flight, and other Gifts (pg. 283). Bonds (pg. 259) are common but Geasa rare (pg. 258). They have an Attribute that functions much like the Strategists' **Lore** (pg. 205), save that their "Spheres" are strata hidden in Creation. In addition, they wield three unique divine powers of their own:

Adept enhances their magical skills. It grants additional flexibility, mobility, shielding and blasting powers (often expressed in appropriately angelic form), the ability to "study up" more easily on new forms of magic, the ability to contend against miracles with appropriate magic, and a *lot* of raw power. An Angel's glamour can repel a Strategist's powers of destruction; their alchemical concoctions can unmake miraculous contagion; the wards of an angelic exorcist can bind even Excrucians and other law-beings in place.

Gardener lets the Angels reshape Heaven and possibly other places that they've claimed, bringing forth wonders therefrom. This is potentially dangerous, in that they could, for instance, reshape part of Heaven into a gigantic war machine, but that's mostly not the kind of thing they actually *do.*

Finally, **Holy** makes them *intense.* It's the thing that lets an angel get into someone's head and *make* them a hero, even if they don't really want to be. It's what gets them spotlit by random environmental phenomena all the time. There is a claim floating around that angels are each free from one moral/ethical commandment, which would also fall under this power ... but also doesn't make any sense. (Because, what would that even *mean?)*

Most Angels are all but immortal, shrugging off mundane attacks and level 0-6 hostile miracles ... and often reducing the effect of even those at 7+.

... AND, ON *Hell*

Hell is always with you.

You won't realize that until you're looking back—until you're in a dark and empty time, a hurting time, a ruined and compromised time in your life. You won't realize it until you understand one day that you've failed, that you've wasted yourself and your opportunities. Then you'll look back and you'll see that Hell was always there.

It was with you when you made excuses.

It was with you when you didn't bother to care.

In your self-righteousness and your laziness and your willful stupidity; in your casualness with the things you cared about, in your willingness to give up your own good fortunes in order to hurt somebody else; in your pettiness, in your rushes to judgment, in every mistake you regret and will always regret.

God wasn't with you, then, if He even exists. Cneph, the closest thing to God we have evidence of, the will that made the Ash and flame from nothingness—*Cneph* wasn't with you. Not Heaven. Not the Wild, not the Rules, not even, probably, the Game.

In those times when you were your most petty and small and twisted only Hell was there.

Hell is what loves you even when you're wrong. Hell is what loves us even when we're bad.

And it's fire and brimstone and poison and rotting things, too. It's a punishment ground and torment-realm at the base and bottom of the Ash. It's corrupting the Fallen Angels, turning them into monsters, and the human souls that wind up there aren't any too well off themselves. But that isn't the core of it. That isn't the heart of it. It's just the price we pay to have something like Hell in the world at all.

For loving the monsters were the folk of Hell condemned.

For standing up for Caligula, for Pol Pot, for the ichneumon wasp ... did the Fallen Angels fall.

Therefore it is that we are never without our witnesses, no matter how terrible it is that we may be. We are never

opposite: *by Silvia Cucchi*

without something to look upon us and give honor to our suffering and our mistakes. We may tumble to the bottom of the Ash, forsaken of and by all other things, and still we will exist, and still we will not fall into the Not, because there is a Hell.

You may take that as a comfort or as a horror. I think it may be both.

There are times in your life when you'd like to cradle despair against your heart, when you want the Not, the nothing, the emptiness of the world, anything to stop the pain. And then it's a cruel joke that you can never be alone, that you can never get away from Hell and its poisons and its flames. But there are also times when you are lost in the darkness, and longing for the brightness, and the goodness, and you cannot find them; and in such times, there is, at least, a Hell beside you in the dark.

It is the baseline of the world. It is the darkness that reaches upwards towards the brightness. It is the fire that longs to embrace us all.

It is the final company for all of us, at the bottom of the Ash;

The work of Hell is holy, in this life.

THE MECHANICS OF THE FALLEN

Fallen Angels retain the **Holy** powerset—like the Angels, they're *intense*. They buy **Ability** at three points per level, like the Strategists do; intense or not, they're just not that good at life. They have access to Gifts, Bonds, and Geasa. They also have three divine powers that neither the Angels or the Strategists possess:

Wounded is a power born from the wicked fire at the nadir of the Ash. It lets them turn their suffering, their wounds—everything terrible that happens to them, really—into power. Cut off their head and they'll develop decapitated-angel powers. Drown them and they'll develop drowned-angel powers. Cast them into Hell to burn forever and they'll become ... well, the Fallen.

Sealed is weird. It's broken. There's some way that their powers, or the way they work, *break the rules*—of Creation. Of the void. Arguably, of the game. Fortunately, it's not until they get really good at it that it will really *help* them.

Finally, **Allegorical** is a powerset for creatures of metaphorical and psychological import—for figures of story and psychological actors in others' lives. It focuses on transforming others, waking the world to life, and being an ancient and wondrous creature. One could say, this is what the Angels' Gardener trait became, when they lost Heaven's Garden and took up love for all things instead.

The Fallen are rarely immortal in the strictest sense but it takes an awful lot to actually get rid of one. A weak effort isn't enough to actually touch one and one's first few *serious* attempts will just turn into damage (pg. 279) or be subsumed into their **Wounded** wounds.

GREAT SERPENTS

Look. They're really big snakes.

I can talk about what they mean. I guess I *will* talk about what they mean. But that's not important. The important thing about the Aaron's Serpents is, they're bigger snakes than you are probably imagining. They are probably even bigger than *that*.

They are, like, visible from space. If the astronauts were tuned in to the Mythic World, they could look down and wave to them. The Serpents might wave back. Or they might snap their heads up and eat the space station as a snack. I don't even know.

The scale gets a little strange.

You know how there are stories of gods who grab the moon, but then the next moment they walk through a door? A door that is probably less than 238,900 miles tall, although you never can know with a door?

It's like *that*.

They are amusing because it is just so impossible that they exist. The brain rebels.

They are sensualists. They are peaceful. That is fortunate, because twenty five trillion ton snakes that are *not* peaceful would be a problem. They are often wreathed with a kind of archaic glory. Like, they're the kind of hundred-mile-long snakes you'd see in Camelot, if Camelot had snakes that big. Or, culturally sensitive depictions of fabulous pseudo-historical places from other continents. *Those*.

You'd see them there. They wouldn't necessarily be in the middle of it, kings and queens and all, but they'd be wreathing the whole thing, like a Celtic knot.

Let's go a little deeper—

Well, no, take another moment first, because you kind of have to. You need to pull back a little further, if you're going to see them, and that's even *if* they've already shrunk down so that they're small enough to interact. Take a moment. Get the picture in your head.

OK, read on.

Think about the cosmos. Think of the ... outside-we-know.

Out there, beyond the still, stable world that we understand, the universe is in motion. *Existence* is in motion. It spins. It stutters. It slips. It turns. Even when it is still, it holds within it the staggering and terrifying potential for sudden motion.

The vast rock of the Earth, the tree of worlds, the stability in which we trust—

It always moves.

And, I think, that motion? That grinding, cataclysmic, unexpected, and slippery motion at the bedrock of the world? I think that's what the Serpents are.

I think that motion is, basically, snakes larger than mountains, larger than we can comprehend, larger than we can *see*, snakes larger than our eyes can process, we do not see them when we see them ...

Snakes, as they move across the Earth.

There aren't that many, but honestly, one would be enough. Ten would be enough, and one on Earth. To say: *ha ha, you thought the world was still?*

It moves.

Enough to *tell* us that the bedrock yearns to shift. To argue with our plaintive, childish whine that it ought never so.

It's impossible to see the Serpents at their normal size. Even, to be honest, if you are an astronaut. They are only in a very notional sense *actually* visible from space. They are visible from space, in the sense that a thing can be visible when nobody can see it, which is arguable; but then again, probably things were still visible from space even before there were astronauts up there to see?

An argument can, at least, be made.

It is impossible to see the Aaron's Serpents unless they've shrunk down. Unless they've become merely mind-bogglingly large—turned themselves into *daikaiju* and dragons, or something even smaller yet. Even if we *know* where and what they are, even if we *know* they are there, if we can perhaps see their *thereness* in the Mythic World or have had them pointed out to us, we just can't grasp it:

That mountain range is a snake, we know, but that is dissociated knowledge.

That river is, yes, like everything, alive...

We *talk* to them, but we cannot grasp the thing we see.

The Serpents are the children of the Tree of Worlds; they are born from it even as the planets are, even as the Earth was grown to dangle from its branch. They form from glyphs embedded in the wood. Even the littlest newborns, blind and barely distinguishable from their sourcing glyph, are bigger than human people get; before they leave the innards of the Ash to crawl upon its trunk and branches, they are long as skyscrapers and twice as strong (as a skyscraper would be, if it were strong). They are whip-fast, too: that's probably not what you want to hear about a twenty-five trillion ton snake, but what else can I say? It's true.

Their scales are as hard as the world itself.

Why don't they just steamroller the Excrucians, then? (Presumably by, like, literally *rolling over* them?) Mostly it's because they're actually *too* big. They can't engage them at a meaningful level. A Serpent that's using its full size to fight isn't in a *fight* any more, it's gone all conceptual, and that's not necessarily a thing the Host will lose.

Also, they aren't born to fight. They aren't *here* for war. They can fight if they gotta, but they're not snakes of battle (or, snattle.) They're ... they're *sneace.*

They're *snove.*

They're *snentle, sneaceful enjoyment of the existence of the snorld.*

They aren't come into the world to fight, any more than the great vastness of *things* has done.

They're there to exist, to *enjoy* existing; to explore the *Js.*

CHILDREN OF THE ASH

The Serpents buy **Ability** at two points per level. It is natural for them, like their other traits; they are born, like the mortals are, to immerse within the world—

But the Serpents, like the Angels, are essentially *im*mortal.

Vastness they have; it grants them ambiguous size and form and extraordinary physical and spiritual power.

Wanderer they also have; it calls them away to hidden worlds and distant lands. The stronger this trait, the better they are at travel in general, and, at bringing forth cool things from those distant lands.

Like the Fallen, the Aaron's Serpents are **Allegorical**—they are ancient and wondrous creatures, whose passage transforms others and wakes the world to life. This trait also has a power that acts like **Ignition** (pg. 196), letting their mundane actions compete with miracles when living up to a certain role; this is important for the Serpents *in particular* as their vast strength is, ultimately, mundane.

Finally, they too are **Sealed:**

They command weird, broken powers. Powers, or at least a power, that *breaks the rules*.

By default, their strength is mundane. They have an enormous Edge over any mortal combatant, but anyone capable of using miraculous strength to wrestle them to a standstill or whatever automatically succeeds. In practice, there are tricks of "being a *kaiju*" in **Vastness** and "competing with miracles" in **Allegorical** that means this almost never comes up: but, if they're not really very *good* at being vast, and they're not living up to their Allegorical role, and their Sealed power isn't strength or power (which it's most often not), they can actually *lose* a strength contest ... and then a hero can knot them up or throw all 25 trillion tons of them into the sea.[1]

Geasa are rare for the Children of the Ash (pg. 258); Gifts and Bonds somewhat less so (pg. 283, 259)

1 I've been advised by various snake-throwing companies that this is unlikely to have any meaningful climatological effect.

If you befriend an Aaron's Serpent, it'll show you the stars. It'll share its favorite food with you, or its favorite show, or its favorite relics of some ancient city lost to time. If you befriend an Aaron's Serpent, it'll take you onto the Ash one day, out onto the trunk and branches that are its mother and its home, and show you the sourcing power of the world. And if you are very lucky and it is thoughtful and it is kind it will never once bump into you, like all the worlds are ending; or crawl over you, like a Richter 9.

THE STORY OF THE RULES

Once, the Rules were writ into our flesh. Do you remember that?

Back in the garden, before the beginning of Earth's time, *we* were the holy book—we the DNA of us—and we were made for an ascension. We were made to seize innate divinity, to be *elohim,* godhead, namers of the unnamed things.

This was taken from us.

In the Garden, before the dawn of time, the Rules were ripped from us; were *cut out* from us, made independent. Were named ... sovereign and suzerain, were set *above us*, law and word appointed over life. They seized the garments of our holiness, and left us in our beggar's garb; they took the chalice of immortality, and kicked us, spurned us, from their manse's door.

We, who were born to be gods, were made to beasts.

The Rules will not deny it.

If you ask them, they will say, it is not their will. They do not *want* to hurt us, to stomp us down. They want, they will assure us, literally *nothing more* than to raise us up. They *yearn,* with every fiber of their unalloyed, undivided, and unfibered being to haul us up beside them, transform us, transfigure us: make us that which will live forever.

Only, they do not know how.

They know only one template for immortal things, after all, and that is Rule. The only way they would know how to raise us up is to make us *as* them—and this, even the Rules can understand, is a mistake. They will not even *pretend* that they believe that to turn you into a word, a name, a living law is to ... immortalize ... you. At best something of you would be preserved.

So ... ask them why they endure, why they survive, themselves, why they do not simply discorporate and return the legacy that they have stolen; why they dare to *arrogate* themselves the Rule of Rule over humanity, and they will blame their wicked, twisted conjoined twins. They will point, not at themselves, but at the sinister agenda of the Game.

"*We* did not take it from you," they will say; "not by our hand was the Garden sealed; not by our deaths will you be made immortal. That ... that *all of that* was them, was they, who were born on the selfsame day. We do not even hold, ourselves, the Garden, that was Lost."

In this they are not lying. Not exactly. They are not even precisely *wrong.*

It is merely that they have chosen, like an honest reporter in a lobby's pocket, a very *convenient* interpretation of the facts. They have chosen to understand the world in a way that requires they do nothing other than what they are naturally inclined to do, to take no responsibility for anything save what they wish; they have shied away from any more ... transformational ... understandings, lest the tower of their moral high ground shake.

Lest they have to look on us as equals, or with shame.

Lest they grasp that *we cannot be the equals of the Game* whilst the Rule holds yet our crown.

Who are the Rules, then? The Lords of Rule?

They are the self-appointed guardians of humanity. The ones born unto the world to save us ... or so they say. To ensure that, though *you* may die, though *I* may die, though all of our ambitions be made as trash, *something* that is humanity continues on.

They would break us if they could, make us as dolls—lock us up within their cupboards: safe, compliant, faceless, sound—but that would not be human.

They would make us live forever, as I have said, but they do not know how.

It is pitiable: they have ruined us, and now they must live with the ungainly herd of beasts they've ruined, must try to bake their bread from our mortal clay, to ... squeeze red blood to be their wine from all the awkward turnips of our lives, to save us, when we are so terribly unfit to being saved and they so terribly unfit to be our saviors and not the keepers of our tombs.

They are so brilliant and so beautiful but they are *cold* and o they do not understand.

Who are the Rules, I ask again?

THE RULES OF PLAY

The Rules buy **Ability** at one point per level. They may have Geasa, Bonds, and Gifts, but, in general, these are rare—the Rules possess a certain straightness and uniformity in their design.

The Lords of Rule are **Holy,** even as the Angels; lower-end Ability actions are made effortless. It is given unto them to tend the world; the cities of humanity are their gardens; thus the Lords of Rule are known to have the Angels' **Gardener** trait as well.

Too, the Rules have **Deepness** to them: they are abstract creatures, who can dissolve their identity into emptiness and disapparate from the world; who can represent, and be, more than they are; who can infect others with their soulless vision; and who can *eliminate* the tangled mess from life, imprisoning people and other things amidst the conceptual empyrean.

Finally, **Architect** is the power that they have to grasp the grand design of things—to move others to their will, with or without the target's knowledge; to anticipate what is to come. It drives their stratagems and their schemes: at level 0, barely enough to manage their Chancel or some other pocket world; at 7, able to map the Earth, and time, out to their distant ends.

Even as the Angels, the Lords of Rule are essentially immortal. Only the greatest miracles can do them harm; torn apart by mundane force or weaker miracles, they will simply ... reconstitute themselves. They become reborn, within the world, directly from the Rules of play.

They are that which stand in clouds of radiant glory and look away from life.

They love you. Yes. They know you. Yes. But they will not *see* you. They will not *hear* you. You are no holy book, no grand divinity; you are tainted by gross physicality of life.

They know you, yes—

But, *the you that there should have been.*

In the perfection of your soul do they know you. In the deep truths of you do they know you. They know things about you that you've never had a chance to live, nor you never will.

They stand without verisimilitude, not speakers to our world of flesh. They do not know the traumas in our bones.

They are equations on gematria.

They are a dream of perfection, through good law—of *us*, of *our humanity*, made perfect, through good law.

And that would be good. *They* would be good, for they *are* still the book, the holy book, the book that was made for us, the book that once lived *in* us, the truth, the glory, and the word, only, they are looking at the light, and not down at us; they *would* be good, but they will not see the tangled mess that real life becomes.

THE WILD

The Wild ...

The Wild is solipsist. It is inward-turning, it is a knowing of itself. It cannot distinguish between the Wild and the world.

Its Magisters arise from nothing. They discover they have form. They discover they are bounded, finite creatures. And so they say: *in Creation I am a prisoner.*

Lo!

They look upon themselves. A dissonance arises. They are not as they expect themselves to be. They are not entirely natural to themselves in every part. And so they say: *the Wild is alien to the world.*

In this, they are of course correct.

That is, to analyze the Wild in these terms and see that they can only see themselves; that their every reaction is a reaction to themselves; that they are ultimately introspective creatures, is to see the obvious origin for their thoughts. But they are still Imperators. They are still primal creatures. If they say they are alien creatures, if they say that they are prisoners of Creation, then perforce it must be so.

They are occupied with their own being. It transfixes them.

They find the hints of structure in their essence and unfold them into laws. They become creatures of absolute dedication to the rules they find inside them; or, perhaps, they've always been.

What is hurtful to them is dross, waste. To allow the existence of their enemies in the world is a self-destructive habit that they would like to kick.

WILD MAGISTERS

The Wild buys **Ability** at three points per level, though their Ability attribute is subtly different; a low-functioning Wild Magister is generally better described as "alienated" than as "hopeless." One might also say that a high-Ability Wild Magister is experiencing something closer to "synchronicity" than to "flow."

Its Magisters are prone to bearing Geasa (pg. 258), and may have both Bonds and Gifts (pg. 259, 283).

The Magisters of the Wild are alien in form; they wield the **Symbolic** power set, as will the Gods—an attribute that identifies them more thoroughly with their Estates and grants them additional limbs or physical features with persistent divine or magical abilities.

They are, arguably, monsters, too, as well—

Their **Monstrous** Trait enhances a personal Technique and grants them a number of powers out of nightmare. One of their specific traits (perhaps their strength, or their speed, or the force of their breath) is limitlessly potent. Where they go, they curse or cure the land. The strongest monsters of the Wild wield this trait in smithcraft and in artifice, creating fabled artifacts from it that are both wondrous and fell.

Their **Allegorical** Trait, as for the Fallen Angels, grants them the power to transform others, to be ancient and miraculous, and to wake the world to life. Where they walk, things unroot themselves, become self-contained, and cease their self-justifications. Symbols bleed into reality. Flowers pull free of the ground. Humans discard their faces, grow extra arms, and turn their speech to fire. Walls dissolve. Roads twist upwards into the air. Unreadable icons burn into being from the ether and hang in place, as if trying (somehow) to explain.

Finally, **Persona,** as for the Nobilis, allows them to incarnate in the things of their Estates, bind themselves to one or more of the laws their Estates follow, and turn things *into* or back away from being one of their Estates.

Trapped in the world, unable to escape it, the Wild is traditionally as immortal as the Angels. As *with* the Angels, though, this applies only to mundane actions and cheaper powers; level 7+ effects can grind the Wild down.

What is helpful to them, of course, is right and good and just.

But fundamentally and symmetrically, as it is necessary that they be, they are *fair.* They are absolute and unwavering in extending their philosophy to all.

You are a prisoner in Creation. *You* are an alien to the world. *You* must find the hints of structure within you, insists the Wild. You must unfold it into law. Sanity is a prison. History is a prison. *Personhood* is a prison. You are caught within its web.

The Wild dreams to set you free.

THE STORY OF THE GAME

The Game is the knotted twiggly horror in the gut of the human condition.

It's reckless.

It's cognitive errors and the death-fear. It's carelessness and small-minded negligence. It's the animal that lives in our flesh. It's the fact of having flesh at all.

TO PLAY THE GAME

The Lords of Games buy **Ability** at three points per level. It does not cripple them. Even at low levels of Ability, their divine powers make them awesome, glorious things.

They have access to Geasa, Bonds, and Gifts; Bonds (pg. 259) are the most common of the three.

And the divine powers of the Game are these:

Wanderer calls the Lords of the Game away to hidden worlds and distant lands, knowing not where they go or whence they came—though, typically, the land they visit most is representative of their Estates. The stronger this trait, the better they are at bridging between worlds at whim and bringing back the resources of those foreign lands.

Monstrous, as for the Wild, enhances a personal Technique and grants a number of powers out of nightmare. One of the Imperator's specific traits (often their strength, but perhaps their speed or something else) becomes limitlessly potent. They also gain an inconspicuous alternate form, the power to hide behind lieutenants that their enemies must defeat before they can challenge them, and the ability to curse or cure the land.

Prophet is the Game's parallel to the Domain and Persona of the Nobilis—the power that they have to enact their Estates into the world. It guides them in subtle inspiration; makes them inspirational to others; grants them strange arts evocative of their Estates; and most of all, allows them to solve problems as their Estates would do. It is in their capacity as Prophet that the Queen of Knives can cut through any line or queue; in their capacity as Prophet, that the Lord of Famine withers bills away.

Hunter, last and cruelest, is a power born of void. It is that hungry thing inside the Game that sees past the surface of the world and revels in the subtle essences beyond. Its practitioners are great hunters, mimics, and tricksters; they can counter others' powers and their Gifts.

It is granted unto the Lords of Games that they may see in Ninuan. This power they receive through the **Monstrous** Trait, even as do the Warmains (below); even as would the Wild (pg. 401), were they free to leave the world. With this power, they may travel freely, albeit cautiously, through the Excrucians' silvered land.

The Lords of Games are not typically immortal, although killing the deep essence of their Estates is harder than killing their body, mind, and soul—it is common to kill a Lord of the Game, only to have that essence flee as a fading shadow, returning at some future time with another personality and another face.

The Game is everything that makes us what we oughtn't be.

It's our folly.

It speaks with our own voices.

The Game will hear you. It'll more than hear you. It'll parrot you back at yourself. Maybe just the parts you say aloud. Maybe the parts you didn't mean to say at all.

The Lords of the Game can have grandeur to them, but to tell you the truth, I think that's our own pride. That's the part of us that wants our self-haunted and twisted and grieving side to be something awesome and magisterial, echoing back out. I think if we weren't so proud they would be as monkeys and parrots to us, chattering back in laughter all the things they've heard us say.

I could be wrong.

Maybe the side of us that walks in emo really *is* that grand.

The Game loves every human voice. A little outcast girl is as fab to it as a rock star or King—maybe *more*, since she needs more help from it to let her heart's voice free. It wants everyone to unleash that voice, you know, to stop holding themselves in, to live free and crazed and wicked as the beasts are wicked and an equal to everybody else.

The Game will set you free.

The Game will hold you up as you try to fly, will help you get farther and farther from land, and then it will drop you; for the only thing more beautiful to the Game than your freedom is your using that freedom to overextend yourself and die. Or, to kill yourself in folly or despair, or to tumble helplessly from the ruined cliff of your own ideas.

The Game doesn't want anyone to hold you back.

The Game doesn't want anyone or anything to get in the way of your *living.*

And the Game doesn't want anything to kill you in the end but you.

The Game is the wind and the laughter that follows a falling suicide, down into the night.

It doesn't really understand you, I guess I should observe. Not any more than the Rules do. It's a mad celebration of who you are and your voice and your freedom and your suicide but it's too blinded by the dark to really give any meaning to it all. It's barely even aware of *itself* when it's with you, except inasmuch as you are aware of it. It's listening to the sound of you much more than your specific words.

There're few creatures in all Creation less capable of grasping that something you are trying to tell them is genuinely *important* than the Game.

But that's okay, the Game will say.

You understand you, don't you?

Isn't that enough?

THE DEEP MYTHIC

In the primitive days of life and mind there were no easy distinctions.

Gods found themselves born into the world in the primeval state of the amoeba, the virus, and the mold. They were tangled gods, on the border between life and death, splitting and recombining, twisting about one another, unable to say exactly where one ended and another began, not because they were blind, but because of a genuine ambiguity in their forms.

We see this through the lens of science, squinting back, as the emergence of single-celled prokaryotes from the inanimate—

The dead world, beginning to waken to a state of war.

Listen, for this has always been the truth of life: that it hungers for the death of other life. That from the moment of its birth it seeks to consume the life around it, to subsume the life around it, to subdue the life around it and make it a portion of itself.

In the primeval tangle, the gods that were the greatest predators survived.

We know this—we should know this, at least—

Empathy was a latecomer to the game.

Empathy came hundreds, even thousands of rounds in. It didn't show up until life became restless at the murder of its lot and sought to take the game in a new direction. It didn't come into play until the minds of the world were stable enough, safe enough, fixed enough in their form that they could imagine being lonely; until the first victors had shown up, taking home the prize that was existence; until life had progressed far enough for its strongest representatives to declare successfully some boundaries to their selves.

The gods that came before it knew no loneliness. They were blind even to their misery, and they knew not the edges of their lives.

And so; and so; and so they struggled, for nigh a thousand years of world. The archaea-gods of Earth warred amongst themselves, and drank down all their children. Then there were the gods like algae, breaking forth upon the sea; and finally the New Gods, who learned the Idea "Cooperation" for the first time in the world, and made alliance, and imprisoned the bodies of their primeval forerunners in the mazes of themselves.

Suddenly the tangle of them at the lowest layers of the world was not war and death, but sex; or at least, war and death *and* sex, for they are still a very early sort of creature, and things to them are not entirely distinct.

These are the "True Gods" that we know today, writhing, intertwined and tangled alien sentience at the bottom of the mythic world. Their lives are lived in the deeps of the world, beneath the arbitrariness of our distinctions; all there is flesh and life, life against life, flesh against flesh, castles and cities made of these same named substances, where the soldiers and the servitors of the gods are as much their blood cells or their spoken words as individuals in themselves.

There the Gods live in palaces that are the bodies of the Gods—their own body, perhaps, or another's. There they grow armies of their own selves, and other Gods'. There they walk in caverns hollowed out inside themselves, and look up at the fleshy sunbeat of their heart. To try to pull them from the Mythic by force of attention is like catching the Ouroboros by the tail, or to drag out the phone company by pulling on a cord; your mind cannot hold them all, you can drag up only one of their tendrils, one of their extensions, one of their pseudopodia. Their edges blur back into the undifferentiated welter of everything else.

THE GAME OF GODS

Divine Imperators buy **Ability** at three points per level. This does not indicate so much that they're bad at life as that they're poorly equipped to move among humanity—a Divine Imperator with Ability 5+ would be a Divine Imperator that could work an office job without flinching, and that'd be a rare sort of creature indeed.

In form, they are alien. The **Symbolic** power set identifies them more thoroughly with their Estates and grants them additional limbs or physical features with persistent divine or magical abilities; their **Vastness** grants them ambiguous size and structure along with an extraordinary physical and spiritual power.

Like the Lords of the Game, they are called away to hidden worlds and distant lands. Often, those hidden worlds are the worlds within themselves—the palaces and kingdoms that exist within their sprawling metaphysical extent. Often, those distant lands are painfully unreachable; the yearning for them will never be requited. This is the Game's trait, **Wanderer;** the stronger the trait, the better they are at bringing forth wonders and immensities from such lands as they manage to reach, or have within.

Conversely, like the Lords of Rule, they have a **Deepness** to them: a power to abstract themselves—to withdraw from the surface of Creation, to pull back into the deep mythic, and become implicit in the world. This attribute is their power to entangle themselves with others, to infiltrate themselves into others, to be a thousand-tendriled thought instead of a *being* as beings are normally understood. Ultimately, it is a power to transfigure the things of the world, through their presence, into things *themselves* somehow deeper, more symbolic, and more abstract.

The Gods of Earth are typically immortal, and have access to Geasa, Bonds, and Gifts. The nature of their immortality is not the conceptual invincibility of the Angels; rather, it's just really hard to kill something that's that big, that deep, and that abstract. Even if you think you've killed one? You've probably missed a layer or two of what they are.

We are blind to them, though they are all around us.

They are ... too much.

We cannot look at a wall and see a tooth of a principle of building. We cannot see how it is in the act of crumbling, how the ceiling and the floor do squeeze it. We cannot see it as a place of infestation for the insects in the walls. We cannot see how buildings themselves are cast up like the mountains from the restless earth, one great long rolling wave of City that is born, crashes against the shores of people, life, and stone, and dissolves away again. We cannot see how the molecules of the thing strive constantly to break their form. We cannot see the fangèd everything that is around it striving constantly to swallow it back into the welter of all other things; how it will—when we cease to give attention to it—be inevitably devoured by the larger structure of our home, be chewed and gulped and swallowed down by the visual field, flowing into the things around it and their edges, bereft of all its boundaries and slaughtered. We cannot see how its calm stability in our lives is under threat eternal and will one day with certainty collapse. We cannot see the history of it, from the moment of the wall's arising to the day that it will end. We do not know what happened to the brothers and sisters of the drywall at its core; *and of such substance are the Gods.*

They are the baseline for the world.

They are the breath that first was breathed into our world, the Earth, to make it live.

And everywhere they are in intercourse with one another, at war with one another, strangling and killing and devouring one another, and we see it not; though less now, and more carefully, in these iron days, when even Gods are forced to truce.

ON THE DROWNING DEEPS

Beneath the Deep Mythic is an empty place. Beneath the Deep Mythic is a world un-breathed-into by the divine. To us it is not comprehensible.

To us it is a timeless, placeless void. It hath not even the darkness, but undifferentiated light; or perhaps the light is the same as darkness, the two not separated from another.

And the sky and the sea and the earth are as one thing, there. And all moments are as the same thing, there.

And the Imperators, they are formless there; not Angels or Serpents, but phenomena.

And the Riders, they are monsters too—cutting tendrils; fanged night.

And there is something, too, that much resembles life—that has the likeness of life, in that deepest place; something like the body of the world. But it is a corpse-life, a death-life, a life that hath not the divine spark that causes things to be. It is an endless, alien skittering at the bottom of the world.

Does it sound horrid? It is not horrid.

Does it sound frightening? Oh, it is frightening.

It is the deepest and most solemn place: that which we name the Drowning Deeps.

The Imperators and Excrucians of that place are ... different creatures.

Arguably they are the same *beings*—each Imperator found in the Drowning Deeps a spiritual extension of an Imperator above. Each *Excrucian* found below, in some abstract way, bound or correlated with the Riders that walk the Earth.

SHADOWS IN THE DEEP

The Imperators and Excrucians of the deeps do not share a character sheet with their worldly selves, if indeed worldly selves are a thing they have. They are functionally separate creatures.

They buy **Ability,** adapted to the deep, at one point per level. Geasa are common and Bonds are common; Gifts are relatively rare.

As with Gods, their basic nature is purchased as **Deepness** and as **Vastness:**

Deepness measures their attunement to the Deeps. It is what lets these monsters fade away into the Deeps, becoming one with it, or return themselves to immanence. It is what lets them bite as easily into minds and souls as flesh, savaging any visiting enemies. It disrupts the function of reality: with it, they may prison someone in a mirror-world, or dump out the Mona Lisa from her painting. It makes them more than ordinary mortal things.

It is, arguably, what correlates the Excrucians of the deeps to their surface "selves."

Vastness does not so much declare them large—what is size, in the Drowning Deeps?—as creatures of an *arbitrary* size. It enhances their physical and their spiritual power.

They have an equivalent to **Lore** (pg. 205), as well; save, adapted to the Drowning Deeps and not the void. This is what allows them to perceive and move in a place where perception and motion is not possible. It also allows them to arm themselves with locally sourced powers.

Lastly, like the Angels do, the Imperators of the deeps have **Adept.** Assiduously, they wield strange magics. They are rarely practitioners of known arts like formation magic or alchemy; rather, they have unique magic arts that are suited to the Deeps. This attribute facilitates these arts; grants them shielding, blasting, and mobility powers; at high levels, it lets them transcend the local space and time.

The local Excrucians instead have the Noble-like attribute, **Aspect:** they are monsters, but they are *tirelessly competent* monsters. They may be held at bay ... but not forever. Their mundane actions—the slicing of their tendrils, the dripping of their acid, the fluttering of their dusted wings—can contend with miracles. They are stronger and faster and smarter, always, than you would ever dare expect.

It is rare that a surface being has reason to go below; if one does, best tread with care.

opposite: *by Melissa Spandri*

... but for formed beings that venture into the Deeps, that hardly matters.

Down below, the War is a clash of formless monsters—of Imperators like bladeless edges and Excrucians like the culling fog. It is a place of predators, where at any moment *something* may lunge forth from the continuum to devour you, or a chorus of miracles ring out around you to forever banish you from time. The abyss itself, the Deeps, has eyes;

You can run forever, and you will never get away.

THE ACTUALS

Actuals buy **Ability** at three points per level. Even that is generous; they are not adapted to the surface of the world.

Geasa are common—see the reference to "Wardings" *(right)*—but Bonds and Gifts are relatively rare.

The Actuals have one unique divine power: **Visage.** This is the power they have to emerge into the world, to take on an apparent form, and to let that form relate to other things. It *organizes* the world around the Actual, and particularly the minds and selves of all observers, into the matrix defined by the Actual's vision—potentially doing very little, if the Actual sees itself as an ordinary beekeeper or an aspen; potentially warping history and the present and any viewers' minds, if it sees itself as a spreading plague of shadow, a cephalopod that lives inside the hearts of lovers, or the last and long-lost King of Tokhta Hill.

Like the Gods, the Deceivers, and the Lords of Rule, there is a **Deepness** to the Actuals—a Deepness that allows them to exist, not as life, but as phenomena. They are not *beings,* not in the sense that humans and dogs and cats are beings; they are infections in the world. At best, that terminology is literally accurate but undeserved; at worst, it is precisely and meticulously on point.

Like the Warmains *(below)* and the Lords of Rule, they are **Architects.** Manipulators. Weavers, at the web of fate. They see, or, rather, *are part of,* the grand story of the world.

For the Actuals, this is the power to place themselves where they like in the causal web and move others with gentle tugs upon that weave. It is the power to design their life and circumstances: to gather minions; predict and alter others' paths; to control the workings of the space that they—if they infect a space—infect. It inspires others; it lulls them to sleep; it lets the Actual slip into others' lives and hearts. At the highest level, it lets them understand what other people really are. —until the moment that their victim is devoured.

Finally, each Actual may have a unique **Style**: the power of a thing that is not life, but *pretends* to life, by means of an artificial specialty and a series of innovative plot devices. The power of, e.g., a biomechanical thing that is always growing new machinery, or a plague that may come up with new symptoms and vectors of transmission.

THE ACTUALS

In the deepest dark, there squirm the Actuals.

They are the bones and organs of the Drowning Deeps. They are the biomechanical architecture of existence. They are the substrate of *being* that precedes form.

They are the soulless forerunners of the True Gods—the movement that is like life, before it learned to live; the thinking that is like personhood, before it learned how to be people. They are the dead things that invented life.

They are born hollow; they are empty.

They have no capacity to bear witness to themselves. If they were to find themselves alive, and meaningful, and in possession of a soul, they would not know that they had done so. They may long for life and self, but these are things they may not have.

They make such identity as they possess by binding things around them.

They organize things into matrices. They cause things to relate to them. They give rise to the space in which things exist, the time in which they dwell, the capacity to have spirit within the flesh.

Alone they were lifeless. They were as meaningless words spoken from nothing to nothing to no purpose. They were as models without the concept of referents. They were the dead that moved. Then fire kindled in Heaven and was Firstborn, Imperator of Meaning and Existence; and the Actuals became something more. They were still dead, empty and alone ... but also a medium competent to sustain a world.

The Actuals are creatures of straight white limbs, pillars of ivory; the writhing, wriggling presence of impossibility. The breath that isn't breath, membranes of clear substance and the jittering of moments fit incompletely into Time. They are mechanical worms and insects that writhe together in the endless dark of their blindness, their deafness, their inability to touch or smell or taste or know. They strive a meaningless striving to consume, to grow, and most of all to *wake*—the last of which they cannot do, for to know themselves and thereby know the world is for an Actual both impossible and a sin.

They are content—inasmuch as the term applies—to remain in the subtle realms. They dwell in the Drowning Deeps, distanced from all immanent things, living among the amorphous, monstrous analogues to Imperators and Excrucians that move and predate down below. The Actuals are the terrain there, and the camp followers; the weapons, the supply lines, and the transports; the dissolvers of the dead. They are the matrix of being, and its container, in which the others war.

Yet they may emerge into our world—encysted, most often, in failed miracles and paradoxes; in the legacy of overweening Noble or Imperial hubris, or of something going *wrong.* They are caught in such things, like insects in amber; dredged up into the surface of the world by the pressure differential when that surface ... falls apart.

They may emerge into our world, and live among us.

It is, inevitably, a thing of tragedy.

The bodies of Actuals in the human world are interpreted forms; they make no biological sense. Often they make some *mythical* sense—e.g., thornbush-creatures, or creatures of spreading blankets of needle-like spines, or protoplasm, or creatures of endlessly branching wires, or whatever—but they may also be pure mandalas of flesh.

When it emerges, an Actual locks onto the nature of the worldly thing it dwells in—the miracle or the paradox, or, sometimes, the something-else. It merges with that thing's attributes: its mind if it has one, its body if it has one, its continuum if it exists in time. It lives and grows within that thing. It drives it to then consume other things: a hunger and a power of absorption that only sharpens, never fades.

The Actual, and the thing that has become an Actual, does not know itself.

It may only find itself by consuming—well, whatever it is it consumes. By *turning that thing into itself* so that it may see itself through that thing's eyes. That is the purpose of its consumption. That is the theory behind its actions. But it is a theory that fails. Over and over again it fails. The thing it consumes becomes as blind and deaf and empty as the Actual itself in the moment of its conversion.

It may only find itself by consuming; but consuming does not *help*.

The shape of the Actual grows as it devours. Sometimes this is literal: the creature becomes an expanding protoplasmic blob. Sometimes it is divisive: the creature remains, but something grows through it, leaving it suspended in the midst of the mandala's expanse. Finally it may be ambiguous: the Actual may "spread," occupying more and more minds and bodies and places and times, without any single entity's participation in that growth.

The Actuals are infections, they are infestations, they are plagues. At best they have a terrifying power to eat things they oughtn't be able to eat, driven by an equally horrific appetite. At worst they have merely to touch you, or to look at you, to bring you into the collective of themselves.

They are primordial. They precede us. They are shrouded in great Wardings, and may not be interfered with without great Cost.

If the world is lucky the Actual will have a guiding mind that resists this growth. If it is unlucky it will have a guiding mind that colludes with it. More go that way than you would think. They give in, they go along. They agree to devour the world, and who could blame them? Their need is real and vital.

Even such monsters as the Actuals do not deserve the deprivation they endure. They deserve our help. They deserve a rescue. But there is nothing to be done.

They cannot have what they need.

They will never have what they need. It is not possible.

There is nothing to be done for them save to burn their hosts, to cut them back into the Drowning Deeps, and to exile them piece by painful piece from all the world and sound.

On Those Most Wicked and Faithless, the Deceivers

The Deceivers live outside the world; they think that we have built the world out of lies. They think the whole of Creation is a jungle of deceit that we have put up to keep from seeing ourselves the way we really are.

They love us but they love not that lie.

They come to unmake the world for us. They come to help you forget the Eyes and Ears and Nose, the Work and Home and School, the Trees and Wind and Laughter and Hearts and Hope.

They come because they think us marvelous, whatever it is they think we are—whatever thing they imagine, that we cannot imagine ourselves, lives behind these purported lies.

And because they see us as such, we may see ourselves as such, in them.

Their love is sneaky and dirty and beautiful and it makes us love ourselves. It is a gap of forgiveness and grace in the iron of the world. It is awful because they will not hesitate to hurt us, or lie to us, to open up that crack. They do not see the legitimacy of any of the things we believe in. They only see the soul.

In their eyes—

It is like looking into night, and seeing yourself on a field, in open space and cradled in the arms of the earth and sky; and the stars look down, and one by one begin to fall.

Sometimes that's terrifying. Sometimes it's loving, too. Sometimes it is a desecration of the sky and at other times a gift.

They are honest but they hate us in every particular; it is only the invisible essence that they love. They are the ones that tell us we need not judge ourselves forever for what we have done, but they are not approving of anything else that we may be.

In a ritual that takes a day—dawn to dawn, dusk to dusk, or some incomprehensible equivalent in the Lands Beyond Creation—a Deceiver may tell themselves the story that they are someone *else*.

In this fashion they weave about themselves the power of someone real that they have met.

The result is not particularly obvious.

The person whose life they borrow most likely will not notice—will feel an apprehension, at the most, a shudder, as if someone had walked across their grave. Those who look at the Deceiver are unlikely to see the lie: they change their *spirit*, not their *body*.

But the Deceiver gains in the course of the ritual full access to everything that person *is*.

They gain their mortal skills. Their passions. Their loves and hates and needs. They gain their powers—for instance, and most importantly, the miraculous abilities a Power or Imperator has.

Thus you may meet a Deceiver with all the power of the Power of Fire, or Guns, or Waves, or Green or Greed. Or, worse, a Deceiver in the "skin" of an Imperator, immortal as Imperators are immortal, and capable of speaking Imperial laws unto the world.

Name the story—find whose power it is they have stolen—and you may control the Deceiver.

This is a limited power.

It can't be used against them more than once every few hours and only by someone loyal to Creation. You get one order, one command that you can slip under their second skin.

They can defy that order, too, if they have to. It shatters their power—they lose the borrowed power, which makes them vulnerable, and dearly does it wound them—but they don't *have* to obey.

The effects fade over time, too; it's probably just three to seven days or so, until they can pretend they didn't hear the order at all.

It's not an insurmountable weakness, in other words, but it's a pretty bad one. Name the Deceiver's "second skin," the source of their borrowed power, and you can compel them.

The Powers call this *the Truth of the Name.*

THE PRINCIPLES OF DECEIT

Deceivers buy **Ability** at two points per level. Many are immortal, unnaturally beautiful, or both. They may have other Geasa, Bonds, or Gifts.

Like the Gods, like the Lords of Rule, they're possessed of a quality of **Deepness**—their truth is a truth beyond that found upon the surface of the world. Like the Gods, like the Lords of Rule, they may *dissolve* themselves: may vanish from the superficial experience of Creation, and enter into a subtler underlying world; may come to represent something *more* than they are as just themselves; may *infect* those who dare encounter them with their particular ideas.

Persona is another method they have for imposing their perspective on the world. Like the Powers, their Persona allows them to incarnate into the "Estate" that is its subject; to bind themselves to its rules as Geasa; to bring other things into, or cast them out, of that Estate. Theirs, though, is not the Nobles' Persona; theirs not the governance of, nor the identification with, any *thing* within the world. Rather, each has a Persona that is reflexive, that binds them into a personalized edifice of myth. They choose pseudo-Estates with their own names in them like "the Lies of Iolithae Septimian" or "Those Who Listen to Coriander Hasp"—and thus, they may incarnate into those lies, or into those who so listen; may bind themselves to the rules that govern that rare and particular cheat and game; may make existing things into Iolithae's lies, or induct them into the ranks of those who listen; or, of course, of those who *no longer* listen; or take those lies and cast them out and make them truths.

It's weird. But that's fair. *They're* weird.

Like the Fallen, the Deceivers have **Sealed:** a power set that's just as weird as they. A power set that's *broken.* ... but which doesn't help as much as it *ought* to help unless their attribute or their Cost expenditure is high. For most of them, this is going to be the power of the Second Skin.

Finally, they have access to **Theft,** which is the ability to reach into people and take *something* out. Part of the target's "truth." That can then be used to control the target, or to emulate them, or to draw directly on the thing they took. This is more generally a trickster's power set; it offers shapeshifting as well.

The Deceivers' ability to perceive Ninuan is limited; *their* sense of the void is far more philosophical, personal, and abstract. They must use indirect means (Ability, as described on pg. 64; magic; breaking themselves with Theft; or borrowing the skin of a Lord of Games) to perceive the silvered land.

... if pressed, rather than construe this as a weakness on their part, they will generally interpret Ninuan as a communal mental construct that serves to organize the Host.

ON THE STRATEGISTS' ACCURSED FATE

I shall keep these notes brief, for much on the Strategists has been spoken elsewhere; but some few things must here be said.

The Strategists are those that say that the world is wrong. Saying that the world is wrong, they armor themselves in the power of emptiness. They weave it into them, body, mind, and soul, because it is *not* the world. Then they come into the world to break it.

It is sick. It is a sickness.

Should I empathize with they who come into the world to torment and destroy us, all the while dripping with their disdain and moral judgment? Should I empathize with those who tell us always how horrible and wrong we are even as they tear our lives apart?

... it's not the job of those of us they've scarred, I think. It's not my job, and perhaps not yours.

But ... *someone* maybe should, I guess;

Their own fates are rather awful ones.

They are dying, each and every one of them is dying, often in ways too horrible to contemplate. The world closes up the existence of each Strategist like a wound, in unique, individualized, and personal ways; and then they don't stay dead. They fall screaming into the void instead. They flail outwards into the Not.

They armor up there, like I said; drink deep of the cool, healing substance of the nothingness; and then, they come back again into the world, to suffer, and to make us hurt.

... they don't know any other way to live.

On the Hidden Terror of the Mimics

The Mimics dwell among the Imperators.

They're like Imperators.

They have Estates. They can speak Imperial miracles. They can even have Chancels and Powers.

But at the heart of each Mimic is a horrible twisting secret blasphemy of the void. The Excrucians put it there, so the story goes—in desperation, when killing an Imperator isn't going right, when just *ending* the Estates won't do what they want it to; or in opportunism, when they've got an Imperial corpse that no one knows about, so they don't *need* to finish off its portion of the world right then.

They don't kill it, not quite, if it wasn't dead. They don't burn the cerement-Estates away.

They shove the pieces around the blasphemy and make a Mimic of it all, instead.

There's nothing the Mimics fear more than letting someone see that secret blasphemy inside them.

Which is good, by the way, because knowing one of those secrets can cause your brain to spiral in on itself like a neural net at the edge of a singularity, and then when there's nothing but blank void in your head, your skull will crumple inwards like a crushed soda can and you'll wail out this endless susurration of the secrets of the void and everyone will scream and try to cut your tongue out before you finally pop your heart and go away. That's not what happens to *everybody*, you understand, but it's how György Krusko and Javairia Al Sabah went and a couple others at the edge of the people-studying-all-this community, and nobody knows of any cases where it's ended *well*.

The Mimics are just like the Imperators, in short, only instead of being natural, they're unnatural; instead of being premised on something right and appropriate in Creation, they're a set of Estates premised on something awful and unnaturally wrong. That is why they work against Creation, even though they seem to be *like* the things of Creation.

It's like the Mimics and the rest of us are words in the same language, but used to a different intention.

On the Brutality of the Warmains

The Warmains wish to wrestle us.

They wish to *test* us, to make us fight them, to make us hate them. They cast electrons from their orbit to make the protons rage. They break the symmetry of planets. They spit Flynn Gannary upon their blades to make his mother fight.

His *mother!* She didn't even know about the War!

They tell us that the world is unworthy of unbeing; that

THE GAME OF MIMICRY

Mimics are generally created with an epic **Greater Invocation** (pg. 222, 248); assuming that the Imperator in question is in fact dead or close to it, the process is relatively quick. If the creator is hoping for a staunch ally, they should also bind the Mimic as a Treasure (pg. 182)—if not immediately, then, at least, quite soon. Otherwise, they may simply leave the Mimic, once created, to go about its tainted life.

Mimics buy Ability at the rate set for the Imperator type they Mimic; their propensities for Gifts, Bonds, and Geasa follow the pattern for that type as well. Thus, a Mimic crafted out of an Angel would buy Ability at one point per level (pg. 397), prefer Bonds to Geasa, and favor unnatural beauty and flight over miscellaneous Gifts. A Mimic crafted from a Serpent would buy Ability at two points per level (pg. 399); Geasa would be unlikely, but Gifts and Bonds a little less so.

Mimics have an attribute that functions much like the Strategists' **Eide** (pg. 159); it differs only in that their dream-of-self is not their own, but a thing built by their creator(s) out of a law-being's corpse.

The Mimics are, like the Fallen, **Wounded.** Even more so than the Fallen, perhaps; their superficial wounds mean less to them, they have no single defining dagger in their hearts comparable to the Fall, but—there is nothing *to* them, at the core of them, *but* a wound. They constellate the pieces of themselves around the gaping horror of it.

Like the Deceivers, they may practice **Theft.**

Finally, each has a unique **Style**—the power of a faker in the world of the Imperators, a power not just to access the basic techniques of their Imperial "kind" but to wield a unique specialty and a series of inventive plot devices as well. For comparison, imagine an ice elemental with a few apprentice techniques (and a *lot* of ice magic) infiltrating wizard society, or a disguised bear with a basic grasp of manners and a *lot* of money infiltrating human society: it's really not the *same*, but it's enough to get through an awful lot of wizarding or human situations, respectively.

They do *not* get the various attributes of the Imperator type that they imitate, but they are generally able to emulate them. For instance, they are never **Holy,** but have multiple ways to make an impression, get into people's heads, and be spotlit by environmental effects all the time. They're never **Allegorical,** because there'd be something intrinsically hinky there, but they can use Eide or Style to bring the world around them to life ... or, with a bit of work, use Wounded, instead, or Theft.

Fleshy immortality such as the Angels have is functionally a Gift, and so tends to carry forward to the Mimics of a type. Abstract immortality such as the Game (pg. 402) and the True Gods (pg. 403) possess is a little harder to duplicate; Mimic True Gods must aim to never die.

THE LAWS OF WAR

The Warmains are eerily competent; they buy **Ability** at one point per level.

Their physical forms are things of power, often possessing Gifts (pg. 283) like flight, natural weaponry, immortality, fiery breath, unnatural beauty, or the ability to pierce the boundaries between the worlds. They may also have an inexorable Geas or two (pg. 258) or an alien Technique purchased (pg. 259) through a Bond.

The core divine attribute of the Warmains is also a core power of the Game (pg. 402); they are reflections, twisted duplicates, across the boundary of the Is and Not.

That attribute is **Hunter:** the hungry thing inside them that sees past the surface of the world and revels in the subtle essences beyond. Its practitioners are great hunters, mimics, and tricksters who can counter others' powers and their Gifts.

Monstrous hath the Warmains too, to enhance a personal Technique and grant them a number of powers out of nightmare. They may lurk in inconspicuous form. They can escalate their strength, or perhaps their speed, or perhaps something else entirely, to a level the world cannot bear. They can hide behind lieutenants that their enemies must defeat before they can challenge them.

They can curse or cure the land.

Like the Fallen, they have **Allegorical.** They have no story of their own within the world, but enter it as creatures of metaphorical and psychological import. With this attribute they transform others, wake the world to life around them, and wield an ancient, wondrous power.

Finally—and here they break, at last, from any parallel with the Game—they have access to **Architect.** They are not Strategists, but they are creatures of war, and a portion of that war is strategy. The Warmains grasp the grand design of things. With that design, they may move others to their will; with that design, they may anticipate the things to come.

It is granted unto them that they may see Ninuan; this, through their **Monstrous** attribute, as for the Game. They are Ninuan's scourges and its guardians, they hunt its wild lands; in deep and hidden places in its darkness do the Warmains make their homes. Woe to any being of Creation that they should find there; woe, sometimes, even to Excrucians met along the way. They may greet and discuss strategy, may share a drink and a fire; may invite the traveling deathwright or Deceiver or fellow Warmain in, or pass in silence; these are the proper behaviors, and the most likely ... but they may also see something in their fellow Rider that, if not properly *Creational*, is still and somehow worthy of their hunt.

only the *best* of us deserve to end at their hands. They tell us that the world is only truly *real* in its opposition to them—in what it is to the Warmains—and that it has no purpose save as their testing creates. The world is not a lie but a hypothesis to them: **here is something that may show the Warmains worth.**

They are brutal and focused.

They are profoundly uninterested in your unwillingness to play their games of war. They do not accept the refusing of their challenges. You will lose, and then they will either leave you alone or break you; or you will win, and they will make it their mission that you should die.

And they will love that—you understand.

They will give you a smile that can break your *heart* before they put aside the game and go to kill you. They will not be lashing out in bitterness. They will be delighted and amazed that they have found another person worthy of this death. They love nothing so much as that delight and that amazement. They love nothing so much as being impressed by you. They will not think that they are ending you. They'll talk about it as if they are lifting you up from existence, *freeing* you from it, making you a part of something infinitely more worthy—*them*. If you make a strong enough impression the Warmain will even take your face and personality and body type after you die. They will adapt themselves to the incidentals of your *dharma*, they will keep your fundamental nature alive by emulating you as they find new people to challenge, hurt, and kill, in honor of you.

Because they decided you were just. That. Cool.

opposite: *by Melissa Spandri*

Index

… 25
[Icons and Symbols] 312, 318
λ- 43, 382
Arcs 312
Black and White Flame 327
Misc. 318

Aaron's Serpents 42, 55, 59, 398-399
Abandoning Quests 322
Abaton 392
Abd-al-Rashid, city of 341
Abhorrent Transmogrification 288
Abhorrent Weapons 47, 190-191
Ability 98-99, 125-131, 271, 313, 371-372
Abomination ..... see *Blunderbore*
Absurdist Comedy 337-344
Action level ..... see *Action result*
Action result 138, 155, 260
Actuals, the 406-407
Administration Miracles 183, 194
Advanced (Science) 134-135
Aelfscienne 49, 64, 133, 392
Age of Pain, the ..... see *Third Age, the*
Age of War, the ..... see *Third Age, the*
Agony Rites 167-168
Alchemy 135
Alfar, the 49, 133
Ambiguity? 100, 112-113, 133-134
Amphibian 294
Angels 42, 46, 55, 59, 65, 106-107, 134, 395-397
Any-Time Quests 317-318, 318-320
Annujan 48-49
Arc Quests 313
Arcana 66, 98, 100, 205-206, 212-222
Arcs 313, 371-375
Art 47
Atrocity ..... see *Briareos*
Attention 44, 45, 228
Attention (action) 114
Automatic Powers 153, 249-250
axis mundi ..... see *World Ash, the*
Bane, the 38, 97, 120-123
Base Difficulty ..... see *Difficulty*
Bellum Magnum, the 21, 46-49, 61
Bessares ..... see *Briareos*
Beyond, the ..... see *Ninuan*
Biluin ..... see *Blunderbore*
Bindings Arcs 99, 313, 371-372
Bleak Effects 136, 252-254
Bloody-Handed God, the ..... see *Lord Entropy*
Blunderbore 191
Bonds 98, 259
Bonus XP ..... see *Quest Bonus XP*
Border Mythic ..... see *Mythic World, the*
Briareos 191
Burn 98, 232-233, 267-268, 274, 279
Cadenza ..... see *luthe*
Campaign 17
Cape May, NJ 107
Casting Rites 172, 237-238
Chancels 55, 134, 135, 137, 395
Chancery 18, 72, 97, 156
Chapter 18, 116-118
Cityback, the 61
Cliffhanger Rites 170
Cneph 42, 354, 383, 397
Colbrand 190
Colibrand ..... see *Colbrand*
Completing Quests 323
Connection Miracles 193
Conflicts 125
Complex 262-265
Mundane 138-139
Mundane vs. Miraculous 256-257
Miraculous 260
Vs./Among Wishes 261
Conjury 135
Contagion Miracles 235
Contests ..... see *Conflicts*
Cost 98, 267, 267-273, 273-279, 279-281
Costumery Miracles 168
Council of Four, the 60-61
Creation 35
Cruxstone 136
Cuing Action ..... see *Nudge*
Cup of Flame, the ..... see *Weirding Wall, the*
Damage ..... see *Taking Damage*
Death 36, 39, 40, 276
Deathwrights 39, 49
Deceivers 51-52, 281, 407-408
Decisive Action 119
Deck, the 206
Deep Mythic, the 59, 403-404
dementia animi 58, 69
Design Rites 197
Designs 136
Desperation 240
Destruction Miracles 235-236
Devils ..... see *Fallen Angels*
Difficulty 125
Diminutive 385-388
Dionyl 133, 392

Disappointment 276-277
Divine Imperators 42, 403-404, 406
Divine Plan Miracles 198
Dog-Headed Goddess of Ordinary Things, the ..... see *Imperators: Surolam*
Dol-y-gaer, reservoir at 355
Domination 42
Drowning Deeps, the 404-406, 406-407
Drunkard's Gift, the 286
Durant 290-291
Dynamic Action 116
Dystopian YA 344-349
Eden 392
Edge 125, 131, 139
Eide 98-99, 156, 159-160, 161-178, 179, 271, 313, 375
Eide, the 44, 152
Eight Impossible Numbers, the 47
Elysium Miracles 234
Ember 42
Emptiness Arcs 99, 313, 375
Ending Book, the 100, 273-274
Epic (Effects) 132-133, 248-249, 262
Ereto ..... see *Eurytos*
Ersius ..... see *Western Sea, the*
Esoteric (Effects) 68
Estate 56, 394
Eternal 283-285, 291
Eurytos 191
Everyday Actions 125, 127-128, 251
Excrucian Eyes .... see *Eyes, Excrucian*
Excrucian Militares .... see *Strategists*
Excrucian Names .... see *Names, Excrucian*
Excrucians, the 46-49, 59, 97, 404-406
Abhilash Folcher, dying of propaganda 188
Abrimund Pelendavian, dying of puppetry 210
Achillios Arminius, dying of gentrification 228
Adosinda Valentia, dying of life 185
Agiwulf, who walked far 208
Agnavi Gerungsson, dying of paradise 185
Aiderida Elsevir, dying of illumination 139, 288
Akrios Vennon, of Newberry 290
Alatheus Tirzah, dying of fog 187
Alodia Godafrid, dying of rumor 227
Amalasontha Getacian, dying of the bathroom 162
Amalgard at-Vidius, dying of grain 164
Amaliana Welbarc, dying of souvenirs 184
Anselm Maramurian, dying of the bath 208
Ariana Aquincium, dying of the trumpet 211
Athanaric Kalden, who burns bright 314
Audovera Tyras, dying of heat 188
Aunigild, namer of the weapon Monstrous 190
Aurica Melsambrian, dying of stories 371
Avery Leudagar, dying of sunlight 227
Beucadican Myrkvior, dying of smoking 166
Brandila Silva, dying of tornadoes 166
Celestria Durance, dying of laughter 190
Clarimond Holmes, author 42
Coliya Albins, instigator and ideologue 351
Drogo Cronesis, dying of toughness 291
Ebruim Vantchev, dying of graduation 209
Emmeline Widukind, dying of the box 229
Erebic Vandil, of the drunkard's gift 286, 391
Eutharic Carolus, dying of hand sanitizer 162
Evgeniya Davkiya, dying of claustrophobia 166
Fabian Comosicus, dying of examples 279
Farnobius Nores, author 366
Fastrida Ostelin, dying of stylization 292
Gabriela Varin, dying of legacy 210-211
Gadicadigan once-Gaur, dying of surnames 389
Galaias Suardone, dying of snakes 211
Galienne Karga, dying of bears 232
Galterius Therivingian, dying of sweeping 230
Genseric Dace, as described by Faith Bernham 291
Gesimund Lucashev, dying of paper cranes 211
Gildegud Rusidavian, dying of the tower 210
Gladwin Arcaeda, dying of the sound of bugs 190
Godigisel Audamar, dying of forests 228-229
Gosvintha Tzeviyel, dying of war 210
Gudelive Ibnassian, dying of illusions 165
Gundrada Nilkins, the Glorious 291
Guinemar Welkin, dying of grief 232
Harmut Aedean, author 97
Harumaph 354
Herlewin Toome, who wields the flower rite 255
Hinnerith Carsus, dying of rank 185
Huneric Oursler, dying of the four seasons 230
Iustina Thrasaric, Deceiver, who is all fires' end 356
Jeanne-Alice Maliqe, dying of scissors 185
Jocelin Duras, the disappointing 276
Julie Detrick, with her Unblemished Guise 295
Kaethe, who found the summit of the void 208
Kheryna Reiner, dying of filth 230
Kriemnas Gepoia, of the loyal sphere 288
Kyrina Geissler, dying of the mountain 227
Lagariman Dracontos, dying of delight 165
Lampridius Ansamen 131, 286
Laodice Roufon 175
Lenya Adrasteia, dying of guns 187
Leovigild Lengyel, dying of daisies 207, 345
Lexiarchos Caducine, dying of old age 178, 269, 317
Licinia Aldwin, dying of water bottles 228
Liecia Coren, blogger 347

Lithius Tain 329
Logistilla Lacasse, author 257, 331, 333
Lucian Voros, dying of swords 208
Lysarges Britolanian, winged fox of the Host 294
Madelgarde Kistri, dying of amber 278-279
Malakai Mesmer, dying of lost empathy 127, 269, 368
Marcovefa, dying of asbestos 289
Matavius, consort to a notional ruler of the Not 384
Melancholy Eitsfulg, dying of the otherworld 163
Mr. Cheung (in potential), dying of ants 9
Nicolette Hailwic, dying of rage 186
Oeriel Faucher, dying of harmony 228
Osuin Thermidau, dying of artificial sweeteners 67, 67-69, 91-93, 151-153, 209, 307-309
Otker Nentidavian, correspondent 323
Pepin Rhaterin 125
Radegond Gethiran, dying of frowns 207
Renault Amphibolous, dying of cats 163
Retemaris Arproprion, dying of The City 164
Riciberga Wendelin, dying of philosophy 164-165
Ruothilde Zamil, the eternal 291
Sadagares Arkyn, dying of caves 165
Sigibald Abteien, dying of theft 166
Sigrida Ofilius, dying of noise 230
Silvester Bethania, dying of money 188
Sisenand Grimhilt, dying of a hut in the woods . 162
Sthenric Merrin, dying of an overtight collar 292
Sunilda Hadubrand, dying of dreariness 208
T. Herminafrid Holmes, neo-compatibilist 349
Theodric Moreau, dying of calcification 227
Theudegisklos Mosian, misdialing fetishist 92-91
Thiudia Greuthung (may she know no sunsets, nor no stars) 283
Thursten Ismara, dying in a Russian prison cell .. 188
Totogoto Beligine: free from the bonds of Time 290
Turin Vulferam, dying of online comments 229
Ulfegoia Branwen, who has a wolf in her name .. 386
Unimund Bures, dying of appearances 186
Ultrogotha Carelli, author 340
Vadamerca Zakynthian, dying of mecha 162-163
Vetericus Sarka, dying of stealth 208
Vilares Scandzia, dying of curry 184
Vinitharius Sarmize, who caught the bus 259
Vivian Buryat, author 49
Wilgefortis Trana, dying of infringement 210
Ygraine Leubovera, who has seen her destiny 289
???, who is dying of waves 10
Exorcism 135
Extraordinary Powers 132-133, 248-249, 262
Eyes, Excrucian 19, 46
Fae, the 65
Faery Magic 135
Fall, the ..... see *War in Heaven, the*
Fallen, the ..... see *Fallen Angels*
Fallen Angels 42, 281, 397-398
Fire-breathing 294
First Age, the 43
Fisher's star, the 350, 394
Flight 294
Flore 98-99, 156, 181-183, 183-202, 203, 270, 313, 374
flores ..... see *Treasures*
florilegia 182
Flower Rite, the 59-60, 177, 255, 328-330
Focus Quests/Characters ..... see *Session Focus*
Folk Tales 351-357
Formation Magic 135-136
Fortress-Scale Artifacts 202
Four Costs, the ..... 98; see also *Cost*
Fugue 98, 211-212, 269-270, 274, 279
Fugue Chip 25
Gaieges ..... see *Gyges*
Game, the 42, 402
Game Master (GM) 17, 96
Geasa 98, 258-259, 262
Gifts 98, 183, 283-295
of (Greater) Destruction or Unfettering 284
of Tongues 286
Glamour 135
Glitch 36
Glitch, the 35, 97, 122
Glitched, the 38
Glorification Miracles 196
Glorious 291
Golden Age Foundation, the 364
Golden Era, the ..... see *First Age, the*
Greater Powers
Administration Miracles 200
Agony Miracles 174
Casting Rites 177-178, 243
Cliffhanger Rites 175-176
Connection Miracles 198
Contagion Rites 241
Costumery Miracles 175
Design Rites 202
Destruction Miracles 241
Divine Plan Wishes 202
Elysium Rites 240
Glorification Miracles 200-201
Guidance Miracles 200
Hunt Miracles 220
Ignition Miracles 201
Inchoation Wishes 221
Infusion Miracles 221, 382
Intensity Rites 174
Investigation Miracles ..... 218; see also *Investigation Effects*
Invocation Miracles 222
Masking Wishes 243-244
Misdirection Miracles 178
Navigation Miracles 220-221
Percipience Miracles 221
Projection Rites 198

Revenant Rites 240-241
Shattering Miracles 242
Spherecraft Miracles 218-220
Strategy Miracles 177
Stunts 174-175
Talent Miracles 176-177
Trust Miracles 201
Unfettering Rites 242-243
Vision Miracles 218
Wailing Rites 238-240
Gretchen Smith, revelation of, the 379
Guidance Miracles 194
Gyges 191
Harumaph ..... see *Excrucians: Harumaph*
Hatred ..... see *Malambruno*
Haunt 39
Heaven ..... 42, 344, (391-)392, 395-397
Hell 391, 397-398
Horror ..... see *Eurytos*
Hreidius ..... see *Western Sea, the*
Hunt Miracles 214-215
IC 17, 96
Ignition Miracles 196-197
Immersion 98, 191-192, 270, 274, 279
Immortal 292
Imperators 40-42, 54-55, 58, 59, 97, 345, 394-395, 404-406
Ananda, Imperator of Murder, the Infinite, and the Fourth Age that Is to Come 61
Angel of the Golden Era, the 43
Angel of the Houses of the Sun 355
Angel of the Sea, the 106-107
Angel of Subtle Causal Force, the 210
Angel of Time, the 40
Angel of Trees, the 40-42
Attaris Ebrôt Appêkā, Imperator of the Third Age 47
Beauty 42
Bet-Raqaph, Imperator of Space 46
Ebrôt Appêkā 48
Firstborn, Angel of Meaning and Existence .40, 406
Ha-Qadosch Berakha 61
Jan ben Jan, Imperator of Earth's Second Age 43
Lord Entropy, Imperator of Desecration, Destruction, and Scorn 56, 61
Surolam, Imperator of Willpower, Law, and the Broken-Hearted 61, 392
Za'afiel 392
Immutable 292
In Character ..... see *IC*
In-Focus Quest ..... see *Session Focus*
Incarnate ..... see *Rules, the*
Inchoation Miracles 216-217
Infection ..... 36, 38, 49, 121-123, 167-168, 174, 226, 234, 240, ... 277-279
Infection State 233-234, 238-240
Infusion Miracles 216
Instantaneous Effects 248
Intensity Miracles 168
Investigation Effects 254
Investigation Miracles .... 212; see also *Investigation Effects*
Invisibility 294
Invocation Miracles 217
Ite 42
Jotunheim 392
Lacunae 64-65, 135, 136, 393
Lands Beyond the World, the ..... see *Ninuan*
Language of Flowers, the 136
Languages 100, 133, 286
Law-Beings ..... see *Imperators*
Levers 99-100
Literary Fiction 358-364
Loathing ..... see *Gyges*
Loci ..... see *Chancels*
Locust Court, the 61
Long Road to Recovery, the 365-370
Long-Ranged (Effects) 249
Lords of Games, Lords of the Game ..... see *Game, the*
Lords of Rule, Lords of the Rules ..... see *Rules, the*
Lore 98-99, 157, 205-207, 207-222, 223, 269-270, 313, 371-372
Lostling 207, 382
Loyal Sphere 288-289
Luck 289
luthe 380-381, 388
Magic 127, 134-138
Magisters of the Wild 42, 401
Major Goals 321
Malabur ..... see *Malambruno*
Malambruno 191
Mars 49
Mashai ..... see *Imperators*
Masking Rites 238
Matavius ..... see *Excrucians: Matavius*
Mimics 54-55, 87, 132, 281, 409
Miracles 67-69, 91-93, 136, 151-153, 158, 247-257
Misdirection Miracles 172
Moment of the End, the 43
Monstrous ..... see *Colbrand*
Mortals 281, 393
Mundane Actions 18, 134, 138-139, 151-152, 256
Mythic Reality ..... see *Mythic World, the*
Mythic World, the 56-59, 392
Mythological Beast (Gifts) 292-295
Nameless Roads, the ..... 43, 360; ..... see also *Nobilis: Fayola Osiagobare*
Names, Excrucian 19, 379-390
Narsinha ..... 46; see also *Weirding Wall, the*
Native Ground ..... see *Sanctuary, the*
Navigation Miracles 215
Nettle Rite, the 60, 265
Night-Craft, the 136
Ninuan ..... 39, 43-45, 46, 63-64, 97, 118-124, 135, 135-136, ... 212-214, 375, 382, 394

Nobilis, the 55-56, 58, 61, 134, 136, 276, 281, 328, 345, 369, 371-372, 394-395
Adrien Elsey, Power of Toys 55
Alice Acacia, Power of the Reprieve 55, 60, 249
Bran Gainor, Power of Armor 55
Damon, Power of the Sands 55
Fayola Osagiobare, Power of Branching Paths 46, 55, 205
Helissent de Reymes, Power of the Maze 55
Ianthe Falls-Short, Power of Debate 55
Kalliope Tsouderos 174, 295
Malahdi, Power of Sevenfold Vengeance 55
Power of Guns, the 60
Nobles, the ..... see *Nobilis, the*
Non-Player Character ..... see *NPC*
Not, the ..... see *Ninuan*
NPC 17, 96
NPC Cost Pool 280-281
Nudge 115-116, 265
Ofeili 42, 188
Online Games 113, 317, 322, 323
OOC 17, 96
Orange Tab 209
Order of Falling Stars, the 337
Ordinary World, the ..... see *Prosaic Reality*
Out of Character ..... see *OOC*
Outrage ..... see *Typhon*
Pace (of a Scene) 151-153
Percipience Miracles 215
PC 17, 96
People 39
Perception 20, 45
Perfect Timing 290
Petrichor 87
Phantasmagorical (Effects) 68, 250-251
Planning Miracles 254-256
Player ..... see *Game, the*
Player Character ..... see *PC*
Popular Acclaim 290
Powers, the ..... see *Nobilis, the*
Prescott's Children 40, 235
Projection Rites 183, 193-194
Prosaic Dream, the ..... see *Prosaic Reality*
Prosaic Reality 56-59, 67-69, 392
Prosaic World, the ..... see *Prosaic Reality*
Quest Bonus XP 314
Quest Cards 314
Quest Flavor Options 321-322
Quest Powers 252, 316
Quest Sets 337-370
Quests 99, 311-323, 325-370
Qistjan 48-49
Reaction ..... (114-)115
Reckoning 113
Reflexive λ-Creation 288-289
Reflexive Actions 249
Reflexive "Creation" 288-289
Reflexive Destructive Effects 288-289
Reflexive Illusions 288-289
Reflexive Knowledge 288-289
Region 192, 247, 248
Revenants 39, 274
Revenant Rites 234
Riders, the ..... see *Excrucians, the*
Riders' Abstinence Society, the ..... see *Chancery, the*
Rites 158, 258, 262
Rule One 377
Rule Zero 5
Rules, the 42, 400-401
Sanctuary, the 65-66, 124, 234
Sanctum ..... see *Sanctuary, the*
Scene 17, 151-153
Schumacher School, the 359
Science, Faith, and Sorcery Actions 119-120
Seal of Time, the 42-43, 47, 360
Second Age, the 43, 290
Sequelae (of the Creation), the ..... see *Waylets*
Serious Wounds ..... 272-273; see also *Wounds*
Serpents ..... see *Aaron's Serpents*
Session 17
Session Focus 316
Shapeshifting 294-295
Shattering Rites 236
Shepherd Arcs 99, 313, 374
Side Quests 313-314
Slow (Effects) 251-252
Snipehole ..... see *Glitch*
Sovereign Powers, the ..... see *Nobilis, the*
Sphere, the 66, 120-123, 205-206, 269-270
Spherecraft Miracles 214
Spinners ..... see *Strategists*
"Spirit Magic" 135
Splintering 42
Spotlight 18, 100, 111-112, 124
Stichic Reading ..... see *luthe*
Stilling 98, 131-132, 166-167, 271, 274, 279
Story 18
Storyline Quests 112, 314-315, 316, 318, 320-322
Strategists 48-49, 97, 408
Strategy Miracles 171
Stunt miracles ..... see *Stunts*
Stunts 131-132, 168
Superficial Wounds ..... 272-273; see also *Wounds*
Sustained Effects 248
Taking Damage ..... (152-)153, 261, 267, 267-271, 279-280, 281
Talent Miracles 170-171
Task 125, 127-128, 168
Technique, the 98, 100, 131-133, 134, 156, 160, 259
Teikiph ..... see *Typhon*
Tempering (of a Warmain) ..... (53-)54
Third Age, the 47
Thought-Record Technology 135
Throne, the 64
Time-Consuming (Effects) 251-252
Transformative Wounds ..... 272-273; see also *Wounds*
Treasures 100, 182

True Gods ..... see *Divine Imperators*
Trust Miracles 197
Truth of the Name, the 408
Turn Back! Turn Back! 123-124
Typhon 191
Tyrants ..... see *Strategists*
Unblemished Guise 295
Unfettering Miracles 237
Unlands ..... see *Waylets*
Unworld Journal, the 348
Valde Bellum, the ..... see *Bellum Magnum, the*
Very Time-Consuming (Effects) 251-252
Vision Miracles 212-214
Void-Creation War, the ..... see *Bellum Magnum, the*
Void-Sense, the 212-214
Wailing Rites 233-234
War in Heaven, the 43
Wards 252, 257, 258, 261-262
Warmains 53-54, 281, 409-410
Waylets 63-64, 124, 135, 143
Wear 99, 125, 128-129, 268-269, 271-272, 274
Web of Khedeb-Neret, the 337
Weirding Wall, the 44, 45-46, 61, 124, 391
Welken-Law, the 136
Welken-Rite, the 60, 177, 334-336
Western Sea, the 140, 384, 394
Wicked Actions 122-123, 124
Wight ..... see *Revenant*
Wild, the ..... see *Magisters of the Wild*
Wildlords ..... see *Magisters of the Wild*
Wishes 158, 260-262
Witness (actions) 120-122, 122-123
World, the ..... see *Creation*
World Ash, the ..... (41-)42, 202, 391-392
World-Breaker's Hand, the 286
Wounds 133-134, 268-272, 272-273, 273-274
Wraith ..... see *Revenant*
Wyrd 98-99, 157, 225-226, 226-244, 244-245, 267-268, 313, 375
Wyrd, the 44, 152, 225-232
Wyrdling 227, 383
XP 101, 267, 317, 317-322
XP Token 25
Ymerae ..... see *Imperators*

Quest Index

Bindings Quests

1 *A Nameless Light*, 366-367; *A Peaceful Life*, 358-359; *An Orderly Life*, 338-339; *Bind*, 327; *Entangled*, 345; *Study*, 331; *The Bookstore (v. 2)*, 312, 315; *The Work of Time*, 364; *Treasure, the*, 334

2 *Angels' Vigil, the*, 314, 326; *Drowning*, 360-361; *Taking Care of a Small Child*, 316-317, 332-333; *The Bookstore*,312, 315; *The Crossroads*, 368; *The Gaol of the Just*, 346; *Things Break Down*, 339-340

3 *A Distant Dream*, 341-342; *Event Planning*, 328; *Flower Rite, the*, 328-330; *Grail Quest*, 362-363; *On, Into Nightmare*, 347; *Poisoned*, 330-331; *The Great Work*, 370

4 *Flower Rite, the*, 328-330; *Searching*, 359-360; *Study*, 331; *The Sharp, the Sweet*, 340-341; *The Shrouded Hills*, 369; *Two Worlds Collide*, 348

5 *A Peaceful Life*, 358-359; *A Symbol of Hope*, 349; *Bind*, 327; *Fitting In*, 342-344; *The Long Night*, 366; *The Work of Time*, 364; *Welken-Rite, the*, 334-336

Shepherd Quests

1 *A Peaceful Life*, 358-359; *An Orderly Life*, 338-339; *Angels' Vigil, the*, 314, 326; *Something New*, 352-353; *The Bookstore (v. 1)*, 312, 315; *The Crossroads*, 368; *Treasure, the*, 334; *Welken-Rite, the*, 334-336

2 *A New Job*, 325-326; *Bind*, 327; *Searching*, 359-360; *Settled In*, 351-352; *Taking Care of a Small Child*, 316-317, 332-333; *The Bookstore*, 312, 315; *The Long Night*, 366; *Things Break Down*, 339-340

3 *Angels' Vigil, the*, 314, 326; *Drowning*, 360-361; *Event Planning*, 328; *Flower Rite, the*, 328-330; *In Defiance of the Night*, 354-355; *The Great Work*, 370; *The Sharp, the Sweet*, 340-341

4 *A Distant Dream*, 341-342; *A Legendary Collaboration*, 353-354; *A New Job*, 325-326; *Grail Quest*, 362-363; *Study*, 331; *The Shrouded Hills*, 369

5 *A Nameless Light*, 366-367; *An Antagonist's Troubles*, 356-357; *Event Planning*, 328; *Fitting In*, 342-344; *Taking Care of a Small Child*, 316-317, 332-333; *The Work of Time*, 364; *Welken-Rite, the*, 334-336

Emptiness Quests

1 *A New Job*, 325-326; *A Peaceful Life*, 358-359; *An Orderly Life*, 338-339; *Bind*, 327; *Settled In*, 351-352; *The Long Night*, 366; *Training*, 333; *Two Worlds Collide*, 348

2 *A Distant Dream*, 341-342; *A Nameless Light*, 366-367; *Angels' Vigil, the*, 314, 326; *Entangled*, 345; *Searching*, 359-360; *Something New*, 352-353; *Study*, 331; *Treasure, the*, 334

3 *A Legendary Collaboration*, 353-354; *Angels' Vigil, the*, 314, 326; *Drowning*, 360-361; *Poisoned*, 330-331; *The Bookstore (v. 2)*, 312, 315; *The Crossroads*, 368; *The Gaol of the Just*, 346; *Things Break Down* (339-340)

4 *Bind*, 327; *Flower Rite, the*, 328-330; *Grail Quest*, 362-363; *In Defiance of the Night*, 354-355; *On, Into Nightmare*, 347; *Poisoned*, 330-331; *The Bookstore (v. 1)*, 312, 315; *The Sharp, the Sweet*, 340-341; *The Shrouded Hills*, 369

5 *A Symbol of Hope*, 349; *An Antagonist's Troubles*, 356-357; *Fitting In*, 342-344; *The Great Work*, 370; *The Work of Time*, 364; *Treasure, the*, 334

Glitch

FOR E'EN THE TIMELESS VOID
MAY CRACK
BENEATH THE BURDEN
OF THE WORLD

player name

CHARACTER NAME

LUTHE

BANE

ATTRIBUTES	COSTS
EIDE	STILLING
FLORE	IMMERSION
LORE	FUGUE
WYRD	BURN
ABILITY	WEAR

GIFTS, BONDS, AND GEASA

TREASURES AND ARCANA

TECHNIQUE

Rule Zero: you are not playing **Glitch**

Five-Attribute Cheatsheet

Eide
0 - **The Agony Rite** (guards infection, pg. 167)
1 - **Intensity** (force of personality, pg. 168)
2 - **Stunt** (cinematic Technique action, pg. 168)
3 - **Costumery** (quick costume change, pg. 168)
4 - **Cliffhanger Rite** (false suffering, pg. 170),
Greater Agony (invokes infection, pg. 174)
5 - **Talent** (pass the test, pg. 170),
Greater Intensity Rite (be valuable, pg. 174)
6 - **Strategy** ((reactively) make a plan, pg. 171),
Greater Stunt (high-end Technique, pg. 174)
7 - **The Casting Rite** (make minions, pg. 172),
Greater Costumery (role F/X, pg. 175)
8 - **Misdirection** (hide something, pg. 172),
Greater Cliffhanger Rite
(fake taking damage, then wham!, pg. 175)
9 - **Greater Talent** (being a *kaiju*, pg. 176)
10- **Greater Strategy** (Wound => plan, pg. 177)
11- **Greater Casting Rite** (warp the world, pg. 177)
12- **Greater Misdirection** (false reality, pg. 178)

Flore
0 - **Connection** (hear a Treasure's need, pg. 193)
1 - **Projection Rite** (sleep-visit Treasure, pg. 193)
2 - **Administration** (awake-visit, pg. 194)
3 - **Guidance** (... offer it guidance, pg. 194)
4 - **Glorification** (awaken its power, pg. 196),
Greater Connection (*flore* insight, pg. 198)
5 - **Ignition** (help it win, pg. 196),
Greater Projection Rite (++range, pg. 198)
6 - **Trust** (it willfully helps you, pg. 197),
Greater Administration (++range, pg. 200)
7 - **Design** (make/tweak artifacts, pg. 197),
Greater Guidance (better guidance, pg. 200)
8 - **Divine Plan** (shape destiny, pg. 198),
Greater Glorification
(awaken extraordinary power, pg. 200)
9 - **Greater Ignition** (fierce action, pg. 201)
10- **Greater Trust** (+power, +range, pg. 201)
11- **Greater Design Rite** (big artifacts, pg. 202)
12- **Greater Divine Plan** (*flore* => wish, pg. 202)

Lore
0 - **Investigation** (look up Arcanum, pg. 212)
1 - **Vision** (direct perception, pg. 212)
2 - **Spherecraft** (void-wisdom, pg. 214)
3 - **Hunt** (catch Arcana, pg. 214)
4 - **Navigation** (find a way, pg. 215),
Greater Investigation (learn things, pg. 218)
5 - **Percipience** (self-training, pg. 215),
Greater Vision (+persistent/sharp, pg. 218)
6 - **Infusion** (invest Arcana in things, pg. 216),
Greater Spherecraft (void-wisdom, pg. 218)
7 - **Inchoation** (create λ-things, pg. 216),
Greater Hunt (catch harder Arcana, pg. 220)
8 - **Invocation** (new uses for Arcana, pg. 217),
Greater Navigation (make a path, pg. 220)
9 - **Greater Percipience** (train harder, pg. 221)
10- **Greater Infusion** (stronger infusion, pg. 221)
11- **Greater Inchoation** (warp the world, pg. 221)
12- **Greater Invocation** (ritual attacks, pg. 222)

Wyrd
0 - **Wailing Rite** (*infection state*, pg. 233)
1 - **Elysium** (enter sanctuary, pg. 234)
2 - **Revenant Rite** (recover there, pg. 234)
3 - **Contagion** (curse stuff, pg. 235)
4 - **Destruction** (break stuff, pg. 235),
Greater Wailing Rite (*desperation*, pg. 238)
5 - **Shattering** (damaged => power, pg. 236),
Greater Elysium Rite
(enter sanctuary more reliably, pg. 240)
6 - **Unfettering** (deny reality, pg. 237),
Greater Revenant Rite (heal stuff, pg. 240)
7 - **The Casting Rite** (make minions, pg. 237),
Greater Contagion Rite (potent curses, pg. 241)
8 - **Masking Rite** (change your mind, pg. 238),
Greater Destruction (+power, pg. 241)
9 - **Greater Shattering** (go *kaiju*, pg. 242)
10- **Greater Unfettering Rite** (defy reality, pg. 242)
11- **Greater Casting Rite** (warp the world, pg. 243)
12- **Greater Masking** (+power, pg. 243)

Ability
0 - **Fail** (but maybe get -1 Wear, pg. 130)
1 - **Well-Met** (be basically together, pg. 130)
2 - **Function** (basic tasks, pg. 130)
3 - **Focus** (be present, pay attention, pg. 130)
4 - **Expertise** (professional work, pg. 130),
Greater Fail ("this can't be done," pg. 130)
5 - **Steel** (unpleasant tasks, pg. 130),
Greater Well-Met
(be well-met without resources, pg. 130)
6 - **Organization** (organization, pg. 130),
Greater Function (overdo basic task, pg. 130)
7 - **Flow** (flow state, pg. 131),
Greater Focus (*intense* attention, pg. 130)
8 - **Study Up** (learn something new, pg. 131),
Greater Expertise (stunning work, pg. 130)
9 - **Greater Steel** (break limits, pg. 130)
10- **Greater Organization** (leadership, pg. 130)
11- **Greater Flow** (*amazing* work, pg. 131)
12- **Greater Study Up**
(learn magic or memorize /stunts, pg. 131)