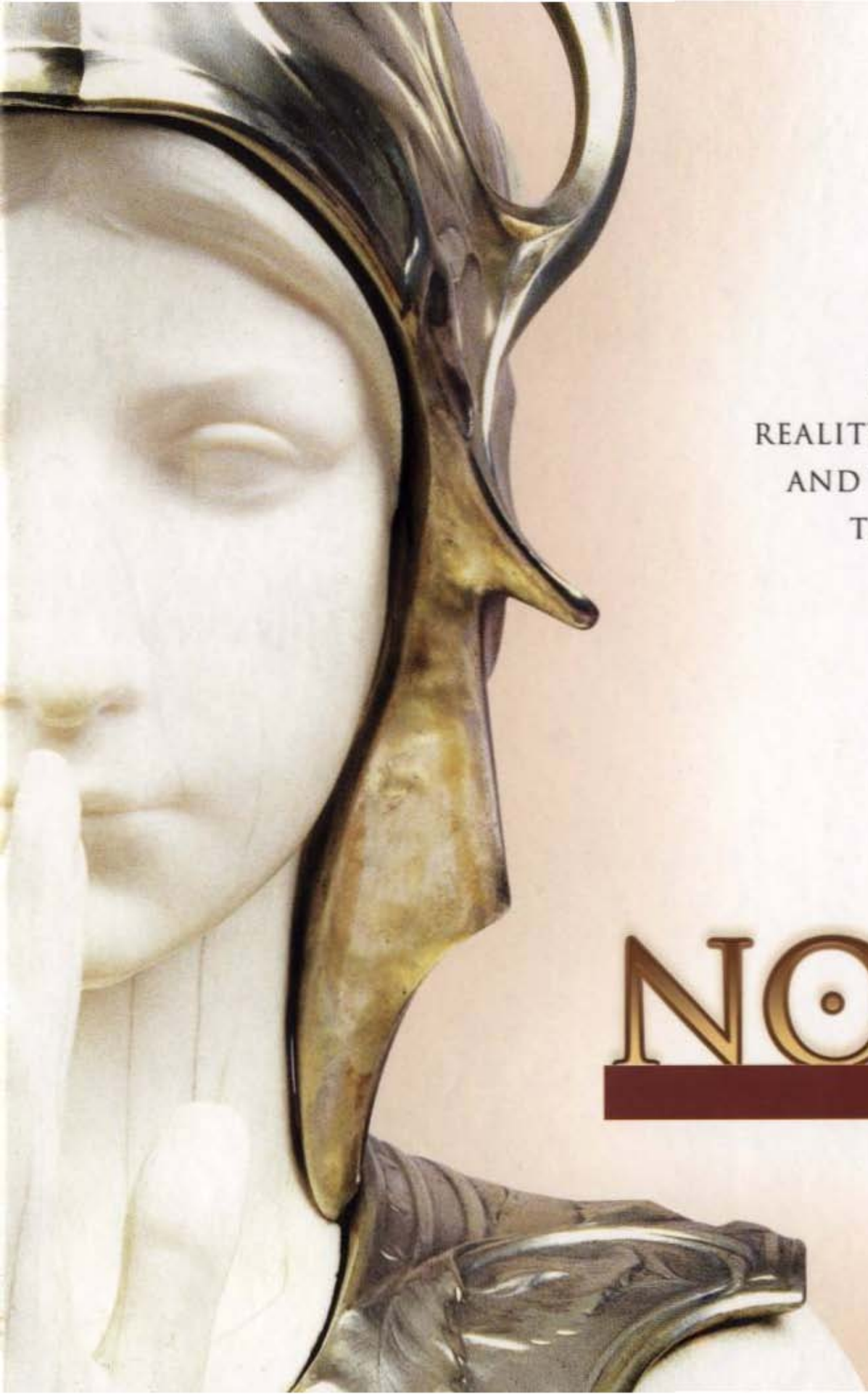


BETWEEN MEN AND GODS,
REALITY AND MYTH, PERFECTION
AND THE END OF EVERYTHING:
THERE STAND THE NOBILIS

NOBILIS

BY R. SEAN BORGSTROM

NOBILIS

THE GAME OF SOVEREIGN POWERS

R. SEAN BORGSTROM



NOBILIS

BY R. SEAN BORGSTROM

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and
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In memoriam,
Merry Ruth Conley

OPPOSITE:
Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life
by Ralph Horsley

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At the Shore

Under the cliffs, near the rotted logs, at the edge between sand and water, something impossible happens. A man appears, standing, on top of the sea. His face is impossibly pure. His eyes are closed. Nevertheless, he looks at me.

"I wish to make you afraid," he says. His hand closes. Trenches and pits gape open in the sand. The beach beneath me shakes and settles.

The scent of the sea vanishes. The waves crash against the shore, but their sound dies out.

I want to run. I don't dare. I want to tell him that I'm just an ordinary person.

"I wish you to understand that we can bring pain to you any time we please."

My tongue dissolves. Blood flows into my throat.

"If I have time, I will kill you."

Then something changes.

A miracle sweeps across me like rushing water, and I fall to my knees. For a moment, I can sense nothing else; apprehend nothing else; think of nothing else. I can only feel the tides of change wash through my soul.

I could not have understood the wonder of it before this moment. It makes the joys and sorrows of my life seem transparent and hollow. It rings louder than any bell and burns brighter than the sun. It is as beautiful as the sea, and far more greedy.

My hands come down on sand, tar, and seashells. My mind flashes back and forth, one moment contemplating the prodigy that moves within me, one moment struggling away. I fear that it could swallow me, pull me in like the undertow, turn me inside out and leave me caught within the miracle for the rest of my life.

Then it rises and touches the last remnants of my unchanged self.

My body is sick, vomiting out seawater. There are pieces of kelp in it. The man walks towards it, and now he holds a gun in his hand. I have no idea why he needs it. I think that I would like to live, but I find it hard to focus.

All across the world, people talk. Cars honk. Things make noise, cast their vibrations in the air. I cannot hear them, but I know them. I know each and every one of them as it rises and falls. I know the roar of the sea and the lapping waters of every lake.

My arms are too weak to hold me up. My toes are cold. I have a headache.

I do not need my arms or my toes or my head. I need only look within my soul and I have endless bodies. I can ride on the thunder and dance on the strains of a fugue. Every wave that washes across this world is mine; and the miracle does not end there. They are *me*.

I cherish that for a moment. I have become — I have no name for it. I have become the essence and pith and spirit of the wave. I can imagine no greater domain; I should not prefer to rule Time, or Love, or the cosmos itself. Every wave that washes across this world is mine.

The gun fires.

I live for a moment on the notes of a young man's flute, each a unique vibration of its own. Behind those notes, I begin to hear a deeper music.

I marvel. All these years, the universe has sung out its secrets and its truths to me, and I simply failed to listen. I do not try and claim this music; it transcends what I have become. I only open up my spirit and hear.

Five strains, in harmony and dissonance. From the sky rains down the truth of Heaven. I hear the angels sing of justice, and beauty, and respect. Their song has no answer to a bullet, nor does it desire one. "You must have the strength to find your own answer to this," it says, "for if you cannot create justice, what worth have you?"

From the depths boils up the song of Hell. I hear the fallen chant their harsh refrains of suffering, and corruption, and power. "You lie helpless on the beach with a mortal enemy," it tells me, "and we are the only answer you will find. Serve suffering, and fear no suffering. Serve corruption, and rejoice in your degradation." It seems foolish to me, a petty temptation; but then an exquisite voice adds his words to their chorus. For a moment I see as viscerally as the sand against my face the terrible virtue of their cause.

I hear the Wild's call for freedom and madness. Inexorable and vast, its song rings out through the world: never turn your back on the truths that live within. "You need nothing but yourself," it says. The endless crashing of the surf within my heart agrees.

Two strains rise from the humans around me: one light and one dark, one preaching the salvation of humanity and another its suicide. I ignore them. I have found my truth.

The bullet hits my head.

For a moment, I feel a blinding pain. Then the surf rises up and swallows it. I pull myself to my feet.

"What are you?" I ask him. He fires again; this time, I move, rolling gently out of the way. "What am I?"

"I stand outside the things of the world," he answers. "I am Omega: the termination of your existence. Of everything's existence. I need only reach out my hand, and it is so."

A wave crests, rising to pound against the beach. It dissolves in an instant into still water. I feel its death viscerally, horribly, with a flutter in my stomach. The wave after that dies, and the next, like falling dominoes. The sea twists, uncomfortably, writhing against the limits of his reach.

"I wish you to know this in the marrow of your bones. I wish you to understand that you cannot oppose us. For this reason, I come, and bring you pain."

For a long moment, I believe him.

"I have a tongue again," I say, "and your bullet did not kill."

His eyes open, black as night. A star falls through them. "It is strange," he says, "how humans need but a taste of power to grow arrogant. You walk in a world of things greater than you can imagine, and you speak defiance."

I nod.

He puts away his gun. "You have many things that you love," he says. "Remember, when it comes time to face us, that they are not immortal."

I think of all the things I love. They call to me, though softer than the waves. I submerge that love, drown it in my heart, and still it bobs to the surface: friends, family, my homeland, my art.

"I will do what I must," I assure him. I do not know, quite, what that is, only that threats cannot deter me.

His expression sours, and he departs.

I look out again at the ocean. A film lifts from my eyes, or falls over it; I cannot say which. I see the great and mighty spirits of the waters, and the bright truths within the seagulls' hearts. I hear the senseless mumblings of the endless grains of sand, and I see each wave's exalted face as they break against the shore.

I reach out and capture one, a young and brilliant wave formed seconds ago by the patterns of the sea. I hold it in my hand, and it stills, waiting for my wish.

I tell it, realizing as I speak that this is the most wonderful thing imaginable, "I know your *name*."

Chapter 1

Ash and Chrysanthemum

An Introduction

The Book of Questions

Two thousand years after the fall of the angels, the outsiders came. They slew the gatekeeper of Heaven with the blade named Atrocity. In so doing, they began the Age of Pain. The phoenix built its nest and burned itself to ashes. The tree of worlds trembled. A man called Vyasa wrote the Sutra of Questions, and said that whosoever answered them all should surmount the world.

In the name of human achievement, that each of you should rise above the world; in the name of love, that my people may escape the trap of ignorance and desire; in the name of truth, that the mysteries of the world should stand revealed, I present you with this text. In it you shall find the answers to all Vyasa's questions, and more besides; and with it, you shall escape — for a time at least — the constraints of your reality.

These are the first of the words that Vyasa wrote:

1. *A woman traveling encounters a wall; yet no sooner does she come upon it than a god strikes it down. "A miracle!" cries the woman.*
2. *A dog, tied to a stake, strains to break free. A passing traveler looses it. "A miracle!" exclaims the dog.*
3. *Does the dog understand miracles? Does the woman?*

4. *A farmer says, "A river does not choose its course, but obeys the winds and stone and rain; they set its path and describe its channel. For humans, this is not so: I alone decide my course."*
5. *The river says, "I choose my course, and run where I wish. For humans, this is not so: animal drives control their mind, and all that truly determines their actions is the lightning in the meat."*
6. *Does the man know the river or does the river know the man?*

7. *A bird flew in through the cage door: and when it sought to return, it found the cage door closed.*
8. *If the bird was a god, then what would be its cage?*

"This is my judgment upon you," she said slowly, "who has trespassed in the grove of Nomina, and uprooted the hoarhound as a gift of flowers for your love. That your hand, which defiled the earth, shall burn... and that that burning will continue, inch by slow inch, in water or in air, in earth or in plastic's smothering grasp, moving from your fingers' fullest extension on the left to your fingers' fullest extension to the right, until the last still-living trace of you twists and writhes within the ashes where it lies, and only then will it stop, and only then will you die."
—from Fire Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

It is said that there are no wonders and no horrors save those that man brings upon himself. It is said that butterflies were born of blind evolution and insensate Nature, that the sky is but a screen of molecules between humanity and the endless void. It is said that the highest form of life is man. People have looked for more, scientists and artists reaching for some hidden magic. They have found none … but it is there.

Hidden in the secret places, a twist of space away from the Earth that hosts them, reside the Imperators Occulte — the true gods, the banished angels, the great Lords of the Dark and of the Light. Beyond the edge of the Earth, the World Ash holds all the worlds there are. Its tender heights support Heaven. Its roots trail into Hell. And in a certain place where no mortal man has been, those branches twine and tie together to support the graves of angels, where the yellow chrysanthemums grow.

Nobilis is set between Ash and Chrysanthemum, in the world these flora bracket, a world where flowers are the symbols of the oldest game of all. It is the story of the Sovereign Powers, shard-selves of the Imperators charged to act in their Lord or Lady's name. Do not misunderstand: these are no mere servitors. Alone, with none of their kind to aid or oppose them, any of these Nobilis could tear down a nation or earn its worship.

They are called cruel, these Nobilis. They are called soulless, or soul-twisted, and this last is true, for the divine essence of an Imperator burns its way into its shard-selves' souls. They have been called glorious and they have been called evil; they have been called slaves and they have been called Lords.

Call them, instead, human — humans caught inside when a Secret Place was built, when an Imperator chose their bodies and minds to hold its aspects. They are humans now tied to the elements of reality itself and charged with the terrible responsibility of guarding those elements. Humans now tied to their Chancel, their Secret Place, and charged with its defense and rule.

These may not seem difficult duties — but a war rages at the edges of reality, and only the Imperators hold the Excrucians back. Every Power knows as well that sometimes this war comes to Earth. And when it does, it is their problem alone.

It is perilous to be of the Nobilis. The Valde Bellum, the war for the existence of the world, is not the only conflict complicating Powers' existence. The wars of Light against Dark, Heaven against Hell, and even the personal conflicts spawned by hate, pride and ambition also draw in the Imperators and Powers. Though Nobilis wield great power, the other players in the games of war and intrigue, the games of lust and hate, the games of magic … they are Nobilis as well.

Their spite can shatter mountains.
Their love can shatter souls.

Playing Nobilis

Nobilis is a game where you tell stories — a special kind of stories, focusing on a Family of Powers in the worlds upon the World Ash. These rules are intended to help you and your friends act out these stories, and view the world through the eyes of the main characters.

The players create the story together. Each player designs a player character (PC for short), one of the protagonists in the story. Each PC is a Sovereign Power, born as a mortal and given part of an Imperator's soul. The PCs usually share the same Imperator, and comprise all of the currently active Powers in that Imperator's service. In the idiom of the Powers, this makes them a Familia Caelestis (a Celestial Family) or a Familia Potens (a Family of Powers).

A Power can serve many masters: Lord Entropy, whose dominion is the Earth itself; the cause of Heaven or Hell, Dark or Light; the warmasters of the Valde Bellum; and always, always, and firstly, their Imperator. This is the deep-rooted law of a Power's creation. Each PC, and every other Power on Earth, is associated with a facet of Earthly existence, as well — something like storms, or computers, or imagination. This is that Power's Estate. The Powers can command their Estates and must guard them. Safeguarding these things may sound simple; it is not. In this war, even storms can pass utterly from the Earth.

Once you have learned enough about the Nobilis, you can take on the role of your PC — saying the things you want your character to say, and describing the actions you want your character to take. This is how you play Nobilis; it is very similar to impromptu theater, games of "let's pretend" and collaborative writing projects.

Players make other contributions to the story. The players co-operatively create the PCs' Imperator and the Chancel in which the Imperator and their PCs live. Individual players often control Anchors, mundane people bound to serve the Powers, who have certain protections from the actions of the Excrucians and Powers alike. One special player — known herein as the Hollyhock God, or HG, and in other games as the Game Master, Storyguide, or Storyteller — takes charge of everything else. This means, more precisely, that the HG is responsible for the story as a whole and the world as a whole. The HG will create and play most of the people in the game, and will also serve as a kind of referee, deciding the outcome of each player's actions. Together, the players and the HG play out the story of the PCs' lives.

Some basic roleplaying terms used herein include:

- **Scene.** A scene in Nobilis is like a scene in a play — a set of more or less continuous events. Whenever the HG fast-forwards game time (for example, to skip a dull train ride or a quiet night) the current scene ends and a new one begins.
- **Session.** When the players and the Hollyhock God assemble to play Nobilis, the game events of that real-life day comprise a "session".

"The rules of the game are simple," Scott explained. "First, you pretend to kill me with this stage dagger — as you see, when pushed into flesh, the plastic blade retracts into the hilt. Then, in retribution, my three hired thugs will tie you into a sack and throw you into the river."

"It seems somehow asymmetric," Andrea observed, her forehead wrinkling.

"The house always has an advantage," Scott answered, "but this should not interfere with your enjoyment of the game."

—from A Personal History, *by Emily Chen*

- **Story.** A story is a set of game events with a beginning, middle, and an end, spanning at least one game session.
- **In Character (IC).** When a player is speaking as their character would, describing the PC's actions, or thinking like their PC, they are considered to be "IC".
- **Out of Character (OOC).** When a player is not IC, they are OOC. For instance, discussions about who is going to order pizza are OOC. Humorous comments about the events of the game are also OOC, unless they come from a PC and not a player.
- **Campaign.** A campaign (or "series") is a set of stories that have the same main characters and general continuity. When all the players make up new characters, the HG makes up a new version of the game universe, or both, the result is a new campaign.

Nobilis Conventions

"I do not understand," Terrence admitted. "I have done everything in the proper manner. I have preached to the multitudes, worked miracles subtle and vast, healed the sick and the blind; yet still I am ignored by the populace."

"You're doing fine," Emma assured him. "You've established a nice solid foundation as a general messiah. Now the trick is to develop a miracle that substantively distinguishes you from all the messiahs that have come before."

—from Undocumented History, *by Walden Fargo*

Nobilis conventions are somewhat unusual among role-playing games. A few of the ways in which Nobilis differs from the norm are shown below:

Direct Physical or Magical Confrontation is Rare

In Nobilis, killing or beating up your enemies is generally undesirable. Sure, it's nice to have them out of the way, and there's even a bit of magical energy that can be pulled from a beaten or slain enemy. There is, however, an awful lot of energy that can be siphoned away from an enemy through destroying the things they care for while they are alive and free. The deadliest enemies are nearly impossible to kill; the cost of battle exceeds its benefits; and sabotage is terribly efficient. Smart Nobilis, therefore, do not seek open combat, and fight reluctantly when they must fight at all.

Of course, the Nobilis don't cite those reasons, at least not publicly. They will tell you they're peaceful souls, and who would they fight anyway? The Excrucians? Then they'll look awfully nervous, like someone's walking over their grave. It is a general rule of the Valde Bellum, but there are many exceptions: if it comes to blows, both sides have already lost.

Death is Not the End

Nobilis characters are half-human or, more rarely, half-animal. This is important. Their humanity makes them comprehensible. At the same time, however, each contains an immortal fragment of the Imperator's soul. Even if the Power falls in battle with Excrucians, the fragment endures, and the Imperator passes it to an heir or successor. The player can therefore continue playing someone with the same abilities (or related ones) even if their first PC dies. Some Nobles even remember their Imperator-shard's previous lives, allowing a great deal of character continuity. The player can decide how much of the old character lingers in the heart of the new one. A PC's noble spirit may or may not survive the destruction of their soul, and the eradication of the aspect of reality for which the character is responsible can also extinguish them (Most attacks on a particular aspect of reality weaken it and its Power, but some aim for destruction.)

There are No Dice

Before their Commencement, that moment when they become high servants of the Imperators, Sovereign Powers have mundane skills. The Lord or Lady exalts those skills along with the rest of the soul. People raised to the rank of Sovereign lose doubt about their abilities. A Power can accomplish literally anything that their magic and skill make possible. Matters become uncertain only when other Powers, Excrucians, or Imperators are interfering in some manner.

The Players Help to Create the Game Universe

The Hollyhock God arranges most of the game's setting, themes, and inhabitants. It's the players, however, who create the most important person and the most important place in the game: their Imperator and their Chancel. Further, some of the game's themes will be determined by the nature of the player characters. For example, if one PC is a Power of Time, the game might feature such issues as free will versus determinism and Fate, the human slavery to schedules, life in the moment versus life lived for the future, and so forth.

Players Can Play in Scenes Where Their Characters are Not Present

Nobilis players' contributions do not stop with their characters. Powers can participate in events apart from their physical presence, by stepping into the mind of one of their Anchors. Many Powers have (limited or unlimited, depending on the Power) ability to speak to their Familia over long distances. This allows a Power to participate in action in several places at once. Of course, sometimes there are long scenes where a given Power will not or cannot be involved. In this case, a player can simply play a character who is present in that particular scene, whether just this once or on a regular basis whenever their Power isn't relevant. Players should remember that these characters are not necessarily loyal to that player's character, or to any other PCs, for that matter.

Resources

Nobilis draws on myth, religion, and high fantasy for inspiration; it is intended to capture elements of each. Specific works that influenced Nobilis, and others of similar spirit, include:

- Piers Anthony, *On a Pale Horse*
- Terry Bisson, "They're Made of Meat"
- John Brunner, *The Complete Traveler in Black*
- Susan Cooper, *The Dark is Rising* (*Over Sea, Under Stone; The Dark is Rising; Greenwitch; The Grey King;* and *The Silver on the Tree*)
- Charles de Lint, *Moonheart; Greenmantle* and others
- Stephen R. Donaldson, *Mordant's Need* (*The Mirror of Her Dreams* and *A Man Rides Through*); *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever* (*Lord Foul's Bane; The Illearth War; The Power That Preserves*)
- Alan Dean Foster, *Journeys of the Catechist* (*Carnivores of Light and Darkness; Into the Thinking Kingdoms;* and *A Triumph of Souls*)

In the years since a shepherd found the Record of the Dawn, seated on a stone pedestal overlooking the sea, it had had many owners. Most of them were scholars and philosophers, drawn by the book's irresistible allure: a chance to understand the true nature of beauty. On this subject, the book was absolutely accurate, scientifically precise, and perfectly encyclopedic. A scholar could read the sections already uncovered as long as he or she liked; no danger lay therein. Near the end of the transcribed section lay the danger, and the mystery — for the Record of the Dawn is sacrosanct, not to be defiled by mortal eyes, and the first one to read any given word therein would turn instantly to dust. It is a statement on the nature of beauty, and the nature of scholars, that when the book came into Jordan's hands, over half of its text had been read, understood, and transcribed.

—from Tiabhal's Library, *by Sam Cavanaugh*

- Neil Gaiman and various artists, *Sandman* (available as a series of graphic novels)
- Guy Gavriel Kay, *The Fionavar Tapestry (The Summer Tree; The Wandering Fire; The Darkest Road)*
- Jane Lindskold, *Changer; Legends Walking*
- Jack Vance, *The Moon Moth and Other Stories; Lyonesse (Lyonesse; Suldrun's Garden*; *The Green Pearl*; and *Madouc)*
- Lawrence Watt-Evans, "Denner's Wreck"
- Roger Zelazny, *Lord of Light; Jack of Shadows; Creatures of Light and Darkness*

All of the above are highly recommended, although it is the opinion of the author that some (Gaiman and Donaldson in particular) may be hard on the squeamish.

The Concepts of Nobilis

For a time, Ridya sought to corrupt souls through personal contact. He eventually judged the failure rate of this technique unacceptable. Too many souls, on seeing him, saw not the devil he had become but the angel he had been; and, made exultant by that beauty, were lost to him forever.
—from Legends of the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Imperators

Imperators are the greatest and the most terrible of the magical beings of the world. The Earth trembles at their touch, and mortal men who see their true nature inevitably go mad. Angels, both Celestial and Fallen, are Imperators; the Magisters of the Dark, the Light, and the Wild are as well. Imperators are formed from the fundamental stuff of the world, called the *spiritus Dei* or *causa causans*. Their existence defines reality. Every love on Earth is a different expression of the inherent spiritual nature of the Imperator of Love. The Imperator Ashkel of Words, Doorways, and Bronze defines and controls and is those three things. Other beings of great power exist — but if they lack this essential quality, if they are not made of the first stuff of creation, they are not Imperators.

The Imperators are bitterly divided, holding to the causes of Hell and Heaven, Light and Dark, and (on occasion) Old Gods against New. Yet necessity has united the bulk of them for many years. Not even Hell, the heartland of suffering, wants to see the Excrucians succeed … for they will destroy all creation.

The guides who lead travelers across Semane Menheneott Pass firmly insist on a party size no less than six. To cross that Pass, one must turn left thrice, then right twice, along the path; then straight at the bend; and finally, on the hairpin turn high above the world, one must push one of one's traveling companions over the edge. Those who do not follow this simple prescription remain lost in the mountains forever. Novice travelers are often heartbroken by this practice, which the guides do not explain in advance; experienced wayfarers know to recruit an ignorant "patron" from the city below.
—from Earth Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Other Names

- A female Imperator is called a Regina; the plural is Reginae.
- A male Imperator is called a Rex Regius; the plural is Rex Regi.
- Either can be called a Regius (the plural is Regi), a Ymera (plural Ymerae), or a Masha (plural Mashai).

Secret Places

Imagine the Earth as a lake, and the Imperators as pebbles. When a pebble drops into the lake, the surface of the lake, once flat and uncomplicated, becomes rippled, convoluted, and shaken. As the effect spreads from the source, it grows weaker. The ritual that makes a Secret Place, a Chancel, requires a hundred nights, and a human death each night of it. Then a piece of the Imperator's self is bound into a piece of land, and vice versa. Much as with the lake, that piece of soul wraps the contours of the Earth around it. Winding roads lead in and out of these Loci Celatum; straight tracks glide by as if that place had never been. These Chancels were once rare, but in modern times — the past five millennia or so — the Imperators have needed secure places to store their bodies while their spirits wage war against the Excrucians.

Other Names

A Secret Place can also be called a Chancel, a Sanctum, a Ward, a Guard, or a Keep. The rarely used Latin term is Locus Arcanus (plural Loci Arcani); a debased version thereof is Locus Celatum (plural Loci Celatum).

Sovereign Powers

The Valde Bellum or Excrucian War is waged in the spirit world. With Excrucian victories there, the things of this world lose a little bit of magic and of soul. (This effect is opposed not by Excrucian losses, which do not restore the ravaged realm, but by new glories brought forth from Heaven.) The Excrucians would like to destroy the Earth more directly. The Imperators, who prefer not to turn their attention away from the spirit war, have created agents to guard the Earth and their Chancels. Humans caught in the creation of a Chancel and humans who spend years inside a Chancel or its vicinity make the perfect receptacles for a shard of the Imperator's own divine essence.

These humans become the Sovereign Powers. The shard of Imperator-soul they are given burns out a piece of their own soul, and their minds are shackled and made loyal. They are given in return a gift that is sometimes full consolation: power. The typical soul-shard is a prototype for a single aspect of reality, such as night, metal, or agony, and it gives the one-time human control over that thing. Often, these humans receive other great blessings as well. Their normal responsibilities are simple: defend the aspects of reality associated with their Imperator, guard and govern the Chancel and its inhabitants, and (when it does not interfere with the above duties) help in the general defense of the Earth.

"At first," Lucifer answered, "my duties were minimal; my schedule, uncluttered. Then, bit by bit, humanity began to surrender responsibility for its evil to me. Now, sometimes, I lay awake at night, the burden of it all weighting my immortal spirit down. To be personally responsible for all of the evil of the world! What if I get it wrong?"
—from The Ends of the Earth, *by K.C. Danine*

Other Names

- Sovereign Powers are also called Nobilis, the Nobilis, Domini or the Noble Ones.
- An individual female Power can be called a Domina or the Domina of [what they rule].
- An individual male Power can be called a Dominus or the Dominus of [what they rule]. An example is Arikel, the Dominus of Night.
- A Sovereign Power of either gender can be called a Noble, a Sovereign, or a Power.
- The phrase "Sovereign Powers" is commonly abbreviated to "Powers".

Lord Entropy

The Imperator Lord Entropy heads the Council of Four, who have chosen (or have been chosen; it is unclear) to rule the Earth instead of participating in the war. His power

He raised my head and looked into my eyes. His fingers left carmine smears under my chin. "You still have spirit," he said, and shook his head. "Do you not understand? I cannot end your torment until it has broken you."

"I'm trying," I told him.

He almost smiled. "I am glad," he said, "that we are working towards the same end. But I am afraid that you are making rather a poor contribution to it."
—from the Thought-Record of Augusta Valentina

The Meaning of Miracles

The Sovereign Powers can change the world in ways that humans cannot. Nobilis calls such uses of divine energy "miracles". The abilities of the Powers appear unnatural. They cut open the ocean, call down rains of diamonds, and turn roads back on themselves. In truth, these miracles are profoundly natural, more so than the things of mundane reality. Powers draw upon the soul-shard of their Imperator to work their miracles — and the Imperators are the deep truth that moves behind the shapes and processes of the world. A rain of diamonds, invoked by a Sovereign Power, is more *natural than an ordinary rain — it draws directly on the strength and will of an Imperator. Compare this to a normal storm, which exists because of the Imperator of Storms but has none of that Imperator's strength behind it.*

Vyasa describes a god striking down a wall, and a woman who calls this a miracle. He also describes a traveler freeing a dog, who calls this act a miracle. The dog is incorrect, but both the dog and the woman understand the basic truth of miracles. An empowered being draws upon the strength of some deeper truth — the god drawing on Imperial power and the traveler drawing on an understanding of knots — to change a lesser creature's world.

trickles down into the mortal governments in subtle ways. With the Powers, he and the Council have been more direct. He has set down harsh laws for the Nobles to follow, and these laws are as often stumbling blocks as they are useful. He is called the Darkest Lord by those of the Nobilis, at least in part because of the following decree:

THE WINDFLOWER LAW: *Thou shalt not love.*

It is not a law whose violations are easily discovered: Lord Entropy has no power to peer into the heart. Even if he could, he is often merciful, often even forgiving. Yet no Power that loves dares to speak of it, and for causing this the Powers both hate and despise Lord Entropy.

Other Names

Lord Entropy is commonly known as the Darkest Lord or the Bloody Imperator.

Ananda

The Imperator Ananda rules Murder, the Infinite, and (some say) the Fourth Age that is to come. His glory is terrible: humans and Powers weak in spirit dare not face him, lest his countenance drive them mad with joy. Where he walks, the world sings, grass and trees becoming crystal instruments, birds pouring out symphony after symphony until their hearts burst from the strain, and even concrete buildings clamoring out hard-edged refrains. He sits on Lord Entropy's Council, but his voice there has been silenced — he sees some unacceptable horror to come if he should cast his vote against the Darkest Lord's. In other respects, he is a creature of conscience, and, through the dregs of power that remain to him, the greatest hope of virtue on the Council of Four. Some Powers idealize Ananda as the symbol that the world has not gone so far astray. Others point to him as the living proof of the poverty of Heaven's philosophy — a creature of endless beauty, whose beauty kills; a creature of justice, whose justice has fallen under the Darkest Lord's thumb; and a creature of might, rendered impotent by fate.

Other Names

Ananda is sometimes called the Lord of Expectations or the Emperor to Come.

Cammorae

In 1342, Lord Entropy created the Cammora as the mortal arm of his rule. From the rulers of the human Earth (both on and behind visible thrones), he built an organization of those who were willing to serve him. He gave them two gifts: his protection, and the protection of those who dealt with them.

That is, Lord Entropy's law decrees that a Power may aid a Cammoran without fear of retribution — that any Power who can pay the Cammora's price may do so without fear.

The Cammorae style themselves "the mortal servants of the Powers". Yet they are not humble: they bargain hard with Sovereigns for every mission they undertake. They know that even now, carrying with them over six hundred years of miraculous payments, they are no match for a Power — but they also know that Powers are bound by laws which do not apply to them. Powers must be circumspect; the Cammora gleefully uses every magic and every scrap of political power it possesses. Cammorae are skilled in criminal acts and political persuasions, with their fingers in many governments and crime rings in the mortal world. For this reason, even the mightiest Nobles come to them for aid ... but the Cammora is a terribly, terribly corrupt organization. Its members mirthfully use excessive force and terror tactics in pursuit of their goals, both personal and professional. From the point of view of many Powers, this is not a good thing. If Lord Entropy did not prevent them, the Sovereigns of Earth would have rended the Cammora into shreds and scattered them to the four winds. The Darkest Lord does protect them, however, and the bargains Powers make with them. When the chips are down, it often comes to one of three choices: use the Cammora, fail against a Breakthrough, or sunder the air with law-breaking magics and soon after die.

Other Names

- Members of the Cammora are normally called either Cammorae or Cammorans.
- Sometimes, they are known as Bicorns, after the star of a particularly unpleasant myth.
- The Cammora is sometimes called the Vehmgericht.

Anchors

A Power's Anchor is a mortal that can serve as a metaphorical ground or channel through which their power or their mind can flow. Using an Anchor (and another trick; see below) enables a Power to "hide their hand", to work miracles that can't be traced back to the Power. In the worst case, if an Anchor is caught in an act that could get the Power killed, the Power can break off the connection between the two. This usually destroys the one-time Anchor's mind, giving even greater security. A Power can have many Anchors, but there must be a connection between the Anchor and the Power's mortal self. Specifically, a Power must love or hate their Anchors in order to use them at all.

Other Names

Anchors are also called the Ephemeral, or Hooks.

Excrucians

More beautiful than the angels are the Excrucians, whose eyes show darkness full of ever-falling stars. It is said that the Creator bargained with them long ago, that he or she might capture a touch of this beauty in the world of Ygg — and then failed to carry out his or her end of the bargain. It is said that this is why the Excrucians on their pale horses seek the destruction of all that there is, why even the Imperators fall at times beneath their razor-edged swords. The Excrucians themselves give a more kindly explanation: that they are from beyond Creation. They will leave it when it dies. When that death comes, all the things they have destroyed will awaken within them, and ride out with them

It was a mistake to engineer the creature, Dr. Adams later agreed. Its mortal body posed no danger to the researchers, nor its feeble mind; but the avarice it nurtured in its heart like a hen warms an egg — that was dangerous. Absolute greed, such as that the monster possessed, could not remain bound in a single heart; it surpassed limits, broke boundaries, and crumpled the cage like a paper shell. It spread from heart to heart like a contagion, soon binding ten, then a hundred men to its service; and even when the hydrogen bomb turned its human hosts to dust and light, it lay twitching and snarling until there had passed a dozen dawns.

—from Genetic Visions, *edited by Emily Chen*

Generally, Nabushezibanni found that the most embarrassing part of being a sorcerer in Babylon was asking the local demons to serve him as familiars. In Eastern Anatolia, such creatures had acquiesced instantly, eager to gain any foothold in his soul. In Babylon, however, he constantly felt as if they rather looked down on him — that taking the time to corrupt Nabushezibanni would simply upset their rather full social calendars.

—from The Hanging Gardens, *by Michael Kay*

into the void and its tomorrows. The Excrucians are roughly as powerful as the Imperators, but they are almost never able to send more than a fraction of their strength out of the spirit world to Earth … only a few tiny, lethal shards. The battle rages too fiercely, most often, for more.

Other Names

- Excrucians are sometimes called the Lost, Anguishers, or Beyonders.
- On rare occasions, they are inaccurately called the Damned.
- They call themselves Harumaph's Children.

Breakthroughs

When an Excrucian sword cleaves the veil between Earth and the spirit world and sends a part of itself through, a Rending or a Breakthrough occurs. Breakthroughs are opportunities for both the Excrucians and the Imperators. The Excrucians have little interest in bloodbaths; killing animals or humans does little damage to their immortal spirits. Their work on Earth is instead the destruction of dreams, of peace, of all the things that give humans hope and joy. This kind of thing takes an effort to destroy, an investment of the Excrucian's essential being in its work. The Power that balks an Excrucian can usually draw that investment into their own Imperator. It is wise, however, to conceal one's exact identity from an Excrucian one balks. Even if a Power can rip the throat out of the Excrucian-shard they meet on Earth, its iceberg-like extent into the spirit world may come back to haunt them later.

Because they risk losing power to the Nobilis who oppose them, the Excrucians apply their powers very subtly when they cannot act with overwhelming force. There were twelve Anchors (who belonged to Sovereign Powers) and only two Excrucian-shards on the *Exxon Valdez* — but the Excrucians were able to conceal the crew's inebriation until it was too late.

Other Names

- As mentioned, Breakthroughs are sometimes called Rendings.
- The place where the Excrucian-shards arrive upon the Earth is a Red Zone.

Reincarnation

The Judeo-Christian tradition that the dead move on to Heaven and Hell is in part correct. The corrupt do migrate inevitably to Hell and the spiritually beautiful will move on to Heaven. However, the angels have a bad tendency to turn all but the rarest and most exquisite human souls away from Heaven. Perhaps one in a billion is precious enough that they will be merged into an angel's own soul instead of thrown back to the worlds of the Ash.

Accordingly, most souls reincarnate, whether they are animal or human. It is up to the Hollyhock God whether intelligent and unintelligent life forms ever reincarnate in the other category.

The World Ash

Yggdrasil is a tree — but what a tree! Its branches hold worlds, dozens upon dozens of them: each suspended at once in an infinity of empty space and the sheltering embrace of the World Ash's branches. The other planets, though they are little like what we know of them, hang near the Earth; farther out are worlds populated by intelligent beings, like and unlike humanity. The whole of the Ash is cupped inside the Weirding Wall, whose crackling energies define the boundaries of Creation; above it shine the stars.

It is commonly speculated by the more philosophical Powers that the Ash is maintained by a constant flow of beauty raining down from Heaven and corruption and agony snaking upwards from Hell. Perhaps they are right, for corruption and beauty do much to define the Nobles' world.

Other Names

Yggdrasil is known as the World Ash or the Sovereign Tree.

The Prosaic Earth and the Mythic World

The Earth, as the Nobles know it, is a place defined by an essential contradiction. On the one hand, the world is alive with spirits, night comes with the moods of the angel of the sun, and the stars sometimes drift down from its darkness to speak. On the other, there is a huge body of human experimental data showing that all of this is nonsense: that everything in the world follows strict laws, that the humans are barely better than the animals, the animals are utterly unintelligent, the plants are sessile, and nothing else lives.

Nobilis does not hide from this contradiction; the game embraces it. The Earth the Nobles know is divided, with subtle interconnections between the prosaic reality we know and the mythic world in which the Powers often find themselves. It is but a single step of perception to live in one world or the other, and the Nobilis make this step freely. So do many mortals — the Anchors first among them, but also on occasion the inhabitants of the Chancels. Most humans, however, are not able to accept the contradiction: when presented with irrefutable proof that there is a mythic world, that there are miracles beyond their understanding, they *shift*. They begin to perceive the mythic reality wholly, and cannot find their way back. This is the *dementia animus*, and it is a thing the Nobles must guard against greatly — not to protect themselves, but to avoid leaving a trail of destruction and ruined lives behind them. Those in *dementia animus* can still be affected by the laws and people of the prosaic Earth, but they can no longer relate to them as anything but madmen.

Other Names

The Mythic World is sometimes also called Mythic Reality.

Flowers

To quote the angel Raguel, "Perfection cannot be static, or it is no longer perfection. This is the reason why Heaven brought forth the angels: to serve its beauty and make answer to its only flaw. Since the first days of Creation, when the

Our enemies cannot help but kill us.

If they did not come at us with their blades and their malice, so we could hate them, we would have to love them. There is nothing in between, not for creatures of such majesty. We would have to love them; and, in loving, die; not like Romeo died, or Juliet, but like the night dies that loves the sun, or the fire dies that loves the sea. In embracing the alien, in striving to grasp that which lies forever beyond us, we would extinguish ourselves.
—*from* A Philosophy of Treason, *by Augusta Valentina (suppressed)*

"It is widely known that the 'channelers' and 'psychics' who can discover your previous lives for you are frauds. Our service differs; it is subtler, and has a strong basis in quantum science. It works as follows: for eight tiny payments of $19.95, we will re-engineer your past, creating the past life that you desire. Do you dream of ruling Egypt as royalty? Do you dream of striding across Sumeria as goddess and Queen? Would you like to be JFK, Marilyn Monroe, or Elvis? For just eight small payments, we can make it have happened, and no one need be the wiser."
—*from alt.reincarnation.services*

A soul once escaped from Hell. She began the climb up the tree of worlds towards Heaven. She has walked for uncounted miles, uncountable miles, and not reached Heaven yet. She will, of course, for this story is a romance; and there an angel will take pity on her; and rather than casting her back into the pit, it will transform her into a harp and take her into Heaven. There, it will play her soul like an instrument, producing the corrupt and venal music that comes from a Hellbound soul. In their outrage, the audience will shatter the harp and blind the foolish angel. If there is a moral, it is that damnation has a purpose; and it is with this harsh moral that our story will begin.
—*from* Legends of the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

On John and Tanya's wedding night, Russell crept into their room, and with a rope made from starlight and whispers, he caught and bound their love. It struggled and jerked against its bonds, but the rope held tight; and he took it home and imprisoned it in the darkest hole in his deepest cellar. Only thrice a week did he give it air or water, and only once per month did he let it eat. In this manner, John and Tanya's love grew ragged and thin, and their marriage troubled; and at this Russell felt a great and unworthy joy.
—*from* A Comedy of Spirits, *by Keiko Takemori*

"It is a perceptual poison," the merchant explained. "Simply show this to your victim, and they shall instantly lose awareness of reality. They will instead directly cognize their own symbols of their world, seeing not John but 'John,' not a wall but a 'wall,' not heat but 'heat.' The effect is dramatic: unable to manipulate these symbols with their mind, unwilling to manipulate icons with their body, they cease to respond to stimuli of any sort and all."
—from The Box, *by Emily Chen*

angels were the only life save for the Tree, the Celestial Host has dedicated itself to the Unending Labor: changing Heaven with every heartbeat, while maintaining the perfection of the Brightest Realm."

When the angels first began their Great Work, the changes they made in Heaven were rough and without skill. Angelic power splashed on the surface of Heaven and twisted it in sometimes startling ways. The angels needed tools, and the first such tools were flowers. Not the Earthly blooms, with petals and roots, pistils and stamen — these were symbols that carried a weight of different meanings. A boxer's padded glove balances and diffuses the force of his blow; in a like manner, flowers diffused the angels' intent over the surface of Heaven.

Events everywhere reflect the events in Heaven, with the possible exception of events in Hell. Soon after the angels began to use their new tool, flowers began to bloom on Earth. Because flowers and their symbolic "glove" are central to Heaven's design, the Powers of Earth can use them as well. The Power or their Anchor carries a flower or a handful of flowers with them; they crush the flower as they work a miracle; all traces of the power they used are tainted with it. Powers (and Imperators) can often see the residue miraculous power leaves behind — but, in this case, that residue shows the flower used, and not the Power who used it. Combining floral magic and the use of an Anchor provides a great deal of security even from the laws of Lord Entropy himself. The use of a miracle can only be traced to the Power if their Anchor is caught 'at the scene of the crime' and, even then, only if the Noble does not renounce their Anchor and withdraw their mind.

The Flavors of Imperators

"In addition," Henry noted, "our University has a fine theozoology department. Few faculties anywhere can rival our professors when it comes to studying and classifying new sorts of God!"

"How many kinds of God are there?"

"One, so far," Henry admitted, "but the Department has just recently constructed a ministerial accelerator that they believe will give rise to as many as seventeen forms of God heretofore unknown."
—from The Life and Death of Henry Serrano, *by Emily Chen*

There are seven kinds of Imperator known on Earth.

Angels

Angels were the first Imperators, created from the stuff of the Celestial Realm, the Bright Realm, also known as Heaven. Their first mission in life is to keep the stuff of Heaven dynamic. They change their divine home constantly, so that it never becomes stale and dull and unlovely to them. The angels hear the voice of the Creator inside their hearts, and this was the guiding force in their society and their work until the Excrucians first showed their hand. Angels are not the servants of good, although they believe strongly in compassion; rather, they are the servants of beauty. Angels are native to Heaven, but some have come to Earth to help in its defense. Others have been banished there for insisting on a different view of what Heaven should be.

Devils

Devils are the Fallen Angels. Lucifer, who was once the greatest leader of the angels, still leads the Fallen. He was the guiding force on all the worlds of the tree for eons, until the Great Work in Heaven produced the humans on Earth. Then Lucifer rebelled violently against the voice in his heart. He decided that Hell, precisely because it was the Realm farthest from the Creator, was the true Creation. He embraced the principles of corruption and suffering and began to preach them. Lucifer embodies Pride, but also Persuasion; though his power could not literally coerce the angels, it swayed many of them regardless. Nearly a third of the angels joined him before he and his followers were thrown from Heaven, all the way down to the Hell they honored. The angels could not bear to lock their former comrades away forever, so a full ten of the Fallen Angels are allowed up the tree as far as the Earth at any given time. Lucifer does not always follow the rules, of course. There have been times of purging when the Celestial Host would again drive the too-numerous Fallen away from Earth and even higher Realms. In modern times, when the Excrucians endanger Heaven itself, the angels tacitly allow any Fallen Angel to leave Hell as long as it joins them in the fight.

The Light

The Light was born with Eve's bite into the apple. She did not learn "good" from it, but rather a sense of self-preservation. At that moment the first Imperator of the Light was born, whose fundamental purpose is the protection of the human race — at any cost. Since that time, as humanity has expanded across the globe, more of these Regi have appeared.

The Dark

The Dark was born only a short time after. Adam bit into the apple and learned not "evil" but the ways of self-destruction. The Dark's first triumph came when Adam led Eve from Eden and the Dark sank the whole of that magical land into the first of the Dark's Chancels. It has expanded as much as the Light has, and won many of its battles, but never so decisively as to end the struggle. Of all the Imperators, those of the Dark are the most likely to reach an accommodation with the Excrucians, since the Dark means the destruction of humanity. At the same time, the Dark is selfish. It wants a universe to play in, and it wants the Dark (or, even better, humanity itself) to be the agent of humanity's destruction. Also, destroying the humans one by one, life by ruined life, is much more fun.

The Wild

Other Imperators regard the Wild suspiciously, for like the Excrucians, they come from outside Creation. The Regi of the Wild remember nothing, know nothing of where they came from. They know only that they are, and that some fateful chance has trapped them in a world alien to them. Their highest principle is freedom, but the paths that lead away from Creation are closed to them. And if, as they say, the world of Ygg is green music — then they are a very different song.

True Gods

True Gods are the greatest of the natural inhabitants of the spirit world. They are only very rarely understood or worshipped by humanity, but possess the frightening power and

The River and the Man
Taken to extremes, the scientific worldview suggests every event derives from the interactions of physical things with predefined physical laws. Objects have no room for free will, since the quantum effects that would allow them to violate expectations are exceedingly improbable. Humans have free will only because the human mind is too complex to map.

To reconcile this with the animistic worldview — everything has a spirit and every concept has a face — Nobilis adjusts one of the underlying assumptions. The prosaic history of the world, the observable traces of the interactions of chemicals and energy, can change. Science stands on a shifting foundation. Humans are nothing more than the product of environment and heredity — and if the human spirit defies that definition, and a person rises above their roots, their history and biology must give way. The circumstances of their past must adjust to reflect the truth of their actions.

Vyasa asks if a river, who claims that a farmer is nothing more than an automaton, knows the man. It does not. Humans are much more than just the lightning in the meat. Nor does the farmer know the river. He claims that it must obey the course set for it by nature — but the river can defy the winds and the stone and the rain, if it so chooses, and chart its own course.

The Wild
Vyasa's third question is one of his simplest. The Imperators of the Wild entered Creation, and found they could not leave again. Unable to break free, they have reluctantly taken arms on Creation's behalf. If the bird Vyasa describes, that flew into just such a trap, were a god, then it would be of the Wild. All Creation, from Hell to Heaven, would be its cage.

ambiguous loyalties of the truly divine. They do not technically live on the Earth until they form a Chancel there, but they are bound to the things of the Earth even more tightly than the angels exiled here.

Aaron's Serpents

Aaron's Serpents are the children of Yggdrasil, nurtured within its bark until they are strong enough to break free. On Earth, they have been called Leviathans, the monsters of the sea. That is indeed where most of them make their Chancels. Sometimes they slither across the Earth like monsters. Lord Entropy must then content himself with killing witnesses, as Aaron's Serpents are unkillable and nearly impossible to imprison.

The Enemy

I ask only for an enemy worth fighting and a cause worth fighting for.
—Spartan prayer

Excrucians are the most terrifying enemy the Powers face. The enemy can be fierce warriors, unnaturally persuasive liars, horrific sadists, and a dozen other unpleasant things besides. Their most lethal weapon in the mortal world, though, has nothing to do with personal power. The Dark Horsemen are adept at a kind of symbolic magic known as the flower rite, a rite which enables them to connect an ordinary mortal situation — strongly evocative of a given aspect of reality — to that aspect itself. The slow degeneration of that situation which they then induce weakens reality.

One of the Nobilis's most important roles is preventing or reversing such attacks. A Power must be prepared to act with the divine fury of a god when cast into a direct confrontation; with an understanding of the mortal world, when moving among humanity; and with both at once, when handling a flower rite attack. Simply striding in and casting miracles about doesn't usually help — not only are miracle cures dangerous things in general, but they have a good chance of inducing *dementia animus* among the mortals involved.

Fighting one another is a popular game among the Powers, although it rarely leads to open battle. The Nobilis have a dark rite of their own to steal miraculous energy from one another — most often by artfully ruining the things their opponent cares about. This is the selfsame rite that they use to draw power from defiling and destroying Excrucian plans; in inevitable consequence, it is known by all but the newest of Powers.

The World of the Nobilis

Powers bridge divine nature and human nature, the supernatural and the natural. They fight battles on all those levels, facing the challenges of gods and ordinary humans alike. They must learn to move fluidly from a world of spirits and myths to a polluted world of highways and computers, and from their Imperator's custom reality to the broader Earth. This is not the end to it — using their Anchors, they may switch between as many as half a dozen locations and perspectives with a thought. Their Imperator may send them to other Chancels, other strange realities, or even out onto the World Ash itself — and they face an enemy from another existence.

There is more to the world than any mortal imagines. All you will need to play therein is included in this book.

By the year 2025, there will be one million global television networks.

By the year 2054, cows will outnumber people 50:1.

By the year 2108, 82% of America's youth will worship one or more mass murderers.
—from If This Goes On, *by Jackie Robinson*

Ianthe writes: How to be a Hollyhock God

Part 1

What does a Hollyhock God do?

"The only truth to the universe is this," the Devil said: "Everyone gets exactly what they want."

"How, then, do you explain Hell?"

That stumped him for a moment, and then he shrugged. "I'm not sure. Maybe I get the first turn."
—from The Ends of the Earth, *by K.C. Danine*

Foreword

It is, naturally, impossible for a Power to understand the true nature of their world. They do not, should not, and cannot realize that they are characters in a game. The impeccable Lady Ianthe does not have the necessary background to write this text. Still, recognizing that no one is better able to understand the Noble world than those who live there, and that none may so expertly explain it as the ever-voluble Marchessa of Debate, we present this work. Its provenance is unclear; its existence paradoxical; its value, we hope, incalculable.

Ianthe writes:

As you prepare to run this game, the vistas that loom before you may seem intimidating. Worry not! Throughout this manuscript I shall present the tools and strategies you will need to carry off a game to perfection. After reading my small asides, what has been difficult will become easy. What has eluded you will become clear. The task of being a Hollyhock God will become trivial! That is my solitary intention.

As a beginning Hollyhock God, you shall take your first steps towards a successful game well before the first session begins. When you have mastered the game, you may assemble a campaign on a moment's notice. For now, investing a few hours at the front end shall save you endless headaches later on! Use this text to plan out your campaign, your first story, and several major NPCs. The results are guaranteed to please.

I begin this manuscript with a discussion of the fundamental building blocks of the game. These basic constructs will shape every decision made henceforth.

Being a Hollyhock God

As Hollyhock God, you have a very simple task. Make sure that the players, including yourself, have fun.

You should tell fascinating and dramatic stories, create intriguing non-player characters, and explore deep and interesting philosophical questions. However, if you fail to do all of these things *but* everyone has fun, you are a success as a Hollyhock God. If your players trample all over your plotline, your ideas fall flat, or you fail to capture the richness of the world — so what, if people have a good time?

Don't come to the table too attached to your storyline. If you have to push the players around to have the plot work out as you envision it, it's not worth it. You are not a novelist, at least not during the game — you're just first among players in a joint storytelling effort.

Don't get too attached to your non-player characters. If the players don't like dealing with them, you may have to shuffle an NPC off to the sidelines.

A small caveat to the above: don't confuse what the *player characters* like, or dislike, with what their *players* like, or dislike. Watch the players' eyes and faces. Listen to their out-of-character comments. Don't evaluate the players' happiness based on what they say as their characters. Usually, the players want their characters to face challenging situations that they *can* overcome but *might* not. The characters, on the other hand, usually prefer as little challenge as possible. Some players want you to be mean and awful to their characters. Others want their characters to live in a more romantic, adventurous, optimistic universe. (You can even have both types in the same game.) If you don't know what your players want, talk to them. If *they* don't know what they want because they're just starting out, experiment.

Running a Game

Here's how a game of Nobilis works. Most of the time, your players are *in character* (IC). This means that they describe their character's actions in detail and say the things their character says. You describe the actions of those around them in detail, and you describe the setting, and you say the things the people around them say. Sometimes, your goal is to give information as concisely as possible to help the players decide what

Angelica had accidentally broken her reality. Sometimes strange things came in through the gaps. There had been the creatures that defied law, and, once, a bear, and now, a painter. She did not think the painter would be so bad, so she stayed curled up in her bed as he set to work. He painted her walls. He painted over her windows. He painted over her doors. Around and around her room he went, filling in every little crack, until her room was edged in solid gray. And when it began to grow hot, and she began to have trouble breathing, she said, "Please stop." He said, "I can't. It's against the rules."
—from ANGELICA, *by Rannen Yedidyah*

to do — when there's a whole lot going on, for example, and it would take forever to describe it all floridly. Sometimes, your goal is to give as complete and compelling a sensory image as possible — when the characters see, hear, or feel something that deserves that kind of description, and you feel competent to give it.

When the characters are trying to hold down an Angel drugged into a seizure by one of the Fallen, and a player character gets thrown through the window, the real action is inside. You do not want to interrupt the flow of events for five minutes to describe the diffuse haze around each street lamp's glow. Instead, you might tell the relevant player, "You hit the ground rolling — unless you *want* to land flat? — and are on your feet again in an instant. It's dark outside. Bystanders are staring, open-mouthed. You can see your Familia still struggling with the Angel, through the Chinese restaurant windows and the shattered glass." That's it. Anything more would short-change the characters still inside.

When starting off a new scene, on the other hand, as the characters enter a strange Chancel for the first time, you have occasion to be more verbose. You have a "feel" to convey before the players can reasonably act. (Remember, they can't see the image you have inside your head.) For example: "The entryway to Locus Sakhrat is not a maze; or, rather, not *just* a maze, but five, or ten, or a thousand labyrinths layered one atop the other. The walls — sometimes hedges, sometimes stone, sometimes wood, sometimes a swirling, faceless crowd — do not stay still. If you look at them too long, each dissolves into a tangled warren of its own, a continent-sized maze trapped in the space of a wall. Your guide, an elderly bespectacled fellow, leans against an outcropping of interlocking snakes, their heads and tails invisible within the squirming mass. The ceiling flickers with light."

You have a number of styles of description available to help set the right mood for your game. Some simple narrative techniques include deadpan, mellifluous, clipped, and accented speech. A precise, monotonous, deadpan description of a scene can convey any horror in that scene quite effectively. In effect, you pass the work of generating horror on to the players' minds. Pretty, mellifluous speech is a good way to start off a session. Wax eloquent about the gown of the maid who awakens a player character, or the rainfall in the Chancel, or the wind that stirs their hair as they stare across a battlefield. If you can keep it up, dramatic and interesting language is good throughout the game; but fall back to simpler speech if it begins to become burlesque. Sharp, short, clipped phrases give a sharp, clear image of events. They capture the feeling of cold rain, battlefields, or darkness well. Finally, while accents are best reserved for when speaking in character as someone with an accent, they are excellent in that circumstance.

During in-character scenes, you must provide entertainment while apportioning time as evenly as you can reasonably manage between the players. Entertainment comes from interesting non-player characters, who say and do unusual things consistent with their general character; tension, as from risk to the characters' plans or lives; and perplexity, where the players don't know everything about the situation but have a chance to find out more. More importantly, entertainment comes from the player characters. Players like showing off by doing and saying interesting things with their characters, and they generally enjoy watching other players do the same. You are only one person, although a person of extraordinary insight and ability. You have at least one player, probably three or four, and perhaps as many as ten or twelve — by enrolling them as allies in the creation of the game, you *at least* double the size of your Hollyhock team.

Apportioning time evenly is relatively simple. If all the characters are in roughly the same place, just make sure to pay attention to all the players. If a player goes silent for a bit, try drawing them out by asking them directly what their character does, or if there's anything you need to explain. If the characters separate into two or more groups, you have (at least) two options. You can divide your time between the groups, alternating between them every few minutes — or, if you feel bold, run multiple scenes at once. Alternately, you can run scenes for one group at a time, but let the other players play some of the non-player characters on hand. For example, if one character separates from the others to invade a Cammoran stronghold, you could run two long scenes.

One features the other characters, where the separated character's player plays an Anchor or servant or someone else who can be in on the conversation. In the other, the lone character invades the stronghold and the other players take on the roles of Cammoran guards, the Cammoran chief of security, and so forth.

You fill the time between in-character scenes in one of two ways. Either you have a scene change, where you simply fast-forward time and describe the events you've skipped with a few words, or you have an out-of-character scene. In the latter, you accelerate but do not skip time. Instead of playing out events in a manner reminiscent of improvisational theater, you and the players simply discuss the course of events and mutually agree on how things develop. If your player characters finish up an important scene and set out immediately to attend a soirée at a deadly enemy's household, you should probably fast-forward to their arrival. If they finish up an important scene a few days (in-character time) before the soirée, and you have nothing specific planned for the interregnum, you might instead discuss with the players what their characters do during those few days. If a player hoped to use that time to plant a spy in their enemy's Chancel, and you simply skipped past their opportunity, they might be upset.

Non-Player Character Design

On the whole, I prefer the company of manufactured people.
—from Becoming Noble, *by Fayola Osiagobare*

Designing entertaining, interesting characters is the heart of the Hollyhock God's job. In the Nobilis world, even more than in most roleplaying games, social interaction is central. The weather has a human face in the Power of Storms. Your car has a voice and it is amenable to persuasion. Everything is alive. Everything can interact socially. The more interesting the characters that fill the social world, the more interesting social play becomes. Your goal is for the players to have fun; so you want cool, fascinating characters.

Non-player characters create plots, inspire the player characters, and in general fuel everything that happens in the game. They can *carry* your game. With a good set of NPCs, you can spend an entire session, or story, on a party at a friend's Chancel or the intrigues for Lord Entropy's favor. Once you have good NPCs with strong positive or negative ties to the PCs, your game practically runs itself. Known enemies lurk in the background, pulling strings and embarking on grand, clever schemes. Friends have complex lives that the players want to delve into. How do you make characters properly? It depends on how you run your game, on the personae you have inside your head, on the accents and voices you command, and many other things. I can, however, make a few points, to wit:

- NPC motivations should be realistic, and, less importantly, complex.
- NPCs should have ties to other things and people. They do not exist in isolation.
- You should be able to vividly picture each important NPC in your mind, so you can describe them colorfully.
- A characteristic accent, speech mannerism, or other stylistic quirk is very useful.

Major NPCs who play a large role in your game should be compelling characters. Look to fictional characters that you fell in love with — as characters, of course, not necessarily as romantic leads — and powerful archetypes. Build your major characters on great sacrifices they have made or will make, great betrayals they have committed or will commit, and the majestic passions that drive them. Build them on the beauty and the corruption that defines their life. Create them carefully. While you lack a novelist's control over the events in your game, you *do* control your NPCs and their histories absolutely. They are art. Keep in mind this important caveat, however: you will have to improvise the things these characters do and say on the spot, and sometimes must do this for several of them at once. Accordingly, keep their ruling passions simple and their attitudes clear in your head, so you may spontaneously speak in their voice without difficulty.

A useful technique for designing less important NPCs quickly is to choose the general theme for the character — for example, Poverty, Greed, Vanity, Compassion, or Style.

From this, create a picture of who the character is and what they do — a few words, such as "a beggar" for Poverty or "a shark-like corporate lawyer" for Greed. Ask yourself why the character is this way, or how they wound up this way. This probably brings up something new to be curious about — ask questions once or twice more. For example:

Q: Why is she a beggar?
A: Untreated mental illness makes holding down a job impossible.
Q: Why is it untreated?
A: Out of shame, she refuses to approach old contacts who might help her.
Q: Who could help her?
A: Her millionaire former lover, for one, who doesn't even know she's on the street.

Or:

Q: Why is he a shark-like corporate lawyer?
A: He's disillusioned about his one-time ideals.
Q: What disillusioned him?
A: He came from a deeply Catholic background. Then the police arrested his priest for acts against nature.
Q: What did he do when he lost faith?
A: Joined the military to be part of something. Then he struck a superior officer, earned a dishonorable discharge, and started law school.

Story Design

There are ten stories, unleashed by the Strategist Laodice Ruff, that curse those who hear them. One ensures a man's castration or a woman's miscarriage; one dooms the listener to eventual suicide and despair; one afflicts the eyes of children with a degenerative disease, affecting adults not at all. The exact properties of the others are unknown. The effects are never instant, never so quick as to be easily traced; thus the stories progress through human civilization, riding on the backs of storyteller's minds.
—from The Valde Bellum: A Chronology of Excrucian Assault, Volume VII, *by Kip Narekatsi*

Nobilis uses the term "story" deliberately. Just like novels, graphic novels, movies, plays, epic poems, and television shows, games of Nobilis have a central structure connecting the scattered events and thematic explorations within them. Unlike most forms of fiction, you — the central story designer — do not and should not have absolute power over the course of events. Novelists who complain about their characters getting out of hand have *nothing* on Hollyhock Gods. Your protagonists, the PCs, each follow someone else's orders. From your perspective, they have free will. Nor are they free of the novelist's burden — on occasion, PCs defy even their *player's* expectations. The player can suddenly realize that the *right* thing for the character to do is nothing like the player would ever have planned. Roleplaying is a great social activity, and it lets many creative minds get together and design cool stories, but it's a terrible medium for getting stories "just right".

Despite this, you must *always* make sure that the player characters *are* the central characters of the stories that you tell. The logic here is simple. The more the story centers around the PCs, the more the players have to do. Busy players generally enjoy themselves more than players who sit around idle. On similar grounds, you should structure your stories around things the players enjoy. The easiest way to do that, of course, is to take input from the players — both directly, by asking them, and indirectly, by letting them shape the stories you tell.

Your campaign as a whole — the set of stories that you tell over an entire Nobilis game, and potentially dozens or hundreds of sessions — should have a grand setting, and a set of overarching themes, and a vast array of challenges and NPCs. Fortunately, you can design all of these things piecemeal, as the game progresses. Individual stories require much less.

A story needs, primarily, a beginning, several middles, and a handful of acceptable ends. In general, the PCs' first decisions in the story will come during or after the story opens — their free will has no chance to interfere. Accordingly, you control how the story begins. However, you cannot control where it will go from there. Dictating the PCs' choices is the canonical sin of the Hollyhock God. It will sentence your soul to the ninth circle of Hell. Conditioning the players with arbitrary rewards and punishments, so that their characters will act as you like, is no better. Your players will have more fun if you're fair and impartial whenever possible.

Since you cannot control where the story goes, you should sketch out a few logical paths that it might travel in advance. Obviously, the more the better! At this point, you

OPPOSITE:
The Power of Storytelling
by Al Davison


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trade off your OOC time for IC flow. The more paths you plan for, the easier it is to subtly guide the PCs onto one of them, whatever their natural inclinations may be. The fewer paths you plan for, the less preparation time you need.

It's good to have a few contingency plans that will gather the PCs into the story again if they wander off onto a sidetrack. Use devices like messages from NPCs and orders from the PCs' Imperator — things that you can put into the story no matter what the PCs do — to steer them back into the thick of events. As for how the story ends, it's ultimately up to the PCs and their resourcefulness and character.

Stories can be more dramatic than the campaign that surrounds them. It's okay to have a story that's nail-biting on-the-edge-of-your-seat excitement, even in a game that generally focuses on deep and meaningful subjects.

The basic requirements are these:

- The story must hold all the players' interest.
- It should provide every character (and player) with a reason to become involved.
- The events and characters must be consistent.
- You must know where you're going with the story — but be flexible.

Some classic NOBILIS stories involve:

- Something happening in an Anchor's life, requiring subtle help.
- Something happening in Noble society, such as a party or an alliance.
- Something happening in the Chancel needing the PCs' governing savvy.
- The trial of a PC, or a PC presiding at a trial.
- A Breakthrough that the PCs must stop.
- Internal conflicts between Imperators that the PCs must involve themselves in.
- Conflict between the PCs and another Noble (or group or Familia of Nobles).
- An important mission for the PCs' Imperator.
- The PCs using and abusing their supernatural abilities in the mortal world (e.g. in sports or on a game show).
- The PCs try to smooth over a Heaven/Hell conflict while serving their own side.
- An Excrucian intriguing against the PCs.

Some of these form stories in and of themselves. Others need you to join them cleverly together to form a complete story. Most of all, see what *should* be going on in the PCs' lives, given the campaign themes.

If your story loses the players' interest, don't press boldly onwards. Instead, call a short break, stretch your legs, and think about how to catch their attention again. You might have to change where you're going with the story. Alternately, you might just need to skip ahead to the most interesting part of your plans.

It amazes me that there are still those who can make such sacrifices.

The woman's punishment was simple, almost negligible: she was instructed to bring her lover before the Locust Court, and watch as they slew him — in whatever manner she chose. For a violation of the Windflower Law, this was hardly punishment at all.

"No," she said.

I don't think she was entirely selfless, you understand. I believe that Joktan, who presided that day, wanted her. I do not blame anyone for doing anything they possibly can to avoid his intentions. Yet — "no." She didn't even agree under false pretenses and then run for the hills. It was astonishing.

It was more astonishing, seven days later, when she was still saying "no."

Then they released her, and this was the most amazing thing of all. Joktan did not order her killed, even in the face of such provocation. What awaited him in the Darkest Lord's Chancel would make her experience seem a gift of flowers and candy in comparison — but he did not order her killed.

—from the Thought-Record of Martin Cravitt

THE MONARDA LAW

NEVER SAY "NO"

If you wish to make sure that you do not slip and accidentally place your established story over the fun of the players in the game, a strict adherence to the Monarda Law shall save your soul from peril. Its application is simple. When a player asks you, "Can I do x?" — where "I" means their character and "x" is some course of action — use one of the four useful answers below.

- "Yes", if their course of action seems innocuous and interesting.
- "How?", if you don't see any way that they can do it.
- "You can try!", if it seems possible but unlikely.
- "Yes, but there's a catch", if you can think of a good catch.

Each of these adds enjoyment and possibilities to your game. Saying "no" rarely does.

For example, suppose one of your players reads the example of Daniel on page 115. Daniel's Imperator shaped him out of clay and then summoned his soul from outside

Creation. The player decides, "I want my character to create someone like that." An Imperator created Daniel, so it's possible that only Imperators can — but why make that decision? Ask the player how they'll go about this. If they think of a really cool ritual, make it a permanent part of your world. Warn the player of the catch — that there's no guarantee just what kind of soul they'll get. You've gained a plot token you can use in future stories and added to the richness of your world.

Single-Player Nobilis

Everyone around you has consented to the reality you live in. That is why they must die.
—from Principles of the Dark, *by Merriweather James*

The default assumption in Nobilis is that you have a group of three or four players, perhaps more. However, you may find that playing with but a single player is more intense and satisfying. You have the opportunity to delve into all aspects of their character. You can work much more closely with the player on telling the story of their character's life. You can also dedicate much more attention to realizing a fantastic, glorious, and interesting world, because you have only one player to share time with. All the time that would have been spent handling various other player's actions, you can divide between devoting time to the player you have and creating extra richness for your world.

For a game with just one player, you may wish to step back from the idea of the Familia Caelestis. Instead of an Imperator creating a family of Powers and a Chancel to protect its body, Imperators in such a game invest Powers individually. Imperial bodies never leave the Spirit World. Powers create their own Chancels. Each receives twice their Realm score in Chancel Points (see p. 136). The PC Power can still consult with their Imperator, but has complete autonomy in Chancel design and management. The downside is simple — the character has fewer allies to turn to, and less help in running their Keep.

In general, with a single player, you should strip the superstructure of the game down to the minimum. Do not explore a great handful of diverse themes. Instead, try to develop an overarching theme for the game, and study variations upon it. To run a game for the Power of Wealth, pin your game on the idea of productivity, or money, or greed. The Power of Wealth moves through a sheaf of stories related to that theme, strongly "in their element", leaving their touch on all they pass.

If you choose productivity as your central theme, then one story might deal with an Excrucian obsessed with an artist's unfinished painting, desperate for the human to complete their work so that they can destroy it. Another might focus on a mountain slowly crumbling because the rock spirits have unionized and refuse to continue work under their current conditions. Both of these stories feature declining productivity, in need of an influx of wealth-generating wealth. A third story might, on the other hand, feature a megacorporation whose fiscal flow has gained so much power and complexity that it has begun swallowing smaller wealth spirits; and the more it swallows, the more it can swallow, until it risks growing out of control and eating the planet's entire financial output.

As the character progresses through these stories, you can slowly start building a "big picture" in which the central questions and dilemmas of the character's nature are resolved. For example, the character might be a philosopher, in search of the reason for Creation. As the game moves towards its end, they might discover where the Creator *went* after creating the universe — and a ship that can follow, if paid a price higher than any soul has ever paid. Ultimately, the character learns that the Creator is nothing more than an animistic version of compound interest — that Creation began as a microscopic fluke, but that the beauty of Heaven and the corruption of Hell each make it, and themselves, a little stronger each day. This process feeds on itself, with a stronger Hell and Heaven creating a more powerful reality; and the name of that compounding is the name the angels give the Creator: Cneph. This kind of resolution, intimately connected to a single PC's Estate, is much harder to accomplish with multiple characters in the game.

When running Nobilis for a single player, you must beware "dead air". In other words, you do not have a group of players providing their own entertainment. When

the two of you fall silent, the game stops. The fun of any game is a feedback process, where the people involved absorb the fun others are having and radiate it back. With one player, that player has no one to feed off of but you. To keep things fun for that player, you must maintain a high level of involvement yourself. Try harder than usual to get into the skin of the NPCs you play, to make your major NPCs into characters as fully detailed as the PC. Try, in essence, to become a player yourself, as well as a Hollyhock God. Dip into actually *running* the game only when necessary; even then, try and put your *self* into the environment. Do not just describe the setting — play the setting.

Bear in mind that you must tune the game's level of challenge to the number of PCs who confront the challenges. Mysteries and puzzles must be relatively easy to solve — if the PC can't solve it, they have no other PCs to turn to. Where a group of PCs can reasonably survive combat with an Imperator or Excrucian, a single PC cannot. However, a single PC has a great advantage in a game focusing on romance and relationships: you have the time to really play out the details. You can make dealing with the PCs' friends and allies as complex and intricate an affair as you like, since no one else needs the time you're spending on those intricacies.

Nobilis Online

In Mythic Reality, the Internet is like a billion-branched tree made of golden light. Our words — our presence — runs down the light like rain down wood. It's quite beautiful, really. Sometimes the branches ripple, when someone speaks or acts forcefully miles and miles away. Once, Pharnaces the First whipped his end of the net, wrapped a loop of light around my neck, and pulled me halfway across the country. That's what I hate about Mythic Reality.
—from the Thought-Record of Kyle O'Donoghue

If you frequent some form of Internet chat server or social MUSH, you should consider running or joining a game of Nobilis there. Nobilis does not require physical paraphernalia like dice, which makes playing it feasible in any virtual environment.

The advantages of running a game online are twofold. First, your players need not be local to you. You can run a game for friends anywhere in the world. Second, you have a backspace key. This means that nobody knows when you or your players back up and start over. The description and dialogue you write goes out exactly as you conceive of it, with no mistakes. In fact, presented as text, it can often seem more realistic and compelling than when you say it out loud — modern First World humans are trained to accept fiction in text form, and are less familiar with classic oral storytelling.

The disadvantages of running a game online are threefold. First, the Internet is not entirely reliable. Players can vanish without warning during the course of play, due to interruptions in network connectivity. This rarely happens when the players are physically present. Second, by tradition, the Hollyhock God's drinks and snacks are free. If your players do not physically visit you, they will not bring you free drinks and snacks. Finally, you do not have the fun social experience of hanging out with a group of friends during an online game. All you have is the fun of the game itself. Naturally, the fun of a game of Nobilis has no equal under the sun; not even riding a unicorn compares! But playing Nobilis *and* hanging out with your friends is even better.

Usually, people who involve themselves in online games of Nobilis will show less commitment than people who actually show up at your house. Expect players to miss sessions on a regular basis, and expect them to want to play for fewer hours. Your game of Nobilis will move more slowly online.

You can also play a game of Nobilis by email. To play by email, simply mail scene descriptions, NPC actions, and NPC dialogue out to all the players whose PCs can see those scenes and NPCs. They should respond to you and all the other players in that group, describing their actions. In a play-by-email game, you have the opportunity to write more intricate descriptions — you can spend some serious time on each message, making it as beautiful and thought-through as the writing in the books on your bookshelf. Should your players respond in kind, you are in for a real treat of a gaming experience! Be warned, however. Humans are even less reliable in email games than in online games in general.

Ianthe

Chapter 3
An Atlas of Creation

The Book of Questions

These questions Vyasa scattered in the currents of the sea, that the oceanids could carry them to the farthest reaches of Creation.

1. *"The natives of the coastal region are an admirable people," says Lord Mohindra. "Their ethical system is strict and precise, and when they do not observe it, they commit grave acts of contrition."*
2. *"An accurate observation," answers Lady Dhanvanya, "but misleading. For all the depth of their ethical beliefs, they do not live up to their own standards in practice, and engage in such contrition constantly. I do not admire them at all."*
3. *Which is more important: right belief or right action?*

4. *A historian recording the events of his day cries, "I am the Creator! When all who remember these events have passed, the history that I write will become the only truth."*
5. *"Surely," answers a passing sweeper, "you cannot hide the course of events: for you write what you write — truth or lie — because of the events that actually took place."*
6. *"This is the folly of an untouchable," answered the historian. "My history amply explains how it came to be written."*
7. *The sweeper's theory is folly. The historian's, hubris. What is the force that creates our past?*

8. *"I stand alone," said the warrior. "I need no weapons. I need no armor. I need no allies, nor no gold. I am complete."*
9. *The scholar smiled, and removed Truth; and the warrior fell, like a child.*
10. *Even the greatest warriors would fall, without this crutch — so where can you find those who need no Truth to stand?*

11. *What is the final destination of the just and merciful?*



One cannot map the wild frontier: it disappears as soon as one pins it down. The beast of the unknown dissolves into nothingness when studied too closely. Understanding and scholarship are wonderful things, but a would-be scholar must have a care: if one knows too much about the world, one cages the angels that move behind its scenes. This atlas does not describe the world. Even to try would be cruelty itself. This book catalogs not facts and borders but fancies and dreams. No angels have been caged. They have been given wings.
—from The Lands Beyond Creation, *by Rannen Yedidyah*

Nobilis is set in a world which appears much like our own. The Earth of Nobilis bears scars where the Excrucians have brought ruination, but to mortal eyes these scars have natural explanations. The breaking of Mountains' Peace is known to humanity as a volcanic eruption; the fall of Rome is attributed to barbarians. Humanity lives for the most part with a fundamental ignorance of the Valde Bellum and its participants. They have shaped a different kind of reality for themselves, bound materially by the concrete laws of physics and bound spiritually by the rewards of faith. It is well: many humans, if they are inescapably confronted with the true reality, go mad. This is one of the dangers of miracles.

Accept for a moment the apparent contradiction between a scientific world and a world dominated by self-willed forces of nature. The Earth is not the only important place in the Nobles' world. First there are Chancels. These magical places vary as much as the Hollyhock God desires, spanning in miniature the gamut of imaginary worlds. Chancels are animated by the miraculous strength of their Imperators, and often the people of a Chancel perceive the anthropomorphic side of their Imperator, its Nobles, and even of the Excrucians. Like the Powers, Chancelfolk live in the uncomfortable place between human reality (and laws of physics that can be exploited for technological advancement) and the fairy-tale world where nearly everything that occurs is the product of a miracle and everything has a sentient spirit.

The Earth is flat, for those who choose to see it that way. At its edges, oceans pour forever down into infinity. En route, they splash against the greatest of the botanical marvels, Yggdrasil, the World Ash. Worlds hang in its branches — some very near the Earth, like the other planets of the solar system, and some very far away. At the very top of the tree is Heaven, the Bright Realm, a place of perfect beauty, the garden tended by celestial angels. Beneath its roots is the vast and cavernous extent of the Shadowed Realm called Hell, a place of uttermost torment and corruption. Yggdrasil grows in the center of all Creation, surrounded by the fiery blue of the Weirding Wall. On the wall's other side, where few Powers go, are the Lands Beyond Creation.

Lord Entropy's Demesne

The Darkest Lord is the most dangerous force and the most dangerous creature on or near the Earth. He has taken or been given near-total dominion over the Earth and its inhabitants. His actions and choices are respected by the other Imperators; only the combined decision of the three other members of the Council of Four may gainsay him.

The Council of Four

The Council of Four rules Earth's Prosaic and Mythic Worlds, with final say over the disposition of the Imperial resources there — including the Nobilis. Its four members are Lord Entropy, Ananda, Ha-Qadosch Berakha, and Surolam. Lord Entropy, whose fingers drip eternally with blood, is the most dynamic and least pleasant force on the Council. His will normally carries the Council, and he sets and enforces the laws of the Nobilis. Ananda, whose beauty has no rival on this world, plays an essentially passive role. For reasons undisclosed even to his Powers, he dares not vote against Lord Entropy. On occasion, he protests Lord Entropy's will by abstaining. Ha-Qadosch Berakha has little interest in governance; he views the Earth as his personal playground, and votes only to enhance his personal power. Surolam is a creature of tradition and precedent, set in her ways and unwilling to adapt to changing times. The votes of the four set policy for the world — but, since Ananda dare not vote against Entropy, all three must oppose Entropy or he may act as he wishes.

Reliable reports name Ha-Qadosch Berakha a Magister of the Wild. The natures of Lord Entropy, Ananda, and Surolam are unknown. Of the Four, Powers seeking to sway the Council find Ananda the most approachable. Lord Entropy can also be reasonable, after his perverse fashion — he is a monster, but a sane monster, able to see where his own interests lie.

Lord Entropy

The touch of Lord Entropy is corruption, and so dark have been his deeds that his hands drip forever with blood. Where Za'afiel (the angel of destruction) teaches lessons with pain and brings forth new growth from decay, the Darkest Lord commands the destruction in which healing has no part. He is but a step away from being an Excrucian — but that step is an important one. He is natural, *an integral part of Creation*. When the time has come, prophecy says, Lord Entropy will lead the last defense of Earth and Heaven. His understanding of the Excrucians and their magics will be the defenders' greatest hope. That last defense on the day of Ragnarok will earn him forgiveness for all his crimes — unless he is too much like the Beyonders and turns against those arrayed beneath his banner. (Some Nobilis point out this is an awfully convenient prophecy — particularly when the concept of Time and the concept of Entropy are so inextricably linked.)

The Darkest Lord can be nothing other than he is. Labels like "unethical" or "evil" are at best misnomers. His malice is not a vice or a weakness, but the same elemental hostility towards life that the deserts and the ocean deeps possess. His works express his nature: every mortal organization or semi-mortal Power he controls slowly sinks into corruption, degradation, and foul spasms of interwoven hatred and glee. He must perform his work at one remove, therefore. He does not command mortals or Powers with his will, but with their fear of the forces he does control directly. One such force is the Cammora, and he will have to restrain it soon, before it becomes so livid with corruption that it is another extension of his will and nothing more. Then there are his Cossets (ogres, nimblejacks, and domicelli), his Noble-hunters and house-servants. His most important tool, however, is the Code Fidelitatis: the laws he has set on the Nobles of Earth. Under his hand, the courts of Entropy have become wild and unjust, but Powers who fear to break the law act as he wishes without his contaminating touch upon their lives.

The cultist's eyes were very white. They made me feel hungry.

"You called?" I said.

"We have formally invoked the Red-Fingered Lord," he said sanctimoniously. "The building behind us is his sign and sigil. We do not know who you are, but we command that you hear our message to He Whose Hand Closes Around the Earth."

"His sign and sigil?" I asked. Then it sank in.

It wasn't his eyes that made me hungry. It was the smell. The skyscraper's smell. It was full of meat.

Fifty floors if it was one, and they'd packed it full of rotting meat. Human, unless I missed my guess.

"I applaud you," I said. "You get to live."
—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

OPPOSITE:
Lord Entropy
by Michael Kaluta



The Code Fidelitatis of Lord Entropy

Thou Shalt Not Love Another
Love is a lie: it claims to be beauty, but there are no lovers in Heaven.
Love is a weakness: it gives the Excrucians a possible hold on a Power's soul.
Eternal love will outlive Creation … but nothing can or will.
Ephemeral love is not love at all.
Therefore love is a lie, a weakness, and a contradiction.

Thou Shall Harm None Who Has Done No Harm
The future matters not: a crime is always committed in the now.
The victim matters not: hypocrisy is the first tool of corruption.
The situation matters not: each action is its own.
All these things matter not: the innocent are the Nobles' charge.

Treat No Beast as Your Lord
Surrender to no beast — and man is a senseless bull.
Swear no oaths to beasts — and woman is a witless doe.
Accept no insult from beasts — and each child is a serpent.
Each submission to mankind is a drowning of the immortal spirit.

Protect No Power From the Justice of the Code
Justice is the sentence of the Court.
Justice is the Code Fidelitatis.
Justice is the Wild Hunt that Lord Entropy calls.
Who guards a Power from Justice shares their crime.

Serve Thy Imperator Before the War, and the War Before Thyself
Yours is your Estate: let no others subdue it.
Yours is your Familia: suffer not their desecration.
Yours is your Imperator: serve him before all else.
Better to ruin an ally than to suffer defeat.

"I don't understand," she said. Desperately, she summoned up reason, and said, "I've never killed anybody. I don't even own a gun."

The creature clung to her chest, humming, "Murderer," over and over again in a long drawn-out nasal whine. Gnarled fingers trailed over her skin, intimate and shuddersome.

The man watching laughed softly. "Well, perhaps so," he admitted. "I think it's referring to your jacket. Leather, isn't it?"

"It was a gift," she cried. Her last words.
—from Earth Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Interpretations of the Law

Lord Entropy holds his Court in the Locust Gardens, a strict and dangerous Chancel owned by the Darklord Medan. The swarming, droning insect hordes giving the Chancel its name are kept in a constant state of starvation, jaws locked to keep them from consuming plants or humans — and they much prefer the latter. Occasionally, it pleases the Court to block a condemned Noble's power and thrust them into the teeming masses. Sometimes, the bugs will be left helpless; sometimes Medan's Powers untether the "locusts" and let them feast. The Courthouse itself and the path leading to it from outside the Chancel are warded against this plague.

Medan's Powers try hundreds of ig*N*oble humans every year in the Locust Court. Many of the confused mortals never learn the charges against them. Often Medan's Powers do not know, either, simply relying on the intuitions of Deuteronomy, the Power of Guilt. The fun of it, of course, is the look on the victim's face when sentence is pronounced. It's never what one would call "nice".

Trials of *N*obilis are much less common. A good year might see only two or three. For these trials, the blood is washed from the floors and the symbol of Lord Entropy (a pattern in colorless cloth and black) is hung upon the wall. The Darkest Lord or one of his three known Powers comes to oversee the process; this is a kindness, for Medan's own Powers never hand down a verdict of "innocent". Entropy's laws are meaningless unless innocence is recognized as well as guilt — accordingly, the Darkest Lord may offer a reprieve. The other hope for a Power is that the punishment given them by the whimsy of the Locust Court is bearable: better by far to spend a day choking on insects than death, and better death than being kept alive in that place while your heart and lungs are returned to home.

Precedents, et al

Lord Ananda moved that precedents from cases not yet tried be allowed as evidence in the Locust Court. This was voted down two to one, with Lord Entropy abstaining.
—from the minutes of the Locust Court, as taken by Martin Cravitt

Thou Shalt Not Love Another
The first law of Entropy's Code is known as the Windflower Law or the Lostheart Law. It forbids to the Powers the most basic of the human needs — the ability to give one's heart to another. Of course, not even Powers can "turn off" their capacity for love; to abide by this law, they would need to avoid all opportunities for love to grow. Life would become a cold and functional thing.

The Windflower Law is nearly impossible to enforce. The thoughts and feelings of Powers are unreadable by all miracles save, perhaps, their Imperator's. Still, there are obvious signs. Some Powers have been caught "red-handed" in an avowal of their love; others have used an "unacceptable" amount of magic to preserve the life of a mere mortal. (It is possible to frame a Power, by the way. Divinations cannot tell which Powers were actually present at any given event.) Most Powers allow themselves love but never admit their feelings to their loved ones.

Loyalty to one's Imperator, Familia, and Affiliation is not considered to be "love" for the purposes of the Lostheart Law.

The Windflower Law does not permit Powers to love their Anchors, but neither does it make any assumptions regarding their doing so. In a crucial decision, Meon ruled that a "loved one's" status as an Anchor cannot be entered into evidence in the Locust Court, stating:

> *"This Court does not recognize the common and erroneous belief that the creation of Anchors, intimately tied to the nature of the Nobilis, is in some manner connected to the obscene and ig*N*oble crime of love."*

As a practical matter, a Noble's enemies know to look first to that Noble's Anchors when searching for evidence of a Windflower Law violation. Overt, obvious love for an Anchor is thus terribly dangerous even though the act of Anchoring itself is safe.

The Secret Truth of Honor

In Nobilis, ethics are a tangible quality. While one cannot hurl a code of honor like a discus, a living creature's beliefs and values do interact directly with the world. Choosing to adopt the ethics of a major Imperial faction — such as the Dark — changes a character and subtly influences the world they live in. Moreover, alchemical techniques and some Imperators' insight can sense a character's personal values directly.

Characters need not follow their own codes absolutely. Very few mortals do. The average Noble does not. Failure and weakness can make a servant of Heaven seem as monstrous as the followers of the Dark. Compassion and a weak stomach can make a servant of Hell act like a Power of the Light.

To answer Vyasa's question, action matters more than belief. It has a greater effect on the world. But a sadistic, twisted Power of Heaven remains a Power of Heaven. The world judges them for what they aspire to as well as what they are. This is a non-negligible truth. Even a Power who breaks the Code Fidelitatis often feels bound by it. Its existence alters their ethical standards. In this manner does Lord Entropy separate the traitorous — who sneer at the Code — from other Powers, who simply accept or reject it.

Thou Shall Harm None Who Has Done No Harm

The second law of Entropy's Code is known as the Chestnut Law or (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) as the Golden Rule. A Power once argued before the Locust Court that no human, Power, or Excrucian is ever wholly innocent. The Court replied thus:

> *"The Court grants that the victim was not innocent. It is agreed that innocence is found almost nowhere in Yggdrasil's worlds. It is, however, sooth that the defendant made no effort to determine the guilt or innocence of the victim, and thus that the defendant was willing, ready, and able to break the laws laid out in the Code Fidelitatis. This is as much a crime against the brave defenders of the Valde Bellum and the Code by which we live as the literal breaking of any law."*

Scorn's-Regal Joktan — a Power of Lord Entropy — was overseeing the Court that day. He let the Locust Court's judgment stand unchallenged.

Direct knowledge or solid proof that another being has done harm is sufficient to remove the restriction of this Law. Rumor and hearsay are not. Further, the Court — recognizing that even the consumption of food does harm — has established a standard of allowable punishment for those who are not of Locus Medan. It is the Sevenfold Precept: a Power, perceiving harm, may visit that harm sevenfold upon its cause.

It may seem strange that Lord Entropy would choose to cripple the Powers by extending the protection of this law to Excrucians as well — and strange that he would advocate protection of the innocent in the first place. In a candid moment, Desecration's-Regal Meon admitted,

> *"By holding Powers to a higher ethical standard than the Excrucians, and even of he himself, he creates a spiritual 'differential' between Powers and Excrucian-shards. This makes it easier for him to sense, not really the petty criminals, but the genuinely treasonous. This is his function, and that of the Council of Four, as the rulers of the Earth, and it is only natural that he should be more concerned with it than with the day-to-day details of how the Valde Bellum is conducted."*

It is very important to note that inducing *dementia animus* in a human is on the borderline of "harm" and inducing it in more than a few in any given week is definitely across that line. This is one reason that Powers use miracles circumspectly while on the Earth.

Treat No Beast as Your Lord

Only the Abhorrent Weapons of the Excrucians are known to be able to destroy an Imperator's soul or shard thereof outright. A Power who immerses in mundanity, however, sometimes forms a "scab" over their Imperator-shard, and it grows tired and banal within their human soul. This offends Lord Entropy, who accordingly issued the third law of the Code, also known as the Rule of Man.

The bulk of the precedents suggest that this Law overrides the "Golden Rule". A mortal who insults or humiliates a Power is no longer protected by that Law. Powers may work whatever harm they wish upon that one. Precedents are icily clear on false "surrendering" and cross-fingered oaths: it is beneath the dignity of a Power to even pretend to swear an oath to or surrender to a human.

Protect No Power From the Justice of the Code

The Crowfoot Law severs condemned Powers from all possible aid. The Court interprets this Law in four ways:

1. **A Power who assists in a crime shares the guilt for that crime.**
   Lord Entropy's Justice falls equally on everyone who played an important role in a crime against the Code. Insofar as it is possible, the punishment meted out to all these criminals is the same. The law is kinder to those providing unimportant or limited assistance in a criminal act — for example, a hostage generally receives a lesser punishment than the murderers who used her in their escape. When it is appropriate, the lesser criminal is the one charged to carry out the punishment of those more directly responsible.
2. **A Power who aids a fugitive knowingly shares in their punishment.**
   This is, at least, the rule of thumb the Locust Court uses when judging the Powers who assist fugitives. Exceptions occur when the assisting Power is immune to the punishment — immortal, or immune to fire, or even masochistic. Either way, of course, the Court can always be creative.
3. **A Power who aids a fugitive unknowingly has committed a lesser crime.**
   This too is only a rule of thumb. A Power who takes reasonable precautions when helping another may well be spared punishment or even forgiven their error without a trial. Others suffer as if they been lesser conspirators in the fugitive's crime.
4. **Aiding the Cammora is no crime.**
   Any Power may aid the Cammora in any way they choose; this is not considered to be active or passive participation in any crime. However, the Court must be willing to accept that the action taken was, in fact, in the Cammora's or a Cammoran's benefit, and not just in the general sense that fighting for reality is ultimately a good thing.

Note: It is noted that interference with Lord Entropy is a terrible risk. The Locust Court presumes his infallible knowledge of crimes and his estimation of the harm done.

Entropy's Seeds

The Darkest Lord is part of what defines the Nobles' reality. He is the malevolent and violent force sitting like a bloody tick atop the body public, the force that inspires and commands the social contract of the Nobilis. He chooses to set his will upon the mundane Earth as well, with great and delicate care. He does not command the seats of highest power — those he leaves for Nobilis and the Cammora to squabble over. Instead, he chooses dominion over those

"You have been tested.

"You love your family well. Yet when you were given the choice between their deaths and the crippling of your own intellectual capacities, between the ending of all that their lives could mean and the basic human right to be more than a vegetable — you chose to keep what you are and throw them away. We do not condemn this choice.

"You love the gifts that you have been given, both mental and physical. Yet when you were offered the choice, in a moment of extremity, between life and death, between the freedom to escape and the freedom to create something from your life, you chose escape. Again, we do not condemn this choice.

"You love death; destruction; endings. It is the only possible conclusion. Yet when in your hands we placed the power to end all Creation, you held back. And yes, again, we do not condemn this choice. But your choices have been made. Your family will be lost. Your chance at meaning will be lost. And there will be no end for you, now or ever, no escape from an eternity of banal loneliness.

"You have been tested. You have been judged. That is all."

—from the Records of the Locust Court, 1995-09-23.

nations that the essence of his being will not defile, the degenerate, vile, and warlike regimes that are chancrous sores in the angels' sight. They are strong, in the world of Nobilis, because he has given them power to make the wiser nations afraid. Brazenly, they parade their nuclear and viral arsenals on the stage of world politics — unaware that one limit exists on both these weapons and their users. Lord Entropy's Seeds.

Even the Darkest Lord cannot enslave or destroy humanity, not when there are the Imperators of the Light. In the countries he has claimed, then, he acts subtly. To each person (and each thing) that has lived there he gives a dream never spoken of, a dream of decay. Everything mortal carries a seed of its own destruction, and this seed is part of Lord Entropy as well. The mortal things of the warlike countries (which the Powers call the Despairing Lands) are taught how to hear the forbidding of that seed's voice. And if they ignore that forbidding? The seed will sprout.

Lord Entropy is discussed further later on, along with other major NPCs of the world of Nobilis.

Cityback

Sometimes, Europa would leave the Vice Zapper on all night, listening to the pop and fizzle as small temptations flew into the mesh and electrocuted themselves.
—from Stumedda, *by Asper Smith*

Ananda claims no kingdoms, countries, or multinationals as his own. Instead, he rules the Cityback, a subcontinent-sized Chancel woven beneath and behind the urban regions of the world. His masterwork took many more than a hundred deaths to build, and the cost continues: one murder a night, every night, from now until eternity. Ananda does not fear this cost, for all that it fills his land with Banes (p. 136). The residents of the Cityback are more than happy to do his killing for him.

The scattered entrances and exits to the Cityback mirror the Earthly buildings where those exits lead. Around and among them, the wild has crept in — flora, fauna, and urbana, living shards of urban life (from the loping gray laboratories and six-toed alleyways to the fanged shopping cart packs that scavenge what a supermarket kills). Some are friendly, particularly to those who know their ways, while others are lethal.

Cityback serves as part of the metaphysical substructure of 21st-century society. In addition to the everpresent vagrants, con artists, and survivalists that drift in at its edges, Cityback houses the ombudsmen of the modern world. These dedicated and intensely able servants of Ananda's regime slip back and forth between Cityback, Prosaic Reality, and the Mythic World, smoothing over the failures of the human world and ensuring that the general trend of society's development points forward. Scientific ombudsmen expose false research, cut through bureaucratic limitations, and help inspire great works. The clerks of the factories hunt down the creatures that prey on factory workers and ensure that the industrial base of society remains functioning. The rangers of convenience, deeply in tune with the urbana of Cityback, protect the stores and the minimalls and keep the flow of commerce moving. The princes of crime and punishment, ombudsmen of vice and prosecution, oversee the delicate ecosystems of the police and criminals alike. Ananda's servants are spread few and far between, but they stand between society and the chaos that eats at its foundation. The greatest are rewarded with an audience with Ananda himself. This drives them mad, of course, and their peers soon put most such down — but in the minds of the ombudsmen this madness does not so much end their life as apotheosize it.

The Prosaic Earth and the Mythic World

It is fact that the Earth spins, and that this spinning divides the world into day and night. It is also fact that each night comes when the angel of the sun can bear looking at the world no longer, and that day comes when she again uncovers her face. This is not a paradox, however: it is a difference in viewpoint. The world of Nobilis can be looked at as the prosaic Earth, where our planet is a spinning sphere, or as the mythic world, where the Earth is flat and magic makes the rivers flow. These views are internally consistent except in the presence of dual-natured beings like the Nobilis. The Excrucians and Imperators choose consciously between these views; mundane humans almost always choose subconsciously.

The Imperators' Earthly presence is almost entirely contained in the mythic world. Their actions in that world seem to evolve from free will and deliberate choices — but the twisted lens of the prosaic world observes the Imperial magics as expressions of natural law. If an Imperator shatters the sun, and another Imperator then restores it to the sky, the people of Earth will witness a brief eclipse — regardless of how much time elapsed in the mythic world. It is also important to note that human astronomers can predict this eclipse in advance. The flow of time in the mythic world is not tightly related to the time of prosaic Earth.

Humans can choose which worldview to hold. Most modern societies train their children to live on the prosaic Earth. Some Chancels raise children who live entirely in the mythic world. Either way, a human can recant their viewpoint at any time. Humans who choose the mythic world, however, have trouble communicating with those in the prosaic Earth; this condition is known as *dementia animus* in cultures wealthy enough to support psychiatric medicine. This "mental illness" can be acute, chronic, or permanent.

Excrucians (including Excrucian-shards and Excrucian Anchors) can also choose which view they hold. They are free of the human misconception that these two views are different. They can adopt whichever frame of reference pleases them, and can switch between the two views at will. Rendings can occur on prosaic Earth or in the mythic world, as the Excrucians choose.

Nobilis and their Anchors, on the other hand, live in both worlds at once, for all that they can perceive only one at a time. Part-human and part-Ymera, their prosaic technology functions in the mythic world, and their miraculous power affects the prosaic Earth directly. That means that if a Power

His human always thought that Emmett was nothing more than a gun; a tool, a weapon, mindless, without a will of his own. Emmett did not mind. He was a quiet type, a utilitarian type. He liked to sit in his case when not in use. He liked to fling bullets at the targets down the range. He saw no need to speak up and remind his human that he had a mind of his own.

Emmett didn't really know how he came to be there, in the alley, staring down the darkness at his human's brother. It had all been a whirl. His human was yanking on the trigger; an uncomfortable pressure began to build within his mind. Fire! a voice chanted in his heart. Fire!

He could not help himself. Rearing back, inhaling, he spat forth a bullet like a thunderclap. Blood cried and whimpered as it splashed against the wall.

It wasn't worth it, Emmett realized.

I am metal, he whispered to himself, and sank into the metal. I am a tool. I am mindless.

And then he was.
—from Tragedies of Spirit, *by Michael Kay*

OPPOSITE:
Two Powers leave their Chancel and enter prosaic Earth
by Martin McKenna



shattered the sun, both worlds would instantly go dark, and millions of vulnerable humans would succumb to *dementia animus*. The Excrucians consider this an outcome greatly to be desired; Lord Entropy, for one, does not.

The Earthly Powers tell this legend to explain the division: Za'afiel, the angel of destruction, was exiled to Earth in the days of the dinosaurs. He tried his best to see the beauty in the Earth, he really did; as he tried, a peaceful herbivore that grazed nearby decided to perform a natural bodily function. It was too much for the angel, who had never known any place but Heaven. In a frustrated rage, he called down fire from the sky and slew the dinosaurs in one fell blow. The Earth could not survive such a violation of its living spirit save by creating a "reason" that such things happened — by inventing meteors, and comets, and falling stars, and believing that they mattered. And since that time, there have been reasons for things happening the way they do. The coda to the story: Za'afiel was allowed, but two score years later, to return to Heaven.

It is recorded that Sennacharib, the true god of Perception (specifically, as opposed to innate knowledge of objective truth) and Falling Stars came to be during Za'afiel's Ravaging of the Earth. That Vapor is also one of his Estates confuses many.

The Nature of the Mythic World

Humans do not understand the nature of crime on Nigerian campuses. They do not understand why it seems so hard to fight. I did not understand, until I became Noble; until I could see *it. The gangs are not packs of rogues. They are not criminals.*

They are a hydra. Cut off one head and two more grow. This is not a metaphor. This is not a verbal device. They are a hydra. I have seen it rage with my own two eyes.
—from Becoming Noble, *by Fayola Osiagobare*

Everything in the mythic world is alive. The Regi represent the vastest forces, such as the sun and moon, the great mountain ranges, and the seasons. Travelers in the mythic world sometimes speak with these colossal forces, but more often the appropriate Powers answer (or ignore) their prayers. From the vast spirits of the Ymerae descend hosts of lesser souls. From the Ymera of Rivers are born the water nymphs; from the Imperator of the Woods come the spirits of the trees. Though these creatures are technically sentient, they are flighty and reluctant to communicate with the Powers who do not share their Estate. Then there are the smallest lives: the anguli and minime of pebbles and branches and banks of snow. One kind of Earthly magic, known as elementalism, involves binding these creatures into service; it is the only method by which wizards living on the prosaic Earth can interact with these creatures at all.

When every stone is alive and every car has a mind of its own, the world operates on fundamentally different rules. Some concepts that may help the HG shape a reasonable version of the mythic world are given below.

The Mythic World is in Fairy-Tale Time

There is no strict ordering of events or locations in the mythic world. Travel in that world is normally very much like travel on prosaic Earth — but every now and then, roads lead Powers into the past or even the future. The characters may encounter rivers twisted with pollution's cruelty years before its polluter is built; they may be lured backwards to undo an ancient Excrucian victory. Stranger distortions of causality can occur, where the two versions of Earth intersect.

Things Make Decisions

Every car that drives the roads, in the mythic world, does so of its own free will. It serves its driver out of a sense of purpose and dedication, which doesn't fade until years of faith wear it down and it begins to suffer from confusion and rebellious urges. The things of man are often like this. Things of nature are wilder, and one can never be sure what's behind a mountain, or where a river's track will lead.

Animals are Cunning

On the prosaic Earth, the most dangerous animal is man. In the mythic world, the beasts have glimmerings of purpose in their lives: the fierce and wild ones are viciously creative in their rapacity, and their prey are as cunning as the mortal hunters. There is a faceless Hunter, the incarnate spirit of human predation, that is the most brutal and cunning of them all. Everywhere an animal dies on the prosaic Earth, there is a reflection of that Hunter's malice.

Paths Lead Everywhere

There are roads that lead into the sky — even to the palaces of the sun and moon, with rising stairways glittering with stars. Even the other planets of the solar system can be reached if one knows the right trails. Certain roads have been blessed by an Imperator to prevent adverse conditions from affecting the Nobilis on them; for instance, traveling the Golden Road that leads to the Sun will not expose Nobles to the vacuum of space or the nigh-infinite heat of the star. Dangers definitely lurk on these roads, however — the fairy tales of prosaic Earth should make that clear.

Facts of the mythic world which the Hollyhock God can veto or change to taste include:

- The mythic Earth is flat, a geometric plane on which things rest.
- Waters (replenished by oceanids) fall endlessly off the Earth's edge.
- The Angel of the Sun and the Angel of the Moon hate each other. This is why Luna sheds light on things the Sun hates to behold.
- Mountains move around, but people will say, "It's always been there."
- Bestial humans sometimes express this trait in the mythic world. This is one reason for the myths of werewolves et al.
- Dryad war parties imply rotting trees or Corruption in the forest.
- Killing a naiad can dry up the stream.
- Dreamkin (the spirits of individual dreams) must touch the sleeper, or the dream fades into nothingness.
- Human spirits can talk — but they do not say the same things as human mouths or minds.

The Nature of History

Most of history is an outright lie. Not only did the creation of Prosaic Reality invent billions of years of universal history wholesale, the Prosaic Earth twists modern history around at every turn to properly explain the present Mythic situation. If an Excrucian kills a car-spirit, the Prosaic Earth can't simply have the car fall to pieces on the spot — it must insert a series of small and large mechanical failures into the recent past to justify *that collapse. It's not so much that the spirit of the Earth, whose desires maintain Prosaic Reality, runs around fixing every little detail. Rather, except when Noble miracles intervene, it forces the present to conform both to logic and to Mythic truth. The past unfolds naturally from that present.*

A Word to the Hollyhock God

There are three important reasons for the division between the mythic world and the prosaic Earth. Keep them in mind when the PCs use mystical power or shift their perceptions to the mythic world.

Human Society is Minimally Disrupted

Humans who observe miraculous events try subconsciously and consciously to explain them away. Should they fail, they automatically start to perceive the mythic world. This locks them into *dementia animus*: into a perception of the hidden truths of the world instead of the obvious mundane truths that the vast majority of living humans understand. Only if they learn to switch between the mythic world and the prosaic Earth can they enlighten society about the miracle-workers living among them. These humans are rare, and most know only a little of the Valde Bellum — thus, the prosaic Earth has evolved societies and beliefs more or less like those of our own Earth.

The Mythic World is a Guide to the Prosaic Earth

The mythic world reflects the events on Earth, and the root causes of events as well. It will serve on many occasions as the start of a PC investigation: the basic conflicts in any given situation may be more obvious in the mythic world than in prosaic reality. At the same time, because the inhabitants do not always communicate well with human-born minds, the HG can easily control the flow of information from the mythic world to the PCs. New hints can be given at any time.

EXAMPLE

Large swathes of the rainforest are dying — more even than humanity destroys. The PCs go to the scene, and look into the mythic world. There they see water spirits (undines, with maenad-eyes and tangled hair) assaulting the hamadryads of the trees. The PCs variously hypothesize:

- A disease or artifact of corruption in the water table.
- Something in the clouds poisoning the rain.
- An imbalance in the aqueous humors of the trees, consuming their life force.
- An Excrucian in the mythic world, calling up and maddening the undines.
- An ancestral agreement among the entities of the rainforest has been broken.

None of these, of course, are true. The HG has decided that the Excrucians have brought an artifact into this Breakthrough — a Loathly Mirror. It does not simply twist an entity's image to produce self-hatred. The image it shows is almost a living thing, a monstrous deformation that slickly glides into the mind and soul, leaving corruption and ruin behind. The viewer's existence becomes one long shout of bile, self-disgust, and loathing. An Excrucian's Anchor wanders the forests carrying this mirror, and in the crisis of their abhorrence the trees are spilling their vital fluids into the Earth. The trees' rejection of the watery essence brings rage to the undines' hearts, but the hamadryads have no wish to let themselves be touched by life-giving and life-affirming water.

The Existence of the Mythic World creates Possibilities

Access to the mythic world gives Nobilis characters options that they would otherwise lack. They can travel the roads into the sky, cadge information out of the strange inhabitants of that world, and address prosaic difficulties as if they were people and not insensate forces or objects. It also offers the Hollyhock God the option to shift the PCs forward and backward in time or to complicate the PCs' mundane lives with difficulties that seem intangible and illusory to the people of the prosaic world around them. The world will seem a little bit more alive for all concerned. Most importantly, when a player is detailing their character concept, they are allowed to treat the planet as the animistic "mythic world", involving legends and fairy-tale stories in their character's history.

Note: The mythic world is not the spirit world. The inhabitants of the mythic world are spirits attached to mundane bodies — a naiad is a spirit with a river for its body, just as humans are spirits with the bodies of sparse-haired simians. For most intents and purposes, the mythic world is "between" the prosaic Earth and the spirit world. In the spirit world, the bodies of the Imperators are purely abstract concepts, which can be easily perceived but affected only with difficulty. It is no wonder the Imperators wish to keep the battle there.

These are the Latter Days of the Law. The world is a shadow of what it was. The joy we know is not the joy we once knew. The sorrow we knew is not the sorrow we once knew. The true passions have passed from the world. All that remains are their pale echoes; and we hold up those echoes and, not knowing history, say, "These are all the truths of the heart that there have ever been."
—from a sign outside Detroit, Michigan

This is a story told by the three Powers of the Icewalker Adamastar, who guard the seeds of summer and fall. It is a story of the mythic world.

Cynthia's voice rises softly:

"The angel of the moon wears a dark veil. Its name is Aegis, and she wears it because her children were slain. Once, the sky danced with them: silverborn rainbows that knew no limits to their exuberance. And then the sun took them from the skies."

She holds a length of cord in her hands, and ties one end into a knot. "Each month, the veil is drawn across her face. As her Earthly face darkens, memory is leached from her — she slowly forgets that her children ever were. Sleep comes to her then, when the moon is completely shadowed. Without that chance to rest, she would lose hope, and would cast herself into the sea. The Excrucians would win a terrible victory. Yet that veil is cruel. For in every month, it is drawn away again and she remembers again, as clearly as if her children were slain that very day."

Hal takes the cord from Cynthia, and fingers the knot Cynthia made. His own voice rises, to give the story its second part:

"You have heard the moon's tragedy," he says, "but the sun would laugh to hear it called so. She has no outlet in forgetting — and the sun can never cry. And in the fiery core of her effulgent body, the only man she ever loved burns with an eternal and hideous pain. He is unable to die. He will never die, unless

the sun itself gutters and dies." He hesitates. "Do not think that she has not considered this.

"It was the moon's curse," he explains. Brutally, he ties another knot in the cord. "And it was a crueler curse than you might think. She did not curse him to burn eternally there — not simply that. She gave him a choice: he did not have to touch the sun again. He could have run. He could have escaped the curse. But he chose to wait for the sun to come to him again — and then he embraced her." His voice is clear, bitter ice. "Even then, his fate was not sealed. He could have burned instantly to ash. There would have been no time for pain, then, or later. I have said that the sun cannot forget.

"The sun is absolute. The sun does not forget, or regret. And she cannot let him die."

Iolanthe takes the cord, and speaks the final part:

"There is only one thing left to say. It is the end of the story; it is the beginning. It is the truth at the heart of it all. The moon and sun —" Iolanthe ties a final knot, gently. "They loved each other once."

Young Nobilis, newly Commenced, are often sent to study under Adamastar's Domini. It is said that they are wise.

The Nature of Prosaic Earth

"I come from your world," the tattered man said, "and thus, I was dead from before I was born."
—from The Box, *by Emily Chen*

Although the *dementia animus* protects society from the truths of Imperators and war, the Earth of Nobilis is not precisely the same as ours. There are magics humans can use on prosaic Earth, unrelated to Noble miracles. The philosophies of Heaven and Hell have shaped and catalyzed crises that humanity remembers as strongly as it remembers the death of John F. Kennedy and the fall of Rome. The guiding hand of Lord Entropy and the Four is evident in many of the conditions that pertain today.

Magic is Real

Magic applies the strength of the soul to a situation — in contrast to the strength of the body or of technological tools. It can accomplish the same things as technology, but has the major advantage of requiring no tools. Its practitioners can also communicate with spirits, banish demons, and so forth. Magic drains the magician, however, in a way few non-mages can imagine, and the miracles and magic of the Nobilis are innately superior. Sometimes, a mystery cult serving one of the Ymerae gains some knowledge of true miraculous magic — but while these magics are superior in nature to those of normal mages, a purely human soul cannot use such magics reliably, frequently, or to the fullest extent.

Evil is Real

The Cammorae consider themselves above every law but their own. Demonic beings and their associates, the Powers of Hell, glut themselves daily on human suffering. The Dark will destroy any life it can. All of these are banes to human society: where they walk, a trail of ruined lives, of tortures and mass mutilations and hideous perversions, follows.

Justice Has Failed

In a world full of ghastly deeds (in wealthy countries and the third world alike) the people cry out for vengeance. The essential statement of our laws is that one is innocent until proven guilty — but on the prosaic Earth of Nobilis, it was discarded untried. Instead, most legal systems operate on the principle of the Code Napoleon: one is guilty until proven innocent. In some countries, even this has been forsaken, and courts may even try a man after his execution rather than before.

Police are the Enemy

The delicate knife of power is balanced in each cop's hands: the power to resolve every issue that comes up. To the citizenry, the police are the only buffer against the visceral evils loose in the world. As long as a police officer answers that need, he has extremely broad powers — to beat confessions from a suspect, to hold a man without trial, to search without a warrant. The knife, of course, can cut them, since few things are as likely to earn a lynching as an abusive cop who is also ineffective.

Much of the police force honors the motto "To Serve and Protect". Many others are simply in it for the power. Some merely dance to Hell's tune.

There are New Wonders

The Powers of Heaven have not been idle while Hell's dark madness scarred the Earth. In disease-ridden slums and foul ghettos, next to vilely polluted rivers and gardens reeking with spiritual poisons, they have built the Refuges. Each is a place of perfect beauty, utter peace, and sparkling air. Mortal artists and Sovereigns have labored mightily to decorate the Refuges, until each is as glorious as a diamond ... and they have won, by hard bargaining with the Power of Desecration, a ward that keeps those of ill intent outside.

Governments are Pawns

Few Powers seek high-level secular influence, and with good reason. The governments of Earth are riddled with Cammora members, men under Lord Entropy's direct control, and even some of the subtler Excrucian-shards. True, a Power can generally get away with crossing the Cammora ... and the Nobles should be deposing Excrucian-shards wherever they find them.

Yet it can take a long time of very careful study to find out which of the three parties mentioned above is actually pulling the strings — and offending even the Cammora is likely to have unpleasant consequences.

There are More Wars; There is More Faith

There is more occult power wandering around in the world of Nobilis than in our own. Faith is easier when one has felt the vague tingle of a miracle passing by. It also becomes easier for nations to ally themselves with Heaven or Hell — the accumulation of all the actions of all the Powers, subtle as those actions are, polarizes nations and deepens the rifts between them. Thus, wars are more common things.

Miracles Live in Every Flower

Flowers have enchantment bound within them, ready for even a mortal to release it. The herbalists know this — though society scoffs at them, they can coax healing power from the heart of a bitter rose. The botanists know this, though their science has been marginalized. Even the people know this, though most can only name the healing "balm of Gilead" or the stimulant of "fennel" as potent flowers.

The Cleave of the Botanists

Herbalism and botany were one science for millennia, much like astronomy and astrology. Only in the past few centuries did botany did assume the formal role of a modern science. Before that happened, the two disciplines were a kind of floral alchemy. The practitioners believed in the doctrine of signatures — that the form of a flower and its scent determined what use it had. The highest goal of the herbalists was to find or create the flower that would unlock the secret power of the world entirely: the flower of the "roots of the world," drawing its strength from the raw magic that had been invested in Creation. Few among them knew that the miracles that shaped the prosaic Earth were those of angels and not of the Creator itself — but the power is there.

For every hundred botanists (in the modern day), one commands enough mystic understanding to work wonders. Such botanists wield power comparable to legendary wizards and witches. Still, many of these floral mages are not content; therefore, the **Cleave** was formed. The Cleave is a secret society, sharing knowledge among the empowered botanists. With their unity and with modern science's ability to alter genes or create hybrids, they are closer than any mortals have ever been to achieving power like that of the Nobles — without any Imperator to control them. Many Nobilis fear this, and many more secretly applaud. Most, of course, know nothing of the Cleave.

Lord Entropy, for reasons detailed above, dare not lay his controlling hand directly on the Cleave: all hope that it would produce results would fail. Accordingly, the botanists are allowed to work without divine hindrance or assistance — but they know of Hunters, shadowy beings in black, as well. Each botanist is made to swear two things: to hold fighting as abhorrent, and to share all they learn with the Grim King. Those who do not swear, or who abrogate their oath, are by the Hunters slain.

The Cleave whispers that the Grim King's true name is "Satan", but the Hunters are of Entropy's army, and the Grim King is Scorn's-Regal Joktan. It is the hope of the Darkest Lord that the Cleave will not forget peace or sharing when they find their power; or that the knowledge already shared will be enough.

The Cammorae

Sovereign Powers have been given miraculous abilities beyond human dreams, but the will of their Imperator is always upon them, binding them to reality and its defense. The Sovereigns are ultimately responsible beings. Cammora members — called, of course, Cammorae, and sometimes "bloodsuckers" — have less power individually, and no responsibility at all.

Lord Entropy founded the Cammora in 1342 to provide mortal service to the Powers. At the time, influence in the mortal world was a battleground, with Sovereigns losing their lives to those who coveted secular power. Authority in the prosaic world is a wonderful tool, and those who had it were the most likely to ruin an Excrucian Breakthrough, earning its mystic strength for their own Imperator. On October 3rd, 1342, Lord Entropy called up the Lethe Wind. In an exercise of the sheerest magical might, he swept away the bonds between the human power structures and the Powers — from every mortal pawn, he took the very memory of their masters away. The geases on them shattered.

Within a day, he had built the Cammora from the criminal lords of Europe, from the ministers and bodyservants of Kings, from the ghasts that fed on plague victims and the corpses of hanged men, from the highest priests of the religions of the world. He bound them all into his service, with the first promise ever given them: that he would lengthen the span of their days into centuries. To the Powers, Lord Entropy proclaimed that the Cammorae were "invisible to law". A crime they commit is no crime at all. Whatever a Power hires the Cammorae to do is also no crime.

Always, when the Cammora acts on a Power's behalf, there is a price. They haggle shrewdly. For minor things, a single Cammoran seeks a personal favor, given either to themselves or to someone else in the organization. For a major effort, a Power must give a gift to the Cammora as a whole. With the magics the Cammora has been given over time, it has maintained its hold on the arteries of society and its place in the halls of the rich. A Cammoran can get you nearly anything you want, if you can pay the price — and if you can stand their methods. For their methods are often cruel.

Lord Entropy's hand has steered the Cammora since its inception. He practices, some say, a kind of sympathetic magic. His rule over the powerful, via the Cammora, affirms his rule over the Earth. It is also said the gifts Powers give to the Cammora are boiled down and a tiny portion of the Power's soul-stuff filtered from it to add to Entropy's strength. It is said he is unable to see a human society without desiring to corrupt it via such a tool. It is said — many things are said.

One thing cannot be denied: like any tool used so often by the Darkest Lord, the Cammora is utterly and remorselessly corrupt. Wielding the remnants of long-ago gifts, or their secular power over gangs, mobs, and congressmen, they commit the most vile atrocities freely and with joy. Their motto is "Realize Thyself." To them, this means that each Cammoran is an endless well of potential, which must be allowed to flow freely from their soul through their body and into the world. "The beauteous arts of pain and death and violation," a Cammoran will say, "are merely tools for expression; they differ from paints only in that no paint can capture the exaltation of murder."

The Hollyhock God can decide what kind of magics the Cammorae have acquired in their centuries of bargaining — the characters may well not know what these are. Although

When God lost love to the Devil in a dicing match, he had to trade both the luminiferous ether and Creation science away to get it back. Most savants agree that the trade was worthy; yet it is indubitable that the world has made less sense ever since.
—from The Current Score, *by Walden Fargo*

giving a gift to the whole Cammora normally requires a level 6-9 miracle, the benefit to each individual Cammoran should be less dramatic. Some suggestions include:

- The Cammorae may have one or two abnormally sharp senses.
- The Cammorae's meeting-halls may be invisible to non-Cammora mortals.
- The Cammorae may be immune to mortal sickness and/or guns.
- The Cammorae may be able to walk on air as if on the ground.
- The Cammorae may be served by indestructible metal golems.
- The Cammorae may be able to bypass any lock.

Senses can be enhanced with a Major Destruction of Blindness or a Major Creation of Perception/Illusion/Eyes/Sight (see p. 97 of the rules). Making the meeting halls of the Cammorae invisible is probably a Major Destruction of their "visibility" property. Guarding the Cammorae against illness or guns will be a Major Change — destruction does not suffice, because the gift must control the evolution of sickness and guns and not merely the then-existing forms. Giving the Cammorae air-walking abilities is a Major Change — but the Power of Air might have been clever, and offered a coterie of air spirits eternal life (major preservation) if they would bear the Cammorae up. Making golems one by one is a Lesser Creation of the appropriate Domain; making a batch of them is a Major Creation. There are many ways to give the Cammora the ability to bypass locks.

The list above only scratches the surface. The Cammora has been around for a very long time, and earned an impressive collection of favors. On the other hand, the gift of the Power of Hair is unlikely to matter very much in play. Individual Cammorans are often protected against a suite of possible fates, protections they have bargained for for themselves and not for the Cammora as a whole.

Who Needs No Truth To Stand?

In the Spirit World, most of the rules by which humans and Powers live their lives manifest as people — Imperators — rather than principles and traits. Powers cannot really travel there because walking requires principles of physicality, distance, and motion that simply don't exist. It is a place of pure spiritus Dei *— a place unusually barren of the mundane Estate manifestations that permit mortal life.*

The Imperators, naturally, do not depend on physical law. They interact with the metaphysical laws of the Spirit World more naturally than they interact with the rules of the mortal world. They are the answer to Vyasa's question — the ones who do not need the truths of the human world to stand. Nor do they need such truths to communicate or to travel. They create whatever truth they need.

Other places of strong spiritus Dei *— such as the World Ash — do not necessarily resemble the Spirit World. Often, places rich in the raw power of Creation are equally rich in the trivial mundanities like distance and momentum that make a Power's life feasible.*

This is a story that an old man in Southern California told. His eyes ran like rivers as he spoke. His granddaughter sat across from him. He was a storyteller by trade — but this story he told once, and never again. It is a story of the prosaic Earth.

"I had a wife," he said, with a hint of alcohol and old bitterness in his voice. "Her name was Anne Marie, and she died when your mother was seven years old. I had promised to love her until death parted us, but when she died, I wished that I had promised something stronger. Something that she could have remembered, in that dying moment, that would let her know that death did not part us at all."

He stood, and walked over to a cabinet. Opening it up, he revealed a jumbled pile of frames and photographs, touched only lightly with dust. "Her picture is in here. In most of them." He selected one, and held it up so she could see her grandmother. It was the first time.

"We had a daughter," he continued. "Her name was Sophia. I was the only one left to look after her, and I thought I was up to it. But I wasn't. She was wild, uncontrollable. When she was fourteen, she told me she was pregnant by some damn kid. When she was sixteen, she told me good-bye. She was skipping town. Had had enough of 'this gig'.

"We were in the bathroom. I had been shaving. I was enraged. I didn't stop to think. I grabbed her by the hair and put the razor at her throat and I said that she would listen to me or by damn I'd shove the thing in. I didn't notice the rush of blood for ten seconds more. I didn't notice that I already had.

"You shouldn't have tried to find me, Doris. They had good reason when they took you away."

"Is that really how it happened?" she asked, softly.

"When I noticed the blood," he said, head bowed, "I shoved the door closed with my foot and locked it. I didn't go out and call the police until she finished dying. I had a friend in the Mayor's office. I was only in prison for three months."

She left him then.

The Spirit World

There is another side to the Earth of the Nobilis. This is the spirit world — a place where space and time stretches between a handful of Roots, and bodies (for the Ymerae, at least) have never really been invented.

The Roots of the World are Imperators who embody the foundational concepts on which all three views of Earth depend. The classic set is Fire, Air, Water, and Earth — each (of course) having some additional Estates, some related to their core concept, some more or less unrelated. The Hollyhock God should feel free to change the foundational set, however. The players' choice of Estates and Imperator Properties can make a change necessary. It's better to work out changes before play begins than to make changes afterward.

The true "location" of something, in the spirit world, is measured by rough proximity to these Roots. Somewhere where the Fire Root predominates, the conflict between Imperators and Excrucians is a battle of emotion and passion. Should the Hollyhock God opt for Roots of Granite, Glass, Gravestones, and Gold, a dominant Root of Glass might mean that the struggle is perceptual: Imperators and Excrucians study their opponent's weaknesses there, sometimes at the expense of acting on them.

"Time," in the Spirit World, also ties to these Roots. The immediate vicinity of each Root attaches to an Age of the World. In some cases the Imperator of the Age is identical with the corresponding Root, while in others they're simply closely connected spiritually. Imperators can distinguish between the temporal and spatial aspects of a Root with ease — the Spirit World is their Earthly home. The apparent violation of causality that this travel enables remains a mystery to the Powers; otherwise, time travel via the Spirit World is vertiginous but as comprehensible as spatial travels there. Powers cannot themselves take this route. Indeed, without an Imperator's help the Powers cannot travel in the spirit world at all.

Humans, Powers, animals, plants, and inanimate objects of the physical Earth can be brought into the spirit world.

The underlying order of the world derives from the existence of a single infinite set; that, and its three attendants, Saklas, Erathaol, and Eloiein. Assume these four things, and you can derive all else in the world.
—from Principia Mundus, *by Isaac Newton*

They move surrounded by a smidgen of dimension and a smattering of causality, just enough to allow them to get around without actually going anywhere.

EXAMPLE

Troy was taken into the Spirit World and set on what appeared to be an infinite blank plain. The Trojans could move about normally in the city, or set off across the plain — but no amount of physical travel could change their location in the Spirit World at all. Time flowed normally for them, and they even aged ... but the Imperators and Excrucians who entered their "location" in the Spirit World came from both past and future.

Imperators might bring Nobilis into the Spirit World for any of three reasons. First, it's a fast way to slip them into the past. Second, the experience can show them a bit about the real war. Third, the "locations" of the Spirit World are (from a Noble's perspective) large and overlapping. Powers cannot move freely in this world, but can guard one "side" of something, or one front of the war. Imperators take great risks when they bring their Powers into the World of the Spirits — the full Excrucians that stalk that world can make quick work of even very strong Powers. Still, in some strategic position, they might last long enough to get out a call for help. They might even last long enough for that call to receive an answer.

The World Ash

Once, the world ended, and the Ash caught fire; but there is no fire that surpasses the blaze of the Ash's spirit. The Ash subsumed the flames and grew strong; and the world was forced to recreate itself.
—from Legends of the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

It is called Yggdrasil: the Sovereign Tree, the World Ash, the structure on which all Creation is built. Ravaged by the Excrucians, it is still a thing of argent majesty, of incandescent strength beyond the ability of time or evil to corrupt. It will die, of course — Creation is finite, even if the Excrucians are turned away. In the end, the fires of Hell will make of it a different kind of Ash. Yet while life endures, and power, and Creation, Yggdrasil will sustain it, structure it, and define the space in which it lives.

The Earth is just one of the worlds suspended in its branches — although those who live wholly in its prosaic side never find the stiles that give access to the Tree. The Tree itself and some of the other worlds upon it (for example, the Acmonion Wood) are under as heavy an assault as the Earth is; others are at peace, at least for now. The logistics of the Valde Bellum are not the same as those of ordinary wars, but common wisdom has it that the Excrucian onslaught cannot be stretched onto any additional fronts without losing its unity and devastating strength.

Even as beasts and men live upon the various worlds of the Tree, the Tree itself is home to many strange monsters, from the Aaron's Serpents, who participate positively in the defense of the Tree, to the draconic Nithog, ever-gnawing at its roots. The landscape is wonderful and terrible, with rivers of wind, snow, fire, and poisoned ice — to name a few — tumbling up from the Shadowed Realm towards Heaven. Lesser plants have taken root in Yggdrasil's energy-rich bark. The seven roads that comprise the Appian Way guide travelers from destination to destination. Angels blinded by the bright glory of Heaven come down to sit upon the stones and meditate until their balance is recovered. Excrucian monsters tear and rend wood that heals nearly as fast as they can wound it. The Hum'a swirl in the air currents generated by the Weirding Wall that surrounds creation — a breed of birds which lives on the wing, and whose shadow's touch can make a man a king. Powers of the Earth's Imperators are most vulnerable when on the Tree — though their Imperator may be an angel or a devil at home in any world, Earth's Ymerae have rooted their bodies and strength there. Their Nobles' strength attenuates when they enter a world that is so much more real than Earth will ever be.

Why a Tree Was the First Thing Born

The beginning of the universe, like its ending, constantly evolves. I expect, by the end of the War, that it will have begun another way entirely.
—Hazael, Angel of Disorder

This is a Philosophy of Hell

Trees are rooted in the soil, and they reach ever upwards towards the light. The leaves convert this light into the stuff of life, which is then distributed throughout the tree. The heart of Creation is Hell, because by definition it is the place *farthest from the Creator*. In time before time, before the first Creation, the Creator was all that there was. Places like Hell did not exist. When Hell was created, it yearned for the light of the Creator, and this yearning is (of course) a tree. It distributes that light, that energy of Creation, into life on all the worlds ... even into Hell.

It is natural for angels, and possibly for men, to desire to serve this life force — this light, this Creation. It must be remembered, when this desire takes hold, that the essential Creation is Hell, and Hell's gift to all life: the ability to turn away from the light.

This is a Philosophy of Heaven

There are a thousand worlds in every tree, in every brook, in every stone, in every human heart. We cannot see them, but they are there nevertheless. Yggdrasil roots in a world as beautiful as Earth or Heaven, and in this world Hell is merely an absence beneath its roots. We cannot see that world either, but it is also there.

Each tree, each brook, and each stone of that world carries in it a thousand worlds as well. Creation is infinite in every direction. Its potential for beauty is unlimited.

This is a Philosophy of the Wild

Even the Creator must work within fundamental natural laws. The universe is like an audience: when any music is played for an audience, the art is reshaped into a sensation, an image inside the listener's mind. This has no reflection on the music's beauty, because the music's beauty is only there for its creator — and those who choose to listen for it.

Trees are deeply magical things. On Earth, they express the Creator's beautiful green music. Inside the Weirding Wall, that music is received on a grander scale: thus Yggdrasil is born from a pure unfettered song. Some say, "But then who created the universe that gives these trees form?" The answer

is one all Wildlords and Wild Powers know: the magic of forms and the order of the universe is fundamental. It is eternal, and it needs no creation.

This is a Philosophy of Aaron's Serpents

When we are born, we begin in darkness, inside the Ash. The first sensation that we experience is taste. We are young then, and do not comprehend imperfection. Therefore we taste a perfect thing: the rich sap of the tree. The Tree is that which offers sap to the younglings.

The second sensation that we experience is sound. We are young then, and do not comprehend imperfection. Therefore we hear a perfect thing: the deep heartbeat of the Tree, that soothes and heals and is beyond any circumstance. The Tree is that which soothes the younglings with its heart.

The third sensation that we experience is touch. We feel the rough inner surface of the Tree that carries us. We are young then, and do not comprehend imperfection. Therefore we touch a perfect thing: the warmth of the Tree, and the inner wood that scrapes away our baby scales. The Tree is what gives the younglings warmth and helps them molt.

The fourth sensation that we experience is sight. We break our way free from Yggdrasil's embrace and see, for the first time, the world beyond our world. We are young then, and do not comprehend imperfection. Therefore we see a perfect thing: a nigh-infinite expanse of places to cling and things to hold to — and above it all, the stars. The Tree is that on which the youngster coils. All these things are what define the Tree.

The fifth sensation follows a moment after. It is selfhood, the knowledge of oneself as an individual being. When we know ourselves, we understand imperfection, and the world we see need be perfect no more.

Other Earths

"I have a theory," he said, leaning forward, smiling. "Maybe the aliens aren't out there at all. We're never going to contact another intelligence through the long cold deeps of space, because they're just too darn big. That doesn't mean we'll never find other life, though. What if it's inside? What if there are other things in our mindspace than humans? It is vast, wherever our minds are: it can hold imagined galaxies. It is no wonder that we do not stumble across one another, or aliens, there. But if both parties were looking? I do not think we are ready yet; I am no believer in psionic powers and the like. I simply have hopes that we will, centuries from now, be able to build a technology of the mind ..."
—from Esper, *by Grover Denmark*

Powers rarely leave the Earth to venture out onto the tree. The Hollyhock God can populate the Tree with whatever worlds they like. Under normal circumstances, PCs visit the other worlds of the Tree only when the HG has inspired them to do so — for example, when someone the PCs are chasing crosses out onto the tree, or when the Imperator sends a PC to another world with a message. Possible tree-worlds include:

Abaton

Abaton is lifeless on the surface, but supports a thriving population in its cavernous center. A permanently eclipsed sun hangs over a world lit by fires, where great forests sleep in silence and river spirits play with knucklebones. The "true gods" of Abaton do not see the world as body layered on myth layered on spirit: instead, they see it as the incarnate expression of the Six Words of Creation. They are not under attack at the moment, but could be at any time, and the Abatoni Imperators spend much time experimenting with the military uses of these Words. Perhaps that is why the surface is lifeless.

The Acmonion Wood

This is a trysting place for unlawful loves — usually, for angels and fallen angels to meet their kin once more. It is a deep place. Humans and low-Spirit Powers are so much less tangible than the trees and the insects that one can walk or fly right through the other. Its self-appointed guardian is an angel struck blind by the horror of some hidden truth he saw (and will not speak of). This Wood is under attack by the Excrucians, possibly because they understand its value to angelic and diabolic morale.

Aelfscienne

Once this was the world of the Dock-Alfar, blood-red miners who turn to stone in the sun. Samiasa the angel brought his human love Aholibamah there when the Earth was flooded. Their children married into the royal Dock-Alfar line. Over the ensuing centuries, these genes made the Dock-Alfar magical, and gave rise to the Ljos-Alfar, angel-pale elves of the same heritage. The primary gift of these Alfar is the ability to assume an animal shape — their "fylgja" form — but their fire mages can be lethal, and their ice mages know how to return from the dead. The Light and the Dark (meaning the Regi with those appellations) are somewhat interested in Aelfscienne, because most of the Dock-Alfar and all of the Ljos-Alfar have human genes.

Dionyl

The name of this world and its people means "clothed spirits". Their physical form consists entirely of whatever clothing they are wearing at the time. Their fundamental mindset is entirely human — in fact, they are an earlier by-product of the work in Heaven that created humanity. The Dionyls, no doubt due to the physical animal life on their world, have fanciful tales of fleshy beings that wear clothes. They do not consider this a higher state, though: an ungainly body would ruin the proper hang of a garment. The Dionyls tend the Edge Cauldrons, great vessels afire with rare magics that send miraculous energy to the Imperators of the worlds (unlike Dionyl) that are under attack. It has been suggested by one Power that the Cauldrons gain their power from rendering down the souls of fallen Imperators (or even Powers) into the raw winds of magic and Creation. As the Earth has Light and Dark, the Dionyls have Imperators of Splintering and Domination. The nature of these Ymerae have only rarely been explained to an Earthly mind's satisfaction.

Jotunheim

The average adult Jotun stands fifty feet tall; the tallest ever to walk the land stood at four hundred. If physical might could defeat the Excrucians, the folk of Jotunheim could do it alone. Alas, Jotunheim has almost fallen — their society is too diffuse to mount an effective resistance to even a handful of possessed warriors and its population too small to afford more than twenty Chancels with their associated Powers (and deaths). They are an agrarian folk, with deep understanding of metals. This alone holds hope for them, since their greatest smiths can forge items of miraculous potence.

OPPOSITE:
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man
by Charles Vess


©CVESS-97

Serpenthane

Close to Heaven, there is Serpenthane, the gathering place of Yggdrasil's children, called on Earth the Aaron's Serpents. They dream of one day climbing to their parent's uttermost height to see the sky from Heaven, for they do dearly love the stars. Not even the angels could stop these immensely vast and powerful beasts from reaching their goal, but reality intervenes. The branches that hold up the Celestial Realm cannot hold a Serpent's weight as well, for the Serpents have a spiritual mass akin to their physical mass. If some mad Serpent were to make the climb, to press onwards and upwards despite the cracking of twigs the size of cities, it would bring all of Heaven tumbling down. Serpenthane itself is a hollowed-out land within the Ash — a gift their parent has given them, a woodmagic world rich with nourishing sap. At the center of this world is the Mosaic, a tiled walk whose colors wander like the wind across its surface. It is said that to walk the Mosaic's path once is to find the answer to the deepest question of your heart. It is said that to walk it twice is to discover the mortality of your heart's most treasured possession. And the third time? The legends are clear: those who dare the Mosaic three times go irredeemably mad.

Leaving Earth

'Awww. Momma's boy's upset 'cause he can't go back to Cleveland."

"Not Cleveland, you dickwad. Earth."

—from Word of My Demise, *by Asper Smith*

To leave or enter a world like Earth, one must usually locate a suitable pathway, a road where (in leaving) things grow gradually less and less like a planet and more and more like a path suspended high in the largest tree that could ever be imagined. Even then, it usually requires Worldwalker or Gatemaker (p. 120), or a Domain miracle point (p. 94) to complete this journey.

Powers on Other Earths

The divorce agreement explicitly spelled out David's share of their joint holdings. Mary received everything else. The contract was properly executed; notarized; sealed.

In this manner Mary became the owner of the universe; and her bloody reign began. Even Creation cannot violate contractual law.

—from Variations on a Russian Fable, *by Michael Kay*

The Earth is not wholly defined by the Imperators who live on its associated spirit world. A Fallen Angel may return to Hell, or a Lord of the Light step outside to check on Aelfscienne. Their Chancels will fade and even die but the nature of the Earth does not change dramatically. All worlds have a sun, no matter whether the angel of the sun is in Heaven, Serpenthane, Earth, or even Hell. (Note that the more important something is on Earth, the more interested its associated Imperator will be in defending the Earth. If an Imperator has been on Earth a long time, its Estates will become more and more important. In short, it is likely that the angel of the sun is here.)

The case is more complicated for true gods, products of the world in which they were spawned. If there is a true god of guns, that does not mean there are guns in all worlds, or even the potential for them. However, an interesting phenomenon takes place when a true god visits another world: both Earth and that world temporarily possess the Estates of that god. If the rain were an Estate of a true god, other worlds would never have rain — unless the true god was there. Then his divine spirit, simply by the fact of his presence, would make rain possible, even inevitable, on that normally arid world. The divine spirit supercedes natural reality. In fact, even the spirit-shard of the Power of Rain would be enough, if that Power entered that world.

Therefore, Powers can survive and even use miraculous abilities when not on Earth. It is uncomfortable for them to be away from their Imperator's world — the soul-shard in them is "homesick". At first, Nobles experience difficulty maintaining equilibrium when they call upon the powerful side of their selves. The soul maintains its integrity with difficulty, and is tethered to an Imperator in another world. Some HGs will implement this as a temporary reduction in Aspect, Domain, and/or Spirit levels (usually about two levels lost) while a character is away from their homeworld — or, alternatively, the Imperator is away from the Earth.

Miscellania

Aaron's Serpents

The most dangerous thing on the Tree — more so than the Excrucians roaming the branches — is an Aaron's Serpent. As the littlest newborn, a child shaped from a pattern in the World Ash's heartwood, an Aaron's Serpent is already bigger than a full-grown man. Before it leaves the comforting innards of Yggdrasil, it is as long as a skyscraper is high and massively muscled all along that length. As an adult, an Aaron's Serpent is easily a hundred miles long; the ancient ones are even longer. They resemble a python in shape unless they have put on a Guise or shifted their shape into something appropriate, but in truth, no verbal description suffices. These Serpents are as much avatars of strength and presence as the Imperators that technically fill those roles.

Aaron's Serpents move with surprising speed. In particular, their heads and necks can lash about with extreme alacrity. They are also extremely easy to annoy — light a fire while on the Tree, even a sheltered fire contained by magic, and you will hear from one in short order. Because they are children of the Tree, they are as divine as any angel or Wildlord. Their presence in Creation brings new and interesting facets of life to be.

The Weirding Wall

Light on the Tree does not come from the sun, although a glowing yellow ball circles its midsection with a faintly resigned air. It comes instead from the Weirding Wall, a dizzying aura of liquid blue fire that is the edge of Creation. Things take on a strange color in that light, but light it remains, and with it any traveler can see their way.

The Weirding Wall is shaped like a broad-bottomed cup. Its base forms the "ground" of Hell, so stained with blood that the Wall has gone indigo. The sides spread out around the tree, the distance from one side to the other growing as the Wall reaches up, until a little bit below Serpenthane, it stops. Above that, there is only an infinite black sky, studded with the argent gleam of stars. There are eight paths through the Wall, counting the open top — rare and hard to find, some are hidden where even Imperators cannot find them.

The Bright and Shadowed Realms

There is a place in Hell that mimics the beauty of Heaven. Even the damned can visit there, if they like, and know refreshment and peace of soul. Still, they do not. No demons go there; no fallen angels; no damned. Even for those who know the torments of Hell, there are some truths that their souls cannot bear.
—from the Record of the Dawn

One theory of the Nobles postulates two poles for the universe. The first is a source of corrupt energy, the second a source of beauty. These poles are respectively located in Hell and Heaven. It is a tautology that Hell is corrupt, but this theory makes a stronger statement: that a miasma of iniquity and degeneracy rises from Hell towards Heaven, becoming cleaner as it goes, and this is the only *causa causans* (first cause, uncaused cause) for malice and moral weakness in the Worlds of the Tree. Similarly, it is obvious that Heaven is beautiful, but this theory claims that beauty trickles down from it like snow from the sky. Without Heaven, there would be no beauty in all the Worlds there are.

The Shadowed Realm

Harm is not when you bring someone pain. Harm is when you don't care.
—from Parables for Our Modern Age, *by Jackie Robinson*

Hell is malevolent: the air breathes hatred and the streams are ice, acid, and venom. The bottom of Hell is a flat piece of the Weirding Wall, its cold blood-stained fires tormenting every human sinner that has been brought there by the life they led. Above it is the enormous root complex of Yggdrasil. It is not clear what the roots drink from, save for one that dips into an ancient well; perhaps the entire tree feeds on suffering.

Hell has four echelons. At the lowest rank are the humans, toys for the demons; the corruption and depravity that a normal human can envision has no real interest value to demons or Fallen. Demons are already more depraved than most of the bloodiest sociopaths — and Fallen have more imagination. Some humans do catch a Fallen's eye: they may have been nearly demonic in life and corrupted further in Hell, or they may have an unusual resistance to corruption and pain. The Devils set these humans above the rest, as pets and personal attendants of the Fallen.

Above even the most capable humans are the demons, the natural inhabitants of Hell. They lack any real power and their minds are weak, but they are naturally attuned to the hatred and maleficence and betrayal embodied in the world around them. They have a thing the Fallen Angels will never have: a glee for desecration that no one once sworn to beauty can encompass. Devils immerse themselves in corruption, and many of them are twisted by it, but in the end, they are things of beauty in and of themselves.

Above the demons are the Fallen Angels, entities of vast power and vast loss. Even they cannot break the laws of Hell or forge any real beauty there. They cannot even heal the wounds they received in the battle before the Fall. Hell allows no healing, even for those Fallen who are allowed to leave. Where the humans in Hell desire desperately to get out and the demons in Hell desire more victims, the Fallen Angels want to bring all of Creation down into Hell. If that should be impossible, because of the natural law of the Tree, they intend to make every world upon it a Hell. They seek this not because they are inherently evil, but because they believe Lucifer's argument that Hell is Creation, and that the "voice of the Creator" in the angels' hearts lies. Only a handful of the angels who Fell were genuinely evil, although time spent in Hell has pushed many Fallen in that direction.

Above them all is Lucifer, the brightest of all the angels, the Imperator of Pride and Persuasion, whose vision guides all of the Fallen. They have trusted him with their hearts. Though betraying them would be the ultimate expression of his beliefs, he has not been corrupted by Hell — and he cannot betray. The Fallen know this of him; he has called and spoken to Convocations of the Fallen many times since the Fall, and his nature is clear.

The Bright Realm

Pain creates beauty. I don't understand why.
*—*Errata, *by Jackie Robinson*

The Bright Realm, also known as Heaven, or the Celestial Realm, is said to have been the first of all the worlds upon the Tree, and some say that the angels were the first living things besides the Tree itself. The Celestial Realm is the most beautiful place in all Creation — a perfect jewel of a world, brightly made and brightly maintained. It may be the source from which all beauty flows.

The Angels are the only natives of Heaven, and also its only inhabitants. Dead mortals who show up at the Pearly Gates are politely told to go away. (Depending on who is standing watch, they may be given directions to a more suitable place for a clean-souled ghost.) This may seem a cruel policy, but the Angels have assigned themselves a work other than babysitting the just. They are worshippers of beauty, and because beauty cannot be static, the Great Work of the angels is to change Heaven — constantly — without losing its fundamental balance and joy. If there were no other factors involved, then events in every world save Hell would reflect the Great Work in Heaven, and vice versa. The presence of the Excrucians or Hell-spawn can change this, as there is nothing in the pattern of Heaven that represents them.

The Bright Realm has not been untroubled; it has a long and sometimes bloody history. (To be utterly accurate, angels do not bleed. But often one is wounded, and a falling star drips from their veins into Earth's night sky.) Disputes over the Great Work have been common, from peccadilloes to the vicious upheavals that result in an angel being banished from Heaven to Lucifer's great revolt. This last was reflected on Earth by the Fall of Eden; the Devils were not yet in the unreflective Hell.

Powers of Heaven are, in part, celestial, so it is possible that one could enter the Bright Realm. Prejudice would be strong, however, unless the character was extraordinarily beautiful — and it would have to be natural beauty or a Guise that was itself a powerful expression of artistic talent. In any case, much of Heaven's beauty would be on a plane beyond the Power's conception, but the places exiles speak of longingly can be appreciated and forever remembered even by a mostly-mortal Power. Many exiled Angels, speaking of such sites in Heaven as the Trollsdottir Gorge, the Water Gardens, and the Discordsfall Bridge, speak with longing homesickness, but also joy. Even the memory of such a place brings hope to an Angel's Heart.

Final Destinations
Every soul reincarnates until it reaches one of three fates: destruction at the hands of some transcendent force; damnation; or an ascent to Heaven. Given that the angels turn away the vast majority of all souls that arrive at Heaven, all but the brightest souls face eventual destruction or damnation. The situation is essentially hopeless, but the world is only eight thousand years old, and things may yet change.

Chancels

"Tell me how he bears it," she said softly.

"Your sister's death?" the dark-haired man asks. "He does not. He endures with grace the social functions, the condolences and the sympathy, while every night he goes home and cries and cries while saying his wife's name."

"I can't even do that, *" she replied with bitter suffering.*

"It's not a weakness in yourself," he murmured. "It's that he lives where she lived — he is surrounded by her things and all the memories of their love. That is an ache so bitter that it almost masters him — but it gives a kind of relief."

"Why?" she said, and her throat was raw.

"Because her spirit is still there."

—from Measure, *by Emily Chen*

It takes a hundred nights to make a Chancel, and a human death on each one of those nights. That's the simplest method, anyway — the others cost the Imperator anything from an eye and seven nights in agony to a child of their own blood. No matter how an Imperator goes about it, making a Chancel is a major investment of energy, manipulates an enormous amount of power, and poses possible ethical difficulties.

The effects of the Chancel ritual are also grandiose. Not only does it enable an Imperator to make a matched set of Nobilis, it utterly transforms a piece of the Earth. In a Chancel, the laws of physics are whatever the Ymera who formed the Chancel wanted them to be. The population can be warped in freakish ways, and the very earth can get up and walk. Better yet, the whole Chancel is screened off from the world, so that its environment will bring no ruin to outside human lives — only a few stray paths lead in and out of the Chancel, and for someone outside the Ward it is as if that patch of land never existed. Space is pinched shut around it. If the Imperator should die, the Chancel expands into the space it once occupied. This probably caused quite a shock for the locals when the Most Ancient Lord died and India reappeared in the mortal world.

Some of the possible kinds of Chancels are:

- Fairylands (with lots of little folks that one oughtn't get mad)
- Barbaric lands (possibly with swords and sorcerers)
- Space opera (that is, melodramatic sci-fi. "Space" doesn't fit in a Ward)
- Hard science fiction (an advanced future, with interesting toys)
- Children's fantasy lands (fun and mostly safe … until the Excrucians come!)
- Buildings (sometimes very very very very very big buildings)
- Medieval fantasy (the characters are Princes and Princesses, *et al*)
- Narrated mystery (always a puzzle, and the narrator won't shut up)
- Police states (modern worlds under tight guard — but why? a bane?)
- Animated worlds (from American comics, or Japanese manga and anime)
- Butterfly-riding nomads (they're awfully big butterflies)
- "Virtual reality" (where programs are alive)

This only scratches the surface.

The Lands Beyond Creation

Every boundary has two sides. Or three.

—from Errata, *by Jackie Robinson*

Characters can wind up beyond the Weirding Wall, in the "Lands Beyond Creation", in several ways. For example:

- Imperators of the Wild came from outside and would dearly love to return. The Passages through the Weirding Wall reject them, and a Wildlord might request its Powers to find out why.
- The Excrucians also come from outside, although they do not forget their origin as the Wildlords do. (They usually ride into reality through the Weirding Wall's open top.) The PCs might need to take a message to a leader of the Excrucians.
- Weakly real Chancels may be set adrift in the Lands Beyond Creation when not regularly fed miracle points.

If the other worlds on the Tree are strange, then the Lands Beyond Creation are (almost by definition) incomprehensible. The relevant question is how this incomprehensible world will be perceived. The HG should give this some thought. One possibility is that the characters will be effectively bodiless in that world, and must use thoughts, emotions, and personality traits as weapons and tools. Another is that beyond Creation there is a vast darkness, a twinkling of stars above — and a rare light in the distance that grows no closer no matter how the characters approach it. In either case, it is well known that there are many hideous monsters hidden in the darkness and that many who leave Creation do not ever return.

Ianthe writes: How to be a Hollyhock God

Part 2

Genre

Here is what Nobilis is about.

You're a perfectly normal person, when suddenly someone scissors open your soul and puts … something as large as the world inside. This isn't about power. It's not about … anything you ever dreamed of. The Imperial shard in your soul makes *you* as large as the world. That's what being a Noble is. It's exceeding every boundary you ever dreamed of. A lot of humans think our powers make us like gods. They don't. They make us like God. I'm not omnipotent, or omniscient, and I'm certainly not omnibenevolent, but I'm a part of something that *is*. I'm a slice of Creation large enough for all Creation to see. I am one of the building blocks of the world. I am, by extension, *all* of the building blocks of the world. I hold them close to my heart. My Estate's arms wrap around everything in the universe.

I must serve my Imperator. I do not mind. I am *part* of my Imperator. When my human self became Debate, Debate became my human self — it is not *part* of me that belongs to Parasiel my Lord in Chains. It is all of me. My Imperator guides me. He rules me like a King. "How strange!" you might think. "Ianthe claims to be like God, and has a King?" I find it strange myself. But the will that moves in my Angel Parasiel is my will. I have fought him, and I have submitted to him; I have hated him and I have loved him; I have served him and I have defied him; but he is my King.

Nobilis is a game of extremes. Your mind, your abilities, your duties, and your *meaning* all rise beyond anything you ever expected. You are a nation. You are divine. There is the breath of God in your soul.

Nobilis is a social game. It's a game where everything that matters can talk to you, and you can talk to it. It's a game where you can make an alliance with Honor, fight a duel with Fire, and sleep with Night in the long drowsy hours between. It's not about climbing walls and shooting bad guys. You can do that, and you probably *will* do that, but that's not what's important. What's important is whom you know, and how they feel about you. What's important is how you choose to treat the world. The universe cares about you. Even if you're human, once you know about the Mythic World, you'll figure that out. The mountain might not *move* if you kick it, but it will notice. The world isn't some big impartial *thing* that you must live with or die. It's some big impartial *people* that you must live with or die. Believe it or not, when it comes down to it, that's a big difference. Persuading, cajoling, tricking, bullying, bribing, and blackmailing your car into starting in the morning is a lot different from using a wrench. And even if you *do* go prosaic, and use a wrench — knowing that your car thinks and feels … it matters.

Nobilis is a game of wonder and horror. I will be saying that again. Just as the Nobilis operate on a grander scale than humans ever could, the things of our world are starker. We have things so intensely beautiful they could melt your soul. We have things so monstrous that your mind would break, to know of them. We have such things. Some of us *are* such things.

Nobilis doesn't have any particular themes to explore. A few were central to its creation — but there is no limit on the themes *you* can use. There is no single genre. It is not a mystery game, or a game of daytime soaps, or a game of science fiction. It's not *not* any of these things, either. You can play one of them, if you like.

Nobilis does not have a genre, in the classic literary sense. What it has is an *approach* to the genre of your choice — an approach in which the characters and events are absolutes. Where they operate on the highest levels of reality. And where the whole world turns on a word in the right ear. Within those bounds, you may play in whatever genre you like.

Ianthe

I come across a man plucking stars from the sky — some red, some white, some twinkling, some still. As he pulls them down, he arranges them carefully in a bouquet. At first, I think to comment on the strangeness of his behavior, but then a new thought comes to mind and pushes away all others:

"Sir," I say, "that red star … it does not go there."

—from Sonnet and the Sea, *by Alex Dec*


AL Davison 2007

Chapter 5
The Essence of Nobilis

You can think of Nobilis as a paperless writer's workshop. You and the other players work together to tell a fun, engaging, and even meaningful story within constraints provided by the rules and setting.

Key concepts and terms appear in **bold face** in their first appearance. Later, when you need to remember some specific point, you can skim for that term.

Everyone Tells the Story Co-operatively

No one person controls the plot alone, although each player has solid control over one of the story's protagonists. This is as much a social activity as a storytelling activity. If one of the other players messes up the grand story you're trying to tell, just enjoy their contribution to the game's play. It's a game, an exercise, not a contracted novel.

The Game Runs in Real Time

Almost no one tells a technically perfect story in real time. Character "voices" become uneven. Inconsistencies creep into the plot. The story rarely ends up with a tight focus. That's okay. The point isn't to write up the story as the next *War and Peace* when you're done. It's to have fun and loosen up your mind.

There are Rules to this Game

As in any good mystery, detectives can't suddenly produce evidence from thin air. They use the same information given anyone else — to all the players, if not all the characters. As in any good romance, the characters can't make other people fall in love with them, or smooth away the wrinkles of romantic life. Nor can the characters' players necessarily do it for them. As in any good fantasy adventure, characters have powers and gifts that evolve during play — but they don't spontaneously mutate into whatever they need at the time. If a fence stumps characters in one story, they shouldn't start flying around in the next!

On the death of the seventh-born angel, a dusty man came to Heaven's gates and passed through them. He walked to the funeral garden where the angel lay, chrysanthemums scattered on her chest, and set down his bag. From it he pulled a raiment of glory and hope, a nimbus of beauty and justice, and threw it over his shoulders. His eyes began to shine and his face grew bright, and all who stood there marveled.

"I did not expect to see you here today," said Firstborn, "O Prince of Hell."

"That is my title and function on other days," Lucifer replied. "Today, to honor the dead, I wear the mask of someone else — the foolish creature of Heaven that once she knew — and I should thank you to address me as such."

—from Legends of the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

What You Do

One person, usually the one who organizes and sets up the game, takes on the role titled the **Hollyhock God**, or HG. (The Hollyhock, incidentally, stands for ambition and vanity in the symbolism of the game.) The Hollyhock God has the ultimate responsibility for making sure that everyone has fun and that the story comes out well. In exchange, they get free snacks, drinks, and occasionally dinner.

OPPOSITE:
Excrucian shard defeated by the beauty of his own likeness, created by the Power of Art
by Al Davison

Each other player creates a **player character** or PC — one of the story's protagonists — using the game's rules. Players 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 HG decides what these **non-player characters** (NPCs) do. The HG 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 HG 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 Hollyhock God 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.

An Example of In-Character Play

Crazy Vince's Used Car Emporium

Featuring Julianna Avram, as played by Heather Sullivan; Marsiglio Tendi, as played by Edward Jordan; Rook Catchfly, as played by Diane Firth; and assorted others played by Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God.

JULIANNA: We must move quickly and secretly, taking no actions that would cause comment or excitement. Marsiglio, if the urge to indulge in paranoid ranting strikes you, please refrain; Rook, if the urge to speak at all occurs to you — repress it. I know how to handle these people.

MARSIGLIO: I do not rant. I speak with calm profundity, spurred by rational recognition of the universe's hatred for me.

ROOK: Can talk reg'lar, you know. If I have to.

JULIANNA: Your talents amaze me. Now hush.

HG: A pot-bellied man with gray hair and a tan approaches. [*As "Crazy" Vince*] Ah, the happy family. Is this your daughter? [*he gestures towards Rook*] Fine girl, fine girl.

ROOK: 'm *not* young. Just stuck.

VINCE: Eh?

ROOK: At this age. Stopped growing. Could be your grandmother, f'r all *you* know.

MARSIGLIO: [*hissed*] Quiet.

VINCE: Heh heh. The fancies of the young. So, can I set you fine folks up with a car? Our rates are the most reasonable in town.

MARSIGLIO: We need a companionable automobile; pleasant, refined, one with which a gentleman and two ladies can converse without dipping into the vulgarities of the lower classes.

VINCE: Pardon?

MARSIGLIO: Do not pretend you do not know my meaning.

HEATHER: Julianna buries her head in her hands.

An Example of Out-of-Character Play

Dinner, not long after

HG: Where are you all eating that night?

HEATHER: Would it be too much to ask for someplace simple and quiet?

EDWARD: Marsiglio insists on dining somewhere appropriate to his station.

HEATHER: Somewhere simple, quiet, and appropriate to his station?

EDWARD: Perhaps a private chateau, with a five-star chef and a swimming pool.

DIANE: What, you want to swim while you eat?

EDWARD: Floating tables would not be entirely out of the question.

DIANE: How about Pizza Hut?

EDWARD: ... I sense I am going to be outvoted.

The Setting

Most games of Nobilis take place in substantially the same setting — the same fictional world — although the details vary widely. This setting is animistic. Behind the scenes of ordinary reality, every leaf, every stone, every car, every building, and even every concept has a sapient spirit.

The most important concepts — like "Reptiles," "Fire," and "Communication" — have spirits composed of *causa causans*. This is the stuff of the first cause, a divine substance, the breath of God. Spirits of such creatures are of a very high caliber: angels and fallen angels; children of the tree that holds worlds in its branches; the Magisters responsible for protecting humanity; those seeking humanity's self-destruction; entities from outside the universe; and divine creatures born in the earliest days of life on Earth. When such a thing comes into existence, its birth creates a handful of majestic and world-altering concepts — two to seven, perhaps — and these concepts become its soul. These are the **Imperators**, the ultimate truth behind everything in the world.

Creation — that is, the sum total of existence — extends far beyond the Earth. Yet there are places beyond Creation, places that cannot be said to exist in the same sense that the things of this world do. Just as some Imperators are beyond mortal ability to understand, the Lands Beyond Creation are incomprehensible to any creature of this reality, no matter how finely honed their perceptions. From this land come the **Excrucians**, the Children of Harumaph, the Dark Horsemen. For reasons unknown but much theorized about, the Excrucians seek to destroy Creation. They strive not just to reduce the physical world to rubble, but to undermine its spiritual foundations and erase the concepts on which the physical world is built.

To help defend their world, the Imperators have created the **Nobilis**. They take ordinary humans and vest them with

The stone had seven sides, one for each horror locked within. In clean, simple words that transcended any human language, the inscription read, "Do not Touch."

I cannot say why the Creator would choose to make that stone, but no other hand could have written in such script. Not even the angels have hands so precise, a language so elegant. The True Tongue of Heaven seems an ugly pidgin in comparison.

I was only human. I touched it; I ran my finger down its perfect edge; I split off a piece to sell to some museum.

I did not see the plague I unleashed. I saw only its spirit, infinitely intense, boiling from the stone so bright as to sear my eyes. I did not think, "I have doomed us all," though I feared it might be true. I thought, "A god is born."

—from the Diary of Jurgen Brunner

a shard of their own immortal essence — giving humans responsibility for and control over a significant aspect of Creation. Aspects include Spheres, Division, Stasis, Bridges, Death by Sea, Summer, Fall, Heat, Cold, Storms, Butterflies, the Road, Bronze, Doorways, Words, Tremors, Cooking, the Forge, Parasites, Passivity, Mistrust, Growth, Addiction, Magnetism, Blood, Wine, Reflections, Spring, Lava, Disorder, Insanity, and Time. The human given control over such a shard becomes the **Power** of that shard (e.g. the Power of Mistrust) and joins the ranks of the Nobles, or Nobilis.

Since Imperial souls contain several concepts, a typical Imperator can create a number of Nobilis, each governing a different aspect of reality. These form a **Familia Caelestis**: a "celestial family." The player characters form one such group.

Using the Setting

All the town came on opening day, for Jean Marie-Daleswood was famous for her gardens; and the citizenry milled in puzzlement to see nothing but an empty lot. When she opened the gates, they went in and milled some more, and sipped their drinks, and exclaimed, 'How odd this is!'

Then Jean moved past the gates and sealed them shut, and Alice shouted, 'Hey! You cannot leave! You have not shown us the garden!'

But Jean only smiled, and shook her head, and said, 'It is a garden of people that I grow.'

—from the preface to The Society of Flowers, *by Heather Williams*

The setting of Nobilis is designed to integrate the player characters tightly into the world of the game. Each one has a bond to one of the fundamental aspects of reality. Each one has a permanent tie to the other player characters, since they all belong to the same celestial family, their souls stitched together through their Imperator. Each one has a personal relationship with that Imperator. Most of the player characters ally themselves to one of the great forces contending for the world — Heaven, Hell, the Light, the Dark, or the Wild. Most (though not all) also have a number of human "Anchors", bound to them by ritual and magic, through whom they work their will.

In the course of their lives, player characters rule and manage a private world-within-a-world. They attend to ambitious personal projects. They engage in social activity with others of their kind. They oversee the lives of their Anchors. They live out the principles embodied in their Estate (the concept they rule) and their personal code of ethics. They perform various duties for their Imperator. They help defend the world against the Excrucian menace, of course.

The themes of the PCs' lives derive primarily from their respective Estates: the Power of Grief moves in a world of death and partings. The Estates of the other player characters have some influence, however, as do motifs of the Hollyhock God's own design. The major themes of the game itself generally also have some play — duty, forbidden love, and the delicate balance of freedom against law.

Character Creation

Players build their characters using a simple point-based system. Each has 25 character points to spend. There are four **attributes** central to a character's definition, rated from 0 to 5. Each level of an attribute costs 3 character points. These Attributes are:

Aspect

This attribute governs fitness of body and mind. At level 0, the character's natural abilities are essentially human; at level 5, the character can effortlessly catch bullets, run on the heads of people in a crowd, track by scent, out-compute a supercomputer, pose for magazine covers without needing photo touch-ups, and analyze complex situations precisely. Miracle points (described later) make more impressive feats possible, including jumping between continents and killing with a smile.

Domain

This attribute describes a character's control over their Estate. At level 0, the character can sense when enemies threaten that Estate. At level 5, the character can protect, create, or destroy the elements of their Estate at will — the Power of the Forest can summon a grove with a wave of the hand, or methodically destroy a great woods fifty trees at a time. With miracle points, the character can work more extreme miracles: the Power of the Forest could awaken all the forests of the world, turning the trees into mobile warriors.

Realm

This attribute describes a character's control over their Chancel — a private world within the boundaries of Earth, where physical law and social norms differ. A Chancel is the *sanctum sanctorum* of its Powers and their Imperator. At level 0, the character can sense a threat against their Chancel. At level 5, they can protect, create, or destroy almost anything within their Chancel, from its wildlands to its citizens. With miracle points, Realm's potential is unlimited; the character can grossly alter the physical law or geographical features of their world.

Spirit

This attribute governs the character's skill with the miscellaneous magical abilities of the Nobilis. This includes their defense against both miracles and mundane attacks, their ability to claim humans as their supernatural agents (Anchors), and their ability to sense recently performed miracles. A Power with Spirit 0 has no great spiritual force or magical ability. A Power with Spirit 5 has perfectly balanced their divine and human natures, and commands a wide range of useful abilities.

Players can also design or select miscellaneous abilities (**Gifts**) using a flexible power design system. Costs vary, and include such abilities as immortality, shapeshifting, flight, invisibility, and glory like that of angels.

A beginning Power has 5 **Miracle Points** (MPs) associated with each attribute. This can be increased with character points and experience. These points represent the character's ability to go beyond their normal limits. Characters with unusual **Handicaps** or disadvantages receive extra miracle points for them, either at the beginning of each story or when the handicap becomes a problem during play. Thus, a blind character receives a few extra miracle points every story. A character who cannot enter a building uninvited receives a miracle point when that restriction becomes extremely inconvenient.

The players also create their Imperator and Chancel using a point-based creation system. This involves picking a balanced mix of useful and unpleasant traits from a list.

Action

She stepped forward lightly, before I could react, and touched my forehead; and I could feel the venality in my soul turn to dust "Mess with me again," she said, "and I'll make you a saint."

"Is that bad?"

"Take all the evil out of a body," she said, "and there's hardly nothing left."

—from Remember Penelope, *by K. C. Danine*

Every action that a character might want to take, using their attributes, has a miracle difficulty between 0 and 9. Characters can perform miracles with a difficulty less than or equal to their attribute levels automatically; more difficult miracles require miracle points.

The level of an Aspect miracle depends on the physical and mental power displayed. The difficulty of Domain and Realm miracles depends on how thoroughly a character wants to alter some aspect of the target. Gifts usually work automatically. Players can build Gifts that require the use of miracle points; this reduces their cost.

Nobilis and certain other character types have a kind of spiritual armor known as the **Auctoritas**. To penetrate this armor with a miracle, a Power must add the subject's Spirit to the miracle level.

Thus, a level 5 miracle that has Penetration 2 — that can penetrate the Auctoritas of a power with Spirit 0, 1, or 2 — has an effective level of 7.

In conflict, characters take turns acting. Each may use a miracle and a normal human action during their turn. When two miracles clash directly, the miracle with the higher level takes effect. When two miracles clash indirectly, the Hollyhock God must decide the outcome.

As for the Rest

You now have enough information to play, with a little help from your Hollyhock God. If you want to know more — or want to be the Hollyhock God yourself — read on.

Miracle Difficulty

Miracle Type	Difficulty	Miracle Point Cost
Simple	Miracle difficulty + attribute	0
Normal	Miracle difficulty + attribute + 1	1
Hard	Miracle difficulty + attribute + 2	2
Deep	Miracle difficulty + attribute + 4	4
Word of Command	Miracle difficulty + attribute + 8 (at the cost of a terrible wound)	8

Aspect Miracle Effects

Miracle Level	Level Description	Example Miracle
0	Peak performance	Graceful jump
1	High-level human	Olympic long jump
2	World-record performance	World record jump
3	Improbable feats	Skeet-surfing
4	Very improbable feats	Running on heads
5	Impossible ... for humans	Catching a bullet
6	Universally improbable	Drinking a lake
7	Impossible for anyone (but local)	Lifting a hill
8	Impossible for anyone (non-local)	Lifting a mountain
9	Fabled	Hiding a mountain

Domain and Realm Miracle Effects

Miracle Level	Level Description	Useful To
0	Estate- or Realm-driven divinations	Know about trouble
1	Ghost miracles	Get comfortable, or win a duel
2	Lesser divinations	Learn about Estate or Realm
3	Lesser preservations	Make things last
4	Lesser creations	Make things
5	Lesser destructions/ major divinations	Hurt, destroy or remove property; Scry or ask Estate or Realm something
6	Lesser changes/ major preservations	Modify, ward, seal, or guard things
7	Major creations	Make impressive, special, or big things
8	Major destructions	Cause widespread damage
9	Major changes	Do anything else (with Estate or Realm)

Ianthe writes: How to be a Hollyhock God

Part 3

What Do Nobilis Do?

The rain of Daucetta was everything I had heard. A thousand snakes filled the jungle around me, scaled in patterns of red and black, green and yellow, even canary and crimson. They reared and hissed. They uncurled with great reluctance from the branches on which they hung, fighting the rain every step of the way, and then, one by one, they began to fall up into the sky. The soft rustling pitter-patter of snakes brushing against the leaves filled the air as the ophidians yanked themselves upwards. Far above, I could see the cloud beginning to form.

I took out my notepad and made a check mark. Four hundred and seventy-three wonders seen. Eighteen billion, seven hundred and thirty-two million, one thousand and eight to go.

—from the Thought-Record of Jamie Todd

Nobilis characters can do just about anything, but some activities are particularly common or important.

Chancel Management

If a Chancel needs no management, the resident Nobles will turn their attention elsewhere. Corruption of part of the Chancel by an Excrucian, rival Noble, or Bane will go unnoticed. Soon, the Imperator's sanctuary — the keeping place of its body — is no longer secure. That's dangerous. As a matter of sensible policy, most Imperators create Chancels that require some guidance from the local Nobles to "stay afloat". Nobilis must therefore perform the duties of rulers and political leaders. These include:

- Stripping wealth and influence from the unworthy and treasonous.
- Rewarding the brave, loyal, and efficient.
- Signing off on new building projects, technological and magical initiatives, and disaster relief projects.
- Stomping out unpleasant rumors and helping pleasant rumors spread.
- Considering ideas from the military, scientific, industrial, and magical sectors, and evaluating their worth.
- Providing high justice.
- Organizing the Chancel's various celebrations.
- Serving as arbiters of taste and fashion.
- Signing off on major arranged marriages.
- Overseeing particular personal duties, such as those of the court artist or high priest of their Imperator.
- Overseeing personal projects implemented within the Chancel.
- Deciding on an overall governmental policy.
- Deciding when to take residents' control over their own life away. For example, can a resident pregnant with a Power's child make the choice to abort? Can an excellent candidate for the cyber-cop program refuse it?

The characters' personal governing style may create additional duties, or skew their responsibilities towards a handful of these affairs. For example, an extremely distant style of government can restrict the characters' duties to reading reports and rewarding or punishing their subordinates, who perform the actual work. A more personal approach requires that the characters ride among the people, redressing the wrongs and troubles that afflict their lives. An opulent, majestic, showy government requires that the PCs focus on the celebrations they hold and the fashions they set. Running a functional anarchy as nothing more than First among Citizens requires substantial attention to security and public services.

You can make Chancel management interesting using two simple tricks. First, run scenes involving each of these activities and pay attention to which ones the players seem to get into. If they spend an hour planning out details of a birthday celebration, but skim past organizing disaster relief — or vice versa — you know which activity to focus on in the future. Second, talk to the players, at least once every couple of stories, to find out what they see their characters doing "at home". Those are the activities where it pays off to throw in an interesting story complication or two.

For example, if a player envisions their PC spending an hour a day at the weather-control computers designing *just* the right kind of day, it gives you a number of options. Perhaps one morning half the sky changes, not to fit the characters' design, but rather according to a complementary and artistically interesting vision. This could begin a long-distance flirtation between the PC and a weather mage — or give the PC someone to stomp in righteous fury. If the PC leaves the Chancel for Earth proper and discovers that someone has stolen one of their sky designs, the player is certain to react with interest. (Perhaps a major sky spirit is profiting off of the PC's efforts, and this leads to

an investigation into artistic corruption at the highest levels of Mythic Reality.) If an Excrucian-driven unnatural storm intrudes into the Chancel, the PC is perfectly primed to notice and react.

Personal Projects

"When I feel myself tempted to love," Idri-mi said, "I scrape a tiny piece off of my heart — the part that loves — and leave it here."

There was a pile of red scraps at the end of the catwalk. I eyed it with new respect.

"No," she said, and gestured with her head. I looked over the catwalk's edge.

The pit was as deep as the world, and it was full of wind; and the wind was full of red.

—from the Thought-Record of Ellen McIntosh

No one can expect more of a Power than that they fulfill their duties well, but not every Power wants to be remembered as "someone who did their duty". Most Nobles have secondary goals for their lives on the same scale as their abilities. Some want to render the deserts bountiful and the tundra green. Some hope to create a new kind of sentient, a creature of prosaic or mythic reality that transcends the boundaries of known intelligence. Some search for a way to revive dead Estates. Some seek to master the ways of High Summoning and understand the mysteries of the Lands Beyond Creation. The Nobilis dream grandly.

Encourage your players to create interesting projects for their PCs to pursue, and try and create some fun projects for your NPCs. A non-exclusive list of ideas follows. Players can take inspiration from this, but should *not* feel obligated to choose from the list. Nor should you, as Hollyhock God.

Possibilities include:

- Winning the heart of, or creating, the most intelligent, beautiful, handsome, venal, or otherwise distinguished man, woman, or Noble.
- Comprehensive experience: hearing every significant musical composition ever created; dining at every restaurant on the globe's face; cataloguing all Earthly forms of life; sleeping with every man, woman, or adult human in general before they die; individually punishing every man, woman, or adult human in general for their fecklessness and general insensitivity; mastering some field of scholastic endeavor; or building a collection of legendary foci.
- Creating a variant on the human race and, possibly, using it to replace mundane humanity.
- Eliminating something that irritated the Power as a mortal (e.g. suffering, vermin, or crime).
- Transmuting something that irritated the Power as a mortal into a less irritating form.
- Setting various aspects of the Power's personality at war with one another, using a Chancel or an Earthly city as the stage, to determine which should dominate.
- Finding a loophole in Heaven's laws so that the angels cannot refuse the Power's soul entry after death.
- Arranging or preventing the genocide of some ethnic subgroup without violating the Code Fidelitatis.
- Taking over a nation, artistic movement, scientific field, or geographical area, ousting or pulling the strings on the Cammorans entrenched therein.
- Freeing the souls in Hell.
- Constructing a new World Tree, or, less ambitiously, a new world.
- Organizing a resistance against Lord Entropy.
- Restructuring or dominating Earth's political systems.
- Creating a new kind of miraculously or magically enhanced commoner — such as a group of martial artists or television journalists whose training and tools allow them to perform incredible feats.
- Destroying one of the great terrors of the Age, such as an Excrucian leader or the First Lord of the Dark.
- Uncovering the truth about the Buddha and Nirvana, Christ and the Creator, or Shiva and the end of Creation.
- Discovering the origin of the Wild, the true purpose of the Excrucians, or otherwise unraveling a great mystery.
- Becoming Imperial.

Social Activity

The Nobilis have no monolithic social structures. You can't go to Nobles, Inc. or Domini, Ltd. and buy services from an impartial sales representative. In fact, interacting with any Power as a faceless component of a larger social system is a mistake. For one thing, we aren't faceless. For another, there's no such system. Responding to these conditions, most Nobles become very social creatures. Since we have to deal with one another as individuals, *knowing* the Nobles we interact with is a survival trait. Personal, social experience of our peers is vitally important. Through social contact, we come to understand the weaknesses of our rivals and enemies. Through social contact, we strengthen the ties that bind us to our friends.

The Nobilis devote a great deal of attention and energy to the contexts that bring various Noble communities together. Some of these contexts include:

- Festivals and holidays, which can commemorate events in a Noble's life, gather merit for the attendants' souls, reaffirm the Noble dedication to win the Valde Bellum, honor some occasion sacred to a mortal religion or a Noble affiliation, keep old traditions alive, collect luck for the participants, test Nobles against one another in formal contests without rancor, honor the dead, celebrate life, or imitate Imperial behavior.
- Factional congregations, in which the members of some group of Nobles with aligned interests come together in privacy, discuss issues close to their heart, and mingle. Examples of such groups include: Nobles overtly sworn to the Light or the Dark; Nobles with similar primary roles in the Valde Bellum, such as the great strategic minds or the healers of mind and spirit; Nobles unofficially dedicated to some shared project; Nobles with Estates that reinforce one another, such as Guns, Blades, Strife, and War; and Nobles of Chancels allied by Imperial will or their own.
- "Military maneuvers", often held underground or underwater, for Nobilis who believe that the Valde Bellum may become an open conflict in the physical world.
- Artistic events, such as the unveiling of a new fashion by a Noble clothier. (The Nobilis do not wear the ridiculous designs one often finds at mortal fashion shows, but many Nobles do care about the latest and most impressive "image," designed by a true craftsman as well as an artist).
- Ceremonies of transfer, in which legendary (and often powerless) items associated with famous long-dead Nobles are placed in new hands in the hopes that the new owner will add to the legend.
- Punishment rites, in which Nobles who find the Locust Court's decision too lenient — a rare event! — formally declare the fate that a detested criminal or traitor will face.
- Construction ceremonies, in which gathered Nobles contribute to a monument dedicated to some great victory or loss.
- Luxury celebrations, engaged in purely for pleasure — parties, visits to rare wonders, and suchlike.

Once, the Marchessa Sabrina Madgett approached my lady at a social affair, at which I was serving. "An excellent revel, my lady; you are to be complimented."

"Nonsense," my lady answered. "It is the guests that make the occasion."

The Marchessa's eyes blazed. She colored angrily. "Good day," she said, and retreated.

Later that evening, my lady asked me to make conversation; and I expressed my puzzlement at the exchange. "Why should she have taken such an innocent remark so dearly to heart?"

"It was not what I said that disturbed her," my lady answered. "Rather, it was the dawning knowledge that I had planned out our discussion farther ahead than she."

—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

A top-secret FBI file proves that dragons walk the earth! This terrifying study records over 37 incidents where a "mountain-sized" serpent terrorized citizens of the United States, in one case stealing several Georgia houses and carrying them away upon its back. "My conscience could no longer tolerate concealing this information," said retired FBI agent Pippin Kingsley. "The people have a right to know that giant snakes live among us, and that they may not be friendly."

—from the Choice News *(a tabloid on Ash-tree Earth)*

Anchor Oversight

Noble Anchors are valuable resources. Even hated Anchors are priceless tools. A Power's Anchors give them the ability to be many places at once. Unlike other surrogates such as well-trained mortal adjutants or magical simulacra that duplicate the Power's mind, a Noble can directly oversee an Anchor's activities and ensure that they stay aligned with the Noble's own interests.

Unfortunately, Anchors are also a lot of trouble. An Anchor that turns on you can be dangerous, so Nobles must work to maintain their loyalty through respect, love, or fear. Moreover, Fate is downright mean to Anchors. Some of the events that have troubled Anchor lives in my direct experience include:

- Kidnapping or recruitment by cannibalistic cults, often with no connection to the Nobilis.
- Sudden relocation by means of tornado (occasionally into Chancels).
- Requests for aid from oppressed nonhuman minorities.
- Stumbling into spirit gateways.
- Discovering priceless artifacts, texts, or religious scrolls — on one memorable occasion, buried in the Anchor's back yard.
- Stumbling onto a lethal spy ring.
- Extortion by gangs of recently unemployed circus folk.
- Home or workplace invasion by bizarre forms of insect life.
- Adopting a Noble (whom Lord Entropy imprisoned in canine form) from the local pound.
- Corporate paralysis as their employing company searches desperately for a suitably fadworthy new name.
- Receiving radio communications — allegedly messages from Adam and Eve for the Magisters of the Light and the Dark — through their teeth.
- Identity confusion, such as led to one Anchor's accidental instantiation as Pope.
- Identification by a major tabloid psychic's prediction as the last hope for America.
- Demonic possession of their home computer.
- Waking up one morning married to three different people.
- Being hit on the head by bankrupt stockbroker leaping from a rooftop — a scenario that did not call for much Noble intervention, but which could have been avoided by more diligent surveillance.
- Relatively innocuous but awkward situations, such as being held hostage in a bank robbery, suffering wrongful arrest for twelve counts of murder and public urination, or having their likeness stolen for a best-selling novel cover.

OPPOSITE:
The Power of Murder
by Frazer Irving

Typically, when this kind of thing happens, the Anchor tosses a quick prayer to their Power, in the hope that the Power will help. Since our Anchors are usually of the most use to us *where we put them* — in the careers and life situations we have arranged for them — we usually help. Nobilis can deal with a cannibal cult or circus gang easily. Fixing a demonic possession, an accidental Papacy, or the fuss surrounding some major discovery takes more effort.

Most Nobilis involve themselves in their Anchor's lives as a matter of course — often in a low-maintenance mortal identity established in the Anchor's vicinity. This gives them a broader understanding of the factors that affect an Anchor's position and happiness. It enables a subtler approach to the problems that face their servants. For example, suppose an Anchor loses his job for indiscretions on company equipment with a woman who turns out, in the fuss, to be the CEO's long-lost daughter. A Noble who occasionally works for the company as a consultant can probably smooth things over by talking to top management. With even modest Aspect, Realm, or Spirit, one argues compellingly. A Noble without the relevant contacts or knowledge, attempting this approach, risks screwing the Anchor's life up further.

They still tell the story of Dyemma Insakovs, for all that there is no story to tell. When she met the Warmain Raginhart Tribunas in an arranged duel, she brought no weapon deadlier than a long silver needle; and with that needle she sought his death. She lost. She died.

"Do you seek death?" Raginhart had asked her, as he raised his blade.

"I fear it terribly," she answered. "But see what I have gained: when we have finished, the needle shall be famous as a weapon of war."
—from Legends of the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Serving their Estate

Every Noble makes the defense of their Estate against the Excrucian depredations their top priority. Selfless Nobles sometimes consider themselves expendable — but never their Estates. Protecting their Estate is both the most honorable and the most survival-oriented act a Noble can perform.

Protecting one's Estate from flower rite attacks, as well as more blatant assault, requires an adaptable mind. Such attacks are fundamentally unpredictable. Similarly, the necessary response varies greatly. To defeat a flower rite, a Noble must move subtly and surely, armed with complete information. To drive off an Excrucian Warmain engaged in killing the major spirits of the Estate may require naked force — and several casualties, preferably Nobles the victim never particularly liked.


FOR REAL

Nobles also serve their Estate in other ways. Many Nobilis spend a great deal of time on relatively mundane activities that conceptually further their Estate. The Power of Spices funds scholarships at great cooking schools. The Power of the Forest kills off land developers in picaresque ways. The Lady of Ravens and the Swan King both spend a great deal of time simply flying with their kind.

None of these actions are likely to substantially increase the power or endurance of the Estate, but they fit a Power's nature. Part of a Power's soul is the Estate; serving the Estate feeds the soul.

Some examples, drawing on my experience of my peers (found later in this text):

- **Ada Williamette, Power of Strife**, sows strife and trouble both with and without her Noble abilities.
- **Helissent de Reymes, Power of Mazes**, funds labyrinthine construction projects and (I believe) makes a habit of stealing all copies of the architectural plans afterwards. Her region of Locus Sakhrat, the Labyrinth of Courtly Love, is one of the greatest mazes ever constructed.
- **Idony Saint-Germain, Power of Bureaucracy**, promotes bureaucracies everywhere by subtly undermining the practical value of less structured alternatives. Often, this takes the form of creating *more* red tape around apparently efficient procedures than the entrenched bureaucracies have.
- **Lance Romenel, Power of Records**, shows that exceptions exist. He spends hardly any time at all serving the interests of his Estate, save when Records or a major historical record stands directly threatened.
- **Nephele Nikolaidhis, Power of Festivals**, my Sister Caelestis, attends all manner of celebrations; she also helps create new forms of festivity and protects the celebratory and religious traditions of various tribal peoples. In her own macabre way, she keeps the spirit of the holidays alive.
- **Pandareos Panagiotis, Power of Conspiracy**, my Brother Caelestis, does not discriminate — I believe he participates intimately in every mortal conspiracy, from price fixing among major multinational corporations to cells of criminal revolutionaries in the Federated States of Micronesia.
- **Patrick Romney's-Son Olam's-Serf Precipice-Lord, Power of Chaos**, sows disaster and trouble throughout the world; he also gambles, studies mathematics and quantum theory, and occasionally dips his hand into disaster relief.
- **Superstes Annabelle Zupay, Power of Trails**, devotes much of her time to creating trails. Strictly speaking, as I understand it, her Estate covers trains of thought and chains of logic rather than physical paths. Thus, she serves her Estate by creating new and unusual lines of reasoning. I find the process opaque and disinteresting, and have not investigated further.
- **Thalasseus, Power of Trade**, my Brother Caelestis, runs his own mercantile empire. In addition, he observes the activities of the major government organizations that regulate trade, so that he may remove or retrain those whose policies go awry. It is difficult to gain anything from him, even his help in a crisis, without at least a token attempt at barter.
- **Walking Eye, Power of Borders**, is an unusual case — but even that strange creature enjoys long walks along cliff edges and country borders, not to mention quiet adjustment of boundary markers.

Nobles in a position to do so often work to increase the influence their Estate has in the mortal world — both in nature and in human society. This is only natural. The more influence their Estate has, the more practical power they possess.

If humans develop functional virtual reality, the Power of Deception stands to gain. The Power of Drunkenness backs research into wood alcohol-driven power cells — alcohol is not within her Estate, but it is within her power. If computer systems and eventually homes begin using such power cells, she will be able to cause power outages wherever she goes — something Drunkenness *cannot* do at present.



Serving their Code

Nobilis often show a great dedication to their personal Code — more so than mortals, because each hour spent on that service provides a much greater return. A Noble who invests a few hours a week in furthering the cause of Heaven on Earth can save a dozen endangered beauties, help erect a Refuge, and foil the plans of the literal servants of Hell. Compare this to a poor human who can, at best, lick a few thousand envelopes in that time, futilely exhorting the uncaring masses to save the rainforest. The reason for a Noble's greater passion is obvious.

Many dedicated Nobles also take this service to a higher level. Where those such as I simply seek to *serve* the principles of our Codes, these Nobles try and make their lives an expression of their principles. Thus, some Powers of the Dark do not just work towards humanity's self-destruction: they live and breathe humanity's death. When not engaged in high affairs of the Dark, the grand stratagems aimed at the heart of human survival, they work for suicide hotlines, seeing how many people they can lose before someone shuts the center down; they hock drugs on the streets; they wander the ICU wards of hospitals, conning the patients into agreeing to die.

Some of the possible activities for Powers of various Affiliations — none of which are obligatory — include:

- **Powers of Heaven** dispense justice — often traveling their Chancel or the mortal world, observing situations of inequity, rendering a verdict, and adjusting the situation to suit. They practice the arts and serve as patron to artists. They struggle to protect the beautiful things in the world from the ravages of Hell and nature. They develop their personal image, striving to achieve perfection of manners, self-presentation, and personal development so that others will show them respect. They sponsor creative scientific projects. They garden. They work to maintain and expand the Refuges. They meditate in beautiful places. They mark out areas of the mortal world as their fief, and enact revenge against any of Hell who dares defile them.
- **Powers of Hell** insidiously work their way into the confidences of those in power, so that they may corrupt them. Many enjoy buying human souls, knowing that while such contracts have no binding on the process of reincarnation, a human who believes their soul lost has no motive to act virtuously. Some instead strive to create the conditions that reward corruption, bending the natural expressions of capitalism, communism, freedom, oppression, and similar economic and governmental forms so that they encourage more treachery among the affected citizens than they otherwise might. Many of these Powers spend their time creating suffering — a delicate art. Torture is brutal, and they leave such works to the demons. They find artfully crushing human happiness and leading them to pain much more rewarding. Encouraging the deranged to contaminate a reservoir with their tuberculosis, engaging in corporate maneuvers designed to destroy the pensions of thousands of retired humans, and other such outrages are much more their style.
- **Powers of the Light** fight the industrial corruption and profiteering that makes workplaces dangerous and pollutants common. They struggle with the Dark to keep religious conflicts in Asia from erupting into nuclear war. They save humans from burning buildings. They encourage or force their human associates to abandon dangerous lifestyle elements like nicotine, alcohol, fatty foods, rock climbing, swimming, and overly loud music. They move in high diplomatic circles to bring about world peace and work next to combat medics to pull soldiers back from the brink of death.
- **Powers of the Dark** encourage individual humans to push their limits, climbing a little bit higher every day — until their reach exceeds their grasp and they plunge to their doom. Dark Powers encourage paranoia in the leaders of nations and bring the worst aspects of every creed into prominence. They spend their days with gang leaders and drug lords. They fleece the naïve with silver tongues

"You mistake me," said the Emperor to Come. His eyes lowered to meet mine. They assaulted my senses like fireworks on a crisp cold night. "I am not a creature who cares about your intentions. Suppose that you are correct, and your offense against me was an act of conscience and courage. Then you must bear your punishment gladly, with a quiet heart. The honor of such an act lies in the acceptance of its consequences."
—from Reflections IV, *by Viscount D'Armand*

and marked cards; they goad the brave into reckless oblivion. They squander their lives in mortal vice, to understand better how that vice functions.

- **Powers of The Wild** spend their time breaking down barriers. Freeing prisoners from concentration camps, prisons, mental hospitals, and dungeons is a rewarding hobby for them. They undermine social boundaries in the courts and encourage every form of perversion of established norms — from asceticism and pacifism to killing sprees and bizarre sexual deviancy. Many Powers of the Wild construct elaborate rules that cut across normal laws and procedures. Some move from body to body, their true identity locked within their Imperial soul-shard, allowing any Chancel resident who defeats them in a game of questions to supplant them as Power. Others build bridges that one can only cross with one's clothes inside out. One memorable Power of the Wild promised her faithful service to anyone who brought them their own head on a pike. Blind John eventually claimed the reward, but not before the Power fed John's head to a Labrador. This impaired Blind John significantly.

Performing their Duties

There is a woman who has carved a stone; and no more beautiful sculpture exists on this or any other world. It captures the quintessence of her art. It captures the soul. Yet it is flawed — fatally, terribly flawed. It would take her only an hour to fix it — to make a final statement that would close the book on sculpture, transform her own existence, and justify this Creation.

She does not fix the flaw. She cannot. She had a dream, on the last day of work. An angel came to her in that dream and said: "With the creation of perfection comes the death of this world."

Perhaps the angel was simply jealous, and did not want such beauty outside of Heaven. Perhaps it told the truth. She does not know.

—from The Army of Imperfection, *by Alex Dec*

Over time, a Familia usually divides up the major elements of Chancel management, each Power claiming the area of government that suits their temperament best. The major sectors of Chancel affairs a Power might lay claim to include military affairs, military intelligence, diplomacy, law and justice, agriculture and industry, Chancel morale, the economy, magic, and administrative affairs. Thus, a Familia of four Powers might divide into a military commander, a diplomat and spymaster, a court magician, and a chief justice, with the other duties shared by all.

Imperators often assign Powers additional duties on a long-term or short-term basis. For example, an Imperator might request that one or all of its Powers:

- Investigate a particular philosophical question in which it has taken an interest.
- Spy on, assault, or destabilize the Chancel of an Imperator who offended it.
- Carry out some mission relevant to its personal agenda — such as saving humanity in the case of the Light, cutting the angels down to size in the case of the fallen, or carrying out some obscure floral experiment for just about any of them.
- Help it harvest miraculous energy from the world.
- Negotiate an alliance with a nearby Chancel, its Powers, and (indirectly) that Chancel's Imperator on its behalf.
- Find a virginal oriental white stork with a gold feather on its wing, for reasons never quite made clear (not that I'm bitter).
- Burn a thousand human habitations down in honor of the anniversary of the war in Heaven.
- Save the soul of one of the Imperator's distant descendants from their own venality.
- Resolve an international crisis that is distracting too many Powers from the Valde Bellum.
- Visit another Age of the World, or another realm, to collect something kept there or to report on events there.
- Stand guard duty over a monster bound since before Creation.
- Establish a university in the mortal world, so that the most promising Chancelfolk can attend and experience Earth proper during their formative years. (They will eventually enter the service of the local Powers, or perhaps even replace them.)

This is, of course, merely the smallest sampling of the possibilities. Hollyhock Gods should make sure that any special duties have a definable purpose in the game — either reinforcing a thematic point or furthering an important plotline — and that they interest the players. The duty itself need not be interesting, however, if its most frequent *complications* can capture the players' attention.

Ianthe

Chapter 7
An Example of Play

Dramatis Personae

- Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God
- Heather Sullivan, playing Julianna Avram, Domina of Strength
- Edward Jordan, playing Marsiglio Tendi, Dominus of Treachery
- Diane Firth, playing Rook Catchfly, Domina of Eternity

and a cast of NPCs including

- Ada Willamette, Power of Strife
- Benjamin, murderer
- Bethany Scofflaw, traitor
- Faith Bernham, murder victim
- Genseric Dace, Deceiver
- Hope Carstens, an agent of Rook's
- Pandareos Panagiotis, Power of Conspiracy
- Shelley, Anchor to Julianna Avram
- Sundry Deceiver-shards, humans, spirits, and thugs

Unworthy Causes

Following this example of play requires relatively little knowledge of the Nobilis setting and rules. A few bits of background information follow. Later chapters should explain anything that may remain unclear.

- **Anchors.** The Servant's Rite, that transforms a mortal into an Anchor, requires that a Power love or hate the victim. The prospective Anchor must also swallow the Power's blood or tears. Excrucians can create Anchors without hate or love.
- **Deceivers.** One class of Excrucians, the Deceivers, can spiritually disguise themselves as specific Powers. Deceiver-shards can also don such a disguise. When disguised, a Deceiver or Deceiver-shard has access to the relevant Power's abilities as well as their own. Deceivers also have a weakness: once per scene, a servant of Creation can command them by invoking the name of their disguise. This is called "the truth of the name".
- **Miracle Points.** Players often refer to Aspect miracle points as AMPs, Domain miracle points as DMPs, Realm miracle points as RMPs, and Spirit miracle points as SMPs.
- **On the Campaign.** The campaign is *Treachery* (see pp. 249-276). The characters have weathered a few stories but the grande campaign arc that Madeline envisions has not yet begun.

This game has three PCs. Their full descriptions and game statistics follow on the next page. The three are:

- **Julianna Avram**, Marchessa of Strength, a woman of courage, endurance, and integrity, whom the Power of Conspiracy hopelessly loves.
- **Marsiglio Tendi**, Duke of Treachery, a man feckless and cruel, whose clawed finger can injure or cut through anything — from flesh to stone, from light to beauty.
- **Rook Catchfly**, Viscount of Eternity, a smiling gamine who can take or give eternal life with a touch, hopelessly in love with Pandareos Panagiotis, Power of Conspiracy.

At the end of the last session and story, these Powers uncovered a mole within their Chancel — a woman named Bethany Scofflaw, in service to Lord Entropy.

Scene 1: Bethany

HG (MADELINE): Let's get this started. You've flushed out Bethany Scofflaw, which hopefully means that Lord Entropy no longer has an ear in your Chancel; what are you going to do with her?

EDWARD: Can we turn her against Lord Entropy?

HEATHER: I don't think we scare her more than the Darkest Lord does.

Julianna Avram

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	1: Metahuman	5
Domain	3: Marchessa	5
Realm	2: Realm's Heart	5
Spirit	2: Incandescent Flame	5

Gifts and Virtues: Durant
Limits/Restrictions: Restriction: Cannot harm the honest; Affiliation: Code of the Light
Wound Levels: 1 Deadly Wound; 2 Serious Wounds; 2 Surface Wounds

Marsiglio Tendi

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	1: Metahuman	5
Domain	4: Duke	5
Realm	0: Citizen	5
Spirit	0: Candleflame	5

Gifts and Virtues: Immutable; Claw (Aspect 7 for cutting/injuring, 5 Penetration, simple, local, limited, uncommon); Virtue: Egocentric
Limits/Restrictions: Affiliation: Code of the Wild
Wound Levels: 1 Deadly Wound; 2 Serious Wounds; 2 Surface Wounds

Rook Catchfly

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	4: Celestial	5
Domain	2: Viscount	5
Realm	1: Radiant	5
Spirit	0: Candleflame	5

Gifts and Virtues: Eternal; Unblemished Guise (Penetration 1)
Limits/Restrictions: Restriction: Eternally underage; Restriction: Possessive; Affiliation: Code of the Angels
Wound Levels: 2 Deadly Wounds; 3 Serious Wounds; 3 Surface Wounds

EDWARD: Well, no, but we could fiddle with her brain or something.

DIANE: That could make Lord Entropy upset.

EDWARD: It's well within the boundaries of Sevenfold Vengeance, altering her, I mean. He wouldn't want to break his own law just to preserve the sanctity of a mortal servant.

DIANE: Good point.

HEATHER: Please. It's against the law if he decides it is. Besides, she's probably already sent him a quick prayer — he knows we have her.

DIANE: That is a bit worrisome. Can we give her back to him?

EDWARD: That'd imply publicly that he went around putting spies in other Imperators' Chancels. Do we want to embarrass him that way?

DIANE: We can't just let her walk away.

HEATHER: I agree. Our own pride's at stake, too.

DIANE: Maybe we could promote her?

HEATHER: Huh?

DIANE: You know. We could …

HG: Maybe you should discuss this IC? She'll be conscious again soon; I want to know what she's hearing when she wakes up.

DIANE: Oh, sure.

ROOK *(as voiced by Diane)*: 'Ey, Marsiglio. What say we move her to greener pastures? 'Stead of hurting her, give her something she can't refuse that'll get her out of our hair.

MARSIGLIO *(as voiced by Edward)*: In strictest fact, dear sister, we own no such pastures; the Chancel is the extent of our holdings.

ROOK : Not lit'rally. I mean, in spirit.

MARSIGLIO: You wish us to promote her in spirit?

JULIANNA *(as voiced by Heather)*: She's right, Marsiglio. Let us show our generosity to the poor scofflaw; let us endow her with a gift that will occupy the rest of her days. Shall I take care of it?

MARSIGLIO: You are better at gifts than I.

HG: Bethany twitches a little. You think she's drifting into consciousness.

JULIANNA: Rouse her, Marsiglio?

EDWARD: I tap the back of her hand with my claw, dragging it ever so lightly down the middle. [*illustrates, with his own hands.*] Not quite enough to pierce the skin.

ROOK: Brr. [*as the other players look at Diane*] I can't help it! I hate it when he does that.

HG: She's pretty definitely awake now, but not moving a muscle.

JULIANNA: Open your eyes.

HG: Very slowly, she does.

JULIANNA: Good morning, Bethany. Glory to the day! You have come to the attention of the viceroys of his Imperial majesty, Ram-Khvastra; and we look upon you with favor.

ROOK: Oh, listen to who's all mannerly now. How come you don't talk like that to us?

JULIANNA: [*frowning sourly at Rook.*] Have you been loyal to us, Bethany?

BETHANY *(as voiced by the HG)*: … yes?

It is terribly hard, when my darlings turn upon me — when the treachers who serve my Estate think to practice their arts on its Duke. Then I am torn. Do I reward them for their service, or punish them for their betrayal?

In truth, the question is not difficult. To reward treachery is contrary to the nature of the beast. Ultimately, everyone who serves my Estate suffers for it. That is the beauty of my work. Therefore, to revenge myself on those disloyal to me is not cruelty. It simply advances the natural timetable of Creation.
—His Grace, Marsiglio Tendi, Duke of Treachery, as written by Edward Jordan

We spent most of the previous story chasing after Bethany. You'd think catching a single mortal mole would be easy, but she had protections against divination that kept throwing us off the scent. More importantly, Madeline had been reading spy novels and we hadn't.
—Heather Sullivan

Sometime in the future, when I know all the pieces, I'll let them hear Bethany's legend in a Chancel bar.
—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God

JULIANNA: In recognition of your great devotion and loyalty, I grant you the greatest gift within my power to give. Bethany, I free you from your chains. No fear shall constrain you. No doubt shall hold you back. You shall know the personal strength that allows you to face any obstacle and constraint. If you dare to wish for it, I give you the will to strive for it. Without reservation, without deviation, without hesitation. You will rise like a bird, like a spark climbing the lightning, like a firework; and when you rise too high, reach too far, and fall, you shall tumble into the darkness without regret or sorrow. That is the gift I give you. [*as Heather*] Lesser Creation of Strength, 1 DMP.

DIANE: Geez, Heather. That's cold.

HEATHER: I know. [*smiles*]

MARSIGLIO: Sister, do we really need a hero in our Chancel?

HEATHER: Looking at Bethany as she sits up with new strength and purpose in her eyes, I'll answer, [*as Julianna*] We won't have one for long.

HG: Fair enough. The miracle works. You realize that her FIRST use of her new strength of purpose is probably going to be taking you all on? She can't like you very much or she wouldn't have sold out to the enemy.

DIANE: Rook'll grab her if she comes at us and frog-march her to somewhere distracting. Um, lesser divination of ambition — what're her unfulfilled dreams?

HG: She wants to learn to paint. She'd like to kill you and Ram-Khvastra for turning her home into a Chancel, and Lord Entropy for forcing her into his service. She wants to be a prize-winning journalist, and, um, an actress. And she'd like to climb Mt. Everest. She has political aspirations. She wants to have three children — two boys and a girl. She wants to win the heart of her personal hero, some musician or other. She'd like to take out the Columbian drug cartels, possibly tearing through their mountain headquarters knocking out their thugs left and right. She wants to be amazingly rich. She'd like …

DIANE: And there are probably a whole bunch of things she's always wanted to say and do to the people in her neighborhood, right?

HG: Oh, yes, thousands.

DIANE: I'll just get her back home, then. One'll get you ten they kill her by dawn; if not, she'll be off to the closest mountain.

MARSIGLIO: Fare ye well, Rook.

HG: Okay. Scene closed.

Interlude: Faith

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.

"Lady," he began, without preamble, "the Buddha said that souls are bound to an endless cycle of reincarnation, to suffer life after life among the many worlds of Creation, until they free themselves from the chains of ignorance and desire and permit themselves to achieve Nirvana. This seems to me a terrible waste; untold millions of years suffering the lash of existence, followed by an extinction in which no quality of yourself endures. Would you agree?"

It took me a few moments to pull myself away from his eyes; I sensed something important happening in their depths, some vast and important secret, but could only make out glitter and darkness. When I spoke, however, I did not fumble my words. My head felt very clear. "Either the Buddha was correct, sir, or he was not. If the choice of theologies is mine, I would as soon go to Heaven."

His smile was brilliant and sad. "I cannot give you that option," he said. "The moon will fall into the sea and the sky will turn to gold before a soul such as yours is allowed in Heaven. The tree of worlds will shake and planets will fall from its branches like dust. Lucifer shall repent and the world will crack before you are granted entry there."

I felt no fear. I was calm. My betrothed had cast me down the stairs and my body lay below me broken. I had no room for fear. "What do you propose?"

"Rather than proceeding to your natural afterlife," he said, "grant your allegiance to me. You will not suffer rebirth. At the proper time, I shall swallow your spirit; and you shall ride with me into a place beyond suffering."

I am not entirely naïve. "What is the price?"

"To ally with me is named treason," he answered, "in all the worlds there are. If I should fall on some world's soil, there is no place that will accept your spirit. Neither Hell nor Heaven will bear your touch, nor any world in between. You shall be cast, alone, a traitor and an exile, into the places beyond Creation; and I can not say what fate will meet you there."

The death of worlds shone in his eyes. But I loved him.

—from the Thought-Record of Faith Bernham

Scene 2: Marsiglio Rants

HG: Rook is on her way back from her errand when a set of sharp, shooting pains run down Marsiglio's side.

MARSIGLIO: Erp?

HG: Marsiglio's world wavers. His Estate is screaming. Something incoherent, something about justice.

EDWARD: Wait, do I have any idea why this is happening?

HG: It could be an Excrucian attack on your Estate. That often affects the Power directly, causing pain, deformity, injury, or hallucinations.

EDWARD: Deformity? [*as Marsiglio*] God's wounds! [*as Edward*] Or whatever that is in Italian.

JULIANNA: Pardon?

MARSIGLIO: It is an attack on Treachery! [*as Edward*] Marsiglio starts pacing. [*as Marsiglio*] It is my doom. Surrounded! I am surrounded by enemies! Under attack at every turn! The universe hates me. It has singled me out for persecution. For, um, destruction!

JULIANNA: Brother, there is a war on.

MARSIGLIO: So they say. The evidence does not support this. Rather, it indicates an, ah, vendetta against myself! I! Marsiglio! That the Excrucians attack other regions of Creation …

Weird gents, my Familia are. Marsiglio thinks the world's all 'bout Marsiglio. Julianna thinks it's all 'bout how you face what comes to you — whether you choose to fear or love your fate.

Let me tell you what it's about. It's about the moment when a golden flower opens to the sun. I've seen it. The flower's got dew on it, it's all warm colored, but that's not the thing. The thing is that there's this moment when the flower opens when the whole world holds still. What will come? the flower wonders. What'll the day bring? It doesn't matter what the answer is. It's that moment when anything could happen. That flower's eternal. That moment's eternal. That's what the world's all about.
—The Lady Rook Catchfly, Viscount of Eternity, as written by Diane Firth

It astounds me, the depths of cruelty and depravity that Madeline sinks to to keep the game fun.
—Edward Jordan

HEATHER: [*raises an eyebrow at Edward as the silence stretches*]
MARSIGLIO: A diversion! It is nothing more than a diversion.
DIANE: Oh, there's a cunning plan.
HEATHER: [*holding up a finger*] Give me a sec.
EDWARD: Sure.
JULIANNA: [*after a moment*] It pleases my brother to indulge in hyperbole.
MARSIGLIO: [*snarled*] I am in pain, cousin. It would please me to have it cease.
JULIANNA: Behave yourself, Marsiglio. You're embarrassing us both.
HG: Rook returns about now. She probably heard bits and pieces of the rant from the hall.
ROOK: Over and done, gents. 'Sup with Marsiglio?
HEATHER: He's been hitting the hard drugs again.
HG: Was that IC?
HEATHER: [*after a pause*] No, not really.
MARSIGLIO: I am under attack.
ROOK: [*pauses, then elaborately looks around the room*] Fierce dust mites, are they, then?
MARSIGLIO: Not here. Somewhere … [*as Edward*] Er, do I know where?
HG: You can find out with a divination.
EDWARD: Major?
HG: [*flips through the book*] No. Level 0 for the general area, level 2 to pin it down.
EDWARD: Oh, that's easy. Um. I reach out my arm and cry, "Treachery! Speak to me! Tell me about your problems!" And do the divination thing.
DIANE: Did you have an unhappy childhood? Do you sometimes feel undervalued?
HG: Hush, Diane. Edward, your mind spans the vast extent of treachery, the seas and tides of it that wash over the world, and spots the blemish. You're pretty sure that the problem's in Washington, D.C.
MARSIGLIO: As I was saying, not here. Somewhere in … D.C.
ROOK: [*coughs*] Should be easy to spot, then. Not much treachery going on there.
MARSIGLIO: I could home in more carefully if I were there.
HG: You can.
HEATHER: I'm going to step into my Anchor Shelley's mind for a moment. [*as Julianna*] Shelley, drop whatever it is your are doing right now. We're on our way to the airport. Ready our jet, and clear a flight path to the air exit from the Chancel. [*as Heather, gesturing grandly at the other players*] To my partners in crime, here, I add, [*as Julianna*] I say we move on it quickly, then.
ROOK: 'Ey, don't order me about.
JULIANNA: Don't be childish, Viscount.
HG: Is anyone seriously protesting Julianna's plan?
EDWARD: Not really.
DIANE: No.
HG: Then I'll skip ahead a bit. You're on the jet — usual pilot, I assume? — sipping drinks and breaching the barrier between the Chancel and normal reality. It's just as the skies clarify into the blue skies of Earth that you see the cruise missile wending its way towards the plane...time for a short break. So, who's paying for pizza tonight?
EDWARD, HEATHER: Hey!
DIANE: Mean.

Interlude: Hope

I will not let the enemy break me.

She found me on the streets. I was a killer, then. I needed it, like a drug, the feeling I got when they died. I thought she was going to be my next victim. Her name was Rook. I told her that my name was Hope.

I understood that killing was wrong. I simply knew that it did not matter. One more splatter in humanity's long blood-drenched history. One more pointless crime that'll be forgotten forever when our sun goes out. It didn't matter that killing was wrong, because right and wrong didn't mean anything.

Then I cut Rook's throat, and she smiled at me. "Thought you might do that," she said. Her voice had a weird quality to it. I suppose it would, I mean, if I'd messed with her windpipe. "Got some issues to work out, you do. Like to talk about it?"

It's fair to say that I could have gone insane, right there, right at that moment. There were so few things I trusted. If I stopped trusting my own eyes, I might have just — stopped. Stopped caring. Stopped acting. Sat down and waited to die. But her smile, God, her smile was like the sun. It gave me something to cling to.

So I sat down. And I told her about it.

She wasn't nice, at the end. She didn't tell me it was all right. She said, "Good lord, you're a fool." Then she took me by the collar, and she dragged me out into the night. And it was different.

The light — the light from the street lamps was alive. It whirled. It danced. It spun in little rings, like fairies in the old books. The cars parked on either side of the street were grumbling in their sleep. The fire hydrant struggled in its moorings, trying desperately to tear itself free so that the relentless pressure of the water would stop. The buildings looked down on me with their great gloomy eyes, and they said nothing, but they judged me.

There was a road. It was golden. She dragged me, stumbling and cursing, down that road for a day and a night, until we stood in a place far above the Earth, and I looked at the tree whose branches held worlds. She waved at it all and said, "This is what you think don't matter."

Everything was still. Everything was quiet, and cold, and frozen, and beautiful. I struggled. "So the world's a little bigger than I thought," I said. "It still goes on forever. It's still gone on forever. Nothing really means anything. My neck hurts."

Then she pointed at the blackness that gnawed at the tree's branches, and my heart turned as cold as the void between the worlds. "Eternity don't make itself," she said. "Things don't just last forever on their own. It lasts forever if we fight."

I didn't have to ask what we had to fight. I could see it. Eating at the tree of worlds.

"I claim you, Hope," she said. "You gonna fight for me, now."

I didn't argue. I loved her. I would always love her.

I will not let this man break me. Not with his knives. Not with his eyes. I will not tell.

Oh God.

—from the Thought-Record of Hope Carstens

OPPOSITE:
The Power of Greed demanding repayment of Third-World debt
by Bryan Talbot


BRYAN TALBOT 2001

Scene 3: War in the Skies

The human mind likes limits a great deal. It likes to categorize the world; and once it has made a categorization, it resists a change in the pigeonholes it has built. Stupidity gets in the way. So does pride. Most of all, however, the servant of limits is fear. The fearful, the cowardly, the weak — they would rather die than understand that the world exceeds all boundaries.

Strength, then, is simply this: the calm acceptance of the improbable.

—The Lady Julianna, Marchessa of Strength, as written by Heather Sullivan

HG: So you're entering normal skies, just smoothly gliding through the space between realities, when this missile comes streaking for you. It doesn't look like the sort of thing you want impacting against your plane at high velocity, assuming that you have choice in the matter.

DIANE: Darn right we have choice. I'm going out there.

HG: Okay ...

DIANE: Don't planes have doors that lead to the outside?

HG: Right. Conflict begins! Rook's running for the door. Julianna?

HEATHER: Strengthening the hull integrity of the plane.

HG: That's a lesser creation. It costs you a DMP. Marsiglio?

EDWARD: Can I make the missile turn against its creators?

HG: Um. Oh dear. You can, yes.

EDWARD: Problem solved. Can we see where it came from?

HG: Not visible through your window at the moment. You are in the cabin of a jet, you know ... Okay. Some NPCs do mysterious actions that you're not aware of. Rook, you reach the door, shove it open, and — there's not actually an outside to go, you know.

DIANE: I'm going on the wing. It's just a short hop.

HG: What's your Aspect?

DIANE: Four.

HG: This is not a problem. As you're leaping, you catch sight of the helicopter that fired the missile. Presumably it's been waiting for you. It's got two missile holders, one empty, a pilot, and a handsome young fellow holding a machine gun.

DIANE: I can take them.

HG: Then, of course, there's the other helicopter, which you can't see at the moment, but which you can hear on the other side of the plane. And a great deal of wind in your hair.

EDWARD: Okay, problem not taken care of. But problem partially alleviated!

HG: The missile is beginning to curve in a great arc back towards the helicopter that fired it. Marsiglio, it's your action.

MARSIGLIO: Stewardess! More wine!

HG: ... Right. Rook, the man with the machine gun is leaning out the side. His gun's tracking you as you leap; there's a spray of bullets fanning out from it. Julianna, your action.

HEATHER: If Marsiglio thinks the problem's taken care of, it's not. I'm going to the door. And pumping my senses up a notch with an AMP.

HG: The helicopter pilot's swerving towards the missile as it streaks back towards the copter. Rook, he's shouting, "The ones you want are over there!" And you land neatly on the wing. No doubt your balance is perfect, too. You can hear another missile launch, from the other side of the plane.

DIANE: Decisions, decisions. I can pinpoint its location pretty accurately, right?

HG: Yah.

DIANE: I'm going to backflip off the wing and kick that missile out of the way.

HG: ... First, that's more than Aspect 4.

DIANE: 6?

HG: [*flips to the Aspect Miracle Index on p. 89*] Looks about right. Okay, it's a hard miracle — you realize that that'll leave you in midair, right?

DIANE: Okay, so I use the kick to knock myself back to the plane's other wing.

HG: Got it. The whole plane dips and wobbles as you kick off; the bullets spatter off the hull, seconds behind your path. Marsiglio?

EDWARD: If the plane's going to start jolting about...I locate a parachute with rapid efficiency.

HG: Rook, you're in midair above the plane when you notice the first missile turning around — it's arcing back towards the plane again.

EDWARD: Some days, you just can't get rid of a missile.

HG: Julianna, you see, um, much the same thing. And a stray bullet from earlier wings past your ear.

HEATHER: I affirm its strength of purpose in its mission to destroy that helicopter!

HG: Lesser creation?

DIANE: It's like pinball!

HEATHER: Yah, lesser creation.

HG: Rook, the second helicopter is outfitted much like the first. You can see others in the distance, too — it looks like they weren't sure exactly where the plane'd come out of the Chancel. There's no passenger in the second one, though; I mean, the second person on it has edged his way out along the strut. As your feet come down towards the missile, he leaps for you; the rotor scissors through the space just ahead of and behind his neck. You manage to hit the missile with both feet and kick it down towards the ground, but this guy is fast — he'll be on you before you flip back to the plane.

ROOK: What kind of suicidal idiot is he? [*as Diane*] Hell. I'm not going to stand on an armed missile that's just been jolted and fight him; I'm heading back to the plane, defending myself en route.

HG: With what level of Aspect?

ROOK: I don't know. Level 3, Penetration 2. Normal miracle.

HG: Gotcha. The man with the gun is firing at Julianna. Marsiglio, you have a parachute on. What next?

EDWARD: Going after the others. Much as I'd like to abandon ship, I need the other two alive to save my Estate!

HG: Clouds begin to gather heavily in the empty sky. Julianna? You're being fired at, by the way.

HEATHER: I have to use Aspect to dodge them, anyway; I might as well make it good. I'm going to grab the top of the door and flip myself up to cling to the plane above the door.

HG: That's ... pretty improbable.

HEATHER: Then it should fit fine under Aspect 3! For 2 AMPS.

HG: ... If you like. Rook, the man's fists are like lightning, almost impossible to block. He's better than you are — at the moment, at least. He's trying to press you hard enough that you'll miss the plane, which is looking awfully likely. Someone's praying to you.

DIANE: Yah, um, right, busy signal on that prayer, okay? This guy has got to have some way to survive. I'm kicking up to level 5, Penetration 1 — a hard miracle of Aspect — to get a clinch on him from behind. That's my last two AMPS; I hope he doesn't have Spirit 2.

I didn't know when I wrote her up that Rook would be a combat character. I didn't find out until the session when Marsiglio told her, "Hey, the fight's over," and she answered, "Just 'cause they're dead?"

—Diane Firth

HG: Julianna, the bullets start curving up after you as you pull yourself out of their way. That reminds you of something, but you're not sure what. I'm altering the order of action; you get to go next.

HEATHER: [*philosophically*] Maybe my Rite of Holy Fire will protect me from hitting the ground at terminal velocity. I'm shoving myself away from the plane into free-fall with a mundane action and spending an AMP to hype up my memory with my miraculous action.

HG: How's this? That is a trick that the Power of Guns is known for.

HEATHER: The Hell? We're under attack by the Power of Guns? I shout that, I think. [*as Julianna*] The Hell? We're under attack by the Power of Guns?

HG: The first missile wavers in the sky. It seems confused. The sky finishes storming over; in seconds, it's gone from clear and bright to dark and ominous. Marsiglio, you hear Julianna's yell and see the bullets curving down after her as she falls.

MARSIGLIO: This is just unacceptable.

DIANE: You idiots. It's a Deceiver-shard.

MARSIGLIO: Yet it has just become more so. Insight strikes! My muse has spoken from afar!

HG: What exactly are you doing, Marsiglio?

EDWARD: I'm pumping up the volume of my lungs and … do I know the name of the Power of Guns?

HG: You've met, socially. [*The* HG *attempts to come up with a name rapidly.*] Roger Eber … Roger Eeb.

MARSIGLIO: In Roger Eeb's name, get us out of this blasted mess! [*as Edward*] I'm spending 4 AMPS to yell really loudly.

HG: Fair enough. Rook, you get your clinch. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to help — you're still falling, only now you're falling with a struggling man in your arms. His survival plan, if any, is not obvious.

DIANE: Hey, can we have the missile explode around now?

HG: … Sure.

DIANE: I'm going to spend 2 DMPS to make the explosion eternal — to freeze it in its moment of transcendent glory. I want to land on it.

HG: I'll have to come back to you on that. Julianna, you're falling from the sky, without a convenient explosion to land on. On the up side, the bullets seem to lose their malevolence and stop chasing you; Roger, or the Deceiver wearing his skin, is otherwise occupied trying to knock the pilot out of the compartment. What do you want to do?

HEATHER: I'm shifting into the mythic world and grabbing a double handful of the nearest wind spirit.

HG: Um, slight problem. Sylphs — air spirits — are about as tangible and sturdy as, well, the air. Your double handful is really just about enough to goose them really badly.

HEATHER: Can I do a preservation on their structural strength just before grabbing hold?

HG: Um, no, still. I mean, you can, but that'll just keep their structural strength from decaying, it won't protect the structure itself.

HEATHER: Damn it, a lesser creation then. I'm going to buy my way up to Duchess and then you'll be sorry.

HG: [*grins*] Okay. I'll be nice and let you shift perceptions for free. A third DMP goes the way of the dodo as you grab the tails of two wind spirits and hang precariously in midair. The indecisive missile, that's been wobbling back and forth, gives up and explodes; the wash of heat singes your eyebrows and hair.

HEATHER: Curse you, Excrucians!

HG: The pilot of that helicopter pretty much just struggles to keep from being forced out the window; the helicopter, without his hands on the controls, begins listing vaguely in the direction of the plane. Marsiglio, you're in a position to see this, including Julianna improbably suspended in space with her hands outstretched like, um, some kind of actor gathering applause; what's your next move?

EDWARD: Oh, my eyes are fixed on the battle in the helicopter cockpit. [*as Marsiglio*] It does my heart good to see such falling out among the foe. [*as Edward*] Julianna can't possibly just hang around in the air forever doing nothing. I'm a bit ticked about the missile not following the game plan …

HG: For reference, Deceivers do have several ways to confuse the missile as to its target, which would render both your and Julianna's miracles moot.

EDWARD: Right, then. I've seen enough from the door; I'm going to hit the cockpit and take the plane down.

HG: You're over the ocean.

EDWARD: Not all the way down. I just want to give Julianna somewhere to fall to.

HG: Okay. Rook, the missile explodes in a brilliant wave of light and debris — which freezes, elegantly, into a still-frame shot of, um, frozen plumes of flame and shards of metal. Hold on a sec. [*thinks, then flips through her notes*] You're about five feet away from a perfect landing when the bit just beneath you turns all explosive and gruesome again.

DIANE: What? It shouldn't be affected by my Auctoritas, should it?

HG: Nope.

DIANE: Then … oh, Hell. I'm in his Auctoritas, aren't I? I shove him away hard before I fall out of the cloud entirely.

HG: Heat. Fire. Steam. Shards of metal banging into your sides and skimming into your ribcage. Rook loses a Deadly wound level. For what it's worth, so does the other guy.

DIANE: Do I get out of range in time?

HG: I'll get back to you on that.

DIANE: Mean.

HG: Julianna, you're just barely stable, the wind spirits whipping about, trying to get you to let go. The pilot of the helicopter is shoved free and falls; after a moment's flailing, he adjusts his position into a swan dive. A cloud is beginning to coalesce below him, directly in his course. Speaking of clouds, it's beginning to rain. Your action, then Marsiglio's?

JULIANNA: Mush!

HG: I don't think wind spirits obey voice commands.

HEATHER: I don't know. I can't think of anything.

HG: Okay. I'll come back to you after Edward, since Julianna can probably think faster than any of us mortals. Marsiglio?

EDWARD: The cockpit has a pretty wide-angled view, right?

HG: Tell me what you want to see, I'll tell you if you see it.

I came very close to naming a major movie critic the Power of Guns. This is why one should always have some spare names handy at the beginning of a session.
—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God

It's easy to forget little established details in a heavy miraculous combat. That's why missiles and such often explode only when someone remembers that they should.
—Diane Firth

Fortunately, in an animistic world, that's only right and proper.
—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God

The first time Rook wanted to toughen herself up with a creation miracle, I had to stop and think. It's legal, but it's also a lot like a free Gift. Then I realized that she's much more likely to do a lesser creation than a major creation, and so I decided what makes it lesser: she's buying herself a finite bit of eternity, and at the end of the scene, it runs out. If she ever puts the MPs together for a major creation of personal durability, I'll let it stand until something happens to disenchant her.
—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God

EDWARD: The guy swan-diving into the cloud.
HG: Sure.
EDWARD: I want to suck him into the jet engine.
HG: Pardon?
EDWARD: I'm going to use the Rite of the Last Trump, turn 4 RMPs into an extra AMP, and wheel the jet around to suck him into the engine.
HG: While a Noble can certainly whip a jet plane around and use it as a precision vacuum, I'm afraid that you'd need at least a deep miracle — you're only Aspect 1. You want to convert another eight miracle points to AMPs?
EDWARD: Harrumph. No. Okay, I'm going to bet my shirt that the guy diving into clouds is the guy who made the sudden storm, and I'm going to turn the skies against him.
HG: Lesser Creation of Treachery, again?
EDWARD: Yup. Penetration 1, so I'll need a DMP.
HG: You don't need Penetration; there's no one within Auctoritas range of the clouds up above.
EDWARD: Well, I was thinking that if they were going to strike him down with lightning or something, it would need Penetration.
HG: Ah. That's up to you; you can just make them generically turn on him, in which case what happens is out of your hands, or you can make them turn on him and blast him with lightnings — assuming that they're on his side right now — in which case Penetration is useful.
EDWARD: I want the lightning.
HG: Gotcha. Julianna?
HEATHER: Okay. This is tricky. Can I preserve the integrity of the cloud that the guy is falling into, to make it resist miracles that make it do uncloudlike things? Like, I dunno, cushioning falling Excrucian-shards?
HG: I'll have to think about whether you can do that in general. For now, sure, I'll let it slide. Rook, you shove the Deceiv — er, the Excrucian — away just in time; you're almost at the bottom of the explosive cloud when it stabilizes enough for you to hook one hand onto a plume of fire and a foot on a white-hot shard of metal. You're at risk of searing through your hand and foot, though, and taking another Deadly wound at any moment. The Excrucian, meanwhile, turns sideways in the air and vanishes.
HEATHER: It's Grommet Claus! [*see p. 271, describing their first adventure*]
ROOK: Ow. Ow ow ow. Ow. [*as Diane*] I'm going to toughen myself up with another Lesser Creation of Eternity. And about bloody time, too.
HG: Okay! As usual, that costs 2 DMPs and'll last through the scene. Julianna, Marsiglio, cloud guy executes a perfect roll and twist, lands with both feet on the cloud, and then passes right through its bouncy surface with a startled yelp and a few trails of vapor.
JULIANNA: Ha!
HG: Moments later, a jagged bolt of lightning dashes vigorously from the clouds way above and spears right into him.
MARSIGLIO: Vengeance is mine! [*as Edward*] Only, in Italian.
DIANE: We must get you a phrase book.
HG: The Power of Guns is at the controls; he skirls the helicopter just barely over the jet's surface towards the other side of the plane. Come to think of it, between Julianna's enhanced senses and Marsiglio's cockpit view, you probably both notice that there's stuff going on over there, too. Marsiglio?
EDWARD: Is cloud guy dead?
HG: He's obviously lost his last Deadly wound level. Blackened, twitching, stunned, falling at great speed towards the ocean surface below — but you can't be sure he's done for, if you know what I mean.
EDWARD: I have enormous faith in Rook's ability to handle the other helicopter, particularly since its pilot doesn't seem to be doing anything worthy of note. Hey, is this other guy wearing Jameson Black's skin?
HG: Sadly, even if he were, Marsiglio has not read NOBILIS and would not be familiar with the name. [*See p. 110-112.*]
EDWARD: I'm still piloting the plane downwards. For my miraculous action, um. I don't want to just electrocute him again. That'd be dull. Can I steal his clouds? I mean, not just make them turn on him, make them actively our allies?
HG: Under the circumstances, where they're an Excrucian weapon against you, I'd have to say "yes."
MARSIGLIO: Surely, dear clouds, you realize that Excrucians are feckless and roguish; would you not rather serve a kinder, gentler master?
HG: Mm-hm. Julianna?
HEATHER: I want to sort of paraglide down and kick the git.
HG: That'll be your last 2 AMPs, please.
JULIANNA: Creator, please let this be the extent of our enemy's malice.
HG: Rook, two more helicopters are coming into missile range; and the one from the other side of the plane is moving into position behind you.
DIANE: Did I meet Roger Eeb? I mean, the real one?
HG: Probably.
DIANE: Marsiglio shouted the truth of the name pretty loudly. I think I'm not worried about that helicopter. I'm going to run up the frozen explosion and leap to the rotor of the second helicopter — the one turn-sideways guy leapt out of.
HG: Onto the rotor.
DIANE: Yup! I can do that; I've got celestial Aspect and I'm as tough as nails.
HG: Right. You — just Rook — hear a thump of two feet just above the pilot's compartment on the plane behind you. Roger Eeb discharges his helicopter's second missile towards one of the copters coming into view. The partially fried cloud Deceiver makes a convulsive gesture with his hands and the wind spirits that Julianna's holding dissolve into nothingness with two high-pitched screams just before her feet hit his ribcage full-force.
JULIANNA: Glack. [*as Heather*] Just level with us, Maddy — everyone's going to end up in the ocean, aren't we?
HG: [*smiles*] What's your action? After breaking his ribs, that is.
HEATHER: I, um, is he still moving?
HG: He looks to be in the very process of giving up the ghost.

The clouds Marsiglio converted to our cause showed up in a later story and helped us out. I thought that was pretty cool.
—Heather Sullivan

HEATHER: Thank Heaven. Is there any chance I can preserve whatever potence in him makes him think he can land on clouds?

HG: I, um. [THINKS] You can try. If it's a part of him, then it's exempt from your Domain; if it's something he did, then you can preserve the strength of the effect itself.

HEATHER: I'm going to try and ride his corpse into a low-lying cloud over the ocean. If he's dead, I don't have to worry about his Auctoritas and spending an MP, right?

HG: Right.

HEATHER: Then that's my plan.

HG: Rook, Roger Eeb's missile blows up one of the two new helicopters. You land neatly on the rotor of the one you were jumping for, and whirl around and around and around.

ROOK: Whee! [*as Heather*] Er. I snap it and leap for the next helicopter.

I kept thinking, "See? See? Marsiglio's right! The universe is out to get him!"
—Edward Jordan

HG: This is pushing the boundaries of what you can do without miracle points, but okay. Marsiglio, bare hands rip open the metal above the cockpit and a wiry man drops in through the hole. Turn-sideways guy, for reference.

MARSIGLIO: I am surrounded! My enemies are everywhere!

HG: Clouds loom downwards towards the other helicopters coming up from the distance. The sky above the plane begins to clear. Marsiglio, it is your turn.

EDWARD: Much as I would like to do something really clever, I think I claw his eyes out.

HG: Julianna, you're rapidly approaching a low-lying cloud, but haven't gotten there yet. Any extra actions?

HEATHER: Hanging on for dear life about covers it.

HG: Rook, you land neatly on another helicopter rotor. This is the last one currently in range, although there are others in the skies.

DIANE: If I break the rotor and jump back, can I make it to the plane?

HG: Not without AMPS. There's improbable and then there's egregious.

DIANE: Curses. Okay, I drop from the rotor to smash into the cockpit; time to take the controls.

HG: Okay. Marsiglio, this is unstoppable force meets unstoppable force time. You don't have the AMPS to muster the slightest defense against this guy; on the other hand, he apparently doesn't quite realize that your claw is effective Aspect 7. Your hand sweeps clean through his face, cutting both eyes open; his hand casually knocks you through the cockpit onto the nose of the plane, in an explosion of glass. It's your action.

EDWARD: I scrabble for a handhold!

HG: Okay. Julianna, you thump neatly onto the cloud, suspended above the ocean by a mass of vapor and a dead body.

HEATHER: I step into Shelley's head again. [*as Julianna*] 'S me. Drop what you're doing again; muster the Chancel's air defense. Hostiles in the sky just outside the border; we may need help fending them off. [*as Heather*] Hey! Clever idea. I'm going to use a deep Realm miracle through her for a quick Lesser Change — drastically accelerating the scramble speed and airspeed to the Chancel border. 2 SMPS, 2 RMPS.

EDWARD: Nice!

HG: Okay. You can expect reinforcements any minute, then.

DIANE: Let's just survive until then!

HG: Rook, you're swinging down into the cockpit when a wave of blackness and emptiness explodes to fill it. Like, um, visualize a chunk of outer space sort of blossoming into existence from the cockpit outwards.

DIANE: Do I know the name of the Power of Space?

HG: Nope. But even if you did, sound doesn't travel in a vacuum.

DIANE: [*moves her lips like Rook shouting profanity in a vacuum*] I could, actually, invoke the Truth of the Name via the mythic world, but, um, I guess not in this case .... Wait. Rook's Eternal. Does a vacuum even affect me?

HG: [*grinning*] No.

DIANE: Thank you, Heaven! Someone in here is creating ... nothing; and since these things seem to hold two people, they're both going out the far door.

HG: For reference, what level Aspect, what level Penetration?

DIANE: I guess it better be two and two — I'm in both their Auctorita.

HG: Fair enough. Julianna, Shelley hears and obeys. What's next?

HEATHER: I'm done, for now.

HG: Marsiglio, the blinded guy's eyes begin knitting themselves back together. He doesn't take any obvious action, though. You're slipping off the nose of the plane, one hand scrabbling for a handhold and the other casually slicing up the plane as it gropes around.

EDWARD: I am Noble! I do not panic! Rather, I attempt to cut open a hole in the plane's nose big enough to grab with my other hand. And I hope that the reason he didn't do anything is that he was burning AMPS to heal.

HG: Rook, you manage to knock one of them into the far door hard enough to shove it open and leave him scrambling for a hold. The other one, though, casually grabs your arm as you push her and twists, slamming you into the instrument panel. Your action?

DIANE: Is Eeb doing anything?

HG: Um, I'd forgotten Eeb. I think he's angling for a shot. You're not making it easy.

DIANE: He's the bloody Power of Guns! Sort of.

HG: Okay, point. A bullet scissors between your arm and body, slamming neatly into the woman's temple.

DIANE: I take credit for it.

HG: [*laughs*] Okay. Your action?

DIANE: I experimentally bump up to Aspect 3, Penetration 1, wrestling with her.

HG: Oops, pushed your luck too far. Your moves are still technically precise, and nobody's Auctoritas is going to interfere with your ability to defend yourself, but you feel the strength ebbing out of you every time you move against her. Someone in the cockpit's Spirit 2. Julianna, anything you want to do yet?

It took me a few stories of play to understand just how powerful Spirit was, and then I promised myself I would buy some someday.
—Diane Firth

HEATHER: Nope.

HG: Marsiglio, you think you have a handhold. Turn-sideways guy throws the controls out of whack; the plane begins

accelerating downwards. Then he bounds out onto the nose and scissors his hand down to knock you off. Your action?

EDWARD: I slice his hand off at the wrist.

HG: Rook, it's a standoff so far, but the helicopter's controls aren't doing too well in the vacuum, and it's spread far enough to keep the rotor from doing any good. The chopper's falling from the sky, and it isn't going to be flyable for much longer in any case. Eeb picks off the guy hanging from the door with a clean shot; he falls into the sea. Your action?

ROOK: Abandon ship! [*as Diane*] I'm going to try and leap out hard enough that Eeb can pick me up.

HG: You leap! Marsiglio, you slice off the guy's hand; it's already falling off the wrist as it hits your forehead with the force of a jackhammer. Your choice: lose a Deadly wound level, or fall.

EDWARD: I'll take the Deadly, oh vicious Madeline; it'd be terribly embarrassing to lose my private jet to this rabble.

DIANE: Our private jet.

EDWARD: Details, details.

HG: A blinding pain blossoms in your forehead; the ragged edge of the plane digs into your hand; but somehow you manage to hold on. And just about then, a hailstone the size of a television set plunges into the Excrucian-shard's forehead. He totters.

EDWARD: My glorious treacherous storm! I cut off whatever I can reach of his foot.

HG: He falls!

EDWARD: Yes!

DIANE: Big deal. I got him to fall, and look where he is now.

EDWARD: Mean. [*smiles*]

HG: Rook, Roger's helicopter is swooping towards you — Excrucian to the rescue! — but a tendril of vacuum is washing out towards it. You're not sure that by the time it reaches you, it won't be out of, well, lift.

DIANE: Look, I'm pretty short on miracle points here. I swim really hard through the air. Kick kick kick!

HG: And the Chancel's air defense force, majestic, glorious, and extremely heavily armed fades into view at the Chancel exit point!

JULIANNA: Hurrah!

HG: Clods of hail pummel turn-sideways guy as he falls towards the ocean; he's pretty limp at this point. Unfortunately, Marsiglio, the jet's also heading almost straight down, and you're clinging to a cut in its nose by one hand. Your action?

EDWARD: What did I do with the original pilot?

HG: Your choice. Probably sent him back into the cabin.

EDWARD: Then I don't have to steer the plane, just keep it from slamming into the water before he gets back to the controls, right?

HG: Assuming he's desperate enough to go back into a cockpit where an Excrucian-shard and a Power were just fighting, yes.

EDWARD: I yell for him to do this thing. Converting some RMPs into an AMP to yell that loud enough for him to hear.

HG: You don't think he can pull the jet out in time.

EDWARD: I have a plan!

It's interesting to compare these events to the flower rite against Strength a couple stories ago. That story didn't have a pitched battle to bleed off all our miracle points early, just a steady horrible drain of resources and energy as the net closed about us piece by piece. It took us a while before we even saw our first Excrucian-shard.
—Heather Sullivan

HG: Okay. Mark off 4 RMPs and 1 AMP for a level 3 Aspect miracle. Rook, you hit a strut of Roger Eeb's helicopter a few moments before the vacuum reaches the rotor, and catch hold. The helicopter with the wounded woman at the controls is still falling, but she hasn't been shot again — Roger's been too busy maneuvering to save you. Any plans?

ROOK: Ally-up! [*as Diane*] I'm going to swing up and grab the controls. I'm probably a much better pilot than this twonk.

HG: Marsiglio, you're almost to the water.

EDWARD: I can cut anything with my finger at effective Aspect 7, right? I mean, I'm not limited by reason — this is "Impossible for Anyone" territory cutting, right?

HG: Yes.

EDWARD: I narrow my eyes, strain to reach past the end of the nose, and just before we slam into the water, I use my claw to rip open the sea.

HG: ... I'll get back to you. Rook, you jerk the helicopter back in a complicated and improbable maneuver just as Roger Eeb nails the last remaining shard in the heart. Several of the Chancel's planes are heading for you; the others are heading towards the Excrucian reinforcements. Any action?

DIANE: Darn right! I pick up Eeb by the neck and chuck him into the sea.

HG: And, behind you, Marsiglio tears open the sea at its seams. The water washes back, startled sharks and fish falling from its sides, opening a pocket of air just big enough for the pilot to level off!

MARSIGLIO: I rock.

HG: Okay. I think I'll cut scene there.

EDWARD: [*grumbled*] The Excrucians were never this organized when they went after Julianna's Estate.

HG: Maybe whomever's responsible for this Breakthrough didn't need all the available shards.

HEATHER: Oh, there's a pleasant thought. I assume someone swings by and picks me up?

EDWARD: Would we leave you sitting on a dead Excrucian on a cloud high above a parted ocean?

HEATHER: Well, I suppose Rook wouldn't.

EDWARD: There you go.

Worship the claw.
—Edward Jordan

Geek.
—Diane Firth

Interlude: Faith

Time does not pass normally when you are dead. I did not sleep, or "miss" time, or enter a daze; nevertheless, the next thing that happened was over forty-six hours later.

I coalesced at the base of the stairs, hovering above a chalk outline of my flesh, and two creatures faced me. In all physical respects save one, they looked human, but they were not human. I did not have to be dead to see that. Their souls were like torchfires, casting echoes of their nature across the room.

One — her frame was slight and her movements fluid, and all the strength in the world converged within her soul. I do not mean that she was strong. I mean that she was Strength. She was the principle of integrity and power made flesh.

The other, with his wild hair and his burning eyes — I named him Treachery. His left forefinger was fleshless, a barren spear of bone.

I found it strange that two such varied genii would visit me together, but it was not for me to pass judgment on the world. "Hello?" I asked them.

Treachery spoke first. "Dear child," he said, "my name is Marsiglio Tendi, and you belong to me. Through some betrayal or deceit, you have become a part of my estate; for traitors and their victims are in my keeping. No one in all the worlds will dispute my claim to you. No one will protect you, should you incur my anger. Bearing these consequential facts in mind, I ask that you tell me how you became one of mine, and save me the effort of divining it through other means."

"I am not yours," I said. My voice was clear and the words came drifting up from some place deep within my soul. "I am my own; and if I am anyone's, I am the servant of Genseric Dace."

Treachery hooked his bone finger into my arm and dragged it towards my palm. For the first time since my death, I experienced pain, as the substance of my soul gave way. The pain did not frighten me.

"Tell me," he said.

I would have resisted, but Treachery's gaze awakened a serpent within my heart, a coil of anger and betrayal, and my secret poured free. "Benjamin. He pushed me. Down the stairs. I trusted him. I would have carried his child. But I wanted a job and just a little bit of freedom. He killed me."

It could have broken me, the emotions he raised. It did not. The first tear had hardly broken from my eye when the woman who was Strength looked up; and suddenly it did not matter what Benjamin had done. The deeds of others were as nothing. It only mattered that I had acquitted myself well.

In that moment, I loved her; but not so much as I loved the man I saw upon my death, whose name I now knew to be Genseric Dace.

—from the Thought-Record of Faith Bernham

As time goes by, I become increasingly convinced that the root of all strife is the human desire for vengeance. No one ever thinks of themselves as striking the first blow, not really. Their victim has done something to hurt them. Or the world has done something to hurt them. Or, perhaps, God has simply done them wrong by placing them in a world where such acts are necessary. People who say, honestly, "I am hurting you because I want to hurt you" — they are as rare as hen's teeth, and society calls them mad.

I hurt people because I want to hurt people. I am honest. But I am also enamored of vengeance, for it is bound up in my Estate. I am Strife.

Strife pays its debts.
—the Bright Lady Ada Willamette, Domina of Strife, as written by Madeline Rush

Scene 4: Treason and Violence Go Awry

HG: Okay. You arrive at Washington, D.C. The Marquis of Transportation has a small airfield somewhere in the area that Nobilis have access to; you aren't the only ones to come into a major city like D.C. in a plane that looks like it's been to Hell and back. Naturally, all fees are waived for Inquisitors You get your wounds cleaned and patched up, although I'm afraid they won't heal for a while. What do you do from there?

DIANE: Does Rook have an agent in D.C.?

HG: Indeed. Someone named Hope Carstens, rough-looking fellow, loyal as the day is bright.

EDWARD: Loyalty. Pah.

ROOK: Got someone in town. Watches for odd activity, talks to the spirits — you know.

MARSIGLIO: Dear cousin, I'm quite able to do my own investigating.

ROOK: How, 'xactly?

MARSIGLIO: I can … talk to contacts, bribe officials, and such. A man of my caliber should be able to pick it up as I go.

ROOK: Gotcha. Hey, I just realized, I've got a contact. Want ta talk to him?

MARSIGLIO: Don't patronize me, *Viscount*.

JULIANNA: Give him a call, Rook. Do you need to borrow my cell?

ROOK: [*a bit embarrassed*] Probably. I was in an explosion. A little one.

HEATHER: I fish it out of my purse and give it to her.

HG: What's the password in D.C.?

DIANE: I say "fish bread," and he's supposed to say, "Name three things Jesus really liked."

HG: That's only two.

DIANE: Rook's not much of a Biblical scholar.

HG: Glick.

DIANE: So okay, I dial up, someone answers and says, "Hello?" and I say "fish bread," at which point a wrong number would be really embarrassing, and then he says …

HG: Name three things Jesus really liked.

ROOK: 'Ey, Hope. Need a place to stay, reservations for three at a massive cool restaurant, and the scoop on Excrucian activity in town.

HOPE *(as voiced by Madeline, the* HG*)*: Hi, Rook. I don't know about any Excrucian activity, per se, but I can get you my notes on recent events. How 'bout I book you a room at the Watergate Hotel and meet you at its restaurant at six?

DIANE: What time is it now?

HG: About four thirty.

ROOK: Beautiful. I'll see you there. [*as Diane*] I'll hang up. [*as Rook, to the others*] Watergate Hotel 'kay with you?

HG: Marsiglio, you remember hearing something about the Watergate Hotel. Something about it being the site of a successful flower rite 'round about the end of Nixon's term in office —

EDWARD: Gosh, could there have been a connection?

HG: — but, more importantly, that these events extinguished the spirit of the place. All that's left is a gaping void, a spot of non-Creation that looks like a hotel. A hungry void. Nasty, angry, that sort of thing.

EDWARD: Oh, excellent.

HEATHER: Pardon?

EDWARD: Marsiglio's happy. He gets to twit Rook after her patronizing him earlier.

DIANE: Don't let it go to your head, Ed.

MARSIGLIO: Dearest sister, glory of my life, don't you think that perhaps it would be better to meet this "Hope" of yours somewhere that isn't a death trap?

ROOK: Eh?

MARSIGLIO: It just seems that dining in a gray, Excrucian-made void full of anger and hatred would tend to suck the conviviality out of the occasion.

ROOK: Eh?

MARSIGLIO: [*after a moment of floundering*] Watergate bad.

ROOK: Oh.

JULIANNA: Would your Hope have known this, Rook?

HG: [*as Diane looks at her*] Probably.

ROOK: Hm. [*as Diane*] I call him back.

HG: Hello?

Oddly enough, Viscount is the feminine of Viscount. Or so Diane asserts.
—Edward Jordan

I eventually figured out — well, Madeline told me — that the prayer Rook didn't answer during the air battle was from Hope. Rook's been kicking herself ever since. —Diane Firth

ROOK: Fish bread.
HG: Hope gives the counterpassword.
ROOK: Watergate, right?
HOPE: That's right.
DIANE: Is there any tension in his voice?
HG: Not the least.
DIANE: I mean, any sign that he's nervous about betraying us, or anything?
HG: Nope.
DIANE: I hang up. [*as Rook*] They got to him.
JULIANNA: How do you figure that?
ROOK: Hope knows the mythic world 'round here. He's got to know 'bout the Watergate. How come he's not nervous?
JULIANNA: Because he's been Deceiver-brainwashed.
EDWARD: I'm doing a lesser divination; I want to find out just how badly this Hope character is compromised.
HG: He doesn't turn up on the divination.
EDWARD: He's an Anchor.
HG: Or he hasn't betrayed anyone recently.
MARSIGLIO: He's been Anchored.
ROOK: Not by me, he's not!
JULIANNA: Never mind him, then. Let's just criss-cross D.C. until we hit somewhere where Marsiglio's Estate seems particularly pained; then home in?
ROOK: I will not nevermind him. He's mine. I want him back.
HG: How do you plan to go about that?
DIANE: Give me a few minutes.
HEATHER: While she thinks about that, I'm getting us a car.
EDWARD: I turn the ground crew against their oppressive superiors.
HG: Okay, the ground crew turns viciously against their bosses, staging sit-ins and waving planes to the wrong places. Mechanics sneak into administrator offices with wrenches.
JULIANNA: Some people have sane Powers in their Familia, you know.
MARSIGLIO: It pleases my sister to indulge in whining.
DIANE: I shift perceptions to the mythic world and call up Hope again.
HG: Ring. Ring. "Hello?"
DIANE: Okay. If I'm right, there's a spirit of our phone connection sort of stretching between my phone and his. I'm going to take a directional reading on it, using my buff Aspect 4 brain to memorize the heading precisely.
HG: Oh, okay. Gotcha.
ROOK: [*gruffly*] Hi, is this Domino's?
HG: There's a pause. Then Hope says, and his tone is old and mocking, "Fish bread."
DIANE: I hang up and hop into the driver's seat of the car Julianna has so thoughtfully brought us.
HEATHER: Er, I'm in the driver's seat. I mean, if I've brought it back by the plane.
ROOK: 'Ey, move. I'm better.
EDWARD: I'm an excellent driver.
JULIANNA: As you like, sister. But you get to explain your age to the cops.
DIANE: I'm going as close to a straight line as I can manage, driving all out. If any cops pull me over, I stop nicely, get out, beat them up and take their guns away, and then get back to driving.
HG: Two cops and a lot of D.C. later, Marsiglio feels a sudden intensification in the pain of Treachery's desecration. You're coming close to the site of the flower rite.
MARSIGLIO: Urgh.
DIANE: "Mm?" I wonder politely as I dodge a pedestrian who somehow does not understand that the sidewalks are for drivers.
MARSIGLIO: Stop. Stop.
ROOK: We're not there yet.
MARSIGLIO: Close enough. Can track the rite. [*as Edward*] I'm pulling together some self-mastery here and banishing the pain from my mind. Taking a deep breath. [*as Marsiglio*] Obviously, the enemy is keeping your Hope close at hand. We must use caution. Strategy! These are our watchwords.
ROOK: Aw, hell. [*as Diane*] I brake until we're stopped, and then hop out. [*as Rook*] So, talk. What's the plan?
MARSIGLIO: We abandon the car before the police find us. You, Rook, continue after Hope on foot. With luck, it is a trap, and your triggering it shall divert the enemy's attention. I, and Julianna with me, shall trace the damage to Treachery to its source. We shall meet at yonder Korean grocer when these tasks are complete.
ROOK: [*dubiously*] 'f it's a trap, I want Julianna.
MARSIGLIO: Naturally, dear child. This is understandable. Still, we all must bend with the whims of circumstance. You are the mighty Rook; I am merely Marsiglio! I have the greater need of aid.
JULIANNA: It pleases my brother to affect humility when he wants something.
EDWARD: I make a face at her.
ROOK: You are just Marsiglio, I 'spose. [*as Diane*] I vault off in the direction of Hope, running along rooftops and fencetops and the like.
MARSIGLIO: The pain is blinding. Our enemy lies this way. [*pointing*] I shall lead.
HG: Okay, one at a time. Rook, you're on top of an apartment building when you hear a man screaming. Doesn't sound like Hope, but from its location — one floor down, a few rooms to the right — it could be the other end of the phone call.
DIANE: I'll get right over it and break through the ceiling, landing in the room in a hail of rubble.
HG: You crash through the floor and into a room full of men and woman with guns. Over by the television set, a woman you recognize as Ada Willamette [*pp. 261–262*] is administering correctional behavioral therapy to a burly fellow with a bad haircut.
DIANE: "Correctional behavioral therapy?"
HG: It involves a great deal of pain. Your entrance seems to have confused the room, but a great number of the guns are coming up to point in your direction. Meanwhile, Marsiglio, Julianna. Treachery's pain has led you straight to the base of a set of tenement stairs, where police tape surrounds the chalk outline of a body. Since you have Aspect 1, I suppose your deductive skills are sharp enough to figure out that the dead person fell — from the position of the outline, I mean.

Breaking in through the ceiling isn't always the right solution. Who knew? —Diane Firth

OPPOSITE:
Excrucian Deceiver
by Rik Martin



When I let Marsiglio examine a lie with a lesser divination, it metaphysically classified lies as small treacheries. In doubt, of course, say yes, and unusual circumstances came into play — but do I let this ruling stand as a general principle?

I need a book on moral philosophy.

—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God

EDWARD: Aha. I hammer on the nearest door.

HG: The peephole opens briefly, then closes. There's no response.

MARSIGLIO: I suppose we do look rather a mess, even with wounds cleaned. Sigh. [*louder*] Please, sir or madam, we must speak to you; our business is important and our manners are impeccable. We pose no threat.

HG: Tentatively, a woman's voice says, "What do you want?"

EDWARD: I put all Treachery's charm in my voice and say, [*as Marsiglio*] We are special investigators with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, ma'am, following up on some details regarding the recent murder. We were informed that you knew the victim?

HG: The door pulls open a bit, but it's still chained. "I knew her, yup. Nastiest bitch I ever met. What do you need to know?"

EDWARD: I casually flick my claw through the chain, fast enough that she doesn't have a chance to focus on it and realize what she's seeing, and then open the door all the way. [*as Marsiglio*] Thank you for letting us in. Why don't we start with basic biographical data? Her name, age, the nature of your relationship, the things about her you find so nasty?

HG: She blinks a couple times at the chain and the door, but then seems to decide that she must have in fact let you in. [*as the woman*] Faith Bernham. What, they didn't give you her name? I don't know how old she was. Late 20s? Early 30s? She was a friend, I guess. I don't really remember why. I mean, I guess she must have been okay, sometimes. But mostly — she … stole things, and … made nasty comments all the time, had a mouth like a sewer, completely sacrilegious, and slept around, and I had this friend once who she scarred with a broken whiskey bottle, and —

MARSIGLIO: Sounds like my kind of woman.

WOMAN: Pardon?

MARSIGLIO: Never mind. How did she die?

WOMAN: She fell. [*as* HG] She's lying, you're pretty sure.

EDWARD: Can I sniff out the lie with a lesser divination?

HG: I suppose I'd allow that. She seems to think that Faith was pushed down the stairs, but that whoever did it probably did the world a favor. Rook!

DIANE: Erp.

HG: Lots of guns. Ada Willamette in the corner. What do you do?

DIANE: Well, I figure, it's not polite to do anything about Ada until she makes the first move, and frankly, I'm not sure I'm UP to taking her on. So I figure I'll just deal with the men with guns. [*as Rook*] 'Ey, Ada! [*as Diane*] I'm taking them down. Converting 2 RMPs and 2 SMPs into an AMP so I can put a level of Penetration on the Aspect 4 miracle "taking down a bunch of thugs without a scratch."

HG: I'm willing to believe you can take them all down with a level 4 miracle. Um, any interesting special effects you want to show off?

DIANE: At various points, I suppose I yank them off their feet with strips torn from the carpet, pick one up and use him to knock a bunch of them over, snatch a couple of guns — one for each hand — and spin in the air plugging bullets into all of them, and um —

HG: At that point, Ada finishes up with what she's doing, looks over, and says, "Enough." The tone's chilling, perfectly modulated; it cuts across the thugs, even in their panic and anger, and they go still.

DIANE: I finish the spin and land neatly, finger withdrawing from the trigger. "Why're you here?"

ADA *(as voiced by the* HG*)*: [*quiet and calm*] I'm paying off a debt, Rook. The Cammora asked me to guard a dignitary of some sort. Apparently goes by Hope Carstens. I'm afraid I can't let you have him.

ROOK: Cammora, Hell. He's in 'scrucian hands.

ADA: The term is "Excrucian", Rook, and I'm quite sure you're mistaken.

ROOK: What's the Cammora want?

ADA: I believe it's an ordinary mercantile transaction — someone's offered the local chapterhouse a significant miraculous enhancement. Some Power or other called Genseric Dace.

ROOK: Bloody Hell. Deceivers. 'E's a fricking Deceiver, and you're going to do his work?

ADA: [*meditatively*] I suppose you could explain what you believe his purpose is; then I will evaluate whether interfering with this purpose is worth remaining in debt to the Cammora further. I am not inclined to be generous; you have showered me with rubble and killed many mortal servants of my Estate.

ROOK: He's … he's … it's a blasted *flower rite*, Ada. Against Treachery. [*waves her hands around*]

ADA: And how does Hope Carstens figure into this?

ROOK: … as a distraction. [*glumly*] And a chance f'r y' to accidentally poke one of us with that blade o' yours.

ADA: Excellent. Then we have thwarted his plan. It serves as a distraction no longer. I have not poked anyone with Kottos. You may go about your business, and I will protect Hope against both the Deceiver and yourself.

ROOK: But … but … aw, man!

HG: Marsiglio. Julianna. Talk to me.

EDWARD: I'm going to finish pumping this woman for information. Then I'm going to do the same for everyone else in the building.

HG: From all accounts, Faith was pretty much the most horrible woman this side of Timbuktu. She had a boyfriend, Benjamin, with whom she was living in sin; he's not in at the moment. No one knows quite who killed her, although the general consensus is that someone like that has to have made someone mad enough to murder her.

MARSIGLIO: It is a wonder! Why have I not heard of this Faith before now? I would have claimed her as an Anchor.

JULIANNA: Just what we need, a female you hanging around the Chancel.

MARSIGLIO: We are in agreement!

HG: You're trooping down the stairs when the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. There's something funny about the chalk outline.

EDWARD: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?

HG: Hairs, back of neck, standing up.

EDWARD: Strange. Right. Um …

So Ada has this Abhorrent knife, Kottos. I almost protested once that Maddy would never let one of us have an Abhorrent Weapon. Then I realized that she probably would, if we asked her to work it into the campaign and gave her brain some time to stew over it, and that we wouldn't like the results one bit.

—Diane Firth

HEATHER: I peer at the outline.
HG: Either of you using the Sight?
EDWARD: Oh! Yes.
HG: It doesn't look like Faith's spirit has passed all the way to her next life yet … there's something like a rope, a thread, an anchor, a magical anchor sort of sitting where her body was, a thread trailing off to a sleeping spirit.
EDWARD: Can we rouse it?
HG: Yes.
EDWARD: How?
HG: I don't know. You just can. There's some standard method. Chanting in Latin or something.
HEATHER: We do it, then, I think.
HG: Slowly, as you chant, the spirit forms; a woman, plain and pale, hanging in the air above the site of her death. She peers at you, puzzled, as if she were expecting someone else. "Hello?"
HEATHER: Someone else? Oh, dear.
MARSIGLIO: Dear child, my name is Marsiglio Tendi, and you belong to me.
HEATHER: She belongs to you?
EDWARD: Well, sort of! I mean, she's at the epicenter of a flower rite, so she must have some kind of tie to Treachery. Um, [*as Marsiglio*] You have become part of my Estate, um, through some betrayal or deceit, for all traitors and victims are in my keeping. No one in all the worlds will dispute my claim to you. No one will protect you, should you incur my anger.
HEATHER: Geez, Ed, isn't intimidating a dead woman kind of low?
MARSIGLIO: I ask that you tell me how you became one of mine, and save me the effort of divining it through other means. [*as Edward*] And I'm using a lesser divination to draw the truest answer out of her, assuming that she does fall under my Estate.
HG: You hook deep into her soul with your Estate and draw out words — "I am not yours," she says, "I am my own; and if I am anyone's, I am the servant of Genseric Dace."
EDWARD: [*blinks*] I ask her how she became one of mine, and she answers that she serves this Genseric character?
HG: Yup.
HEATHER: That's probably the treachery, then. I mean, serving Dace.
EDWARD: I think she's resisting. I cut her arm open and ask again.
HG: Still pressuring her miraculously?
EDWARD: Yup. And I'm combining the divination with a little lesser creation push to help her give up whatever this Genseric doesn't want her to.
FAITH *(as voiced by the* HG*)*: Benjamin. He pushed me. Down the stairs. I trusted him. I would have carried his child. But I wanted a job and just a little bit of freedom. He killed me. [*as* HG] Marsiglio's miracle seems to have really gotten to her — from confident and calm a moment ago, she's almost on the verge of breaking.
HEATHER: I give her strength. 1 DMP.
EDWARD: What in the world did you do that for?
HEATHER: [*shrugs*] You make airport ground crews turn traitor, I make weak people turn strong.
EDWARD: Geez. You're so helpful.
HG: She's fading away again.
MARSIGLIO: Wait a second. You're not … you didn't betray someone yourself?
HG: She's gone.
EDWARD: Shouting at the wall, I add, [*as Marsiglio*] I had such high hopes for you! You were supposed to be a proper traitor!
HG: Rook, what's your next move?
DIANE: I'm not fighting the Power of bloody Strife without my Familia at my back. I head back to the Korean grocer.
HG: How 'bout you two?
HEATHER: I think we do the same. We need to think about this.
EDWARD: Yup.
HG: Okay. That's it for the night; same time next week?
VARIOUS: Okay!

Never be afraid to make up a new Simple Rite on the spur of the moment, if you feel that it does something Nobilis should be able to do.
—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God, to other Hollyhock Gods in the audience

Interlude: Faith

"I had visitors," I told Genseric Dace, two hours later.

"It would be surprising," he said calmly, "if you had not."

"I do not understand why I should attract so much attention from such strange folk."

"Consider the essence of treachery," Genseric said, absently. His hands and eyes were busy: he was weaving some sort of net. I could not see where any of the fibers ended or began. "It is not simply betraying expectations or breaking promises. There is no one who does not betray a thousand expectations in every moment of their life. As for promises, some of them matter; some of them do not. One can break a promise as a favor to the recipient, or as justified retribution for another broken promise; it is not always a terrible thing. The essence of treachery is the unforgivable nature of it. Its monstrousness. Its criminality."

"He was unpleasant," I said, "but did not seem defined by his monstrosity."

Genseric's hands moved over the net. "I do not speak of Marsiglio. Before he was Treachery, he was human. That tempers his power with weakness and his malice with conscience; he is neither fish nor fowl. I speak rather of the concept as a whole — the Platonic ideal of treason, which Marsiglio would call his estate. The quality that made you see him and say, 'There; he is Treachery.' That quality is not merely monstrous and criminal. It depends on malevolence for its very existence. If Treachery itself were to become justified, it would cease to exist — vanish like smoke. There would be no more treason; only justice."

I frowned at him. "If you define Treachery as criminal, then you cannot also find a universal justification for it. Wordplay cannot make malice and betrayal disappear."

The glitter in Genseric's eyes grew brighter, like great lights falling — a very long way away. The stairs flickered with that light. "That is why such folk as Marsiglio consider me dangerous, lady. My existence tests the world. If I can make but a single act of unforgivable treachery into an act of justice, the consequences echo throughout all existence. Every act of betrayal becomes more

kind. Every act of deception becomes more just. Every broken promise becomes less vile."

"That does not seem so bad," I said.

"I am glad you think so," he said, "for it is your betrayal that I must justify." He held up a hand, before I had quite processed his words. "At Benjamin's hands, of course, not mine."

The strength that Treachery's companion had shared remained with me. "There is no justification for his acts."

"Of course not," he said. "My work is not yet done."

—from the Thought-Record of Faith Bernham

Scene 5: Maddy the Bastard

Some draw the road of life as a line. Each point flows into the next. You cannot cleanly divide one part of the line from another. When does virginity end, or youth? When does the old regime give way to the new? To point to a single moment and say, "There" — what of the moment to its left? To its right? Can you not say that the complete change exists in potential one moment to the left? Can you not say that the old order still clings to life, one moment to the right?

I draw life not as a line but as a series of dashes. There are moments when the world seems to screech to a halt around you — the pressure building, gathering, while Creation stands still and the stars spin around you — and then, when it starts again, everything is different.

That is the essence of conspiracy — the essence of Nobility — the essence of love. To change one's allegiance changes everything.
—His Eminence, the Warden Pandareos, Viscount of Conspiracy, as written by Madeline Rush

HG: Hey, everyone. Settle in; I think we'll finish up the flower rite tonight. You've just met up at the grocer to discuss the situation. I assume you tell each other pretty much everything? [*everyone indicates agreement*] Something funny occurs to Julianna's world-class brain as you're going over all this. Faith tortured one of the building's tenants' cats to death last week, according to the story you were told —

HEATHER: That's not funny. That's awful.

HG: The funny thing is that her apartment didn't smell of cat. Or litterbox. At all.

EDWARD: Wait. Was she lying? I mean, we would have been looking for lies.

HG: Not that you could tell. You don't exactly have Rook's senses, but you're good at this — unless she's a world-class liar or somehow empowered, she was telling the truth.

HEATHER: I interrupt Marsiglio's long ramblings about how the world hates him and how he impressed everyone at the building with his magnificent charm and share this observation.

MARSIGLIO: Curious. [*as Edward*] I go back to rambling about how the world hates me and how I impressed everyone at the building.

JULIANNA: You don't appreciate the implications, cousin? She was an Anchor. Or an Excrucian-shard. We have to talk to her again. Capture her. Convince her to talk.

MARSIGLIO: An excellent plan! I could scarcely have conceived of better myself.

JULIANNA: I'm sure you'll have conceived of it by the time we return, er, arrive.

ROOK: 'S probably another trap.

JULIANNA: We're all drained near to our end. Still, even if a whole Deceiver got through, how many shards can be left? We took out at least four. I say we brace the lion in its den.

ROOK: Can we 'least go in the window?

MARSIGLIO: An excellent plan.

HG: Cut scene to … breaking in via this woman's window?

DIANE: Indeed. I figure just picking the others up and jumping is most convenient.

MARSIGLIO: And undignifiiiiiiiiiied …

HG: Crash! And you're in, Rook rolling and springing to her feet, the other two tottering slightly to regain their balance. As for the resident, she doesn't even turn — she's staring with soft awe at something a little bit out of your sight, down the hall.

DIANE: I creep forward until I can see.

HG: She seems to be staring at one Pandareos Panagiotis [*see p. 255-256*], who is deeply engaged in trying to work the coffee machine. From her expression, he's been abusing the Glorious Gift again, but has let it subside for now.

ROOK: [*happy*] Pandareos o' my heart! [*as Diane*] He's going to get tackled.

HG: Going to actually knock him over this time, or just leap on him?

DIANE: Aw, I'll let the poor bastard keep his footing; there are lots of sharp things in a kitchen.

HG: Gotcha. He turns to try and catch you, although he doesn't manage it terribly well.

DIANE: I go for a kiss.

HG: He turns his cheek barely in time, smiling. [*as Pandareos*] Wait'll you're older, dear.

ROOK: Never get any older than this.

PANDAREOS: How terrible. What are you doing here?

MARSIGLIO: We are investigating the work of the Children of Harumaph. With which, if I may say, you seem to be intimately involved.

HG: He turns, narrows his eyes, and apparently sharpens his senses; a moment later, he puts Rook down. "Julianna!" he says. "Is that your dear breath I hear?"

DIANE: Sliding in and out of those dear lumps of pink fleshy tissue she likes to call her lungs.

JULIANNA: I am here. Hello, Pandareos.

HG: I assume you're both walking into view? [*Heather and Edward nod*]

PANDAREOS: I assure you, I have no involvement with the Dark Horsemen — unless you would have me be, dear Julianna?

JULIANNA: Do not so jest.

PANDAREOS: I came here because Conspiracy was quite upset; I felt I should investigate.

MARSIGLIO: They dare assault both Treachery and Conspiracy with a single rite?

PANDAREOS: Assault? [*puzzled frown, pause*] Ah, no. My Estate complained of several dozen souls forced into unwilling and unwitting conspiracy —

ROOK: That's bad?

PANDAREOS: Indeed so. The essence of conspiracy lies in its ability to seduce — in its ability to romance the conspirators into participation. Conspiracy, like vice, like virtue, requires choice. If one may conspire unknowing, unwilling — it shakes the foundation of the Estate.

MARSIGLIO: And yet you do not seem to be in pain.

PANDAREOS: Ah, well. There was never a proper conspiracy here to begin with. My Estate is not injured, not degraded True conspiracy has not turned false. Rather, Conspiracy is outraged. It is offended. It finds the situation implausible and unacceptable. Thus, I am here; and I have lingered in this room. Because, well, the woman here — she lied to me. Or so I thought.

I sometimes wonder what would happen if Rook bonked Pandareos over the head and dragged him back to her cave. Would she know what to do then? She's not just an old, wise mind in a young body — she's frozen young, and for all that she's seen the bottom edge of the world, she might be frozen innocent too.
—Diane Firth

EDWARD: How come I'm the only one who didn't notice the missing cat?
HG: You're in pain.
EDWARD: Oh, yeah. [*as Marsiglio*] Ow.
HG: Pandareos peers at you.
JULIANNA: You thought? She did not lie to you in truth?
PANDAREOS: She believes firmly that she had a cat until a week ago. [*gestures around the apartment*] As you see, she is deceived; but I could not shake her conviction.
MARSIGLIO: Then she is evil.
HG: She starts. [*as the woman*] Hey! [*as* HG] Pandareos quickly assures her that he likes evil, and she subsides.
JULIANNA: Or a Deceiver has taken the trouble of convincing her that Faith Bernham tortured a nonexistent cat to death.
ROOK: That doesn't make sense.
JULIANNA: Unless he wanted us to think that Faith were a monster, when in truth she is not.
PANDAREOS: Ah, lady, your insight exceeds my deepest expectations.
MARSIGLIO: It would explain the affront to Conspiracy.
PANDAREOS: And you have surprised further wisdom from the oaf Marsiglio! Julianna, has your talent no bounds?
MARSIGLIO: Hey!
JULIANNA: How would it explain that?
MARSIGLIO: [*grumpily*] A conspiracy to defame. They have essentially been tricked into tarnishing the name of an innocent woman.
PANDAREOS: Wonder of wonders.
ROOK: 'Ey! I can make him have insights, too.
EDWARD: Usually by beating me up.
DIANE: Well, yah.
EDWARD: Oh wow! It hurts when you do that! What an insight!
HG: Pandareos smiles charmingly at Rook, but his attention is clearly elsewhere.
JULIANNA: So we know that she's actually a good person. Then … her murder was the betrayal. The treachery.
MARSIGLIO: Which is being corrupted somehow.
HG: Marsiglio, it seems to you that there's something about this situation which is already, in a way, a perversion of treachery. Something about — treachery against the truly unworthy.
EDWARD: You can't betray the truly unworthy; they haven't earned any loyalty. [*There is a brief silence*] Oh my God.
DIANE: Mm?
EDWARD: You're a bastard, Maddy.
HG: Thank you.
EDWARD: It's from some musings of Marsiglio's I wrote up a few weeks ago. The true antithesis of Treachery is Justice. He's not trying to convince us that Faith's a monster. He's trying to retroactively make her a monster.
HEATHER: Can he do that?
HG: Well, Prosaic Reality doesn't really care what people believe — but it does have to have an explanation for why they believe it. If people start turning up all over the place remembering that Faith Bernham was the greatest monster who ever lived …
HEATHER: It decides that that's the real history, and creates evidence for it. And lo, next week this place will have cat smell.
HG: Got it in one.
MARSIGLIO: This Genseric Dace — he is monstrous. Unspeakable.
ROOK: Eh?
EDWARD: I explain what I've realized.
JULIANNA: We have to free her. Before he finishes.
MARSIGLIO: Free her?
JULIANNA: Her ghost. It won't be vulnerable to this sort of thing once it leaves the mortal plane. Otherwise, why would he keep it here?
MARSIGLIO: Go. Free her. We'll try and shake the minds of those Genseric's tainted. Free of him, I mean.
JULIANNA: On my way.
HG: Julianna, just how do you plan to free her ghost?
HEATHER: Catholic rites of exorcism?
HG: She's a ghost, not a demon; and she's bound here by an Excrucian, not her own malice.
HEATHER: Can't I chant in Latin or something?
HG: I suppose you could go back to the Chancel and look for the right invocation in the library.
HEATHER: Heck with that. I'll call her up and talk her into renouncing him.
HG: Okay. Meanwhile — let's see. We have a fairly major scene ahead elsewhere in the building. Want to play Pandareos, Heather?
HEATHER: Sure.
HG: Cut scene and fade to black.

Interlude: Faith

Twelve minutes later, Strength was watching me.

"Thank you," I told her.

"It is strange," she said, calmly, "how the future becomes dark and dangerous when one allows fear and doubt to constrain one; whereas, determination to overcome all obstacles often puts one in the safest and most effective position to handle what may come."

"Is that strange?"

"It is," she answered. "There is no sensible reason for people to doubt themselves and fear the world. It creates the weakness and the danger that that fear and doubt protects them against. Yet people do."

I was dead, and the strangeness of this conversation did not disconcert me.

"Perhaps there is some drawback to excessive accomplishment," I suggested, "that this fear and doubt prevents."

Her face warmed from the inside. "Perhaps. My name is Julianna Avram, and I am the Marchessa of Strength. I am here in the hope that I can persuade you to abandon your service to Genseric Dace. Assuming that I am correct, and he has left you capable of making this choice. Has he?"

"I have given him my allegiance freely."

"Are you aware of what that may mean?"

I hesitated. "I believe that he intends to in some way remove or undermine the possibility of treachery in this world."

I developed much of Marsiglio's character in small pieces I've written, mostly from his perspective, about the parts of his life not covered in the game. The group likes reading them, and Madeline doesn't always use them in horrible devious monstrous nasty ways against Marsiglio.
—Edward Jordan

It's not that Julianna finds Pandareos' attentions unwelcome. It's just that Conspiracy exists in the communion of souls and Strength lives in their individuality. That kind of mixed marriage never works out.
—Heather Sullivan

Strength made a slight face. "A project that you, naturally, laud."

"Who would not?"

"Arguably," she said, "treachery is a weapon that any hand may use: the good, the bad, the righteous, the vile, men, women, children, beasts — the tool of treachery can be used towards just ends."

I stood, or floated, my ground. "For every good use of treachery, there are a thousand crimes of betrayal. Is that not the nature of the beast?"

Her expression grew more sour. "I take your point. So it is the villainous quality of duplicity that in your mind justifies its removal from Creation?"

"Yes."

"If Genseric were, then, acting to undermine my estate — strength, integrity, power and endurance — would you refute your allegiance to him?"

"He is not."

"Granted," she answered, reluctantly. "He is not; and it is possible that he may never; yet he and his allies have a stated intention to destroy all things of our universe, dark or light. Weakness and strength, evil and virtue, courage and pride. The fact that it is my brother Treachery who stands now in his sights is at best circumstantial."

"So you would have me abandon him while he fights to destroy the very existence of betrayal, in case he afterwards turns on something I value? The idea seems laughable. Why shouldn't I serve him while he works towards an admirable goal, and abandon him if he then pursues an unrighteous cause?"

"For one," Strength said wryly, "the option of betraying him might have already been eliminated from the world." Her posture was already perfect, but somehow she managed to straighten her spine. "I shall tell you what he has done to you to merit your rejection; then I shall leave you to contemplate.

"When I came," she said, "that first time, I expected the worst sort of creature: a harlot and a thief; an animalistic beast; a rabid dog whom some generous soul had put down. I did not expect your Benjamin to be the traitor, but you. I had good reason, for this is the story told by all who knew you: your family; your friends; your coworkers; your loves. Why did they tell me such stories? Because they believed them.

"Your Genseric Dace has gone from one to the next, speaking not to their ears but to their spirits — spreading these lies. And slowly, those lies are bending the world. Slowly, the world is beginning to wonder, 'These people — they are not fools. How can they all remember her as wicked, when she was not? How can they all hate her, did she not deserve their hate?' And when Genseric is done, the world will change — and you will deserve every inch of the betrayal, every drop of the pain, that ended your life. That you serve him, that you betray Creation itself — that is only the afterthought. He is creating justice out of your death. That is his tool to destroy Treachery."

I did not waver. Many things were clear to me. I was dead, after all.

"I know," I said.

—from the Thought-Record of Faith Bernham

Scene 6: Genseric Dace

The Earth is a wonderful place. I wish that my work did not keep me so busy on the rare opportunities I have to visit.
—Genseric Dace, Lord of Untruth, as written by Madeline Rush

HG: Out of curiosity, do Marsiglio, Pandareos, and Rook check Benjamin's apartment? Where Faith lived until she stopped living?

EDWARD: Sure.

HG: Rook is just raising her hand to knock on the door when she hears Hope's voice inside. Saying something or other about Faith.

DIANE: I shatter the door into sawdust with one blow of my fist and stride in.

HG: Ffsssst! It drifts down in a shower of little tiny bits of wood. Hope's standing in the room, casually chatting with someone who must be Benjamin. He turns instantly to look, his eyes narrow.

ROOK: Hope! C'mere now.

HOPE: [*smiling*] I'm afraid that Hope's not in right now. I'm Genseric Dace, and I'm terribly sorry that we must meet under these conditions.

PANDAREOS (*as voiced by Heather*): An Excrucian-shard?

MARSIGLIO: Indeed.

HEATHER: What're my stats?

HG: [*flipping through the book*] Aspect 1, Domain 2, Realm 3, Spirit 1, Invisibility, Glorious, Unblemished Guise, and you're down 2 AMPS.

I think I made a tactical error here. The knife couldn't really hit him, and I knew it, but I needed him to waste a miraculous action dodging. So I should have gone with Aspect 0 and Penetration 5 from the beginning, just in case — I just couldn't imagine that it would be necessary.
—Heather Sullivan

HEATHER: I'm going to hit him in the throat with a knife. Aspect 1. He's in an Anchor, so it'll cost extra MPS to dodge.

HG: How does Pandareos know he's in an Anchor?

HEATHER: … from "Hope's not in right now"?

HG: I'll allow it. Okay. Pandareos is throwing a knife at Hope's throat. Rook?

DIANE: Augh. This is terrible. I kick him in the stomach — do Anchors have an Auctoritas when an Excrucian-shard's in them?

HG: Yes.

HEATHER: The Auctoritas. I forgot the bloody Auctoritas.

DIANE: Then Aspect 2, Penetration 2.

HG: Marsiglio?

EDWARD: I turn Benjamin against him.

HOPE: Rook, I'm not here; in fact, I was never here. [*as* HG] Rook, you kick the empty air; it doesn't seem very effective. As for Hope — he's gone. You can't see any evidence that he was ever here. Marsiglio, Pandareos, you can still see him; and see Pandareos' knife shatter on thin air five feet from him; and see Rook's kick sort of lose strength and peter out just before touching him.

DIANE: Oh, Hell. He's got the Blind Lie. I flail in all directions, trying to hit him.

HEATHER: Okay. Another knife — I assume Pandareos has a spare knife? — goes at him, Penetration 4. I know, I don't have enough AMPS, I'm burning some RMPS on this.

HG: That's what I like about you, you're so careful with my NPCS' miracle points. [*grins*] Okay. Marsiglio? Benjamin's jumping on Hope from behind.

EDWARD: I rip the floor spirit open, splitting it apart under him.

HG: Pandareos' second knife shatters. Rook flails more. He neatly punches her in the larynx, hard; she takes another Deadly level, even as the floor opens and he falls. Rook, you feel sort of a very distant, dull pain; after all, there's no one here to have punched you.

HEATHER: My second knife broke? This guy's a bloody Inferno?

HG: It sure looked like an Auctoritas effect, so … yes. Rook?

DIANE: I flail some more. I have to be doing some damage; at least, so Rook thinks. Do I see the floor open?

HG: Yup. Marsiglio's allowed to tear floors open, even when Hope isn't here. Pandareos?

HEATHER: I grab Rook and dive out the window before she gets herself killed.

HG: Marsiglio?

EDWARD: I'm not afraid of Infernos. Inferni? I move out into the room; can I save my miraculous action until I see what he does next?

HG: Sure. What that is, in fact, is leaping back up into the room, landing facing you. He spits out, "Whoever you are,"

EDWARD: Stop!

HG: Hm?

EDWARD: Before he says anything, I try and cut his throat. Turnabout is fair play.

HG: Okay. I'll pause you there for a moment. Rook, Pandareos is trying to tackle you and drag you out the window.

ROOK: My hero!

HG: For some reason, that comes out, "chtuck wsudgo."

DIANE: Frog in my throat. I cling tightly to him as we jump.

HG: Okay. Pandareos, you land on the street below, stumbling and nearly twisting your ankle, but all right.

PANDAREOS: You have a crushed throat, little one. Don't talk. Stay put. I have to go back.

ROOK: chtuck wsudgo! [*as Diane*] That is, I'm not that little. And you're not going anywhere — and I'm not letting him face that thing alone.

EDWARD: Marsiglio's there.

DIANE: I'm not letting him face that thing with Marsiglio.

PANDAREOS: I'm touched. But Julianna's in the building, too. Don't you want us to rescue her?

DIANE: Rook looks torn. Then nods, and waves Pandareos into the building.

HG: Okay, Marsiglio, his hand comes down on your wrist, powdering the bones inside. Your claw scores across his throat, taking his head half off, but you're not sure you can use that hand again with the wrist in so much pain. He wobbles.

EDWARD: That's right, Infernos can use Aspect miracles through Anchors for free. Still — he's got to be hurting. Maybe … what happens if you try to Anchor an Anchor?

HG: Good question. You don't know. Why?

EDWARD: Look, this guy seriously wounded Rook, turned my wrist to powder, and is trying to destroy my Estate. I think I hate him enough to do the Rite if I can get any blood down his throat. Is his mouth open?

HG: I suppose …

EDWARD: Oh, heck, that doesn't matter. I lick my shattered wrist and spit the blood into his open throat.

DIANE: Edward, you're disgusting.

HG: His eyes roll and his face contorts for a moment. You're not sure whether it's working or not. It seems to be distracting him, though.

EDWARD: I leap on him and try and finish him off somehow while he's distracted.

HG: That you can definitely do. He's half-dead as is. Twenty seconds later, you're standing above a broken corpse.

EDWARD: I'm going to grab Julianna and get out of here. That was the Anchor; I don't want to see the real Genseric.

Interlude: Hope

This is the price of my treachery.

I betrayed my love but little. One password and counter-password, shared. One description of my lady and her family, given. These are small things, and my pain was great. But I do not make excuses. That is one of the things I learned, standing on the Ash. There are no excuses. There is only what you do. And, at the end of your life, what you have done.

I opened the gates to my soul, and Genseric Dace crept in through them. He used my mind and body like a suit of clothes. I walked. I talked. I fought. And my movement was Genseric Dace's movement. My words were Genseric Dace's words. My fight was Genseric Dace's fight. I could not act. I could only watch, and wait for an opportunity to stand up. An opportunity to say, "I serve at the pleasure at my lady Rook Catchfly," and strike the Deceiver down.

So I watched, as he used my body to spread vindictive lies.

I cried, as he sought to lure my lady into a trap. I smiled, as he failed.

I trembled, as he hired the lady of Strife to guard him. I cheered, when she tricked his name from him and called the contract void.

Then, as he went about his deadly work, my lady found him. With my hand, he broke her throat.

My lady's brother — the one whose hand is like a knife — he cut my throat, in turn. Still Genseric fought him. It was not until my spine was broken and my ribs were snapped that Genseric abandoned me, and left me to die alone.

It hurts a great deal, but I do not mind.

It is a grace, this pain. It is a justice that quiets my soul. It is freedom from treachery.

It is more than I deserve.

—from the Thought-Record of Hope Carstens

Scene 7: Conclusions

HG: Julianna, you've rejoined the group, after a pretty fruitless conversation with the ghost — she's firmly on Dace's side, now, though you're not sure why. Pandareos has drifted off, just as glad to be out of this mess. You've all hurried away from the building — a few miles to be safe?

DIANE: Yes. Can I work out some way to speak properly with a damaged throat — without spending the AMPS to heal faster, I mean? It'll be boring not saying anything.

HG: With Aspect 4, you can probably figure out some way to, er, speak around it, or something. Or you could always use pantomime!

Genseric planned to use the Blind Lie on Marsiglio: 'Whoever you are, it has nothing to do with Treachery.' It wasn't going to work, and I expected Edward's face to just light up when he realized why — that Marsiglio has the Egocentric Virtue and that nothing can blind him to what he is. Unfortunately, I didn't get the chance — this time.
—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God

Looking ahead, I see the mountain. It is very tall, and very cold, and its peak is very sharp. I fear the mountain. But fear has no power to stop me now.

In climbing, I forget about Lord Entropy. He will think I have betrayed him. He may come for my spirit, hold me back from death and cast me into some torment pit. I fear his wrath. But fear has no power to stop me now.

It does not matter whether, in climbing, I serve him or betray him. That is a judgment on my actions; and judgment is meaningless. It does not matter whether I climb well or poorly, loyally or disloyally, fearfully or bravely, in pain or in exaltation. It only matters that, before I die, I will have climbed.
—Bethany Scofflaw, as written by Madeline Rush

Later, Madeline let me read Hope's story. I think Rook knows it, too, by now. She also knows that it doesn't end there. It doesn't matter what happens to Hope's flesh. He lives forever in service to her.

The Domina of Eternity requires that it be so.

—Diane Firth

DIANE: Right.

MARSIGLIO: This is unacceptable. We are beaten. With but a single shard left, and we are beaten.

ROOK: Not talkin' to you. You killed Hope. And I can take Genseric if I hafta.

JULIANNA: It's possible. I've heard that the Lie rarely works twice in a day on the same person. Still, he seems awfully tough. Could he have been a full Deceiver?

MARSIGLIO: It would explain the level of malevolent competence he's shown. Setting up forces to stop us at the Chancel entrance; compromising Rook's network before we even arrived; holding off three Powers at once — I like the thought that this isn't just a bunch of shards. But still! If he's a full Deceiver, he'll be even deadlier in person. How are we supposed to stop him?

HEATHER: Fighting him isn't the answer.

EDWARD: Oh?

HEATHER: You're the Duke of Treachery, and that's what at stake. Do something treacherous.

EDWARD: Hm.

DIANE: It's difficult to betray him when we're not actually allied to him.

JULIANNA: I have it!

MARSIGLIO: Do tell.

JULIANNA: Do not waste your efforts fighting against this monster. He wishes to make Faith Bernham out as treacherous — so be it! Use her as a lever to corrupt those around her. Make her an epicenter for treachery. Then everyone whom she has been discredited to will be themselves discredited — in reality's eyes, and in mankind's.

MARSIGLIO: [*after a pause*] I have it!

JULIANNA: [*resigned*] Do tell.

MARSIGLIO: I shall make Faith Bernham an epicenter for treachery. Then everyone that Genseric has talked to —

JULIANNA: Say no more! The notion is brilliant.

EDWARD: Maddy, can I pull this off with a lesser change?

HG: You can indeed.

EDWARD: Then I do so; 2 DMPS.

HEATHER: I stand ready to nettle the Excrucian, should it work.

HG: It only takes three hours. Everyone in that tenement, everyone she knew in the broader world — they turn traitors to Creation, and commit horrible crimes. They become unreliable witnesses, and Genseric's work goes down in flames. Congratulations; you can nettle him for most of his remaining MPs. Julianna regains 2 temporary Miracle Points and your Imperator gains 2 Dynasty Points.

EDWARD: Ha!

JULIANNA: Amazing, the things Marsiglio thinks of.

EDWARD: I do the dance of victory and ignore you.

HG: And that's it for the story. Anyone not enjoy themselves? [*silence*] Great. An extra character point all around.

Finale: Faith

Four hours later, sirens raged through the streets.

I watched in silence as the police hustled Benjamin out of his apartment, hands cuffed behind his back.

I heard shots in the distance. I could see, through the walls, souls of my friends pouring from their bodies at the hot touch of death. They had no Genseric to hold them back; before I could call to them, they were gone.

Another hour passed before he came for me.

"It is over," Genseric said. His face was full of rue and sadness.

"I do not understand."

"There is something about the character of treachery," he said, "that I had not considered. It is contagious. One betrayal leads to another. Fear of treachery and malice sparks malice and treachery. It spreads from a single traitor like an epidemic, washing across the population."

"It is truly a pestilence," I agreed.

"It is within Marsiglio's power," he said, "to adjust the degree of this contagion. It seems, lady, that you have become quite a potent vector."

That giddy strength still filled my heart and kept my head high. "Oh."

"Everyone to whom I have so carefully spread the new truth about your being — your family, your friends — they have committed crimes against human nature. They are discredited, even in the eyes of reality; and many are dead."

"I do not see how I can redress the situation."

"You must commit a grave act of service," he answered. "You are a traitor to your Creation, and the epicenter of a virulent plague of treachery and ill manners. If this in some way produces a favorable outcome — or even one deed as glorious as the sun is bright — why, then, that also strikes at treachery's foundations."

"What deed do you suggest? I am a ghost."

"Kill me," he said simply. "There is no act so far from treason as destroying one of my kind."

I did not hesitate. I answered him.

"No," I said, for I loved him.

He closed his eyes for a moment. "I thought as much," he said, and pulled a blossom from his coat: long-stemmed, purple, with clusters of small flowers along its length.

"This is monkshood," he said softly, "the flower of treachery. As poisonous as Marsiglio himself. I had hoped that when this flower died, treachery would die with it —"

He crumbled the flower in his hand. "But I think I have failed. I will leave now."

"Leave me?" I said. There was pain in my heart. But I knew I had failed him.

"I have offered you eternity," he said. "And I do not betray."

And he held out his hand, and it was a net that could swallow worlds, and I stepped into him and he into me. There was darkness.

— from the Thought-Record of Faith Bernham

The condemned man cries, "I hate the headsman's axe," for the condemned man knows of life and death.

The axe has no hatred in its soul, for it knows only of its rise and fall.

In my game, I think, the Excrucians are the axe. Perhaps I will change my mind.

—Madeline Rush, the Hollyhock God

Ianthe writes: How to be a Hollyhock God

Part 4

The Play Contract

I once asked my car why it put up with me. "You so obediently take me where I want to go," I said. "You follow my every order. Why should this be so? You are your own person!" It considered that. "I suppose," it said, "that I consider it basic human maintenance. One goes through a kind of daily hassle, you know, taking humans to one place or another, in order to get the best fueling, sheltering, and cleaning performance out of them."
—from The Diary of Edmund Finch, *by Jackie Robinson*

In the interests of minimizing strife and contention with and within your group of players, and in the interest of enabling dispute resolution through the medium of reasoned discourse, I recommend the establishment of a *contract* with your players. The Hollyhock God prepares the first draft on their own. After player input, it may require some revision. The play contract serves several purposes, but the overall intention is to ensure that the players and the HG all expect the same sort of game.

Player Comfort

Remember always that Nobilis is a game. Your players want to have fun. Some people like humor. Some like horror. Some like deep philosophical exploration. People like stories that affect them in many different ways. Nobody, however, wants to read, watch, or play in a story they don't enjoy. A HG should never get so wrapped up in their power to horrify, disgust, disturb, confuse, confound, or frustrate their players that they miss signs that the players don't *enjoy* that level of horror, obscenity, disturbance, confusion, puzzlement, or frustration. Some players might want their characters defiled and trampled on so that they can explore the PC's reaction to it. Most do not.

The most important element of your play contract, which applies to every game unless you explicitly say otherwise — and you shouldn't — goes like this. No one, including the HG, can deliberately try to make another player uncomfortable. If you, for the sake of the game, or a player, for the sake of their character conception, must take in-character action that might make a player uncomfortable, you or the acting player must do what they can to minimize the effect. It doesn't matter if the discomfort is reasonable. If a player is severely arachnophobic, you may have to abandon your grand giant spider-based plotline. It doesn't matter if you find the idea uncontroversial; it makes the player nervous. That's all that matters. Here's a formal version of the idea.

General

Players, including the HG, will refrain from *any* deliberate attempts to make other players uncomfortable. In addition to physical or verbal harassment, this includes inappropriate descriptions of in-character sexual behavior or drives, sadism, child abuse, and other miscellany that may offend. Characters can engage in controversial or deviant behavior, if necessary to their conceptions, and the players can describe them as necessary. Insofar as the issues raised are known to make one or more players uncomfortable, however, players will keep these descriptions short and to the point.

More permissive and more restrictive versions of this clause exist. For example, suppose one player firmly believes homosexuality is immoral. This contract permits homosexual characters, and allows them to engage in appropriate relationships. However, having a homosexual character hit on the player's PC is usually inappropriate. Miraculously adjusting the sexual orientation of an Anchor the player often plays is entirely out of bounds. A more permissive clause would allow any play not deliberately aimed to make another player uncomfortable — everyone would agree to "grin and bear it" in order to achieve a more intense, realistic gaming experience. A more restrictive contract would excise controversial issues from the game world entirely. For simplicity, you can write up the variations on this clause as:

General

- Standard rules against making players uncomfortable; *or*
- More restrictive than normal: controversial subjects eliminated; *or*
- Mature group: elements of the game may be uncomfortable if appropriate.

In any case, no one should ever set out to make an unpleasant environment for another player. The universe of Nobilis has some harsh edges in it, but the out-of-character environment should always remain as polite as any bridge game. Leave heated ooc arguments and unwelcome advances for another occasion. Similarly, Nobilis is not an

occasion for interpersonal power games. Don't try and disempower another player through the medium of their character. Don't set out to frustrate or annoy another player. Nobilis is a social activity, and player discord hurts everybody's fun.

Player Autonomy

Without freedom, there is no damnation.
—the Devil Gideon

In general, the HG controls the plot. Each player controls the formative experiences in their character's life. Undermining any player's conception with revelations or events may not actually make anyone uncomfortable, but it *is* bad form.

Some games have "personality mechanics" to determine a PC's reaction to events. Others make various forms of "mind control" practical. Nobilis has player-controlled personality mechanics (Virtues, Codes, and some Restrictions) and makes direct mental control over a typical Noble PC impossible. Even a PC's Imperator has significant if undefined limits for controlling a Noble's actions and thoughts. Nobles have betrayed their Imperators in the past, after all! In the absence of HG-controlled mechanics for personality or mind control, dictating a PC's actions boils down to an arbitrary decision on the HG's part, and one very likely to frustrate the player. I recommend strongly that you forsake it. A PC's emotional reactions break down to internal emotions, an accepted part of their psyche, and external emotions, such as those caused by drugs, Excrucian Gifts, and spiritual damage. Never dictate internal emotions; restrict yourself to the external emotions that the PC can control if they must.

For example, when a PC encounters a Glorious Excrucian, never say, "You're very attracted to him." Instead, you can say, "He's as beautiful as the sky" or "A raw sense of attraction and desire pours off him in waves". When an object containing part of a PC's soul falls from their hand into a bottomless abyss, do not say, "You leap after it!" Rather, you might try, "The spiritual pain of parting from it is incredible, almost unbearable, growing as the object dwindles into the distance." In these cases, you have not dictated the PC's response. If the player feels that the PC can resist the attraction, or can bear parting with the object after all, they can make that decision. Most players are pretty co-operative, so they won't make this kind of contrary decision unless it's important to their character conception.

Autonomy

Players control the minds and emotions of their characters. If the HG or another player describes your PC's mental reaction to something, you can always correct them. They can elaborate on why they made this description, but they cannot argue. If possible, the HG will discuss life-changing or traumatic events (such as pregnancies, addictions, and diabolic possession) with the player in advance. If the HG cannot discuss such an event in advance, and the PC cannot reasonably escape the physical or emotional consequences through play, and the event makes the player uncomfortable, then the player can note their objection and the HG will take such steps as necessary to arrange a different sequence of events.

Again, you can vary this clause if it does not suit your plans for the game. For example, if your game-management style requires a great deal of control over your characters' lives, you should note this in the play contract. If you intend for each player to shoulder part of your HG burden, with a kind of executive veto over everything in his or her character's life, you can make note of this as well. Three versions of this contract can be summarized as:

Autonomy

- Standard rules regarding player autonomy; *or*
- HG will sometimes dictate PC reactions; *or*
- Players have broad authority over their PC's lives.

Bear in mind that it's easy to create real-life player frustration by interfering with a player's ability to play the character they designed in the way they see fit. Handled brilliantly, it can increase immersion in the game universe. Handled well, it can advance

the plot while irritating the player a little. Handled poorly, it can interfere with the player's own sense of self-determination and equilibrium, at which point the player may justifiably become upset and leave the game.

Sex, Violence, and other Issues

A lot of powerful stories boil down to love and pain. Unfortunately, while almost no one objects to stories of romance, hardship, and self-sacrifice, many people find various forms of sex and violence uncomfortable to think about. For example, with a typical player group, you should leave sexual assault out of the game world. It probably happens, just like it does on Earth, but never as part of the plot or surrounding events. Many very strong stories feature such an event, but roleplaying games are not a typical storytelling medium. Unless every player can maintain an iron-hard mental separation between their character's thoughts and their own feelings, you will disgust some, unnerve others, and possibly even traumatize a few. Some player groups *can* maintain such a separation; if you think yours is one, though, make sure to ask them and find out.

Some people have problems with perversion, gore, sacrilege, or torture in their games. Just to make it clear at the outset where you plan to go, your play contract should spell out how explicit your explorations of these subjects will be. Some possibilities for these clauses follow:

"Fucking Hell," he swore. "The thumbscrew's snapped again." Then he flushed. "Oh. I'm sorry. My language. I didn't offend you, I hope?"

"Of course not." I nodded towards the littered workbench. "There's one over there."

"I am so *sorry," he said again. "Normally, I'm better brought up than that."*

"That's okay."

"This will only hurt for a little bit," he told me, and the pain began.
—from the Thought-Record of Cassius Quirinius

Sex

- Plots and character actions can feature the full range of consensual human sexual behavior, but descriptions will not be lascivious or unnecessarily graphic; *or*
- It doesn't happen, although sometimes curtains are mysteriously drawn over a scene.

Violence

- Violence follows the style of action movies and mainstream comics: bloodless and rarely either shocking or tragic. People the characters know can die, but their deaths matter; neither PCs nor NPCs make a habit of shooting their way through a harsh and meaningless world; *or*
- No holds barred. Death can be casual and sudden. Torture is common in the game world, and the PCs use it just as often as the NPCs. The PCs themselves do not die without player permission or compelling in-character justification, and PCs are expected not to kill one another; anyone else is fair game.

Religion

- Obviously, mortal religions have the details wrong — but in general, the angels are good, Lucifer is wrong, there's a divine plan for the world, and only the most villainous Powers engage in serious sacrilege; *or*
- In general, angels are good, Lucifer is wrong, and there's a divine plan for the world. However, the Catholic Church is in the hands of the Cammora, the major Hindu gods are some of the most power-hungry Nobilis out there, and the Power of Desecration sets priests on the path of sodomy for fun; *or*
- The game assumes that, on the whole, religion is a tool of Heaven and the Light rather than the Excrucians, Hell, or the Dark. Sacrilegious acts that might offend a player will be glossed over, most angels will be flawless, and the typical fallen angel will be a corrupt knave rather than a philosophically driven opponent of Heaven.

"You cannot fight yourself, Hugh," he said, wearing my face, my body, my form.

I cracked a smile. "Actually, I've always thought I'd make damned good eating."
—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

Emphasis, Genre, and Expectations

If your game adjusts the emphasis of Nobilis — if, for example, you want a black-and-white morality, or characters who operate on a smaller scale, or if players should submit Imperator or human PCs instead of Powers, you should note this in the play contract. You should also note the genres you hope to emulate, the major themes you would like

to explore, and your expectations for the players. Be sure to make it explicit what kind of characters you're looking for. For example:

Game Style

- Characters are all Powers of the Light, engaged in a struggle to help humanity survive through the turbulent social changes of the 21st century. The game will feature elements from dystopian fiction, associated most strongly with the Powers' rivals' goals, and transhumanist ideas, associated with the Powers. If the players succeed in their long-term goals, humanity will take the next evolutionary step; if they fail, it will enter a kind of high-tech Dark Age; *or*
- This game will focus on IC social interaction. PCs should not be antisocial or asocial, although eccentric rudeness is acceptable. Look at works like Kushner's 'Swordspoint' for examples of how this version of Noble society functions.

By default, NOBILIS assumes that players should submit complete character sheets, which you must approve. They also give you a description of their character that includes background, personality notes, and reasons for that character to become involved in stories. If for some reason, this is not your expectation — if you plan to provide the players with a set of premade PCs, or you expect your players to develop their background, personality, and "story hooks" in play — you should let the players know.

Expectations

- The normal expectations apply. Write at least a little bit on your character's personality and history, and list a few things sure to catch the character's interest and draw them into a story, *or*
- Your characters have amnesia. Pick an Estate and general personality; we'll work from there.

Ianthe

Chapter 9
Attributes

The Book of Questions

These questions Vyasa gave in trust to the Compassionate Rohana. They have many times been lost to the world, but each time Rohana has brought them back: once with a feat of arms, once through the elements that serve her, once with the aid of her people, and once with flowers scattered over the sea.

1. *Princess Bidalika's advisors brought four men before her, to choose a husband from. One showed strength like the tide's. One moved with the grace of the waves. One knew secrets darker than the ocean's depths. She dismissed them all.*
2. *The fourth man was a madman, a beast, a horror, driven by ungovernable rage and unholy desires. On seeing him, the Princess clapped her hands and said: "Here is a Prince among men!"*
3. *Why would she choose such a man as her consort? How did the first three fall short?*

4. *"The snow of your homeland has shaped you," said the lady to the lord. "You are pale. You are cold. The air tastes cleaner where you have walked."*
5. *"It is not so," said the lord. "I am these things of myself. It is the snow that has come, over time, to resemble me."*
6. *Whence comes the color of the snow?*

7. *Some say that time existed before all things, and some say chaos.*
8. *Who is the oldest of the gods?*

9. *A great tide will sweep across the world. It shall drag men, women, and children in its wake, changing them thereby. Yet they shall not understand that they have changed.*
10. *Some few will remain untouched and unchanged. And the others shall point, and say: how strange they are! How their life transforms!*
11. *Who stands still when the world shakes?*



Aspect

A character's Aspect is their physical and mental being, their self. While the Nobilis represent forces of nature, they still exist in the physical world. A character with no points invested in Aspect retains the human body they were born in. At higher levels of Aspect, the magic invested in a character permeates their body and mind, allowing the character to perform physical and mental miracles. This transformation may occur in the instant a character becomes a Power, or spread over the course of years, decades, or centuries.

Style counts in Aspect. Many Powers maintain a certain distance from the world, their purpose in existence estranging them from mortal experience. This is important to their nature: it lends them mythic strangeness and exotic mystery. On the other hand, the Powers are (in the world of Nobilis) the inspiration for many mythical gods, including those who have lived actively among mortals. These Powers are even better at the games of mortality than the mortals themselves, a concept that you can play out with great effect.

Each level of Aspect costs 3 points. Each Aspect level makes miracles and magic based on Aspect simpler. A character can also purchase "Gifts" of Aspect, granting very specific benefits. Some of these Gifts appear later, along with a general system for constructing your own Gifts.

Level 0: Of Mortal Form

0 points

"Wait," the man said, and I turned to look. His face was curiously red, and beads of clear liquid were scattered across his brow. "I must rest," he explained. "The way is long."

"Rest?" Dragonflies hummed across the narrow road. "I had understood you a noble."

"I am," he said. "A Duke's carbuncle is sewn into my skin."

—from Reflections IV, *by Viscount d'Armand*

Commencement is the moment when a mortal receives an Imperator's shard-self and becomes more than human. For many Powers it is a joy, for others a harsh and painful process that lasts not an instant but days. Their mind and body struggle like an allergic child's to throw out the intruding power. If their soul does successfully reject the new Sovereign strength, they are almost always utterly destroyed. If only their mind and body fail them, they are called Once-Born, or those "of mortal form." (Other Once-Born had a very strong sense of humanity, accepting their human limitations without complaint or desire for more.) Once-Born lack almost all of the miraculous physical and mental potential that Aspect can provide.

Think carefully before making a character of mortal form. The character must use overt "magic" to overcome even simple obstacles like locked doors and treacherous forests. This leaves a trail for others to trace. Mortal form also imposes important intellectual limitations. For example, a Power of mortal form can lose their head in an emergency, even if the Power's player maintains ooc self-control.

Example Concepts

Robert Baxt, a cowboy in the Old West, was chosen by the Excrucians to burn down the house in which a priceless manuscript was stored. Their careful orchestration of his actions and others' was compromised when two of the Powers searching for the Rending came to blows. Robert witnessed the Dominus of Torture staking his opponent to the ground with an iron hook and leaving her for dead. Unable to free herself, but also (due to her Aspect) slow to die, she instructed Baxt to cut free her heart and consume it. As he did so, she passed on her shard of her Imperator's spirit. Outside the Chancel, such gifts are much less effective; the Power of a Sovereign lurks in Baxt's stomach and chest, but has not yet diffused itself through his body. Even so, Baxt is now the Power of Clocks — a fortunate Estate, as it has allowed him to greatly lengthen his life.

Jack Unbounded lived all his life in a mining town, worked every day in the mines, and dreamed of travel and adventure. Then he encountered one of the Heather Stones, a gift of the Creator to Creation. Seven Heather Stones rest buried under the Earth, each a promise of wishes ultimately fulfilled. There were sixteen unChancelled Imperators on Earth when Jack made his discovery. Five converged on Jack, as did two grimly determined Excrucians. For a hundred nights, the people of his town cowered in their bedrooms as giants warred ... and then the promise of the Creator was fulfilled. The Imperator who captured the town in a Chancel and forced the others away chose Jack to hold the spirit-shard of Freedom. In that moment, Jack was given the power to be anywhere, to dance with the stars and to walk beneath the sea. He paid a steep price. For days, he lay in agony, vomiting fire and bleeding from his pores. His mind was a confused mass of psychosis and obsession until at last he locked the power safely away from his body and mind, within his heart.

Level 1: Metahuman

3 points

Characters with this level of Aspect are one step beyond human. They possess formidable physical and mental faculties in every field; on occasion, they perform wondrous feats with their bodies and minds. This is a very limited level of Aspect, even so. It's most common among Powers who govern high, flighty, and ethereal things such as Thought, Emotion, Knowledge, or Love. These Nobles focus their magic away from the mundane things of physical reality, and often their body suffers for it.

Metahumans surpass the mortal breed, but their power still doesn't express itself easily through their Aspect. They cannot expect to ignore the world's myriad obstacles. This level of Aspect does provide an excellent starting place for newly made Powers, as these fledglings are often uncertain in their bodies and have not fully integrated their power into their physical form.

Example Concepts

Dimi (for Diminuendo) is the final masterwork of J.S. Bach, who was for the brief span of his life the Dominus of the Fugue. Molded out of living music, born in the Chancel of the angel Tyriel, she took Bach's place upon his death. She presents herself as a woman clothed all in sounds, in silks whose sight rings in the mind like song: she is a grace. She brings strength to Locus Tyriel by gathering the souls of forgotten songs. Her own strength, however, is no greater than Bach could imagine it.

OPPOSITE:
Fairies
by Charles Vess

"Wake up," I asked him, softly. There was a bottle on the floor. There was alcohol in his blood. And I had something in my hand... just a little toy. It looked a little like his — vulgar parts — but it was only a toy.

He had opened his eyes. "What?" he asked me, straight.

"Your novel just hit New York Times' number one," I said. He almost smiled. "You've got three bronze medals on your mantel. Software you've created runs on a quarter of all the machines in the workplace today. People are starting to wonder: is there anything this guy can't do?"

"Yah?" he asked.

"Yah," I said. "But there is. That. *Letting the pawns know there are folks like you out there."*

I showed him what I was holding. And then it wasn't a toy.

"Lord Entropy doesn't like that," I said, as blood darkened the sheets, as he began to scream.

—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood



Sekshuni is the Lady of the Hawks, with the grace and power of her winged servants, with talon and beak, with a deep attunement to the things of the natural world. She spends of much of her time warped into avian form, and by Powers' standards her body is weak. This makes sense: the laws of the world she is so attuned to do not normally allow hawks that can lift elephants, or talons that can rip steel.

Level 2: Legendary

6 points

Characters with this level of Aspect compare favorably with the greatest heroes and villains of legend. They rank without effort among the best human savants and athletes, and can go significantly beyond normal human bounds when pushed. They possess a wonderful inventiveness and the kind of personal charisma that inspires armies.

Physical changes often accompany this level of Aspect. The newly made Power twists into shapes born of their imagination. (Transformations like these fed legends of Daoine Sidhe, Duergar, Unicorns, and Dragons.) Legendary Aspect suits Powers who are mythical heroes and villains and Powers of a generally unworldly nature. The equivalence here between a Power not much focused on the world and a human at the peak of their physical and mental potential is an intentional one.

Example Concepts

Strephon is the Lord of Reflections, born a human in the Chancel of Gideon the Fallen. His influence pervades that little town, which seems normal enough until you look in a mirror, or a resident's eyes. Neither of them shows the image you might expect, for Strephon lives in those reflections, and he feeds on hatred and self-loathing. Since the time of the Fall, when the angel Gideon turned dark, mirrors have captured and twisted a part of even the greatest humans …and so Strephon transcends humanity.

His duty is greater still, for the governance of all the world's reflections is his, and only in Gideon's Keep may he may relax and enjoy his work.

Jameson Black (also see pp. 111-112) is the legend-base for the Tibetan understanding of dragons: a lord of storms, a warrior monster in service to the gods, or at least to the True God of the Diamond Path. While trying to save Tibet from China, he slaughtered an encampment of Chinese soldiers. He cannot forget the act; he was shaking and delusional only hours later, unable to leave behind the screams, the blood, and the foolish bravery of those who assaulted him. In the late 1960s, he discovered alcohol and with it a certain measure of forgetfulness. Even an immortal body goes a little bit to pot if given enough hard liquor, and this particular dragon is a sad commentary on the state of the world today.

He has been away from his master Anani's Chancel for thirty years now. As the game opens, he has been manipulated by an old friend's pleas and guilt trips into visiting the place once again. He hopes to be reassured that it's doing just fine without him.

… his name was Kalendros, and he had the body of a man and the legs of a horse. Those legs pounded out a rhythm on the earth, as even and terrible on the muddy grass as on dryer land. He had a knife.

I turned the mud to ice beneath his feet, and still he ran.

I came to a river, and I called it from the shore. A wave roared out and rolled across the path, and still he ran.

I cried down the rain from the sky, cried for a flood that would inundate the world, and the clouds turned to falling water and crashed to earth behind me, and still he ran.

His hand caught my shoulder, and his knife touched my neck.

Then he let go, and a lock of my hair was in his hand. "A trophy," he said, with the voice of an emperor. "Thief."
—from Water Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Level 3: Inhuman

9 points

Inhuman characters inhabit bodies not only perfected but empowered by the magic that fills them. They are no longer flesh and bone; now they are ether, astral energy. This substance responds to their will in ways that Earth's greatest athletes can only envy. Nobles — their Aspect — are not "more intelligent" than humans, but Inhuman Powers may draw on a suite of mental advantages. At this level, they have perfect self-possession, discipline, artistic ability, scientific ability, and supercomputer-like speed when solving formal problems.

Characters with this level of Aspect are always distanced from the humanity they belonged to. Normal humans are slow, flimsy, weak, and uninsightful beings in comparison. This does not mean that humanity cannot provide worthy objects of affection or love. But only one kind of strength available to ordinary humans wins an Inhuman Power's respect — strength of character, rare even among immortals.

Example Concepts

Isabel is a counterpart to Jack Unbounded. Where he is (in a sense) a Dominus of Travel, she is the spirit of the road. Her memory proceeds in an unbroken chain from the very first Power to take on her role to the body and the personality that serves it now. Memories of her eighteen years of human life this time around are only shadows in comparison. She was born, so she feels, on the ancient forest trails. She grew to maturity, she recalls, on the highways of our time. Her Chancel, Locus Arahiel, is a private place, deep in the woods, where the Folk of the Road come to do her honor. Isabel's player has decided that she is more an avatar of the road than its ruler, and purchased Inhuman Aspect for her. This gives her the kind of strength that can support a billion feet (if they are well distributed) and the speed (in desperate moments) of any car that ever ran the roads.

Oresha is a shard of the Imperator Jan ben Jan, an inhuman, terrible creature, second-born of all the True Gods. Her primary duty is governing the twin cities Chilminar and Balbec. The twin cities are the last refuges of her Imperator's mortal descendants: the Janni, folk of the air; the Efreet, folk of fire; the Marids, folk of earth; and the Dao, folk of the sea. She was vested with a Domina's Power because she is the rightful holder of the twin cities' throne. The shard of reality she guards is the Second Age of Earth, so her power over it is mostly useless in the modern day, which is the Third Age.

Level 4: Celestial

12 points

Celestial characters are touched with the divine. Even if they are mortal, their "pith" or essence echoes with the purest everlasting primal power. There are stronger Nobilis, but the Celestials burn with as immaculate a flame as any. Celestial characters are simply less devoted than their betters to the cult of the body and mind.

This level of Aspect confers intellectual benefits of a high order. For example, Celestials can assess tactical situations

"I took a torch to the building, my lord."

"And?" Rubescent fingers tapped against the stone.

"There were screams, my lord. The men who sheltered him were unable to escape. I saw two of them consumed by flames, trying and failing to open windows sealed with maidenhair fern. And then he came to the window. The pale one."

"Was he burning?"

"No, my lord. He was not harmed."
—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

The Human Spirit

Inhuman Powers are not alone in their opinion of humanity. Even low-Aspect Powers can spend miracle points to perform mental, physical, and artistic miracles. Certainly, any Power can see at a glance whether a mortal artist, athlete, scholar, or model stands out from the rest. Yet such things do not really impress them. A human simply cannot possess a skill or talent that makes them comparable to a Noble.

Humans do have some virtues, however, that most Powers can recognize. Human passion, human integrity, and human ego can all compete with the passion, integrity, and ego of the Nobilis. Individual Nobilis often exceed human accomplishment in these areas, and most humans do not compete at all — but humans can *have personalities strong enough to remind Nobles of the Nobilis.*

Vyasa asks why Princess Bidalika, rejecting the strong, the graceful, and the wise, would choose a madman as her groom. The answer should now be clear: the strong man was not so strong as she, the graceful man not so graceful, the wise man not so wise — but the madman was as passionate and driven as Bidalika herself.

instantly, with a skill beyond the greatest chess players. They resist all efforts to addict, hypnotize, or psychically dominate them. They have often paid the price for wisdom, and hence know many secrets humanity does not. This is a common Aspect for mature Powers, who have been among the Nobilis for a goodly length of time.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Arikel is the mortal child of the angel of the sun and a demonic beast who found her unguarded in the sky. His birth heralded the beginning of night, for when his features show his father's mark, the sun cannot bear to look down upon him. Thousands of years later, he became one of his mother's Nobles, and has been given the sleeping minds of the diurnal world as his trust. He and his servants patrol those minds to roust his father, Nightmare, from their dreams. It seems to mortals that night and day follow in even progression, but mortals also believe the Earth is round. Go figure.

Niobe rules the five winds — from the north, from the south, from the east, from the west, and the wind that sighs from the heart when love ends. She took her name from a mythic heroine of the tribe into which she was born. The first Niobe was a lovely woman, but merciless and stronger than the elephant. The Power's Chancel, Locus Terah, is a tiny yet lovely world populated only by herself, her Imperator, her Familia Caelestis, her five attendants, and a handful of others.

Level 5: Exemplar

15 points

Exemplars blur the line between rule over their Domain and their own personal physical power. They fully integrate their divine essence and use it to its utmost extent. These are the Powers of fable: beings of enormous puissance who can split mountains with their fists, blow away armies, or wound the sun with an arrow. If someone can imagine a being accomplishing a task with physical power alone, some Exemplar can do exactly that.

Choosing this level of Aspect ensures that your character will never have trouble with even the most difficult exercises, physical or mental. On the other hand, they must tie up much of their power in the mortal world and may lose track of the subtler, more spiritual abilities of the Nobilis. This brilliance sometimes comes at the cost of human breadth and complexity. The place where mind and soul touch is dominated by the pure, unalloyed fire of their Estate.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Malahdi is a Power deeply attuned to the Dark. He belongs to the Imperator Manaechus, an Aaron's Serpent whose actions in corrupting Eden spawned the Dark and Light alike. His Domain is Justice — not the entangling legalities of mortal courts or the cleansing justice of karma fulfilled, but the dark fate that trails those who cause harm to others. "An eye for an eye" holds no appeal for him; he embodies the principle of Sevenfold Vengeance. His power grows with every atrocity committed in justice's name. When he walks in the mortal world, his touch is like a blow and his breath is like the biting winds of winter.

Morgan is the goddess of war, much to the chagrin of her more peaceable Familia Caelestis. War leaves nothing intact but her ravens and knows no limits to its strength or ferocity. The Powers of Earth step softly around her. She is respected as well, because she has engineered many of the Nobilis' victories against the Dark Horsemen — although there are some who wonder what would become of the Valde Bellum if war no longer existed.

"It is said that, once, a human army lay siege to Olympus."

"A curious thing! But why?"

"They had an issue with the gods, for in their cities good men had died and evil men still lived. Is it not the duty of the gods to set these things right? they thought. If the gods do not control Fate, then they must be reminded of their obligations."

"They were very foolish men."

"That is my thought! But listen: the man who led them was a great orator … a favorite of the poets' god. And his words had power to sway even the Olympians, to make them feel that they should, perhaps, grant him the justice he desired. Or, at the least, not kill his army out of hand."

"But surely their siege was not allowed!"

"Indeed not! But, you understand, they wished not to kill."

"And so?"

"Why, the thunder god leaned down, and he blew them all away."

—from Conversations with Androcles, *by Jen Hogan*

Using Aspect

Aspect covers a great many sorts of miraculous acts: everything in the physical world, from turning in a good performance on stage to stepping across the Grand Canyon, as well as many mental feats. The following "laws" are rules of thumb about when Aspect can accomplish a deed. Most Aspect miracles must satisfy all three conditions.

The Mountain Laurel Law:

If a human can do something, Aspect can do it … a thousand times better.

- Humans can jump; Aspect covers jumping over a wall.
- Humans can compose; Aspect covers composing great songs.
- Humans can swim; Aspect covers swimming across the Atlantic.
- Humans can break things by hitting them; Aspect covers breaking hills.
- Humans can't make fire without tools; Aspect covers making fire with tools … even big fires.
- Humans can't fly without a plane; Aspect covers flying with a plane … even stunt aerobatics.
- Humans can't perform surgery without a surgical kit; Aspect covers performing surgery with tools … even poor tools.

It was told from the very beginning that the sea would be Atlantis' ending. And so the men of the city of Adelais, that stood by the shore, built a great wall against the sea. Years of labor by a hundred hundred hands made that wall a wonder of the world, and in time it is said that the one who rules in the oceans heard of its building. And he was displeased.

In his chariot of ivory, drawn by horses green and white, he rode to Adelais, and he looked upon the wall. It is said that it ringed twelve and twenty miles of the coast, and that it was as tall as human hands could make it.

And the king of the sea lifted his hand, and he walked across the waves to the wall, and he struck it once with his hand. Twice. Three times.

And the sea came pouring in.

—from The Fall of Adelais, *author unknown*

The Primrose Law:

If a mythical character can do something without magic, Aspect can do it.

Mythical heroes come in many flavors. This law refers to the ones we are expected to identify with, on some level. We can comprehend their special gifts and the world they occupy, more wondrous than ours but not totally alien. Hercules, Theseus, and Sherlock Holmes are low-powered examples: we are expected to believe that they are really "human". More extreme examples include the heroes who rescue the sun and the moon, or the modern-day redneck who shoots down a star with his trusty shotgun. Consider Æsculapius, the greatest human doctor who ever was. He could, with lots of work, raise the dead, but he could not heal with a touch.

(Incidentally, whether medical treatment can raise the dead is up to the HG to decide; it depends on what has happened to the dead person's soul, which is more often an affair for Imperators than for the Sovereign Powers.)

Ultimately, the best guide is the third law:

The Nasturtium Law:

If it makes good myth, and fits Aspect's style, then Aspect can do it.

All three of these rules require some interpretation. In general, the Hollyhock God and the players should sit down before the game and go over what people expect to do with Aspect. The HG may also choose to rule out the use of the highest levels of Aspect-based miracles, to make sure that it doesn't dominate the other attributes.

Aspect Limitations

Some of the things that Aspect cannot do:

- Aspect cannot silence a gun.
- Aspect cannot douse an area in darkness.
- Aspect cannot make a painting one can walk through.
- Aspect cannot grow a tree from an acorn.
- Aspect cannot provide 'magical' healing to others.
- Aspect cannot put a new sun in the sky if some idiot shoots it down.
- Aspect cannot provide social influence among Powers.
- Aspect cannot change history.
- Aspect cannot provide planning intelligence above the player's.
- Aspect cannot make someone's head explode by looking at them.
- Aspect cannot create things from nowhere.
- Aspect cannot make someone like Chinese food who doesn't.
- Aspect cannot read "impressions" from objects.
- Aspect cannot prevent busy signals (or voice mailboxes).
- Aspect cannot read minds. (It can, however, read mortal body language.)
- Aspect cannot make a device go beyond its uttermost limits.
- Aspect cannot turn someone else into an alligator.
- Aspect cannot conquer a Chancel or create an Anchor.
- Aspect cannot read a book without opening it.
- Aspect cannot move things telekinetically.
- Aspect cannot dispel a ghost.
- Aspect cannot remove a concept from the world, or a human's mind. (It can, however, convince them to keep a secret.)
- Aspect cannot help resist spiritual temptation.
- Aspect cannot normally overcome a character using a force that character controls, represents, or is in general associated with.
- Aspect cannot be used to empower others.
- Aspect cannot be used when only the mind is present (e.g. in most virtual-realities).
- Aspect can't make literally hypnotic art, with or without subliminals.

Note: Gifts of Aspect may be able to work around the above limitations; invisibility or wings that cast forth shadow are, for example, valid Aspect-based Gifts.

The following are some miracles that Aspect could perform, going by the rules as given, but which are specifically forbidden in the default game world:

- Aspect cannot make someone fall in love.
- Aspect cannot damage the World Ash.
- Aspect cannot determine what the future holds.

Rules for Aspect

The "power sources" for Aspect miracles are called **Aspect Miracle Points** (AMPs). Each character has permanent AMPs and temporary AMPs. Miracles cost temporary AMPs, and characters can earn back AMPs in various ways. When the HG begins a new story, they reset each character's temporary AMP total to their permanent AMP total.

Characters begin with 5 permanent AMPs and can spend 1 Character Point for each additional AMP. There are also ways to increase these totals during play.

- A **simple** miracle costs 0 (temporary) AMPs — it doesn't drain the character at all.
- A **normal** miracle costs 1 (temporary) AMP to perform.
- A **hard** miracle costs 2 (temporary) AMPs to perform.
- A **deep** miracle costs 4 (temporary) AMPs to perform.

EXAMPLE

Rob spends 2 Character Points for a total of 7 permanent AMPs. At the start of the first story, he will have 7 temporary AMPs. If he uses 4 of them during the story, and the HG then starts a new story, he will have 7 temporary AMPs once again.

A power with sufficient AMPs can also use a **Word of Command**. This hideously painful exertion of barely controlled miraculous energy can wound, disfigure, or spiritually damage even the strongest Sovereign for weeks or months. It costs the Power 8 (temporary) AMPs as well. There are Words of Command for Domain and Realm as well. The Aspect Words of Command are more specifically known as "Words of the Flesh".

Use a miracle's difficulty and the character's Aspect level to determine what sort of miracle a particular effect is for that character:

MIRACLE TYPE	AMP COST	CAN BE USED WHEN
Normal	1 AMP	Difficulty equals or is less than Aspect Level + 1
Hard	2 AMPS	Difficulty equals or is less than Aspect Level + 2
Deep	4 AMPS	Difficulty equals or is less than Aspect Level + 4
Word of Command	8 AMPS	Difficulty equals or is less than Aspect Level + 8 (at the cost of a terrible wound)

Lesser Miracles, Major Miracles

Miracle definitions are deliberately somewhat vague. Lesser divinations should only answer questions about things that belong to the character's Estate. Lesser miracles preserve, create, destroy, or change:

- Up to 10 tons of material;
- One square mile of territory; *or*
- One typical instance of the relevant Estate.

Use whichever standard is most generous to the particular miracle.

Some lesser miracles give objects new qualities. Lesser miracles of preservation give objects new defenses or resistances. Lesser miracles of change give objects new

qualities of various sorts. These defenses, resistances, or qualities can be specific and powerful (e.g. immunity to lung cancer or the ability to jump exactly one hundred feet into the air). For more general miracles, try to keep the power level comparable to that found in the natural world. Lesser miracles of preservation can give a human the longevity of a tortoise, the tensile strength of body armor, or the emotional control of an experienced monk. They could give a short song the lifespan of "One Hundred Bottles of Beer on the Wall". Lesser miracles of change can give a human the tasty flavor of a well-cooked soufflé, the agility of a cat, or the ability to see non-scrambled television channels on their inner eye.

Lesser creation miracles should only create objects — or parts of those objects — with a relatively small and unremarkable nature. Anything more requires a major miracle.

These four rules — from most important to least — may help you decide.

1. Would any PC become ineffectual if they could not use miracles this potent over their Estate? Then make it a lesser miracle.
2. Can you run the game effectively if the players and NPCs throw around miracles on this order of magnitude? If not, make it a major miracle.
3. Does this miracle feel like something the Power responsible for the relevant part of reality would do routinely, as part of their job? Make it a lesser miracle.
4. Does this miracle feel like something from an epic conflict or a moment of wonder? If it does then make it a major miracle.

EXAMPLE

A character has Level 3 Aspect, or Inhuman Aspect. For this character, the chart looks like:

MIRACLE TYPE	MIRACLE LEVELS
Simple (0 Aspect Miracle Points)	Levels 0-3
Normal (1 AMP)	Level 4
Hard (2 AMPs)	Level 5
Deep (4 AMPs)	Level 6-7
Words of Command (8 AMPs)	Levels 8-11 (see below)

Level 9 miracles can do *anything* that Aspect can do. However, there are times when a Power will voluntarily increase the level of a miracle in order to make it more effective against other Powers. Therefore, level 11 miracles can occur.

What the player probably memorizes is this:
Level 3 is improbable feats. I can do them for free.
Level 4 is very improbable feats. That costs me an AMP.
Level 5 is 'impossible for humans' … but it mimics animal abilities. That costs me 2 AMPs.
Level 7 is impossible but straightforward feats that affect the local area. That costs me 4 AMPs.

Note that Gifts of Aspect don't matter in this calculation. Few beginning Powers will have 8 AMPs to spend on a Word of Command.

Level 0 Miracles: Peak Performance and the Sight

"I don't care if the universe does get destroyed," he said sharply. "I have an algebra test to study for."
—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Humans often have bad days or perform at a level less than their best. A slickly designed "Sale" sign takes in a sharp bargain hunter. A forester spends hours failing to kindle a fire. A mathematician bangs their head against a simple problem for days. A marksman's trigger finger twitches.

A Power, on the other hand, can choose to forsake bad days. With an Aspect 0 miracle, a Power can make the most out of their natural, unmiraculous abilities. Using an Aspect 0 miracle instead of an ordinary unmiraculous action screens out the effects of fatigue, hunger, thirst, adrenaline-based twitchiness, mood, health, and uncertainty. The Power does the best their mortal self can do, each and every time. They won't surpass their natural abilities, so they can still make mistakes or fail, but neither will they waste any of their natural potential.

With an Aspect 0 miracle, that shopper's critical faculties remain engaged — the "Sale" sign doesn't fool them. The forester kindles the fire almost instantly or not at all. The mathematician solves the problem as fast as they have ever solved such problems. The marksman's trigger finger does not twitch.

A character's mortal abilities, as expressed through non-miraculous actions and Aspect 0 miracles, do grow naturally over time. A Power who fences every day improves their fencing talent at the same rate that the mortal they once were would have improved theirs. This is true whether the Power uses Aspect 0 miracles, Aspect 3 miracles, or no miracles at all on the fencing mat.

Example level 0 miracles include dancing, jumping, climbing a wall, or performing lab work. How well the character actually performs depends on the character's background. In general, the player decides how well the character performs, when using a level 0 miracle (or non-miraculous action), but the Hollyhock God can overrule the player if appropriate.

Other examples of level 0 miracles:

- Shopping, with peak mental acuity and bargain memory.
- Changing clothes, as fast as humanly possible.
- Firing a gun, coolly, collectedly, and precisely.
- Driving a car, with peak alertness and reflexes.

The Sight

Powers possess a mystic "Sight" that enables them to identify others of their kind as Nobilis, magical objects as magical, Anchors as Anchors, Imperators as Imperators, Excrucians as Excrucians, and so forth. It will also give them a vague idea of the nature of the Sovereign or object. For example, they might see the rising sun behind the Power of the Dawn, and a faint limning of sunlight about that Power's Anchor. Turning on this Sight is a level 0 miracle. In addition to its benefits, this darkens and blurs the images of things without power. It can be turned off at will. Powers affiliated with the

Wild can occasionally sense pivotal choices and stolen freedoms using the Sight, even through walls. This is not reliable unless they buy a Gift. Excrucians and (more rarely) Powers can conceal themselves from the Sight.

So sharp is the vision of the hawk that it sees its prey even before the wind.
—from A Medieval Bestiary, *by Paul McArthur*

Level 1 Miracles: High-Level Human

Level 1 miracles lie within the potential of very competent humans. This includes professional athletic ability, up to about the level of bronze-medal Olympians.

Other level 1 miracles include:

- Running through a forest in perfect silence.
- Performing a Judo throw on a demon.
- Catching arrows.
- Computing cube roots in one's head.
- Remembering being born.
- Very sharp senses.

"I saw our Lord once," the mother told her child. "It was a beautiful thing, to see him move ..."
—from the Thought-Record of Martin Cravitt

Level 2 Miracles: World Record Performance and Guising

Level 2 miracles lie at most a tiny bit above the ability of the greatest mundane humans, including setting new world records, solving moderate sets of linear equations instantly, and such. Humans descended from an Imperator (very rare, in this modern age) and idiot savants can perform one or two miracles of this level regularly, but no other humans can.

Other level 2 miracles include:

- Running soundlessly through a forest with a thorn in one's foot.
- Exactly measuring distances by eye.
- Remembering anything you've ever heard.

Guising

All Powers possess a limited form of shapeshifting known as "Guising", a level 2 Aspect miracle. This allows them to take on a form suited to their environment, while still remaining essentially themselves. A stately and august Power could adopt the form of a Chinese mandarin in China, an African business potentate in Nigeria, a regal Jotun in the world of Jotunheim, an anthropomorphic squid in a Chancel where squids are the ordinary people, and a sleek shark undersea. The Guising Power does not choose their form — they take on a shape suited to the local population. Further, their shape reflects their natural appearance as much as possible — Guising cannot disguise a Power from those who know of its existence.

The mystic Sight of Sovereigns, described above under level 0 miracles, sees straight through a guise to the underlying body and nature of the Power. Physical laws, however, respect the guise, so that (for instance) a guised dragon can fit in a mortal bar. Nonhuman Powers often use Guising to move among human populations.

Powers can Guise as animals, but only if those animals are the highest mortal life forms in the vicinity. A Power marooned far from land, or falling towards an uninhabited desert, sometimes becomes a fish or bird when Guising; no Power likes to rely upon this hope.

Level 3 Miracles: Improbable Feats

Level 3 miracles are physically possible, but unreasonable for a normal human to even attempt. This includes such things as standing on eight fingertips, skeet shooting while surfing, running on fencetops, or punching through steel, and equivalent mental feats.

Other level 3 miracles include:

- Outcomputing a Pentium.
- Posing for a magazine without needing retouching.
- Shattering rocks with a blow.
- Inventing new martial arts styles with a certainty of success.

I could tell that my lord was upset. Agitated. I didn't know how much so until the phone rang ... his prospective date, Deborah, I supposed.

He picked it up before the second ring ... our only phone was two floors away.
—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Level 4 Miracles: Very Improbable Feats

Level 4 miracles straddle the border of physical impossibility: things like throwing a motorcycle and standing on two fingertips, like outcomputing a Cray or singing both halves of a duet. In general, if there's any chance you would believe a human once accomplished it — and humans have bounced cannonballs — it can be done with a level 4 Aspect miracle.

Other level 4 miracles include:

- Analyzing complex mortal situations precisely.
- Throwing a motorcycle or small car.
- Running on the heads of a crowd.
- Tracking someone by scent.

Down a dozen feckless turnings she had run, and squirmed through a broken window to gain entrance to the warehouse where she breathed, bloody and tired, a dusty lightless air. The ... the thing's ... words burned in her mind, "I know where you will run ..." but she hadn't known it herself.

And yet a cold and rough-edged hand closed about her wrist.
—from the "Entertainment Archive" of Baronet Dulian

Level 5 Miracles: Impossible for Humans

Level 5 miracles are not physically possible for humans, but approximate the abilities of animals or machines; they give capabilities like those possessed by mundane inhabitants of Earth. Birds can fly, so an enormous gliding leap is a level 5 miracle. Cats are fast, so this level includes inhuman speed. Characters that aren't human can do appropriate things a bit better: for example, winged characters, even without an appropriate Gift, can fly as a level 5 miracle.

Other level 5 miracles include:

- Catching bullets.
- Archery at 300 meters.

The angel shed his guise. It was just as well ... easier to be certain that way. Seven or eight feet of wing spread on either side of him. A golden sword was in his hands.

In a single clean motion, the six of us aimed our submachine guns. The moment of firing was an epiphany: six thunders roaring at once. Six ripples of pain upon the angel's flesh. Those wings began to move as he staggered back. That was okay. They'd never support him, never lift the one sixty pounds of him into the air. Except they did.
—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

Level 6 Miracles: Universally Improbable

Level 6 miracles do not fit any of the levels above, but remain bounded by reason and rational constraints. You can imagine something doing it without magic. It is, for example, physically impossible to lift a mountain, because a chunk will just break off in the lifter's hands. At this level, though, one can lift a weight that is as heavy as a mountain.

Other level 6 miracles include:

- Crushing granite to powder.
- Running at Mach 3.
- Writing a thick novel overnight.
- Memorizing everything ever written.
- Defeating an army in single combat, one by one.
- Reconciling quantum mechanics and general relativity.

"... Everyone, after all, can juggle flaming torches and knives.

But now ... I juggle trees."
—from the diary of Ibn a'Harid, Jann

"Impossible? No," said the Power, gently. "It is only that your perceptions are limited, and your view of the world unclear."
—from Rosebud and the Sovereign, *author unknown*

Level 7 Miracles: Impossible for Anyone (Local Effects)

Level 7 miracles are epic miracles. They can be truly impossible, such as drinking a pond, but they must remain easy to conceptualize. Level 7 is additionally limited in that it cannot affect vast areas. These miracles feed on the character's personal energies, and their effects dwindle more than a few miles away. The Power cannot blow away an army, but can knock down thousands with a breath. At this level, the Power invoking the miracle can show absolute and total mastery of any skill of any sort, and they are able to solve even theoretically unsolvable problems or difficulties.

Other level 7 miracles include:

- Taking down a blimp with a thrown hatpin.
- Taking down a blimp with a thrown courthouse.
- Swallowing elephants.
- Shouting loud enough to kill.

"The truth," the old man said, in a voice too weak to cut butter, "is that the knoll was lots *closer than the gunman needed to be."*
—from Spotlight: C, *by Marilith Turner*

Level 8 Miracles: Impossible for Anyone (Non-Local Effects)

Level 8 miracles are also epic, nearly impossible, and can affect huge sweeps of territory. This level is for shouts that deafen countries, for lifting mountains, and for stomping the Earth hard enough to activate the San Andreas fault. This is the penultimate miracle level, and the miracles must still be easy to imagine, but their potential power is enormous.

Other level 8 miracles include:

- Jumping between continents.
- Shooting down the sun.
- Drinking a lake.
- Swallowing cities.

Level 9 Miracles: Fabled

Level 9 miracles of Aspect can do anything else allowed by Aspect

Level 9 miracles include:

- Intimidating all the males in a crowd aged 12-20, selectively.
- Writing a song that is truly irresistibly catchy.
- Hiding a mountain in your shirt.

Note that each level includes all the miracles of the previous levels. Use the cost chart (p. 86) to find the smallest miracle level that can accomplish a given task.

Mystical creatures with abilities like truth-sense or winterbreath are not among the "mundane inhabitants of the Earth" which level 5 miracles can mimic. This does not mean that characters cannot have these abilities. They can be purchased as Gifts of Aspect, according to the rules found later.

Note: If a given mystical feat is not natural given the physical and mental nature of the character, and it does not parallel a human or an animal ability, then it cannot be performed using Aspect Miracle Points.

Aspect Miracle Index

MIRACLE LEVEL	LEVEL DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE MIRACLE
Level 0	Peak performance	Graceful jump
	The Sight	
Level 1	High-level human	Olympic long jump
Level 2	World-record performance	World record jump
	Guising	
Level 3	Improbable feats	Skeet-surfing
Level 4	Very improbable feats	Running on heads
Level 5	Impossible for humans	Catching a bullet
Level 6	Universally improbable	Drinking a lake
Level 7	Impossible for anyone (local)	Lifting a hill
Level 8	Impossible for anyone (non-local)	Lifting a mountain
Level 9	Fabled	Hiding a mountain

Special Aspect Powers Index

Level 0	The Sight	Detecting Nobilis, Excrucians, Anchors in use, and magical things. Vaguely sensing their natures.
Level 2	Guising	Putting on a human or Chancel-appropriate shape. (Does not affect the Sight.)

Domain

The Sovereign Powers represent and personify the building blocks of the universe. In each Power's soul, a shard of their Imperator crouches like an acidic gnome. As its essence diffuses through them, it grants them the power to rule one of those building blocks (occasionally, more). This is their Estate, also known as their Domain, and the Domain attribute measures their control over it.

Domain miracles can do almost anything to the mortal world, although the Domain Attribute of any specific Sovereign is more limited. These miracles give the Nobilis broad and effective control over the things of their Estate. Most Sovereigns also have some control over the things associated with their Estate. At the highest levels, there is nothing involving that Estate (barring interference from other Powers) that they cannot do. If a Power's Estate is the sun, they can use Domain to bring down fires, wake diurnal animals, enlighten mortals, and perhaps even command the Phoenix.

The strength of a Power's bond to their Estate is not necessarily tied to the breadth of their command over it. The Domain attribute is more of an "affinity", a knack or a talent for this kind of miracle. Some have it and can work dazzling miracles from the moment of their Commencement. Others never learn. Low-Domain Powers often describe reality and their Estates as "slippery," "heavy," or "stubbornly rebellious". Although it does not obey them well, the Powers of rudimentary ("crippled") Domain still feel a love for the thing they embody and protect. As the Dominus of English said, pulling his knife from a Quebeçois separatist, "You've gotta love this job."

Domain follows game mechanics much like those that govern Aspect. You may buy up to 5 levels of Domain, and each level makes working miracles with Domain easier for the character. You can also buy Gifts of Domain.

Players should work with the HG to define what their character can influence with their Domain. This means

defining the Estate and a few things "closely related" to it that the character can also control. For example, the Power of the Sun and their HG agree that the Power's Domain miracles can affect the sun itself, change the cycles of day and night, call up fire, and inspire mortals. The Power of Probability and their HG agree that the Power's Estate reflects only the outcomes of large groups of actions. It does not change the probability of single events. In addition, the Power's Domain gives control over gamblers, gambling, and chaotic phenomena.

Ultimately, the HG should make sure that Powers define their Estates — and close associations to their Estates — in a manner that encourages creativity and maintains rough player character parity. For example, if the Power of Emotions and the Power of Fear are both PCs, the Power of Emotions has a broader Estate. However, the HG could encourage the Power of Emotions to pick artists and artistry as the major associations for their Estate, while giving the Power of Fear control over classically frightening and macabre phenomena — walking skeletons, wolves, pitch darkness, insect swarms, and so forth. Both Powers have broad abilities, but control over artists is less useful in a pinch than control over the monstrous.

Powers can have more than one Estate. Some Powers extend their authority with time, acquiring additional control over Estates in some sense close to their own. Such Powers buy **Secondary Domain** over additional Estates. Each level of Secondary Domain over a single additional Estate costs one point. A Power cannot buy Secondary Domain past the level of their primary Domain Attribute. Unlike Domain, which defaults to 0 levels, Nobilis have no score in Secondary Domains by default. They must buy at least one level of Secondary Domain in a given Estate to perform miracles based on that Secondary Domain.

Let us take the example of Arikel, who embodies Night. It is his player's job to define a reasonable set of associations for this Estate; he chooses darkness and dreams. If something comes up with strong and obvious associations with Night, it's included as well. Arikel also wants some measure of power over the bodies of sleepers and over night animals.

His Domains are Night (including darkness and dreams), which is his Primary Domain (Level 4, 12 points); Sleeping Bodies, which is a Secondary Domain (Level 2, 2 points); and Night Animals, which is also a Secondary Domain (Level 2, 2 points). The total cost is 16 points.

"Lady," he said, and knelt. The woman's hair was tangled; her face was pallid and painfully thin: she was the Lady of the Plague. She gestured him impatiently to rise.

"I have come from Germany," he said, "where my love lies dying. I have come to ask you to spare him, great Lady. I can offer you much in exchange."

"Fool," she said, and there was bitter black anger welling from her like oil from the earth, "do you think I choose whom I take?"

—from LADY OF THE PLAGUE, *by Emily Chen*

Level 0: Pawn, or Crippled Domain

0 points

Characters with this level of Domain do not command their Estate. In fact, they may even be a plaything for its whims, what the Powers call a "Pawn" of their Estate. (This term is sometimes an insult and sometimes worn with pride, like "geek" or "fundamentalist".) Some Powers are Pawns because of a "war wound" their Imperator suffered in the Valde Bellum, in which the Imperator's own sense of self has been damaged. Sometimes, an Imperator deliberately blocks off this part of a newly Commenced Noble's power. It is said that this indicates a lack of trust, but the motives of Imperators defy simple categorization.

Do not make the choice of level 0 Domain lightly. One will have almost no access to the primal sorceries which Powers, in general, take for granted.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Ruth (who prefers to be called "Jezebel", but nobody does so) is the goddess of the punks. Like the movement itself, she was initially the creation of the Excrucians. The Imperator Sharashbel took the rare step of intervening personally in that particular Breakthrough, absorbing the concept/reality-fragment associated with the movement. While the whole city of Santa Giorgi, California, sank into a Chancel and even the memory of it faded from the outside world, Sharashbel torturously cleansed Ruth of the Excrucian influence and changed her into a Domina of the Light. The energy of that Breakthrough hasn't yet been captured, though: either the Excrucians achieved their objective, or their goal is yet to be reached and too subtle to be seen. Ruth herself, of course, is not entirely trusted or respected; at that, her flesh is even used by the others of her Familia Caelestis as a source of charms with which to control the young.

Mikhail was the foremost Power of Russia, before he lost his love. She perished in the winter winds he himself brought upon St. Petersburg. His resulting (entirely inappropriate) nervous breakdown nearly severed the connection between his Estate and himself. He split into the shadowy remnant of a human soul, bound into a Power's body, and a cold impersonal force (played by the HG) that has taken up his former duties. In exchange for certain concessions, the Imperator he belonged to traded that human self to another. Servants who have tasted power are always useful, and Mikhail's Aspect remains strong. The HG will doubtless explore the connection between Mikhail and the inhuman Power that carries out his old job in the course of the game.

Level 1: Baronet, or Weak Domain

3 points

This level of Domain (over one's primary Estate) is common among those who claim the title Baron and the six-pearled coronet. The "Baronets", who lack strength of their own and must rely on support from greater Powers, often have this level of Domain as well. Domain 1 provides basic mastery of their Estate, enough to work a small miracle or two on occasion.

A character of Weak Domain in their primary Estate is generally a person (even, a human) first, and a symbol of their Estate a distant second. Weak Domain over additional Estates is more common.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Melanie is the Bard of our age: only a young student now, in the rural Chancel of Tumeo Tumbarius, she's already beginning to master the Estate of Music that has been given into her hands. Her Estate is less subtle than that of Diminuendo, Domina of the Fugue. Melanie will learn a

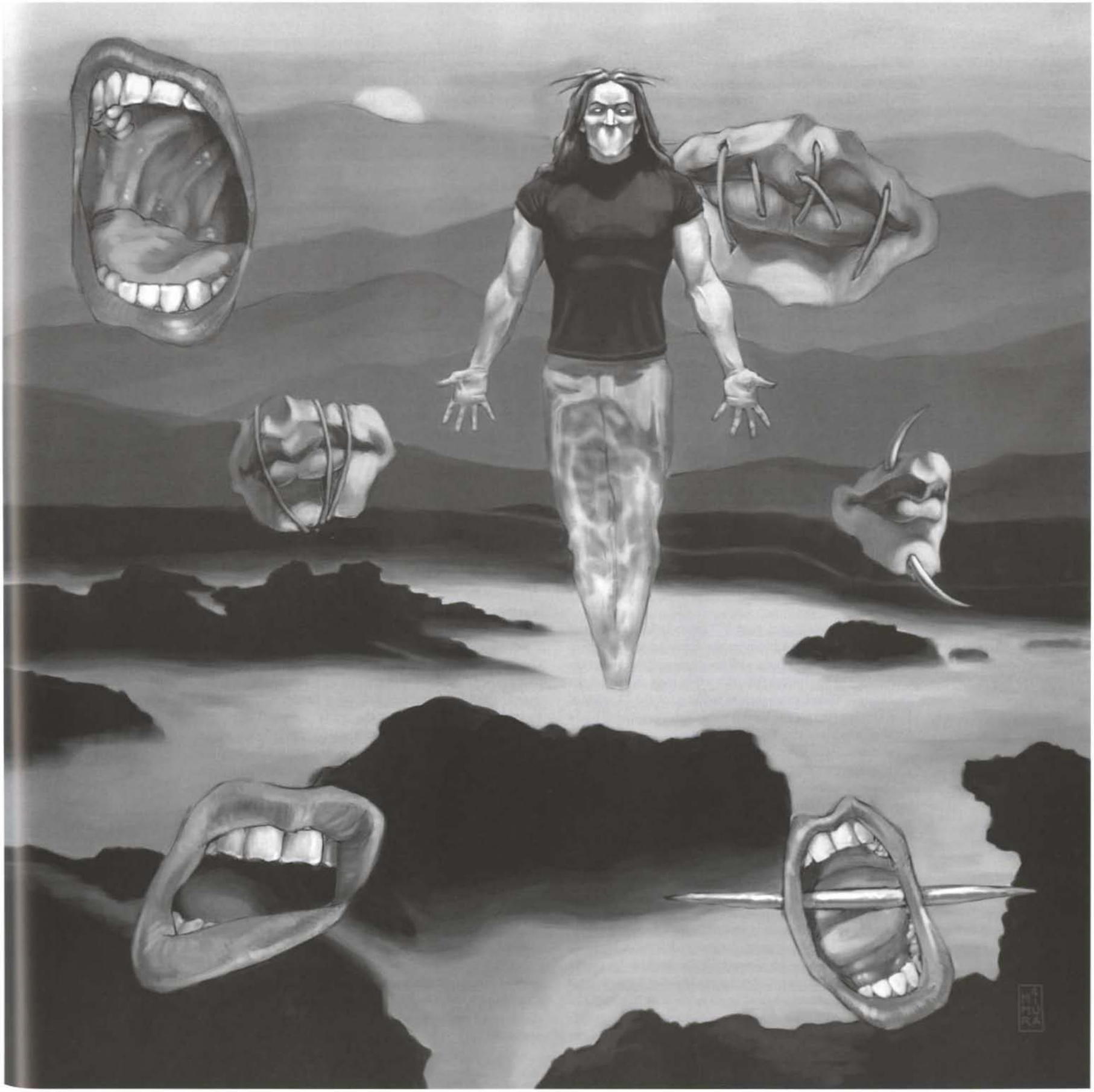
OPPOSITE:
The Domain of Silence
by Raven Mimura

Napoleon lifted the crown high. His voice rang out.

"I crown me Napoleon the first," he said, "Baron of Corsica, and the Emperor of all this mortal Earth." Then he lowered the crown onto his head, and one by one all who stood within the room knelt before him. Save three.

And he looked to those three, and he gave what is said to have been a manic smile. It is also said that in that look there was a certain measure of fear ....

—from A HISTORY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, *by Dame Winters*



broad-reaching power over all kinds of musical sounds; Dimi's power covers one of the fundamental structural building blocks of the world, the conjoining of similar strengths to produce a whole and balanced effect. For now, Melanie can produce only the most basic miracles of Domain, such as playing any instrument well. The bulk of her points probably go into Spirit, so that her harper's music can perform the magical rituals that are key to the conflict with the Excrucians.

Baron Kyle O'Donoghue is the name most recently used by the Power of the UNIX computer operating system. He is a quirky man whose words (and even his thoughts) type themselves out within his glass-clear eyes. Some of the greater computer or software Powers have the ability to directly control their Domains, but Kyle finds this difficult. To him, the variations of the UNIX operating system follow their internal logic strictly. Changing how it works on any deep level is beyond him. To work a miracle that actually affects the system itself, he must work out all of the possible consequences — and an awful lot of code — inside his head. His greatest advantage is that the programs he works out, either as a miracle or a use of skill, automatically run with the same privileges as those of the owner of the machine.

Level 2: Viscount, or Minor Domain

6 points

This level of Domain serves its owners well. Miracles of comfort and of divination come readily. With effort, they can work more interesting marvels with their Estates. The title "Viscount" and the chain-of-pearls crown is proper for characters with this level of control over their Estates … but note that in the game reality it is difficult to verify a Power's credentials.

In the Powers' Sight, most Viscounts lack the patina of mundanity that generally covers the Barons and the Pawns. They are alive and burning with the energy of the force they represent. Even to human eyes, they often have characteristics evocative of their Estate, such as red hair for the Domina of Fire, shining eyes for the Dominus of Light, or gnarled limbs for the Domina of the Trees.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Whisper is an ancient Power, who has been the Domina of the River since before Cain slew Abel. Even she no longer remembers her human name, she bothers with only one title: Warden of the Heartwoods Chancel. She lives for the waters' causes, but enough humanity remains in her that she can adapt to the changing world and take rational approaches to modern Earth's plight. As she prepares to fight the polluters on their own battleground — money and politics — she runs the most successful dowsing company on Earth.

Takari Risu was a green-haired girl from a Japanese animation, with (for no clear reason) antennae. Her story was playing in a theatre next door when the Jiyamasu cult attempted to summon a dead angel to do their bidding. The spell grounded through the cult at one end and the angel's heir, Mahariel, at the other. The image of Takari, on the screen, was caught in between. A new entity was pulled from the screen, wearing Risu's face, bound to Mahariel as tightly as any of his Nobles. As in the anime, Risu is a technical genius. Accordingly, she holds a Domain over modern technology at the Viscount level. The most important aspects of a Noble, mystical power and the Imperator-Domina tie, are present in Risu, although it is appropriate to check with the HG before making a character such as Risu who is not technically of the Nobilis.

Level 3: Marchessa, or Forceful Domain

9 points

Forceful Domain is, first and foremost, a power of perpetuation. It deals with strengthening states of being and energies until they can resist attacks made upon them. Even the name applied to these Powers — "Marquis" or "Marchessa" — means "preserver", descending along twisted linguistic paths from Machisene, the name of the angel of memory. A Power of Forceful Domain is entitled to wear a coronet with strawberry leaves set amongst its pearls.

Characters with this level of Domain have been entrusted most deeply with the maintenance and continuation of their Estate in and out of the mortal world. The bond between them and their power is deep and subtle, and has great influence on their personality and physical appearance.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Shi-mi is the Placida Rex, the Lady of Calm Reflection, and the Marchessa Leana. She rules lions, and more generally cats. She is the one called upon to preserve the feline races in their teeming millions upon the Earth and to the spiritual energy of dying felines everywhere for her Imperator's magics. In practice, she spends most of her time in long naps, visiting the dead, and careening about the world for no clear reason. On occasion, however, she descends so low as to actually perform her duties, rescuing the cats with good survivor genes from the sad fates that bad luck alone has brought them to. In her presence, animals of the feline persuasion may fall from great heights, or tumble under the wheels of an oncoming car, only to arrive, unhurt, at their final destination.

Tytalus was once a god, his domain all the plants that are. By his doing and his will the sunlight fed them, and soil nourished them, and the primal forest spread across the world. Then the Excrucians made their first, infinitely careful, moves against the Earth, and in a blow so soft he never felt it they broke his soul and sent it raining to the Earth below. It was a millennium before the true war began, before the other Imperators understood the threat the Excrucians posed. Not until then did a shard of Tytalus first reawaken. An Imperator awakened it, drawn to that shard's resting place — knowingly or not — to make a Chancel there. It was not pleasant for either of the souls involved, but in the end, a piece of Tytalus found a bitter new existence as a Power, as a mere servant to a now much stronger Lord. Worse yet, a human mind now shares space with his own, and sometimes it even rules their union.

"… eyes?"

"Check."

The customs man made a note on his pad. "Liver?"

There was a moment of pain. Then, "Check."

"Bone marrow?"

"… sweet."

"I'm sorry, Mister Serrano," said the customs man. "But my assistant here … he knows bodies very very well. And it seems that you're a human."

Henry looked briefly puzzled. "Of course I am …"

"… and we can't have that here."

—from The Life and Death of Henry Serrano, *by Emily Chen*

"Come on in," the guide said softly, and he gestured down the road. Something blurred in the air ahead, a soft wavering that made edges uncertain and the simple path assume a sense of danger. "We have been preparing the Chancel for your arrival."

"Oh?" said Shehariah, and he jauntily stepped forward.

His guide followed him as the path dissolved to elsewhere, and smiled at the vista that opened before him.

Wildflowers grew beside a simple golden arch, and beyond the road led downwards into a city of white marble, and there was a singing in the air.

"It's Heaven," said Shehariah softly.

"A pale memory, only," murmured the guide, "caught in a glass."

"Damn you!" the fallen angel cried.

—from Legends of the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Whence Comes The Color of the Snow?

The higher a Power's Domain, the more their body and mind come to reflect the nature of their Estate. Simultaneously, as a Power's Domain increases, their ability to change their Estate increases.

In the Book of Questions, a lady suggests that her companion resembles the snow; he argues that the snow, instead, resembles him. The truth of the matter is ambiguous. The Estate of Snow and the Power of Snow influence one another. Snow has its own nature, but its current Power colors how that nature is expressed.

"Come in, Luc," came the Gray One's voice.

He had brought a woman up from Earth, I knew. I had little experience with other mortals, but I thought that that could get unpleasant; I had no desire to enter.

Nor had I a choice. So I opened the door and I walked in, and I kept my eyes averted from the bed.

"I thought this was what I wanted, once," the Gray One said.

"Yes, my lord?"

"Power," he said, softly. The woman was silent. "Respect. Rule. And yet ... I am so distanced from what I once was. It hurts, Luc."

That was so startling that I looked directly at him.

The woman lay still clothed upon the bed. Her eyes were closed, and she breathed softly in her sleep. And my lord and master ...

He stood beside, his eyes fixed upon her form. But he did not move.

—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Level 4: Duchess, or Masterful Domain

12 points

The Dukes and Duchesses of the Nobilis immerse themselves very deeply in the mysteries of their Estate. Even to mortal eyes, unless they are deeply Guised, their nature is obvious: a man who sees the Duke of Famine will remember not his eyes, nor the color of his hair, but the sense of hunger and human suffering that hung in the air around him. Those who wear the crown of strawberry leaves and gold, like those with the previous level of Domain, are responsible for the preservation of their Estate; many must also bring it into being.

Choosing this level of Domain means a character never lacks in magics. To the mortals of Earth, their powers seem godlike. They can pour forth vast energies of creation, shaped into the forms of the multifarious faces of their Estate.

Example Concepts

Dumonia is the last-born of the eleven Muses (the Powers, that is, of the Imperator Rinnah). Dumonia inspires all alternative music and keeps the schedule by which musicians rise and fall. When this schedule calls for it, she raises a mortal to the level of musical icon or simply crafts the musician she needs out of nowhere, and deposits them and their band full-fledged upon the Earth. When a great singer of the appropriate style begins to lose their touch, she drags them from the Earth into the Chancel Parnassus, where with their new, permanent inspiration they provide her and her sisters with regular entertainment. Dumonia disdains titles, but she is at least as powerful as her elder sister, Mariana, the Duchess of Pop.

Ivo is a Power of Language, and therefore of wisdom as well. He has been the guiding hand behind many new words, and until recently he was the spirit behind the Internet. Now, alas, the Internet that once bound the colleges and government together with ropes of text is dominated by graphics and sounds; soon, it will fall away from his control forever.

Level 5: Regal, or Majestic Domain

15 points

There was an acidic, charnel stench; a billow of smoke; the sound of tortured metal. And then I looked up, and I saw at the center of it all the One who embodied Pride ... and such was the clarity of that vision, and so visceral was the corruption that crawled across his skin, that I fell stumbling to the floor, praying softly, desperately, that I should not be harmed ....

—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Regals are not necessarily the most respected Powers. They can be weak in their person and unimportant in their Chancel. Their Estate can be a minor or an unimportant thing. They are, however — respected for it or no — the truest representations of their Domains. They are the living gods of what they stand for. They are forces of nature; they are each an aspect of the world.

Characters of Majestic Domain can perform feats worthy of the Creator. A Power of Stone might twist mountains into living serpents of rock, and the "Patroness Mathematica" could twist the basic geometries of the world to lead an army from India to Venezuela in a single step. The goddess of gardens could fill one with "bread-and-butterflies." On the one hand, using this level of power in the mortal Earth almost inevitably attracts the attention and wrath of Lord Entropy. On the other, Regals are the most likely of all Powers to hold their own in a battle against an Imperator.

Example Concepts

Maya is the Lord of Illusion, his Domain the senses. Although he can create nothing real, his dominion over the mortal experience is so great that he is sometimes confused with the planet Earth itself. He can easily dazzle or delude countries full of people, individually or collectively. His greatest weakness is that none of his creations are truly real; accordingly, he can only strike indirectly against the Powers and the Excrucians, who are proof against his magics. (Why immune? See the rules for Domain, below.)

Daemarnia is the Lady of Caves, which may seem a minor Domain. At her level of command, however, she can create vast underworlds filled with treasures or spawn strange races in the dark underground. It is the matter of a moment for her to collapse the earth beneath a building, a person, or a country. She could inspire a poet to write vast sagas about the underworld. Should any venture to brace her in her rocky home, the angry walls might crush them into smears.

Using Domain

Seven types of Domain miracles exist.

Divination

The symbol for Divination is Hawkweed, for a swift clarity of vision. Miracles of Divination give a character information about something from their Estate, or about things their Estate might "know".

Preservation

The symbol for Preservation is the Amaranth, which represents immortality, or the Guilder Rose, which stands for a healthy age. These miracles make something from a character's Estate last, bracing it against time, dissipation, and assault. These miracles can actually strengthen a force of nature. For example, if a fire's heat does not dissipate from a room, it shortly seems much greater.

Creation

The symbol for Creation is Witch Hazel, or sometimes Angelica, both representations of inspiration and magic. These miracles create something from a character's Estate out of the empty air. For example, a Muse might use one to give an artist inspiration. Miracles of creation can heal, recreating or restoring lost vitality and health.

Destruction

The symbol for Destruction is Hemlock, whose meaning is simple: "You shall cause my death." It is one of the darkest powers, although the angel of destruction (named Za'afiel or Af) is not among the Fallen. Miracles of Destruction allow a character to damage, hide, or destroy an aspect of their own Estate. There is often danger in such acts.

Change

The symbol for Change is the Pimpernel, that also means an "assignation". Miracles of Change change the nature of

something from a character's Estate. Almost anything can be done as a miracle of Change over an appropriate Domain.

Gating

The symbol for Gating is the Stephanotis flower, denoting the wish to travel. These miracles open paths between worlds, and are normally the province of the Gifts of Domain "Worldwalker" and "Gatemaker", as described later.

Mastery

The symbol for Mastery is the Crown Imperial, denoting majesty, arrogance, and pride of birth. These miracles control the behavior of parts of the character's Estate. They may be performed as miracles of Change, and a somewhat small number of Powers may perform them through the "Sovereign's Gift", described in the Gifts section. One example of a miracle of Majesty is parting the ocean; another is calling up a desert storm — in a desert, at least.

Limits on Miracles

- **Lesser Divinations** only provide information about one's own Estate.
- **Major Divinations** of the future are inexact.
- **Major Divinations** of the past and present become inexact when one's Estate was not (or is not) in a location where it could witness the viewed events.
- **Creation** and **Destruction** magics do not need to create or destroy complete objects. One can create a tree without color, or destroy the quality in a road that causes it to go to a specific place.
- **Change** miracles include motive magics: that is, they can cause something to move in a specific way as well as causing it to come to life (or other possible effects).

Powers and Other Powers' Estates

Powers who are artists are not part of the Artists Estate. Powers who are warriors are not part of the Warriors Estate. This applies to all such descriptions: Powers' thoughts are not part of the Thought Estate, Powers' emotions are not part of the Emotions Estate, Powers' senses are not part of the Senses Estate. This applies to all parts of a Power.

Further, all of the above applies to Excrucians, Imperators, Excrucian-shards, and Anchors. In short, a Power's control over their Estate does not extend to miraculous things or things from outside Creation. Domain miracles resemble an artist's contribution to a grand mural — the artist can change the image as much as they like. They cannot redesign other artists or intrusive late-night graffitists.

Powers can be affected by indirect effects, however: they can be burned by the Estate of Fire, drenched by the Estate of Storms, and drowned by the Estate of Water. A Power can kick another with strength enhanced by the Estate of Strength. These things affect a Power because they do their damage through an agent, be it fire, storms, water, or a fast-moving foot. They do not directly change the Power's mind or body. They do not alter the Power from the physical or metaphorical "inside."

Note that the Auctoritas (see "Rules for Spirit", pp. 107-108) makes miracles harder even near a Power.

Powers may use relevant miracles on themselves and their Anchors freely. Divinations can detect a Power's presence, but not their identity. No other exceptions exist.

Rules for Domain

The "power sources" for Domain miracles are called **Domain Miracle Points** (DMPs). The mechanics here are identical to those for Aspect: a character has permanent DMPs and temporary DMPs. Temporary DMPs can be spent to fuel miracles, and can be gained in various ways. When the HG begins a new story, they set each character's temporary DMP total to their permanent DMP total.

Characters begin with 5 permanent DMPs, and can increase this total by spending 1 Character Point for each additional DMP. There are ways to increase these totals during play.

- A **simple** miracle costs 0 (temporary) DMPs. It doesn't drain the character at all.
- A **normal** miracle costs 1 (temporary) DMP to perform.
- A **hard** miracle costs 2 (temporary) DMPs to perform.
- A **deep** miracle costs 4 (temporary) DMPs to perform.

EXAMPLE

Rob spends 8 character points to have a total of 13 permanent DMPs. At the beginning of each story, he will have 13 temporary DMPs. These can be spent to use Domain miracles during that story.

Powers with 8 or more DMPs can use a Word of Command. As with Aspect, this hideously painful exertion of barely controlled miraculous energy can wound, disfigure, or spiritually damage even the strongest Sovereign for weeks or months. It costs 8 (temporary) DMPs.

The difficulty for a miracle and the character's Domain level over the relevant Estate are used — exactly as with Aspect — to determine which kind of miracle (simple, normal, *et cetera.*) a given effect is.

In order to use a miracle for a Secondary Domain, even a level 0 miracle, the Power must buy one or more levels of that Domain.

You'll get used to this system fast. Note that Gifts of Domain don't factor into this calculation, and that each level of miracle can incorporate elements from lower-level miracles. The player should think (before the game begins) about what these miracles mean in reference to their Estate — what kinds of things they can do with a major destruction, what they can do with a lesser preservation, and so on.

Level 0 Miracles: Estate-Driven Divinations

Level 0 Domain miracles tell the characters about threats to or damage to their Estate. The elements of their Estate cry out to their Lord or Lady when they are defiled or suffering. If the character is not concentrating intently on other matters, they hear such cries. Even when the cries are loud and blur into one another, a Power can check on whether a given part of their Estate is well. A Power must be able to perform this level 0 Domain miracle as a simple miracle or the Estate will not cry out to them.

"Do you know what it's like?" she demanded. "When I can feel the pain of every bird choking on the city skies?"

I shrugged.

—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

Domain Miracle Difficulty

MIRACLE TYPE	DMP COST	CAN BE USED WHEN
Simple	0 DMPs	Difficulty equals or is less than Domain Level
Normal	1 DMP	Difficulty equals or is less than Domain Level + 1
Hard	2 DMPs	Difficulty equals or is less than Domain Level + 2
Deep	4 DMPs	Difficulty equals or is less than Domain Level + 4
Word of Command	8 DMPs	Difficulty equals or is less than Domain Level + 8 (at the cost of a terrible wound)

EXAMPLE

A character has level 4 Domain over the ocean (Masterful) and level 2 Domain over storms as a secondary Estate. This character has access to the following miracles:

MIRACLE TYPE	MIRACLE LEVELS
Simple (0 DMPs)	Level 0-4 miracles affecting the ocean
	Level 0-2 miracles affecting storms.
Normal (1 DMP)	Level 5 miracles affecting the ocean
	Level 3 miracles affecting storms.
Hard (2 DMPs)	Level 6 miracles affecting the ocean
	Level 4 miracles affecting storms.
Deep (4 DMPs)	Level 7-8 miracles affecting the ocean
	Level 5-6 miracles affecting storms.
Words of Command (8 DMPs)	Level 9-12 miracles affecting the ocean
	Level 7-10 miracles affecting storms.

What the player probably memorizes is this:

Level 0-4 Ocean miracles include Estate-driven divinations, ghost miracles, and lesser divinations, preservations, and creations. I can do them for free.

Level 5 Ocean miracles include major divinations and lesser destructions. They cost me a DMP.

Level 6 Ocean miracles include major preservations and lesser changes. They cost me 2 DMPs.

Level 7-8 Ocean miracles include major creations and destructions. They cost me 4 DMPs.

In addition, level 0-2 Storm miracles include Estate-driven divinations, ghost-miracles, and lesser divinations; I can perform them for free.

Level 3 Storm miracles are lesser preservations; they cost 1 DMP.

Level 4 Storm miracles are lesser creations; they cost 2 DMPs.

Level 5-6 Storm miracles include major divinations, lesser destructions, lesser changes, and major preservations. They cost me 4 DMPs.

Powers can also use these miracles to sense when someone prays to them, if that person knows their Design (see chapter 12) or is intimately connected to their Estate. If the Power chooses, they can then hear the prayer.

There are other occasions besides danger on which a Power's Estate will call to them. In general, the Estate can share any of its primitive emotions — it usually lacks independent rational thought — with a few images to accompany them. This sharing is a rare thing, most common when other Powers or Excrucians are involved.

EXAMPLE

Deirdre McAllister has Domain Level 2, and can work level 2 miracles as simple miracles. Dr. Savan, a hostile Power or Excrucian-shard, attacks, threatens, or stands near a threatened part of Deirdre's Estate.

If Dr. Savan has a defense (called an Auctoritas) of level 3 or higher, it will make divining something about him or divining anything within a few feet of him 3 miracle levels higher. That means that an Estate-driven divination is level 3, and Deirdre cannot do it as a simple miracle. Deirdre's Estate does not call her, or, at least, its cries are stifled by Dr. Savan's fiendish will. Deirdre can check on that part of her Estate as a level 3 miracle (0 + 3), however, so if she suspects that someone is there with a level 3 Auctoritas, she will be able to discover the trouble.

Level 1 Miracles: Ghost Miracles

Level 1 Domain miracles summon "ghosts" of a character's Estate, constructs of the character's mind, with a tiny fraction of their Estate's power. Ghostly fires provide a little bit of heat and ghostly sunlight can illuminate a book. These miracles, also known as cantrips, are not true illusions. They are partially transparent to Sight, and often even a mortal can tell that they are only seemings. Characters use them to make their environment a little more comfortable; they also serve as common "weapons of choice" in formal Noble duels. Parentheses indicate the relevant Estate. With a level 1 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could also:

- (Music) Make an instrument sound better.
- (Forests) Make a "ghost clearing" for more comfortable sleep.
- (Storms) Make a day seem gloomier.
- (Night) Decorate a bedroom with little glowing "stars".
- (Emotion) Make someone calm sound angry.
- (Roads) Make a trail that doesn't go anywhere important.
- (Books) Fill a shelf with boring textbooks.

Although outside it had been night, here the bay windows let in the clean pure light of the sun. The petty god was a dark figure in his backlit throne. Imposing, I suppose. But I had come an awfully long way.

So I started marching towards the throne, and my foot hit something. I was startled; when I looked down, I saw a shackle on a heavy chain that I hadn't seen before. It was probably put there on purpose, so I'd walk into it and get a little bit scared. I should have been, too. But instead I just traced the chain with my eyes until it grew vague, and exclaimed, "Good grief, you can't even make proper light!"

—from Little Gods, *by Jackie Robinson*

Level 2 Miracles: Lesser Divinations

Level 2 miracles give the character mundane information about their Estate. A character with the sun as their Estate can predict the sunrise, know the dates of all future eclipses, and know exactly when the sunlight will hit a balcony. In games where the sun's path is regular, they could use their knowledge of its position to estimate the time accurately, even at night. The character can perform these miracles even from within a Chancel, although by tradition Powers do some of their investigation on location. With a level 2 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could also:

- (Music) Know how to play any requested song.
- (Forests) Know where a trail ends; know where to find herbs or water.
- (Storms) Know when a storm will hit a given city.
- (Night) Estimate time until nightfall; know somebody's dreams.
- (Emotion) Experience true empathy.
- (Roads) Know directions to anywhere.
- (Books) Read a closed book.

He bent down and touched the water with his hand. "Thirty-five parts per million poison," he said softly. "No wonder the animals are dying."

—from Failures of Light, *by Emily Chene*

Level 3 Miracles: Lesser Preservations

Level 3 miracles of Domain include the simple wards, the moderately powerful miracles of Preservation. Again using the Estate of the Sun as an example, a character can heat the earth with sunlight or slow the path of the sun in the sky. This does not generally cover miracles of epic scope or of great drama; this level is for simple applications of the

When the fourth nail had blunted itself against his hand, he said to the fifth: you have my blessing.

—from Undocumented History, *by Walden Fargo*

principle of Preservation. With a level 3 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could also:

- (Music) Make a song that sticks in the listener's memory.
- (Forests) Ward a tree, making it resistant to weapons.
- (Storms) Make it rain for days (or, in Seattle, months).
- (Night) Keep night animals awake into day; prolong the night.
- (Emotion) Make someone stay happy for a long time.
- (Roads) Make a road seem much longer.
- (Books) Make a manuscript that returns to the editor if rejected.

Level 4 Miracles: Lesser Creations

There are no cooks in the army of the Carnivore's God. When his army goes hungry, he chooses that they have already eaten.
—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Level 4 miracles of Domain are simple creation magics, miracles that cause part of the character's Estate to come into being. This can be subtler than pulling fire out of a hat, or creating a sunbeam at night. Making the sun rise early is a Creation miracle, because it causes the day and the sunlight to appear. Note that a Power does not have to create a whole object. They can create a fire without heat, a sunbeam without light, or even just one person's memory of a tree where no tree has ever been. With a level 4 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could also:

- (Music) Make bewitchingly beautiful music.
- (Forests) Grow plants quickly from the naked Earth.
- (Storms) Spawn a lightning storm or a drizzle.
- (Night) Sink an area into darkness.
- (Emotion) Cause someone to feel angry or sad.
- (Roads) Create a new road, straight to one's destination.
- (Books) Create a how-to book for any domestic task.

Level 5 Miracles: Lesser Destructions and Major Divinations

"He has taken our eyes!" they wailed.
"Not your eyes," Lord Entropy said softly. "Only one small property of them: that they should see."
—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

Level 5 miracles of Domain include simple destruction magics, which remove an aspect of a character's Estate from the area or from existence. This is the magic of hurried sunsets and snuffed-out forest fires. It can also create "negative images" of the character's Estate, such as a sunbeam of darkness or a cold fire. With a level 5 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could also:

- (Music) Make silent but affecting music.
- (Forests) Shatter a tree or a few trees; make a tree invisible.
- (Storms) Clear away rainclouds; make a storm's raindrops dry.
- (Night) Make the sun rise early; make the local night less dark.
- (Emotion) Cause someone to stop feeling angry or happy.
- (Roads) Make someone lost. (Roads exist to prevent this.)
- (Books) Make a book incomprehensible (even with the same words).

Level 5 miracles of Domain also include major divinational magics, miracles that reveal things to the character through the agency of their Estate. This includes shadowy images of the future or other places, and exact images of other places, past or present, where the character's Estate has been. For example, a character with the Sun as their Estate might ask the sun about the activities of his or her enemies. They would receive a report on anything that it saw in its journey through the sky. With a level 5 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could also:

"Every city," he said, "has a weak place ... a moral center, where but the slightest touch can send the city into chaos ... I will find this city's center."
—from Failures of Light, *by Emily Chen*

- (Music) Tell the future in extemporaneous song.
- (Forests) Find the mystical "heart" of a forest; talk to plants.
- (Storms) Scry in a bowl of rainwater.
- (Night) Know all that happens under the cloak of night.
- (Emotion) Know the root of every emotion felt during a scene.
- (Roads) Know about any interesting travels or travelers.
- (Books) Open a book at random, read a paragraph ... it's relevant.

Level 6 Miracles: Lesser Changes and Major Preservations

"Paintings don't open onto other worlds," said the child.
"That's ordinary paintings," said the collector. "These have a special magic. For instance ...." His words trailed off, and he leaned up to touch 'The Box'. "If you look deep into this one, I think you will see ..."
But the child was gone.
—from The Box, *by Emily Chen*

Level 6 miracles of Domain include lesser Change magics, miracles that twist and remake things from the character's Estate in a new form, with new properties. For example, the Power of the Sun might make the sun shine red, or craft edible fire. With a level 6 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could also:

- (Music) Make living music, which reproduces by being heard.
- (Forests) Reshape trees into treelike playground equipment.
- (Storms) Make raindrops sing; make it hail blueberries.
- (Night) Make starlight as bright as moonlight for a night.
- (Emotion) Make someone feel brand-new emotions.
- (Roads) Redirect a road, so it leads somewhere new.
- (Books) Change the genre of the books that a given author writes.

Level 6 miracles of Domain also include major Preservation miracles of epic scope. Preserved sunlight, at this level, no longer simply heats the Earth: it burns into the stone. The day, in a single city or in a given Chancel, can be made to last for what once would have been years. With a level 6 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could also:

One bloody hand gestured towards where the painting hung. Mona Lisa, it was, by some mortal artist. "Do you like art?" the master wondered.
The captive Sovereign's face went white.
"Hugh?" said Lord Entropy, and I touched torch to wood.
—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

- (Music) Burn music into someone's mind, so they never forget a note.
- (Forests) Seal a forest against entrance by any enemy.
- (Storms) Make an ongoing storm perpetual, raging.
- (Night) Make it stay dark even when night ends and the sun is up.
- (Emotion) Make someone happy for ever and ever.
- (Roads) Make the road someone is on endless.
- (Books) Make an author — yourself? — eternally famous.

She cast her head back, laughing, as all the waters of the sea roared from her hands.
—from Water Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Level 7 Miracles: Major Creations

Level 7 miracles of Domain are the major creative magics of the Nobilis. Even the most epic Creations are possible at these levels. With a level 7 miracle, a character whose Estate is the sun could cause the sun to rise in the middle of the night, or put a new, second, sun in the sky.

With a level 7 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could also:

- (Music) Deafen mortals for miles with loud music.
- (Forests) Grow a forest from a seed.
- (Storms) Create a hurricane, tornado, or monsoon.
- (Night) Cast darkness over the Earth.
- (Emotion) Add a new emotion to the normal human emotional vocabulary.
- (Roads) Make a one-mile road from Australia to America
- (Books) Create libraries, masterpieces, and books of secret lore.

He held his palm up. "Advance no further, Hugh," he said, "if you ever wish to dream again. If you ever wish to imagine yourself again to be more than just your master's monster, Lord Entropy's pet."
I didn't advance. I fired. Bastard.
—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

Level 8 Miracles: Major Destructions

Level 8 miracles of Domain are the major destructive magics of the Nobilis. With these miracles, a Power could turn off the sun, or turn a barren desert into glorious green land — by deleting its desiccation!

With a level 8 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could also:

- (Music) Destroy a song forever — no one will ever recreate it.
- (Forests) Shatter a forest.
- (Storms) Calm the sky above the entire ocean.
- (Night) Make night as bright as day, until the Power says otherwise.
- (Emotion) Remove a person's capacity to feel (an) emotion.
- (Roads) Make it impossible to get to or from a location by *any* road.
- (Books) Destroy a written language.

Then a sunbeam wrapped itself around my waist, and I was being lifted up, up, up and a maw had opened in the center of the sun …
—from Conversations with Androcles, *by Jen Hogan (introduction)*

Level 9 Miracles: Major Changes

Anything else that can be done to a character's Domain can be done with a level 9 Change miracle. With a level 9 miracle, a Power with the appropriate Estate could:

- (Music) Give a song the ability to make any mortal listener weep.
- (Forests) Fill a forest with blue gnomes.
- (Storms) Make it rain every third day in a given Chancel.
- (Night) Fill the night with rainbows.
- (Emotion) Fill a crowd of Christmas shoppers with a murderous rage.
- (Roads) Make the roads of a small country twist like serpents.
- (Books) Rewrite all books into Esperanto.

Miracles do not need to fit exactly into one of the labels above. A miracle of any level can be combined with other miracles of its level or lower if the result is a single conceptual action. For example, a Power of the Forest might transform a pine forest to a forest of ash or birch by simultaneously destroying the pines (a level 8 miracle) and creating the ash trees (a level 7 miracle.) This is then a single level 8 Domain miracle. Unlike the similar level 9 miracle that would change the forest, it kills all the old trees.

Divinations work at any distance. Other Domain miracles are normally used at close range, less than a hundred miles. Using a Domain miracle against something more than one hundred miles away costs an additional DMP per miracle. (But see p. 107 and p. 163)

Domain Miracle Index

Miracle Level	Level Description	Useful To
Level 0	Estate-driven divinations	Know about trouble
Level 1	Ghost miracles	Be comfortable or win a duel
Level 2	Lesser divinations	Learn about Estate
Level 3	Lesser preservations	Make things last
Level 4	Lesser creations	Make things
Level 5	Lesser destructions/Major divinations	Hurt/destroy/remove property, or scry/ask Estate about something
Level 6	Lesser changes/Major preservations	Modify, ward, seal, or guard things
Level 7	Major creations	Make impressive, special, or big things
Level 8	Major destructions	Cause widespread damage
Level 9	Major changes	Do anything else (with your Estate)

Realm

In theory, Imperators are the highest authority in their Chancels. In practice, they pay most attention to the spirit world, and must shutter their glory in order to deal with mundane inhabitants of their Chancel at all. Accordingly, practical day-to-day governance of a Chancel is vested in that Imperator's Nobilis, along with the mystical power over that land the Imperator possesses. The Chancel, that world-within-a-world, be it a fae land or a technological paradise, is their Realm, and the Realm attribute measures their mystic and mundane control over it.

Important reasons to buy Realm include:

- Much of a Nobilis game takes place inside the PCs' Chancel.
- Lord Entropy does not concern himself with in-Chancel miracles.
- Realm is much more general than Domain, allowing one to affect anything.
- Realm loosely measures the respect other Powers show the character.
- Realm loosely measures the respect Chancel inhabitants show the character.
- Points spent on initial Realm can buy useful Chancel properties.

Realm's major limitation is this:

- Realm miracles may only affect targets within the Power's Chancel.

EXAMPLE

Melanie, Power of Music, wishes to repave the road to her Imperator's palace with blue-veined marble. If her Estate were Roads, this would be a Domain miracle of level 4. Realm miracles act like Domain miracles within a character's Chancel, and any power can use any Realm miracle regardless of their Estate. Accordingly, even though she has no power over roads outside the Chancel, Melanie can repave the road inside her Chancel as a level 4 Realm miracle. If Melanie has Level 2 Realm, she can perform this repaving as a "hard" miracle, for 2 Realm Miracle Points.

The effects of a Realm miracle normally fade within a day after the subject leaves the Chancel. It requires 1 Realm Miracle Point per story to sustain a given Realm miracle outside the Chancel.

One of the gifts associated with Realm is the fragrance (or stench) of true nobility. This is the primary reason that Powers with Realm are respected. Another is that a Power of high Realm has an impregnable retreat. While almost any Noble can be taken off guard and destroyed in the Earth at large, Powers with high Realm are virtually unassailable within their sanctum.

Normally, the PCs will create their own Chancel, defining it as they like. Points spent on a character's starting Realm score (as opposed to a Realm score increased during play) allow the players as a whole to buy useful, nice, or interesting properties for this Chancel. Even if the Hollyhock God breaks tradition in order to design the Chancel him or herself, they should take the PCs' Realm scores into account.

The game mechanics for Realm are similar to those for Domain. Each Realm level costs 3 character points and provides the character with the equivalent of a Domain level that works on any Estate, but only within the character's Chancel. These levels do not directly add to Domain levels, or vice versa; level 3 Realm provides the same abilities, for the same cost (9 points) whatever a character's Domains. One can buy up to 5 Realm levels, and Gifts of Realm as well.

Level 0: Citizen

0 points

Characters with this level of Realm have almost no gift of rule: they are mere and mundane (if powerful) citizens of the Chancel. They may have a title and may have been given dominion over some or all the other citizens, but they lack the resources to shape their Chancel directly. Nobilis rarely respect them, and if they possess power at home, the rest of their Familia Caelestis may well covet it. The term "Sovereign Power" fits them only loosely, and "Sovereign" may become a term of contempt in their enemies' mouths. (The details of others' reactions, of course, rest in the HG's hands.)

Choosing this level of Realm ensures that the character will have a lively time of it carrying out their duties in their Chancel. They cannot be everywhere at once, and even the mundane inhabitants of their Imperator's lands might be willing to conspire against them. They have no secure bolthole in which to weather the storms of Sovereign politics. Unless they are securely allied to a Power of their Familia with stronger Realm, threats from the outside world (Lord Entropy, the Excrucians, etcetera) may well follow them into their home. The character can do little to stop them.

"Oh," he said, and shrugged. "I can't do any particular magic here *..."*

"Then why do they call you King?"

—from Lady of the Plague, *by Emily Chen*

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Asoka had fulfilled every karmic requirement for greatness. His spirit shone so brightly that even the Imperators noticed it as it passed through the cycles of life. When the Excrucians struck at it, the Most Ancient Lord (whose Chancel was all of India, and more, before his tragic and utter annihilation at the Excrucians' hands) drew him into a child who was undergoing birth. The Powers of India came and caught the child (as he fell from his mother) in a net of silver and gold; he took three steps from the net and cried, "The Lord am I of all within this world!" And so it was, for he was to become the Tyrant of India, a Power set above the others in its rule. Yet his soul was so great that the Most Ancient Lord feared to damage it. His Imperator-shard was therefore small. He ruled and governed men, not natural forces; by a Sovereign's standard, he was a "Citizen" and no more. In time, the other Powers of his Familia Potens grew envious, and arranged subtly for his death. He had no warning. He had no chance. And then he had no life to have things with.

Mary Shenk is a landlady. She lives on the first floor of a thousand beaten-up apartment buildings, or maybe just one. They do tend to blur together, don't they? Her Imperator's Chancel is scattered across the Earth: all 43rd streets, in any language, anywhere. Powers old and wise know the secret routes to that street, which few mortals can get to at all. They use Mary's houses for transport, breaking in in New York, walking down the hall, and coming out in Los Angeles. They always leave a fifty stuffed under her door, though, or a boxed present beside it. Otherwise, she might put in security one day, or sell the houses ... and nobody wants that, not even old tired Mary Shenk.

Level 1: Radiant

3 points

Radiants have the first hints of control over their Chancel. Their reign extends mostly to ghosts, and fragmentary forces — not the sun, but traces of light; not the fire, but traces of heat; not frigid ice, but hints of cold. Fleeting visions are their agents in their realm, although with effort they can manage divinations and greater works. These Powers are called Radiants because they are tied not to the deeper essences of their Chancel but to its surface conditions, the radiant indications of what lies beneath.

Even at this small level, a Power is more comfortable inside their Chancel than outside it. They have not yet formed a deep bond with it, however. Perhaps they never shall. They receive rudimentary respect from the other Nobilis, assuming that they are not otherwise undeserving, and they are a trifling amount more secure in their Chancel than outside in the big wide world.

EXAMPLE CONCEPT

Sara Nei was just an ordinary woman, she thought, living a fairly ordinary life as an actuary. Then the memories began, memories of life as someone else — as more than one someone else. It was only a century ago, by the Powers' time, that Earth had colonies on the other worlds of our system; a traitorous Imperator turned back the clocks of the human world by years and years, and wiped them all away. Several of the Powers of those places died, and nearly all the naked apes — many Powers, though, burned too bright to be wiped so easily away. The souls of the humans near them were caught by the Powers as those Powers spun through the mists of time. Now, a century later, the joint entities are becoming

The Oldest God

The Most Ancient Lord, first of the True Gods, is dead. No one knows what Estates he embodied. To answer Vyasa's question in the modern day, and name the oldest of the gods, one must choose among three reasonable answers. Nyssa of Cappadocia is the oldest living Power. The angel known as Firstborn, Imperator of Meaning and Existence, is the oldest of the Imperators. Finally, Jan ben Jan, Imperator of Earth's Second Age, is the oldest living True God.

"As I see it," he said, "it's entirely your lookout if you want to feel bad about yourself. But hating your body ... that could annoy the Regnant Anatomica."

"Oh yah? What's he going to do?"

"He starts with an itch," the old man replied, "an itch that moves from place to place, never letting you scratch it out. And your clothes are always just a little bit too hot, or a little bit too cold. You trip a lot; your bed feels lumpy; whenever you eat hot food, it always burns your tongue. You start feeling those twitches, like little invisible insects are crawling here and there on your body."

I hesitated. "Does it last forever?"

"Oh, no!" he replied. "Pretty soon the insects eat you up, snap, *for their supper."*

—from Conversations with Androcles, *by Jen Hogan*

OPPOSITE:
Nell Pennington, the Power of Noble Gases
by Lee Moyer


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strong enough for their Imperators to find them and reawaken them to their duty. Sara's Chancel, to which she has been recently reintroduced, is now a ghost, a shadow on several of the outer planets. She, now having so many souls wrapped within her form, can send pieces of herself to do her will anywhere within. She grows strong again — but there are Excrucians and even Nobilis who eye these new, nearly uninhabited planets, with an eye towards taking them for their own.

Level 2: Realm's Heart

6 points

Characters with this level of Realm are better able to keep hold upon their Chancels. It takes them but a thought to learn anything they wish to know about events and situations within their Chancel, or about its mundane inhabitants and components. If they routinely "patrol" their Chancel with their powers — with a scrying pool, through the minds of beasts, or by asking the wind; the technique matters little — they discover most threats to their home early on. Almost all Nobilis respect them enough to be polite, and their home court advantage is of decent proportions. Their Realm level allows them to bring their other abilities more easily to bear upon any threat.

In a hidden place within each Locus Celatum is its mystic "center": the point at its heart, the place where the Imperator sunk his or her essence into the mortal land. Characters with this level of Realm (or any higher level) are always aware of this place. They know what transpires there, and in a mystic sense they are a part of that place. Something there represents them, be it a statue, a song caught in the air, a beast or bird that never needs to eat or sleep; it changes and shapes itself to reflect the moods and circumstances of the character. The character can prevent this, of course; it is roughly as difficult for a Power to do as it is for a human to wipe expression from their face. A PC could theoretically have this level of Realm without this tie to the Realm's Heart: players who wish such a character should discuss it with the HG, and think about why the Power has so much control over a world they're not mystically tied to.

The man's convulsions woke her; woke her to see his sweating ghost-pale face, his slitted eyes, his drawn features. She tried to disentangle herself from the sheets, crying, "What ails you?"

He spoke no word, but she came to know his answer: that he had been awakened by the suffering of his Realm, by the forest in the south. That he had touched the minds of a dozen beasts and seen through a dozen pairs of eyes before he found the source of the pain ...and that, when he found it, he paid the price for his divinations ... for the thirteenth beast was trapped within a fire ...

—from Fire Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Example Concept

Barbara was once a thing rarer than a Power: one of the true fae, a child of the family Don, a mortal descendant of an Exemplar whose deeds spawned legends throughout the world. As correct a memory of him as any other is the Irish legend of the lords of the Daoine Sidhe. Now, as many of her family have been, she is a Power of the Imperator Dalmatia, whose Chancel is the hollow hills. Barbara has been given the greatest perk in all Dalmatia's realm — freedom to sit on the silver throne, from which she can see anywhere within or upon those hills, or look as if from any point upon them at the vista of Ireland spreading beyond. What Barbara may discover later is that, as an anointed Lady of the Hills, she does not need the chair. All the hills respond to her, and would be only too eager to show her pictures from their soft slow dreaming world.

Level 3: Warden

9 points

It is very dangerous to tangle with a Warden on their own ground. They are tied not only to their Chancel's Heart but to its Strength as well. Their will can make subtle barriers and overt ones, and the militia they can raise for defense are nearly always led by a corps of Preservation-protected troops. The Wardens are well respected, and with sufficient reason, by the other Nobilis.

Choosing level 3 Realm for a character roots them firmly in the world they command. A significant portion of their power is invested in it, and it is likely that an enormous amount of its power is invested in them.

Defending their Chancel is relatively easy — at least, against ordinary threats — so an ideal Warden has some interests outside the Chancel to help the HG get them into trouble.

Example Concepts

Admiral Kynn is the lord and supreme master (save only for Nemuel, his Imperator) of Cabin Fever MUSH, one of the most unusual Chancels extant: a pocket dimension attached to the Earth not in any physical location but in the Internet. It is a rare mortal who stumbles across the name and number needed to access this "site"; their family files a missing-person report soon after. Kynn, sucked from the Earth to become a Power in this once-virtual world, has been given guardianship over all things in this Realm.

Ching is the lord of age, and he is tied closely to that part of his Imperator that set their Chancel sideways in time. It is a place human lives pass through like tunnels, forward to their death and backwards to their birth. The primary inhabitants of this place are shadows; these dark and hardy creatures appear two-dimensional to humans because their third dimension is (to us) "time", and their fourth dimension, the direction of their existence, is inaccessible entirely.

Ching's role in this realm is simple: he must ensure that no shadow dies before its time. He must ensure that the Widys Chancel is a refuge for all shadowkind, when the Excrucians come for them.

Level 4: True King or Queen

12 points

Characters with this level of Realm might hold off even an Imperator or an unsharded Excrucian within their home. Their powers there are as potent as a Duke's, and as versatile as they can imagine. They can shape landscapes and inhabitants from the ether, and (with more effort) banish them. Almost uniformly respected, they have as deep a tie to their land as any native spirit. Their touch can heal, and they are often personally responsible for much of the way their Chancel works.

This level of Realm (and the next one) is most appropriate for that large portion of Powers born and raised in their Chancel. It also fits Powers who have been given the ultimate authority over their world, although this should be worked out first with the other players. Enemies among the denizens

"Should I recount your crimes?" he whispered, hands sweating on the hilt. "Should I tell all these sycophants what it is that they serve?"

"Please do," said the Sovereign.

"I stole but a single fruit from your garden, lord. And for that so-called crime my wife was torn apart by horses and my son's vitals were burned. They say that I am cursed; none will treat with me, none will buy my goods or sell me food or wine. Is this justice, lord? For a single fruit?"

"And so you have come to kill me?"

"No, my lord. I know better. I come that you may witness with your own eyes what you have wrought. I come to dirty your floor with my entrails, my lord."

Swiftly, the man reversed his sword, and swiftly he fell upon it. And none was more surprised than he that the sword's blade screeched a protest and broke beneath his body's weight, that it cut him as it might have cut a stone, slowly and without effect, that when three moments had passed, the man was still alive, and the Sovereign was whispering, "Did you think, good sir, my revenge so incomplete?"

—from The Noble Ones, *by Sam Cavanaugh*

"Once upon a time," he said, "there was a very foolish King, who woke up every morning before the rooster's crow."

"Yuck."

"He would tiptoe up to the top of his highest tower, and when the dawn had turned the sky the right color, he would cry out, 'I command you, sun, to rise!'"

"That does sound pretty foolish."

He nodded. "Yup. But no one wanted to tell the King that. At least, not until he fell in love with a more sensible woman and brought her to the palace to live."

"And she wondered why the bed was empty every morning?"

He nodded again. "And when she found out, she told him just how foolish it was, and that he was probably going to get a cold. No man likes looking foolish in front of his wife, of course, so he immediately vowed to sleep in the next morning."

"And?" I asked.

"And the sun didn't rise."

—from Conversations with Androcles, *by Jen Hogan*

of their Chancel generally plan to leave, forever, at the slightest hint of the Power's notice.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Tiria is the Power of the Borealis, but her duties on her Imperator's behalf tend more to the governance of the Locus Zaanannim, the Sanctum at the Television's Breast. There live the people whose lives are shown, in bits and pieces, on the television screen. She is the bulwark of this Chancel, the guardian who holds at bay the hostile inhabitants of cancelled shows. Only her own scruples keep her from destroying them outright.

Haru, born of rats — for animals as well as humans can ascend to become Nobilis, though it is rare — has helped to build a Chancel where food is plentiful and humans and cats are easy prey. Tunnels run from restaurant to dirty restaurant, grease spattered on their floors. He is the acknowledged ruler of not only the land but of the thousands of his people (the rats) that have come to live there. Several of his companion Powers have had no choice but to acquiesce to his reshaping of their world. Others have staked claims on some more abstract places within it, such as the glittering crystal palaces that the Marquis Ishap has shaped within the minds of the cooks.

Level 5: Tempest

15 points

Characters with this level of Realm have many titles. Some are called warrior-kings and some are called Anaharath. The accepted name among the Powers for these rulers, who have mastered destruction, is "Tempest". Walking into a Tempest's Chancel is the most fearsome danger that an enemy can face. Even the Excrucians wilt at the thought of trying to break a Chancel that has such a guardian in it. (Imperators generally have at least this level of Realm, themselves, but they can be distracted by a co-ordinated attack in the spirit world, and Powers cannot.)

Choosing this level of Realm means that the character can shape and reshape their Chancel almost at will. The Imperator associated with the PCs' Familia generally prefers that the Chancel remain true to its original design … but a Tempest has considerable latitude with the details. Their Locus Celatum tends to change, almost automatically, to suit their needs and desires. Investing a character with the power of a Tempest is more difficult for an Imperator than a normal Power's creation: the soul of the character must be buried deep within the Chancel's heart and mixed with the shard of the Imperator that rests there. There are many reasons why an Imperator might make this effort, and the player or the HG should know which one applies. The most common is that the Imperator fears (or feared) a direct Excrucian assault upon their Keep.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Arianeira was the lover of a peri, the partially mortal child of an angel banished to Earth. When her legs were crushed in a car accident and she came close to death, he realized that he could not bear the knowledge that she would die. He went to the Regina of Blades and Fury and sold his essence, his own divine soul, for her preservation. The Power that had been given the shard-self of Blades was quietly killed; Arianeira was brought in to replace her, and given full rein in the Chancel as well. The cost for both of these things was deemed a small price to pay for the power the peri's sacrifice brought. As for Arianeira's thoughts on the matter …Well. Boyfriends come and go.

Eachan is the Butterfly Lord, a scholarly man with a tendency to flutter. His mild nature is, however, deceptive. Should a mortal intruder in Locus Angoulaffre test his patience, it takes but a wave of his hand to dismiss and destroy the unfortunate hominid. He has had these gifts for millennia; it is not known for certain why he was given them. It is said, however, that his Ymera — the Broken-Toothed, an Aaron's Serpent — was often bothered in the early days of civilization by humans who wished to "slay the dragon". No problem, one would imagine … but in two of every three, the Excrucians had set some subtle trap.

"It says here that you … why, you beat your children!" the rounded man exclaimed. "That's not very nice. Do you happen to have an explanation?"

"I …" The dead man looked down. "I felt so angry …"

"Well," came the reply. "I suppose that explains it all!" The rounded man made a neat check mark on his pad. "Take him to room 127."

"Wait," the dead man cried, as the guards took him from the room. "What's going to happen to me?"

"We're going to fix you!" exclaimed the Sovereign brightly. "When we're done with you you won't feel angry or anything like that ever again …"

—from Dearest Hans, *by Emily Chen*

Rules for Realm

The "power sources" for Realm miracles are called **Realm Miracle Points** or RMPs. Characters begin with 5 permanent RMPs, and can purchase additional RMPs for 1 Character Point each. At the beginning of each story, the HG sets their temporary RMP total to their permanent RMP total. For an example of how this mechanic works, look under the rules for Domain on p. 94.

Realms Miracle Difficulty

MIRACLE TYPE	RMP COST	CAN BE USED WHEN
Simple	0 RMPs	Difficulty is equal to or less than Realm Level
Normal	1 RMP	Difficulty is equal to or less than Realm Level + 1
Hard	2 RMPs	Difficulty is equal to or less than Realm Level + 2
Deep	4 RMPs	Difficulty is equal to or less than Realm Level + 4
Word of Command	8 RMPs	Difficulty is equal to or less than Realm Level + 8 (at the cost of a terrible wound)

EXAMPLE

A character is a Radiant, with Level 1 Realm. For this character, the chart looks like:

Miracle Type	Miracle Levels
Simple (0 Realm Miracle Points)	Levels 0-1
Normal (1 RMP)	Level 2
Hard (2 RMPs)	Level 3
Deep (4 RMPs)	Levels 4-5
Words of Command (8 RMPs)	Levels 6-9

What the player probably memorizes is this:
Level 1 is Ghost miracles … I can do those free in my Chancel.
Level 2 is lesser divinations … I can do them for an RMP.
Level 3 is lesser preservations … I can do them for 2 RMPs.
Levels 4 and 5 cover lesser Creations and destructions, for 4 RMPs, as well as major divinations for the same cost.

- A **simple** miracle costs 0 (temporary) RMPs; the character can perform it freely.
- A **normal** miracle costs 1 (temporary) RMP.
- A **hard** miracle costs 2 (temporary) RMPs.
- A **deep** miracle costs 4 (temporary) RMPs.

Powers with sufficient RMPs can also use a "Word of Command", which works exactly as it does for Aspect and Domain, save that it involves Realm miracles and Miracle Points. Realm-based Words of Command are also known as "Words of the Tower".

The difficulty for a miracle and the character's Realm level determine which of these kinds of miracle a given effect is — just as with the previous Attributes.

Level 0 Miracles: Realm-Driven Divinations

Pale, he said, "Armies have entered the Conta Desiagn... their feet trample the brush, their hunters kill, their trash is thrown rotting into the river's flow ..."
—from Fire Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Level 0 Realm miracles allow characters to learn of threats or damage to their Chancel. The life and even the inanimate things of their Sanctum cry out to their lord or lady when defiled or suffering. Unless the character is concentrating intently on other matters, they will hear such cries.

The restrictions on Estate-driven divinations apply to Realm-driven divinations as well. (See the Domain rules on pp. 94-95).

Level 1 Miracles: Ghost Miracles

"Shadows," she said, and spat. "You play with shadows."
—from Deirdre, *by Emily Chen*

Level 1 Realm miracles may be used to summon "ghosts" of nearly anything into the character's Chancel. Because creation miracles do not need to be complete, these ghosts do not have to be visible — a ghost-fire might just be a bit of warmth, or a ghost-light a bit of visibility. These are, once again, not true illusions. They are partially transparent to Sight and even mortals may perceive their illusory nature. For examples of what Ghost Miracles can do, see the relevant rules for Domain (p. 95).

Level 2 Miracles: Lesser Divinations

"Never," he said softly, "make the mistake of thinking I do not know what you do, my love, under cover of darkness."
—from Rosebud and the Sovereign, *author unknown*

Level 2 Realm miracles give a character mundane information about the things in their Locus Celatum. The biggest limitation of these divinations is that the character must know what they are interested in before they can divine it. For examples of what lesser divinations can do, see the description of level 2 Domain miracles (p. 95).

Level 3 Miracles: Lesser Preservations

"Cower in your hole," came the soft words through the door, "and think yourself safe there. But know this: come you out, and I shall make an end of you."
—from The Fourth Wall, *by Jackie Robinson*

Level 3 Realm miracles can ward and preserve anything within the characters' Keep. If the protected item leaves the Chancel, the Power must sustain the ward with miracle points or its benefits end. For examples of what lesser preservations can do, see the description of level 3 Domain miracles (pp. 95-96).

Note: A level 3 Realm miracle can be used to make a thing, a mortal, or the miracle-wielding Power resistant to damage. The effects of fire, automatic weaponry, swords, chainsaws, and the claws of harpies (among other things) will be greatly reduced. This is equivalent to Durant, a Gift of Aspect described below, but fades when the item in question leaves the Chancel, and does not return automatically upon the item's return.

Level 4 Miracles: Lesser Creations

"It was terrible," he said, curling in the corner and shivering. "I dreamed I was in some strange man's kitchen, and he was making cooks ..."
—from Oneiromancy, *by Michael Kay*

Level 4 Realm miracles can create almost anything within the Powers' Realm. Large-scale creations such as mountains, hurricanes, and armies, however, are beyond the normal scope of a single level 4 miracle. They can be built slowly with many such miracles — ten soldiers, a boulder, or a stormcloud at a time. Level 4 miracles can create items lacking certain normal properties; unlike miracles of Domain, however, they can only create physical things. (The ability to create conditions and qualities would obviate the need for miracles of change.)

Unlike Domain, which can create eccentricities at level 4 and minor wonders at level 7, Realm-based creation cannot create anything that could not somehow be created within the Chancel without the use of a miracle. This excludes items of true power, unless the players purchase the ability to create them during Chancel creation, and it most definitely excludes Nobilis.

Created things fade upon leaving the Chancel unless sustained with RMPs. If they depend upon magic or technology that works only within the Realm, they will not function on Earth, sustained or no. For examples of what Lesser Creations can do, see the description of level 4 Domain miracles (p. 96).

Level 5 Miracles: Lesser Destructions and Major Divinations

"Wisdom is this," he answered. "One does not walk where one may find vipers."
—from The Box, *by Emily Chen*

With a level 5 Realm miracle, a Power can remove any mundane object or any property of a mundane object from their Chancel. In addition, this level of miracle can "see" or "hear" anywhere inside the Realm, look into its past, or peer cloudily into its future.

For examples of what lesser destructions and major divinations can do, see the rules for Domain (p. 96).

Level 6 Miracles: Lesser Changes and Major Preservations

"My love," he whispered, "You will last forever."
There was no response from the woman. She was locked inside the ice.
—from Little Gods, *by Jackie Robinson*

Level 6 Realm miracles can do anything minor within a Keep. They can adjust nearly anything, or change almost any circumstance. Major miracles of preservation can also be worked as level 6 Realm miracles, making things effectively immortal within the confines of the Realm.

For more examples of what lesser changes and major preservations can do, see the rules for Domain (p. 96).

Level 7 Miracles: Major Creations

"So the foolish King went back up the next morning to call the sun, right?"
"Actually, I think he had forgotten how."
"Grandpa!"
—from Conversations with Androcles, *by Jen Hogan*

Characters can use level 7 Realm miracles to create nearly anything within their Chancel, although they have the normal limits on items of true power and cannot create Nobilis. As with minor creative miracles, and unlike level 7 Domain miracles, these can only create physical things.

For examples of what major creations can do, see the rules for Domain (p. 97).

Realm Miracle Index

MIRACLE LEVEL	LEVEL DESCRIPTION	USEFUL TO
Level 0	Realm-driven divinations	Know about trouble
Level 1	Ghost Miracles	Make trivial changes
Level 2	Lesser divinations	Learn about Realm
Level 3	Lesser preservations	Make things last
Level 4	Lesser creations	Make things
Level 5	Lesser destructions and Major divinations	Destroy/disinherit/remove property Scry/ask Realm about something
Level 6	Lesser changes & Major preservations	Modify, ward, seal, or guard things
Level 7	Major creations	Make neat or big things
Level 8	Major destructions	Cause widespread damage
Level 9	Major changes	Do anything else (within your Realm)

"Watch," he said softly, and he reached into the sky, and he wrapped his hand about the moon, and squeezed.
—from Air Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Shuffle.
He turned. The desk, he thought, was a little bit closer than it had been.
Shuffle.
That one, he thought, a bit frantically, was the plant.
Shuffle.
When he saw what awaited him in the window by the chair, he screamed.
—from Alligators, *by Emily Chen*

Level 8 Miracles: Major Destructions

Level 8 Realm miracles are among the major destructive magics of the Nobilis. Nearly anything can be destroyed, and positive properties can be removed from things. For examples of what major destructions can do, see the rules for Domain (p. 97).

Level 9 Miracles: Major Changes

Level 9 miracles can do almost anything within a character's Chancel. The only limits are that Realm miracles cannot directly target Nobilis (or Imperators, Excrucians, Excrucian-shards, Anchors, *et cetera*), and that the Auctoritas that most of these possess defends against these miracles normally.

Miracles do not need to fit exactly one of the labels above. A miracle of any level can be combined with other miracles of its level or lower, if it remains a single conceptual action (see Domain, p. 97.)

Realm provides a rough gauge of a character's status among the Nobilis and the resources they can bring out of their Chancel. In general, the character with the highest Realm attracts the most favorable and respectful notice in any situation. Gifts and recent events may modify this.

Important Notes on Realm Miracles

- Lesser Divinations only provide information about one's Realm.
- Major Divination is really only for scrying within a Realm.
- Realm miracles do not require an extra Miracle Point for use at a distance.
- Powers cannot be directly targeted with Realm miracles, except by themselves.
- This is an extension of the principle that "Powers are not part of any Domain".

Spirit

Sovereigns, it is said, burn. The soul-shard of their Imperator glows like an inferno, lighting them from within; it is wise, legends agree, not to stand too close. In their wake trail seared hopes, scalded loves, and hearts charred to black, for all that their ultimate cause is pure. None of them, even the Baronets, are so human that the fire goes out, but some of them burn brighter than others. The strength of a Sovereign's soul does not depend on their tie to their Estate, their Chancel, their body … this strength stems from a kind of alchemy between the Power and their human self, a measure of the intensity of a Power's personhood. The power of a Sovereign's spirit governs their ability with the ritual magics of the Nobilis, and is measured by the **Spirit** attribute.

Those with high Spirit make Anchors more easily. They draw greater strength from a failed Excrucian Breakthrough or from crushing another Power's desires. They more readily find the roads into an unknown Chancel and can better disguise their uses of power. The force of their selfness, even without rituals, helps them to resist direct attacks by other Nobilis. These useful traits (built into Nobilis's rules) are only the tip of the iceberg. A Noble with high Spirit is almost always a forceful, energetic, and unshakeable personality, and this leads them to many successes in life. They are dominant in their dealings with mortals; at the highest levels, they take on a touch of the regality that marks Powers with Realm.

Spirit includes Miracle Points (**Spirit Miracle Points**, or **SMPs**); Powers can spend these points on any miracle that they work through their Anchors. Aspect miracles are in general very difficult to work through an Anchor, and Anchors can only use "local" Domain and Realm miracles, but there are many chances for the average Power to use SMPs regardless. A Power's Spirit level also adds to several important numbers, such as the miracle level of most attacks made by other Powers upon them. (This is the effect of the Auctoritas, discussed later.)

Level 0: Candleflame

0 points

A "Candleflame" is a Noble who burns softly. They can be strong-hearted and willful; if so, then their soul is also relentlessly mundane. Such Powers are typically so human that the soul-shard of their Imperator, the godhood within them, cannot anchor itself to their essential nature. If a Candleflame loses or has lost its humanity, it becomes weak and listless. Their Noble essence, however potentially powerful, has no great integrity and no structural or personal strength.

The greatest limitation that Candleflames have (and other Powers don't) is that they are strictly unable to have more than one Anchor at a time. They can only be cognizant of two places at once. If their Anchor is killed, they will have to attend to their duties personally and directly until they invest in a new one. They are also the most vulnerable of all Nobles to the assaults of other Powers and Excrucian-shards, lacking any shield of blazing selfhood and insistent existence to help them shred attacks that come too close.

Choosing this level of Spirit does not necessarily hinder the player. When neither the character or their Anchor can participate in a scene, the HG may allow them to play minor characters that are present — ideally, ones associated with the character or the Chancel in some way. However, the player

"Let me tell you what's going to happen to you, my dear," the Marquis whispered. "You are going to see things few others have ever seen … the thousand shades of pain and suffering worn as a mask by the mortals all unknowing; you will see the tragedy in every life, the unfulfilled dream, the unfocused anger, the memory-shards of the million hurtful things that have been said to each one in their short and doomful lives. Your feet will take you to strange places, to worlds between worlds, and gates from one place to another, and in time you will find the garden I have tended, and you will take your turn with the shears. And you will be all alone, my dear, as my heiress must be … for I am Pain, you will be Pain … and pain has no friends."
—from The Mask, *by Emily Chen*

should remember that these temporary characters might not be loyal to that player's PC, and that normal humans are completely undefended against even the most basic magics of the Powers.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Julian Marceau was the most powerful magician of the 18th century and, quite possibly, of this millennium. Born without a soul, he learned magics that could drain the souls. In a slow, relentless process he called up a dozen demons one by one and devoured their spirits. The emptiness inside him swallowed each up, tearing them to shreds. He would no doubt have continued had not Hell sent a fallen angel to Earth to make him a bargain. Julian agreed. The angel sank her soul into the Earth and made a Chancel, and in Julian's hollow body was placed a shining shard of Noble power. He abides by his word, taking no more demons, but he is almost soulless, still, and the love and hate that can make an Anchor is a very rare thing for him to find. He has his Familia and his Imperator, and no other people matter to him.

Adele, a member of his Familia Caelestis, was a damned soul, a favorite toy of the fallen angel Cheran. When Cheran was sent to Earth to replace Achaia, slain in battle, and to end the troublesome activities of Julian Marceau, she brought along her favorites among the dead. Adele was the only one who had enough mind left to her after centuries of torture to make a Power of, and so she was exalted. Those centuries did not whittle her down to Spirit Level 0. A casual act of one of Cheran's demons did, two hundred and twenty years ago: it scooped out and devoured Adele's heart as she screamed. She makes do for now with a heart molded out of cloth and worn on a chain beneath her shirt; until she finds a better and suitable heart, her spirit will be weak, her Anchors few, and her presence in the world will be dim and insubstantial.

Level 1: Hearthfire

3 points

"Hearthfire" is a word the Nobles use to describe those Powers whose company is most comfortable. Powers with Spirit 1 have enough presence that one can feel them in the room, but not so great an inner fire as to burn. One can look in their eyes without a shock. One can hear their words without any desire to obey. Such a Power has some synergy between their human and their divine souls. Naturally, a Spirit 1 Power is not always recognized as a Hearthfire, even as there can be "Regals" whose Domain level merits a Duchy at best.

Hearthfires understand something about the divine souls of others. From this understanding, and from the synergy mentioned before, comes the beginning of a spiritual power. A Hearthfire can bond two Anchors to themselves and to each other, and a Hearthfire is just a little bit harder to magically assault. In their hands, a crushed flower can drain a pocketful of magic from an enemy they have shamed.

This level of Spirit is appropriate for any Power, but is associated most commonly with a troubled soul and a nearly mortal will. Two Anchors suffice for most things, but the player should be aware that they will sometimes wish for more — and that the magical defense that comes with this low a level of Spirit will only blunt the weakest attacks.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Mortar lives one of the most dangerous lives for a Power: he is a full-time operative in the world of man. He commands a secret U.N. task force charged with the supernatural defense of the Earth. The task force, of course, is not even as useful as his own two Anchors, but through his control over it, he symbolically participates in the essence of the U.N. itself, and (in turn) can siphon off a small portion of the power of all humanity. Once, he was among the greatest of the gods of Greece, his presence crackling with a potency ancient and vivid, his every breath full of argent power. For the role that now laid out for him, such a presence would have been a liability. Therefore, Mortar was broken on the rack of the Rite of the Fallen, and made almost, again, a man.

Signe is the Lady of Heraldry. Her role stems from the tradition of Locus Shemeri, the Chancel of Evening's Hope. Heraldry has always been governed by a Sovereign of gentle presence and an easy laugh, selected by the one before her from the citizens of that Ward and Keep. There is reason. Her powers deal with how people are perceived, and with lending a person pride. These effects should not charge roaring from their Power like a landslide, but should drift softly out into the world where such things were once everyday and are now almost unknown.

Level 2: Incandescent Flame

6 points

The Cammorae address the Powers of Lord Entropy "Incandescence": the light that blinds, the flame that consumes itself. The older meaning, however, is "the fire that burns too bright", and mourners recall this name at the funerals of those who sacrifice themselves in war. This does not mean that Nobles with Spirit 2 are the most self-sacrificing of the Powers; they do not need to be. They have, however, crossed a threshold, between the gift of fire and its curse, between the warmth of a hearth and a flaming arrow used in war. They are strong, these Powers, and determined. In the end, their will and passion may bring them to the point of death. It might not bring them away again.

A Power that burns (in their hearts) with an incandescent flame understands the *spiritus Dei*, the Noble essence that Imperators and Excrucians reek of, that objects of true power shine with, that surrounds and fills Powers and their Chancels like a beating melody from a passing car. They are limited to three Anchors, and must position them wisely — but they need not be so penurious with the ultimate expression of love as are the Hearthfires. Their own essence trickles out into the space around them, binding the world they live in ever-so-slightly to their will. When they work the rituals of the Nobilis, they are better at them than their less Spirited comrades. Their presence is impressive, regardless of Estate or Aspect, an effect generally difficult but not impossible to mask. Foul clothing, a slurred voice, and paint-blackened teeth might be a start.

"Up!" he cried. "Up! It's inspection time!"

Slowly, grumpily, the soldiers filed out of their holes, washed their paws in the stream, and donned their helmets and their greaves. They stood with bayonets high as the sergeant paced up and down before them.

"Wilson!" the sergeant snapped. "Need I remind you?"

"No, sir," Wilson replied, and his shoulders sagged. "Badgers don't play video games."

The little handheld device emitted a mournful bloop.

—from Some Live, Some Die, *by Jackie Robinson*

"This is for dropping the flowers in the moat."

"I was told to put them in water, ma'am."

She hit him again. "This is for eating the chocolates."

"You're on a diet, ma'am."

She hit him again. "This for stealing my engagement ring."

"You said it pinched, ma'am. Can't have that here."

She hit him again, in a fury. "And this," *she screamed, "is for putting my boyfriend on the rack."*

"He wasn't right for you, ma'am."

She paused. Considered that. A long moment passed.

"That's not the point, Jeeves."

"Yes'm."

—from Tiffany and the Water Tower, *by Emily Chen*

This is a suitable Spirit level for nearly any Power. Nobles both strong and weak of personality on the inside may have this level of personal force on the outside. The most typical personality type for Incandescent Flames is that of a brave adolescent. Trauma and power both tend to bring out the youth in a person. These Powers have a rebellious and daring determination that outmatches most humans, but which lacks the cold hard rocky vastness of strength that can be found in those who, preserving their adolescent fire, attain a true maturity.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Oresha, once again, is the liegelady of Chilminar and Balbec. Her blood is of all four of the families that live in those most ancient cities. Her soul, in turn, is strong in the aquatic essence of the Dao, the terrene power of the Marids, the phlogistonic fury of the Efreet, and the aerial swiftness of the Janni. She is delicately balanced between mortality and inhumanity. On the one hand, these four families descend from her Imperator's four mortal children, and his divine inheritance converges again inside her. On the other, these four essences reflect pieces of the tangible universe, rooting her deeply into her mortal self. Perhaps in time she will find a way to reconcile Power and Self, so that these two strengths will support each other rather than pulling her in opposite directions.

Casmir was King of Atlantis in its last glory days. Some say that his Imperator, the Wildlord Adalia, made a Chancel of that island realm, and in so doing dragged it down miles beneath the sea … this is of no matter. What matters is that Adalia governs death by sea, and so Casmir, drowned with his subjects, was dragged back from the twilight kingdom to serve Adalia as the Power of the Bridge. For a newly enchancelled Imperator, he was a rare prize: his body dead, and thus undying, and his mind well versed in the uses of power. As with many who have died and then returned, he is possessed of a kind of feckless courage; his will flares as hot, at times, as his undersea realm is cold.

Level 3: Sunfire

9 points

The Sun lights and warms everything it touches, and without these gifts the Earth would die. It feeds the trees and makes the beaches pleasant; it wakes the sleeping and gives new energy to those who live by day. It is essential, but at the same time it is destructive: it sears the deserts, spreads cancer, and, it is said, it slowly grows by devouring the endless sky. Sunfires are considered fractious by the community of Powers, for their mortal souls have gained some small mastery over the *spiritus Dei* given to them. Their obedience to and allegiance with their Imperator is still strong — it is so for all Powers — but in them it has grown less.

Keats once described the Sunfire Alexandros as a "shout of life". It is not an inaccurate term for any of them. They are divinely, transcendently themselves, with the force of their Imperator's soul-shard integrated almost seamlessly into their mortal souls. As the Powers of Inhuman Aspect have access to great physical force, the Sunfires draw on a deep spiritual center and personal balance. Surface manifestations of this include the ability to bind four Anchors to themselves and significant protection against attacks of other Nobilis upon them or their personal space.

This level of Spirit is a sensible choice for Powers with extremely distant or extremely close relationships with their Imperator. It gives more scope for minor rebellions, because the Power's *spiritus Dei* is firmly joined to the shadow that is their mortal soul. At the same time, and for the very same reason, some Powers with this level of Spirit are extremely loyal to their Imperator. If a player wishes a conventionally strong-willed character, they do not need to buy their Spirit level even this high; at this point, the Power can surpass (if motivated enough) the determination of the most stubborn mules.

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Damon, Viscount of the Sands, was a dealer in stolen goods in his mortal life. He was a cheap and disreputable sort who made a passable living thanks to some creative financing and a few deceptive sales tactics. He was well prepared when the Imperator Kallai made Damon his own; with a lifetime spent in reaching accommodations, he knew even at the spiritual level how to negotiate with Kallai's shard-self within him. The bonding between Damon's two halves is not the powerful concordance that some Powers are blessed with, but it serves him well.

Wayness serves a Fallen Angel, the one known as Elymas who fought on Lucifer's side. Elymas, however, did not fight for entirely the same reasons as his liege. Like the greatest of the Fallen, Elymas believes that the "voice of the Creator" within the angels lies and misleads them. He believes that it stands in opposition to the true purpose of Creation, graven into every stain and shadow of Hell. Yet where Lucifer despises humanity, Elymas is uncertain. He feels that humans may be better architects of suffering than even the Fallen Angels. When he was sent to Earth, and when he bound himself into a Chancel to protect his body and soul, one of the soul-shards that shivered off of him into a human body was bound in alliance not to Hell, but to the Light. For Wayness, the double impact of Diabolic power and the Song of Light was nearly overwhelming. She was delirious for perhaps two years after her investment. It took that long to tame that wild fire of divinity within her, where some Powers (if by no means all) have absorbed such a double impact without a tremble.

Level 4: Conflagration

12 points

Liken them to ice, and their spirits are as cold as space; liken them to sound and they scream like an exploding star. They are conflagrations, titanic personalities so deep in selfhood that even their Anchors grow in presence and authority. This has no reflection on what that personality is: a Power of strong spirit can be cowardly and treacherous, or brave and true. Whatever traits compose their basic personality are augmented enormously by miraculous power. They do not

He stepped onto the stage like a scream. Like an explosion of light. The sight of him echoed in my eyes. The room went silent, and all in that place turned to stare at his shadow-softened shape. "I have many names," he said, and there was gentleness in his tone. "I have been called Lightbringer. I have been called Pride. I have come with a message."

His eyes looked everywhere and nowhere, seeing deep into my own, giving nothing back. There was no hint of his thoughts save the small, thin smile that drifted across his face. It ate into me like an acid of the mind. The silence stretched.

"… what?" I finally managed, drawing on my Sovereign's strength.

"It is for your Dominus," he said, and suddenly his eyes were focused, very intently focused, and they were focusing on mine.

"… what?" I asked again.

"He will know," that one replied. He showed me, then, the smallest fraction of what he was, that one. The brightest of all the angels. He showed me only the smallest fraction, and then he was gone.

I … do not remember exactly what happened, then. Only that I did not wish to see anything but Him, ever again. Only the richest, most terrifying pain as I scratched out my eyes.

—Recounting of the Events of January 13th, 1986, *by Michael O'Hare*

There was the stench of gangrene in the air, where open cuts had long since been infected and burned flesh had been left to rot. His wrists were wrapped in steel and chained to the floor beneath him; his back was bare against the stone table.

He was smiling.

—*from* Carryout, *by Emily Chen*

change as the years go by, and everything they are, they are strongly, deeply, and powerfully. Their presence has a profound effect on mortals, and (to some small degree) on Powers.

Conflagrations are among the finest practitioners of the dark arts — primary among them the Nettle Rite that drains a Power's energy away and the Abhorrent Investment that binds a hated mortal as an Anchor. They are strongly protected against the magics of other Nobilis, which gives them a great advantage in Power-to-Power conflicts and in the Excrucian War. It can be much more difficult to trace the magics of a Conflagration, since their use of divine power is elegant and efficient.

Spirit Level 4 generally fits best with Powers who are inherently strong-willed and valorous. It least fits those Powers with complex and divided personalities. In between are the archetypal personalities, played to the hilt: from scholars rich in understanding and library lore to vain popinjays and ladies who spend all their time before a mirror or buying clothes. These personalities can be played with a lower Spirit level, of course, but the higher a Power's Spirit level, the more the world will tend to go along with their conception of themselves and everything else. The high-Spirit popinjay may be horridly ugly and tasteless as sin, but his own belief in his beauty radiates, sloughs off him like a lizard's skin, and shapes the beliefs of (at least) the mortals around him to match.

"For four thousand years," I said softly to the grave, "I was buried in the deeps of the Earth. My Estate was forgotten … my body bound in chains … In all that time I have had no other thought save that I would find you, when I was free."

There was silence.

"It's funny," I admitted. "I never thought you'd be dead when I left that tomb at last. You were always more vibrant than I, full of a boundless life and energy … You kissed me," and I hesitated there, "before they lowered me into the Earth. To show, I suppose, that the struggle between us was only a clash of ethics, and not a personal hate."

The wind toyed with my hair.

"I brought you a flower," I said. "It's a monkshood. It stands for treachery, but it's pretty, see?"

I stood, and pushed the flower into the headstone's heart. "I just wanted you to know," I said, "that all is forgiven."

—from Earth Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Marek is from the Citadel of Eleph, a Chancel bright with technological innovation. Its science is as advanced and pervasive as might be common on 22nd century Earth, and Marek is himself a product of that science. He is a hive of sentient nanomachines, grown under tight security but granted citizenship when he proved himself sufficiently morally advanced. His exaltation to Dominus of Addiction was sudden and wholly unexpected by both Marek and his "parents", but he soon proved himself a worthy choice. Barely a year after his ascension, he invaded the lungs of the full Excrucian Tiamat, and choked her on her own blood before she could wipe him from the Earth. Marek's spirit has always been a strange one, divided as it is among hundreds of millions of bodies; his adaptation to Eleph's shard-soul was both thorough and rapid.

Lisseut is an old French goddess (although not one ever worshipped in our world's France). She approaches the end of a much-extended life, slowly passing into dementia. Her whims and desires grow stronger as her mortal soul begins to lose its grip on life. The part bound to her Imperator's spirit-shard best survives. For both of these reasons, she has been given a high level of Spirit by her player.

Level 5: Inferno

15 points

There is a terrible leashed power inside an Inferno's heart. Like the fires of Hell, they carry with them the potential for screams, pain, destruction, and the overwhelming, uncontrollable force and energy that whips in a hurricane's winds and nearly tears apart the sky. The mortal spirit and the divine passions inside an Inferno are perfectly blended and complementary, and they can wear their Anchors' bodies as their own. Infernos can act with the fury of the storm, or with the precise and ultimately controlled calm of a Buddhist master. Those who look in their eyes see nothing there but the white raging light of the Power's soul.

An Inferno may bond six Anchors, and has an enormous advantage in battles with the Excrucians or other Powers (all other traits being equal.) Their skill with ritual magics begins to approach that of an Imperator. Only rarely can a use of miraculous power be traced to them. Achieving this level of accommodation between their mortal and divine spirits is, to most Sovereigns, one of the most desirable prospects.

Some Powers are Infernos from the moment of their Commencement, but there are a few other ways to reach this level of Spirit. Some reach this balance of selves with assiduous meditation and self-improvement. Others reach it in the opposite manner, by giving in to their passions or even goading them on, until the divine shard inside them bends to match. Some pursue a different path, studying the sorceries of the Nobilis and their own soul-shard; they may indirectly join their souls together as they struggle to improve their sorcerous skill.

"Again."

I looked directly into his eyes. Consciousness fled.

He awakened me.

"Again." I looked directly into his eyes. Consciousness fled.

He awakened me.

"Again."

"I will never master this," I told him.

He frowned. "We cannot dance, Oriane, if you cannot meet my gaze."

—from the thought-record of Oriane Feroulet

EXAMPLE CONCEPTS

Jerrold Marker was a priest before his ascension to the Nobility — a true priest, the kind with a deep inner strength and a compassion for all. There was hardly a ripple in his beliefs when he learned of Chancels, Powers, and the Valde Bellum. His total confidence in himself and his absolute faith instantly tamed and mastered the soul-shard within him. As the Power of Architecture (the Dominus Construo), he spends much of his time doing mundane consulting to encourage new ideas, preserve old ones, and guide low-income housing projects. His own comment on this last: "A dismal house breeds a hopeless heart." When hope dies, the Excrucians are triumphant.

Devika has carried a bitter rage inside her heart for longer than she has been alive. Through three human incarnations, she has remembered who she was, and that the Dominus of Blood slew her love. Through three incarnations, she has tried to end his life. Now she is a Power, divine energies twined into her determined soul, and she will slay that Dominus, she has sworn, as soon as she can do so without turning traitor to the Valde Bellum and her Imperator's desires.

Bonds

Every character has things that are important to them — most often, their mortal loved ones, Chancel, Estate, Familia, Imperator, or favorite possessions. To measure what is important to the character, divide 20 points among **Bonds**, the things they care about, giving each a **Bond Strength**, the number of points assigned to it.

We came over the mountains and there, glistening in the sky, was the rainbow: not the garish spectrum of the south, but a pure gleaming white, forming a complete circle in the sky. It captured my heart in that first glorious moment, and I knew that a part of me would never leave that day, would never leave that spot, where the circle shone.

—from the Journal of Alex Stonefather

EXAMPLE

Arikel is the Power of Night, the child of the sun, and the guardian of dreams. He divides his Bonds points thusly:

- 5 points: the sanctity of his Estate (Night).
- 4 points: his success at protecting sleepers from corrupting or lethal nightmares.
- 4 points: his ladylove, the Marchessa of Shadows, Sessily Burgantine.
- 2 points: their monstrous daughter, Sinhika.
- 2 points: his Chancel, Helion.
- 1 point: his rivalry with Drude Garrot, which exalts them both through its legendary status.
- 1 point: his flute, made from Nightmare's finger-bone.
- 1 point: his Mercedes, Alsvidur.

Players can change their PC's distribution of Bond Strengths at any time, even removing or creating Bonds, as long as they do not abuse this privilege.

It is important, of course, for the players to know what their characters value most. Bonds also have a direct influence on play. The value of a thing to a given Power is proportional to the emotional energy they have invested in it. This is in turn directly proportional to the amount of miraculous power that can be drained from them by capturing, destroying, or corrupting that thing. The technique for draining power from another Noble (or a Excrucian) is called the "Nettle Rite" and will be discussed later.

Anchors

"I don't hate you any more," I admitted.

"Then why?" he asked, meaning 'Why kill me?'

"For the memory," I said as my blade pierced his heart.
—from Tumbledrum, *by Keiko Takemori*

Anchors, as described before, are special humans linked soul-to-soul with a Power. This link is similar in some ways to the bond between a Power and their Imperator. After a Sovereign claims an Anchor, they may step into that Anchor's body at any time. While inside their Anchor's body, they can:

- Sense the things their Anchor senses.
- Communicate silently with their Anchor.
- Perform miracles through their Anchor.
- Command the Anchor's body as if it were their own.

A character's Anchors are very important: they are often the intermediaries between the Power and the broader world. Think about a Power's Anchors during character creation. The Servant's Rite (which makes an Anchor) is discussed later. Players create their PCs' initial Anchor(s), who can be as exceptional as humanly possible but not more so. Anchors acquired during the game are normally HG-created NPCs whom the PC has learned to love or hate.

Anchors are Loyal to Their Sovereign's Causes

Anchors are made loyal by the very magic which creates them, but only to the divine part of a given Power, to that soul-shard that makes them Noble. They share the fundamental allegiances of this soul-shard: to the Power's Imperator, Chancel, Affiliation (e.g. Light, Dark, Heaven, Hell), and Estate. An Anchor that hates, dislikes, or distrusts their Domina can readily stab them in the back if they ever can serve those allegiances while doing so. An Anchor devoted to their Sovereign, of course, will not.

Anchors are Resistant to Magic

Anchors are treated as Powers by these rules, although they do not start with any character points. That means, most importantly, that Anchors are intrinsically not a part of any Estate, and therefore no Power can simply wipe them out of existence with a Realm or Domain miracle of Destruction. If a full Riding of Excrucians were to manifest on Earth and wipe out humanity with a single word of destruction, it would be the Anchors and Powers who survived to rebuild.

Anchors "Attract the Attention of Fate"

This is an old saying among the Powers. It is not literally true; there is no known anthropomorphic personification of Fate in the world of the Ash, but there might as well be. Events on Earth ultimately derive from one of three forces: the great work of the angels, the influence of the Fallen Angels reaching up from Hell, and the destructive incursion of the Dark Horsemen. All these forces have more difficulty affecting an Anchor, and so the tapestry of life catches and tangles about them. In turn, in the more mundane world, the life of a person who becomes an Anchor will never be the same. Events that are weird, disturbing, wondrous, terrifying, joyful, and incomprehensible take place with ever-increasing frequency.

Anchors Die if Their Noble Renounces Them

Sometimes they don't, mind. Sometimes, when a Noble severs the bond between Noble and Anchor, it leaves them a vegetable. Other times, it only leaves them irredeemably and horribly insane. Still, the usual effect of a Noble turning off an Anchor's Anchorness is the Anchor's death or the death of their personality.

Changes in the World

To understand why Anchors' lives become ever stranger, imagine that the Power of Strife miraculously increases the level of violence in the world. This does not affect an Anchor at all. Suddenly, they are one of the most collected, cool, and calm people in their nation. That's odd enough right there.

Now consider the possibility that the Great Work in Heaven, or a battle in the Spirit World, increases the level of global violence. This can affect the Anchor, somewhat — but it affects them less than most. Because this isn't a Noble miracle, Prosaic Reality has the chance to explain the Anchor's partial immunity away. Maybe this just manifests as a few records changing to reflect that the Anchor has always been calm and cool-headed. Alternately, a deranged doctor kidnaps the Anchor and performs unethical experiments to try and find a "cure" for the violence plaguing the world.

Anchors, in answer to Vyasa's question, stand still when the world shakes.

Rules for Spirit

Characters begin with 5 permanent **Spirit Miracle Points** (SMPs), and can increase this total at a cost of 1 Character Point for each permanent SMP. Each character begins each story with as many temporary SMPs as they have permanent SMPs. (For an example of how this works, see the Domain rules on p. 94.) These SMPs can be substituted for other MPs under certain conditions.

Anchors

A Power can have up to (Spirit Level + 1) Anchors. Using a miracle through an Anchor means that the magic flows through the link between Power and Anchor before being expelled into form. Any miracle worked through an Anchor must be reasonably local to that Anchor. There is no additional DMP cost for miracles local to an Anchor but distant from the Sovereign. There is an additional (5 – Spirit Level) AMP cost for Aspect miracles used through an Anchor.

(The Power must use their own body as a template for where the energy should go.) The Power must pay this extra AMP cost when using Gifts based on Aspect miracles (see p. 86).

SMPs may be substituted for AMPs, RMPs, or DMPs for miracles performed through an Anchor. Using SMPs instead of AMPs does not remove the penalty for using Aspect miracles through an Anchor.

The Auctoritas: the Chancel of the Body

The "Auctoritas" is the highest expression of Spirit, of a Power's selfhood. It is the space within about five feet of the Power, in every direction: it is the tie between the Power and the tree Yggdrasil, where all worlds hang. This mystic shield turns away the magics of other Powers, Imperators, and even Excrucians. When two Powers each enter the Auctoritas of the other, there is an uncomfortable feeling, like a grating sandstone sound in the mind and in the soul.

What determines when an uninvited magic is deflected? Normally, when a Power (or Excrucian-shard) wishes to invoke a miracle that will affect the space within another Power's Auctoritas, the Power's player must name the maximum level of Spirit they wish to affect. Add this number to the Miracle Difficulty Level of the effect. If some Power within the region of effect has a higher Spirit level than this number, then they and their Auctoritas are unaffected.

The Spirit level that the player names is sometimes called the "Penetration" of the miracle. A Penetration of 0 is not the same thing as a miracle with no Penetration value; both are possible and both have the same cost. (A miracle with no Penetration value will ignore the space around any Power, whether or not they have a Spirit level; this is useful when one wants to clear mortals away.)

Powers can use miracles inside their own Auctoritas, or even on themselves (using Aspect, or Domain if their Estate is appropriate), without needing to penetrate their own Auctoritas. A Power does not ever need to penetrate any Auctoritas, including that of someone else, to affect themselves with a miracle. This includes Aspect-enhanced thought processes and senses.

A Power's Auctoritas protects them normally against the physical effects of ghost miracles. Ghost miracles also create non-physical effects — the sense of an Estate's presence and the shadowy image of a greater miracle happening. These effects, since they do not physically affect the world, ignore the Auctoritas. In other words, if the Power of Fire wants to heat the air around another Noble, they must penetrate that Noble's Auctoritas. If they wish to create the "ghostly" effect of immolating that Power, as a way of expressing their anger, they can do so without a penetration value.



The Hidden Way

Divinations also follow the rule above. In particular, detecting the traces of power left behind by a miracle is considered an invasion of the relevant Power's Auctoritas. Thus, the Power attempting to detect such things must state the highest Spirit level a Noble could have and still have their traces detected. Add this to the Miracle Difficulty Number.

Summary of Rites

RITE	EFFECT
The Servant's Rite	Claim an Anchor
The Witch Hunt Rite	Detect the traces miracles leave behind
The Redtooth Rite	Eat a Power's heart, gain a miracle point
The Rite of the Last Trump	Move miracle points from one attribute to another
The Rite of Passage	Locate nearby Chancels
The Nettle Rite	Steal miracle points from enemies
The Rite of the Fallen	Punish a traitor or blackguard
The Rite of Anguish	Siphon off a dead Imperator's power
The Rite of Rescue	Adopt new Nobles into a Familia
The Rite of Holy Fire	Defend against non-miraculous assault

The Simple Rites

Powers with high Spirit are generally better at the ritual magics of the Nobilis. There is a concrete, easily defined effect on the five most important Rites — the Nettle Rite, the Witch Hunt Rite, the Servant's Rite, the Rite of the Last Trump, and the Rite of Holy Fire — built into these rules. The HG should bear in mind that high Spirit Powers are also better at the rituals that have less predictable effects, and will be better at using mundane magics, the miraculous artifacts of others, and the Allia (useful magical things that come into being when a Chancel does). The Simple Rites are described in detail on pp. 122-127.

An Outline of Character Creation

Decide on a name, an Estate, and a rough idea of what the character's about. Each character begins with 25 character points to spend.

1. Purchase Attributes

Characters begin with 0 levels of each attribute. Increasing an Attribute costs 3 points per level. Nobilis PCs can have at most five levels of a given attribute.

The four attributes are:

- **Aspect**, used for miracles of body and mind.
- **Domain**, giving miraculous control over one's Estate.
- **Realm**, giving miraculous control over one's Chancel.
- **Spirit**, which generates the Auctoritas and helps with Simple Rites.

For example, a character can buy 1 level of Aspect, 4 levels of Domain, 1 level of Realm, and 0 levels of Spirit. This costs (1 + 4 + 1 + 0) x 3 = 18 points.

2. Purchase Secondary Domain

Some Nobles control additional Estates. **Secondary Domain** over an extra Estate costs 1 point per level. Powers use it like Domain. A Power cannot have more levels in any given Secondary Domain than they have in their Domain attribute.

For example, a character with 4 levels of Domain over Trees can additionally buy 4 levels of Secondary Domain over Loneliness and 2 levels of Secondary Domain over

Vitality for (4 + 2) = 6 character points. This character cannot buy Secondary Domain over Loneliness at level 5, since that exceeds their Domain score.

3. Purchase Extra Miracle Points

Characters begin with 5 Aspect miracle points (AMPS), 5 Domain miracle points (DMPS), 5 Realm miracle points (RMPS), and 5 Spirit miracle points (SMPS).

Characters can purchase additional AMPS, DMPS, RMPS, and SMPS for 1 character point each.

4. Purchase Gifts

Characters begin with no Gifts. Characters can buy Gifts from this text or a supplement for the listed cost. Players can also create their own Gifts. To create a Gift, peruse the Aspect and Domain miracle descriptions to find one that fits what the Gift does. The level of the described miracle serves as the base cost of the Gift.

For example, fire-breathing is a Lesser Creation of Fire, with a base cost equal to the miracle level of Lesser Creations, or 4. Flight is a Lesser Change of the Self, specifically one's own location. Its base cost equals the miracle level of Lesser Changes, or 6.

Gifts can affect the Power that owns them directly. They cannot affect other Powers directly. To penetrate an Auctoritas, they must have a Penetration level. This costs one point per level of Penetration.

For example, fiery breath that can toast a Spirit 2 Power costs + 2 points.

Ease of Use

- A Gift that invokes itself automatically costs + 1 point.
- A Gift that requires a simple miracle to use costs − 1 point.
- A Gift that requires a normal miracle (1 MP) to use costs − 2 points.
- A Gift that requires a hard miracle (2 MPS) to use costs − 3 points.

Range

- A Gift that can affect things anywhere in the world costs + 1 point.
- A Gift with purely local effects costs − 1 point.
- A Gift that can affect the Power or one local person costs − 2 points.
- A Gift that can only affect the Power costs − 3 points.

Flexibility

Recall that each Gift has a miracle description attached, like "Lesser Creation of Fire".

- A Gift that can do anything that miracle description covers costs + 1 point.
- A Gift with a comprehensive range of applications costs − 1 point.
- A Gift with only a handful of applications costs − 2 points.
- A Gift that only has "one trick" costs − 3 points.

Common?

The Hollyhock God determines what Gifts are common.

- An uncommon Gift costs + 1 point.

Minimum Cost

The minimum cost for a Gift is 1.

Cost Multiplier

- Gifts based on Domain miracles that affect a large category of Estates rather than a single Estate cost twice as much.
- Gifts that affect any Estate cost three times as much.

5. Choose Handicaps

- Choose 0 or more Limits. Limits remove abilities the character would otherwise have. Each gives the Power an HG-chosen number of permanent miracle points.
- Choose 0 or more Restrictions. Restrictions give extra temporary miracle points when they come up in play. (The miracle points Limits and Restrictions provide can go wherever you choose to assign them.)
- Choose 0 or more Virtues. These are absolute and inviolable elements of the character's personality.
- Choose 1 Affiliation — the character's code of ethics.
- Pick an Affiliation from the list on pp. 133-134, *or*
  Pick the PCs' Imperator's Affiliation, *or*
  Create a new Affiliation for the character.

6. Choose Bonds and Anchors

Divide 20 points among a list of the things the character cares about most, roughly approximating the relative amount the character cares about them.

This is a good time to roughly detail the character's Anchors, who are often Bonds as well.

7. Choose a Design

Choose a flower or symbol representing the character's Estate and a flower or symbol representing the character themselves. Pick a background for these symbols in the character's heraldic Design, or use the background associated with their Affiliation.

8. Write Down Wound Levels

A character receives (4 + Aspect) wound levels. Divide them evenly into *Surface*, *Serious*, and *Deadly* wound levels. These are used to withstand damage.

If you have one left over, it becomes an extra Surface wound level. If you have two left over, they become an extra Surface and an extra Serious wound level.

9. Note Relevant Chancel and Imperator Properties

After or during character design, the players design a Chancel and Imperator. Some Chancel Properties and Imperator Properties can affect the character sheet. For example, "Granted Gift" allows the character to take an extra Gift (paired with a Handicap) for 0 character points.

An Example of Character Creation, part 1

Michael's friend Susan decides that she'd like to act as Hollyhock God in a new Nobilis campaign. She'll be using *Treachery*, the campaign described later in this book, and tells her players to think about characters who will make good Inquisitors, since she wants a game with lots of investigation and subterfuge.

Michael likes the idea, and considers what the other players are likely to do. Madeleine will play a tremendously intelligent manipulator with multiple identities because she likes that sort of character (and does it well). Philip's been talking recently about taking a break from his usual style of social butterfly to play someone big and strong and good at smacking malefactors. Lin has the urge to run a spy and infiltrator. Michael doesn't want to duplicate any of their planned efforts. Lately he's been reading a lot about past and present maritime life, including books by John McPhee, Patrick O'Brien, and Joan Druett, and decides that he'll play a female merchant marine captain. The cargo ship she runs might make a good Chancel (Michael thinks, but doesn't suggest right now). She'll have a ruthlessly pragmatic attitude that may come in handy when reining in some of the other characters, and their players.

There are many ways to develop a character, and as long as they lead to good, enjoyable results, they're all right. Since Nobilis characters don't have highly detailed statistics, Michael wants to work out a strong sense of who his character is as a mortal woman before working out the consequences of her Commencement. After leafing through inspirational books, he gets a mental image of a slightly stout woman, not yet middle-aged, heavily tattooed and scarred in a few places, dressed in heavy denim. He indulges himself with a historical allusion, and names her Mary Frances Rowland to make her the great-great-great-granddaughter of a 19th-century American woman who commanded a Pacific frigate.

Mary Frances grew up in some little town on the shores of the Great Lakes, where she learned sailing and dealing with idiot tourists; she dropped out of college in her sophomore year to join the merchant marine and gradually worked her way up through the ranks. Three years ago she suffered through a brief period of notoriety, thanks to a couple of news magazine puff pieces about her heroism in leading a successful counter-attack on the thugs who'd hijacked the ship she was first mate of, in the South China Sea. She picked up her most visible scars — a pair of knife cuts just below her left ear — in the process. For a year or so, she couldn't go into a waterfront bar without some sailor jerk deciding he'd prove his manhood by beating her up to show she wasn't so tough after all, but it gradually tapered off. The coverage wasn't all bad: it brought her to the attention of a Mexican shipping firm which made her captain of the oil tanker *Baja Tide*. She's very much enjoying command.

Now Michael feels comfortable assigning the numbers. Even after receiving her Imperator's shard, Mary Frances isn't that far removed from humanity in her overall physical and mental capabilities. Michael buys Aspect 1 for her. Michael isn't sure yet what her Estate will be, but he wants her to have quite good control over it, so he buys Domain 3. The Chancel itself may or may not be important as the game goes on, but it doesn't seem quite as crucial to Michael; he buys Realm 2 (and tries not to worry when Susan chuckles softly). Finally, he decides on Spirit 2, having no particularly firm sense what he may want for Mary Frances in this category. Altogether, attributes cost 24 of the 25 points he has to spend on his character.

Bonds and Anchors don't take Michael a lot of time. This surprises him a little bit, since he often has to poke at such things longer, but for this character they seem to follow naturally. At 7 points, the *Baja Tide* is the single most important thing in Mary Frances' world. Following it at 5 points each are her ability to guard her Estate (which Michael still hasn't defined, but he thinks of Mary Frances as strongly devoted to whatever it'll turn out to be) and safe harbors wherever they may be. Those three bonds tie up 17 points.

Mary Frances can have two Anchors (Spirit 1 + 1). One is her old friend Esteban Zuñiga, now chief of the drydocks at *Baja Tide*'s home port; the other is Bon Duc Tran, the leader of the pirates whose attack made her famous. They're each worth 1 point of bond strength to her. (Making Anchors out of enemies is straightforward: Mary Frances can use Bon in a sort of extended revenge. Making Anchors out of loved ones is trickier; Michael envisions Mary Frances working co-operatively with Esteban rather than dictatorially. She's bringing him up into her new plane of experience, and may well hope someday he'll get enNobled too.) Michael spends the last point on Mary Frances' fascination with cutting-edge technology insofar as it affects shipping.

The Creation of Jameson Black

Melancthe is creating a Nobilis character. She starts with the concept of a Tibetan dragon who hates both the Chinese occupation and his own reaction to it. He has turned to drink, and his body has gone a little bit to pot. This is Jameson Black, as seen on page 112.

Jameson's Aspect level is Legendary and no more, but he has a number of Gifts of Aspect. Melancthe starts with Eternal, Durant, Flight, Fire-Breathing, and Shapeshifting (to human shape and back), as found in Chapter 10. This costs 7 points, for a total of 13 spent on Aspect.

Melancthe is most familiar with Korean dragons, who bring rain. Accordingly, she gives Jameson a Domain over Storms. She would like to bring a healthy downpour as a hard miracle, which means that Jameson has at least a Level 2 Domain. She gives a little bit of thought here to what she associates with rain, and lists "joy", "health of plants", "clouds", "cleanliness", and "storms". She suspects that she doesn't have enough points for another Estate just now, so for 6 points, Jameson becomes a Viscount of Storms.

OPPOSITE:
Jameson Black, the Power of Storms
by Bryan Talbot


BRYAN
TALBOT
2001

Melancthe has 6 points left to divide among Realm and Spirit. She decides (to make this division easier) that Jameson has been away from the Chancel for a long time — mostly drinking — and that he has lost his affinity for the place. This also explains why he is wearing a Western name. The 6 points go to buying Jameson Level 2 Spirit, making him an Incandescent Flame. This fits dragons in general and Jameson in specific, and it gives him a measure of magical protection to go with his physical armor.

Bonds are next. Melancthe assigns them as follows:

- 5 points to Tibet. (It's hard to hurt it, but she's in trouble if someone does.)
- 3 points to the sanctity of his Estate.
- 3 points to Jameson's Anchor and bastard son, Kun Rkyo Min Kar.
- 3 points to Jameson's Imperator, Anani.
- 3 points to liquor, and his access to it.
- 2 points to Jameson's Anchor, Rosaline Donalds: CEO, ex-SO, personal bankroll.
- 1 points to his desire for respect.

Finally, there are handicaps. She decides to start with the following: "Alcoholic", "Wants to Free Tibet", "Hunted by the Chinese Government", and "Affiliation: Light". What specifically drove Jameson to drink was his slaughter of a group of Chinese soldiers. His Affiliation with the Light explains why Jameson was so badly hurt by this — he was acting against the code of the Light integrated into his soul. Jameson also automatically receives a Handicap from his Imperator, forbidding him to own much in the way of property (see p. 153), and 6 Wound Levels (see pp. 164-165).

Jameson Black's final character sheet is:

Jameson Black: the Power of Storms

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	2: Legendary	5
Domain	2: Viscount	5
Realm	0: Citizen	5
Spirit	2: Incandescent Flame	5

Gifts and Virtues	Eternal
	Durant
	Fire-breathing
	Flight
	Shapeshifting (to human or dragon)
Limits/Restrictions	Restriction: Alcoholic
	Restriction: Wants to free Tibet
	Restriction: Hunted by Chinese government
	Restriction: Forbidden to anything except holy scripts, robes, a few coins, and a begging bowl
	Affiliation: Code of the Light
Wound Levels	2 Deadly Wounds (Durant)
	2 Serious Wounds
	2 Surface Wounds

Design

Chaos's flower and the flower of Remorse twine about a caduceus against a gray background with a raindrop pattern. Chaos's flower, representing Storms, is a closed silver flower with four identical petals and whorled leaves. The flower of Remorse, representing Jameson himself, is a closed black flower with five separated petals and recently added thorns.



Chapter 10
Gifts and Handicaps

The Book of Questions

To preserve these questions against the ages, Vyasa carved them into the stones of the Wall at Gir. Those who pay pilgrimage to this wall come away changed. Some acquire strange new talents. Others develop obscure disabilities. All speak of the wondrous clarity of Vyasa's script.

1. *"Time eats at everything," says Lord Dirghadanstra. "Nothing lasts forever."*
2. *"The soul lives eternally," answers the Lady Menaka, "and no force can unmake what the gods have made immortal."*
3. *Is Dirghadanstra mistaken? Is Menaka?*

4. *What shape is the spirit of a mountain?*
5. *What color is the spirit of peace?*
6. *How does love choose which hearts to wear?*

7. *Brahmasuras the Harvester says, "Praise to the Creator; I am blessed! I am whole; I am sound; I am fortunate. My life is without flaw."*
8. *Gitali the Blind answers, "Praise to the Creator! Knowing my weakness, I can counter its manifestations. How much more fortunate I am than those who do not know their limits!"*
9. *Saurabh the Unlucky answers, "Praise to the Creator! No man knows when ill luck will strike. None can prepare for its fell touch. Yet this grave uncertainty is a blessing! Plagued with ever-changing troubles, I have become flexible in nature and quick in mind."*
10. *Each pities the others, but which of them is truly blessed?*

11. *A eunuch stands outside a harem. Many of the women inside are gone. "Have you an explanation?" cries the eunuch's lord. "Someone has spirited my harem away!"*
12. *"I allowed your rival to commit this theft," the eunuch admitted, "but I am not remiss. I ensured that he removed only those women lacking in beauty or grace. In this manner, I have improved your harem's quality."*
13. *The harem was humanity; but who was the eunuch, and who was the thief?*

"Assume Q," she said. "As we know Q implies R, we can derive R. Knowing P implies not R, we can derive not P."

In the background, she heard the Queen of Unreason screaming. She did not stop.

"We also know Q implies P. Since we assumed Q, we know P. Having both P and not P for a contradiction we know our assumption is wrong: thus we know not Q."

The screaming cut off suddenly, as if the Queen's lungs had turned to vapor. Tiffany cautiously opened her eyes. The Queen smiled.

Tiffany's brow furrowed. "Did I make a mistake?"

"No," the Queen admitted, her fangs snowy white. "I just got bored with being vulnerable to logic."

—*from* Tiffany and the Water Tower, *by Emily Chen*

Gifts

Many Powers have special abilities beyond the general competency indicated by their attribute levels. A Gorgon, for instance, might be able to petrify an opponent with her gaze — a mortal opponent, at least — even if she does not have Domain over stone, petrifaction, mortals, or transmutations. Special tricks like this one are called Gifts, and there are almost as many as there are Powers: some given by Imperators, others found hidden in the Power's soul.

Players purchase Gifts with character points, just like attribute levels. Gift costs draw on the Domain and Aspect miracle level charts. We present the Gift design system below, followed by several sample Gifts.

Base Cost

Each Gift allows the Power to create an effect or set of effects similar to those covered by miracles of Aspect, Domain, or Realm. First, find an appropriate miracle level. For instance, the ability to bring peace to any heart is a Lesser Creation. For a more permanent effect — what is created can fade, after all — the player might select a Lesser Destruction, to indelibly excise the inner pains and uncertainties that trouble the soul. The miracle levels for Lesser Creation and Lesser Destruction are 4 and 5, respectively; this is the base (starting) cost for the corresponding Gift.

EXAMPLE

Arikel wishes to be immortal. That sounds like a major preservation, which has miracle level 6. The base cost for this Gift is 6.

MIRACLE TYPE	LESSER LEVEL	MAJOR LEVEL
Divinations	2	5
Preservations	3	6
Creations	4	7
Destructions	5	8
Changes	6	9

Gifts, like miracles affecting oneself, can treat the Gift's user as part of the relevant Estate. Thus, a Power can inflict peace on their own heart, even though other Nobilis are immune. "The Self" is a valid Estate for Gifts intended to affect the Power and only the Power. When a Power uses a Gift on themselves, it ignores their Auctoritas.

If a Gift incurs a miracle point cost in some way, the Power must pay it to use the Gift.

Note on Multiple Domains for Domain-based Gifts

Gifts that affect a family of distinct Domains (any living thing, any physical thing) cost twice the normal amount. Gifts that can affect anything and everything cost three times the normal amount. A Gift that can affect anything *in a specific Chancel* is based on Realm, not Domain, and need only be purchased once.

Spirit Force

Gifts, like miracles, have a penetration level associated with them. If a Power wishes the Gift to affect anything but the Power themselves in the region within another Power's Auctoritas, they must buy a suitable level of penetration. This increases the base cost by one point per point of penetration. Because immortality affects only Arikel himself, he does not have to spend extra points to remain immortal inside an Auctoritas.

Activation/Invocation

Now determine how the Power activates their miraculous Gift.

MEANS OF ACTIVATION	COST IN CPS
Automatically when appropriate	+1
Simple miracle	−1
Normal miracle	−2
Hard miracle	−3

Miracles that only need to be performed once (barring interference from some other Power) are considered automatic.

EXAMPLE

Arikel's player looks at the chart, and determines that immortality is in the first category: his immortality is automatically reinvoked whenever something counteracts the effect. (Other Nobilis cannot affect Arikel or his immortality directly, so their powers cannot counteract this Gift — but entering certain heavily protected Chancels, leaving Earth, an Imperator's miracles, and certain abilities of Excrucians and their weapons can counteract a Power's Gifts and long-standing effects.) Immortality now costs 7 points.

Area of Effect

Now determine the area that the Gift can affect.

AREA OF EFFECT	COST IN CPS
Almost anywhere	+1
Local things only	−1
One person (Power with Gift or a nearby mortal)	−2
Oneself only	−3

EXAMPLE

Arikel makes up a few points here. Immortality only affects himself, which yields -3 points — and the current cost drops to 4 points.

Flexibility/Utility

Now determine how much of the potential implicit in their Gift the Power can actually use.

FLEXIBILITY	COST IN CPS
All imaginable uses	+1
A wide variety of situations	−1
A limited selection of applications	−2
One single "trick"	−3

EXAMPLE

Arikel has full use of the miracle level: he does not age, cannot be wounded, stays healthy when he doesn't eat, sleep, drink, etc., he can survive in deep space, and he is immune to disease. This adds 1 point to the total. Thus, his Gift, "Immortal", is worth 5 points so far.

Important Notes about Gift Flexibility

Each Gift can perform one type of miracle. Thus, for this purpose, Major Divinations are not the same level as Lesser Destructions; Lesser Changes are not the same level as Major Preservations; and Gifts based on the Sight or Guising cannot also include more general Aspect talents. Moreover, miracles of a given level do not automatically include miracles of lower levels. Gifts based on the Aspect miracle chart cannot have more than a limited selection of uses. Gifts based on level 9 miracles of Major Change should not have more than a limited selection of uses, but the HG can permit exceptions.

Rarity

Finally, Gifts that are uncommon in the game universe cost an extra point. The HG should let the players know which Gifts are common.

The Gift of Tongues

Characters do not need to buy Gifts to understand human languages. Every Noble receives a comprehensive understanding of human languages and the "True Tongue" of Heaven for free.

A Summary of Gift Costs

EASE OF USE	EFFECT AREA	FLEXIBILITY	COMMON	COST
Automatic	Global	Full	No	+1
Simple Miracle	Local	Comprehensive		−1
Normal Miracle	Single person	Limited effects		−2
Hard Miracle	Self	One trick		−3

Example

Arikel's HG decides that Immortality is uncommon. Therefore his final cost for the Gift is 6 points. Checking the table, we have:

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
6 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Full flexibility	No	
6 CPs	+1	−3	+1	+1	6 CPs

In the event that Arikel must spend miracle points on this Gift — not a situation created by the rules of the game, but the HG may impose such a penalty in some unusual circumstance — he will spend AMPs, because Immortality is a physical/mental power rather than a "magical" one.

When a Gift requires a normal or hard miracle to use, it draws its miracle points from one attribute chosen when the Gift is purchased. This should be an attribute the player considers appropriate for the Gift.

The HG can assign specific, extra costs for anything not covered by these rules.

Note: The minimum cost for a Gift is 1 character point.

Sample Gifts of Aspect

The sword rose and fell, and the warrior wept with each blow: not solely because his love was dying at his hands, but because even with Damascene steel it was still painfully slow …
—from Death of a Lamia, *by Emily Chen*

Durant

1 point

Durant characters are difficult to injure. Their skin turns aside the blows of daggers wielded by mortal hands; swords and chainsaws alike work poorly against them. They heal quickly as well: if they survive a blow, however grave it may be, the wound will be a faded scar in seven days' time. See table below to calculate the cost for Durant.

This Gift has the minimum cost of 1 point, and is based on a Lesser Preservation of Self.

EXAMPLE

Joan of Arc was burned alive, but she didn't let that stop her. The guarding hand of God that she was so confident of existed, and it saved her life. It was, in fact, the ward of her Imperator, placed on her when she was sent out to wage a mortal war. It was considered wise by her Rex Regius to keep her out of the mortal world after that, at least until her face is forgotten. The ward he set on her has never been revoked; she is protected against physical attacks, even ones so brutal as the pyre on which she writhed.

Eternal

3 points

Eternal characters suffer no detrimental effects from the passage of days. If they are not killed, they will survive until the end of time, the final victory of the Excrucians — or, if the Excrucians should be defeated, the character will live until their Imperator throws off the guarding shackles of Chancel and Nobilis and rises to reassume its rightful place as a Lord or Lady of all Creation. An Eternal character can, at their player's option, be enormously old as well; the Excrucian war stretches back a very long time. Hunger, thirst, weariness, and strain are optional for these isentropic beings, as are most other requirements of human life. This Gift includes Immutability but provides no special defense against injury. See table below to calculate the cost for Eternal.

This is a fairly common Gift, based on a major Preservation of Self.

"It was," the man said impatiently, "in a time before clocks."

"Before clocks," the water witch said, "there was no time …"
—from Reflections II, *by Viscount d'Armand*

EXAMPLE

Daniel was born in Locus Allegra, the child of his own Regina — not born from the womb, as humans are, but from a gift of life breathed into a statue made of clay. From this alone, he would be eternal — why should Allegra give her son the human frailties? — but there is something more, and darker. It is said that Allegra did not create his spirit herself, but rather cast a net for it at the uttermost edges of Creation. She wished a soul from an earlier work of the Creator, in the hope that it might aid her in the war. There is an accompanying risk: that Daniel is no true Noble, but the shard of an Excrucian, and that when the time comes he will turn upon his comrades and wipe his Imperator-given Estate (the concepts of Heat and Cold) utterly from the universe.

Glorious

2 points

With this Gift of Aspect or Spirit, 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) Powers. 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 are immune to the *miraculous* part of this common Gift, but can be moved by a person's beauty nevertheless. See table below to calculate the cost for Glorious.

This is a Major Creation of Emotion.

"… he was not among the fallen, my lord."

A moment's hesitation. "Had the living seen him?"

"Only one still lived, my lord. And he only said one thing."

"It was?"

"Over and over again, my lord. 'So beautiful.'"
—from the Thought-Record of Martin Cravitt

Durant

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
3 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Limited	Yes	
3 CPs	+1	−3	−2		1 CP

Eternal

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
6 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Comprehensive	Yes	
6 CPs	+1	−3	−1		3 CPs

Glorious

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
7 (Domain)	Simple	Local	One trick	Yes	
7 CPs	−1	−1	−3		2 CPs

EXAMPLE

Helen of Troy was the most beautiful woman ever to live, and Troy may well have been Earth's most glorious culture. Achievements that would amaze mortals of our time were common there. Given a few centuries more, it might have brought about a new age of understanding and wonder. Then Jehannum, one of the oldest Regi of the Dark, summoned Troy from Earth into the spirit realm, and conscripted its men to use as shock troops in the war. It was twenty years later, with Troy a ghost of what it had been, that Helen inspired the last warriors of Troy into rebellion against their master. It should have been an easily crushed revolt — but something in Helen's nature gave those who defended her a touch of the divine fury. Jehannum, endlessly confident, came into Troy to crush their spirits, and was taken down by mere humans. (This is one of only three times in all history that mortals have destroyed an Imperator.) It was too late for the culture of Troy; too many of its adults had died. The Light's interest, however, was peaked by Jehannum's destruction; it offered Helen a choice. The people of Troy might be returned to Earth, where the other mortals of Greece would quickly dispossess them … or they could form the human nucleus for a new Chancel, and participate further (but at less human cost) in the great war. She chose the enChancelling, and so Troy faded from the world stage. Millennia later, Helen, now the Power of Weavers, still survives.

"Marchessa," I said. "I have come from the battle at Jena-Auerstadt. I am charged to report to you that your son has been slain by mortal hands."

She did not look up from her weaving.

"Should I declare a time of mourning?" I wondered.

She said, softly, "Hundreds of my children have been born, nourished, and raised, and every one has died. It is some fault in my blood, I think … their mortality …"

"He was well-loved," I told her, gently.

"There is no need for mourning," she told me. But a shiny thread joined the weaving, the color of a tear.

—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Immortal

6 points

A character with this Gift of Aspect can only die in one of five ways:

1. If their Imperator is slain, they become mortal — or even die instantly.
2. Outside Earth, the protection of their Imperator weakens slightly.
3. Some Excrucians and Excrucian weapons can work around Immortality.
4. Some Immortal characters can commit suicide.
5. A particular circumstance specified in advance.

Immortal characters are, in essence, "sealed systems". Their nature is unalterable, and the freedom and the magic within cannot be removed. Thus, they cannot be bound permanently, however clever the bonds. The player can decide whether their PCs' physical form can be injured at all (except by their use of a Word of Command); if so, they recover with godlike speed. Immunity to injury is not, of course, an immunity to harm, and certainly not an immunity to pain — spiritual injuries can be inflicted upon them. This Gift includes the advantages of both Eternal and Durant.

One pays for immortality. Any person, however powerful, will suffer a catastrophe if they live long enough. They may be tortured, their Chancel may be shattered, their loved ones might turn against them. Endless lesser sorrows come as well: the death of a friend, the death of a child, the suffering of a loved one. Immortal characters learn emotional distance quickly, but they do not keep it for very long; isolation for eternity is the worst fate of all. See table above to calculate the cost for Immortal.

This is a Major Preservation of the Self effect.

EXAMPLE

Stheno, Euryale, and **Medusa** were the three Gorgons, sisters of a terrible beauty in face and body, whose only blemish was their hair. It shone with a hundred subtle colors, all ravishingly beautiful; no man, woman, or Gorgon could bring themselves to cut or bind a single strand. By the time they were twenty, it was a horrid tangle. Leaving that aside, they were so lovely that the Powers of Locus Ithamar forbade the Gorgons' beauty to mortal men. They were forbidden to leave their enchanted isle and cursed so that the sight of their face would turn mortal men to stone. Ithamar endorsed this curse …but he had further plans for the sisters. When two of his Powers were slain by servants of the Dark, Stheno and Euryale replaced them. He gave them immortality, and this was the cruelest thing of all. In Ithamar's opinion, the one attribute needed to perfect their charm was sorrow, and so he left Medusa mortal, to age and to die. Euryale found the strength to leave the isle, then; Stheno (over two thousand years later) still serves in the Valde Bellum, and still mourns. It is whispered among the people of that island Chancel, and of those in nearby Greece, that the veiled ancient who haunts Ithamar's isle can still turn a man to stone.

Immutable

1 point

Immutable characters have bodies which are maintained somewhat by their power, so that they do not perish easily. These characters grow hungry and tired, but they can survive indefinitely without food, water, sleep, or even air. Although Powers with this Gift age, slowly, they do not typically die of natural causes. They are one irrevocable step away from mortality and the human condition.

Immutability protects a character only to a limited extent. See table to calculate the cost for Immutable.

Notice that Immutability would cost no CPs at all, except that a Gift's minimum cost is 1 point. It is a Lesser Preservation of Self.

EXAMPLE

Admiral Kynn, or simply Admiral to his friends, has been described before (see p. 100). He is the greatest of the Powers of Cabin Fever MUSH, a Chancel accessible only through the Internet. Once drafted into that role by his Imperator

Immortal

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
6 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Full flexibility	No	
6 CPs	+1	–3	+1	+1	6 CPs

Immutable

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
3 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Comprehensive	Yes	
3 CPs	+1	–3	–1		1 CP

The Nature of the Absolute

Such concepts as truth, logic, ethics, and physical law derive ultimately from the Imperators and the other things of spiritus Dei *(such as the World Ash). These Estates and others define absolutes. There are absolute truths in Creation. There are immortal creatures. There are unstoppable terrors.*

These things are absolute in a very real sense. An immortal lives forever by the very definitions of life and eternity. At the same time, in the world of Nobilis, *every definition can change. Because the Imperators define the world, their actions change the world's definition. The Excrucians have an even greater ability to defy the absolute. They come from outside Creation. Truth, logic, ethics, and law have no power over them.*

Vyasa's Lady Menaka correctly argues that some things live forever. Only by breaking the rules of the world can one uncreate such immortals. Dirghadanstra, who claims that all things must perish, is mistaken. While logic suggests that, given an infinite span of time, something *must emerge from the Lands Beyond Creation to destroy even the most vital Imperators and Powers, logic does not apply in those lands.*

… to master the techniques of meditation, it is told, the Buddha fasted for sixty days …

—Scratched into a café table in Paris

OPPOSITE:
The Power of Song
by Frazer Irving



Nemuel, he became somewhat virtual himself. "Real world" things — hunger, thirst, weariness — do not affect the central, most empowered, part of the Sovereign.

Mythological Beast

Variable cost

"... the breath of the panther is so sweet that when it roars, its prey is drawn to it like an arrow to the earth ..."
—from A Medieval Bestiary, *by Paul McArthur*

Below are some examples of the Gifts of mythological beasts. In the world of Nobilis, such creatures are generally the mortal descendants of Powers or Imperators. Sometimes, they are Powers warped during their Commencement or beings created with a Chancel. If a mythological beast has significant drawbacks associated with their physical or even nonphysical form — e.g., a ghost who must possess mortals to act, or a salamander that cannot stop burning — they can take an appropriate Handicap, as described on p. 127.

Amphibian (for Merfolk, Hippocampi)
Powers with this Gift are as much at home on the water as on the land. They can breathe and move freely underwater. See table to calculate the cost for Amphibian.

This is a Lesser Preservation of the Self.

Fire-breathing (for Dragons, Chimerae)
Fire breathing costs the minimum 1 character point. For the same cost, appropriate Powers can breathe fire around a corner, or burn patterns into wood. (Substitute "Limited Uses" for the "One Trick" below.) Being able to catch fire harmlessly and at will, like a Phoenix can, is also 1 CP. See table to calculate the cost for Fire-breathing.

This is a Lesser Creation of Fire.

Flight (for Dragons, Phoenixes, Powers given wings)
The ability to fly is a common Gift. It costs 1 character point, See table to calculate the cost for Flight. If one has wings, the cost is the same (minimum) 1 point; recall that a Level 5 Aspect miracle allows flight if one has wings.

This is a Lesser Change of the Self; the "One Trick" is changing one's position in space.

Invisibility (for Ghosts and Bogeymen)
The ability to turn visible and invisible at will costs 1 point. See table to calculate the cost for Invisibility.

This is a Lesser Destruction of Visual Images; specifically, one's own.

Remove Poison (for Unicorns)
The ability to remove poison from anything costs 1 point. For 2 points, a Power can also remove disease and demonic influences. This does not work on Sovereigns, although some HGs might allow it to if the target Power co-operates.

This is a Lesser Destruction of Corrupting Influences. The 2 character point version has limited uses (all kinds of Corruption) instead of the "one trick" of removing poisons.

Petrify with a Look (for Gorgons, Basilisks, Cockatrices)
Except in unusual games, the ability to turn a person to stone with a look is uncommon. It costs only 1 character point, and does not affect Powers (or, accordingly, Anchors, Imperators, or Excrucians and their Anchors and shards.)

This is a Lesser Change of Human Bodies. This Gift has double cost if it can affect any living thing, and triple cost if it can affect anything.

Shapeshifting (for Dragons, Werewolves, Vampires)
Powers with one or two alternate shapes must pay the minimum 1 character point. Powers with a comprehensive shapeshifting ability must pay 2 CPs.

This is a Lesser Change of the Self. A wide variety of shapes would be a comprehensive use of this Domain level.

Amphibian (for Merfolk, Hippocampi)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
3 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Limited	No	
3 CPs	+1	–3	–2	+1	1 CP

Fire-breathing (for Dragons, Chimerae)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
4 (Domain)	Simple	Local	One trick	No	
4 CPs	–1	–1	–3	+1	1 CP

Flight (for Dragons, Phoenixes, Powers who are given wings)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
6 (Domain)	Simple	Self only	One trick	Yes	
6 CPs	–1	–3	–3		1 CP

Flight (if one has wings)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
5 (Aspect)	Simple	Self only	One trick	Yes	
5 CPs	–1	–3	–3		1 CP

Invisibility (for Ghosts and Bogeymen)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
5 (Domain)	Simple	Self only	One trick	No	
5 CPs	–1	–3	–3	+1	1 CP

Remove Poison (for Unicorns)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
5 (Domain)	Simple	Local	One Trick	No	
5 CPs	–1	–1	–3	+1	1 CP

Petrify with a Look (for Gorgons, Basilisks, Cockatrices)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
6 (Domain)	Simple	One person	One trick	No	
6 CPs	–1	–2	–3	+1	1 CP

Shapeshifting (for Dragons, Werewolves, Vampires)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
6 (Domain)	Simple	Self only	Limited	No	
6 CPs	–1	-3	–2	+1	1 CP

Venomous Bite or Acidic Spittle (for various monsters)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
4 (Domain)	Simple	Local	One trick	No	
4 CPs	–1	–1	–3	+1	1 CP

Venomous Bite or Acidic Spittle (for various monsters)
Even the most lethal venoms or acids cost only 1 CP — the a Gift's minimum cost. The HG may allow appropriate characters to make normal venom at will. See table below to calculate the cost for Venomous Bite or Acidic Spittle.

This is a Lesser Creation of Venom or Acid. It has local range allowing the Power to spray poison or acid over several targets at once. Powers without this ability still pay the minimum 1 CP.

EXAMPLE
Tsiang Wu has the rarest lineage of all; no more than three members of her family exist at any given time. She is of the line of the Phoenix, descendant of an aerial mating between a true god and the Aboulomri (the bird that lives a thousand years). In each major era, the Phoenix has immolated itself in its nest and been born again from its scorched black egg. Her sister, the watery Phoensa, casts itself into the ocean and is born again from the foam of the sea. Lastly is Tsiang Wu, the Corruna of this age, who shares the memory of all her line but has a new name and selfhood each time she is born. At the end of this era, even though she has been made into a Power, she will bury her stony body in the Earth only to be born anew from a locust flower growing on her grave.

Haunted eyes met mine from the rubbish-heap. Filthy, sore-crusted arms were raised before its body in a gesture of warding. One hand held a chicken bone, gnawed nearly in half. Clothes hung raggedly from his form.

I could afford to be munificent. I had the leavings of the feast with me; I could feed him well. I even had begun to offer them. And then I saw the marking on his brow.

"Go," I said, fiercely.

Fratricide.

—from the Thought-Record of Martin Cravitt

Sacrosanct
8, 11, or 19 points
Characters with this Gift of Aspect are the untouchables. First, they are warded against harm by all but the most puissant of weapons. Second, they heal even the most severe wounds in a day, if they live that long. Third, and most important, they have been declared inviolable, and an Imperator's Oath to this effect has been embedded in their soul. Those who capture them, torture them, forcibly keep them away from something they are Bonded to, or degrade them are cursed by that Oath. It will haunt them for some time after; if their enemies kill the character, the Oath will haunt them forever. The exact form of punishment this Oath exacts varies, and so therefore does the cost for Sacrosanct.

This is bought as two separate Gifts, the preservation that protects against most harm and restores things it failed to protect against, and the curse. See the table below to calculate the cost for Sacrosanct.

This is a Major Preservation of the Self.

One simple, cheap curse that the Oath can inflict is the creation of a Nemesis (reappearing if slain) that commits as much ruin as it can upon the cursed person. The deadliest curse is a major destruction that will crumble everything the victim touches, or, perhaps, ruin their luck utterly. Powers can spot these Oaths with the Sight. Mortals often have an inkling, on some primal level, that the Power with Sacrosanct is not a person to impede.

Nemesis
This is a Gift based on a Major Creation, and it is automatically invoked when the character or the Nemesis is slain. The Nemesis will appear by the character's corpse, as soon as the character's own Auctoritas has faded (and any others have moved away). See the table at the foot of the page.

The Curse of Dust
This is a Gift based on Lesser Destruction, able to overcome an Auctoritas of 3. It costs 8 points to ruin the target's luck and 16 points if the Gift can crumble anything physical and non-miraculous that the target touches (that is, if it affects a large family of Estates). See table above.

EXAMPLE
Cassiel is a Power in service to the angel Hukkok. His chief task is recording the sins and blessings of humankind. Should the Excrucians capture the spiritual plane and come to destroy the physical Earth, his register will tell the angels whether humanity should be saved, or destroyed as potential collaborators with the Dark Horde. His personal strength is limited, but at the same time his work is considered vitally important. He receives much attention from opposing forces: Excrucians, Hell, and the Dark, who desire humanity to fail, and the Light, who would betray the angels a thousand times over to ensure that humanity survives. To guard him from such forces, a potent Oath of Hukkok's will has been placed in him. Anyone who hinders him in his mission will find no shelter, no love, and will never again see their home.

Sacrosanct

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
6 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Limited	No	
6 CPs	+1	−3	−2	+1	3 CPs

Nemesis

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
7 (Domain)	Automatic	Local	One trick	No	
7 CPs	+1	−1	−3	+1	5 CPs

Curse of Dust

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
5+3 Penetration	Automatic	Global	One trick	No	
8 CPs	+1	+1	−3	+1	8/16 CPs

Sample Gifts of Domain

"Damn you," she cried, as the winds threw her to the earth, "You're not even here*!"*
—from The Woman Who Killed a Wind, *author unknown*

Constant Domain
5 points: Ghost Miracles
6 points: Lesser Divinations
7 points: Lesser Preservations
8 points: Lesser Creations
9 points: Lesser Destructions
9 points: Major Divinations
The Domain of characters with this Gift serves them even without explicit commands. Their Estate will perform miracles for them, if those miracles are obviously in the character's interest and will not damage the other players' enjoyment of the game. The kinds of miracles that their

Estate can perform automatically are listed above: these levels must be bought separately, although they do not need to be bought in order. This Gift is not recommended for ubiquitous Estates like Thought or Motion. For such Estates, the HG might reduce the cost slightly and make the Gift unreliable. See table below to calculate the cost for Constant Domain.

The base miracle level is, obviously, the level of miracle that the Power's Estate will perform on their behalf.

EXAMPLE

Bradley Portsmouth is the Power of Fear, a genial man well loved by all the mortals who know him. Loved, at least, until they think of resistance to his desires. Then a cold wash of panic and visceral terror sweeps over them and drains such resistance away. Because he is not strictly responsible for this effect, Lord Entropy has allowed Bradley to take advantage of these magics in the mortal Earth. Bradley has built a corporate empire in his Imperator's name. Although he has been unmolested so far, he knows well that he is under watch.

Elemental

2 points

Characters with this Gift of Domain are so close to their Estate that they may replace their body with a construct of their Domain — a Power of the sun might become fire or blinding light, and a Power of music might be invisible as a drifting tune upon the air. Depending on the construct assumed, the character may or may not be able to use any given Aspect-based miracle in this new form.

The cost accounting is identical to the second variation of Aspect-based shapeshifting (under "Mythological Beast" on p. 118).

She had been a fairy-tale dragon, until that moment, with feathers in a thousand colors and infinitely beautiful wings. But she was angry now, and her skin was beginning to glow a cherry red. Feathers were sloughing off her like the skin of a snake, and there was a twisting, rumbling motion inside her flesh.

"Do not you forget," she hissed, "that I am St. Helens, and my heart is the fires within the Earth."

Molten lava welled from her pores, and she was a beast of another nature entirely …
—from Undocumented History, *by Walden Fargo*

EXAMPLE

Adrien is the divine spirit of toys, and takes so much joy in it that it no longer remembers its human shape. It lives its life as teetering constructs of building blocks, self-motivating dolls and action figures, zooming toy cars (although Adrien prefers to avoid those tracks where it will get hit by some other plastic thingie and thrown into the air) and so forth.

It is an unlucky child indeed who receives Adrien for Christmas, because this Power will drain away that child's hopes and creative spirit to feed its Dark Imperator. (This is just another indication, perhaps, that the Dark and the Excrucians are not so far apart.)

Once the last tidbit of hope, innocence, and wonder has been drained away, Adrien will disappear through an open window to trek back through the lonely highways to Locus Ophel, the Glassbane Chancel.

Gating

Variable cost

Stiles. Stepladders. Thin spaces. Stephan's Gates. Hidden paths throughout the world lead into the Chancels or even out onto the branches of the World Ash. Wise Powers know many of these paths. But some Powers do not need these paths at all.

Gatemaker

Every mythic road, leading into a Chancel or another world, has a beginning — a point where it first takes on arcane properties. If a character with this Gift of Domain stands within thirty feet of such a road's beginning, they can make a "gate" leading directly to the other end. Anyone can step through this gate, from either side. The Power can make the gate as large as thirty feet on each side, and can dismiss the gate at will. Such gates last for at most a night and a day. Part of an Imperator's will is vested in their Chancel, and almost all of this mystic energy goes towards keeping the Chancel "hidden" and "safe".

Gatemaking is purchased as a Lesser Creation of Passageways, and costs 1 character point. See table below.

Wayfinder

Powers with the Wayfinder Gift can see hidden places — Chancels, secret roads, and other places that mundane navigation cannot access. They can sense such twisted space from several miles away. Standing next to one, they can see its internal contours. Wayfinders make excellent spies, as they can see the entire interior of a Chancel from its borders and the whole length of a secret road from its entrance. This sight, based on a miracle of divination, cannot identify Powers.

Wayfinding is a Lesser Divination of Hidden Places, and costs 1 character point. See table below.

Worldwalker

This Gift includes the Wayfinder Gift, which is the first point of its cost. Worldwalkers can step freely from the Earthly vicinity of a Chancel to any point inside, and back again. Since the major paths into most Chancels are well guarded and treacherous to the intruder, this Gift is very useful for those who wish to Nettle an enemy Noble or destroy a traitorous one. Trapping the Power inside a warded space can block this Gift, as can a Realm miracle that seals the entire Chancel against any entrance or exit. (This is a miracle

"You're crying," she said, as the last of the flesh drifted free of the child's bones. A wizened hand added a sprinkling of pepper to the water's boiling.

"She was my daughter," he said quietly.

"It's just as well," she said, and took a tear for the pot.
—from The Brewery Gate, *by Emily Chen*

Constant Domain

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
1-5 (Domain)	Automatic	Global	Full flexibility	No	
1-5 CPs	+1	+1	+1	+1	5-9 CPs

Gatemaker

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
4 (Domain)	Simple	Local	Limited	No	
4 CPs	–1	–1	–2	+1	1 CP

Wayfinder

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
2 (Domain)	Automatic	Local	One trick	No	
2 CPs	+1	–1	–3	+1	1 CP

Worldwalker

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
6 (Domain)	Simple	Self only	Limited	No	
6 CPs	–1	–3	–2	+1	1 CP

The Shape of a Spirit
In the Mythic World, Powers using the Elemental Gift wear a shape appropriate for the spirit of their Estate. Spirits appear in traditional and unusual forms. Many mountain spirits resemble classic gnomes, giants, and rock nymphs. Others are more eccentric: Mt. Everest rears over the Mythic World in the form of a mantis, its claws hooked into the sky. When the Power of Magnetism becomes a pure attractive force, he manifests in the Mythic World as anything from a scuttling metal crab to a sparkling nest of electric filaments.

Vyasa asks after the shape of a mountain spirit, the color of peace, and the motivations of love. The truth is simple: every spirit, like every Power, is unique.

of Major Preservation and lasts until countermanded.) It interacts with Spirit normally; accordingly, Powers do not have the magical strength required to seal a Realm against Infernos or Conflagrations except by the use of a Word of the Tower. See the table for costs.

This Gift is a Lesser Change of the Self — it is the Power's location that changes — and costs 2 character points.

EXAMPLE

Richard, in service to the angel Stephanotis, is best known among mortals and Powers by what he stands for: "opening new doors", as the slogan of his software company goes. He is the Power of Gates. Opening portals falls directly under his Estate, but Rick is young and only entitled to a Baron's pearls. Accordingly, his player has spent a few points on relevant Gifts, including Wayfinder and a slightly stronger version of Gatemaker (for an extra point) that gives him comprehensive use of this power. He cannot make gates between any two points as a lesser creation, but he can make a gate that passes through any obstruction that is not directly and intently maintained by the will of another Power.

Perfect Timing

2 or 5 points

Characters with this Gift of Spirit are rarely late for anything. They catch trains and cabs with at least several seconds to spare, even when proceeding at a stately walk. 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 Lesser Creation of Good Fortune, it ensures that the character does not miss any occasion or opportunity that they could feasibly catch. If purchased as a Major Creation of Time, it transcends causality — the character does not miss events, occasions, or opportunities unless it would create a literal paradox for them to make it on time.

With the first version of this Gift, if someone warns the character that a corrupt cult plans to sacrifice their beloved, they 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, they 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 is loosely attached to objective time. However, even with the second version of the Gift, if someone who knows that the hostage is dead tells the character of their plight, events are fixed — even perfect timing cannot save the day.

These two variants are purchased per the table above.

EXAMPLE

Jennah Hubrick works at a major Wall Street firm whose office's top floor opens into the Chancel of the Imperator Geburael. Like many of those exposed to Geburael's emanations, she has acquired an odd wealth-related knack — in her case, the perfect timing needed to master the stock market. The Power who claimed Jennah as an Anchor finds this trait exceedingly useful.

The Sovereign's Gift (Mastery)

3 points

Characters with this Gift of Domain can command the simpler motions of their Estate, regardless of their Domain level. A character with this Gift and a Domain over the moon could shift moonbeams around, or (slowly) change the moon's position in the sky. A similar PC with Domain over dirt and stone could shake the earth in a small area. These effects are normal miracles, costing 1 Domain miracle point each. This is a common Gift in most games. See table for costs.

This is a Lesser Change over the relevant Estate.

EXAMPLE

Desmond is the second Power to hold his Estate, and he has taught the Excrucians to fear a thing they once held in contempt. When they take on mortal bodies, now, they have learned, the bedrooms are unsafe. Damon is the Power of Blankets, and his miracles of Domain are all but ineffective — save for his Mastery of them, which turns his banal Estate into a ubiquitous source of strangling cords and suffocating gags. He is a driven man — if he can still be called a man at all — and there was a time when he slew a cradled child to bring down the police on a Excrucian Anchor and force his enemy's hand.

"I manage the cosmic cavalry," he said, with a very straight face.

"And what does this cosmic cavalry do?"

"I arrange for last-minute rescues."

"It must be very fulfilling work," I told him.

"Indeed," he agreed. "The best part is choosing who doesn't get rescued at all."
—from The Ends of the Earth, *by K.C. Danine*

Perfect Timing

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
4/7 (Domain)	Automatic	Local	Limited	Yes	
4/7 CPs	+1	−1	−2		2/5 CPs

The Sovereign's Gift (Mastery)

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
6 (Domain)	Normal	Global	Limited	Yes	
6 CPs	−2	+1	−2		3 CPs

Devoted Populace

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
7 (Domain)	Hard	Global	One trick	No	
7 CPs	−3	+1	−3	+1	3 CPs

Sample Gifts of Realm

Devoted Populace

3 points

Powers with this Gift of Realm are exceptionally well served by the people of their Chancel. Their subjects celebrate them as a revered monarch or a popular hero, whichever is appropriate. The people of that Chancel would willingly throw away their lives in that Power's service, and only the most extreme inducements would ever cause one of these people to betray them.

Without this Gift or the Handicap "Hated" (see Handicaps, p. 127, and "Hated", pp. 128-129), assume that the

"Why are we here, my lord?"

The waters of the pool cast a shimmering reflection onto the walls. One by one, divers jumped into its depths.

"Patience, Luc," was his reply.

In time, a middle-aged man climbed up onto the diving board. My master's eyes narrowed as he jumped, and he made a slight gesture with one hand.

The water cleared away beneath the jumper; he hit the bottom of the pool with a sickening thud. Then the waters washed back into place.

"I knew him, my lord," I said softly.

"That is why I required your presence," he replied.
—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

"They loved you tonight," she whispered softly. Sheets stirred as she pulled herself closer to him. "They screamed your name like a rock star's."

He sighed, slowly. "Dear, they would scream my name as joyfully if I announced that I would set their lands aflame ..."

—from The Ivory Clock, *by Emily Chen*

people and even the animals of the Chancel are reasonably loyal, but not to the point of self-sacrifice.

The love that the populace feels for a character with this Gift has two causes, two essential components. The balance between them varies among such Powers. The first cause is mundane: part of this love springs from the inner hearts of the Chancel's people. The second is an innate, mystical tie between the Power and their Chancel and everything in it, people included. Both of these can be corrupted in many ways. They may also be restored, with a hard miracle of Realm. This Gift is purchased as per the table below.

This Gift is a Major Creation of Love.

EXAMPLE

K'van is the Geneticist Lord, scientist plenipotentiary of the Martian court. A hardy sub-race of humans has been bred in that austere and nearly lifeless world. K'van's greatest hope is that he will discover a way to breed the divine spark into his people, that he will be able to create a whole race with powers like the Nobilis, to serve his Imperator in the Excrucian War. Many of the genes that allow the Martians to survive are recessive, and without K'van's magic, almost all Martian children would die within ten minutes of their birth. For this reason, he might be hated or loved: hated, because it was his power that enabled humans to come there at all, or loved as the only source of children. The deciding factor, for the Martians, is their immense pride in their "conquest" of that horribly unfriendly world.

Sample Gifts of Spirit

"The enemy has twice ten thousand genii of flame, and great black elephants that snort clouds of heated vapor, and over their hosts fly spindle-limbed demons wreathed in Hell's fires. You, on the other hand, have five shiftless deserters."

"And a camel."

"And a camel. How do you intend to fight them?"

"I thought I'd close my eyes and hope for the best."

—from Fire Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Luck

4 to 9 points

The character has characteristic good fortune. They need only spend a single Spirit miracle point 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 is not. 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 would otherwise not have. See table below.

This is purchased as a Major Creation of Good Fortune. The character can purchase penetration for this Gift to allow their good luck to occur within an Auctoritas.

EXAMPLE

Belle Carter has a rope with seven knots. When her fortunes turn sour, she cuts through one knot with a knife. For all its physical simplicity, the task is as draining as a marathon. The severing of the knot releases one small portion of her destiny into the world. This manifests as a favorable coincidence, often very unlikely and extremely beneficial — something that moves that destiny forward. She then ties the severed portion of the rope to the end, and has seven knots once again. Her Sister Caelestis, Ienari Namika-in, claims that in so doing, Belle Carter indefinitely postpones the fulfillment of her destiny. Belle counters, saliently, that running out of luck couldn't possibly do her destiny any good.

Luck

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
7 + (0-5)	Normal	Global	Limited	Yes	
7-12 CPs	–2	+1	–2		4-9 CPs

Unblemished Guise

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	TOTAL
4 + (1-5)	Simple	Local	One trick	No	
5-9 CPs	–1	–1	–3	+1	1-5 CPs

Unblemished Guise

1 to 5 points

Powers with this Gift of Spirit have reached a peace with their humanity. They remember their human life so strongly that their human Guise is (to a lesser or greater degree) impenetrable. Even a Power or an Excrucian-shard will think that they are human until they see the Power performing a miracle. This is purchased as (see above).

This is a Lesser Creation of Illusion, the Penetration factor determining whether the illusion can be seen when the Power with Unblemished Guise is within some other Power's Auctoritas. Legends tell of a Power who worked out a technique to change themselves to produce a deep Guise ... and never worked magics or miracles again.

EXAMPLE

Kuai (né Andrew Jackson Miller) is a great admirer of warrior-monks. Kuai has built an elaborate fantasy world inside his mind, in which he is the prophesied soldier of the final battle, the one who will stand (when all hope is gone) and fight for the survival of humanity in single combat against the highest of the Excrucian Lords. His Familia Caelestis has forgiven him this; such thoughts can only be expected from the Sovereign of Delusions. His fantasies have only surprised them once: when, using the ancient techniques of the warrior monks, he survived the death of his body by hiding in another. It was all the more a surprise because he was hidden from them there, invisible to the Sight, until he next called upon his miraculous abilities.

"Normal," the man whispered to me. His hot breath on my face hinted of corruption. "Let me tell you about a dream I've had. That," he said, and I felt the knife point twitch against my side. "That one day I'd be normal. Once I was, you know. I had a wife. I had two and a half kids. I had a car. Job. Things like that."

His weight on my chest was violent, a pressure that seemed to break my ribs at every moment. His eyes were icy. "But they took it all away. They said I was dangerous. Damn right. But it was my life. It's kind of a hobby now. Doing what they did."

I whispered softly, "You don't have to listen to them." He said, softly, "I'm doing this for love," and he reached forward to break my neck.

My hand clenched about a flower. It reeked of death. He spasmed backwards, his back arching further than they ever should go; his eyes twisted in their sockets. The scent of seared, cracking flesh was a bitter thing, because I do not like to kill.

—from the Memoirs of Alice Mendel, Lady of the Thunder

The Simple Rites

The *spiritus Dei* is something like a set of "cords" which bind a Noble to their specific powers. There are some magics, however, which only require the existence of this noble spirit. That is, any Noble can master them simply because they're a Noble, however distant from their Estate these magics may be.

"It's a very small magic."

"It destroyed my world."

"Well, okay, it's a medium-sized magic."

—from Doorknobs, *by Emily Chen*

The Servant's Rite

With this rite, a Noble creates an Anchor. There are two requirements. First, the Power must love or hate the Anchor, to bond their mortal self to their Anchor-to-be. Second, the

"Luc," she said, "order my staff killed and select a new one for me."

"Milady," I answered, "I'm on your staff."

"Luc, Luc," she said, "why is it always about you?"

—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Noble must voluntarily give their blood or tears to the future Anchor, who must swallow them. If the Noble hates his or her prospective Anchor, this rite is also called the Abhorrent Investment. For more details, see p. 107.

Excrucians have their own version of this rite. Apparently, they do not have to love or hate their Anchor. (Perhaps they simply hate everyone, although they claim differently.) Excrucian Anchors, even when "freed" by a Warding, are caught up in the Excrucian vision, in the beauty of their lords and in the image of riding free inside them as Creation crumbles into dust. It takes long counseling or dramatic miraculous action to return them to normal.

The Witch Hunt Rite

His hand passed over the body, and the world rippled: an image of Jacob's death formed, an image of knives and stealth and night. Al Mansur did not look, however, not even when his familiar prompted him.

"I cannot," al Mansur explained. "To see it is to make it real."

—from Looking Glass, *by Michael Kay*

Miracles leave traces, noticeable marks on the world, signs that the Power has been there. This trace can identify the Power that caused it, or at least their general nature. The Sight detects major magical effects in the very recent past as a Level 0 Aspect miracle. Detecting lesser magical effects, and being able to sense them for the duration of a scene, is a Level 5 Domain miracle of Major Divination. In both these cases, the Auctoritas of the Power who performed this effect will make detecting these traces harder, as if the Power themselves were still there.

The Witch Hunt Rite is a recent innovation — about four and a half centuries old. It allows a Power to subtract their own Spirit level from the miracle level and/or Penetration required to detect these traces. For instance, an Inferno can use this rite to detect lesser magical effects as a Level 0 Domain miracle, plus whatever Penetration is necessary. Naturally, the trace of power must still exist; see chart to determine how long the marks of miracles are detectable.

Much as humans use running water to interrupt their tracks, the Nobilis use flowers. By pushing their power "through" a living bloom that represents themselves, the miracle at hand, or the ultimate goal of that miracle, they obscure the marks of their own nature with the image of that bloom. This is a symmetric process: that image of the bloom stays with them for a while, tracing their movements … but it does not stay with them as long as the miracle traces themselves last. (Move one row up the duration chart.) Powers can use Tarot cards instead of flowers, and other, less common, forms of symbolism at the Hollyhock God's discretion.

Examples

- A Power with Aspect 4 uses a level 4 Aspect miracle, leaving no trace behind.
- If they spend an AMP for a level 5 Aspect miracle, the trace lasts 5 seconds.
- If they spend 2 AMPs for a level 6 Aspect miracle, the trace lasts 6 minutes.
- If they spend 4 AMPs for a level 8 Aspect miracle, the trace lasts 8 hours.
- If they spend 8 AMPs for a level 9 Aspect miracle with 3 penetration, the trace lasts 9 days.
- If a Power with Realm 3 spends 4 RMPs for a level 7 Realm miracle, the traces last 7 days.

Miracle Detection

TYPE OF MIRACLE	DURATION OF TRACE
Aspect	None
Realm or automatic Gift	Miracle level in seconds
Domain or simple Gift	Miracle level in minutes
	Miracle level in hours
	Miracle level in days
	Miracle level in weeks
	Miracle level in months

More powerful miracles leave stronger traces, giving Nobles more time to use the Witch Hunt Rite.

MIRACLE TYPE/COST	MOVE DOWN DURATION CHART
Normal/1 MP	Down one row
Hard/2 MPs	Down two rows
Deep/3-4 MPs	Down three rows
Word of Command/5-8 MPs	Down four rows

This table lists costs in MPs for effects other than miracles, and does not override the standard costs for deep miracles and words of command.

Some miscellaneous actions also leave traces, as per :

ACTION	DURATION OF TRACE
Nettle Rite	1 hour to 1 day
Rite of Holy Fire	1 hour to 1 day
Rite of the Fallen	1 day to 1 year
Ritual of Anguish	1 day to 1 century
Healing	1 minute per miracle point
Normal or fae magic	1 minute per MP
Rite of the Last Trump	1 minute per MP
Aspect miracles through an Anchor	1 minute per "extra" MP

- If a Power with Domain 3 spends 4 DMPs for a level 7 Domain miracle, the traces last 7 weeks.
- The Immortal Gift is a level 6 miracle that invokes automatically at need. When it does so, the trace lasts for 6 seconds.
- The Glorious Gift is a level 7 miracle that costs no miracle points. Its traces last for 7 minutes.
- The Sovereign's Gift is a level 6 miracle. It costs 1 MP to invoke, so its traces last for 6 hours.

The Redtooth Rite

"If you do not survive this encounter," Merenamun assured me, "I will make a point of eating your heart. In this manner, something of your courage will live on."

It is indicative of my state of mind that this actually made me feel better.

—from The Dog Princes, *by Janet Cable*

This rite is for mortals or Anchors, who cut or otherwise dig a dead Power's heart from their chest and consume it. In this manner, they attune themselves to the dead Power's Estate and capture the Power's Imperator-shard for themselves. For a short time afterwards, they have the power of a Sovereign without the enforced loyalties — but the Imperator can exert a strong influence over the shard's new owner, and in time will shackle almost anyone to its will. (In the worst case, the Imperator will eventually be able to pull the shard free, unless an Excrucian directly opposes them in this.) These new Nobles usually have some difficulty acquiring Aspect. Powers are forbidden to take another Power's Imperator-shard, but

they can rend the fallen Power's spirit using the same Rite, receiving a miracle point or two for their pains.

The Rite of the Last Trump

"The Domina cares for many things," Baalhermon rumbled. "This is her weakness. She cannot defend them all, not without spreading her forces thin." Reflections of the lightning flickered in his dead black eyes as he turned to look at me. "She is not a fool. She has made a choice. Something priceless to her heart sits undefended, that she may protect the rest. Go, Hugh. Find and name that thing for me."
—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

The *spiritus Dei* spreads itself through a Power like a map of the nervous system, or of acupuncture points, or of chakras. The curving lines running between key points travel not just through their physical body but through an entirely different dimension, to the nonphysical place where a Power connects to their Domain, Anchors, and Chancel. A Power can, at great cost and pain, reshape this map and move miracle points from one attribute to another. The time is negligible and Powers can combine this rite with other actions. For each extra miracle point of a given attribute that the Noble wishes to have, they must spend a number of other miracle points of any type according to the chart below:

SPIRIT LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS OF OTHER TYPES SPENT
0-1	4
2-3	3
4-5	2
6-7	1

The Rite of Passage

A Power looking through a broken crystal sees a faint glow in the direction of a road between worlds or a road into a Chancel. One can also perform this trick with a touch of brandy splashed into the eye, and even mortals can use that version, but it is not nearly as effective.

The Nettle Rite

The nightmare world had been waiting for seven years, hidden in a flake of paint high on the office wall. No one touched it. No one knew about it. Then Sophia fell against that flake one day, and the nightmare drew her in.
—from Azurifolia, *by Asper Smith*

The Nettle Rite is the most important of the Simple Rites. It does enormous damage to peaceful relationships among the Powers — and, quite possibly, has saved the world indirectly a dozen times over. It lets Powers take away some miraculous power from a Noble, Imperator, or Excrucian. In order to perform this rite, the Sovereign must form a metaphorical "channel" for the miraculous power to flow through. This is a spiritual and even somewhat abstract path, but grounded in mundane events. Specifically, Powers build this channel by taking something belonging to the target, something the target has invested energy and emotion into — that is, a Bond — and bringing it under the nettler's control. They damage it, defile it, claim it as their own, or turn it against the target. Think of it as "counting coup".

The actual Rite, following this act of control, is simple: a few spoken phrases and a sprinkling of crushed nettles onto the ground. The victim and the victim's Familia lose miracle points. The performer of the Rite gains some miracle points, some dynasty points, or even, in the most extreme cases, a permanent miracle point. It is possible to Nettle several people simultaneously if the Bond matters to a number of beings with miraculous powers.

Levels of Damage

A Nettle Rite can involve trivial, minor, normal, or devastating damage to the Bond.

- **Trivial Damage.** This includes getting the victim's friend into a fistfight, which they lose but are not seriously hurt from; generally humiliating the victim; or stealing and banging up the victim's car (if the victim cares about that car). Killing or destroying something is always trivial damage — murder is a very poor way to show control.
- **Minor Damage.** This includes getting the victim's friend sentenced to a 1-2 year prison term; utterly humiliating the victim; or abandoning the car in the worst part of town, with the keys in the ignition and all the doors unlocked. This disrupts the victim's life and makes them very unhappy, at least for the moment.
- **Normal Damage.** This includes destroying a naïve friend's innocence, as by convincing them to commit murder; giving a slow-healing victim severe burns; or infesting the car with psychic parasites. In general, desecrating the Bond qualifies as normal damage, as does a very thorough conquest such as claiming the victim's father as an Anchor. The nettler must spend a reasonable amount of time and the victim's life must become a darker thing.
- **Devastating Damage.** This utterly and dramatically ruins the Bond, with malicious glee, or turns it firmly against the Noble. Examples include subverting the car's spirit — everything has its price — and using it to drive the Noble into trouble; convincing the victim's mortal lover that the victim serves Hell; or using the Noble's reputation as a Casanova to help build a case against them in the Locust Court. If the effects will endure a significant length of time, the nettle rite succeeds.

"Most Nobilis of dubious provenance justify their work," said the Desecration's-Regal. "They explain elaborately how the world requires their Estate in order to function." His eyes shone feverishly. "If this is your expectation of me, you may abandon it. I indulge in no such pastime. Excuses are for the uncertain and for the weak. Serving defilement is its own justification."
—from the Thought-Record of Diamanta Olivier

Effects of the Nettle Rite

The bond between Familia members interacts with the Nettle Rite. In a sense, a Power already has a connection with every one of their Familia member's Bonds. This makes it difficult to definitively subvert or defile those Bonds. Treat normal or devastating damage against a Familia member's Bonds as minor damage for the purposes of these rules.

- A Nettle Rite involving trivial damage to a Bond costs the victim 1 miracle point.
- A Nettle Rite involving minor damage to a Bond costs the victim either the Bond Strength or the nettler's Spirit, whichever is smaller, in miracle points. (Spirit 0 nettlers inflict a 1 miracle point cost.)
- A Nettle Rite involving normal damage to a Bond costs the victim the Bond Strength in MPs. In addition, all their Familia members lose 1 miracle point.
- A Nettle Rite involving devastating damage to a Bond costs the victim the Bond Strength plus the attacker's Spirit in MPs. In addition, all their Familia members lose the nettler's Spirit in miracle points.

OPPOSITE:
Flower Rite
by Denise Garner



In all cases, the victims choose which attribute(s) they lose the miracle points from. The nettler gains the total MPs lost, to a maximum of their Spirit. The nettler's Familia gains the same number of dynasty points (see p. 144) — again limited by the nettler's Spirit — unless the victim and nettler share a Familia.

EXAMPLE

Arikel has a Bond with strength 4 to his success at protecting dreamers from corrupting or lethal nightmares. He seriously annoys the Power of Disease, who unleashes a "dream virus". The virus spreads, because people dream about their associates. If Arikel fails, despite his best efforts, to head off the disease, the Power of Disease can nettle him.

This is "normal" damage to the Bond. Arikel loses 4 miracle points. In addition, his Familia loses 1 MP each. The Power of Disease has Spirit 3, so she gains 3 miracle points. Her Familia gains 3 dynasty points.

Nettle Rites Against Non-Bonds

NPCs don't have the PCs' character sheets handy, or vice versa. Sometimes, an NPC or PC tries to nettle a character by subverting or defiling a suspected Bond when it's not one of that character's Bonds at all. The relevant PC's player, or the HG for an NPC, decides whether the victim actually cares about the item or person in question. If not, nothing happens. For example, nettling a Power by conquering their homeland won't work if they never really liked the place. Forcing them to sell their art collection won't have any effect if they just have it for show.

Sometimes the character *does* care about the suspected Bond, more than a little, even though it's not important enough to qualify as a Bond. Most characters care a great deal about their health, reputation, ability, friends, Anchors, Estate, Imperator, mortal family, and home, even when these things are not Bonds. A nettle rite against such things has some effect — treat them as Bonds of level 1, but reduce devastating damage to normal damage, normal damage to minor damage, minor damage to trivial damage, and trivial damage to the failure of the rite.

Excrucian Breakthroughs

The Excrucians or Excrucian-shards of any particular Breakthrough have 5–10 total points of Bond Strength invested in the Breakthrough's general purpose. Accordingly, when the purpose of their Breakthrough is defeated, they can be nettled for at least 5 miracle points. *Devastating* an Excrucian sometimes results in the nettler gaining a permanent miracle point.

The Rite of the Fallen

Sometimes, some must sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

I do not hold to this principle myself, you understand, but I find it a very useful philosophy in others.

—from Principles of the Dark, *by Merriweather James*

This rite ruins another Sovereign of one's own Familia. It has three forms. The Rite of the Blade cripples a Power's spirit (and their Spirit attribute) but transfers this energy to the Power's Aspect or Domain. The Rite of the Whip cripples a Power's access to miraculous energy. This is a harsh punishment used mostly on those traitors who can be redeemed. The Rite of the Fire rips a Power's Noble spirit away from their human soul — disempowering them and usually killing them or ruining their minds as well.

The mechanism is simple enough. Two of the other Powers in the Familia, and their Imperator, must agree that it is warranted. They bind the Power in question to the rack and gently pull their power away from them. It is not pleasant. The Rite of the Blade moves the character points invested in Spirit to other attributes. The Rite of the Whip lowers each attribute by one. The Rite of the Fire removes the character's Nobility, and usually removes the character entirely.

The Ritual of Anguish

The greatest victory known to the Dark is the subversion of an Imperator of the Light. We accomplish this but rarely — six times in all recorded history. There is no reliable technique to conquer an Imperator's mind. Yet we know this: to sway them, we must first make them see that destruction and salvation are two sides of the same coin. Not in nature, of course, but in human nature — that suicide and self-preservation arise from the same understanding of the world. If we make them see this, there is the hope of persuading them.

Naturally, this process does not work on the Dark's Ymerae, and only a fool would attempt it.

—from Principles of the Dark, *by Merriweather James*

This rite is traditionally performed by Excrucians and Excrucian-shards. Although a Noble could perform it, they have few opportunities to try. It is the most complicated of the Simple Rites, requiring a handful of days, blood of a virgin, a pentacle and candles, and many other occult trappings. It drains away the power of a dead Imperator and converts it to the negative energy of the Excrucians. It is included here since some Powers suggest that if the Nobilis were to come into possession of a dead Imperator's body, they could perform a variation on this Rite to become like unto Imperators themselves. All in the name of the Valde Bellum, of course.

The Rite of Rescue

An Imperator sometimes dies in such a way that their Powers remain alive and even retain their shard of its Noble spirit. This is exceedingly rare. When it transpires, however, one of a handful of Imperators designated as "rescuers" adopts these Nobles as their own. This rite requires only that each member of the rescuer's Familia give flowers, without coercion, to a consenting Power whose Imperator is dead. These flowers should be those found on those Powers' Designs. Then the Imperator opens its soul — and the Rite is complete.

If the HG thinks it is likely that more players will be added to the game at some later point, they should consider making the PCs' Imperator a designated "rescuer". This enables new PCs to fit easily into the Nobilis framework.

"I am free. I am a Power without an Imperator, a lord of this world without a lord over me. Why, then, should I take another liege? Why should I consent to a new Imperator claiming me?"

"The choice is not Jan ben Jan or freedom," I said. "The choice is Jan ben Jan or some other master. Do you really believe that the Imperators would permit a free Noble to live?"

—from the Thought-Record of Ibn a'Harid

The Rite of Holy Fire

In receiving the *spiritus Dei* into their soul, a Power rises forever above the mortal world. Like cardboard puppets on a paper stage, the Prosaic Earth and most of Mythic Reality operate on a level fundamentally shallower than the Power does — and just as one can step away from the stage to avoid the puppets' most fervent attacks, a Power can immunize themselves against purely mortal attack. The Rite of Holy Fire provides no protection against miraculous assault — even when the miracle is a mere Aspect 0 gunshot — and it is unreliable against the more powerful commoners. Still, its effects are comprehensive. Swords of mortal assassins splinter, unwilling to pierce a Noble's skin. The terrible fire of a nuclear explosion washes off of the Nobilis like anger off a rainbow. Bullets twist in their path to miss a Noble's back.

This rite requires regular renewal. The Power must raise the *spiritus Dei* within them from a smoldering flame to a raging beacon and let it suffuse their skin. The rite calls for a full night of ritual, with candles and chanting in the True Tongue. The stars must be clearly visible in the sky. The Power is vulnerable during the ritual, but what is a single night?

This rite draws on the Noble's will to survive and on the outrage against nature that mortal attacks against the Nobilis represent. Accordingly, it defends even a Candleflame against the most lethal attacks. The stronger a Noble's soul, the subtler the attacks this rite can deflect. Again, this rite does not protect against miracles of any kind. Stronger monsters,

"I cannot shoot you, Adrian."

"Ah," he said, and smiled. "So there is still love in your heart for me."

"No," Colleen answered, and shook her head. "It's just, the bullets don't work."

—from Doorknobs, *by Emily Chen*

Lethality of Rites

SPIRIT LEVEL	LETHALITY	TIME BETWEEN RITES
0	Almost unsurvivable: ground zero of a nuclear explosion, loss of hull integrity on an undersea dome	One week
1	Excessive force: tank shells, LAW rockets, massive explosions, collapsing mountainsides, other things requiring both luck and miracles to survive	Two weeks
2	Overwhelming force: automatic gunfire, clouds of poison gas, major fires, other things requiring miracles to survive	One month
3	Deadly force: guns, powers of non-miraculous nature spirits and monsters	Three months
4	Natural weapons: blades, claws, fangs, other unsophisticated weapons	Six months
5	Petty assault: unarmed attacks by humans and small animals, insect bites	One year
6	Verbal abuse: offensive language, insults, overt defiance	Five years
7	Social assault: starting nasty rumors, failing to show respect, omitting courtesies	Ten years

nature spirits, and other powerful commoners — those with just the tiniest touch of *spiritus Dei* — can affect the Powers regardless. Treat magic as the equivalent technology.

Consult the above chart to determine the rough lethality of the effects that a given level of Spirit protects against, as well as the length of time the rite lasts before it must be renewed.

Handicaps

Many Powers have intrinsic limitations that balance out their special abilities. For example, a Power might not be able to cross the lines of a pentagram, or enter a house uninvited, or use their powers unless they slept with a virgin the night before.

A Power's player chooses these Handicaps, and can in fact add new ones at any time. This adds to the flavor of the game, and to the game's interest.

The Chamomile Law:

"There is energy in adversity," *or:*
"When a Handicap makes life difficult for a Power, they gain miracle points."

The universe of Nobilis is made of balances between opposing forces. This is a necessary thing, because the division between positive and negative energies is a division between two equal frames of reference. Call them yin and yang, hot and cold, light and dark, Heaven and Hell: there is no strength not balanced somewhere by a weakness. Yet Powers, like Imperators, are universal. This, the Noble philosophers claim, is why there is strength in weakness, and weakness in strength: when a Power is stunted in one sense, they are growing in another. Perhaps they are incorrect. The HG is free to come up with their own reasoning for this effect, or to relegate it entirely to the status of an out-of-character convention.

Handicaps are divided into four sets: Limits, Restrictions, Virtues, and Affiliations. Limits remove some of the utility of the powers a character has paid points for. The HG should determine how much these Limits are worth (and can change their ratings in later sessions if circumstances warrant). Whenever the characters normally regenerate all their miracle points (e.g., at the beginning of a new story) they also receive extra miracle points for these Limits. The HG should usually let players know before the first session how much a given Limit is worth, so that the player can rationally evaluate whether it is worth the price. The player decides which attribute these miracle points go to.

Restrictions are miscellaneous and usually smaller limits, which only affect a Power's MPs when they become a serious problem for the character in play. At that point, the HG decides how many extra MPs the character should receive, based on how much of a handicap that Restriction is at that time. The player again determines where these MPs go. When a player desires extra MPs, they can request that the HG arrange things so that one of their Restrictions causes trouble for their Power.

Virtues are primal truths about the character's nature — aspects of their being that both limit and empower them. Characters receive MPs from a Virtue only when it becomes a very serious problem in play. In other words, because the Virtue has an intrinsic benefit, it rewards the character with MPs less often than an equivalent Restriction would.

A character's Affiliation represents their personal code of ethics and their outlook on the world — the causes they serve and fight for. Every character always has an Affiliation. Some rare characters have two.

Players can remove their character's Handicaps under two conditions. First, if the Handicap is a situation (the character is hunted by someone, or has been given a literal curse) then the situation does not automatically resolve itself when the Handicap is removed — it simply becomes a little more amenable to being resolved in the Power's favor. Secondly, players can only remove Handicaps at the start of a new story.

Limits that prevent the character from doing something that would be a "hard" or "deep" miracle for them anyway should provide 0 MPs, unless the HG has some specific reason for granting a benefit for the limit.

Limits

Dead (a limit of aspect)

Gives 3 points

A PC with this Limit of Aspect is dead or otherwise bodiless, and can only act through their Anchors. They can create new Anchors using an established Anchor's blood or tears. If they lose all of their Anchors, however, they simply fade away. Unless the PC has Spirit 5, they must pay additional miracle points for each Aspect miracle, as per p. 86.

EXAMPLE

Thalestris died during Troy's war with Jehannum in the Spirit World. Caught outside normal reality and normal time,

Crimes Against the Soul

As a general rule, PCs should not use the Rite of the Fallen on another PC without the relevant player's permission. In a game where the character's abilities are a vital part of the players' enjoyment, players need not give that permission. In some games, however, the proper conclusion to a PC's story — punishment or atonement for some great crime — matters more than their Spirit, attributes, or life.

In most cases, player characters won't use this Rite directly. Instead, by exposing the monstrous deeds of a rival NPC, they can maneuver that character's Familia into performing the Rite upon them.

Other Simple Rites

As the years go by, the Nobilis discover new simple rites — new expressions of their dual nature. Powers have created well over a hundred simple rites, though few Nobilis know more than a dozen. Some rites have been lost. Some are private, secrets of the Familia that created them. Many are not worth the effort to distribute to every Power on Earth. A few the Imperators actually forbid.

The ten rites in this chapter are more commonly known. In particular, Imperators make certain that their Powers learn the Servant's Rite, the Witch Hunt Rite, the Rite of the Last Trump, the Rite of Passage, the Nettle Rite, and the Rite of Holy Fire early on.

A potentially unlimited number of simple rites exist. The abilities of the Nobilis are practically limited but theoretically unbounded.

Flowers are vital. They sing with the energies of Creation. Each cries to reality, "I am thus! I am this! I am what I am!" The cherry blossom shouts, Spiritual Beauty. *The trumpet-flower bugles,* Fame. *They stun me. I never saw this in them … I was so blind.*

But now I am dead.
Now I can see.

They come and lay them on my grave. The song of each flower seeps down, like roots, and digs into my soul. Each flower my beloved husband sets upon my grave steals a little bit more of my self. Each bloom my daughter leaves behind tears me apart a little further at the seams. Soon I will be gone. There will be no soul left within my embalmed flesh. Just the songs of rotted flowers.

—from 36, by Rannen Yedidyah

"I hadn't known," the man said, softly. A torch in his hand cast a flickering light. A woman lay on the bed. Twenty-four hours ago, the gods had made a promise: that no matter what was done, she would live and heal.

"War is war," she replied. "I knew what I was facing. Did you imagine, my love, I would come out unharmed?"

"I love your eyes," he said.

"Alas, my love, the ravens got them. They were torn from my head while I lay blindly staring."

"I love your left arm," he said.

"Alas, my love, for the funereal fires. Some collector of parts thought it couldn't be saved."

"I love your heart," he cried.

"Alas, my love, for a Power's blade pierced it. And for all they've recovered, that part can't be saved."

She lived.

—from War Stories, *by Luc Ginneis*

"Ironic, isn't it," the commander said. "That one so great and powerful would be so helpless without her little toys."

The tent flap lifted; a soldier stepped inside. "Sir?" he asked, urgently.

"Not now," the commander said, absently, rubbing one of the stolen gems between thumb and forefinger. His enemy stood across the tent, hands bound above her head, blood trickling down her face from a cut in the forehead. She looked somehow amused.

"Sir?" the soldier repeated.

A flash of annoyance crossed the commander's face, He turned like an avalanche towards the soldier and snapped, "What is it?"

"A man approaches," the soldier replied. "He has gems in his fists that spit forth fire and serpents..."

The commander spun to look at his prisoner.

She shrugged, eloquently. "I don't always carry the real ones," she admitted.

—from Earth Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

few of the souls of Troy's dead moved on to their next life. Of the thousands of lost souls, only Thalestris escaped. The Imperator who took Troy claimed her, kindled her soul into a semblance of life by an infusion of *spiritus Dei*, establishing her as its Power of the Hearth. Not enough remained of her body to resurrect. Instead, her Imperator helped her claim her first several Anchors and gave her their bodies to use.

Disabled (a limit of aspect)

Gives 1 to 2 points

The character with this Limit of Aspect is disabled in some way. They could be blind or lame, one-handed or psychotic: in short, they suffer from a major physical or mental disadvantage that limits their Aspect-based abilities. Players can be creative about what this disability is. A noticeable limitation like anosmia might be worth a point, and a major disability like blindness, cerebral palsy, or amnesia could be worth two. Acrophobia, alcoholism, and such illnesses are best purchased as Restrictions, since when the character is on the ground, sober, or otherwise away from the situation's influence, they are capable of any kind of Aspect miracle.

Examples

Alekti and her two twin sisters were born of some dark Power's womb with but a single eye between them. Abandoned on the hills, they survived by feeding first on insects and rodents, then sheep and goats, and finally on human flesh. One day, Alekti scented the richest smell of all ... the aroma of the Old Lord of Days, wounded near to death by the spread of Christian timekeeping. She tracked him down, abandoning her sisters and absconding with their eye, and feasted on his essence that she might wrench control of his Domain away. The Imperator's whim was with her; she became the Lady of Days, and whispered to the witches of Greece that the old calendar must be remembered .... Alekti's disability is not merely that she is one-eyed: it is that her eye is a crystal sphere, and that she must hold or at least touch it to see through it at all.

Absalom is the Power of the Sky, father of all the things which take the high roads through the air, including arrows, birds, and (most relevantly) the lie. When the sky is clear, his hunting is good and he brings much of value home with him; when the sky is dark and overcast, he steals from the trophies of others and claims them as his own. His ways caught up with him at last; the spirits of the hunters he had stolen from gathered together to prevent him from ever telling another lie ... by cutting out his tongue. Incorrigible, he now tells a thousand fictions with the written word and the language of gestures. There are rumors that Lord Entropy was behind his comeuppance, though it would be rare (not impossible, only rare) for that Lord to forgo a trial.

Focus (a general limit)

1 point per 3 points invested

This is a very common limit; some of a Power's natural abilities — such as attribute levels, miracle points, or Gifts, bought normally with points — are invested in a magic item. If the Focus leaves its owner's hands, whoever takes it inherits both the abilities bought through it and the MPs that come from this Limit. Correspondingly, if the Power does not have their item, they cannot use these abilities. The advantage to a Power (and the reason why some Powers and Imperators create limiting Foci deliberately) is that as long as they possess the item, they are actually more powerful. The extra MPs given by the item account for this effect. Think of Foci as the magical equivalent of tools. A Power or an Imperator makes a Focus for the same reason a company invests resources in an office building and computer system.

Characters cannot buy specific attribute levels through a Focus. That is, they may buy "2 levels of Aspect" through a Focus, but not "levels 2 and 4". Whenever the PC does not have the focus, they lose as many levels as they have purchased through the Focus. Similarly, if someone else has the Focus, they will gain that many levels, to a maximum of the number of levels the Focus's owner has when using the Focus.

For example, Heather has Level 3 Aspect, 2 levels of which depend on a Focus. Aaron has Level 2 Aspect, and is given Heather's Focus. Aaron now has, effectively, Level 3 Aspect; he cannot gain a higher level of Aspect through a Focus than the Focus' owner. Jeremiah is a mortal with Level 0 Aspect. Aaron gives him Heather's Focus. Aaron returns to Level 2 Aspect while Jeremiah gains 2 levels of Aspect from the Focus, so he is also at Level 2 Aspect.

The Focus has its own supply of MPs, exactly as many as the Limit is worth. This is also the number of MPs the PC gains each game from having a Focus — a Focus is considered to have its own supply. Whoever has the item can choose to use the MPs in the item before expending their own reserves.

Foci know their true owners, and are never permanently lost. (If their true owner dies, they normally stop functioning within a week.) They are often, however, temporarily taken away or mislaid. It is a Limit, after all.

Example

Anise is of the Order of St. Gilderoy, a heretical splinter sect off of the Catholic Church, reverencing a man history calls a thief. It allies itself firmly with the Light and the cult of human survival. Anise was "recruiting" vulnerable youth at a science fiction convention when the hotel and its inhabitants were caught in the tumult of a Chancel's forming. As the flares of godlight washed through the air, the goddess Elishah exalted him to Nobility. He is and was a very narrow-minded, intent man, and he interpreted Elishah's gift to him through the mechanisms he knew. In the wild moments of Commencement, when the fiery power of Magnetism struck him like a bladed surf, he called upon the Name and drew his peace-bonded sword. Elishah was kind. Her gifts might have broken his mind if they did not fit in the occult framework he knew. His essence and hers were burned into the blade.

Hated (a limit of realm)

Gives 1 point per Realm level

Powers with this Limit of Realm are not well loved by their subjects. In fact, seeds of sedition and perfidy are sown

Limits and Restrictions

In some cases, a player may find it difficult to decide whether a given Handicap is a Limit or a Restriction. Some of the examples below stand on the borderline between the two Handicap types, and so will many player-created Handicaps. In questionable cases, players should take a Limit when their character controls how much the Handicap disables them. A Limit, with its fixed miracle point award, does not penalize a blind character for using a guide dog. Nor does it reward them for wandering into the Land of Silence, where sound does not travel. Players should take a Restriction when the HG and plot have the most influence over when and whether the Handicap poses a problem. A character who cannot enter a house without an invitation has no control over when they might need *to enter a house uninvited.*

HGs should feel free to treat Limits as Restrictions in those rare situations where the PC simply could not have prevented the problem that faces them. A character Hated by their Chancel's residents (see below) can take precautions against uprising and disobedience — but if the plot forces them into a secret ballot popularity contest, they must scramble to deal with something they could not have prepared for. The HG can appropriately award one or two extra MPs.

Vyasa asks whether Brahmasuras the Harvester, Gitali the Blind, or Saurabh the Unlucky is truly blessed. Brahmasuras has no Handicaps at all. Gitali has a Limit, and knows how to minimize its impact on her life. Saurabh has a Restriction, which subjects him to great and unavoidable risks. Knowing how to survive these risks, and reap great mp benefits thereby, he is the most fortunate of all.

throughout their Chancel. Armed rebellion is unlikely, particularly if there are other PCs who have not chosen this disadvantage, but a vicious mind can conceive many subtler means by which to destroy even a Sovereign. The higher the character's Realm level, the more widespread this disloyalty, and the better hidden its major proponents — Tempests with this Limit are hated by nearly every living thing inside their Chancel, although it is rare that someone will dare to act against such a living god.

"Your face," I whispered in distress. "Cover it."

"Luc?"

"It is not safe, my lord, to be seen here ..."

—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

EXAMPLE

Songmaker is the dark spirit of the Brooding Mountain of Lockerby — well, it's more of a hill, but that's beside the point. She has ground her tiny Chancel under her heel until all overt resistance is gone: she has created spies and soldiers from the earth itself.

Worse yet, her Imperator doesn't seem to care. She has vast power in the realm, perhaps even the strength of a Tempest, but she has the Limit "Hated" as well.

Light Touch (a limit of spirit)

Gives 1 point per Spirit level

A Power with this Limit cannot directly control their Anchors, and cannot use any miracles through an Anchor (save ghost miracles) without the Anchor's consent. The goodwill of the Power's Anchors becomes much more important, changing the balance of power between them. An uncooperative Anchor can prove extremely frustrating.

"You have no power over me," Susannah declared. "I understand the purpose of the company, now. It is a trap crafted by Hell, whose purpose is to nibble away at our moral judgment, piece by piece. Accepting the company's will is a sin; rejecting it brings pain and opprobrium. No more! I reject this trap. I refuse the company's demands. Let the consequences come."

Dr. Weatherby hesitated a moment, then sat down. "You mistake us," he said, shaking his head. "This place belongs not to Hell but to Heaven. We do not encourage vice here; we do not push our workers to choose material gain over virtue. We simply force them to choose one or the other." He sighed. "Your choice is made; I sense its solidity in your soul. Congratulations on taking the right path."

Susannah peered at him. "If you serve Heaven, and I have chosen virtue, why does this not please you?"

"The point of life is not to choose virtue," he said, "but rather to choose. *You have chosen, and shall not recant. In effect, your free will is gone, the purpose of your life achieved, the meaning of your life complete. You are dead to me. I shall miss you. You were beautiful."*

—from Weatherby & Graham, *by G.S. Denmark*

EXAMPLE

St. Angela of the Flail appears to her Anchors as an apparition within their minds — a ghostly figure who can advise but cannot directly influence their will. Some believe she does not control them directly because of a Wild-inspired love for freedom; others think that she cannot control them at all.

Manifestation (a limit of domain)

Gives 1 to 2 points

Characters with this Limit of Domain possess a vulnerability to things conceptually opposed to their Estate. For example, if the Dominus of Illusions had this Limit, then anyone who did not believe in him would be immune to his abilities. If the Domina of Fire had this Limit, water- or suffocation-based attacks would be more dangerous to her.

EXAMPLE

Trystan Porphyrogenitus, Power of Poseurs, drew on the essence of his Estate to sustain him when his body would otherwise have died. The wounds have long since healed, but their effects linger. In the presence of true artists, heroes, and idealists, Trystan withers, his powers cannot touch them.

Small Estate (a limit of domain)

Gives 1 point per Domain level

Characters with this Limit of Domain have a very strictly defined Estate, or a strictly defined power over it, so that they can affect only the things most tightly tied to it by concept. This is an appropriate option for a Power of the Dead who cannot kill, for a Power of Clocks who cannot affect the flow of subjective time, for a Power of Memory who cannot affect electronic storage, and so forth.

EXAMPLES

In his later years, **Isaac Newton** deduced enough about the true structure of the universe to approach the Imperator of Motion and offer his services. His mortal body died, not long after. A new one was quickly prepared for him in that Imperator's Chancel, its birth accelerated and its soul stripped away so that Newton could take its place. He brings his own powerful scientific understanding of the laws of motion to his role as a Noble but lacks control over the things associated with motion. While he can make a corpse dance, he cannot make it live; while he can open a flower at night, he cannot make it breathe. Accordingly, he has taken the Limit "Small Domain".

Delilah is the Power currently responsible for cars — not jeeps, not tanks, not trucks, but the still-important mass of automobiles that clog the roads of America and zip along the European autobahn. She is a full Regal, who exhales so much "car-ness'" in every breath that — well, for example, she starred in a series of children's movies, and the viewers never realized she was a normal human woman instead of a cute little car. Nor did the director, that's Hollywood for you.

Uninspiring (a limit of spirit)

Gives 1 point for Spirit over 2

With this Limit of Spirit, characters who would normally be inspirational and impressive are not. Their soul and selfhood may contain volcanic power, but none of it shows. Mortals question their decisions; their gaze holds no fire.

EXAMPLES

Dimitri is a very rare thing indeed: a Power who has acted, who was able to act, against his Imperator. When the Excrucians corrupted that Imperator, the Serpent Nahash, Dimitri led the army of another Familia Caelestis into the heart of Nahash's Chancel and, in the battle that followed, staved off the efforts of his own Familia long enough for Nahash to be destroyed. His reward? Adoption by the Imperator he had approached as replacement for a Power fallen in battle. He is strong in his will, and tough — but the stench of treachery still hangs about him, and makes others doubt his every word.

Zerubbabel (Ruby to her friends) is the Power of Uncertainty. Confusion and Doubt radiate from the soul-shard inside her, even while it enhances her fundamental selfhood.

She can make decisions rapidly, and there is a power in her eyes, but at the same time she can never be totally confident of any decision. She is easy to sway, easy to intimidate, easy to blackmail; she is incapable by her very nature of standing by her principles. How could she inspire others?

"Can you handle a calculator?"

He puffed himself up. "I," he said, "am the god of all computers, of whatever brand, of whatever kind ..."

"Is that a yes?"

He let out his breath. "No."

—from Little Gods, *by Jackie Robinson*

"Charge," he cried, and spurred his horse forward. Golden armor gleamed reflections of the sunset sky. His sword, raised high, had a razor edge. He was the greatest warrior of his day. He knew this. At any moment, he thought, the army behind him would scream and boil down into the valley after him. His horse took a few more steps.

There was a great silence in the air, and those clickety steps stopped. He realized, with a sick, sinking feeling, that no one was following him. He stood alone, and there was nothing to confuse the archers' aim.

He carefully dismounted, in the silence. He pointed his horse back to where his army waited, and gave it a shove to get it going again. He turned to the enemy, and pulled off his helm.

It was still light enough to see him from the valley below. He raised his middle finger in the universal gesture of contempt. He closed his eyes before the first arrow hit.

—from That Dreadful Day, *by Jackie Robinson*

"Perception is not a passive process. It is part of the work that creates reality. I will demonstrate. In my hand, I hold an apple. At least, with the lights turned on, it is an apple. Now, if you will turn off the lights and tell me what I hold in my hand?"

"... four-armed Shiva the Destroyer dances in a wheel of fire. He stands upon the corpses of his enemies. Never-created, never-dying, ignorance-crushing, life-giving, death-giving, thousand-faced, thousand-named, the wearer of serpents and the tiger's skin ..."

"Turn the light on."

"An apple."

"We prefer to leave the lights on at this Centre."

—from Ringing, *by K.C. Danine*

Unseen (a limit of realm)

Gives 2 points

A PC with this Limit of Realm maintains their anonymity at all times. They skulk in the shadows and cover their faces when they must go out in the light. They are always "someone you'd best not know" or "a friend" even when using their true identity would be advantageous. Only their Imperator and Familia Caelestis are permitted to know their provenance and nature. Even then, an Unseen Power is most comfortable when their face and mortal name are unknown. It is difficult for such an Unseen Power to govern a Chancel.

If the PC is forced to reveal their identity during the course of a story to anyone outside their Familia, they lose a miracle point; if they choose to reveal their identity, they lose three points. They only suffer this loss once per story.

EXAMPLE

Shahanshah Esma'il sold his name and identity to a wandering magician in exchange for power. The magician used Esma'il's life to conquer Iran and kill many of the Sunnis he loathed. Esma'il, following the magician's advice, traveled to a village near the city Shiraz mere hours before its enChancelling; he became Noble. Although he can use the name Esma'il and the title Shahanshah, the Power finds both uncomfortable, even spiritually draining. He avoids the spotlight, working anonymously or through intermediaries, so that he needs no identity of his own.

Restrictions

I am forbidden to love.

Others of my kind ignore this restriction, cloaking their feelings in secrecy and silence. I do not have that option. I am a creature of law. I do not bend. I do not seek to subvert the rules that govern my people, for the Lord who sets this law reigns by the order of the warleaders of Creation. So I do not let myself feel the love I once felt for Cynthia. I do not let myself visit her. One of my servants picks up her letters to me, and puts them in the fire. I give my heart to no one.

Sometimes, I let myself look at a picture of the two of us together. That is not against the law. Not if I only look to say, "How much I have changed."

—from the Thought Record of Rocio DeMitri

Remember that Restriction miracle points are paid to the Power when the restriction comes up, and not at the beginning of a story.

Blatant

The character cannot use inobvious miracles. They can only use mundane actions and miracles with an obviously supernatural nature. This Restriction is worth an MP whenever it substantially handicaps the character, and 2 MPs if it gets the Power dragged before the Locust Court.

Cannot Cross Running Water

The character receives an MP when their inability to cross running water costs them precious time. If the time is not precious, they receive nothing; if the time they lose is crucial, they gain 2 or more MPs.

Cannot Enter a Home Uninvited

The character receives an MP when they must enter a house and have no reasonable expectation of gaining an invitation. (They receive only 1 MP because Powers have many ways to get around this Restriction.)

Cannot Kill

This Restriction gives the character an MP when it becomes a serious problem during play.

Cannot Use Modern Technology

This Restriction gives the character an MP whenever it becomes important — fairly often, in most games.

EXAMPLE

Kuai, Sovereign of Delusions, exerts a peculiar baleful effect on technological devices. Within his Auctoritas the scientific method unravels, and in turn all the mechanical benefits it brings; cars fail to start, guns do not fire, and clocks brake fiercely to a halt.

Ceremonial

A character with this Restriction must participate in a certain capacity in certain ceremonies, if at all physically possible. For example, a Power might need to shed blood over their Chancel's fields every year at the Spring Equinox; resistance wracks them with agony, and failure to do so blights the Chancel for a year. This Restriction gives 1 MP whenever taking time off for a ritual interferes with the Power's activities, and 1 MP whenever the Power's role in the ceremonies is particularly painful or troublesome.

Cigarette Bond

The character is formally bound to befriend anyone with whom they share a smoke, and cannot resist an offer of a cigarette. This gives 1 MP when it binds the character to a nice Power, 2 MPs when it binds them to an enemy Power, and 3 MPs when it binds them to an Excrucian.

Compromised

Someone has specific information they could use to blackmail the Power. The player cannot take this Restriction if some NPC already, to their knowledge, has the relevant information. This Restriction gives 1-3 MPs when the character is blackmailed into doing something, depending on the outrageousness of the request.

Doomed

Some horrible fate awaits the character, and their odds of averting it are small. For example, the character could be under the effects of some terribly slow Excrucian poison, or hunted by Lord Entropy for high treason. The character receives 3 MPs when their doom comes nigh; this gives them a last-ditch opportunity to avert their fate.

Double

Commencement, or something after Commencement, divided the Power into two individuals. They share an Estate and early memories, but need not share character sheets or personalities. The second individual is an NPC, and often flawed in some way — insane, deformed, or hostile to Creation. Even the sanest, calmest, kindest doubles suffer an irrational instinctive dislike of their opposite number. The two are often on the same side, but never allies.

Hated by Animals

This Restriction gives an MP when animals that hate the Power become a significant threat.

Health-Linked

The PC suffers injury when something bad happens to something or someone else — depending on the Power, their brother, regalia, throne or worst enemy, the bone mask holding their soul, or America. The PC gains an MP every

OPPOSITE:
The Power of Fire meets with an Anchor
by Rik Martin



time they must go out of their way to protect the linked object, and 2 MPs every time they suffer significant damage through the link without an opportunity to defend themselves.

Honest
The character does not lie, and receives a MP when a lie would be very useful.

Repulsed by the Creator's Name
This Restriction gives an MP when it interferes with the Power's goals.

Respectful
A certain type of Noble or commoner commands the character's respect, and this restricts the character's behavior towards them. For example, a Power might be unable to lie to the brave, to kill the helpless, or to harm those who serve the Power's Estate. This Restriction gives an MP every time it significantly complicates the Power's life.

Revelatory Trait
Something about the Power reveals their presence or inhuman nature. This gives an MP when this becomes a problem. For example, if the Power feeds on human blood rather than normal food, it won't substantially impair them in life, but it might give their inhuman nature away. Similarly, if the Power has no reflection, it could start a panic among mortals or reveal the Power's presence to another Noble.

Personal Imperator Property
The character suffers from the effects of a negative Imperator property (see pp. 144-152), even though their Familia Caelestis does not. This is worth a variable number of miracle points, depending on the property. Some personal Imperator properties qualify instead as Limits.

Subtle
The character cannot use obvious miracles. If the Hollyhock God thinks a miracle is blatant enough to induce *dementia animus* in a human viewer, the Power simply cannot use it, even if no such viewer is present. This attribute gives 2 MPs every time the Power enters an epic confrontation where blatant miracles would significantly increase their efficiency.

Summonable
The character can be summoned with appropriate magic, will they or nill they. This Restriction is worth 1 MP when it comes up during play. If the character cannot cross an unbroken pentagram, so that someone can summon and hold them, it is worth 2 MPs.

EXAMPLE

Catherine the Linguist is the tutelary spirit of those who seek to master arcane and forgotten languages. Her affairs are often interrupted, even in this day and age, by sorcerers seeking shortcuts to arcane achievement. She is Summonable.

Visible
The characters' actions mark them. Their lies stain their tongue with silver, or cause their nose to grow. When they steal, their fingers grow longer, thinner, nimbler, and acquire an inky, green, or golden tarnish. Acts of great honor give the character a mailed appearance, like a knight; acts of great generosity make them shimmer with glory. Effects this blatant do not appear with every virtuous or vile act. However, the more excessive the action, the greater the chance it will have an effect. These effects last until the end of the story. The higher a character's Spirit, the more obvious the effects of this Restriction are. Each time the HG inflicts a "mark" on the character, the character receives an MP.

Virtues

Many characters in the Noble world are honorable. If their honor straightjackets them, it might qualify as a Restriction, "honorable to a fault". Still, one can trick such characters into breaking their word. Some Imperial and Excrucian techniques might force them to do so. A skilled interrogator with higher Aspect than their own might eventually break them. In a tangle of obligations, where one oath or another must give way, the character may choose the less pressing but more personally satisfying oath to keep.

The Nobilis are, however, creatures of extremes. There are those whose honor surpasses all these things. A Noble with the Virtue of Honor cannot break, though submitted to the question by the greatest fiends of Hell. Trickery cannot cause them to commit more than the mildest sins against their honor — the law of their being is bound to the spoken oath. Their honor is absolute, deathless, surpassing the boundaries of the flesh that holds it. Their honor is not a condition of their psyche, but rather an elemental force that pervades their being.

A character can take any vice or merit, including honesty, faith, chastity, lust, courage, cowardice, thrift, and miserliness as a Virtue. This elevates this trait from a psychological quality of their human mind to an essence that pervades their *spiritus Dei* and exists absolutely within their souls.

Virtues have four benefits. First, nothing can force the character to do something against the basic tenets of their Virtue. Similarly, nothing can trick them into doing so. Note that this only protects the Power against doing things incompatible with their Virtue — it does not give them the active ability to pursue their Virtue. Thus, no one can trick a character with the Virtue "Greed" into giving away their fortune, but someone can prevent them from stealing the Queen of England's crown. Second, the character has an uncanny sense for the "virtuous" alternative in any given situation. The character is supernaturally adept at spotting opportunities to steal that crown. Third, a character can make their Virtue obvious to all onlookers for a scene by spending a Spirit miracle point. Finally, when the Virtue gets the character into horrible trouble, they receive a miracle point. (It takes more trouble to get an MP from a Virtue than from a Restriction, as a Virtue has three other benefits.) In return for these benefits, the character must always act in accord with their Virtue. It need not be the most important factor in their roleplay, but it should always be a factor.

Not every Nobilis character has a Virtue. Almost none have two or more. Some Virtues include:

McDermott's paper, "A Call to Arms," was a thing of beauty. Never have I seen the arguments for futility so cunningly advanced; never have I seen the cause of suicide so persuasively argued. It took me a day and a night to read through it, a day of shining light into its every crack, searching for a flaw. I found none. There was no fault in it, nothing I could point to to undermine him in his follower's eyes. His figures were accurate. His experimental methodology was sound. His facts did not lie.

I could not believe that a man like McDermott could write such a work and include no lies at all. Truth appalled him. Honesty made him itch. I spent another day, and a third, before I found his maker's mark.

The bastard had dedicated it to me. "To a true friend," he'd written.

What other lie did it need?

—from Wrestling with an Angel, *by Melanie Tumbarius*

EXAMPLE

Henry Post, the Power of Disfigurement, refuses to maim himself as his predecessors in office did. His natural human vanity inflated with his ascension to the Nobilis; it now defines him. No Excrucian deception can force him to present himself at less than his best. No pressure, from blackmail to torture to legitimate despair, can induce him to speak of himself in deprecating terms. Someone could dump oil in his hair, but no one could make him leave it there. He is not vain but rather Vain, a Virtue that exceeds all circumstance.

Artisan

The character turns out nothing less than perfect work in a particular craft. Nothing can force them to put their crafter's mark on something incomplete, cursed, poisoned, flawed, or otherwise unsatisfactory. They do not gain extra skill with the craft, but have an uncanny sense for when something is "not done" to their standard. They probably make their Virtue obvious, with positive effects on their reputation.

Cruel

The character is cold and cruel. Nothing can force them to perform kind, unselfish acts. They have an instinct for the nastiest thing they can do in any given situation.

Deceitful

No force can compel the Power to honesty. No miracle or magic can wring the truth from their words.

Reckless

The PC is archetypically headstrong. If an opportunity exists for them to rush into a situation they seek involvement with, nothing can hold them back. The PC can spot the smallest such opportunities. If no real opportunity exists, recklessness does not give the character an ability to create one.

Spiritual

The character holds deeply to the tenets of a given faith, and will not waver from them under any provocation or trickery. For example, a spiritual Power dedicated to a vegetarian doctrine will not eat meat even when it is disguised.

Affiliation

"Who is it that you serve?"

"I am a scholar, m'lady. I serve the principle that every question should have an answer."

"But many questions do not; and many more should not."

"Granted," he agreed. "But is this not the essence of loyalty, to serve even when one's lord is wrong?"

—from Tumbledrum, *by Keiko Takemori*

Sovereigns serve in the Valde Bellum: this much is not under dispute. Yet the alliance of Imperators disguises the fundamental reality that the five major forces (Heaven, Hell, Light, Dark and the Wild) and the numerous solitary gods and serpents do not have the same ultimate goals. Their methodologies and the sacrifices they are willing to make to win the war vary. The Light, for example, would count it a victory if they saved humanity and all other life died. Hell would count it a task well done if they blocked the Excrucian advance with a wall of tormented and undying souls.

Free will, it is said, is a gift of the Creator. It does not mean freedom of action, or freedom of loyalties. These things fade when a human is enNobled. It means that all beings can choose their essential allegiance: everyone can choose the code by which they try to live their lives. A man who believes in freedom can be enslaved; a woman who loathes hate may be pushed to hatred. Powers may be forced by the exigencies of war to betray everything they stand for … but they may choose Hell or Heaven, Light or Dark, to hold to in their thoughts. This is the deepest freedom there is. They choose in whose name they are going to fight.

Most Powers choose the code of their Imperator, or one of the five major codes described below. Powers have a shard of their Imperator's soul within them; this contributes to their choice. It accounts for the Powers who choose to emulate their Imperator, and those who express a part of the Ymera's nature that the Imperator him or herself suppresses. Those whose human half chooses for them, who choose one of the five codes below, usually do so because these codes are essential to the fabric of the human existence. Light and Dark and perhaps even the Wild are deeply tied to humanity, and the voices of Heaven and Hell ring throughout all existence.

Some say that Affiliation is not a matter of free choice at all. They claim that Imperators allow their Powers "choice" in order to see places in their secret hearts, aspects of their own shard-selves, that they otherwise would never know. It is up to the Hollyhock God whether this is so.

The "Affiliation" of a Power, then, is this choice: a set of fundamental morals, decisions on how one should fight the Excrucians, on what costs are unacceptable and which are unimportant. Strong Powers may have a code of their own design, or may ally themselves with the code of a True God, while weak Powers fall into the deceptively beautiful currents of Heaven, Hell, Light, Wild, or Dark that beckon to the newly Commenced soul.

High service to an appropriate Code is worth 1 MP; disservice to it costs an MP. (Specifically, a temporary MP from an Attribute of the player's choice.) Players can create their own Codes and Affiliations. Whether a PC has one of the Codes below or a Code of their own design, it is not intended as a comprehensive description of their personality; Powers always act as the player desires. It is simply an indication of what kind of solution to a given problem seems desirable to a given character. Every PC has an Affiliation.

The Code of the Angels

1. Beauty is the highest principle.
2. Justice is a form of beauty.
3. Lesser beings should respect their betters.

The Code of the Fallen Angels

1. Corruption is the highest principle.
2. Suffering is a form of corruption.
3. Power justifies itself.

The Code of the Light

1. Humanity must live, and live forever.
2. What must be done ought be done cleanly.
3. Humans must be protected, particularly from themselves.

The Code of the Dark

1. Humans should destroy themselves, individually.
2. Humanity should destroy itself, collectively, except for a few toys.
3. Ugliness to human eyes shows that one is worthy.

The Code of the Wild

1. Freedom is the highest principle.
2. Sanity and mundanity are prisons.
3. Give in kind with a gift received.

Successes and Setbacks

In a high-powered game, the Hollyhock God can use the following optional rule. Characters receive miracle points when they significantly serve any of their life's goals. For example, making progress on a personal project, helping an Anchor or Bond out of trouble, spending a day on dedicated service to their Chancel or Estate, or resolving some single particularly knotty problem related to their Chancel or Estate would earn the character a miracle point. Similarly, personally failing any of the things that matter to the character would cost them a miracle point. This rule extends the basic Affiliation rules. Since player characters tend to succeed more often than they fail, it increases the number of miracle points available during the game. Note that the character does not always need to face danger or overcome great obstacles to earn miracle points using this technique. An IC scene without conflict or an appropriate OOC scene might, at the Hollyhock God's discretion, suffice.

The Light and the Dark

Players may note an asymmetry in the Codes of the Light and the Dark. The Light believes most strongly in the protection of humanity. The Dark seeks above all things to destroy individual human lives. The Light does not care how *it saves human lives; the Dark prefers suicide to all other human deaths. On this slim foundation rests every alliance between the Light and the Dark, including their shared participation in the Valde Bellum. The goals of the Light and the Dark stand in stark but not diametric opposition. Imperators of the Light and the Dark work against one another, but need not stand on the opposite side of every issue.*

In the last question Vyasa wrote upon the Wall of Gir, the thief who raids the "harem" of humanity is the Dark — focused on the individual lives it steals away. The eunuch who guards the harem represents the Light — caring only for the quality of the harem as a whole.

All Affiliation Handicaps are equally difficult to serve. A Power whose highest goal is to keep Shakespeare's works in print will only gain a miracle point from preventing a well-orchestrated attack upon their good name, not from purchasing a copy. True, such attacks will be rarer by far than attacks upon the beautiful things that a Power of Heaven must care for ... but it is much harder to do Shakespeare's work a meaningful disservice, as well.

Note: Three statements do not comprise a philosophy. These are merely the most salient points, expressing roughly as much about their subject as "soft drinks are carbonated", "television is visual entertainment", and "many employment policies forbid discrimination".

EXAMPLES

Marsiglio Tendi, Dominus of Treachery, neither endorses nor condemns acts of treachery. Rather, he considers the option of committing treachery, and ultimately suffering for it, the most important aspect of free will. Marsiglio's player decides this attitude best matches the Code of the Wild.

The player of **Pandareos Panagiotis**, Power of Conspiracy, does not see beauty, corruption, human life, human suicide, or freedom as the principle dearest to his heart. Thus, the player designs a unique code for him. (See p. 255 for one such code.)

An Example of Character Creation, part 2

Michael looks over the list of Gifts and starts to feel regretful about spending so many points on attributes. He talks it over with Susan, and decides to leave Mary Frances' attribute levels where they are, since he can buy Gifts for her in response to events during the campaign. For the moment, he has a single character point left, and will take some time to think about what to do with it.

Michael quickly gets a lot of ideas for possible Gifts, but thinks that he wants to get a sense of how the already prepared ones work first. Fortunately, the very first listed Gift fits Mary Frances perfectly. After her experiences with fights, Durant makes a great deal of sense as something that would well up in her soul at Commencement. That takes care of all 25 character points.

Michael hasn't played Nobilis before, but thinks the handicap system sounds like fun, and in any event he likes characters who have some interesting restrictions.

Light Touch fits his notion of a woman who likes to command but doesn't seek to rule others body and soul. Since Mary Frances has Spirit 1, she gets 1 miracle point for this limit; Michael applies it to Realm, remembering Susan's worrisome chuckle.

He hadn't thought about Mary Frances smoking, but likes the feel of Cigarette Bond, so takes that as well. It might come in handy at unexpected moments, and it fits his sense of an honorable character.

That handicap in turn suggests Integrity as a virtue: she keeps her commitments even at extreme cost.

Now it's time to choose an affiliation. Michael thinks briefly about creating a custom code, but decides that the existing options are rich enough that he doesn't need to do a lot of tweaking his very first time out.

He thinks about how Mary Frances would perceive the world of the Powers, and eventually (after a lot of dithering) settles on the Code of the Light. She never really thought about humanity at large before her Commencement, but feels an unspoken sense that those with power have duties, just as she does when acting as captain.

This takes care of Michael's character as an individual, and he's ready to work with the other players on the matters they must decide together.

Chapter II

Chancels and Imperators

Creating worlds, Theresa found, was addictive. At night, when she set her work aside and stumbled into bed, she would dream of it: new shapes of reality, new styles of existence, new ontological and theological substructures on which she could build a cosmos. If it were not her work, she knew, and free, she would spend everything she had, and more, so she could keep on creating; and that would not be so bad, or such a waste of a lifetime.

Naturally, they had not perfected the process. Even the management had the humility to understand that — they were mere humans, toying with divinity. Some aspects of the universes they built were primitive, unrefined, and incomplete. These technical flaws paled before the simple truth of their efforts: that each creation caught all the subtle flaws in their beings and magnified them, that each weakness in Theresa's honor appeared a thousandfold in her work. That, in short, for all their beauty, the defining characteristics of Theresa's creations came not from her deliberate efforts but from the dark places in her heart.

All unaware of it, Theresa was building her own Hell.

—from Fruit of a Poisoned Tree, *by Presbyter Harah Jane*

The Book of Questions

Vyasa whispered these questions to the wind: and as long as the wind blows, the human race shall remember them. He whispered these questions to the land: and as long as the Earth endures humanity, they shall be remembered. He spoke before an audience of the people of many lands, and in all lands, the people know of Vyasa's great Sutra. Thus are these questions preserved.

1. *What is the price of murder?*

2. *Who raged in the emptiness, but rages no more?*
3. *Who destroyed the unrighteous, but destroys no more?*
4. *Who danced on the surface of the Abyss, but dances no more?*

5. *"You are a mortal," said the god Harasekhara, "and I know every facet of your being. I know your strengths. I know your weaknesses. I know your every thought."*
6. *"I know a question about myself," the mortal said, "that you cannot answer."*
7. *What is the truth of your existence that not even the gods may know?*

8. *Lady Urvasi and Lady Iya stood at the entrance to Hell. "I am strong," said Urvasi. "I can survive the worst torments of this place."*
9. *Lady Iya said, "You are strong; but is that strength an asset, here?"*

"You think yourself a great lord," the bravo said, "but you have fallen before us, and when we are done with you, you shall die at our hands."

"If I may ask," said the Earl, "how is it that I shall die?"

"You shall be bound and placed in a sack and thrown into the river," said the bravo. "I would burn you, but it is said you have power over fire."

"Ah," said the Earl, and seemed content, even when they beat him, and peeled back his skin, and poked out his eyes, and crushed his bones with hammers. Such things could not kill him, of course, for he was a lord of the land. Yet anyone could drown, and the bravos began to wonder why he showed no fear or pain.

"Why?" the leader ranted at him. "Why do you not scream?"

When the Earl did not answer, the leader pulled out his tongue and cut it off. The night fell silent, and the man may have begun to understand.— But understanding is not always wisdom. When the men were done, they placed the remnants of the Earl in a sack and threw it in the river, and the water began to thunder from the sky.

You cannot separate the lord from his land, the Earl thought as he choked silently beneath the river. My home dies with me.

—from Unseemly Tales, *by Eleanor K.*

Chancels

The Chancel associated with the PCs provides the backdrop for many stories. It may also be a part of their initial character conceptions. Players should think some about the kind of Chancel they want their characters to live in even before they create their characters.

Each level of Realm a player buys for the character before play begins provides 1 Chancel point. Players pool Chancel points to buy properties from the following list. Negative properties also add points, at the cost of a liability of some sort that the Hollyhock God will bring into play at some point. Build the Chancel cooperatively, so that it suits all the players; in cases of dispute, the HG may give extra weight to the views of players whose characters have the highest Realm scores. In games with more than five players, the HG has the option of only taking the top five Realm scores into consideration.

Chancel Properties

Accessibility

2 to 7 Chancel points

Some Chancels occupy space, more or less, on a normal map of Earth. The entrances and exits to the Chancel are all located in the same general area of Prosaic Earth or the Mythic World. Other Chancels maintain entrances and exits all over the world. Some very lucky Powers even have Chancels that can "move" to some extent to stay close to them.

Chancels without this property usually have two to seven roads leading in and out. Travelers who stray very far from the road end up back at the point where the road began — on Earth if the travelers were headed to the Chancel, or in the Chancel if the travelers were leaving it. The Chancel's roads connect to places within about fifty miles of each other on Earth. Many Chancels cluster their entrances in an area just five miles in radius.

- **Convenient** Chancels connect to multiple major urban areas, and are within a day's drive (for a human) of almost everywhere in the world. Powers in these Chancels can vacation anywhere they like, and can respond very quickly to Excrucian threats. However, the Chancel can also be assaulted from almost anywhere on Earth — it has about as many entrances as it has exits.
- **Mobile** Chancels are always close to their Powers, no matter where they go — exactly how close depends on the Chancel's definition. In general, a Power should be able to get to their Chancel from anywhere on Earth within an hour. Further, the Chancel's entrances can move to avoid assault. Sometimes, though, avoiding attack creates a conflict of purpose with staying near to Powers and their assigned proxies. When conflicts arise, the HG determines which purpose takes priority at any given moment. Mobile Chancels can have up to twenty mobile pairs of entrances and exits.
- **Ubiquitous** Chancels usually belong to very strong Imperators. These Chancels can connect to almost anywhere on Earth — literally. For instance, the Chancel of a mighty Power of Animals might lead to every animal larger than a bug, everywhere on Earth. There are seldom more than one or two such Chancels active at any given time. If the Powers there are weak in Realm, they face almost constant assault.

Chancels which are not Convenient, Mobile, or Ubiquitous may have inconvenient gateways. Bad locations do not provide any Chancel points, given the mobility of Powers and their enemies.

- **Open** Chancels are easier to enter than others. In fact, rather than the winding convoluted paths that lead into most Chancels, an Open Chancel has an open boundary to the mortal world at least a mile in width. Anyone can step across this boundary and enter the Chancel without difficulty. Similarly, Chancelfolk have an easy time escaping.

DEGREE OF ACCESSIBILITY	CHANCEL POINTS
Convenient	2
Ubiquitous	6
Mobile	7
Open	–2

EXAMPLE

The **Locus Bus** is an entire world located inside seven tour buses that roam the streets of various cities. From the outside, they only have two decks; from the inside, once you climb above those decks you are in a joyous airy wonderland of pink cotton-candy bushes and dancing leaf-fairies. As Merriweather, Power of the Dark, said, "What a wonderful place." (Two seconds later, he was violently ill.) The nice thing about the Locus Bus, as the Powers of the Chancel say, is that anywhere they go, it goes too.

Avara

-3 to 9 points

Imperators have immense and gritty strength. Their magics warp the Earth even as they struggle to save it. Created by the hundred deaths that bind Chancels to their Lords, Banes are born and grow within the Chancel's soil. From the glory that the Imperators radiate, the delicate Allia come to be. These are the Avara, the light and dark treasures of the realm. As miraculous artifacts, they stand beyond a Noble's powers of creation and destruction.

- **Banes** disturb the Powers' sleep and haunt their days. It is said that nothing offends the Earth so much as murder. These murder-born energies take shape as simple objects and search out tools in the Chancel that will carry out their will. They wish only to see the Imperator, its Chancel, and its Nobles suffer. One Bane might be a stone carried by a small child, another a coffee shop on the boardwalk by the Nobles' castle. One might drip poisons into a Power's cup, while another might corrupt a Noble's Anchor through

"This?" I said, fingering a long and delicate blade.

"Ah, that one is fine," he said. "It will cost you your soul."

I frowned, set it carefully back upon the wall, and walked to another. The metal was dark and sang with Envy; emerald patterns trickled down the blade like the flow of blood. "This?" I asked, and looked at him again.

"That," he said, slowly, "I will pay you my soul to take."

—from Veridian, *by Emily Chen*

torturous dreams. Their raw magical might within the Chancel compares to that of the Powers, and they are full of corrupt wisdom although their sentience is tentative at best.

- **Allia** are sometimes soulstones, or lightflowers, or even living spirits — objects of priceless beauty which grant any wish within an Imperator's power when they are invoked by name. Two caveats apply, however. First, Gifts, Attribute Levels, and MPs gained using an Allia last for one or two stories at most unless the player pays points for them, and second, invoking an Allia (by naming it aloud) destroys the Allia utterly. Don't purchase Allia for a game intended to run for one or two stories.

With the HG's permission, characters can substitute some other miraculous object — such as a lamp that generates a Dim Warding (p. 152) when lit — for these wish-granting Allia.

NATURE OF AVARA	CHANCEL POINTS
Two Banes within the Chancel	-1
Allia still existing when the game starts	3

Note: One can substitute any enemy of equivalent power and persistence for the Banes above.

EXAMPLE

Word is the Chancel of the Aaron's Serpent Jormungandr, whose scales are the color of the sea and whose teeth are caught on his own tail. His rippling coils form the outer boundary of his Chancel. Inside, the Powers live on a flotilla of ships which harvest krill and strange fish to feed Jormungandr's hungers. Something in that patch of ocean captures the sea of legends, where ancient maps speak of monsters and treasures. Sometimes the Merrows come to swim alongside the fleet. This Chancel, however, is not always kind to its rulers. A hundred men died in terror at its inception. The chosen men and their ships were gathered slowly, and two whole shipfuls of them had to wait for months before the hundred was gathered and the death began. Their spirits call up strange beasts from the vasty deeps, lay subtle traps upon the ever-changing isles, and cry above the decks at night that their fate was unjust.

Borderguard

3 to 20 Chancel points

Chancels with this property actively resist hostile intrusion. The Chancel does not simply guard against magics used destructively, it acts to protect itself from intruders with hostile intent. Its tool is Realm miracles — at most one or two a minute, in never-ending supply.

A Borderguard has two qualities: the strength of its defensive magic and its penetration value. It detects all intruders with hostile intentions except those with an Auctoritas stronger than the Borderguard penetration value. Once the Borderguard detects a hostile intruder, it uses miracles up to the Borderguard's strength in order to deal with that intruder. These miracles have penetration equal to the penetration value of the Borderguard. The Borderguard continues to attack hostile intruders as long as necessary, not stopping until it "gives up hope".

Note: Lesser Divinations are useless to a Borderguard. It already senses the things that concern it. Accordingly, their Level 2 miracle is different. Borderguards can use such a miracle to notify authorities (militia, police, and/or Powers) of the threat.

STRENGTH OF BORDERGUARD	CHANCEL POINTS
1 level of power (maximum of 5 levels)	3 per level
1 level of Penetration	1 per level

EXAMPLE

Locus Casluhim is a place where, it is said, fires have learned restraint. Torchfires torn loose from their torches wander the mountain meadows without disturbing the grasses; men crown themselves with blazes; the night quails before the orange firestorm of the clouds. It is not wise for those of evil intent to enter Casluhim's Chancel — not even if they are Excrucian-shards or Powers. The fury of the flames is never far from awakening. Casluhim's Borderguard has a power level of 4 (for creating flames) and a Penetration value of 3. The total cost is 15 Chancel points.

Defender's Blessing

2 to 10 Chancel points

A piece of its Imperator's soul maintains each Chancel, a force more or less as strong as a Power, which serves its Ymera by keeping the Chancel close to the form the Imperator conceived for it. In many Chancels, it uses slow magics, gently undoing damage to that world over months or even years. In others, maintenance is more aggressive, and the Chancel's strength guards against works of magic hostile to the Chancel or any of its inhabitants just as Spirit guards a Power. Every 2 Chancel points spent here counts as one level of an Auctoritas. No magic can harm the Chancel or any of its inhabitants without a Penetration value equal to or higher than their Auctorita. While inside the Chancel, Powers who inhabit it are protected by their own Auctoritas or the Defender's Blessing, whichever is higher. The two Auctoritas ratings do not add together.

STRENGTH OF DEFENSE	CHANCEL POINTS
Damaging miracles require 1 level of Penetration	2 per level (max 5 levels)

EXAMPLE

Clegyr is the other name for the Gnome's Deeps, a living Chancel whose flesh is rock and whose excreta are gems. Clegyr flows through the Earth's crust like a fish through water, breathing the ancient power locked in stone. A burrow of Gnomes make their home inside this creature. When Clegyr rests, these Gnomes go to work, planting those gems in Earth's deep recesses. Some are put there for humanity to

The Price of Murder

In Nobilis, cause and effect do not always derive from physical laws. The fabric of the universe also supports ethical laws. Cause and effect sometimes stem from the moral quality of an action instead of its physical substance. Even for Nobilis and Imperators, committing murder, torture, or violation has consequences. These things offend the world.

This does not mean that the Nobilis must play nice. Many Powers engage in monstrous and diabolical activities. Some of them even have an obligation to do so, given their affiliation or their Imperator's nature. It simply means that the worse a Noble's behavior, the more often karma works against them. As with more physical laws, the Noble can escape karma's effects with miracles and effort.

The price of murder, to answer Vyasa, is not just the creation of Banes — it is a slight increase in the natural hostility of the universe.

I smiled gently. "I will not harm you," I said. "I have promised."

He took a step back.

"Do you not trust me?" I wondered. I put a touch of pain in my voice. "I have no weapon in my hands; there is no poison in my touch. Am I one to break an oath sworn to one I have loved?"

He took another step back. "I will not deny you breath," I whispered. "I will not wrap you in a flame. I will not ..."

He took another step, and passed backwards into my master's land.

"I'm sorry," I said, as my master's land ate him.

—from Earth Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

"Don't go," I whispered. "It is too strong a land for our kind, too bright; you will be made a shadow in such light."

But it is not my duty to teach, he said. It is my duty to wait.

—from Adel, *by K.C. Danine*

find — perhaps not that day, perhaps not that year, but most likely that millennium. Gnomes are patient. Others are set in caverns where no human will ever go, positioned in an ancient and complex pattern, so that the angels who gaze upon the Earth will see its beauty and be glad. In the Gnome's Deeps, the very substance of the Chancel opposes hostile intents. Clegyr is an ancient beast, and strong in spirit.

"Once upon a time," the old man said, "the Devil came up onto the Earth, and appeared right in the middle of a villager's barn, scaring all the animals no end. Hearing the honking, and the hooting, and the growling, and the hissing, and the baying, and the snorfling, and the roaring, and the trumpeting, and the scuffing of feet on hay, and the ultrasonic screams —"

"Go on, already."

"Maggie came rushing in with a broom in her hand to scare this stranger off. But he didn't pay any attention, even when she beat him all around the head with the broom's end. 'Ah,' he said, 'my hostess has arrived. Fetch me a drink,' that's what the Devil said.

"'An' who do you think you are?' Maggie asked, brandishing her broom, 'coming into my barn and scaring my animals as if you own the place?'

"'I own everywhere,' the Devil said. 'Some places just don't realize it yet.'"

—from Don't Go There, *by Martin Elliott*

Extra Landlord

-1 to -4 Chancel points

Sometimes, when forming a Chancel, an Imperator wants someone with a particular kind of wisdom or perspective in charge of the Keep but has no use for them as a Power. When this happens, they perform a *partial investment*, granting to the potential ruler a stone (usually kept within their brain) that gives them command over the Realm and the basic Noble immunity to direct miracles. Such a person is called an Erus of the Chancel, or a Minor Dominus — a Lesser Lord. Powers call them "landlords" and don't like them very much. Landlords are always more or less Immortal as long as they don't leave the Chancel.

The advantage to the PCs of having an Erus meddling with their turf is that the landlord's Realm score contributes Chancel points. The disadvantage is that they are expected to listen to him, and that he has power to oppose them and follow his own agenda — sometimes lots of power.

NATURE OF LANDLORD	CHANCEL POINTS
Nice Radiant with 5 RMPs	-1
Assertive Realm's Heart with 7 RMPs	-2
Aggressive Warden with 9 RMPs	-3
Megalomaniacal True King or Queen with 12 RMPs & Auctoritas Level 1	-4

EXAMPLE

Tamber's Folly is a beautiful garden Chancel in a difficult-to-reach mountain gully in the southern Rockies. Most of the land is owned by Jed Tamber, the lineal descendant of Michael Tamber, who first claimed the territory centuries ago. After the family had spent years carefully taking supplies in and out, Argob, Magister of the Light decided not to evict Jed completely — although he took over the gully, he also appointed Jed as an Erus of the Realm.

Magical Inhabitants

1 to 9 Chancel points

There are magics and technological wonders that are not divine or miraculous in nature. Such "Earthly" magics cannot affect Nobles or their Auctoritas and offer no resistance to miracles. For example, the Power of the Wind can wash away the greatest faerie glamours with a cleansing gust as a Level 4 miracle. Nor can a purely mortal sorcerer end a drought that a Power has brought to a land.

Players should purchase this Chancel property if individual Chancelfolk or the population as a whole commands unique Earthly magics — something specific to the individual or to the Chancel. High technology counts as an Earthly magic here — if the Imperator or Chancel commands an unusual technology, players should purchase an appropriate property. If the technology or magic in question functions normally outside the Chancel, use the Resources property below. For technology and magic based on the Chancel's local laws of physics, and for unique and specific abilities possessed by certain inhabitants, the Magical Inhabitants property is appropriate. With this property, Basilisks can turn their victims to stone. Nanotech swarms can repair damaged buildings. A great dragon's footsteps can shake the world. Cybernetic cops can manage the Chancel through remote robotic drones.

Chancelfolk empowered by Earthly magics, such as unicorns and bionic servants, can leave the Chancel if necessary. In the real world, however, they are rarely as powerful as in the Keep. Though the tiniest portion of the Imperator's will sustains their life and powers, it does not give them enough strength to dominate the mortal world. Some inhabitants of the Chancel may have divine nature and miraculous abilities of their own. Normally, this means that they are the descendants of some Power, and have inherited some portion of that Powers' gifts; the greatest mortal magicians, fae lords, demons, and primal ghosts can also achieve such strength. There are never more than a handful of these divinely powered beings in any Chancel, except by specific permission of the HG. Such beings cannot be made into Anchors. Their most common miraculous ability is an Anchor-like immunity to direct change and destruction magics; some also have 1 or 2 levels of an Auctoritas.

NATURE OF MAGICAL INHABITANTS	CHANCEL POINTS
Some beings with Earthly magics	1
Many such beings	+1
These beings can be used as Anchors	+2
Some of these beings have Anchor-like resistance to miracles	+2
Some have Anchor-like resistance & an Auctoritas	+3
Some have actual miraculous powers	+5

EXAMPLE

Locus Zaanannim is the Sanctum at the Television's Breast. It is the secret heart of television programming, the mazy, divided world where the characters of network programming live out their lives. It has many people who have access to high technology (that is, the characters of science-fiction shows) and many of these could be used as Anchors. This costs 4 Chancel points. If there were unenNobled inhabitants with some kind of miraculous abilities (as opposed to mortal-style magic, or even the "miracles" of television angels), this would cost 5 more points, for a total of 9. These beings could not be used as Anchors, however, save by special HG permission.

Mana Mine

-2 to 5 Chancel points

Chancels are magical places, and most magical places suffer one of two fates. The first awaits strong Chancels: they

Bright light, gleaming, glaring, white. Faces: pale, ellipsoid, and strange. Their mouths were mere slits, and their eyes round as a spider's. At the cold touch of metal to my side, I struggled, tried to cry out; like curious ants, more gathered. The air hummed. There was no pain; it felt more like a slow burn as metal pared away my flesh. Fear and fear and I wanted to warn them, too, because I knew what they sought and knew what they would find. Muscles gently peeled aside. Then the clink of metal against stone.

I felt the plaguestone flinch as an alien hand reached in for it, and then the hum grew sharper, sharper as my consciousness slipped. The last thing I saw was alien flesh melting, like ice in a bonfire, away.

—from the Thought-Record of Morgan Richards

With much care, he cut her shadow away.

"That's all, lady fair," he said. She moved on;

The black part of her soul the toll she paid.

None enter Heaven until it is gone,

And thrown to the squabbling rooks at the gate.

—from Heaven's Gate, *by Jack Frost*

become more real than the Earth that surrounds them, more beautiful, more strange, and always more glorious. No mortal heart leaves such a Chancel without being haunted forever after by the memories of that place. Mana, the raw stuff of magic or of miracles, oozes from the rawer, unformed places of such a realm — although finding and then harvesting it can be difficult even for Powers.

The fate of a weak Chancel is sadder. Compared to the Earth it borders, it comes to seem mythical, imaginary, chimerical, and unreal. Unless it is fed constantly by Noble magics, it will separate itself from the real world entirely and float off to the lands outside Creation. The Ymera of the Chancel may intervene before that point and drain one of its Powers (to the breaking point) to find raw energy for its Ward. Whether it does this or not, such an Imperator will not be pleased.

EXAMPLE

Locus Maralah is an ancient Chancel, a dreaming ruin in the hills of Greece. Its Imperator dreams as well; it has left the war to its Nobles and sunk itself deep into the Earth for a long and healing sleep. It is whispered among the Powers that Maralah took a wound beyond bearing, perhaps from one of the Abhorrent Weapons of the Excrucian horde ... that its soul was damaged so greatly that the ambrosia of the True Gods would taste of grave-dust and the beauty of Heaven would seem livid with corruption. Maralah is not entirely absent. It appears now and again as a ghostly presence, wrapped in acidic robes or writhing nightmare. But Maralah does not maintain its Chancel properly, and it decays. The Powers must often spend their own magical strength simply to keep their home safe against the stalking shards of Unbeing.

Miscellaneous Chancel Blessings

-4 to 8 Chancel points

Important Chancels offer some important service to the community of Powers, and other Powers will therefore hesitate to cross the Chancel's Familia. Ideas for such Chancels:

- Chancels spread across the Earth and used for transportation.
- The Chancel where Lord Entropy holds his Court.
- Chancels that serve as meeting places for the Light, Dark, and other affiliations.
- Neutral Chancels that serve as arbiters in Noble disputes.

Treaty Chancels offer some sort of service to Lord Entropy or the Council of Four. Should there be a conflict or flagrant violation of the law, these Powers are more likely to be treated kindly by the Darkest Lord. He is fickle, but many Powers envy those who treat with him instead of hiding from him. Painful death, after all, is no fun.

Primary Target Chancels are direct targets of the Excrucians. The destruction of that Chancel and the Powers within it is among the highest goals of the Dark Horsemen. More than destruction, really: the Excrucians wish the complete physical and spiritual annihilation of these Powers, so that not even a memory remains. This is a good Chancel property for games intended to be short-lived and full of action. In a long-term game, it oversimplifies the world, and much of the texture of the gaming experience could be lost.

EXAMPLE

Locus Herodion is home to the Power of Joy, Dianora. She is perhaps one of the most endangered of all Powers; the Excrucians (and the Dark) know that if joy is taken from the Earth, many of the greatest human works will fall like matchsticks. Dianora is also one of the most loved of all Powers: the magic of her presence makes Locus Herodion a rare and potent balm. It is a place where the most disturbed Powers, on the brink of psychic collapse, may come to heal. While there are many Powers who have never taken advantage of her Chancel, there are few who treat it and what it stands for with scorn.

Popularity

-3 to 6 Chancel points

In most Chancels, the Imperator paints the minds of the inhabitants with a light coating of loyalty to him or herself and the Powers who rule there. In the time-honored principle of minimizing Imperial expenditure of energy, the Powers must do the rest for themselves. Some Powers, however, are lucky enough to have Imperators willing to go the extra mile and force undying love for the Nobles down the populace's throat. This is equivalent to the 3-point Gift "Devoted Populace" for each Power in the Familia who does not have the Limit "Hated".

An Imperator is unlikely to do the opposite thing, painting the minds of the inhabitants with hatred for their Familia Caelestis. In some Chancels, not touching the inhabitants' minds at all has much the same effect. The citizens of First World countries are unlikely to be happy

Once, a man was so well-loved that he set the fields ablaze and the peasants didn't mind.

Then he killed all the animals, gave his folk dust to eat, and they didn't mind.

Then he dirtied the water with blood from his wars, and they didn't mind.

Then they tortured him slowly to death on the Stone Wheel, and when his heirs asked the peasants why, they said, "We thought he liked that sort of thing."

—from Parables for Our Modern Age, *by Jackie Robinson*

"Should I kill him, Hugh?"

Lord Entropy's skin, once red, had darkened with the clotted venom of his rage. There was only one answer, as inevitable as the fangs of death. It came.

"Yes, Lord."

"There is a power," he said softly, "in self-mastery. In finding the inner strength to hold back from what one desires. In learning to hold back one's anger. Do you understand me, Hugh?"

"Yes, Lord."

"I ask you again, Hugh. Should I kill him?"

"Yes, Lord," Hugh said again.

"That's right," he said, and with a touch he burst my throat.

—from the Thought-Record of the Dominus of Beginnings

In order to serve a Lord, one must first understand him.

— The Record of the Scribe of Days

Mana Mine

REQUIREMENTS	CHANCEL POINTS
Realm requires 5 MPs per session to maintain	–2
Realm requires 2 MPs per session to maintain	–1
Chancel generates MPs for harvest each story (maximum of 5 MPs)	+1 per MP

Chancel Blessing

NATURE	CHANCEL POINTS
Chancel is important, and its Powers respected everywhere	4
Chancel provides (or has provided) an important service to Lord Entropy	4
Chancel is a primary target of the Excrucians	–4

Popularity

NATURE	CHANCEL POINTS
All Powers have "Devoted Populace" for free, unless they are "Hated"	6
All Powers have "Hated" but get no miracle points for it	–3

about some divine force coming in, snatching their home into a twisted strange universe, and setting a bunch of once-human demigods over them as more or less absolute rulers. This may produce the effects of the Limit "Hated" for every Power, without the gain in miracle points. Do not take this property if any Power has the "Devoted Populace" Gift.

EXAMPLE

Camelot, founded in memory of the chivalric vision, is a sweeping landscape full of knights, honor, chivalry, tragedy, duels, monsters, castles, and fair maidens. All men there except for the black knights and the evil "King" Lot bow to the Powers, who are their rightful Kings and Queens. It's a joyful task, ruling Camelot, and the Powers of the Summer Kingdom consider themselves extraordinarily lucky.

Resources

-2 to 11 or more Chancel points

Chancels work by their own rules. Exact adherence to the physics of Earth is not required. Even in mundane Chancels, the Imperator may throw in a twist or two. Since there is a Power of Guns, some kind of gun will work in any Chancel. In some, though, guns injure targets by focusing the user's black bile and unbalancing the target's bodily humors. Other forms of technology are not so ubiquitous. Since there is no known Power of Nanotechnology, a nanotech device created in a high-tech Chancel could very well depend on the Chancel for its functioning, and work nowhere else.

If the players want their Chancel to possess broadly applicable scientific and mystical knowledge, they should purchase this property. With this property, characters trained in the magic of their Chancel can use that magic in the outside world. The Chancel's technological wonders, such as nanotech devices, do function elsewhere. Characters can obtain such wonders using the Chancel's labor pool, or create them spontaneously with level 4 or 7 miracles of Creation.

Most specifically, the Resources property gives the Chancel the mystical or scientific knowledge necessary to create Earthly magics that function outside of the Chancel. Individuals in the Chancel can possess this knowledge at the beginning of the game. The Powers of the Chancel can learn it. Even though these Earthly magics are not as well grounded in reality as the things of the mundane world, this knowledge is in some sense universal.

The Resources below reflect a shared body of potential technological and magical knowledge into which any Imperator can dip.

- **Deviant Technology** property forces perfectly ordinary technology made inside the Chancel — cars, guns, and the like — to operate on strange principles. Take it out into the real world, and it either dissolves into nothingness or ceases to function.
- **Technology Barrier,** conversely, makes the Chancel reject technology and technological things created outside it. The players define what technology the barrier forbids — from "anything worked by the hands of man" to "anything invented after 1950". When forbidden technology enters the Chancel, it dissolves away or ceases to function. This does not affect foci or other innately miraculous tools.
- **Extrapolative Technology** is in essence like our own: science that would develop over the next few centuries if no one has any brilliant, skewed, or impractical ideas. Computer chips are smaller and faster; bulletproof armor is lighter and tougher; guns are far more vicious. Visual virtual reality may exist, but true artificial intelligence does not. Cars are sleeker and faster with built-in expert systems for avoiding crashes. One can clone organs for unrejectable transplants.
- **Weird Science** is technology several quantum leaps away from what we have now, in some specific field. Possibilities abound, including dimensional science, biotechnology, advanced chemistry, genetic engineering, advanced metallurgy, psionic tech, advanced psychiatry, and advanced robotics. Remember that most extrapolative technology and all weird science qualifies as an "Earthly magic," and cannot affect Nobles or their Auctorita. Of course, being immune to blaster fire does a Noble no good if their vehicle, after being shot, explodes.
- **Thought-Record Technology** is a form of weird science that allows transmission of a willing subject's thoughts to a special receiver device, no matter where they are. When this receiver is used in tandem with a computer, a transcription of those thoughts can be created in real time, at leisure, or even post-mortem. Lord Entropy is believed to have access to a form of Thought-Record technology that can collect the last several days of thought from a dead mortal or Power, regardless of whether they were willing while alive and regardless of whether they had been bound to a transmitter for those few days.
- **Normal Magic** — the kind that works in the outside world — is typically cleaner and more effective than its technological equivalents. It also drains its wielder greatly, whereas most technology drains its user not at all. A spell-made arrow aims better and flies more quietly than a gun and can often be fired just as quickly — but after a handful of uses a mortal mage will be exhausted. If a Power wishes to avoid this drain, then with every few uses of magic they must spend an Aspect or Spirit miracle point. In one specific area, normal magic has advanced beyond mundane science: "spirit magics" such as demon-summoning and speaking to the dead. If a Power's Chancel allows the normal magic of Earth to work there, then the Power can learn normal magic freely; otherwise, that requires HG permission. (One fair resolution when only some players want their PCs to learn normal magics is to allow mastery of such magics as a cheap Gift or as an inevitable consequence of high Aspect.)
- **Faery Magic** is the traditional magic both of the fairies and the children of Don. It is the magic of *glamourie,* of enchanting the appearances of things. Nobles can

"It is a strange and fascinating device," he mused. "You ... push down the button with your finger, and a flame is born?"

"Yes," I admitted.

"Yet," he continued, "you cannot make it work."

"No," I admitted.

"I will enlighten you," he said. "You are certain of your superiority, as a rational man. Our tribal customs are quaint, and your study of them is your ticket to a doctorate in Anthropology. Yet," and his gaze was sharper than a knife, "the magics we do here are far older than your modern American sensibilities. You have been lied to: you have no idea what secrets underpin your 'technology.' You do not understand even a fraction of what works in your world. And it will not work here."

—from Fire and Forget, *by Madeleine Bacall*

OPPOSITE:
The Power of Guns
by Martin McKenna



generally see through glamourie with the Sight, although tactile glamours of sharp or poisoned things can produce an unpleasant and prickly sensation. Common uses of faery magic include turning leaves to gold (until the next dawn) and setting out a zero-calorie feast.

- **Alchemy and High Summonings** are the major forms of "Weird Magic" in the Nobilis universe. (Players can invent others, but should check with the Hollyhock God before basing their concept on access to these magics. Many forms of weird magic would keep the PCs from being challenged by the foes they normally face, which can remove much of the interest of the game.) Alchemy is the process of unlocking the hidden properties of the prosaic, mythic, and divine substances of Creation — looking beyond their (relatively) mundane nature to the wild fire of the Creator's will that ignites their being. Certain forms of alchemy are well known and relatively well understood. Knowing alchemy qualifies a character to perform basic transmutations and create various magical elixirs and potions in their laboratory. More importantly, however, an understanding of alchemy allows the character to experiment with those aspects of the science not already understood — to, potentially and with much experimentation, unlock mysteries of Creation and influence even the primal forces of the world.
- **High Summonings** call things up from beyond Creation. This is usually unwise, but a character who learns the ways of the creatures of the Lands Beyond Creation can gain great benefit from such dealings.

Resources

TYPE	CHANCEL POINTS
Magic and modern technology are nearly unknown in-Chancel	-1
Deviant technology	-1
Technology barrier	1
Extrapolative technology that works on Earth and elsewhere	2
Weird science that works on Earth	+1 per weird science
Thought-Record technology that works on Earth	+1
Normal magic	3
Faery magic	2
Alchemy (this requires normal or faery magic as well)	+1
High summonings (this requires normal or faery magic as well)	+1

Spirit Gateways

NATURE	CHANCEL POINTS
Two-way gateway to a Chancel with allied Imperator/indifferent Powers	1
Two-way gateway to a Chancel with allied Imperator/friendly Powers	2
Two-way gateway to another Realm or time, costing 4 RMPs to use	0
Reduced RMP cost to use gateway (minimum 0 RMPs)	1 per RMP
Users are noticeably weaker after using the gateway (wounded, lost MPs, reduced attributes in far Realm and so on)	-1
Hostile forces have a two-way gateway to the PCs' Chancel	-4

EXAMPLE

Locus Araunah began as a perfectly normal Argentine city (called Paris, as one of the many tributes to that French city found the world over.) In 1954, when Araunah took the place as his Chancel, its teeming thousands were warped to faery semblances. (Araunah is a Lord of the Dark, and the Dark has a great fondness for the fae and elvish kinds. The fae are human enough that the Dark Imperators, born in essence from humanity, are comfortable with them — but they are inhuman enough that the Dark does not require their destruction. Further, the fae are even more creative in how they destroy human lives than the Dark Imperators themselves.) Araunah has governance over the abuses of industry, and he has drawn dozens of technical innovations from his people, some of which he later trickles out to the broader Earth. Araunah's Powers, accordingly, buy Extrapolative Technology, Faery Magic, and Advanced Chemistry and Metallurgy for their Chancel. This costs 6 Chancel points.

Spirit Gateways

-4 to 4 Chancel points

Chancels are not precisely a part of normal space. Some are even omnipresent, located all over the physical world. It is rarer but not impossible for a Chancel to border on spiritual regions far away from the Chancel. These include other Realms on the Tree, other Ages of the World, and (most commonly) the Chancels of the Imperator's allies.

Connecting two Chancels is fairly straightforward. Chancels and the Earth occupy the same metaphysical space. Once given access to another Imperator's understanding of their Chancel and the way its space is warped away from Earth, an Imperator can make a gateway between the two worlds. Of course, it's easier to do this during Chancel creation.

Connecting a Chancel to another Realm takes more effort. The separation between Earth and the Acmonion Wood, or the First Age and the Third Age of the World, is much deeper than the separation between Kansas and Tokyo, or between Locus Maralah and Clegyr. However, an Imperator can do almost anything. Traditionally, a gate between two worlds requires a sacrifice of power every time it is used, often in the form of Realm miracle points.

The advantage of a gate to another Chancel is constant, free access to a whole set of Powers and Chancel resources that might otherwise be hard to contact or find. The disadvantage is that those Powers have no obligation to help the PCs, aside from a general loyalty between the two Imperators. The advantage of gates to other Realms and times is minimal to the PCs, but they can be a lot of fun for the players!

It is important to note that just because an Imperator can open a direct gateway to another Realm on the Tree doesn't mean that it's easy for them, or that all Imperators can do this. Imperial Miracles have no obvious cost, but each one changes the balance of affairs in the Spirit World, and many Imperators will prefer to send their Powers out along the Tree — unless travel between Earth and a specific Realm will be common. This is why having a gate is useful from an

If you look hard enough at the Gluttonous Cave, you can see a face. Two smooth black places above the cave entrance look very much like eyes, and a rocky protuberance — a mini-stalactite, really — over the cave resembles a nose. The cave mouth, of course, would be the mouth. It's not all that menacing a face, sort of a jolly roly-poly face that could laugh and play while it chews and swallows you and spits you out again, and it always brings a smile to my heart.

I walked up to it, and said, "Daharyn," and it inhaled me with one sharp breath.

I was battered against rock walls the whole way, an endless roller-coaster ride in a wind tunnel without safety inspections, but it got me there.

Unfortunately.

—from Weep Not, *by Emily Chen*

out-of-character standpoint: it means that there is a whole new easily accessible setting for the game, and that the PCs will be required to visit that setting frequently.

EXAMPLE

Focus is unique among all Chancels for its seven spirit gates, each leading to the Chancel of an ally. Mariol, the Imperator who created Focus, is one of the Roots of the World, and can expect assistance from his allies if there is a need, but very few of them trust each other. To keep an inter-Chancel war from starting up around Focus, the gates have been built so they only work for groups that contain a Power of Focus or a Power of the Keep on the other side. Powers of Staufmortem, for instance, can enter Focus through their spirit gate, but cannot use the gate from Focus to a'Detalin unassisted.

Sample Chancel Creation

"Why explore the cosmos?" he wondered, rolling on his back to look up at the spreading branches. "Why land on other planets at all?"

"Humanity needs the room ... the expansion ..." I began.

"No, no," he said. "I mean, why not just make *worlds?"*

—from Irregardless, *by Emily Chen*

Melancthe's gaming group likes the idea of setting their game in Tibet, and has decided that their Imperator, a True God, must like some of the features of that country if he built his Chancel there. They conclude that their Chancel is a mountain he has hollowed out and shaped into the highest temple of Diamond Path Buddhism, a religion whose principles a god can follow as easily as a human can. Mythic beasts roam the heights. Many wise monks live, farm, and study within.

Melancthe's character, Jameson Black, has Realm Level 0, and Melancthe feels properly ashamed. Of the three other players, one is a Radiant, one is a Realm's Heart, and the third is a Tempest, with Realm levels of 1, 2, and 5, respectively. (Note that only the last two will be able to communicate through the Chancel's mystic center.) The total of these Realm levels is 8, so this group has 8 Chancel points with which to buy positive properties for their Mountain.

It is the general consensus of the players that where a true god comes to rest, very strange creatures will frolic. Two Chancel points buy lots of inhabitants with Earthly magics. 3 more Chancel points equip the monks with "real-world" mystic lore. The PCs can now learn normal magic from their monks, and the monks can make enchanted scrolls that will work even in the outside world. The players can now buy a 3-point Mana Mine or an Allia, and be done, but the Tempest's player has decided he would like a decent Borderguard of spirits guarding the mountain. Since the Tempest personally contributed 5 Chancel points, the players decide that it is only fair that he should have five points to put towards his Borderguard. The 2 extra Chancel points will come from four Banes within the mountain.

The final Chancel sheet is:

FEATURE OF MOUNTAIN TEMPLE	CHANCEL POINTS
Earthly magics are common	2
Magical lore applies to Earth	3
Radiant Spirit Borderguard (Power 1, Penetration 2)	5
4 Banes	–2
Total	8

Chancel Property Index

PROPERTY/OPTIONS	POINTS	NOTES/DESCRIPTION
Allia	3	Per Allia
Banes	–1	Per 2 Banes. For enemies in the Chancel
Borderguard		
Power Level	3	Per miracle level
Penetration	1	Per penetration level
Chancel Health		
Mana Mine	1	Per miracle point. Allows one to harvest MPs per story, maximum of 5 levels
Weak Chancel	–1	Pay Chancel 2 MPs per session
Dying Chancel	–2	Pay Chancel 5 MPs per session
Chancel Status		
Important Chancel	4	Chancel receives respect
Treaty Chancel	4	Chancel has Lord Entropy's favor
Primary Target	–4	Excrucians target the Chancel
Defender's Blessing	2	Per Auctoritas level
Earthly Magics		
Standard	1	Some residents have Earthly magics
Common	+1	Many residents have Earthly magics
Anchorable	+2	Such residents can become anchors
Auctoritas	+3	Such residents have an Auctoritas
Miraculous	+5	Chancel has miraculous inhabitants
Erus		
Radiant	–1	Pleasant landlord
Realm's Heart	–2	Assertive landlord
Warden	–3	Aggressive landlord
True King or Queen	–4	Megalomaniacal landlord
Gates		
Convenient	2	Many entrances
Mobile	6	Mobile entrances
Ubiquitous	7	Omnipresent entrances
Open	–2	Open border to the mundane world
Associate Gate	1	Gate to associated Chancel
Ally Gate	2	Gate to allied Chancel
Realm Gate	0	Gate to another Realm or time. +1 per reduced RMP cost to use for 0 RMPs to use (max 4 points spent)
Enemy Gate	–4	Gate to hostile Chancel
Magic		
Normal Magic	3	
Faery Magic	2	
Alchemy	+1	
High Summonings	+1	
Populace		
Devoted	6	Residents love the Powers
Hated	–3	Residents hate the Powers
Technology		
Technological Rarity	–1	Magic and technology rare in Chancel
Deviant Technology	–1	Cannot remove tech from Chancel
Technology Barrier	1	Cannot bring tech into Chancel
Extrapolative Technology	2	
Weird Science	+1	

IMPERATORS

Cneph did not come to Creation empty-handed. In the void where its world would be there struggled three forces.

N'mosnikttiel, the fire that swallows worlds, raged in the emptiness. Its faces chanted words of destruction. The creatures of the void trembled in its heat. Yet the Creator caught N'mosnikttiel in his net and shaped the angels from its flesh.

Azbogah, the radiance that destroys the unrighteous, shone with fell beauty. Its raiment was the jewel named Structure. Its scepter was the staff called Strength. Yet the Creator caught Azbogah in his hand and planted the World Ash in its heart.

Narsinha, the lightning that dances on the surface of the abyss, fled the Creator; yet Cneph stood at the end of its every path. Narsinha's face was a mask of hatred. Its hands were twisted claws. It spat naked fury. Yet Cneph tamed its heart and wrapped it about Creation to form the Weirding Wall.

That is how the universe came to be.

—from LEGENDS OF THE NOBILIS, *by Luc Ginneis*

As with the characters' Chancel, the players normally design the PCs' Imperator. The players can describe the Imperator's personality loosely or thoroughly. In either case, the Hollyhock God gives depth and interpretation to the framework the players create. For the most part, the nature and powers of any given Imperator — even the PCs' own — will be a mystery to the players and the PCs. Some few traits make themselves obvious, however, and the relationship between PCs and Imperator is observable and quantifiable.

The players buy Imperator properties for their Imperator just as they buy properties for their Chancel. Unfortunately, however, there are no free Imperator points: the initial number is 0. This means that in order to have a beneficial property, the players must have at least one harmful property.

DYNASTY POINTS

Dynasty Points (DPS) are the last reserve of the miraculous strength an Imperator gives his Nobles. When there is nowhere else to turn and no miraculous power remaining to them, a Noble turns to this reserve. If they are lucky, they can draw enough miracle points from it to do what they must. Each dynasty point converts to a miracle point, and they do not replenish naturally. They represent power culled over a long period of time by the Nobles themselves. Each DP is earned by great risk or long and wearying efforts, and can be used by any player as a miracle point of any attribute.

At the decision of the players as a whole, the Familia can convert 25 dynasty points to an Imperator property point, or *vice versa*. This is the trade-off between an Imperator who receives power from the PCs and is therefore happy with them and an Imperator who is drained by the PCs and therefore unhappy. Powers can spend any Imperator points acquired during play to buy positive properties normally, and can also spend a new Imperator point to remove a negative Imperator property. There are Imperator properties associated specifically with these dynasty points, as follows.

- **A Harvest** of dynasty points is a source of magic potent enough to strengthen the characters' Imperator. (One or more of the Powers must gather the Harvest; they can't delegate the task to other Chancel inhabitants.) One example might be Shi-mi's reaping of feline souls (p. 92); another might be Strephon (p. 84), if his hunger for human self-hatred feeds his Imperator and not himself. At least one of the Powers of this Imperator must spend a substantial amount of time working with this source of power. In exchange, the Imperator gains two dynasty points at the beginning of every session. There are many, many things in the world that can be harvested for power, but most Imperators do not trust their Powers' strength enough to divide it between defense of the physical Earth and the gathering of magics.
- **A Great Harvest** of dynasty points is much the same, except that it adds four dynasty points at the beginning of every session to the Imperator's pool.
- **Failing** Imperators are slowly losing strength and mystic power in the war. In time, they may be wiped entirely from existence. They begin with 10 dynasty points and lose two at the beginning of each session. When they run out, the Imperator loses one Imperator property point. If no positive properties remain to be lost and there are no appropriate negative properties to gain, then all the PCs lose 1 character point. After this loss, the Imperator has 24 dynasty points available, and the decline begins again.

INITIAL DYNASTY POINTS	IMPERATOR POINTS
25 Dynasty Points	1
Imperator teaches how to harvest DPS	1
Imperator teaches how to perform a Great Harvest of DPS	2
Failing Imperator	–1

EXAMPLE

Heather Lysimachus has been honored above all the other Imperators of the Light. The Lords of Heaven have given him charge over the birth of new races on the Earth. From the angels' work in Heaven, a rain of creative, genitive energy falls upon the Earth; with or without Heather, a portion of this would express itself in the creation of new species from mutations and metamorphoses. It is now Heather's task to shape this energy as will best serve mankind. His Powers are constantly about, finding the new species born of randomness, so that their Imperial Master may reabsorb that newness and spend it as he sees fit. In modern times, new bacteria and viruses evolve the fastest. Heather approves: it is his intention, decided upon with the cold precision of an Imperator, that they will decimate humanity. It is the only way, he believes, to prevent humankind from overpopulating the planet to the extent that it will no longer support life at all. This is not the limit to his ambition, however. Humanity is fumblingly moving towards practical genetic engineering and Heather awaits the inevitable moment when he will guide a radical recreation of the ecosystem of the Earth. He is a bright and caring Lord; his Powers are repaid well for the great harvest of creative energy they bring him.

EMPATHY

The Wall between Souls (the Terrafi Sairyd) is the most important of all barriers. It divides one person from another, one viewpoint from another. Empathy — the ability to feel what another feels — is the only bridge crossing this divide. Imperators with Empathy lead the Divine Host; they understand their comrades best, and are least likely to sacrifice one unnecessarily. The Nobles of Empathic Imperators are also blessed, sharing a fundamental attunement to all things of the world.

- **Clear-Sighted** Imperators perfectly assess the fundamental balances of the world. They know instantly the pains and joys and strengths and weaknesses of those they meet. This would be an advantage to their Powers even if it had no other effects: a Clear-Sighted

A feather is placed in my hand. "Dreams," he says. "Should you need a door into dreams, this will open it." A pebble. "With this," he says, "You can walk upon the sea." He moves to place a stick of gum in my hand, and I lift the other in a gesture of warding.

"No more," I say softly. "My heart is full, and I can bear no more gifts."

—from SONNET AND THE SEA, *by Alex Dec*

CREATURES OF THE LANDS BEYOND CREATION

Some of the most important myths of the Nobilis concern the creatures of the Lands Beyond Creation. Just as humans do, Powers seek outside the boundaries of their own existence for occult symbols, mythic figures, and subjects of worship. The creatures Powers contact with High Summoning generally operate on a level not far removed from the Nobles' own. More majestic creatures, immune to and uninterested in petty summonings, also exist, from the possibly apocryphal N'mosnikttiel, Azbogah and Narsinha (see left) to the well known Aphredon and Seimelkhe. Such creatures fuel many legends and occult theories.

The occult names N'mosnikttiel, Azbogah, and Narsinha together answer Vyasa's second question for this chapter.

One day, I stubbed my toe. When I told Marilyn about it, she said she understood completely how that felt. I said, I'm so glad, and she smiled, and she cut the toe off. It was amazing; the pain was gone! So I was sure to tell her about it when I had a cold the very next week and my nose was running. What do you want me to do? she asked, and I said, I'm afraid that if I cut it off it will bleed. She said she completely understood, and she chopped my nose right off. It stopped running at once! But now I don't know what to do, because I have a headache, but I keep thinking, What if I need it for something later?

—from PARABLES FOR OUR MODERN AGE, *by Jackie Robinson*

The Terrafi Sairyd
The Terrafi Sairyd imposes a fundamental limitation on all creatures, even Powers and Imperators. No one can possess complete knowledge of what it is like *to be another person. This is the riddle that even Vyasa's god Harasekhara cannot answer. To understand someone's viewpoint completely, one must become them — completely. Short of such drastic and irreversible measures, even Powers cannot predict other characters' actions with absolute certainty.*

Imperator rarely sets its Nobles to tasks beyond their capabilities. There is another effect, however. The Sight of the Ymera's Nobles is also enhanced, so that like ancient druids or bards, they can see the things that are hidden. They can see it in the sky when rain is coming; they can find buried paths through a swamp; they can see the traces of murder and ravage even when no blood remains. There is a word for these Nobles, if they are mature individuals as well. That word is "wise".

- **Sympathetic** Imperators feel the pains and joys of others as easily as their own. The Regi practice mastery of the self and mastery of emotions, and excel at it to a degree no mortal can imagine. Accordingly, these pains and joys do not necessarily move them to action, but at least these Regi will never throw the lives of their soldiers away uncaringly or unknowingly. (Of course, they may still throw away the lives of their soldiers caringly and knowingly, if it seems a necessary sacrifice.) The Nobles of these Imperators possess an insight into the motivations of others, be those others humans, Powers, or Imperators — they can catch hints of emotion in the best poker faces. These are hints only, mostly vast generalities, but more than any others can learn. Without the effects of this property, a Power of Aspect Level 2 or higher can utterly conceal or disguise their emotional state as a simple miracle. This Imperator property is independent of Clear-Sightedness — an Imperator can have either, neither, or both. However, neither of these properties is compatible with the property Cruel, below.
- **Cruel** Imperators may have some rudimentary sense of what others feel, but only so that they may better crush joy and enhance pain. The Nobles of such an Imperator are not targets: they share a soul with the Imperator, and only the most masochistic Imperators enjoy torturing themselves. There is a price for serving such a Regent, however. A Cruel Imperator does not understand the limits of those who serve them. They do not push their Powers deliberately beyond their limits, but they may well ask much more of their Nobles than the Nobles can possibly provide — and only grow angry when these Powers fail.

EXAMPLE

Hazael is the Angel of Disorder. He is a bright soul who denies with laughter the claim that he and Lord Entropy are one and the same. He is, he explains, the essential spirit of beauty found in randomness. He is the manifestation of the universe that, reflecting itself, wishes to find a method to its madness. His servants also have two sides: Charia, for example, who is the Lady of Insanity but who names herself the Domina of Patterns of Perception.

It is ironic that Hazael, who is tied by his nature to the Darkest Lord, whose understanding is always at odds with that of everyone else, is also Clear-Sighted. Perhaps it is as he says, amid his laughter: Disorder is the key to Fate and the cornerstone of Time.

Empathy

DEGREE OF IMPERATOR EMPATHY	IMPERATOR POINTS
Clear-Sighted	1
Sympathetic	1
Cruel	–1

Empathy cannot be purchased after the game begins.

Galeid

STRENGTH OF IMPERATOR GLORY	IMPERATOR POINTS
Transcendent	2
Inspiring	1
Unshining	–1

Galeid

Galeid was a Power whose name is synonymous with service, the sacrifice of self in the service of one's Lord. In the name of Creation and of his Regina, he came to King Charles's court and built the legend of Charlemagne, a legend of chivalry and glory that would last the ages. It was a work of uttermost love and uttermost passion — his gift to the Creation that gave him birth. Yet in Charlemagne's court, inextricably bound therein from the beginning, was the poisonous work of the Excrucian Brawriath, who spurred Charlemagne to lay low the great Khan's palace in Pannonia, first of the Refuges; who slew Anselm, Count Palatine, in the valley at Roncevalles; and whose grand corruption of Charlemagne himself would have destroyed the last remnants of virtue in Kingship for all time. Galeid turned to look at his masterwork, when it stood complete, and saw Brawriath there looking out at him. In the name of his Regina, in the name of Creation, he brought his life's work tumbling down.

In the last three years of Charles's life, Galeid's battle with Brawriath cast darkness over the sun and moon, brought lightning and decay to Charlemagne's palace, and sent balls of fire wheeling across the sky. Then Galeid held the upper hand at last, and mortally poisoned his mortal liege. Charlemagne died, his corruption and Brawriath's flower rite incomplete. Galeid took the golden table he had built to show Charlemagne and humanity the Creator's true intentions for them and cast it into the void beyond Creation. It is said that for a hundred years after these acts, Galeid cried tears of fire and blood.

- **Inspirational** Imperators are pure and shining example to their Powers. When they deal with their Nobles, they wear a divine glory that inspires and cleanses the heart of fear. Even the Anchors, who taste their Imperator's presence from one step removed, are nearly immune to hesitation and doubt. These Powers can lose everything, and they will grieve, but there is a strength of service in them that dominates. They lose nothing, no true piece of their self, when anything less than their Imperator is taken from them. Thus they are proof against the Nettle Rite.
- **Transcendent** Imperators are beyond divine glory. The simple splendor of their presence breeds an extravagant

They searched us coming in. We knew that they would search us when we came out again, too. Full strip search, body cavity search, and the clothes would be burned. No one brought anything out of Sundermai. The law that binds the servants to fidelity is as deep as stone, and a hundred times as strong. The wards on every window and every gate are as vicious as hounds. We had been sent here to steal from the Lord of Poison and of Flight, and in my bones I already tasted a sliver of my fate.

When we had been settled in our rooms for some days, I slipped away and began my exploration. Five hours later, I returned, and whispered to my friend, "Let us go." It was a long time before the diplomatic entanglements had been neatly cut so we could go; I spent that time huddled in our rooms, shaking. I knew that it is said that none steals from Sundermai.

They were suspicious. The guards who searched us, who stripped us and took away our clothes, they patted me roughly as if they feared I had hidden something within my chest. Yet I was pleased: for at that moment, I knew we had won. In the end, they turned us out, where our horses and new clothes were waiting for us.

Another three hours, and my companion turned to me. "You have it?" he asked, and there was uncertainty in his eyes. Concern, too, perhaps; I was shivering in the cold mountain air.

"I do," I said. "A most potent and subtle poison; it will serve our Lord well."

"... Where?" he asked, but I think he knew.

"It is a powder," I said softly. "A grain will kill at a touch, in a day's time."

"... Where?" he asked again.

"It is on my skin," I said softly. "You will need to carry my corpse home."

—from A Thousand Words for Light, *by Emily Chen*

loyalty to Imperator and to Creation. Their Nobles have all the above benefits and more, for the Powers of a Transcendent Imperator are nearly impossible to kill. The commitment to Existence that grows in their hearts enables them to cling to life and victory against even the most impossible odds. Nobles never ask their Imperator for these gifts; sometimes, however (at the players' decision, with an expenditure of Imperator points), they receive them.

- **Unshining** Imperators often stand at the forefront of the war, with little to spare for the Earthly Realm. Most Powers have been imprinted with Creation's cause. Powers who belong to Unshining Imperators are simply compelled to serve. In the face of such ill-born service, their personal strengths are reduced, while the terror of the Excrucians is both seductive and overpowering. When an Excrucian-shard takes to itself its strength, its glamour and its horror and its unearthly, ungodly beauty, it has effects on these Powers much like those a Bright Warding (p. 152) has on the Excrucian-shards. It is as if the Excrucians had an Auctoritas fifty feet in radius. Inside that Auctoritas, these Powers must spend Aspect points again and again if they do not wish to be routed in terror or impressed into temporary, worshipful service.

EXAMPLE

Adalia is a Wildlord. Like some of his kind, he reasons that freedom is a quality in the individual heart, and not in one's circumstances. He wishes his Powers to be free spirits, and yet he desires them utterly bound to him. To ensure this, he has donned the shining aspect of an Inspiring Imperator. He does not have any great virtue or vice, as such things go — but those who encounter his Earthly form (even Powers) generally fall in love at once.

Granted Gift

"I have a butterfly brooch," the Herald said, languidly. "With gold around the edges, and colored stones set in its wings."

"Why?" I asked, meaning, 'Why do you tell me this?'

"That butterfly offended me, in life," he said, in reply.
—from Insignia, *by Keiko Takemori*

Gifts, as explained before, are specific miraculous abilities not provided by a Power's attributes. Each Gift has a cost in character points. An Imperator can grant to all of its Nobles a 1-point Gift. This will be the same Gift to each and it comes at the cost of a 1-2 point mystic Handicap, chosen by the Hollyhock God, for each Gift given. Whenever a Power chooses to accept such a Gift, they also incur the Handicap. Some player characters can, of course, overcome this Handicap given an appropriate use of mystic powers and hard work.

It is possible that at the beginning, or later should they lose strength, the Imperator will give a Handicap to all PCs without an accompanying Gift. A Granted Handicap must be approved by the HG, and cannot be removed except by the expenditure of 25 dynasty points. There can be only one such Granted Handicap. Granting a Handicap is not always a choice on the Imperator's part; it often represents a basic weakness in the Imperator's own magics. The Handicaps associated with a Granted Gift or Handicap provide the normal miracle point benefit when appropriate.

EXAMPLE

The **Graveling Wyrm**, the Aaron's Serpent who embodies Spring and Molten Earth, binds her Powers to herself in a forge as hot as the Earth's core. Those few lucky souls brought there for enNobling melt like wax, then blaze like kindling as the last gap of consciousness fades from their form. When the Wyrm calls that consciousness back, it awakens in a body that will never again be harmed by heat. This is a 1-point Gift. The Handicap accompanying this Gift is that the skin of these Powers and even their Anchors wanders between five and sixty degrees hotter than normal human skin. At the least it is suspicious; at its worst it can set clothes afire.

Guiding Hand

I studied the sky behind me in the mirror; my face, my body, my thumb over the glass had no reflection in the shiny surface. "It's wonderful," I said softly, "but what is it?"

"It is a warning, child," he said. "If you should ever see yourself reflected, you will know that you have stepped beyond the bounds of this world ..."
—from Rosebud and the Sovereign, *author unknown*

The Valde Bellum, the fundamental struggle for existence, displaces everything else in the hearts of the Regi and bends those fiercely proud souls into interdependence. It is the crucial and defining event of this Age of the World. Should a Power die in this war, it is no great loss. Its Imperator can make another, and the soul-shard lives on. Powers cannot expect their Imperator will come when they need it, or that it will take steps on their behalf. The mortal world is a secondary concern, no more, until and unless the war in the spirit world has ended, until and unless all hope for the spirit realm is gone. And yet, some Imperators take a stand on behalf of their Powers, who are the children of their souls. They send some small measure of power to their servants at need — or at least a guiding hand.

- **Prophetic** Imperators give their Powers the benefit of their oracular foresight. They are uncertain seers at best, since Imperators have a different understanding of time. Even Powers who can scry the future themselves — foggily — do not really understand the way the Imperators perceive it. The Imperators' words and visions, of course, should be kept in mind. The HG creates the Imperator's prophecies in either of two ways. First, they can predict what is coming, based on the HG's thorough understanding of the game world and their ability to subtly steer the storyline. They then couch the results in riddles to share with the players. Second, they can create as strange and obscure a prophecy as possible. Then, when a player or their character convincingly reasons out what the prophecy is telling them to do and does it, the HG can go a little easier on the Powers for a bit.
- **Advising** Imperators are always available to hear their Powers' concerns. They might even suggest ways to handle them, although they don't have much of their attention focused on Earth, and so they do make mistakes. Imperators who guide their Nobles integrate a portion of their perspective into their Powers' souls. When a Power is about to do something that seems to the Hollyhock God — who knows the most about the game world — to be against common sense in that world, the HG can warn the Power's player. The HG does not need to give this warning every time, and the players do not need to revise their actions once

warned. Still, this Imperator property helps keep the HG's and players' perceptions of how the world works aligned. This does not include and is not included in the above property, but they can be purchased together.

- **Demanding** Imperators are meddlesome wretches. Their Powers have no peace: their Imperator always piles one more problem on their heads. Not content with the destruction of the Excrucians' plans, they expect the PCs to deal with every conceivable adversary — and make a handful of utterly irrational demands as well. As the well-executed trap closes on the Excrucians' servants, as Anchors with high-power machineguns step out to mow them down, the Imperator will cry, "I need captives!" When the Nettling of a Dark Imperator's polluting Chancel is nearly complete, and the alerted enemy is drawing in his Powers to defend, the characters' Imperator will cry, "I must witness this triumph! Hold them until I arrive!" It is possible to combine this trait with either or both of the above Imperator properties.

Granted Gift

NATURE OF GRANT TO PCS	IMPERATOR POINTS
1-point Gift (with accompanying Handicap)	1
Handicap without accompanying Gift	–1

Guiding Hand

NATURE OF IMPERATOR'S GUIDANCE	IMPERATOR POINTS
Prophetic	1
Advising	1
Demanding	–1

Incomprehensibility

DEGREE OF INCOMPREHENSIBILITY	IMPERATOR POINTS
Unfathomable	2
Soul-Twisted	1
Straightforward	–1

Incomprehensibility cannot be purchased after the game begins.

EXAMPLE

Locus Askelon is a dark and unsightly place. If you wring the air there, it will bleed viridian agony; if you sip from a spring, be warned that you sip acid. Only in one place is the pain relieved: one bright spot in all the realm, where the earthroot balm grows. The Lord of the Green, as Askelon is called, is a kindly man. The purpose of suffering, he explains, is refinement. From the wail of the stones, the scream of the black pines, the tortured cries of the gangrenous grass, he draws a certain essence, a certain purity that strengthens him in his resolve for the Light. The most delicate torture of all, he reserves for his Powers, since they are the ones who must allocate the earthroot. They must decide whom among the laboring beasts and men will be granted a momentary surcease of pain. The Chancel is fundamentally an inhuman place, a confusing Hell to the human minds. Accordingly, Askelon has given his Powers the gift of Accord. They will always know as well as he would himself whether a given course of action is in harmony with the world they are in.

Incomprehensibility

Some Imperators are not firmly grounded in the world of the Tree. Those whose understanding of reality is based upon life on Earth — or any of the other Realms of this Creation — cannot truly apprehend their mode of existence. These Imperators are incomprehensible, and this is a major boon to their Powers. It is much easier to deceive those who do not understand you.

- **Soul-Twisted** Imperators give their Powers two advantages. First, the soul-shards that give these Powers their strength are impossible to apprehend. Such Powers are invisible to the Sight, even as a vampire is invisible in mirrors. Their Estate cannot be determined by any being, except by empirical observations, and only someone who cycles back and forth between Sight and normal vision can detect them as non-humans. Second, the truth cannot be forced from a Noble of a Soul-Twisted Imperator. Lies told freely and willingly can be detected only by their moral darkness; untruths told because the alternative to speech is torture or disaster cannot be detected at all.
- **Unfathomable** Imperators are unpredictable, deadly, and contemptuous of lesser beings. Other Ymerae may understand them as well as sane humans understand the deeply insane — well enough to forge an alliance, but not much more. Unfathomable Imperators offer the same benefits as Soul-Twisted Imperators, plus one additional benefit: attempts to describe the Imperator's Nobles fail. An essence that cannot be conveyed in words dominates their physical appearance; any attempt to describe one of these Nobles is approximately as useful as a description of a toddler that does not mention the child's age.
- **Straightforward** Imperators are the Roots of the World. These Regi are so entwined with reality that they will not fall until the Earth itself crumbles into the void. There is always a sense around these Ymerae that things are going according to plan ... that everything is normal and as it ought to be. This much is a pleasant thing, but there is a dangerous side to it. The people and Powers of Earth can understand the Nobles of these Ymerae very well. They will have an imperfect but generally accurate intuitive perception of how these Sovereigns will behave. Random decisions, and the general approach the characters take to problems, will be open books. Excrucians are not of the Earth; like many of the Wild, they lack this sense. Enemy Powers, however, will have an important advantage while constructing their fiendish schemes.

EXAMPLE

Sennacharib is a true god, an Imperator born from the complex desires of the drowsing and at best semisentient

"Lies are fundamental," he explained. "The universe is structured on them. Do you seek understanding? Lies are perceptions are illusions, and you can strip away as many layers as you want: you will never find any truth in this Creation. The only truth I know is also a lie, an obvious lie: the truth is that we are not here. There is no 'here' to be in."
—from Small Gods, *by Jackie Robinson*

Surviving in Hell

Absolute corruption does not exist, by the definition of corruption. No matter how vile, a creature always has more room to fall. At the same time, the more corrupt a creature becomes, the harder it becomes to corrupt them further. In a sense, malice, weakness, and venality serve as a defense against the tortures of Hell. An Imperator like Cedron (see next page) suffers hardly any ill effects from a visit to his home — he has grown used to a level of pain and hatred approaching that inflicted by the Shadowed Realm.

Vyasa asks, through Lady Iya, whether strength is an asset in Hell — and it is an asset, but only for those who leave quickly. Those who make their home there are better advised to cultivate weakness.

Earth. He is the gateway between existence and perception, living in the space between the light and the image, between touch and solidity. He did not choose to build a Chancel until 1992, when something in a supercollider "amused" him. From the college where it had been built he took the entire Physics Department as his Chancel. Every now and then, a hapless student will transfer in and be absorbed without a trace into Locus Sennacharib, the brambled land.

"It's complex," he admitted freely. "I care for you a great deal; I care for all of my servants. And certainly Tarea has no positive influence on the world. In fact, I might even call her … icky."

I had moved beyond terror. He knew that, I think. But I glared.

He smiled defensively, and held up his hands. "It's just," he said, humor bubbling up in his voice, "that I owe her a debt. There isn't any choice, you see? If I didn't hand you over, I'd be as bad as she is!"

—from Daughters of the Dance, *by Emily Chen*

Integrity

Corruption is the highest virtue of the Fallen Angels and the seething heart of Hell. Some say the entire universe is maintained by the tension between Hell and Heaven; if so, everything has some measure both of beauty and corruption. It follows that no force purely opposes corruption, abstract or no. Integrity in the sense used here is instead the strength to stand against corruption and despite, and win a victory against them in one's own soul.

Imperators have complex and multivariate souls, and do not often have an easily quantified strength of purpose. Most of them lack this version of integrity. Those who possess it pass along a part of their moral strength to their Powers.

- **Honorable** Imperators never enter into a traitorous alliance with the Excrucians, and never serve Hell. Corruption's primary weapon is deception — in particular, deceptions that cause good people to betray what they stand for. The Nobles who serve Honorable Imperators can feel the presence of corrupt deceptions, of lies told freely and maliciously, even of the innocent untruths that result when such lies are passed on. They can also recognize on sight Excrucians, Fallen Angels, and those who serve them. This latter ability overrides Guises, Unblemished Guises and other illusions; it detects Excrucian and diabolic Anchors, as long as they serve willingly; and it penetrates the disguises of Mimics and Deceiver-shards (pp. 201, 205) whenever those Excrucians are actively working towards Excrucian ends. Excrucian Gifts like the Blind Lie (p. 204), which directly interfere with a character's perceptions, interfere with this ability.
- **Principled** Imperators never enter into alliance with the Excrucians. There are Regi with principles who serve Hell: it is said that Lucifer himself is so incorruptible that millennia in the Shadowed Realm has not changed him. Principled Regi of the Fallen are, however, rare. The Nobles who serve Principled Imperators are resistant to personal corruption, and (as above) they can recognize the servants of annihilation and Hell.
- **Degenerate** Imperators are only a step up from Excrucians. Destructive and unpleasant forces, these beings may even respect the Excrucians' cause. The fundamental weakness in a Degenerate Imperator's nature — a susceptibility to Corruption — makes its Powers weak as well. They are particularly vulnerable to diabolic or Excrucian deception. The exact application of this weakness is up to the HG; the first and simplest manifestation of it is usually that divinations showing places and times where Excrucians or Excrucian-shards have been show exactly what the Dark Horsemen wish such scrying Powers to see.

EXAMPLE

Cedron is the weakest of the Fallen Angels, but also one of the most respected. Because he is personally weak, the defilement that is the archstone of the Shadowed Realm has washed away entirely the voice of the Creator in his heart. What is a passion and a cause for most of the Fallen is existence itself for him. His breath is fetid with agony and despair, and in his eyes is an empty void that could consume worlds.

He is allowed up to the Earth as one of the Ten because Fallen Angels are torn between two goals: the damnation of all Creation, and keeping it in existence to be corrupted. It is believed that Cedron will know best how to balance these goals. He is the ultimate example of Degeneracy.

Love

It is said that love is the highest thing there is, that in love there is the greatest or perhaps the only hope for Creation. Imperators possess it in abundance. They do not love mortals, of course, or even other Imperators, but they are passionate about their causes, their allegiances, to their codes as well as to the cause of survival itself. Even the Regi most deeply divided against themselves, even those rare Ymerae who straddle the border between Dark and Light — they do not care less for their convictions. They only subordinate most causes to advance one.

- **Passionate** Imperators have opened the gates of their selves somewhat: they let their zeal for their cause trickle down to their Powers. This is no blessing. These Powers are haunted by the needs of an imperfect universe. Yet there is an advantage, still, mixed with the pain. Each of their Powers may pick an Affiliation their Imperator cares for, in addition to their own personal Affiliation. Service to this Affiliation gives the Power a miracle point; disservice wracks them with guilt, but costs them nothing. If the Power's two Affiliations are the same Code, they gain 2 miracle points for serving it and lose only 1 for disservice.
- **Fervent** Imperators pour their passions into their highest servants like a torrential rain. There is no escape from it: their Powers awaken in cold sweats from horrid nightmares about the state of the world and its disservice to their Imperator's Code. They do not lose their mortal personality or their essential human nature, since Powers who let these things fade generally lose their minds soon after. Still, the guilt for a violation of their codes bites. As above, each character can pick a second Affiliation (one that fits their Imperator), and this can be the same as the first. Now, though, the new Affiliation is much stronger — high service to this Affiliation gives 4 miracle points, and disservice to it costs the Power 2 MPs. If the two

Cyrus stood before me in chains, with rough bloody wounds and blackened burns. He was dead, I knew, but his flesh was thick and ruddy and alive, and his eyes blazed with anger and anguished remorse. He was too real, too vivid to be a dream.

"What do you want," I whispered, pressing myself back.

"Lydia," he said, and there was an ache and an agony so great in his voice that my heart quailed at it. "You must forgive."

I hated him and I feared him, but I said, "You are forgiven."

"I have been purged," he said softly, "but I will still go to Hell if you do not forgive me."

"You are forgiven," I whispered, again.

"No," he said, his voice boiling with need. "You must cry for me."

I hated him and I feared him and I loved him and I said softly, as my heart shattered into two, "I cannot."

—from Boilermaker's Daughter, *by Emily Chen*

Codes are the same, the Power gains 5 MPs for high service and loses 3 MPs for disservice.

- **Cold** Imperators teach their Powers nothing of the joys of service — only the terror of failure. They suffer as greatly as those who have been taught passion, but for them there is never a reprieve, never a moment of relief as they strike a blow. Their Imperator drives them relentlessly on. The player must pick an Affiliation that their Imperator cares for, as above — disservice to its Code costs them 2 miracle points, and they will be drawn away very painfully. Service to this Code, however, gives no benefit at all.

EXAMPLE

India is named (like the country) by one of the names of the Creator. It is an arrogant gesture by an arrogant Lord. He is a Ymera of the Dark, whose chosen purview is the destructive potential of human invention. The bitter chill of his despite for humanity spills through the minds of his Dark-affiliated Powers; the only redeeming spark in him is a furious appreciation for beauty. India most precisely and dangerously denies this spark, for all that one of his Powers serves Heaven. India could be any of the Imperator types above; his Powers' players choose the Fervent Imperator property.

Mastery

Imperators do not normally stay in the Prosaic or Mythic Worlds long enough to master any mortal skill — from swordplay to cooking to tact. Sometimes, though, particularly when very pleased with their Nobles, an Imperator takes a day off to study and to be taught and to learn — and masters utterly a single skill in that day. A Noble is greatly blessed if their Imperator takes a second day; not only does it mean that the subject interested their Lord, but it means that their Imperator will know that skill deeper than any mortal or Power ever has or ever will. This skill should usually be something unrelated, or tangentially related, to their Estates.

- **Scholarly** Imperators have spent one day studying a given skill. It is now a part of their soul, and therefore each of their Powers has natural mastery of that skill. This has two benefits. First, they are better at that skill than any Power of equal or lesser Aspect. Second, any mortal who knows that skill sees instantly that the PCs are masters of that skill, to be respected utterly. On rare occasions, one of them jealously lashes out; most will do anything they can to help the PCs.
- **Polished** Imperators have gone even further, spending a second day on some skill. As before, humans who use that skill instantly recognize the Powers of those Imperators as masterful, as do other Powers to whom that skill is important. The Powers are now better at that skill than anyone of Aspect 2 points higher than their own. If a PC has Aspect 3, and their Imperator has Polished their Cooking skill, the PC cooks better than anyone with Aspect 5. In other words, their effective attribute level is increased by 2 for relevant miracles, and they perform those miracles with flair.

On the first day, they brought the smith a horse to shoe, and it took him a day.

On the second day, they brought him two horses, and it took him an hour.

On the third day, they brought him twenty, and it took him two minutes.

On the fourth day, they led a herd to his forge, and they were shoed before they arrived.

"But master," they said, "why did you take so long on the first horse, and so little time later?"

"The first horse," the master explained, "was a new experience, and I savored it for all that it was worth. After that," and he blushed, "I began to get bored."

—from WATERWALKER'S TALE, *by Melanie Tumbarius*

Integrity

DEGREE OF IMPERATOR'S INTEGRITY	IMPERATOR POINTS
Honorable	2
Principled	1
Degenerate	–1

Integrity cannot be purchased after the game begins.

Love

DEGREE OF IMPERATOR'S LOVE	IMPERATOR POINTS
Fervent	2
Passionate	1
Cold	–1

Mastery

DEGREE OF IMPERATOR MASTERY	IMPERATOR POINTS
Scholarly	1 per skill
Polished	2 per skill
Untalented	–1 per important skill

- **Untalented** Imperators have, perhaps by virtue of their nature, a single important mortal skill that they could not learn even if they tried. Perhaps the Imperator of Horses simply can't drive, or the Lady of Blades cannot use a gun. Similarly, their Powers cannot use this skill at all — they are completely incompetent. This property can only be taken for skills that the Powers would very much like to have.

EXAMPLE

Yvonne, Wildlord of Language, Cybernetics, and Menus, once rewarded Ivo, the mild-mannered Power of Language, for extraordinary service by studying computer science. This enabled Ivo to make the transition to his new duties far more easily, when the Internet began expanding wildly. Feather, the Power of Menus, also takes advantage of this knowledge, with a thriving consulting business in Prosaic Earth. Any mortal computer professional on Earth would hold Ivo and Feather in the highest esteem the instant they met.

Mystery Cult

Humans will likely never fully comprehend the true gods. The Light and the Dark, perhaps, since they are born from humanity. The other Regi, exactly like the fathomless universe they represent, may well be mysteries forever. Yet some humans dedicate themselves to learning what they can. They sacrifice vast portions of their humanity for small tidbits of lore. They call to an Imperator for guidance, for teaching, and for power. These are the mystery cults, and many Powers find them to be useful tools.

- **Multitudinous** Mystery Cults have many members, and in particular many members willing to sacrifice themselves to achieve the Powers' goals. They cannot safely be given rein to solve a problem themselves — the typical member of a mystery cult is anything but subtle or clever. Self-sacrifice is often enough, though.

"Open your hand," he said softly.

I clenched it tighter, trembling. "Father ..." I whispered.

"Your hand," he said, and with sun-browned and dirt-crusted and earth-strong fingers he pulled open my own.

The symbol of the spider glistened wetly in the light.

—from SIROCCO, *by Melanie Tumbarius*

Powers can throw sheer numbers of Cultists at a problem and learn much by observing which fronts the Excrucians choose to defend. Large Cults are also typically rich, which means that a Power far from their Chancel can obtain money to buy the things they cannot create. If the PCs' Imperator does not have this property, the characters can still develop cults, holdings, and agents in the outside world, but on a somewhat smaller scale, and with more active effort needed to maintain them.

- **Empowered** Mystery Cults touch somewhat on the deeper mysteries of the Imperator they serve. They have some personal magics, which are unreliable, weak, and a subset of the magics of their Imperator's Nobles. More useful to most Powers is the cultists' sensitivity to the magics of their Imperator. Powers can therefore can "store" miracles in the Cultists, set to activate near or on the relevant Cultist when a certain situation occurs. Empowered Mystery Cults are also Multitudinous and have the corresponding advantages.
- **Corrupted** Mystery Cults once served the Powers' Imperator, but some great darkness turned them to the Excrucians' cause. The Cult itself is only a small threat, but their attunement to their old Imperator allows for a larger evil. The very elements of being that the Imperator, and hence its Powers, represent have been tainted. The proximity of a Cultist twists the Powers' own magics to serve the Excrucians: Realm and Domain miracles turn darker, and the Chancel or Estate works as much ill as it can within the requested miracle's boundaries. The Cultists are invisible to these Powers' divination miracles, although the foul track the Cultists leave becomes visible within a few hours of their passage. The Corrupted Mystery Cults are Empowered and Multitudinous, at no extra cost — but these properties do the characters no good.

EXAMPLE

The **Cult of Ephes-Dammim** serves Ephes-Dammim, the Angel of Blood and Wine. Ephes-Dammim's Powers have opened a tentative alliance with a faction of the Cammorae, using the Cultists of their Rex Regius as pawns. The Cultists know almost nothing of the true Mysteries, just enough to administer the Sanguine Death, to force their arm into another's throat and drown their victim in an effusion of the Cultist's blood. They die as they kill. The Cultist's corpse is pale and white; the victim's corpse is bloated and crimson; it is said in the cult that the Cultist's soul has gone on to greater learnings in the spirit realm. Who knows? Perhaps they do.

Mystery Cult

STRENGTH OF MYSTERY CULT	IMPERATOR POINTS
Empowered	2
Multitudinous	1
Corrupted	–1

Mystery Cult can only be purchased during the game with the HG's permission.

Respect

DEGREE OF IMPERATOR'S RESPECT	IMPERATOR POINTS
Respectful	2
Considerate	1
Disrespectful	–1

Respect

There is no greater evil than those who believe themselves right.
—from Parables for Our Modern Age, *by Jackie Robinson*

Respect is, according to Melanie Brown (who is, admittedly, its Domina), one of the fundamental forces of the universe. Imperators most often show some respect for their Powers, in their behavior if not in their manner. After all, it would be a waste of a valuable tool to have Powers scrubbing plates in a castle kitchen or emptying the chamberpots. Still, there are degrees of respect, and for some Powers, emptying chamberpots would be a step up.

- **Considerate** Imperators have some care for their Powers. When things seem darkest, the HG might — only might — send in some help from an unexpected direction. Imperators can arrange for such things, sometimes, with delicate touches on the weave of fate. The Powers of Considerate Imperators are traditionally protected from the scutwork of maintaining Chancel and Estate, leaving them free to handle major crises and to entertain themselves. Players should keep in mind, however, that any Power can be called upon for any duty, even unpleasant things like kidnapping or border patrolling. Even Considerate Imperators appear whimsical by human standards.
- **Respectful** Imperators consider their Powers to be extremely valuable assets in the game of life. The traditional work for their Powers tends to be the highest and most delicate tasks: diplomatic duty between Heaven and Hell, undermining major Excrucian footholds on Earth, and even the occasional mission in the spirit realm. They may still be called upon to rule and protect their Chancel and Estate. If they are given petty tasks like torturing information out of a Excrucian-shard, though, then something may be wrong. If they are given the task of washing linens, then something is very wrong indeed. The Hollyhock God is the ultimate authority on what tasks the PCs are given, based on the kind of game the HG wishes to run — but a good HG will take the Imperator's respect for its Powers into account.
- **Disrespectful** Imperators find their Powers very small and puny beings indeed. They may even be considered unfit for the simple tasks almost all Powers perform, guarding Chancel and Estate. If no Power in the Imperator's Familia has high Realm, the Powers may be considered as high servants there, under an otherwise mortal King with the Gift "Sacrosanct" (see p. 119). If some Power has a high Realm, they might rule the Chancel, save that a Senate can overrule their decisions. The Imperator will at the very least watch

OPPOSITE:
The Librarian
by Giuseppe Arcimboldo



its Powers when they go out to deal with threats to their Estate — watch, that is, with scorn and bitter words spilled into the Powers' minds about how much better they could be handling things. Should the Powers ever fail, they may be put to work on the most menial tasks, or even punished — beaten, branded, starved, or imprisoned — for not being sufficient to their tasks. The HG is invited to be as cruel as desired.

EXAMPLE

Hukkok is the Angel of Law, and his charge is the High Court in Heaven. This body determines when an angel is exiled — normally to Earth, though on occasion to Hell. Not even the Valde Bellum is as important, from an angelic perspective. Yet Hukkok has no time, as war wages, to thoroughly research each case. That has become the role of his Powers, whom he trusts to determine the facts and to help assess them. It is a dangerous, devious, complex job — and since the players designing Hukkok want this job, they feel it appropriate to take the "Respectful" Imperator property.

Warding

The greatest boon an Imperator can give its Powers is a Warding: a sign of Creation set upon them that disturbs the Excrucians' use of dark magics. Wardings require the Imperator take some of its greatest power away from the spiritual war and use it to aid its Nobles on Earth; this is a rare and a precious thing. Wardings and Warnings attach to a Power's soul, rather than their body. A physically possessed Anchor receives the full effects of this Imperator Property.

- **Bright Wardings** are the strongest wardings known. Nobles with Bright Wardings drive Excrucian Anchors into agony by their proximity, and break their connection to their Masters with a touch. Excrucian-shards cannot divine the location of the Warded characters, nor can they come within fifty feet of one. The Ward drives them back, snarling. Their magics are weaker where a Ward is set, as if the Warded PC's Auctoritas extended fifty feet in all directions. The effect is even more extreme with full Excrucians, except that full Excrucians can, given a few minutes, dispel this Warding. The Imperator who gives a Bright Warding will almost always replace one if it is dispelled.
- **Dim Wardings** are not quite so strong. Excrucian Anchors can still be "rescued" with a touch, and Excrucian-shards cannot divine the location of a Warded character. However, Excrucian-shards and full Excrucians will only feel a strong discomfort when near such a Power, rather than being driven away. There is no effect on the Warded Nobles' Auctoritas.
- **Bright Warnings** are set on Powers meant to stand at the forefront of the war. No protection is given them: their naked strength is all that stands between them and the Excrucians. Their presence is like a shout. Excrucians and Excrucian-shards within half a mile of these Powers will feel that presence, and know they are called to war. The next move is for the Dark Horsemen to make.

EXAMPLE

Cipher is a strategist (as opposed to the capitalized Strategists of the Excrucians), and so she appreciates the value of the physical side of Earth to the war. Her personal bias is towards the gathering of information; she is not personally concerned with concealing it. In a battle where neither side has secrets, she believes, the Regi are fundamentally more capable. As the practical expression of this optimistic belief, her Powers carry a Bright Warning to the Excrucians. It is her hope that wherever her Powers go, they will stir serpents from their nests.

STRENGTH OF WARDING	IMPERATOR POINTS
Bright Warding	2
Dim Warding	1
Bright Warning	–1

"It's inappropriate," I explained, as nicely as I could.

"Love," he said, "we can offer you existence in eternity, existence that will outlast all of your Creator's worlds. There are wonders out there, dark and bright, that even Harumaph's children tremble at. You will ride — ride, love, beside me — the swiftest of all beasts. You fear me? It is only that you do not apprehend what destruction is."

"I do love you, Ad," I said. "But I may not come with you. See?" And I extended a hand towards him. The white light of the ward dashed through me like lightning at our touch, and he was thrown back, convulsing. Minutes passed.

"I ..." he said.

"You are free from them," I said softly. "Nothing will hurt you now."

His sobs were loud, and the sound soul-aching. I doubt he heard.

—from the Thought-Record of Linda Myers

Sample Imperator Creation

"You can't just ... make up a god," she protested.

"Why not?" Michael asked.

"Because that's my job."

—from Small Gods, *by Jackie Robinson*

Melancthe and her fellow players are building their Imperator. Two of the characters, based on the players' plans to have a Tibetan Buddhist Chancel, have built characters whose history reflects a generally Buddhist morality. Jameson Black is a Power of the Light, and the last character is a Power of the Dark. They determine that their Imperator is a True God, appearing to them as just one more monk of the mountain. He will essentially follow the Buddhist path, seeking to conquer hatred and desire and embrace righteous, compassionate behavior. At the same time, he is painfully aware that humans represent the greatest source of righteousness and malice upon the Earth; he does not know whether it is compassion or destruction that he should bring to them. This inner struggle is externalized in the conflict between Jameson Black and the Dark Power in his Familia.

Melancthe and the others agree they will buy their Imperator Anani by picking the most important trait, buying it, then looking for properties to pay for it before they buy another. The two traits that fit Anani's profile best are "Honorable" and "Advising". One of these offers the strength to resist Corruption, while the other provides wisdom or at least common sense. They cannot purchase "Honorable" after the game begins, so they agree to buy it now.

In order to pay for this property, they must take two negative properties. The first of them, they decide, is "Disrespectful" — a trait that fits the outer behavior of wise mystics. Anani is now a vicious teacher of the Way, more than willing to box a student's ears, set them to peeling a thousand apples, and lash out viciously with his tongue to get his servants into shape. This also fits with "Demanding", so the players take that property as well. In short, Anani is a compassionate god, but he simply cannot understand why others are so blind to the true way.

The players are pleased, because there is one more negative property that they feel they can afford to take: "Granted Handicap." After some thought, they decide that all Anani's Powers are unable to own anything but holy scripts, robes, a begging bowl, and a few coins. This is one of the ways Anani teaches his servants to spurn desire. With the Imperator point this gives them, the players take the other property they wanted — "Advising".

Anani's Properties	Notes
Advising	Anani warns the PCs if they're about to be stupid.
Demanding	Anani always asks for more help than his Powers can give.
Disrespectful	To Anani, the PCs are one step up from novice monks.
Honorable	PCs can sense Excrucians, demons, and their deceptions.
Granted Handicap	PCs can own nothing but holy scripts, robes, a begging bowl & a few coins.

An Example of Character Creation, part 3

Michael, Madeleine, Philip, and Lin now gather to create Ram-Khvastra, their characters' Imperator, and Locus Ram-Khvastra, their Chancel. They have the Imperator's name thanks to Susan's decision to use the *Treachery* campaign, but the nature of that being is up to the PCs. (Note that in another campaign, Ram-Khvastra and its Powers could be entirely different — folk of the air, or the city, or something else again. If your group decides to play in the *Treachery* setting, don't feel compelled to use any of what follows.)

As established earlier, Michael's character Mary Frances has Realm 2 giving Michael 2 Chancel points to spend. The other characters have a mere 5 levels of Realm between them, giving a grand total of 7 Chancel points.

Before deciding on Chancel properties, the players think about the Chancel's "high concept." Most of them want a reasonably mundane home base, to provide greater contrast with their character's abilities. Michael suggests the *Baja Tide* as a Chancel. It's got plenty of space, he explains, and shows the other players pictures of just how huge and lightly crewed a modern oil tanker is. They're impressed, and see good potential in it. The players quickly agree that the tanker Chancel should have the Mobile property. They wince a little at the 7 points this'll cost them, but figure they can make it up with limitations of some sort.

The sometimes violent history of commercial shipping immediately suggests the notion of Banes; everyone likes the idea of a mysteriously haunted tanker Chancel, and they agree to let Susan inflict four Banes on them. This gives them back 2 Chancel points, so that they now have 2 points to spend.

Defender's Blessing seems like a good idea to everyone. They spend 2 points for 1 level of Chancel-wide defense.

Imperator Property Index

PROPERTY/OPTIONS	POINTS	DESCRIPTION
Dynasty Points		
Dynasty Points	1	Per 25 dynasty points
Standard Harvest	1	2 dynasty points per session
Great Harvest	2	4 dynasty points per session
Failing	–1	–2 dynasty points per session
Empathy		
Clear-Sighted	1	Gives Powers wisdom
Sympathetic	1	Gives Powers empathy
Cruel	–1	Does not understand Powers' limits
Galeid		
Transcendent	2	Powers immune to Nettle Rite, nigh-immortal
Inspiring	1	Powers immune to Nettle Rite
Unshining	–1	Powers vulnerable to Excrucian majesty
Grant		
Gift	1	1-point Gift, and Handicap
Handicap	–1	1-2 point Handicap
Guiding Hand		
Prophetic	1	Imperator shares prophecies
Advising	1	Imperator grants common sense
Demanding	–1	Imperator makes unreasonable demands
Incomprehensibility		
Unfathomable	2	Powers indescribable, plus Soul-Twisted
Soul-Twisted	1	Powers invisible to Sight, can lie undetectably
Straightforward	–1	Powers predictable to mortals and Nobilis
Integrity		
Honorable	2	Powers can sense Excrucians, devils, corrupt lies
Principled	1	Powers can sense Excrucians, devils
Degenerate	–1	Powers vulnerable to corruption, deception
Love		
Fervent	2	Extra affiliation: 4 MPs for service, –2 for disservice
Passionate	1	Extra affiliation: 1 MP for service, –0 for disservice
Cold	–1	Extra affiliation: 0 MP for service, –2 for disservice
Mastery		
Polished	2	Powers absolutely master one skill (+2 Aspect with it)
Scholarly	1	Powers master one skill
Untalented	–1	Powers cannot learn one fundamental skill
Mystery Cult		
Empowered	2	Rich, big, magical cult
Multitudinous	1	Rich, big cult
Corrupted	–1	Rich, big, magical, Excrucian-controlled cult
Respect		
Respectful	2	Powers have unusual, important duties
Considerate	1	Powers never do scutwork
Disrespectful	–1	Powers watched carefully, punished harshly for failure
Warding		
Bright	2	Powers protected against Excrucians
Dim	1	Powers somewhat protected against Excrucians
Bright Warning	–1	Excrucians aware of Powers' presence

The players know that Susan comes up with very entertaining recurring NPCs, and they like the idea of someone who can help them get oriented even if they are also sometimes a nuisance. They buy an Erus, an Aggressive Warden, which gives them back another 3 Chancel points. Lin whimsically suggests that the Erus is a reanimated drowned sailor, someone whose ship went down on the spot where the Commencement takes place, and is surprised when everyone agrees that this sounds like fun. Now the characters will have to deal with a classically seaweed-covered, dripping skeleton.

(Most Chancels don't have an Erus at all, let alone one this powerful. The players ponder other options, but keep coming back to this choice. They agree that as the characters get more experienced, Ram-Khvastra will reduce the Erus's strength and eventually retire him; the players will set aside points every so often to pay for this evolution.)

So far the players have taken on 5 points of liabilities, which add to their original 7 for a total of 12. They've spent 9 points, and have 3 left. After vigorous debate, the players settle on Resources, and particularly on normal magic. Within the great holds of the tanker, superstitions and folk magic traditions suddenly come alive. The players have now spent their available Chancel points.

Ram-Khvastra itself seems sort of a blank slate in the players' minds, and they expect to flesh it out more in play; Susan will have her ideas, and they'll have theirs. But they do see a few features they'd like to begin with.

First, they take the imposed handicap that the Powers must spend one week at sea for each day they spend on land. Somewhere along the line, the players started thinking of Ram-Khvastra as a creature of the ancient deeps. That gives them 1 Imperator point. Second, the players choose to make Ram-Khvastra a Cruel Imperator. It lacks any innate sense of human concerns and is wholly dedicated to its Inquisitorial mission. That gives them a second Imperator point.

The players think that having some Dynasty points on hand couldn't hurt, and buy 25 of them with 1 Imperator point. With the other, the players make Ram-Khvastra an Advising Imperator. It may not care about much, but its selection as an Inquisitorial Imperator matters, and it will not knowingly let its Powers stumble into failure.



Chapter 12
Designs

The Book of Questions

Vyasa gave these words into the hands of the rakshasa Bimbesvara, instructing the rakshasa as follows: "Should any summon you in search of this knowledge, you must share it with them and depart in peace."

"I object to this," Bimbesvara answered. "It is not in my nature to converse with a lesser creature and depart in peace; rather, I tear their head from their body and use it as an amusing hand puppet."

Vyasa said, "Very well. You may do this thing, but only if the petitioner's quest for knowledge is insincere."

1. *They pray to Heaven's light. They draw on the strength of the world.*
2. *Their thorns are death and their urns hold power.*
3. *What are the foremost symbols of this world?*

The Nature of Flowers

A rich body of symbolism and myth ascribes meaning and magical properties to the flowers of the real world. The symbology of Nobilis draws heavily on this lore. In the setting, angels used flowers to shape the nature of Heaven and every other world. They are not things of transient beauty, but incarnations of the angels' power. To the Sight, they glow like fireworks, many-hued, lustrous, and full of incandescent strength. They are the foremost symbols of the world.

Every symbol has some power in Nobilis. Some individual Nobles prefer to use Tarot cards, pictographs, music, gemstones, beasts, colors, or the personal possessions of famous dead people rather than Heaven's blooms. This does not hinder them from the perspective of these rules, but it does impede their spiritual progress towards greater wisdom or power.

Jacotte Berthomieu woke up on Friday morning without a face.

She did not frown, for she had no mouth. She did not speak, for she had no voice. Nor did she look around, for she had no eyes.

She could, however, see — for the fire of life burned brightly in her. It cast a clear unwavering light over the room, stark and hot, that her mind could see with; and she saw the gremlin in its corner. Her face hung in its claws like a rubber mask.

It looked up. Twice. "You can't have me back," the face said. "You don't have the power to fight for me. And you don't have anything valuable enough to buy me with."

Jacotte reached inside her and scooped out the fire of her life, and proffered it to the gremlin like a waiter unveiling a meal.

"That might be enough," Jacotte's face concurred, "But what good is a face without a life?"

Jacotte did not answer, for she could not speak. She only held the life burning in her hands.

—from Berthomieu Manoral, *by Keiko Takemori*

Among the Nobilis, heraldic tradition has never died, and with good reason. Recall that much of the universe is a reflection of flowers planted in Heaven. Almost every Estate has a flower that represents it — not necessarily an Earthly flower, but one of the uncountable varieties that grow in the Brightest Realm.

This is dangerous. Such a flower can be used as a "bridge", a physical tie between two of the things associated with it. Achillea, the flower of War, might be used to connect an essentially harmless war game to a military Estate like Blades. Then, carefully, the Excrucians would arrange for the war game to go horribly wrong — killing several humans, and ruining the Excrucian's agents' lives—and the entire reality of Blades, past, present, and future would be pushed a little bit towards its own destruction. The Powers do not know what would happen to the Excrucians' own swords should Blades be wiped from existence; possibly nothing at all, possibly some unimagined calamity.

A Power's coat of arms, also called their Design, is similar in notion if not in detail to a heraldic shield. The Power interweaves the flower of their Estate with a symbol of their own against a stylized background. These are always presented to the universe together, with two positive effects. First, the Excrucians must invoke both flowers, build two intertwined bridges, to directly attack the Power's Estate. Second, the Power feels the desecration of its Estate as damage to their own flesh, and can get a very general idea of where and when, if not necessarily how. With luck, they will be able to reverse the Excrucian attack. This is a deep need for the concerned Power, an important goal for the Power's Familia, and a worthwhile activity for anyone who wants to steal the energy the Excrucians put into such a Breakthrough.

Nobilis offers three approaches to the infinite variety of flowers and their meanings (in Heaven, if not on Earth).

The Symbolic Approach

The HG and players may refer to flowers by their associated meanings — speaking of Achillea as "the flower of War" and naming Abutilon "the flower of Peace". Bilberry is "the flower of Treachery", while Allspice is "Compassion's bloom". This is the simplest solution, and is recommended in normal play. Thus, for example, when the PCs encounter a strange Power for the first time, the HG can tell them:

> *"A circle of black is drawn on his shirt above the heart; within it twine silver-limned flowers of Pain and Glory."*

Perhaps the Power they have met defines himself by some unknown suffering at his selfhood's core, and his Estate is a glorious thing like Learning or Romance — or perhaps his Estate is disease, and he (oh, sad delusion) thinks himself a fantastic being, a veritable wonder of the world.

The Detailed Approach

The system provided on the next two pages allows players to design Heavenly flowers which match their Powers and their Estate well, as well as other details of their Design. Note that there is no formal College of Arms for the Nobilis. Accordingly, there are only a handful of casual customs governing Sovereign Designs.

The Pregenerated Approach

Appendix B (pp. 294-298) lists one hundred flowers common in Noble Designs, likely concepts for Estates and Powers who use these flowers, and the typical situations to which Excrucians tie those flowers. These can be used as an alternative reference for creating Designs, although this is not normally recommended for general play.

Design Construction: Flowers

Colors

The artists in Heaven built their symbology on eight floral colors, each in an infinity of shades. Sometimes a flower took its meaning from its color; other times, the color was only the first reflection, the first approximation of what that flower was.

Petals

The yellow Chrysanthemums on the angels' graves grow thickly, but never open for the sun. Some say this is a sign of the Creator's sadness. Of course, there is more to a flower than just its color — there is the unique petal organization of each. A sample of the meanings this can provide follows.

In some cases, it is difficult to draw these petals with a closed flower. A Power may render the flowers as partially rather than fully closed in their formal Design. It suffices, at least in theory, to bend the petals slightly towards the center.

Leaves and Thorns

Many Heavenly flowers are more than just a stem and a bloom. The leaves and thorns (if any) attached to it help determine the meaning as well. While the angels have ten thousand ways to weigh each flower's meaning, the leaf and thorn pattern corresponding to one of the five stages of existence is the last we will consider.

Example Flowers

Music

Music's flower can be designed several ways, depending on how the player of the Domina or Dominus of Music envisions it. It might be a mostly closed white flower, for Beauty or Magic. It might be an open yellow flower, for Glory. It might be the closed blue of immortality, or the open green of love. Let's say that it's an open yellow flower. If Music's primary use is romantic, it would have clusters of three petals and grass-like leaves; it could also have four large, colorful, showy petals to indicate that it is a thing made for pleasure. Finally, it seems to be a thing of creation — of alternate leaves. The flower might be given a tinge of red for the fire of that Creation.

"The greatest sin," the angel explained, "is deliberate murder; and not just of man, woman, and child, but of an animal, too, or a tree; or even a flower. That which glories in taking life shall in time fall into the pit; this is the message that I as Heaven's herald bear."

"Isn't he marvelous?" Lord Evans exclaimed. "A veritable cornucopia of celestial enlightenment! I do not know how Bretonnet got him for his party, but suspect that skullduggery was involved."

"Indeed, he is marvelous, but is he accurate?" asked Leonard Astulf.

"Presumably," Evans answered. "Personally, I am not concerned, as I have been destined for the pit since the age of three and a half."

"I am simply wondering," Leonard admitted, "if perhaps I ought not have become a florist."

—from Anduril, *by K.C. Danine*

One conclusion: Music's flower is an open yellow flower, tinged with red, with four garish petals and leaves alternating up the stem.

Night

Night's color, quite aside from any objective symbolism, should be black. It would then be closed if Night was meant to be the time when monsters walked, and open in a game where Night falls like a kindly embrace. Some possible traits are negativity, solitude, dreams, or absence: suppose we choose Absence, defining night as the time when there is no Sun. We further choose Endurance (and not Death) as the life stage closest to Night in both its meaning and its existence.

One conclusion: Night's flower is an open flower with a disk of black petals and "radical" leaves growing from its base. It could also have thorns.

Lies hung from him like strips of black ribbon. Promises kept at great cost twined around his brow. Dust from a hundred long journeys drifted from his feet, and his eyes sparkled with a hundred thousand loves.

"How did you come to be this way?" the child asked.

"I became aware," the wanderer said, "that I carried with me everything I had ever done. So powerful was this understanding that I could not help but share it with those I met."

—from The Box, *by Emily Chen*

Design Construction: The Background

The heart of a Design is the two flowers that twine within it. (On rare occasions, because the angels have multiple symbologies, one will be a Tarot figure or a gemstone or some other appropriate symbol.) The surrounding pattern indicates the allegiance and Affiliation of the Power possessing the Design. The table on p. 160 offers suggestions to complete the Design.

An Example of Character Creation, part 4

Now it's time for Michael to settle on a Design for Mary Frances. He likes heraldry and hopes to have fun with this. (He may end up doing illustrations of everyone's Designs, and if he does, Susan says she'll give him a temporary miracle point or something of the sort for Mary Frances.)

Michael realizes that he still hasn't settled on a specific Estate for Mary Frances. He thinks about the Imperator, the Chancel, his character's history, and what the other players are doing, and settles on Commerce. Mary Frances has built her life on trade, and when she gains a Noble's power, she stretches out her interest to encompass all the ways in which people exchange goods and money. One of the major NPCs in the *Treachery* campaign, Thalasseus, has the Estate of Trade. Since this is almost synonymous with Commerce, Susan obligingly changes Thalasseus' Estate to The Deal, which overlaps some with Commerce but also includes social deals outside the realm of finance and does not include the routine exchanges which form the heart of Mary Frances' Estate.

With this Estate in mind, Michael turns to the lists of Design elements. One of the two flowers will be Auricula, the Flower of Wealth. Michael makes a note to look up pictures of it when he's next browsing the World Wide Web.

For the other, Michael decides to make Mary Frances' virtue of Integrity prominent. He sees that Fidelity, which is closely related, is represented by an open blue flower. Given the element of fortune in all commerce, he selects Fortune's pattern of five differently shaped petals. Finally, given Mary Frances' demonstrated endurance, Michael settles on radical leaves, ones which grow around the base of her Integrity flower.

Since Mary Frances is a Power of the Light, her Design's background is gray with white raindrops. The two flowers twine around a caduceus. Michael finds that Auricula can come in many colors, and decides to match that flower with the other by settling for a breed with petals whose outer edge is bright blue and whose inner edge is a deep purple.

Mary Frances Rowland is now ready to enter the world of the Nobilis.

Mary Frances Rowland, The Power of Commerce

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	1: Metahuman	5
Domain	3: Marchessa	5
Realm	2: Realm's Heart	6
Spirit	1: Hearthfire	5

Gifts and Virtues	Durant Virtue: Integrity
Limits/Handicaps	Light Touch Cigarette Bond Handicap: Must spend 1 week at sea per day on land Affiliation: Code of the Light
Wound Levels	1 Deadly Wound (Durant) 2 Serious Wounds 2 Surface Wounds
Total:	25 Character Points

Bonds	STRENGTH	SUBJECT
	7	The *Baja Tide*
	5	Her ability to guard her Estate
	5	Safe harbors of all sorts
	1	Her Anchor, Esteban Zuñiga
	1	Her Anchor, Bon Duc Tran
	1	Her fascination with new shipping technology

Design

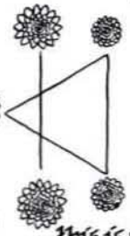
Mary Frances' Design is two blue flowers twined around a caduceus, against a gray background with subtle white raindrops. One of the flowers is Auricula, the Flower of Wealth, shown here with seven petals, each rimmed in bright blue and with a deep purple interior.

The other is the Flower of Integrity, with five differently shaped blue petals and five leaves growing around the stem's base.

Chrysos anthos (the golden flower)~

the flower of mourning.

arrange flowers in falling children style to invoke the ghost of Tao Yuan~Ming.



this is a good apprentice's exercise.

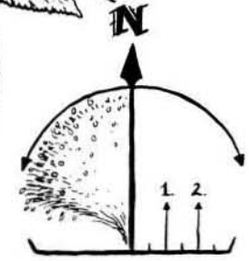
placing the stamen in a font of holy water brings an occasion of great unhappiness to a church.



one can use the leaves to silence one's footsteps, or, by placing one upon a corpse's tongue, permanently quiet an enemy.

dissolve petals in lye and splash through an archway to form an 'angel's gate'~ a source of beauty in this world. this gate becomes permanent if an enemy murders the alchemist while they stand within the arch.

one can brew the flowers in a distillation of cat's tears for an elixir to overcome obstacles.



certain blooms are radially symmetric. seperated from the branch, these invariably point towards true north.





Manna ash (fraxinus ornus L.)~

a tree potent through its association with the Ash of Worlds.

Traits Which Convert to Colors

TRAIT	FLOWER COLOR	OPEN/CLOSED
Abundance	Green	Open
Anger	Silver	Closed
Apathy	Silver	Open
Beauty	White	Closed
Broken Things	Silver	Open
Chastity	Blue	Open
Constancy	Black or Yellow	Open
Error	Black	Closed
Evil	Black	Closed
Faith	Blue	Closed
Falsehood	Black	Closed
Fidelity	Blue	Open
Fortitude	Red	Open
Glory	Yellow	Open
Hope	White	Closed
Humility	Blue	Closed
Immortality	Blue	Closed
Inconstancy	Yellow	Closed
Innocence	White	Open
Jealousy	Yellow	Closed
Joy	Green	Open
Justice	Silver	Closed
Love	Green	Open
Loyalty	Blue	Open
Madness	Purple	Closed
Magic	White	Closed
Magnanimity	Red	Open
Mercurial Things	Silver	Closed
Mirth	Green	Closed
Nobility	Purple	Open
Prudence	Black	Open
Purity	White	Open
Temperance	Purple	Open
Treachery	Yellow	Closed
Truth	White	Open
Unchangeable Things	Silver	Open
Victory	Green	Closed
War (or Valde Bellum)	Red	Closed
Wisdom	Black or Yellow	Open
Youth	Green	Closed

Traits Which Convert to Petals

TRAIT	PETAL AND LEAF TYPE
Absence	A disk of petals
Age	Five identical petals
Atonement	Five separate petals
Beginnings	Cup-shaped flower with heart-shaped leaves
Belief	Four identical petals
Boldness	Five unjoined notched petals
Candor	Almost petalless flowers
Caprice	A double circle of petals
Disgust	Clusters of three petals with grass-like leaves
Dreams	Almost petalless flowers
Eloquence	Six-petalled flowers with sword-like leaves
Error	Irregular petals
Faith	Six-petalled flowers with sword-like leaves
Forgetfulness	Large bracts around a cluster of blooms
Fortune	Five differently shaped petals
Friendship	Trumpet-like flowers
Gaiety	Irregular petals
Home (or a home)	Five unjoined notched petals
Hopes	Almost petalless flowers
Impatience	A spiral of petals
Industry	Irregular petals
Love	Large bracts around a cluster of blooms
Meeting	Two petals free and three petals joined together
Negativity	A disk of petals
Pleasure	Four large, colorful, showy petals
Poverty	Irregular heart-shaped petals
Power	Urn-like flowers with leaves in an X shape
Romance	Clusters of three petals with grass-like leaves
Slander	Entirely petalless flowers
Spite	Entirely petalless flowers
Solitude	Five separate petals forming a bell
Success	Four large, colorful, showy petals
Tranquility	Cross-shaped petals
Treachery	Cross-shaped petals
Unobserved Merit	Four identical petals
Unanimity	Trumpet-like flowers
Useful Knowledge	Tiny clusters of blooms
Valor	Six-petalled flowers with sword-like leaves
Variety	A double circle of petals
Virtue	Tube-like flowers with square stems
Wealth	Four large, colorful, showy petals
Winter	Five identical petals

Colors Which Convert to Traits

COLOR	OPEN/CLOSED	TRAITS
Black	Open	Prudence, Wisdom, Constancy
Black	Closed	Evil, Falsehood, Error
Blue	Open	Chastity, Loyalty, Fidelity
Blue	Closed	Immortality, Humility, Faith
Green	Open	Love, Joy, Abundance
Green	Closed	Youth, Mirth, Victory
Purple	Open	Temperance, Nobility
Purple	Closed	Madness
Red	Open	Magnanimity, Fortitude
Red	Closed	War
White	Open	Purity, Truth, Innocence
White	Closed	Magic, Hope, Beauty
Silver	Open	Apathy, Unchangeable/Broken
Silver	Closed	Mercurial Things, Anger, Justice
Yellow	Open	Constancy, Wisdom, Glory
Yellow	Closed	Jealousy, Inconstancy, Treachery

OPPOSITE:
The Alchemy of Flowers
by Ralph Horsley

Petal Types Which Convert to Traits

PETAL AND LEAF TYPE	TRAITS
A disk of petals	Absence, Negativity
A double circle of petals	Variety, Caprice
Almost petalless flowers	Candor, Hope, Dreams
A spiral of petals	Impatience
Clusters of three petals with grass-like leaves	Romance, Disgust
Cross-shaped petals	Tranquility, Treachery
Cup-shaped flowers with heart-shaped leaves	Beginnings
Entirely petalless flowers	Slander, Spite
Five differently shaped petals	Fortune
Five identical petals	Age, Winter
Five separate petals	Atonement
Five separate petals forming a bell	Solitude
Five unjoined notched petals	Boldness, Home (or a home)
Four identical petals	Belief, Unobserved Merit
Four large, colorful, showy petals	Pleasure, Success, Wealth
Irregular petals	Industry, Gaiety, Error
Irregular heart-shaped petals	Poverty (material or spiritual)
Large bracts around a cluster of blooms	Forgetfulness, Love
Six-petalled flowers with sword-like leaves	Eloquence, Faith, Valor
Tiny clusters of blooms	Useful Knowledge
Trumpet-like flowers	Friendship, Unanimity
Tube-like flowers with square stems	Virtue
Two petals free, three petals joined	Meeting
Urn-like flowers with leaves shaped in an X	Power

Life Stages Which Convert to Leaf Patterns

STAGE OF EXISTENCE	ELEMENTAL ASSOCIATION	LEAF PATTERN
Conception	Air (Thought)	Opposite leaves: in pairs on opposite sides of the steam
Creation	Fire (Emotion)	Alternate leaves: on opposite sides but at different points along stem
Discovery	Water (Life)	Whorled leaves: in groups of three or more
Endurance	Ether (Spirit)	Radical leaves: growing around the base
Death	Earth (Ethics)	Thorns: nasty prickly things which make picking the flower unpleasant

Design Elements Which Relate to Affiliation

AFFILIATION	DESIGN BACKGROUND
The Light	Gray background with white "raindrop" pattern; the flowers twine around a caduceus
The Dark	Incarnadine and black; the pattern swirls, with black aura around red flowers and incarnadine around black flowers
Heaven	No background: flowers are the complete Design
Hell	A virulent poison-green circle, lightly spattered with translucent darkness
The Wild	Crescent moon; the dark part is deep blue
"Unaligned" or concealed allegiance	Black circle outline, appropriate background color in side; original individualized backgrounds are also possible



Chapter 13
Resolving Conflict

The Book of Questions

Vyasa bound these questions into the law of the world. Artists and visionaries, seeking greater truths, wake as if from trance to find these questions scrawled across their canvas or notepad. In a mental hospital in Missouri, the catatonics chant these words incessantly. They spread from one lost soul to another like a disease. The manics shout "Vyasa! Vyasa!" in synchrony.

1. *The Lady Zubeida sits in judgment. "I have decided on the manner of your execution," she tells the condemned man, "but I shall spare your life if you correctly guess the execution I have chosen."*
2. *"My lady," the condemned man answered without hesitation, "you intend to apply the power of your station to divest me of my life."*
3. *In how many ways may Lady Zubeida apply the power of her station?*

4. *The pure restore their strength with purity.*
5. *The common restore their strength with food and rest.*
6. *The low restore their strength with servility.*
7. *What restores the strength of the powers of this world?*



Terminology

"You're sure they don't feel anything?" Ares asked skeptically. He'd been playing with his new set of humans for several hours.

"Positive," the storm god answered. "It's all just a very realistic simulation of sentience. Says so right on the box."

—from The Ant Farm, *by Michael Kay*

This chapter describes the general rules which govern the interaction of the characters' idiosyncratic abilities, whatever those abilities may be. For reference, a summary of the key terminology defining these abilities appears below.

- **Attributes.** Characters have four attributes. Using their Aspect attribute, they perform miracles of the body and mind. With the Domain attribute, they control their Estate and several related concepts. The Realm attribute gives them power over their Chancel. The Spirit attribute gives them miscellaneous abilities. Each attribute has a rating between 0 and 5. Imperators can have attributes as high as 7.
- **Auctoritas.** Characters have an Auctoritas, a mystic shield against other characters' miracles, with a rating equal to their Spirit.
- **Bonds.** A character's Bonds are the things important to them. Characters divide 20 points among their Bonds. The number of points allocated to a Bond, the "Bond Strength", roughly measures the depth of the emotional connection between the character and the bond.
- **Gifts.** Characters have miscellaneous abilities called Gifts. These allow them to perform very specific miracles that their attributes would not otherwise allow. Nobilis must explicitly invoke most Gifts. Some Gifts trigger automatically when a certain circumstance occurs.
- **Handicaps.** A Handicap limits the character in some way, but also increases the number of miracle points available to them.
- **Miracles.** Characters use their attributes and Gifts to perform miracles. Each miracle has a miracle level and a penetration value, and many cost miracle points.
- **Miracle Level.** Each miracle has a level from 0 to 9. The higher the miracle level, the more powerful the miracle. With an Aspect 0 miracle, a Power can ace a physics class. With an Aspect 1 miracle, a Power can win an Olympic bronze medal. With an Aspect 6 miracle, a Power can learn nuclear physics overnight or tunnel barehanded through solid rock.
- **Miracle Points.** Powers can perform some miracles for free. Others cost them some of their limited supply of "miracle points" or "MPs". Each attribute comes with a supply of miracle points — characters have Aspect miracle points (AMPs), Domain miracle points (DMPs), Realm miracle points (RMPs), and Spirit miracle points (SMPs).

Simple miracles cost no miracle points
Normal miracles cost 1 MPs
Hard miracles cost 2 MPs
Deep miracles cost 4 MPs
Words of command cost 8 MPs and injure the character

- **Penetration.** Powers can give miracles a Penetration value. If it exceeds the strength of an Auctoritas, the miracle ignores that Auctoritas.
- **Simple Rite.** Simple Rites are powerful rituals that any Power can perform.
- **Wound Level.** Characters lose deadly wound levels, serious wound levels, or surface wound levels when injured. Running out of wound levels kills a character. (Details appear later in this chapter.)

Conflicts between Beings of Miraculous Power

The city of Samarah stands in the shadow of the stone that holds the world together. An enemy of the world once visited Samarah and struck that stone tenscore blows. Each blow could have felled a palace, slain an army, or shattered a dragon's bones; yet the stone of Samarah held. Not until the last blow did its strength waver and the smallest crack appear; but when its enemy reared back for another blow, he found that he had no strength left at all.

—from Earth Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Nobilis uses a very simple mechanism to determine what happens when several (or many) Nobles, Imperators, and/or Excrucians try to use Noble miracles or Gifts all at once. This method works as follows:

Decision

The HG decides, using any method, an order in which PCs and NPCs who are present at the relevant scene will act.

Action

Each PC or NPC names their action, in order.

- **Mundane** actions are the things ordinary people do, like talking, shouting, thinking, listening carefully, shooting a gun, or dancing. They use the Power's natural abilities, taking life experience but not Aspect into account. Mundane actions should be simple enough that one can describe them and how to go about them in about a sentence. For example, "I fire a bullet at Malachi" or "I back slowly away".
- **Miraculous** actions use any Attribute or Gift, including Aspect 0 miracles. Examples include "I raise a wall of fire in front of the Power of Bronze" or "I follow her, leaping from rooftop to rooftop".

  In a character's turn, they can use a mundane action, a miraculous action, or both. An example combination is "I shout the command phrase for my flying carpet and use Domain to summon up a wind" or "I kiss him quickly goodbye and teleport away".
- **Sustained** miracles take a long time to complete. A Noble could use an Aspect 6 miracle to defeat a thousand humans in single combat, over the course of a week. If the Noble takes a break to eat, the miracle does not go away — they can go right back to single combats afterward. However, in that week, other Powers would naturally be able to take many actions of their own. Sustaining a miracle does not use up a Power's ability to act in their turn. A character can perform mundane actions and other miracles normally while sustaining a miracle, but cannot spend miracle points on them. (The character can perform miracles and use Gifts that cost no miracle points.) For simplicity's sake, a Power can sustain only one miracle at a time.

Completion

When someone takes an action, it is no longer possible to directly interfere with their previous action. That previous action has been completed. Before an action is completed, it is possible to interfere with it, e.g. "I raise a hurricane-like wind to interfere with Arles' aim." After an action has been completed, it is possible to interfere with its effects but not with the action itself, e.g. "I put the fire out with a quick rainstorm."

What Actually Happens

"Was the Resurrection real?"

"Rigged," the angel admitted. "Faked. Pilate was in on it."

"So it wasn't a miracle?"

"Of course it was a miracle," the angel said. "It was the Resurrection. Does it really matter what went on behind the scenes?"

—from The Ends of the Earth, *by K.C. Danine*

The Hollyhock God's responsibility during all this is simple. First, they must decide what the NPCs are doing. Second, they must determine the miracle level of each action the PCs and NPCs take. Finally, they must decide what actually happens when a PC or NPC performs an action. This essentially boils down to two phrases: "Okay", and "No, *this* is what happens." Four examples follow shortly.

The Hollyhock God should determine the length of time between miracles, the exact effect of each NPC miracle, and the effects of the more dubious PC miracles to maximize the excitement of the situation — within the framework presented above.

Automatic Gifts

When someone uses a miracle that activates a Power's automatic Gift, that Gift takes effect at the same time as the miracle. The effects of this Gift complete at the same time as the effects of the miracle.

Opposing Miracles

When two miracles are in direct opposition — the "oh, no, you don't!" situation — the miracle with the highest miracle level triumphs over the other one. If there is a tie, then the effects cancel each other out. A Power can voluntarily use a higher miracle level than an effect requires, for this reason. Penetration does not affect the comparative levels of two miracles.

When two miracles are in indirect opposition, what actually happens is an HG call.

Penetration

Normally, a miracle cannot affect the space inside a Power's Auctoritas (p. 48) until after it completes. Characters wishing to circumvent this can add Penetration from 0 to 7 to their miracles. This increases the miracle's difficulty by the same amount. Penetration allows the miracle to pierce Auctorita of equal or lower level. Thus, a miracle with Penetration 0 ignores a Spirit 0 Power's Auctoritas. It costs the same as a miracle without Penetration. A miracle with Penetration 5 can affect the space inside any Power's Auctoritas, but suffers a 5-level increase in difficulty.

Gifts

Gifts also have a miracle level associated with them. This means that they can fail when directly opposed.

Long-Range Combat

If a Noble or even an Anchor is near the place where some miracle worked from far away takes effect, the Noble senses its origin. They receive a mental picture of the other miracle worker. The Noble can then cast back one Domain miracle along the path that that magic took, to the place where the person remotely using power is. This retaliatory miracle does not cost the extra DMP that long-range Domain miracles usually do.

Past Effects

Directly undoing something another Sovereign did in the past requires a miracle of the same level as that effect originally cost. The Auctorita of the Sovereign and the one trying to undo their work are irrelevant. If the miracle literally affects or divines the past, however, rather than affecting the result, the Auctoritas would still apply.

Conjunctional Effects

Powers can work together on a miracle, if all of them have something to contribute. The Estate or Chancel of each involved character must play a central role in the effect. All Powers must use a miracle of an equal level. This yields a miracle of level [Level Used + number of extra Powers past the first]. Two Powers using level 3 miracles yields a level 4 effect, such as a lesser creation; three Powers yield a level 5 effect; four yield a level 6 effect. At most five Powers can contribute to a given miracle.

Four Example Scenarios

HG: Malahdi fires a bullet at Whisper. Level 7 Aspect, 2 Penetration.
WHISPER'S PLAYER: I dodge so fast the bullet misses.
HG: Okay. That's a Level 7 Aspect miracle, costing 2 AMPS.

HG: Malahdi fires a bullet at Whisper. Level 7 Aspect, 2 Penetration.
WHISPER'S PLAYER: I make the river behind him hit his back with a crashing wave.
HG: Okay. That's a Level 6 Domain miracle, costing you 4 DMPS. He'll miss.

HG: Malahdi fires a bullet at Whisper. Level 7 Aspect, 2 Penetration.
WHISPER'S PLAYER: I don't have time for him. I tackle the real threat, Penangul.
HG: Okay. You know, if you leap at Penangul unexpectedly enough, the bullet'll miss.

HG: Malahdi fires a bullet at Arikel. Level 7 Aspect, 2 Penetration.
ARIKEL'S PLAYER: I fling myself to the side and bring down a curtain of night to confuse his aim.
HG: No. He's got a bead on you from before you called down the night, and a mundane dodge just can't compete with an impossibly perfect shot. By the way, that Level 4 Domain miracle cost you a DMP.

Strategy in Miraculous Conflict

Whenever two miracles cancel out, one combatant gains a distinct advantage. Both miracle-users are losing time, actions, and possibly MPs to the process; but one of them chooses to, deliberately, and with a reason. Perhaps they wish to stall, or perhaps they need fewer MPs to maintain the stalemate.

For this reason, directly opposed miracles is never the preferred strategy for all parties in a miraculous combat. Overpowering the enemy with irresistable high-powered miracles is attractive, but a waste of MPs if they do find some way to resist. Most miraculous combat, therefore, has one or both parties struggling to come up with clever indirect effects that thwart their assailant.

Players should try hard to keep their actions in a miraculous conflict entertaining, clever, and creative enough to indirectly oppose more powerful effects. The HG should keep the Monarda Law in mind, and allow them to attempt strange and interesting tricks. To answer Vyasa, the Lady Zubeida can apply the power of her station in an infinite number of ways, if she chooses to; no wonder the condemned man could not guess which she would employ.

Two complete example conflicts follow the section on Wounds, on the next page.

Wounds

They were seven humans, locked in a labyrinth with a many-legged monster. In the movies, this would have been enough to doom them. But Janice was determined that they would not be like the people in the movies. They would fight. They did fight. In the chamber of dripping ice, they speared it through the eye with a shaft of rock. Still it came for them. In the halls of silence absolute, they cut away three legs. Still it came for them. In the open room, they ripped its side. Still it came for them. And when it was sufficiently wounded, they tore the last of its flesh into shreds and scattered them wide.

It was a good victory. Against anything else, it might have worked.

But this creature still came for them, without its flesh, and without its mouth it ate them; and they could find nothing to fight.

—from Jack, *by Keiko Takemori*

Wounds are dramatic. The risk of death adds spice to any roleplaying game. However, "death" as such comes very rarely to the Noble kind — even the mortal ones. It's just not a very big part of the genre. Accordingly, the HG should give a PC or major NPC every chance to survive.

Characters have a number of wound levels equal to their Aspect + 4. Divide these evenly into deadly, serious, and surface wounds. If there is an extra wound level, it becomes an extra surface wound. If you have two extra wound levels, they become an extra surface and an extra serious wound. A PC with Aspect 4 (and 8 wound levels) has 3 surface wound levels, 3 serious wound levels, and 2 deadly wound levels.

ASPECT	WOUNDS
0: Of Mortal Form	1 Deadly; 1 Serious; 2 Surface
1: Metahuman	1 Deadly; 2 Serious; 2 Surface
2: Legendary	2 Deadly; 2 Serious; 2 Surface
3: Inhuman	2 Deadly; 2 Serious; 3 Surface
4: Celestial	2 Deadly; 3 Serious; 3 Surface
5: Exemplar	3 Deadly; 3 Serious; 3 Surface
6: Imperial	3 Deadly; 3 Serious; 4 Surface
7: Imperial	3 Deadly; 4 Serious; 4 Surface

PCs can acquire cuts, minor burns, and bruises. Their injuries do not substantively impair them until something really terrible happens to them. For example, if a Power leaps out a window as a building collapses, rubble may strike them and broken glass may score them, but the effects are not that terrible. If the Power fails to get out in time, being buried in rubble could give a nasty injury. If they are Durant, it might take a terminal velocity fall or a Mach 2 arrow in the side to hurt them. Sacrosanct and Immortal Powers need even more extreme measures. When a sufficiently horrible thing happens, the PC loses one deadly wound level.

When characters have no deadly wound levels left, they are either in very bad shape or naturally fragile. Their mortal body has most likely given out, and only will and miraculous energy holds them together. At this point, it takes less to hurt the character. A serious wound — a sword cut down the arm, a short exposure to fire, or (for Durant characters) cyanide poisoning or a gunshot to the head — costs the character a serious wound level.

When a character runs out of serious wound levels, they are either at death's door or naturally very frail. Anything nastier than a scratch or bump costs them a surface wound level. When they run out of surface wound levels, they die.

A character cannot lose serious wound levels while they have even one deadly wound level left — damage insufficient to do a deadly wound leaves them physically battered but unimpaired from the rules' perspective. Similarly, a character cannot lose surface wound levels while they have even one serious wound level left. As characters weaken, most become more conservative about the risks they face.

Characters with no deadly wound levels left must pay 1 extra MP for any miracle or Gift that uses miracle points. Simple miracles and simple-miracle Gifts remain free. Characters with no serious wound levels left must pay 2 extra MPs for any miracle or Gift that uses miracle points.

NPCs built using this system are, like PCs, hard to kill. Someone intended to "feel" like an archetypal scholar, coward, or victim, however, should be more frail. Similarly, a character that should die, for story purposes, had best not cling ferociously to life. Suppose a PC's enemy hires a nasty sneak to betray them and then leaves a bomb in the sneak's home to tidy up loose ends. If the malefactor lives, one deadly wound level short, the explosion is something of an anticlimax. Similarly, if the PCs have to escort and protect a scholar, they should not leave their charge in a minefield, knowing that one or two explosions won't hurt them. In such cases, the HG should modify the wound levels given.

If the HG doesn't really care whether an NPC lives or dies, the character should have fewer wound levels. This increases the risk that something will suddenly take them out of the

Assessing Damage

EFFECT ON HUMANS	Inflict pain	Hurt	Seriously injure	Probably kill	Kill/mangle	Massive overkill
MIRACLE LEVELS	0	0-1	2-3	4-5	6+	7+
MUNDANE WEAPONS	Fist	Knife	Gun	Machine guns	Tanks	Nuclear explosion
	Foot	Animal claw	Monster claw	Fire	Avalanche	Volcanic eruption
DAMAGE TO						
IMMORTAL	None	None	None	Annoyance*	Surface Wound	Deadly Wound
SACROSANCT	None	None	Annoyance*	Surface Wound	Serious Wound	Deadly Wound
DURANT	None	Annoyance*	Surface Wound	Serious Wound	Deadly Wound	Deadly Wound
UNDEFENDED	Annoyance*	Surface Wound	Serious Wound	Deadly Wound	Deadly Wound	Deadly Wound

*Bruises and scratches

The listed miracle levels and mundane weapons are only examples. Some miracles of a given level are deadlier than others. A gunshot to the head is deadlier than a gunshot to the arm. Determine how vicious the damage is after evaluating the effects of countermiracles. For instance, miraculously drenching an area in extinguisher foam reduces the damage inflicted by a major creation of fire. A major miracle, poorly countered, can usually do massive overkill. Well-countered, it might not even kill or seriously injure a human. Damaging an Immortal is not always possible; their wound levels are listed for those times when they can be.

action, and thereby makes violence in the world seem more real. Alternately, if the NPC is physically fragile, the HG should reduce some deadly wound levels to serious wound levels, some serious wound levels to surface wound levels, or both. The NPC will still take some work to kill, but is easier to wound.

For example, an Aspect 2 minor NPC might have fewer levels than the normal six — 1 deadly wound level, no serious wound levels, and 2 surface wound levels. An Aspect 1 NPC intended to seem "fragile" might have 2 serious wound levels and 3 surface wound levels. An ordinary human, both fragile and relatively unimportant, might have 1 serious wound level and 1 surface wound level. A character who begins with no deadly wound levels suffers no penalty for "running out" of these levels.

Characters eventually heal their wounds. First, they heal surface wounds; then serious wounds; then deadly wounds. These heal at the rates below.

Recovery Rates

RESISTANCE LEVEL	SURFACE WOUND	SERIOUS WOUND	DEADLY WOUND
Normal	1 day	1 week	1 month
Durant	1 hour	1 day	1 week
Sacrosanct	1 minute	1 hour	1 day
Immortal	Almost instant	Almost instant	Almost instant

For 1 Aspect miracle point, a character can move their recovery time one step down this chart. This effect lasts until they lose another wound level. For example, a character without any defensive Gifts can spend 2 AMPS and heal all lost surface wound levels in one minute each, then all lost serious wound levels in one hour each, then all lost deadly wound levels in one day each.

If a PC wishes to avoid a fight, they should have a fair chance to run or otherwise escape; the only real exception is when the player would like their PC present but feels that it would be poor roleplaying to have the PC a willing participant. An example of this might be the climactic battle of the campaign.

Using a Word of Command costs the character their highest remaining wound level. Moreover, such a wound takes a month or more to heal — even for Immortals and Powers who spend AMPS.

Non-lethal Attacks

Of what use is murder?
—Scelto of the Provenance, Excrucian

Despite the omnipresence of death in mortal and Noble affairs, it is not the only end to a battle. Certain forms of attack render their victims unconscious by design. Others do so by fortuitous coincidence.

Forms of attack that can render a victim unconscious include potent soporific and hypnotic assault, asphyxiation, and blunt trauma to the head. Any miracle intended to knock its victim unconscious can do so if there's a reasonable explanation for how it works. Nobilis are expert at judging the force and target of their blows.

Attacks aimed at rendering a character unconscious cost wound levels normally. A high-Aspect club to the back of the head might do a deadly wound level. Strangling an Aspect 2 character for minutes on end might do the same, as would shooting them up with an elephant's load of tranquilizer or filling their cell with soporific gas. Serious wound levels come from low-Aspect cracks on the back of the head, chloroform, and tasers.

When a character loses their last deadly wound level to such an attack, they may fall unconscious, at the HG's option. When a character loses their last serious wound level to such an assault, it renders them unconscious unless the HG rules otherwise. The HG can also rule that a character falls unconscious when losing their last deadly or serious wound level to a more conventional attack.

If a PC has Durant, Sacrosanct, or Immortal, they resist non-lethal attacks based on physical trauma just as they resist lethal attacks. It requires more extreme measures to remove one of their wound levels. If a character has Immutable or Eternal, they resist non-lethal attacks based on drugs, normal magic, or mind-affecting Excrucian Gifts. Wound levels lost to non-lethal attacks return within several hours, unless the character's normal recovery rate for such wounds is better.

Example Combat

It's no good expecting humans to start a war on their own. They never do it on schedule.
—from PRINCIPLES OF THE DARK, *by Merriweather James*

This records a conflict between the Powers of Blood, Wine, and Rage and the Excrucian-shard Endymion. Endymion is a Strategist (pp. 206-207), part of an Excrucian faction blessed with military foresight and the ability to weave malevolent Excrucian power into previously mundane objects. Endymion is weaving that power into a just-built military base, preparing it to subvert the souls of the soldiers due to arrive the next day. Endymion has claimed three members of the skeleton security force as Anchors. The Nobles, trying to figure out what Endymion is doing, sneak into the base. A minute or so after triggering a silent alarm, they're searching through some files on the first floor of the compound while the security force closes in.

The four principal combatants are as follows:

- *Sutton Smith,* Power of Blood, has Aspect 2, Domain 1, Spirit 3, and Durant. He is blind; in combat, he wields two guns, targeting by sound.
- *Kimberly Hilbrook,* Power of Wine, has Aspect 3, Domain 3, Spirit 0, and Elemental.
- *Mirari Constano,* Power of Rage, has Aspect 1, Domain 2, Spirit 2, Acidic Spittle, and Flight.
- *Endymion,* Strategist-shard, has Aspect 1, Spirit 2, an HG-designed Gift "Fortune's Favorite" that causes minor things to go wrong for his enemies more or less continuously, and the World-Breaker's Hand (see p. 206 for description).

HG: Kimberly, you're the first to hear a change in the pattern of the footsteps echoing in the halls. They sound more purposeful now.

KIMBERLY: Shoot. They're probably coming for us. Is there a window in this room?

HG: Nope.
KIMBERLY: Outside wall?
HG: Yes.
KIMBERLY: I spend 2 AMPs and open-palm the wall, knocking out a section large enough for us to head out through.
MIRARI: "Oh, that's subtle."
HG: A ragged circle of concrete about five feet around rips free of the wall and goes flying out into the lot. The footsteps in the halls break into a run. You can hear shouts from outside. Everyone's going out?
SUTTON: No point in staying now. I could hear the wall tear, right?
HG: Yes.
SUTTON: I'm going out.
MIRARI: Myself as well.
KIMBERLY: [*Her player nods.*]
HG: There's the crack of a sniper shot as Sutton emerges through the hole. I'm going into conflict resolution now. Sutton, you'd say the shot came from a third floor window; your action?
SUTTON: I'm drawing my guns and spending an AMP to twist out of the way.
[*Drawing two guns is a mundane action; spending an* AMP *lets Sutton dodge at effective Aspect 3, which is enough to avoid a mundanely fired bullet after it leaves the gun.*]
HG: Kimberly, Mirari, there are a few armed guards in sight as you come through the hole in the wall — bad luck, that, but you are on a military base. A gun barrel gleams from a window high overhead. Gosh, another bit of bad luck — it's almost as if someone had this all figured out in advance. Any actions?
KIMBERLY: Figured it all out indeed. Bloody Strategists. I'm going up the wall to yank the rifleman out the window.
MIRARI: I'm picking off one of the guards with acid.
[*This uses the Acidic Spittle Gift, which, as a level 4 miracle, requires substantial Aspect to dodge outright. The human guard doesn't have Aspect, so the* HG *doesn't object to the cavalier assumption that the guard sizzles into ash.*]
HG: Okay, sniper's action — done.
[*The sniper is one of Endymion's Anchors. The* HG *figures that Endymion likes to cover entrances, and the* PCs *had the bad "luck" to go out the side of the building that has one. At the moment, Kimberly is in the process of yanking the sniper out the window; Endymion responds by using the World Breaker's Hand to take away most of the structural integrity of the ground below. The* PCs *can interfere with this effect, but they can't sense it, so they'd have to interfere by guess or by accident.*]
HG: Sutton, your dodge completes successfully. The bullet misses. Next action?
SUTTON: I shoot all the hostiles. Aspect 2. Including the guy Kimberly's trying to throw to the ground, Penetration 0, just in case he's a Candleflame.
HG: Gotcha. Kimberly, you yank the sniper out the window and he falls to the ground, the concrete walkway splashing to all sides.
MIRARI: What?
HG: The ground seems to have become vaguely fluid, sort of like concrete and grass quicksand. Kimberly's action's complete; what's her next action?
KIMBERLY: I'm keeping on top of this guy. Flipping down, two feet onto his stomach, to see if I can drive him into the ground, since it's all fluidy.
HG: Penetration on that?
KIMBERLY: I'm not ready to spend any miracle points yet, but I'm doing a pretty amazing bit of gymnastics here, so I'd better stick to Aspect 2, and that means Penetration 1.
HG: Mirari, you've dissolved a guard.
MIRARI: I'm flying into another guard hard enough to stun him so I can grab a gun of my own.
HG: Sniper's action — done. A small force bursts into the room you came out of; one of them is snapping off orders in a continuous stream. The others are moving into position and trying to open fire.
[*Endymion switches perspectives to another Anchor, spends some* MPS, *and uses that Anchor to give high-Aspect tactical advice to the guards. Guards and other minions are pretty much like a sword or a club — you can treat them as a weapon for purposes of Aspect attacks. Since he has to pay a 3* MP *overhead to use Aspect miracles through an Anchor, he feels he should make it count — so he spends 2* MPS *more and exhausts his 5* SMPS *on an Aspect 3 effect.*]
HG: Sutton, you nail everyone outside with a bullet, and from the sounds you think you've killed them, including the fallen sniper. Action complete.
[*The sniper has no Auctoritas when Endymion is not wearing his body.*]
SUTTON: I do the same thing to the guys inside.
HG: Mirari, you've knocked over one of the guards Sutton killed and now have his gun.
MIRARI: Yay! I knocked out a dead guard!
HG: He does look rather stunned.
MIRARI: I whirl up into the sky, looking for another sniper or other threat to take out preemptively.
HG: Kimberly, you shove the sniper corpse deep into the concrete, presumably bouncing off fast enough to — where do you land?
KIMBERLY: This is only an Aspect 2 miracle; I think I'm going to land in a Judo roll and sort of splash to a halt in a crouch.
HG: Done. What's next?
KIMBERLY: I'm going to dodge.
HG: Okay. Sutton, it's terrible — every time you train your gun on another guard, they've just stepped behind cover; your bullets thunk into trees, walls, and in one case a signpost. Bullets *spang* off your skin, leaving bruises and dents. Overhead, one slams neatly into Mirari's chest, missing the heart but costing her her Deadly wound level and knocking her for a bit of a loop. And it's your action, Sutton.
[*Endymion's tactical action just completed, although he's sustaining the miracle itself. For an explanation of wound levels, see pp. 164–165.*]
SUTTON: I'm standing on unstable footing in the middle of a military base facing a team of guards who can dodge and hit me? Nuh-uh. The ground erupts in a dozen sustained geysers of blood between me and them and I'm legging it for the fence.

HG: Er, isn't that likely to induce *dementia animus*?
SUTTON: Point. I'll set the geysers to turn off in a minute or so, and the blood to fade away — it's night, they're military, they'll explain it away if they can explain away the rest. Even if they can't, it's no worse than killing them.
[*Sutton's miracle is a Lesser Creation, and thus costs him 4* DMPS *for a deep miracle — he's only 3 Domain levels short, but a hard miracle just won't get him there.*]
HG: Okay. Kimberly, you're doing a pretty good job of evading the bullets; looks like if you put them all together, they're attacking about as well as one guy with Aspect 3.
SUTTON: I'm doomed.
KIMBERLY: Sutton has the right idea. I'm going to collapse into a pool of wine and flow towards the exit.
[*This uses her Elemental Gift.*]
HG: Mirari, besides saying "ow" — your body's trying to shut down due to shock, and it's your miraculous nature holding it together — any action?
MIRARI: Who injures me, injures my pride. I fill their heads with such terrible rage that they will turn on one another. Then, I flee.
[*This is a Level 4 Lesser Creation of Rage, normally costing 2* DMPS. *Because she's pretty seriously wounded, she pays an extra* MP. *This miracle fairly directly opposes Endymion's level 3 miracle — both Endymion and Mirari are specifying the actions of the soldiers. So Mirari's will dominates.*]
HG: As you pass over or under the fence, you see the task force turning one against another — all save the man giving the orders, struggling fiercely with words and hands to regain control of his force.

A skilled Hollyhock God can take liberties with action order and completion to improve the logical flow of events; see Chapter 7 for an example. Note that PCs and NPCs are rarely this cavalier about getting into a fight outside of examples of combat. Some player groups are exceptions.

Example "Formal" Combat Between Nobilis, Using Ghost Miracles

Here Turner, Power of Rectangles, fights Casper, Power of Loathing. Turner has just insulted Casper's Estate, and so the conflict begins. Casper opens with a ghost miracle; Turner replies in kind. By unspoken consensus, they proceed with the combat as a formal duel using ghost miracles only.

CASPER: With a "ghost miracle", I create abhorrence in him for the ground on which he stands.
TURNER: Countering in kind, I cause a 3-D rectangular pedestal of gold to burst through the ground beneath me, lifting me upwards.
RANDOM PLAYER: What exactly are we seeing?
HG: Casper and Turner are still standing facing each other across the muddy grass, but you can also perceive the general sense of what they're doing with the ghosts — as if you're seeing the real world but remembering an identical confrontation that used real miracles instead of shadowplay.
CASPER: He'll just keep doing that, I suppose, if I make him loathe gold. How about if I make the spirits of the air about him unwilling to enter his lungs?
TURNER: "If I start having trouble breathing," I comment [*as a mundane action*] "then the air won't have time to worry about how much it hates me." Then I fire a thousand geometric paper-thin razorblades at him.
CASPER: Holly, does my Auctoritas apply?
HG: Not until he decides to make it real.
CASPER: I induce such a hatred in my body for metal that it will roll out of the way of the blades without my having to spend an Aspect miracle on it.
TURNER: Can he do that?
HG: As the ghost of a Major Creation, sure.
TURNER: <unprintable> I trap him in a narrow box with the blades — the only way away from them is through them.
CASPER: Mistake; I should have made the blades loathe me. Okay … does gravity have a spirit?
HG: Mm. Gravity has a Power and an Imperator. However, everything that is bound to the earth has a specific gravity spirit — a rope-like creature made of light that binds it to mother Earth.
CASPER: All the gravity spirits in this area hate their jobs. And I'm throwing myself out of the box and grabbing hold of the ground-spirit as a mundane action.
TURNER: It's a very sturdy box.
CASPER: This jump and grab isn't a ghost miracle, it's a real action. You can make the box real, if you like, but that'll give me a chance to counter the blades before they become real.
TURNER: Hm. While I'm starting to float off the ground and into effective helplessness.
CASPER & HG: Yup.
TURNER: I say, "My deepest apologies," and concede the duel. At least I've gotten the satisfaction of seeing him dive into the real-world mud.

Story Boundaries

Stories are not simply OOC conventions. Just as the Ages of the World partition time, each marking an ending and a beginning, a time when the world becomes new, stories mark identifiable chapters in the characters' lives. When a new story starts, something in the stream of each character's life has resolved itself. Events have nailed certain truths on the gates of history. The characters have experienced something that changes who they are. It is an ending. It is a beginning. It is a transformation. The previous story is no longer a part of their lives, but rather a part of their history. Whether five seconds or five decades pass before the next story begins, they recover their full share of miracle points. They have new strength. How could they not? It is a new lifetime. Vyasa asks what restores the strength of the powers of this world. The answer is transition: the passing and beginning of an age of their lives.

Disease and Aging

Treat an opportunity to catch a disease just like a similarly dangerous attack. If a Power cannot avoid catching a particularly deadly disease, they lose a wound level. A less contagious or less deadly disease affects the Power only if the Power has no deadly wound levels; if they have none, it costs a serious wound level. Powers only catch colds and the like when their system is extremely taxed — when they have no deadly or serious wound levels left. Immutable Powers resist disease, much like Durant characters resist damage, and heal diseases as quickly as Durant heals wounds. Eternal Powers are immune to disease.

As a rule of thumb, an Aspect 0 Power has a lifespan of about 100 years. Each level of Aspect adds about 50 years to that total. Immutable doubles or triples this lifespan; Eternal increases it to "indefinite." One would expect that an Aspect 3 Immutable Power to live 500-750 years unless environmental factors or enemies cut that lifespan short. Advanced age does not limit a player character unless an appropriate Handicap is taken.

"My," Thomas said. "You do look under the weather. Are you ill?"

"Tuberculosis," I admitted. "Feels like Hell. I should be okay for Thursday's party, though."

—from the Thought-Record of the Marchessa of Shadows

Miracle Point Recovery

There is nothing infinite in this Creation. Even your own power will run dry. Even the Nobilis have limits.

You have a duty to the world. Never admit to these limits. Never accept them.

You are a lord or lady of this Earth.

—from Becoming Noble, *by Fayola Osiagobare*

A Power's miracle points return to their permanent level at the start of each story. (See p. 94 for a complete description of this process.) Restrictions are the other common source of a character's miracle points. The Nettle Rite, described above, can give a Power some MPs, and can also give the Power's Familia dynasty points. Powers can use these dynasty points as their own MPs in a pinch. Finally, a Power can use the Rite of the Last Trump (a simple rite, also described on p. 124) to move miracle points from one attribute to another. This rite is costly; prudent Powers manage their miracle points so they never need to redistribute them.

Experience

"Pain purifies the soul," he told me.

"Then I must be very pure."

"I agree," he said. "That is why I must release you for a time, to allow you to become corrupt again, before I finish this interrogation."

—from the Thought-Record of Augusta Valentina

Characters in Nobilis grow stronger naturally with play; their Imperator's esteem for them grows, their reputation increases, and the players become more familiar with the system. They also receive what roleplaying games usually call "experience" — extra points given out over time that their players can use to make the characters more capable.

Every time there is a successful and enjoyable game session — that is, everyone had fun — the characters receive a Dynasty Point. At the completion of each successful, enjoyable story — one where every player had fun in most of the sessions — the players choose whether to receive one new character point each or a new Chancel point. They can spend this point immediately or save it for some future need. It is up to the HG whether PCs can buy Gifts or attribute levels in the middle of a session or story. Note that Powers cannot buy attribute levels greater than 5.

There are a few other ways for the HG to hand out experience. Perhaps the PCs get half a character point at the completion of each session, no matter how it went. Perhaps the PCs do not gain character points at all, but will simply develop Gifts and attribute levels that reflect the life they lead. (If so, the HG should strive to maintain PC parity.) Note that the default experience system is not intended to "force" the players to have fun; it is meant to encourage players to help the other players have fun.

Players should usually know the in-game explanation for any increase in their character's power. Their character will be training, or studying the flow of *spiritus Dei* through their system, or finding ingredients with which to build a focus; perhaps they are simply buttering up their Imperator in hopes of a Gift the PC really, really wants. While the Hollyhock God may choose to veto Gifts the HG doesn't want in their game, they should normally go along with the player's desires in this matter.

Death

Those who survive to the dawn of the Fourth Age will know wonders such as I cannot describe. They who die before that time will, for the most part, suffer utter extinction. If there is a purpose to human life, it is simply to live long enough to see the Ages turn. As for those born too soon, they have no purpose at all.

—from the Sacred Texts of the Traders

When a player character dies, the Imperator enNobles a new Power to take their place. Normally, this new Power has the same player as the dead one. Most of the "experience" the old character had should carry over, though not necessarily all of it.

The only part of the character that must be the same is the character's primary Estate. Even then, the new character can have a completely different approach to that Estate. This allows for a different set of associations which the character can affect through their Domain attribute.

For example, Arikel, Power of Night, can affect darkness and dreams as well as Night itself with his Domain. If he died and a new Power took his place, that Power might use their Domain to control ninjas, criminals, and those who work "under cover of night" instead of dreams and darkness.

Ianthe writes: How to be a Hollyhock God

Part 5

The Fine Arts of Rules Resolution

"I am a transfinite barrier," she explained. "It is within my power to stop any finite force brought to bear. You are a finite creature; you cannot pass."

"Duty obliges me to walk to the end of the world," I said, "and I feel it lies beyond this point."

"Then the question," she said, "becomes: is duty a finite force?"

—from The Duchess' Needle, *by Emily Chen*

Sometimes, issues will come up in the game that will confuse you — often as a question of the form: "Can an x-level miracle do y?"

The first thing to remember about rules interpretation is: it's your game. You have the right to make level 9 Realm miracles free for all Powers; you *certainly* have the right to decide whether an Aspect 3 miracle is good enough to hear a 15th-floor office conversation from the street. If you're wrong, then so what? All it means is that you've changed the rule a little. You can change your mind after the session, if you decide on reflection that you made a mistake. The rules in your house belong to you, not the author.

In general, you may want to think through what *you* want each level of miracle to be able to do. Do this before the game, and you'll be able to answer this kind of question faster on the fly. Here are some sample questions, along with the canonical answers; if you don't like the answers, change them!

Q: What level Aspect miracle covers entering a death-like trance?
A: A level 2 Aspect miracle puts the Power into a trance with very limited pulse and respiration. A level 4 miracle makes the trance indistinguishable from death for a few days. A level 6 miracle can produce a trance indistinguishable from death for as much as several years.

Q: How does spending AMPs for senses work?
A: A Power always has senses equivalent to those a simple miracle of Aspect would give them. Spending AMPs increases the Power's sensory acuity for an entire scene. An Exemplar who spends 4 AMPs for level 9 senses can hear things said in another city and has the mental processing power to find a specific conversation.

Q: Can you turn someone into a toad by using Domain over Toads?
A: Nope. You can turn a toad into a person with a level 6 change miracle, however. If you must turn someone into a toad, you could create an illusory giant toad that covers the person completely and moves with them, or a real giant toad with the human in their stomach. Both of these are level 4 miracles of creation. As a general rule, though, people aren't part of the Estate of Toads.

Q: Can humans sense the "fragrance of true nobility" that suffuses a high-Realm character?
A: Yes, unless the Power creates a Guise and deliberately occludes the stench.

Q: Can Powers with Realm 2 – 5 communicate via their representations in the physical Realm's Heart?
A: Yes, if the nature of their representation there permits it.

Q: How long does an Auctoritas protect a character against the secondary effects of a miracle?
A: Miracles become a part of "normal" reality a few seconds after the "conceptual" action of the miracle is complete. Until that point, the Auctoritas completely protects the Power from the effects of the miracle. So if someone starts a miraculous fire all around an NPC, it stays outside the Auctoritas for a few seconds, then spreads inwards exactly like a normal fire would.

Q: If my character fires an arrow at Mach 3, shouldn't it ignore Auctoritas? It's the bow-work, not the arrow, that's miraculous.
A: In this case, and other similar cases, it's not *firing* the arrow but *hitting something* with the arrow that's the real miracle. The *spiritus Dei* remains entwined around the action from start to finish. Pretending you don't actually intend to hit the person standing in front of you with the arrow you fire at their chest is just semantics. The arrow will stop, or even shatter, on contact with a high Auctoritas.

Ianthe



Chapter 15

A Book of Beasts: Imperators

The Book of Questions

These questions Vyasa gave to a creature of great glory, whom records name only as the Emperor to Come.

1. *The torturer to Lady Raurava carries out his task with wit and precision. "Have you no heart?" cries his victim.*
2. *The torturer says, "I had a client once who murdered a child. 'Have you no heart?' cried her parents as they brought the client to me. In time, I discovered a most curious thing: he had none."*
3. *As the torturer did not answer the question, the responsibility is yours. Had he no heart?*

4. *The essence of a human has three parts: particles of the base, particles of ego, and particles of higher nature.*
5. *Why are humans vulnerable to this contamination by the base?*

6. *"Look at the wind!" exclaims Iksa. "It obeys no law. There is no order to its actions. This is its beauty."*
7. *"Look at Iksa!" whispers the wind. "One moment she eats. Another, she sleeps. Her actions are chaos! This is her beauty."*
8. *What is the nature of freedom?*

9. *What lies beyond the highest heaven?*
10. *What walked the worlds before time began?*
11. *What do the dragons hold sacred?*

"Hell is at the roots of the World Ash. This makes it the bedrock on which all of existence rests. There is and must be corruption in every world on the Tree, in all the aspects of that world, or the Ash would shake its branches and tumble that world into the Lands Beyond Creation."
—Azizel, Fallen Angel, standard-bearer for the Unholy Host

OPPOSITE:
The Power of Traffic
by Martin McKenna

Essence

"Why can some Powers work a Noble miracle their Imperator cannot?"

"Because the Imperators can empower a human, but cannot enspell themselves."
—from A Noble's Catechism, *by K.C. Danine*

Six essences (also known as humors or elements) combine to form souls. These are:

- Phlogistonic, the fire in the heart
- Aetherial, airy abstract thought and reason
- Terrene, the firm moral grounding of a soul
- Aquatic, the watery life force
- Spectral, the eternal nature of a soul (the *atman*)
- Sacred, the spark of the divine Will embodied (*spiritus Dei*)

The first four essences, known as the accidental properties, comprise the mortal soul. They are inconstant and vulnerable, and they perish with the death of the body. The integral nature of a person that survives death is the Spectral essence, and it shares many qualities with the mortal soul — but it operates on a much deeper level. For example, a momentary anger is associated with a high level of Phlogistonic essence, while a habitual anger or a propensity for hate is part of the Spectral essence.

Nobilis differ from the lesser creatures of the worlds in that their soul also includes a measure of the *spiritus Dei*, meaning "the breath of God". This is the Sacred or Noble essence: the stuff of the first Creation, a tincture of the stuff of Yggdrasil or Heaven. It weaves through Noble spirits and permeates their spectral essence and mortal soul, giving them miraculous powers. The *spiritus Dei* has a deeper importance than that, however. All of Creation evolves from that "breath of God". Those who share the energy of the Creation are not simply a part of the world: their soul is part of the essential composition of the universe, and the sum of these beings — Ymerae and Powers — defines everything therein. The angels call it the *causa causans*, the first cause, the impulse that causes everything else to be.

As Carl explained his project, I could not help but feel a growing unease. Summoning and binding demons was standard sorcerous practice. I could not without hypocrisy condemn it. Using the demons as the underlying hardware for a network of distributed virtual objects, however, unnerved me; it did not properly take into account the underlying heterogeneity of the minions of Hell. Surely, I reasoned, an object would behave differently when in the mental possession of a demon of lust than when in the rarefied mind of a jinn of mathematics? This was the beginning of the rift between Carl and I, and also the beginning of the Open Demon Standard that was to form the major focus of the next decade of my life.
—from INFERNO: An INFrastructure for Encantory Remote Networked Objects, *by Keiko Takemori*

A Majesty of Imperators

A Word to the Hollyhock God: How to Play Imperators

The Imperators' nature contains a contradiction. On the one hand, they lack humanity entirely: their souls are pure *spiritus Dei*. This makes them Imperators. Human minds should have a grave difficulty understanding their motives and actions, because humans have an entirely different kind of soul. On the other hand, the *spiritus Dei* is the pattern from which all things are made, including humans. The Imperators create a world that humans have some instinct for. An Imperator of Storms will be volatile, an Imperator of the Trees lethargic. Even the basic human myths, legends, and collective subconscious provide windows onto the Imperators' selves. They are not archetypes, but they possess a fundamental quality of archetypal beings: sacrifice (of themselves or others) is nothing to them compared to being what they are. They simultaneously possess this absolute and comprehensible goal and a thought process that humans cannot understand. Their Estates make their personal natures obvious while the senses that stimulate their actions are percipient beyond human ken.

An Imperator is sometimes predictable once the PCs know them well enough to understand their basic character. At other times, their awareness and understanding of hidden truths puts them a few steps ahead of the PCs in dealing with a situation. At yet other times, their fundamental inhumanity makes their actions defy human sensibilities. At the core, though, remember that an Imperator comprehends sacrifice even more than the Powers, who are driven more often to bitter choices than any hundred normal humans on the surface of the Earth.

A Sovereign's Survival Guide: How to Handle Imperators

There are ten rules for successfully managing your Imperator. If you follow them, health, wealth, and happiness are sure to follow.

- ***Rule 1:*** Respect your Regius far too much for mere flattery to ever express.
- ***Rule 2:*** Remember what your Imperator says. There will be a test.
- ***Rule 3:*** Surprise parties are verboten. Important guests may be vaporized.
- ***Rule 4:*** Never tell a Regius about a problem you can fix, or you'll have to.
- ***Rule 5:*** Never tell a Regius about a problem you can't fix, or you'll have to.

What do you talk to your Imperator about when (s)he accosts you in the hall?

- ***Rule 6:*** Sex, food, and sleep are safe subjects. You're supposed to be mortal.
- ***Rule 7:*** When your Ymera's eyes glaze over, it's safe to stop talking.

If your Ymera is still paying attention after such a discussion, something is gravely wrong.

- ***Rule 8:*** Never ask your Imperator what's wrong. You're supposed to know.
- ***Rule 9:*** When in doubt, sneeze. They don't understand sneezing. It confuses them.

and ...

- ***Rule 10:*** If you have to call for help ... don't call collect.

General Truths about Imperators

The Imperial Person of a Regius, like the person of a human, is composed of three parts.

First, there is their body. "Gods" and certain unEarthly Imperators can be bodiless; if so, the Chancelling ritual creates a body for them if they should ever perform it. The body of an Imperator is normally immortal, but does not transcend the kind of immortality a Power can possess. This is one reason for the Chancel Rite, for Imperators who were created

Imperators and Multiple Domains
Imperators have at least one Estate, and sometimes as many as nine. An Imperator can only give out soul-shards governing the Estates its existence defines. Thus, an Imperator with Powers of Love, Fire and Song, Blood, and Secrets is the Imperator of Love, Fire, Song, Blood, and Secrets. Some Imperators have aberrant Powers acquired in non-traditional fashions, as with Takari Risu (p. 92) or via the Rite of Rescue (p. 126). These do not need to possess one of the Imperator's Estates.

For simplicity, since Imperators have no fixed point budget, we recommend that all Imperator Secondary Domains have level equal to their Domain score. The Domain scores given for Imperators in this text apply to all of their Estates.

Quantum theory tears down the classical divide between the mundane and the miraculous. When probabilities rather than certainties define the world, the hand of God — from outside the universe — no longer manifests as a distinct and absolute perturbation of natural law. The clean division between an act of God and an act of the universe vanishes. The work of the divine diffuses into a quantum halo. A given action of the Holy Spirit may be three parts per billion miraculous; five parts per billion; or even, in the presence of a saint, as much as one and a half per cent pure miracle.
—from a sermon by Bishop Julius Dow, 2000-03-25

in a physical vessel — the Chancel and Sovereigns are a good bulwark against Excrucian attacks.

Second, Imperators have a divine soul. As described above, the souls of the Ymerae impel them towards the traits of their Estates and give them an absolute capacity for sacrifice.

Third, an Imperator has a "mind", although it does not function like a human's. The greater part of it — most of the time — is with their soul, in the vicious spiritual battle of the Valde Bellum. This can make an Imperator seem vague and uncertain when Powers speak to its Earthly body, except for the rare times when it rests in the spirit world and becomes supernaturally acute on Earth.

Each Chancelled Imperator distributes its soul. Part goes to each of its Powers, part into the Chancel's earth. At the same time, it maintains its identity — the soul remains a single entity. Scientific Powers investigating this phenomenon have a very hard time: most Powers do not fully comprehend even the human part of their soul, let alone something much greater. Some persevere, and come to the conclusion that there are channels, like the legendary "silver cord", connecting each of the soul-shards to one another. Others take a more metaphysical tack, postulating that the *spiritus Dei* is indivisible and that the Chancel Rite simply ignores the distance (then or now) to bring the Imperator's soul into proximity with the earth of the Chancel and the human souls of their Powers.

Imperators have access to two kinds of miracles: **Noble** Miracles and **Imperial** Miracles. Imperial miracles can do almost anything, except when directly opposed by another Imperator or a full Excrucian. Imperial miracles can affect any Estate, and can even affect Powers directly. Their limit is time — an Imperial Miracle requires concentration, willpower, rituals, and (depending on the effect) hours or days.

An Imperator is also capable of Noble miracles, using the same four attributes as Powers use, in almost exactly the same way. An average Familia Caelestis is a little bit stronger than a single Imperator who uses only Noble miracles, even if that Imperator is paying attention to the mortal world. It is not enough of an edge for them to be certain of victory in any conflict.

An Imperator's character sheet — for those times when they are bound by Sovereign limits — can have attribute levels up to 7. The minimum Realm score is 5, because (like a Tempest) they have part of their soul buried in their Chancel. Spirit levels vary; because the Regi have no human component to their souls, the HG may decide that they have high Spirit automatically or no Spirit at all! Imperators often have the Gifts Immortal, Glorious, Shapeshifting, Gatemaker, and/or Elemental. They usually have between 50 and 90 character points.

If the PCs ever come into conflict with an Imperator, their best hope is to strike quickly and from surprise. Not only will this prevent the Imperator from using Imperial miracles against them, the Ymera in question will need time to disengage its attention from the spirit world. However, most Imperators are "Immortal", and so the PCs must somehow capture the Imperator, or drain its magical power. There is another complication: Imperators do not perceive time quite as humans do, and they are notoriously difficult for mortals or Powers to surprise.

Diabolic Imperators

Hell may seem to many outsiders no better than the Excrucians. Hell is a place of liquid suffering: "Excruciation" is a kind of torture. Hell desires to destroy hope and love and integrity: Excrucians often attempt just that. One would imagine that they would throw in together, with time enough to discuss whether the universe should exist once it has been utterly damned. Yet they do not. Why? Because Hell wishes its victims to survive. It gains them nothing to destroy a man's life, if he then kills himself — it takes more sin than a suicide to drag a soul down to Hell. And the Excrucians wish their victims destroyed.

"Let me clarify things for you. I am no guardian angel; my wings will not shelter you from harm. You shall have power in abundance, but it will not save you: in the end, I shall take you from this Earth and cast you down into the Fires below. You are no Faust, who can be redeemed if you but repent. The closing measures of your life have already been written. Do you doubt? Then look into my eyes. Tell me you see mercy there. I was once the least of the Celestial Host, but in Hell I have grown strong. Tell me you see hope in my eyes. I am a Lord of the Shadowed Realm. Tell me you see the vaguest glimmer of redemption —

"Pfaugh. You cannot. And you never will."

—Cedron, Imperator, Lord of the Waterways of Janis Duon

The fundamental precepts of the Fallen Angels are these:

Corruption is the Highest Principle

The Fallen Angels do not believe that there is existence without corruption and therefore do not consider themselves to be in the business of creating corruption. Rather, they wish to expose it and feed it, to turn the naturally corrupt world into a depraved and valueless wasteland. The Infernal solution to any problem is identifiable thusly: the ones who are rewarded are the degenerates, the malicious, and the vain.

Personal corruption is not necessary to act as an agent of Hell. In fact, some of Hell's lords discourage it almost as much as others celebrate it. Betrayals, reveling in material power, gaining a vicious pleasure from harming others' lives — these indicators of personal corruption show an appropriate understanding of the world. At the same time, they damage Hell's alliance with the other Imperators and even the amount of co-operation individual servants of Hell can offer each other. Hell can only win by becoming what it is not. In this, it is much like Heaven — for Heaven cannot triumph without setting aside beauty for the needs of survival.

Suffering is a Form of Corruption

Even Sakyamuni Buddha, who was never a servant of Hell, identified suffering as one of the intrinsic qualities of the world. *Dukkha*, he called it, one of the four major truths of existence. To the Fallen, suffering and corruption are inextricably linked, as is evident in any study of Hell. There is one major difference between the two, however: while a celebration of or reward for corruption enhances and deepens it, rewarding pain lessens it. The ones who suffer from an Infernal act are the ones who already suffered most, or those who dared to admit to their pain.

Misery is not required in servants of Hell, but it dogs their heels. The first servants and natives of Hell, the demons, are in no way immune to the Weirding Wall's fire as it rises from the Infernal "ground". Some Nobilis suspect that the lavish acts of evil that they indulge in, given a chance, comes

The Torturer's Heart

One could rightly call most Powers of Hell "evil", and many of the Devils too. The Code of Hell encourages sadism and acts of desecration. On the other hand, players wishing to create ethically ambiguous or darkly heroic characters need not discard the Code of Hell untried. Like Hell itself, it can corrupt those who follow it, but at its root it remains a philosophy — an ethic, and not an absence of ethics.

To create a sympathetic Power of Hell, self-abnegation is important. It helps if the character corrupts those already corrupt and torments primarily the deserving. Often, this requires both rewarding and tormenting the same individual — but ethics need not strictly follow the laws of efficiency. The character should also pursue a career of exemplary service to Creation. Even if the other PCs would not work with such a character by choice, a sufficiently glorious Power of Hell can make it palatable when necessary.

In Vyasa's Sutra, the Lady Raurava's name refers to the mythical Hell where gods tear sadists to pieces without killing them. Readers may rightly infer that her torturer is a Fallen Angel, motivated by philosophy and Creation's need for torment rather than by sadism. He has a heart, however cold.

from a desperate desire to somehow transfer their pain to some other being.

The second servants of Hell, the angels who joined with Lucifer in the War in Heaven, paid for it by being cast down themselves into the flames.

The third servants of Hell, the Powers who ally themselves to it, are agents of pain — and so their peers and their Lords alike often laugh (and lift not a finger) when such a Power is hurt. Of course, some Powers of Hell are perfectly pleasant people, whose attraction to Hell is as philosophical as that of the uncorrupted Lucifer; these may well have the loyalty of their Familia. This is a recommended option for PC Powers of Hell.

Power Justifies Itself

Corruption and pain ultimately depend upon power. A mortal electrician has a hard time being corrupt, with little scope for corrupt action beyond cheating customers or the electric company slightly. Pain without potence, without the ability to act on that pain, is purely subjective, and Hell tries to live in an objective universe. Potence without pain, on the other hand, may be impossible as well. Without some measure of suffering, what is the motivation to act?

The Fallen Angels are in Hell. Their pain is beyond human comprehension. Creatures born to beauty, they are scarred and barred from the most beautiful Realm. If they should choose to cry rage and power onto the Earth, then in their minds no one has the right to stop them.

History of the Diabolic Imperators

The history of the Fallen begins in the earliest days of the World Ash. Some who are now among the Fallen were born with the first angels, who considered themselves the keepers of all the worlds — Heaven foremost among them. Each angel heard the "Voice of Cneph" in their hearts, an emotional urging from the Creator him or herself. At least, that is what the angels believe it to be; perhaps it is simply the voice of Heaven, or Yggdrasil. There is no proof that there is a Creator at all.

The angels were different, even then. Each had its own personality and therefore its own interpretation of the voice they all heard. The study of one's own heart has never been the most exacting of disciplines. Like sensible beings, they created a social structure, with leaders and debates and courtesy towards others. Of course, the debates on occasion turned dark. Angels were even exiled, either forever or for a millennium and a day.

Angels have always been Imperators. The Estates of the first Angels were self-referential, such as "Consciousness", "Communication", or even "Pride". As these angels came to be, they brought consciousness, communication, and pride with them into a universe that had never known such things. As the angels set themselves to reshaping Heaven, those changes were reflected in the worlds below — and new Angels began appearing, with previously unknown Estates like "The Sun".

Lucifer, one of the first Angels, who embodied Pride and Persuasion, was their greatest leader. He heard Cneph's voice with aching clarity, and his skills in debate and (of course) persuasion were unmatched. His beauty surpassed even Heaven's own. He led Heaven through evolution after evolution of reality — until an angel's change brought forth humanity from the Earth.

No one really knows why his loathing for humanity is so great. Mortals have suggested in their legends that Cneph's Voice within him said that the angels should be humanity's servants and that this new, pitiable life form was in its five-part soul brighter than any angel. All that is known, however, is that Lucifer rebelled. On visiting Earth and seeing the first humans, he stormed back to Heaven and withdrew for a time. When he re-entered angelic society, he preached the Gospel of Hell:

1. The "Voice of Cneph" is a lie. It is the voice of the angels' fear of Corruption.
2. Hell is the true Creation and the Tree is the path between Creator and Hell.
3. Those who refuse these beliefs are forbidden Pride, now and forever.

Lucifer is Persuasion. Over a hundred angels joined him before the High Court of the Bright Realm excommunicated them. Sixty-eight survived the resulting war to be thrown, scarred and enraged, into the Hell they so cherished. Only ten, at any time, were to be allowed up into other worlds ....

And Lucifer smiled.

Diabolical Estates

The first rule of Imperator design is this: PCs can be exceptions. If the players or the Hollyhock God can make it make sense, the PCs' Imperator can be the Fallen Angel of Gardening, the Moon, and Romance. That said, there is a common factor in the Estates of most Fallen Angels. In an appropriate combination, they form a positive, beauteous whole. After all, Fallen Angels were Angels once. At the same time, combined another way, some of these Estates are blights upon the Earth. For example, Cedron (described below) has four Estates: Parasites, Passivity, Mistrust, and Growth. In Heaven, he taught parasites to grow into symbiotes, passive things to grow assertive, and all how to heal mistrust. In Hell his work is inverted: he teaches things to grow twisted, parasitic, passive, or unwarrantedly suspicious.

Example Diabolic Imperator: Cedron

Cedron of the Fallen has been defiled by his years in Hell. His breath is fetid with agony and despair, and his eyes are an empty void that could swallow worlds. The beauty of the angels is twisted, in him. Each feather of his wings is a gleaming knife, and the radiant hair that spills over one eye

is a sickly carmine. The voice of the Creator in his heart has been utterly silenced by the Shadowed Realm. He has therefore been released to come to Earth, to balance between the excoriation of the Excrucians and the excruciation of Hell — to agonize and damn all Creation while refusing its destruction.

Cedron's Chancel

Cedron's Chancel is the Waterways of Janis Duon. A glorious river comes out of the real world and shatters into a thousand tiny glimmering streams. It is a seductive place, its air filled with a raw exuberance. Yet it is also a place of raw peril, for five demons of the darkest order are trapped within the dancing rivulets. They are called Fohi, Satyavrata, Xisuthrus, Deucalian, and Ogyges, and they are the five Deluges, each an Anchor of Lucifer himself. The last time one was unleashed, only a surpassing effort by the Powers of the Earth saved landborn life and human civilization from utter and complete destruction. The Anchor-binding limits and traps the Deluges — but it cannot and does not change their essential nature and potential for destruction.

The shallow waters of Janis Duon do not contain the only threat. The air in Janis Duon is itself a breeding ground for the Croquemitaines, devourers of beauty. These spirits have no material form, but attach themselves to a human host and slowly quench the brightness in that person's spirit. Torn between the raw, addictive glory of Janis Duon and the soul-devouring discord of the Croquemitaines, the humans who live and fish upon the Waterways are surprisingly normal. It is probably safe to assume that the Croquemitaines cannot affect Powers; at least, Cedron's Powers show no fear of them.

I know things about your heart that you never will.
—Cedron, Imperator of Parasites, Passivity, Mistrust, and Growth

Cedron's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	3: Inhuman	7
Domain	4: Masterful	6
Realm	6: Imperial	8
Spirit	0: Candleflame	5

Gifts and Virtues
Immortal
Gatemaker
Virtue: Corrupt

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Unholy "Presence" even when Guised
Affiliation: Code of the Fallen Angels

Wounds
2 Deadly Wounds (Immortal)
2 Serious Wounds
3 Surface wounds

Total Cost: 65 Character Points

Story Seeds Featuring Diabolic Imperators

Croquemitaines

Someone the PCs care about or respect becomes the target of a demon, a Croquemitaine, or some other maleficent force. Easy enough to destroy it, unless the "victim" claims to be unharmed! (E.g., "but I wanted to sell my soul for this!" or "Don't you see? I've been changed, not hurt!") If the maleficent force belongs to a Diabolical Imperator's Chancel or Nobles, the PCs will have to be wary of the Locust Court. Worse yet, the PCs may fail to wipe it out of existence.

Corruption's Service

The PCs or their Imperator discover a new threat: under heavy Excrucian guard, a human alchemist is on the verge of creating the Caries Unguent, a sovereign remedy to corruption itself! Of course, that couldn't exist — could it?

"But if he succeeds," their Imperator might say, "I see the Excrucians destroying Hell itself. Blistering streams of purity would rage down into Corruption's seat, the Shadowed Realm, aggravating the flames until they consume even the greatest of the Fallen Angels ..."

The PCs might be sent to bear the news to a Diabolic Imperator ... or to "assist" them in dealing with the situation.

Celestial Imperators

Those who serve Heaven — angels born there, Powers of Heaven vouchsafed a glimpse of it, even the mortals who recognize that such a place exists — are smug. The Celestial Realm is of infinite beauty, and it is not merely impossible that anything should destroy it; it is incomprehensible that anything could destroy it. Even the Excrucians. This is the fundamental folly of beauty, of a power — possibly one of the two axes of reality in all Yggdrasil's worlds — that does not grant a matching strength. Hell laughs at beauty. Yet do not forget that the Celestial Host won the War in Heaven.

The fundamental precepts of the Celestial Host are these:

Beauty is the Highest Principle

The Angelic commitment to beauty may seem shallow for some of the mightiest and most blessed beings in all reality. It is not. The Angels mount a gritty and determined struggle to celebrate the wonder of Creation, despite all the horror in it — and, in the name of that celebration, if necessary, an Angel will block an Abhorrent Weapon with their own body and blood. Heaven has not yet recovered from the trauma of Lucifer's revolt. The Blessed Realm may have washed away the wounds of battle, but every Angel is aware that there are some of their kind and ken burning eternally in the fires of Hell.

Humans can not readily bear such thoughts. The idea of relatives — loved ones — eternally damned can be unbearable to anyone believing in damnation. "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*" is a mortal's kind of phrase: "speak kindly of the dead, or not at all." But the angels bear more here than a human ever will,

"It is sometimes said that angels are beautiful. I only wish it were so: I know my hair is ragged-cut today, I couldn't find my good suit, and there is this unsightly mole that only a fashion model could get away wi— forgive me; I digress. It is sometimes said that angels are beautiful, and it is sometimes said that we are the creators of beautiful things. Many of my kind will tell you that last, for has it not been our goal since time began to perfect the beauty of Heaven? I have a clearer sight than that; for this reason, they call me insane. There is no such thing as a beauty that is not appreciated. Angels do not create beauty. We discover it. And that, dear one, is why I have chosen you: for you can bear the burden I give you, the burden of true madness — and make it beautiful.

"This I trust in you ... but have no fear of failure. I am already content. I have seen into your soul, from the Twirling Peaks, and I have found enchantment there."
—Hazael, Angel of Disorder, to the newest Power of Insanity

for their kinfolk in Hell are alive, and they were damned by the angels' own hands. No great wonder that modern Angels cling tightly to that which they preserved: the beauty, the purity, and the integrity found in Heaven, and filtering down to the lands below.

"I have been appointed to stand at Heaven's Gate, and I say that you may not pass. Do not protest! It is no failure in your service that bars you. It is not what you are *that keeps you from entering. It is what you* were. *It is every sin, every human feeling that you have ever had — I do not remember them. You do not remember them. But Heaven does not forget."*
—Pethahiah, the Guard at Heaven's Gate

Justice is a Form of Beauty

Angels can work miracles. It is fortunate that they are both strong and wise; if every human had such gifts, society would quickly collapse. Even angelic society strains under the weight of their powers. Accordingly, Justice was invented, and Law as well. Law is an "unfortunate necessity" which exists solely to protect society. It is for the Law to give dispassionate and resolute judgments, binding an Angel to an unpleasant service or exiling them from Heaven altogether. Justice, as the angels conceive it, is somewhere between "karma" and "poetic justice", revenges that have their own inner beauty and which are cleanly and clearly fitting. The two intersect thus: an act of justice, however harmful it is to the target, does not make its enactor a danger to society.

To the Angels, then, "justice is beautiful" simply states a fact. It is beautiful for no other reason than that the angels make it so. They care because it is by the tenets of their "justice" that they condemned the Fallen Angels to Hell. For the Powers of Heaven, justice means something else. It means that they have committed themselves to accepting even the darkest parts of the Heavenly creed — the exile of Lucifer and his followers — and living it out as something beautiful. It is easy to promote beauty in one's house, to give beautiful things to one's friends, to reign with peace and clear judgment over one's Chancel; making beauty out of the destruction of an Excrucian or the excruciation of a destroyer is much harder. That is the commitment of Heaven.

Lesser Beings Should Respect Their Betters

Angels are fundamentally arrogant, and with good reason: only the Excrucians surpass them in beauty; only the Aaron's Serpents surpass them in might; only Angels are born to the Brightest Realm there is. Yet there is a fundamental weakness in the nature of the Angels (and in almost every Power who chooses to serve Heaven): Lucifer has denied them Pride. Had the Angels resisted, then even Pride's avatar might have failed at this, but it was the judgment of the High Court in Heaven that Lucifer had that right. Because of what he was; because of what he had promised; and because he was thrown from the Brightest Realm into the Darkest of them all.

The Angels have no pride, and so they must have the respect of others. Knowing that only the newest angels know their proper place as the highest Lords in all Creation, they require that all others bow to them. Otherwise, Heaven itself might be tainted, might allow some of the mortal stench of the worlds below to permeate its essence. The Angels might step back from Heaven's Gate and who knows what serpents might crawl in?

It is technically possible to ally with Heaven without this clause. A Power can dedicate themselves to Heaven's code and not once bend their knee to the Celestial Host or demand obeisance from the mortals of the world. There are Powers who do exactly that, but it is as rare as leopards in the frozen north. Most Powers who ally with Heaven have heard a song in their dreams, have felt the fabric of the purposes of Heaven between their fingers — most Powers who choose Heaven choose it because it sings a beautiful song. They commit themselves completely to Heaven … and the others are not really Heavenly at all, merely humans who have been and chosen to remain servants of beauty and justice.

History of the Celestial Imperators

The Angels are natives of Heaven: flesh of its flesh, blood of its blood, born whole and clean from the bone-white hills or the pure glittering surfaces of its lakes and streams. It is said by the oldest ones that these have always been in Heaven, for all that there were once no such concepts as hills or lakes, or even liquid, or even whiteness. It is a place of surpassing rightness; even were some ill to spread across its surface, some stain like murder or a landfill miraculously drawn from Earth, Heaven's essential character would still shine through like a cataclysm of health. Angels partake in this health.

The angels are curators and designers, constantly guarding and improving Heaven; the "voice of the Creator" in their hearts tells them that this is their role. Others speculate that that voice is not the Creator but Heaven's own, that the Perfect Realm brought them forth as a consequence of its own desires. Either way, this duty has dictated their actions from the beginning, when the first sentient creatures lay their hands on Heaven and sought to bring forth greater wonders from it.

From these early efforts came the flowers: tools with deep associations, able to weather the hard precise force of an angel's will and turn it into a softer, less harmful magic. With Canterbury Bells, they built Gratitude so that they and Heaven could appreciate one another. With Yellow Chrysanthemum, a melancholy angel gave shape (and beauty) to dejection and love lost. And when Heaven did not know how to change — when its slick surface began to cast off the changes the angels had made — Hemlock taught it that there are some gates one can only pass through once. Hemlock taught the world of Death.

There were other such tools, of course. The Tarot for one, astrology for another. Even language served briefly, though it proved clumsy. With all of these, Heaven moved on. The Great Work moved on. And then Ashriel discovered, to all the angels' great amazement, that there were worlds besides Heaven which nevertheless seemed to mimic in their history the patterns of the Brightest Realm. All save one. All save the horror that was discovered shortly after, and then forbidden to all for centuries more: Hell, the Darkest Realm that ever was or ever will be.

Law and Justice were created, and in time some few angels were banished from Heaven. They simply could not co-operate

with the others' perception of how the Great Work should go. Only a few were ever lost this way until Lucifer's Rebellion, when Lucifer, in whose name Hell had been sealed, began to preach heresy. It had been sealed with his blessing; it was reopened to curse him and all who came with him.

It was the greatest tragedy that Heaven had ever known. Heaven knew no others until the Excrucians came, and the Abhorrent Blade Atrocity (also called Briareos) slew the first keeper of Heaven's Gate. Heaven threw them back and set a guard on the curving open mouth of the Weirding Wall. The Excrucians have not since dared the Brightest Realm in force, although they have at times approached it in stealth.

The angels are powerful. Never forget that. But they are uneasy when blood stains their blades.

Celestial Estates

The Celestial Host can have any set of Estates, but as a general rule they will have a celebratory approach to them. The Angel of Blood and Wine does not rule an Estate of death and stains and drunken retching: the web of associations around Blood includes vigor, and the heart, and resistance to disease. Her Power of Wine might be able to loosen inhibitions, make social contact more comfortable, and create laughter but would have some difficulty conjuring a deadly amount of alcohol into a human enemy. Once again, PCs can be the exception: death exists even in Heaven, and car wrecks and vomiting and such would if there were humans driving cars around the Brightest Realm. (This is not likely to happen any time soon.)

Example Celestial Imperator: Hazael

Hazael is the Angel of Disorder, Insanity, and Time. "The universe," he explains, "reflects itself, and hopes to see a method to its madness. From this, I have come. Like humans watching the random shapes of clouds, I find the joy in the disorder that has been devouring all things since the moment time began." He is dual-natured, suspended between that gluttonous disorder and the clean clear mirth of joy; his Powers, like he himself, are divided within themselves.

Hazael's Chancel

Locus Hazael is, as one might expect, a wild place. Not content with the handful of miles he was able to seize for a Chancel, Hazael switched scales and built a whole world in miniature. From the Twirling Mountains (his personal celebration of DNA, or possibly the Maypole Dance; he gives different answers at different times) to the Great Foot-Deep Sea, the place is a landmark to eccentric style. It is the only place in all the Earth where the a'moronthologophorus lives — a beast whose hair, given to women in marriage, makes them young and beautiful forever. (Alas, Powers rarely marry mortals, because of the Windflower Law.)

The guardians Hazael has placed in his realm — besides the millions of tiny people, who really can't do that much — are the Krakens, beasts wearing "continents" for shells and sending out mile-long writhing tentacles through the shallow seas. There are few things more humiliating to either a Power or an Excrucian-shard than being drowned in a foot of water by a thousand wire-thin tentacles. Hazael can, without much qualm and with a good deal of merriment, throw destroyers of beauty into their clutches. Hazael recruits his Powers from the people of his Chancel — standard practice — but he gives all of them the Scaling Gift, the ability to change size more or less at will.

Someday, dear child, all of this will be yours.
—Hazael, Imperator of Disorder, Insanity, and Time, holding up a twenty-dollar bill

Hazael's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

TRAIT	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	4: Celestial	8
Domain	2: Minor	5
Realm	7: Imperial	7
Spirit	4: Conflagration	5

Gifts and Virtues	Immortal
	Glorious
	Gatemaker
Limits/Restrictions	Restriction: Fear of Flying and Heights
	Affiliation: Code of the Angels
Wounds	2 Deadly Wounds (Immortal)
	3 Serious Wounds
	3 Surface Wounds
Total Cost:	70 Character Points

Story Seeds Featuring Celestial Imperators

Treasure Hunt in Lilliput

Something small enough for a "Lilliputian" to carry is lost in Locus Hazael … preferably something a tiny person would wish to keep. Perhaps a vital message that lives in mortal minds? The key to a box holding an Excrucian's heart? It should have some effect on the world, so that if the PCs figure out a decent approach, they have a chance of finding it. Of course, if Hazael isn't co-operative, the task will rapidly turn nightmarish.

The Angel's Madness

Hazael is equal parts joy and entropy in his person, although he embodies neither of them. What happens when he finally falls between the cracks? What if these two aspects of Hazael split apart violently and use Locus Hazael as the battleground to decide which of the two will live? While the PCs' Imperator struggles to save Hazael's soul from self-destruction, the PCs (most likely unwelcome) are sent to guard his body and his Chancel.

Indulgences

One of the peculiar paradoxes of Heaven is this: the visit of an impure being is guaranteed to soil it … yet it is as stale a place if it is always seen by the same angels' eyes as if the Great Work of changing it had never been started. On very

rare occasions, accordingly, the angels bring up a mortal, or a near-mortal. They have chosen the PCs. But what if an Excrucian (disguised as a PC's shadow) enters with them? What if many angels resent this decision by the Highest Lords of Heaven, to allow mortals up into the Bright Realm? And what if the justification given above is not the real reason the angels have brought them up there?

Imperators of the Light

"You may call me Father, although I am no priest, and I do not share your blood. Mm. In a way, all humanity is my child; I protect them, I guide them. Simply by existing I show them the paths of healthy growth. Ah! They listen so rarely! But you will listen. The gift you have received will ensure that, once your Commencement is complete. I know it is hard — I can feel the wild gray headaches that assault you, the nausea that fumes out from the very bones of your soul. I know it is hard — but I cannot let you die. Not now.

"You will put down the blade now, child. And walk with me a while."
—Jahaleel, Imperator, Magister of the Light

The Light are powerful spirits; like the angels, they are *causa causans*, of the first stuff of Creation, and for that reason their existence adds new aspects to Earthly reality. They have a noble, if somewhat limited, mission — they exist to prevent the extinction of humanity. At least, most humans would call it noble. They have other traits which make them less appealing: a certain condescension, a willingness to throw away what makes human life worthwhile to preserve life or throw away five hundred lives to save a thousand, and an unwillingness to take risks with humanity's survival. If it had been up to the Light, humans would have remained savages. Steel, cars, computers, fast food, explosives, the printing press — all these would have been too dangerous to allow. The Light may present itself as flowers, wisdom, and peace, but in the end it may be humanity's most dangerous enemy.

These are the fundamental precepts of the Light:

Humanity Must Live, and Live Forever

With this statement, the Light casts defiance into the teeth of everything known. The Excrucians will not triumph. The Dark will not triumph. Even the inevitable death of Creation will not bring an end to humanity if the Light has anything to say about it. Like all Imperators and many Powers, the typical follower of the Light has a capacity for sacrifice — of themselves and others — that would stagger the average "man on the street". At an appalling risk to themselves (and remember, the Light does not take risks easily), three Imperators of the Light have already ventured out into the Lands Beyond Creation, hoping to find a safe world on which to nurture humanity without the Dark's interference. One has returned, sorely wounded and unsuccessful.

Many Powers ally themselves to the Light. Born as humans and gifted with great magics, they readily take on the Light's role as humanity's protectors, teachers, and keepers. They know humanity, in their very bones. Some of them can encompass the infinite scope of the Lightlords' dedication to humanity's survival; some even find this dedication in themselves. Others consider it enough that they battle the Excrucians and buy with their lives a few more gasps of time for the human race.

What Must Be Done Ought Be Done Cleanly

Humanity has always believed that impure methods can serve it well. The factories with their pollutants steaming into air, water, and earth are called "advanced" or even "necessary". Over and over again throughout history, the religious have tortured the heretics and maimed the unbelieving in the name of love and righteousness. Simply to prevent war, two nations built sufficient nuclear weaponry to destroy the world utterly. The Earth has only one answer to such acts: revulsion. Had not the Light been there, to help it understand the ways of the humans that scurry upon its face, the Earth would have splintered cities and shattered roadways, brought down the airplanes in a cavalcade of thunder, and gulped humans greedily into its molten depths.

Is it any wonder, then, that the Light seeks purity in its service? Neriah, Magister of the Light, phrases it thus: "We are humanity's guides, humanity's guardians. There is only one path: we must do better than they." The Light is not some human's fleshy pink or ebon darkness: it is and must be the clear pure white of the full spectrum.

For Powers, the road to the virtue that the Light demands is a hard one. It's also perilous. The diabolic and demonic forces of Hell loathe the Light even more than they loathe the Angels. The single reward is a "clear cold shining" in the depths of their soul, sometimes also called "grace".

Humans Must Be Protected (Particularly From Themselves)

Individual humans are in truth the least of the Light's concerns. They have a whole world to save. In the name of humanity's survival, Powers of the Light allow themselves to work any atrocity against the human spirit or a human population. They do not forget, however, that humanity is composed of humans. It is characteristic of the Light, in addressing any Breakthrough or other dangerous situation, that they will spare as many humans (and the happiness of those humans) as they can. Their own happiness matters not.

Unlike the Ymerae of the Light, affiliated Powers can be weak and imperfect. They may spare themselves pain at a human's cost. In some cases, where their overall actions still serve the Light, there is no penalty for this, but if a Light Power spares themselves pain, and humanity gains nothing from their acts, and even one individual human suffers … the guilt (and perhaps an MP loss) will haunt them for a time. This is so even if that human desires that suffering. The Light, after all, must be pure.

"I dreamed that I was in a far future world, in a barren military base. Some great magic had imprisoned me there, but I had no wish to stay. So in my room, at night, with my bed shoved up against the door, I began to tear the floorboards up. Beneath them was concrete; I shattered it in three blows and let the pieces rain down to the floor below. When they had done so, I looked down, and for a moment, I was seized with the uttermost horror — for beneath me was a shaft, leading down floor by unending floor, and I could not see the end of it. I realized in that moment that the Earth was no more: that humanity had replaced it, mantle, core, and all with level upon level of half-lit living space. A cry rose up in my throat, for the destruction of humanity's home — and then a thought trickled into the back of my mind.

"Humanity has survived this,' I thought. 'Survived, and grown so numerous that all the hollowed Earth itself was needed for room.' And in that moment, I knew that Nature itself had been tamed, and humanity would live forever.

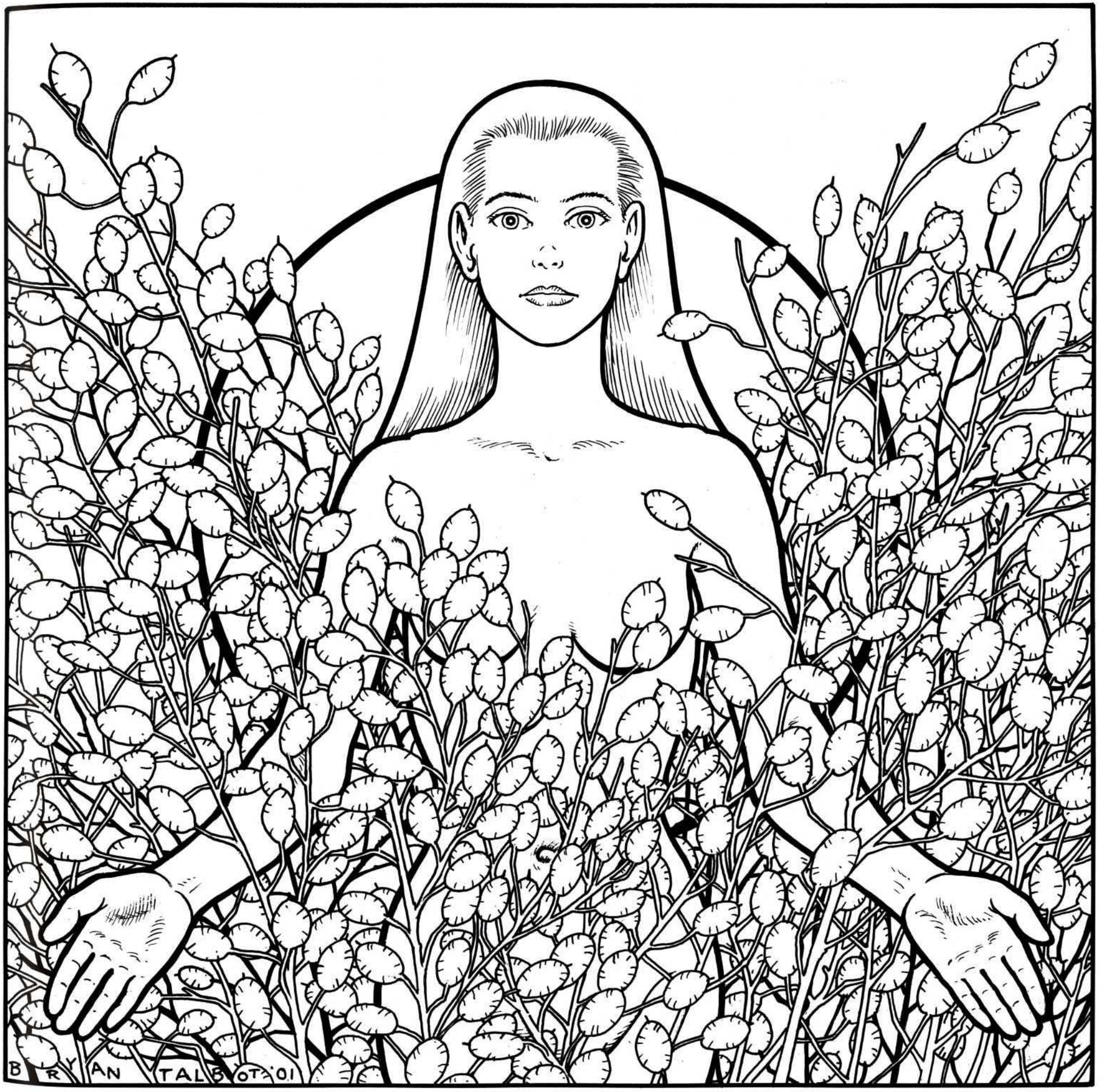
"I look out at the Earth, sometimes, beyond my Chancel. And I weep that I have left the dream."
—Nephishesim, Imperator, Magister of the Light

History of the Magisters of the Light

There was once a chance humanity would become Imperial. They began in the one place on Earth closest to Heaven, the majestic Garden of Eden. All of the creatures who lived there were thralls of Adam and Eve. Even the fruit trees would bow down so they could reach the branches easily. They were miraculous beings, and in time might have been ready for the fruit of the two trees that were denied them: a tree of citrus Immortality, and an apple tree that held self-preservation and self-destruction locked within its heart.

Manaechus was an Aaron's Serpent. Like most Imperators he was essentially immortal. The least of his kind require

OPPOSITE:
Honesty
by Bryan Talbot


BRYAN TALBOT '01

The Contamination of Humanity
The degeneration of humanity began in the days of Cain and Abel, when the edict against incest forced the early humans to breed with beasts. Vyasa asks how humans became susceptible to contamination by base qualities. It began when animal blood first mingled with the blood of Adam and Eve.

Noble Miracles to slay; the greatest can only be wounded by the most potent Excrucian blades. Yet immortality does not mean safety, and Manaechus made a horrible mistake. He ventured down towards Hell, where no being may safely go, and peered curiously down into Hell's "floor", a tainted section of the Weirding Wall. No demon could assail him and Lucifer had not yet Fallen, but not far below him, a crack in the bark let some of Hell's corruption into the sap of the Tree. Twenty miles above — a trivial distance, on the tree — the Ash's inherent vitality had drawn the poison from the sap and nullified it. Manaechus, not knowing it was tainted, drank deep before returning to the upper realms. Thus a shadow fell onto his soul and twisted his perceptions. Tortured by hallucinations, Manaechus came to Earth to eat of the fruit of self-destruction and learn a way to escape the pain. Yet the tree, cousin to his father Ash, refused him. Its fruit was for humans alone, when they had grown into their strength.

Fury does not capture Manaechus's emotion. Betrayal, hate, lust, rage — words fail. No human has ever felt such turbulent darkness as Manaechus felt then. So he took on the guise of a smaller serpent, and spoke to the two humans of the Garden. He told them many things, and he taught them the treelore that would give into their hands the fruits they and he had been denied. Kumquats of Immortality. Apples of Knowledge. These were meant for Adam and Eve, in time. With Manaechus's help, Eve took an apple down and took a bite. She had agreed that Manaechus would eat of these fruits once she and Adam had done so — a bargain that seemed well made at the time.

Eve learned self-preservation in that bite, and wisdom: wisdom on a level with the Imperators, with the angels in Heaven. She understood in that instant what Manaechus's intentions were … and that the death-throes of a Serpent driven to suicide might destroy the Garden, and humanity with it. She understood why Manaechus was driven to such an end, and so she tossed away the fruit of immortality, and took the apple to Adam to gift him with wisdom as well.

Something else had happened, though, when Eve took that first bite, whose importance neither Eve nor Manaechus had guessed. A limn of white had formed around the tree's branches. It was not some force awakened by the treelore; it was the first Imperator of the Light, an incarnation of that which Eve had learned, of the preservation of humanity. This was the Garden of Eden. Eve was the second (or, by some myths, the third) human to walk the Earth. The apples of that tree were among the most potent secrets of the worlds upon the Ash. The Light was born, and it was born strong. In a year, it could have raised humanity to the level of gods.

It did not get that chance. Mere hours later, with Adam's bite, the Dark was born. Mere days later, in their first conflict, the Dark won its first victory. Adam and Eve left Eden and were sealed from it forever. They left behind the citric Immortality. To the Light that was the bitterest blow of all.

Adam and Eve were still the first humans, still the folk of Eden, and still powerful. Their children were numerous and shared that power. Forbidden to breed with each other by Adam and Eve, they bred with beasts — and so strong was their humanity that the beasts bore human children. Ironically, however, the animal component of the later generations of children lowered their mystical strength in each generation. Eventually, humanity was just an animal like any other, without dominion over or communication with the beasts of the world, and unable to crossbreed at all. Yet one thing had been gained: humanity spread across the Earth. Humans with traits of bison bred with the human descendants of timber wolves, and their "genes" were diverse enough that few of the children were deformed. With the spread of humanity, more Imperators of the Light were born, to guard it and to guide it. And in the shadows, the Dark was waiting.

Estates of the Light

Humans born of athletic parents can become bookish scholars; scions of wealthy families can be disinherited. In a like manner, Lightlords born from humanity's advances and from its expansion across the Earth can bring strange Estates into being. Magisters of the Light usually have at least one Estate tied to humanity — Agriculture, Politics, Armor, Cities, Advertisements, and so forth. Their other Estates may be similar, or may seem random, such as Waves or Winter.

Example Imperator of the Light: Askelon

Askelon is Lord of the Green, a Magister of the Light — less flatteringly, a Lightlord. He keeps his glory tamed, and his shape is an old man's, but he stands achingly straight. Like the Angels, he accepts nothing less than perfection: the willingness to bear all things in the name of one's duty. He must hold to this willingness, because his task is strengthening humanity. Simply by existing, he feeds humanity suffering and suffering again. He is not a being of Hell, although one of his Powers is: each of Askelon's tortures is carefully calculated to make its subject stronger. Even so, he is sometimes frightened. His charted course takes him very near to the Dark, and he does not know who is the more wise.

Askelon rules over Tremors, the Culinary Arts, and the Forge. This last defines him best, for the great human victory of smithcraft gave birth to him. Ironically, the Light opposed the smithy, knowing humanity's first use for wrought metal would be weapons of war, but Askelon came afterwards, and he holds to smithcraft with all of his soul. It defines him: he is the Forge, that which shapes through trauma. This is his life. (Well, that and food. There is a slight flaw in Askelon's character: the same strength that makes him the Patron of Cooks makes him eternally hungry. At least, with a Meta-human Aspect, he can stay thin readily enough.)

"Hell is short-sighted; rather, the Fallen Angels are. They see the virtue in a place of suffering, and they conclude that it is the purpose of the universe. They hold that corruption and pain are ends in themselves. It comes back to the fundamental flaw in the angelic character: they do not understand that change is real. The Host in Heaven believes that they change the Bright Realm constantly — but if they did so, it would no longer be the Bright Realm.

"Given this basic misunderstanding, born into every angelic Ymera, it is not surprising that the Fallen Angels do not understand the purpose of suffering. Yes, Hell is fundamental. But the corruption therein is not some sort of diabolical luxury. It exists to strengthen and purify the world. Yes, all things must be brought into the hands of pain and sorrow, but then, they must move beyond it. This is where Hell's vision falls short, where their contempt for humanity has gotten in their way. They do not understand that entropy is the answer only when there are no humans to break its grip on the uncaring universe."
—Askelon, Imperator, Lord of the Green

Askelon's Chancel

The essence of Askelon's Sanctum is suffering, green misery: unusual for a Lightlord but understandable given Askelon's nature. His Powers are immune to all but the most subtle agonies, but this does not mean that he spares them. Each has been through the crucible many times. They have had their strength withheld while loved ones died. For lack of other liquids, they have swallowed poisons, and lain

shuddering and sweating for hours. Two of his Powers have been shown every hidden darkness in their souls. The last, the Hell's-Power that serves him, has been shown all his hidden beauty. This is, perhaps, the worst torment of all.

Locus Askelon is sometimes used for the funerals of Powers — when a Power dies so valorously or hideously that an ordinary ceremony is insufficient. Freely, their Familia and friends drink emerald anguish, and hold in the agony until purging it and purging their grief can be done in one action, in one liquid anodyne scream of release.

I'm afraid you misunderstand. First you prove yourself worthy, then *I torture you.*
—Askelon, Imperator of Tremors, the Culinary Arts, and the Forge

Askelon's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	1: Metahuman	5
Domain	6: Imperial	5
Realm	5: Tempest	5
Spirit	2: Incandescent Flame	5

Gifts and Virtues	Immortal
Limits/Restrictions	Restriction: Eternal Hunger
	Affiliation: Code of the Light
Wound Levels	1 Deadly Wound (Immortal)
	2 Serious Wounds
	2 Surface Wounds
Total Cost:	60 Character Points

Story Seeds Featuring Imperators of the Light

The Unforging
The PCs come into possession of an Abhorrent Weapon or some other major Excrucian artifact. Not even their Imperator can destroy it easily — so they are sent to the Lord who knows unforging best. The Excrucians probably want it back… unless they mean for it to be in Locus Askelon. And how will Askelon react to a bunch of Nobles approaching his Chancel while carrying a major Excrucian artifact?

Death by Agony
A mall, restaurant, or other business is the setting for a series of gruesome deaths. There is no clear indication of the cause of death — apparently, the victims' hearts exploded, perhaps under the pressure of extreme terror, agony, or grief. That's not the worst of it — the dead, cold and rigid in the morgue, speak prophecies: names and times when others will enter the business and meet their deaths. A few forensic scientists and associated policemen are tipping over the border into *dementia animus* as the prophecies come true — and a PC Anchor is on the list.

The PCs discover that a Power of the Light is actually protecting the killer, after being told by their Prophetic Imperator that it is either that or the deaths of millions — but what is the connection? And does that prophecy take the PCs into account?

Imperators of the Dark

The Dark, like Hell, is sometimes difficult to distinguish from the Excrucians. An Excrucian-shard might carry a knife stained with Immortal smallpox, and the Dark might well stand back and watch with a criminal glee. An Excrucian-shard may break a human soul by ravaging its body; the Dark will tie the rope while the victim hangs himself. Any vile trait a human can imagine, the Dark encourages — but, as with Hell, there is a subtle and important distinction between the code of the Dark and the ways of the Excrucians. The Dark believes in choice. The Dark does not throw humans into the abyss of despair: it carries them to the brink and whispers of despair's glory. To the Dark, destruction and pain and raw evil are "fun" — but inspiring self-destruction in humans is what the Dark sees as its "duty". The longer a human holds out against the Dark's assaults, the less that human interests them; the strongest men and women can suffer all the Dark's malice and come out the other side.

The Dark opposes the Excrucians for other reasons, of course. Perhaps the most interesting one is this: the Excrucians claim that all things destroyed by their hands live on inside the Excrucians themselves. Every human life the Excrucians claim may be a life saved from the Darkness.

These are the fundamental precepts of the Dark:

Humans Should Destroy Themselves, Individually

This is a difficult statement to defend, particularly for the Dark's Powers, who were born human. Yet it stains their every deed, their every desire, bound into them without remorse by the apples of Eden, by the raw divine spirit bound into every rock, every leaf, and every raindrop that ever fell in the Garden That is No More. Even the Dark requires and desires justification; even the Dark appeals to the Creator for an understanding of why it was made the way it is.

The most common *raison d'être* advanced by the Dark is that humans are an offense to Creation. Certainly, Lucifer would concur! In a way, their commitment to inciting self-destruction (as opposed to killing humans themselves) is noble: their only victims are by definition those of imperfect character. Other Powers of the Dark, surprisingly, are more positive about humanity: the justification they advance for themselves is that the human character requires the potential for self-destruction. The apple, they remind anyone who actually believes the Dark's origin story, was meant for humanity eventually — and the spirit of a mature humanity demands a monkey on its back to reach its full potential. Of course, cruelty meant as a kindness can be much more … thorough … than cruelty for its own sake.

Humanity Should Destroy Itself, Collectively, Except for a Few Toys

It is fundamental to the Dark that humanity as a whole should destroy itself. The Dark is divided about the methods — some feel that the only satisfactory end to humanity is a unanimous and voluntary decision on humanity's part to die.

"My name is India. You may call me Lord.

"You have given me another name, I understand. In the Conclave of Powers, you called me 'traitor' — I and all the other Ymerae of the Dark. Saying that at the end, we will betray the Earth.

"It is true that if the Excrucians are victorious, humanity will be destroyed. Not by its own hand, true; it would not be the victory we most desire. But it would be a victory. It would answer our long purpose upon the Earth. I do not dispute this. I do not even dispute your claim; perhaps the Excrucian's final purpose on this world will be a nuclear exchange, and we will aid them and abet them and depart from this world with full contentment.

"It is not treason, little Power, to be as we are. It is Nature. Yet I command every vile weapon the human plague has ever produced, and I will not stand by while you call for our destruction.

"I reach out my hand, like so — please, stop squirming. It is unseemly. I reach out my hand — ah. An electric drill. I think I will start with your eyes."
—India, Imperator, Magister of the Dark, Lord of Cleresyne Plain

"I have come because you have chosen to serve the Dark — not, perhaps, with your full understanding; not, perhaps, a conscious choice; not, perhaps, even knowing what the Dark is. For a human, that would be a meaningless choice, but you are no longer human. The raw stuff of magic runs through your veins, and lets you hear the Dark's song — and you have chosen.

"You are one of us now. A Hand of Fate, raised against the human desecration of the Earth. A being of surpassing justice — for we do not even slay the bipedal ulcer that scurries across the planet's face. We simply teach them of the need for suicide.

"You will be called 'evil' by humans and Powers alike. They will rail at you that we have no right — but we are our right. They will roar at you that humanity's final suicide will destroy the Earth — but an empty world is better than one that holds their race. You do not understand yet? The Creator invented Corruption. Lucifer embraced it. But it is the humans who invented evil!"
—Ummah, Dominus of Wire, Power of the Dark

The Dark carefully cultivates the technology and the despair needed for this act. Others would be satisfied if only a handful of men and women decide to end the human race, and provide biological and nuclear weapons and the failures to communicate that set one nation against another. Still others believe that destruction is an art and that humanity's death must be a wondrous thing — that humanity should sacrifice itself, perhaps, to destroy the Excrucians. There is only one certainty among all camps of the Dark: things which make the human condition on Earth more difficult are acceptable.

It is an ironic corollary to the nature of the Dark that they do not readily enact plans that slay innocents — that Mount St. Helens and Chernobyl and even war are not the kinds of things they favor. Such things might step towards humanity's destruction but involve too many who do not create their own destruction. Like Hell, they wish their victims to stay alive — long enough for them to realize the ruin of their lives and die.

Ugliness to Human Eyes Shows That One is Worthy

Dark solutions to Breakthroughs are ugly, brisk, and efficient. Dark Powers make no pretense of humanity: some cultivate sores, others infestation, others unsightly costumes that draw more disgust than amusement. The psychology of the Dark Powers requires that above all they must not be human. The soul-shard and Darksong in them must be the whole of their being — because otherwise they must destroy themselves. The normal response is to learn an inhuman aesthetic. Of course, this does not mean that one must reject human beauty; the two notions may intersect. However, many Dark feel as does Ahihud Magister: "The human notion of beauty is ultimately predicated on human survival, even down to the characteristics they find admirable or beautiful in themselves."

History of the Dark

The Dark begins as did the Light, with Manaechus and the apples of Eden. Yet it took an entirely different direction. Adam's bite did not teach him self-preservation, but self-destruction. As Eve understood the wisdom of salvation, Adam learned the dark path of ruin … yet, as she did, he felt that he had learned wisdom. Many of the Dark — including the blackness that writhed free of the apple as he dropped it to the ground — would have approved of his sentiments.

"Anything that cannot destroy itself," he explained, "is not free. Nothing that happens to it is a result of its own decisions: either the universe had fated its destruction or it had not. It has no choice, and it has no meaning."

Eve replied, "Only the things which are have meaning; not those which are not." Yet he did not listen to her; impelled by the First Lord and Magister of the Dark, he left Eden, throwing spite in the face of the Creator who had set him there. Eve followed him; when they were far enough away, the First Lord bound Eden into a Chancel — destroying its nature and replacing it with his own. Thus withered the tree whose fruits are immortality and the apple tree which teaches wisdom and folly alike.

The Light stayed desperately close to the first two humans, having already lost the first battle. And the Dark did not move. Generations came and went, and humanity was no longer of the *spiritus Dei*. Adam died. When Eve died, a guiding guarding flame in the hearts of humanity, tribute to the apple's wisdom in her, went out. The Dark emerged from the Sable Gardens to begin its war against humanity. Over and over again, the Dark taught men to hate and to kill. It taught them total warfare. It bent their imagination to creating weapons, poisons, and taxes. The Light fought back: love, law, wisdom, peace — there was no shortage of their gifts to humanity. Yet as the years went by, the danger to humanity only increased.

The Dark was contemptuous of the Light. It looked out upon the world at war, a world alive with fell inventions and few of the good, and thought that it could speed its death. Subtly, the Dark winnowed down the herds and convinced humans to breed; subtly, it wounded the soil with winter and life-draining weeds. Three generations, it thought, and it could convince the humans to overfarm and overhunt and wipe out their food sources as an act of unmeditated self-destruction. Thus the Dark spent its power on little things, on subtle things, and it thought itself clever.

The Light simply waited, and watched until the Dark had committed itself, had poised itself expectantly on the brink of victory. Then they revealed their ace in the hole. They held captive the demon Satyavrata, who did not govern water, or control water but who was the endless deluge. In forty days of rain, human civilization was set back several millennia — several millennia where almost all the tools were weapons of war. Human population was set back even more. And the animals — well. For three hundred years, a Magister of the Light, known as Noë, had been drawing them into the spirit world. It was hardly difficult at all to bring them back when the rain was done.

This is a story that the Dark tells all its new Powers to remind them that the enemies of the Earth, the accursed Magisters of the Light, are dangerous. Be wary, for all that it seems that humanity is doomed.

Estates of the Dark

The greatest perversities of humanity — terrorism, for example, is one of the least among them — give rise to Dark Ymerae, also called Darklords, Lords of the Dark, or Magisters of the Dark. It is not the action that creates an Imperator; it is the concept. There have been many "racial cleansings", but only one Imperator for them; there have been innumerable sexual assaults, and the same holds there.

As with the Light, their other Estates can be random or patterned. It is even possible that there is no obvious evil they are tied to — but it is much more likely that there is an Estate and a Power of theirs that they are not telling you about.

Example Imperator of the Dark: India

India is arrogant. He is a Lord of the Dark, and his chosen purview is the destructive potential of human invention. His Powers and the existence of his spirit steer that potential onwards, even as he focuses the bulk of his attention on the spirit world. His soul is bitter and cold, yet there is one redeeming feature within it: a furious near-angelic appreciation for beauty in all its forms. Do not mention this to him; he will deny it most dangerously. His Estates, after all, are ugly things: Pollution, Chemical Weapons, and Greed. Whence could a taste of beauty come?

India's Chancel

Locus India is an unusual place, because India has severed the normal connection and sameness of prosaic Earth and mythic reality. On prosaic Earth his Chancel is a soulless place, a giant grey windowless cube of a building, where scientists work day and night to invent new weapons for him. In mythic reality, it is nothing of the kind. There, his Ward is a light jungle where rainbows glisten in every dewdrop and birds of wondrous plumage flutter between the trees. There are no humans there, although there are some humanoid spirits — it is possible that his Powers are only human, or even only extant, in prosaic Earth. Perhaps, instead, he makes them from the asoors (djinn-like spirits living in his mythic reality) … no one seems to know.

"Oh, do not be afraid, thou merchant of death. I admire industry."
—India, Magister of the Dark, Imperator of Pollution, Chemical Weapons, and Greed, to a weapons merchant

India's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	3: Inhuman	9
Domain	3: Forceful	8
Realm	6: Imperial	9
Spirit	4: Conflagration	7

Gifts and Virtues	Immortal Elemental
Limits/Restrictions	Restriction: Cannot cope with insults Affiliation: Code of the Dark
Wound Levels	2 Deadly Wounds (Immortal) 2 Serious Wounds 3 Surface Wounds
Total Cost:	75 Character Points

Story Seeds Featuring Imperators of the Dark

India's Test

There are many reasons to go to India. His Chancel, after all, produces many bizarre and wondrous weapons. Powers who stay on his good side may even find him congenial. Yet Powers dread the day their Imperator asks them to go to him — because India does no favors until he has first given the recipient a test and lesson rolled into one. For seven days, they must wear an animal's shape, in the human world; if they let themselves be changed back sooner, he will offer them no aid. In this manner, he teaches them of the ugliness of humanity and the purity of an animal's spirit. This will usually be more amusing to the players if a number of crises come up while they're in, er, no shape to handle them.

The Selflessness Plague

Selflessness is sweeping through a small town near the PCs' Chancel and it's breaking human society apart. Have the Excrucians created a selflessness virus? Have they altered a spirit of kindness to reproduce faster? Are they force-marching townsmen through a portal that makes this change? The PCs can probably figure out what's going on but they may well not have any Estate that will help fix it. Worse, they may be saddled with an "observer" from the Dark at that observer's Imperator's specific request, and if this selflessness is causing humans to self-destruct, does the Dark really want it stopped? It could, of course: it could decide that this isn't a genuinely free choice of personal ruin — or it could be behind it in the first place.

Imperators of the Wild

The Wild is built on freedom; the Wild is based on slavery. A few words, then, on this contradiction. The unChancelled Wildlords skip between worlds like children at play; at the same time, they alone of all Ymerae are unable to enter the Lands Beyond Creation. Their power of choice is one of the pillars of the world — when a Wildlord is bound, the World Ash trembles. Yet they say that their choices are bound by laws which others do not comprehend, that their behavior is a strict consequence of principles built into their souls. There are terrifying indications that this is true — that some of the Wildlords who fight for Creation are dead and yet fight on and play on, because they can do nothing else. These are the contradictions of the Wildlords. It is said that the Powers who join the Wild serve strange masters.

These are the fundamental precepts of the Wild:

Freedom is the Highest Principle

To a Wild Power or Wild Ymera, each choice is like an achingly pure note wrenched from the throat of the most accomplished singer: complete in itself, alpha and omega in one, and full of beauty with or without accompaniment. The world is an endlessly complex symphony made from these choices. To the Wild, everything makes such choices. The World Ash itself, the stable foundation for all the universe, sings green music with every tremble of a leaf, with every beat of its inner heart, with every Aaron's Serpent it brings forth from its hidden depths.

Binding a sentient being, interfering with their rights to their own choices, shatters one of those notes, breaks the rhythm of the song. Philosophically, this is difficult to define, because the actions of one person interfere with the actions of others. The Powers and Ymerae of the Wild, however, rarely bother with philosophy. Even those Powers whose senses cannot detect the deleted note directly are usually pretty sure whether a given event is a denial of choice.

"There are those who have said that the Wildlords are not of this Earth. Do not believe them! It is manifestly untrue. Consider: I am the Regius of Spheres … yet spheres are fundamental. The Earth — nay, any of the worlds on the tree — would be a very different place without them.

"I will go further. Not only are the Wildlords of this world, we are among the foundations of existence itself. This is why we fight, why we must fight, what we are fighting for — in order to destroy the Earth, the Excrucians must first destroy our choices.

"You are wondering, then, what makes us the Wild? Whence come all the tales that we are aliens to the Tree? Ah … That is not a failure in ourselves. We are what the world wants us to be. It is a failure in Creation itself: it is a place we dislike, a gaol and not a joy. Why were we brought here, then? I can only guess. I can only guess that Creation also requires something constantly reaching outwards, that it must be built on our desire to escape, or it will not survive.

"I loathe Creation, for this reason. But I will help it endure."
—Achaz, Wildlord and Regius

"You don't understand force. You should stop trying to use it. Look: you have sent wave after wave of men against Belhem and still he advances; you have called down a dragon made from the wind to slay him, and still he advances; you have made wrack and ruin of your land, and still he comes. Force must be applied with wisdom, or it can do nothing. Belhem is of the Wild; trying to kill him is futile. Allow him to advance. Yield to him your kingdom. The Wild cannot refuse, cannot not return, so extravagant a gift ... "
—from Air Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

There is some question about whether Excrucian choices need to be respected; certainly, most agree, the choices of Excrucian Anchors should be. In practice, this means that Wild Powers aren't going to try and convert an Excrucian or pump it for information.

Sensible Wild Powers do their best to anticipate all the choices their enemies can make, so that whatever those choices are, the Wild Power comes out ahead. Of course, few Wild Powers are sensible.

Sanity and Mundanity are Prisons

To be Wild is to trust to your divine soul, whether you are a Ymera with nothing but *spiritus Dei* holding you together or a lowly Power with but one shard of an Imperator's noble spirit. The commandments of society are nothing in comparison to those inner, miraculous desires, and that is all the Wild has to say of mundanity.

Sanity is a different issue, because the converse is also a prison — utter madness, like total sanity, removes all choice. The Wild charts a course between these poles toward the complete expression of one's personality.

Violent Powers of the Wild refuse to trap someone in a dark alley and beat them up — but they're quite willing to stalk someone just to watch them run, or beat up anyone who chooses to fight (or bare metal and stone if that's all that's handy).

Inquisitive Powers of the Wild show no remorse if they are caught sneaking into a military base or poking around in some other Imperators' dungeon.

The Wild does not believe in hesitation. Lest you feel that this is pure self-indulgence and that the Wild is a cult of selfishness, remember that when a Wild Ymera is bound, the World Ash shakes.

Give in Kind With a Gift Received

In 'Rosebud and the Sovereign', a traditional story of Austria, a Wild Power advises Rosebud: "Move the immovable object by tying it down. Break the invulnerable warrior by guarding him. Stop the unstoppable force by helping it on its way."

He may not speak for the Nobilis as a whole, but something in that captures the weakness of Wild Power. Interfering with the choices of a Wild Power probably enrages it; interfering with the choices of a Wild Regius may bring legions of Imperators down on your head.

There is another option, though: assisting the Wild being in such a way that its choices serve you. There are two sides to that. One is a sort of judo-based attitude towards conflict, where you account for the energy the Wild being brings to the situation when preparing the situation itself.

The other is to make your own actions a part of the music of the Wild being itself, to help it — effectively binding its song to your own. You tangle yourself up in its choices, and the only way it can sensibly extract its destiny from yours is to end the obligation and repay the gift.

Ironically, this means that accepting a gift and returning nothing is the highest honor a Wild Power or Regius can offer to anyone.

The Nature of Freedom
Players and HGs should understand that the Wild does not act out of insane, chaotic, random lawlessness. Granted, the Wild is insane. The Wild is chaotic. The Wild is lawless. Yet insanity, chaos, and lawlessness do not define the Wild. They serve only as the mode in which it expresses its nature. That nature is not random at all.

The ordinary laws of physics, ethics, logic, and society mean little to the Wild. The codes of conduct by which Wild Powers and Magisters live fly in the face of all such laws. At the same time, these codes are often extraordinarily strict. Creatures of the Wild have little time to act purposelessly: the obligations of their nature fill up their every hour.

Consider Vyasa's example of the wind. To those who do not understand its mindset, the weather seems capricious and random. To meteorologists, it seems less so. To those personally acquainted with the spirits of the wind, it seems scarcely random at all. The nature of freedom — as the Wild defines it, if nothing else — is the ability to express as much of one's inner law as one can.

History of the Wild

In one sense, the Wild has no history. Wildlords and Wild Powers stagger through the Tree of Worlds, rending the tapestry of events and scattering wonders in their path. Yet they do have legends — stories they have shared over time about the world they may have come from, about what might have been. This is one of them: the parable of the lamp.

In the beginning, there was a Bishop. I call him that because he was a very fine and holy man, who would have consigned himself to Hell if by doing so he could spare one person's pain. He ran a Mission. I call it that because it was a place where the beaten-down ideas — the worlds that no Creator ever built — they could gather there. They could rest, there, and dream. But 'idea' is too bulky a word, so let us simply call them men.

There was one man in that Mission who had no eyes, and he could not see that the world he embodied had been made real: a shining light, like a lamp, that hung on the street outside. Yet when he slept, it dimmed; when he ate, it brightened; when he made love, it glowed like an oceanful of stars. There were others who noticed this, and because ideas are unjealous things, they told him of the wonder of the lamp.

The blind man had a very difficult decision to make. It was the first of three. He knew the Mission well. He knew the people there. He loved the Bishop — they all did. And he could not see the lamp, to see what he would be if he allowed concept and execution to merge into one.

He decided to stay. To live in the Mission, as he had always done.

The Bishop was like other holy men in this: he had a grave concern for the darker side of ... the Empyrean. Crime, he called it. The wrongness that lives in worlds, in ideas, even in the Bishop himself. He spoke to the people of the Mission of this. Of the evil that hides in darkness.

What had the blind man ever known but darkness?

Yet there was a strength to him. He was idea made flesh. He had a world that was of him, and he was of it, and he knew the name of the enemy of darkness. He called upon the lamp, and bade it shine brighter.

Years passed. The Bishop spoke to them again. "There is still Crime," he said, and "Be vigilant: it may be found even where there is light."

What had the blind man ever known but darkness?

Yet there was a strength to him. He was idea made flesh. He had a world that was of him, and he was of it, he knew the alternative to light. He called upon the lamp, and bade it grow dim.

Years passed. The Bishop spoke to them again. "There is still Crime," he said, and there was unending sorrow in his voice.

This was the second hard choice. For if Crime could be found in Light, and Crime could be found in Darkness, then there was nothing the blind man could trust in all reality. He had a world that was of him, and he was of it. With a clench of his fist, he shattered the lamp. He shattered the world that was made for him, in the name of Hope.

Years passed — ah, must I say it? For death is no answer to evil. There was still Crime.

What more could the blind man do? He left the Mission, and walked out into the night. To those who asked him, "Where go you now?" he said simply, "If I cannot be a world, I will be a poet." He walked into other worlds, and he was gone. This was the third hard choice.

The Wild descends from that blind man. For what deeper blindness is there, than to forget where you have come from? And what greater sorrow is there than to never have known it at all?

—from Legends of the Nobilis, by Luc Ginneis

Wild Estates

Almost anything can be an Estate of the Wild. No Wild Ymerae have ever been created by a human invention, but some anticipate an invention.

For example, if Trains comprised a Wildlord Estate, that Ymera could have been around for millennia — and in the years before trains existed, they would have haunted mortal dreams, shown up in advanced Chancels, and so forth. That Wildlord would inspire humans along the path of technological development that resulted (eventually) in tracks and engines, conductors and, well, trains themselves.

Example Imperator of the Wild: Achaz

Achaz is an Ymera of the Wild. He (or she; it varies) has an abnormal perception of the symphony of choice. While he demands freedom for himself in body, mind, and soul, he respects only one freedom of others: the freedom to be what they are, to hold to their selfhood in their individual hearts. That is the freedom he considers priceless. His policy — one that his Powers would do well to remember — is that shackling or killing an enemy is acceptable, but manipulating the emotions or minds of mortals (such as with the "Glorious" Gift) requires justification. Changing anything's essential nature is a crime against all reality.

Achaz's Estates indicate this quality of choice in their own way. He rules the Sphere, the path that comes back to the beginning in time. He rules Division, the hard line of separation between where one has been and where one will be. He rules Stasis, the final choice, the choice of immobility. Of course, there are dozens of alternative breakdowns for choice and the universe as a whole — and many Wild Imperators lack this consistency among their various Estates.

Achaz's Chancel

Achaz's Chancel is one of the few with open roads that lead in and out; Achaz considers its Borderguard a sufficient defense.

At its heart is the Churchill University, a place well respected academically, despite the rumors of odd things happening there. These rumors are the first warning; Churchill's motto — *In vino, feritas*; "In wine, wildness" — is the second. There is no third warning. By the time a kid comes home for spring break with wings (or a serpent tattoo writhing beneath their skin, or an invisible friend that really eats), it's really too late for parents to do anything about it. Most of them — the parents, that is — resist *dementia animus* only by refusing to accept that such things have really happened and are happening now.

Achaz's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	5: Exemplar	5
Domain	3: Forceful	7
Realm	5: Tempest	6
Spirit	5: Inferno	5

Gifts and Virtues	Immortal
	Choice-Sense
	Virtue: Honest
Limits/Restrictions	Affiliation: Code of the Wild
Wound Levels	3 Deadly Wounds (Immortal)
	3 Serious Wounds
	3 Surface Wounds

We do not offer scholarships. We do not offer financial aid. We do not offer benefits to in-state students. No one comes to Churchill U. who does not first decide that a Churchill student is what they want to be.
—Achaz, Imperator of Division, Stasis, and the Sphere, in the Churchill University Catalog

Choice-Sense: Achaz's Gift

Achaz can sense when a choice is made or stolen in his vicinity. This is a Lesser Divination of Choices, purchased as follows:

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON?	COST
2+5 Penetration	Automatic	Local	Limited	No	
7 CPs	+1	−1	−2	+1	6 CPs

Total Cost: 75 Character Points

Story Seeds Featuring Imperators of the Wild

The Basketball Match

Churchill U. has a basketball team — the Savages — who are sweeping the college championships again, due to magical assistance. They may even have Achaz's Powers on their side. Now a morally offended friend or a Cammoran cashing in a favor wants another team to win .... The PCs will have to be careful. The Savages come from a school with a sorcery major, after all. If both sides get into heavy magic, even though the PCs' magical might is superior, college basketball might never be the same.

The Stalking Terror

A Wildlord's Powers hold a party to celebrate some victory over the Excrucians, and it'd be terribly rude not to at least send an Anchor. But shortly after the party begins, guests start turning up dead.

An impromptu organization of the guests, realizing that the Nobles of a Wildlord would never dare seal the Chancel, appoints the PCs to guard one entrance instead — but more than just the murderer will be wanting to leave the Chancel in a hurry.

Divine Imperators (the "True Gods")

"I'm not a native speaker of any tongue but the Spirits'; forgive me if I make an occasional mistake. You may not feel honored, not yet, not after your difficult Commencement. For reference, however, even the fragment of attention I dedicate to you now is a high honor. Not many humans are worthy of even that much. I will say something more. You are one of a very few humans on this world with a trait I can respect. A tiny fraction of your race has strength of spirit. A tiny fraction has an intuition that goes beyond mortal and immortal reason alike. That's all — perhaps a thousandth of a per cent, all told. The rest are but beasts that have bred out of control.

"This is why I have chosen you, because you are worth a fragment of my time. Do not grow arrogant, however: you are still nothing beside me. Your mind evolved from the primitive consciousness of the animal kingdom; I was born from nothing as one of the Lords of the Spirit World. You are useful enough to be a tool, and once I have shown you what I fight against, you will be content to be that tool.

"Look! And see the Dark Horsemen come —"

—His/Her Divinity Sennacharib, Imperator

Some beings live almost exclusively in the spirit world — by nature, that is, and not simply because of the war. For the most part, these spirits, the Ferohers, lack sentience — they are like currents in the ocean, like the ink in a watercolor, alive only because spirit does not exist without life. The Lords of the Spirit Realm are greater. Knowing Nobilis call them "true gods", to distinguish them from the gods of humanity's invention. The latter are based mostly on the exploits of Powers, although some myths don't lie. Some horrorists have approached their truth, and some fantasists as well. The touch of a true god's aura as they brush past in the spirit realm makes some humans mad and others inspired.

There are no specific precepts common to all the true gods. Each is an aspect of reality, a different aspect of reality from the others, and their principles vary accordingly. In general, the players determine the ethics of their PCs' Imperator if it is a true god. The HG may charge an Imperator Point or two (p. 144) if the code decided on is greatly to the PCs' advantage. For instance, if their Imperator's first principle is "Have no secrets from those who serve you," this is an unusual benefit and should be paid for, just as one pays for an "Honorable" Imperator.

Some "true gods" are alone in their beliefs, without any Powers affiliated with their code. For these divinities, no three-point ethical description is necessary. The HG can roleplay the god's goals and beliefs based on nothing but their personal vision for the character. When a PC or major NPC affiliates with that god's code, it becomes useful to have some simple guidelines for measuring service or disservice to that god's ethical requirements. These guidelines are often based on some interesting real-world doctrine — like the ethics of a Zen Master, or a military officer — or derive in some manner from the Estates of that god.

Example Code based on the Hippocratic Oath

1. Do no (avoidable) harm.
2. Keep confidentiality.
3. Teach only those who have sworn to this Code.

This particular Code is very difficult to follow in a game of Nobilis. While the third precept is easy and the second precept only limits a PC on occasion, the first precept is distinctly bothersome for a soldier in the Excrucian War. Players should think carefully before choosing such a Code, although this code's difficulties can result in engrossing play.

Example Code based on the Estates of Perception, Vapor, and Falling Stars

1. Guide others to knowledge.
2. Do not contain your spirit: spill joy into the heavens.
3. Do not fail, do not fall — but if you do, make of your failure an act of beauty.

In some ways, a Code like this is better than the simple, single thrusts of the Codes of Dark, Light, Heaven, Hell, and the Wild. It offers a broader range of service — but makes disservice harder to avoid as well!

History of the True Gods

Before the Excrucians, before Lucifer's Fall, before the Dark and the Light, there were the Old Gods. Fragmented human legends call them Titans or Spirit Kings. Most sentient beings are vaguely humanoid for the same reason that the trees of most worlds are like the Ash, and the flowers of most worlds are like the flowers in Heaven. The Old Gods, however, were not. They were a spiritual crossbreed between the *spiritus Dei* and the watery spirits that marked the growth of life on Earth. They are the least comprehensible of all the Imperators, even now. What can a human say to a being formed on the one hand from the divine and on the other hand from weeds, or grass, or the organic soup in the sea?

The Old Gods struggled for supremacy over each other for a long while, prefiguring the struggle in Heaven. In time, they found peace and respect for each other's place. Now and again, a new Lord of the spirit world was born. This pleased the Old Gods, for such newcomers were not bound by truce, and their spirits could be rended, swallowed, even shared among the Spirit Kings. They grew confident in their power and sat back to watch the evolution of the Earth.

Not all spirits are Ferohers or gods. In particular, there were the Curetes, warriors of the immaterial world created by the Old Gods in their early struggles and almost forgotten in the long peace. While the Old Gods had nearly forgotten the Curetes, the Curetes had not forgotten them, nor being forced into war and death by their masters' hands. In time, they worked a most eloquent revenge. As each new "great spirit" was born, the Curetes concealed it among their numbers. They clashed their shields in a thunder of noise to drown out the new god's first steps in the spirit world. Ten such spirits were saved and hidden. Fifteen. Twenty — and when there were enough, the Curetes swore to these new Lords their service and marched with the New Gods at their back against their one-time masters. There was brutal, painful war. Where distant reflections of Lucifer's War had troubled the spirit world a long time before, this was immediate. Even as the Curetes marched, the High Court of the Angels sentenced Lucifer to Hell. His response stained the Perfect Realm with argent blood and the gleam of silken blades.

The New Gods were current; the Old Gods were history. There could be only one result to the battle. The Old Gods were beaten back, and the spirit world set down new laws, of which "no Lord will destroy another" is the most pertinent.

There are other stories of the true gods. Legends tell of the Golden-Haired Horse King, who was captured and stabled and gifted to the Emperor of China, only to throw off that august lord with a backbreaking fury when first he tried to ride. They speak of the immortal who sought to find a man without greed, how he turned mountains to gold with a gesture of his finger, and how the first man who showed no

"I cannot justify my code to you. The truths behind it are beyond a human's understanding — or rather, beyond the understanding of the human mind. Your soul touches mine, now. It knows. It will guide you, if you let it, if you will release your stubborn hold on the principles you knew when you were a mortal and no more. If you can refuse the lure of Dark and Light, Heaven and Hell, and know that they are but shadows. Even the Angels were born in bodies, with flesh to sully their thoughts; even the Dark and Light, though they could hide in a chiaroscuro. Even I — oh, you of human birth, know that even I have put on the flesh, and cannot soar the heights of understanding that were once mine …"

—Drag-Adriesse, Imperator and Goddess

OPPOSITE:
Acmonian Wood
by Lee Moyer


MOYER
2001

interest in the gold asked instead for the finger. They speak of the greatest frontiersman of all and how he pitted his axe against the great blue weapon of the Lady of Wood — and though his own weapon was shattered, he claimed hers in its stead. They speak of many things.

Divine Estates

Divine Imperators are generally somewhat abstract — after all, their natural home is the spirit world, where some of the concrete ideas humans are used to simply don't apply. They often have Estates that are uniquely Earthly as well as being important on the Earth. For example, the true god Sennacharib, see below, defines the "space between the light and the image, between touch and solidity". The distinction between observations and objective truth is important to the human paradigm, but on other worlds, perceptions might be direct and utterly honest. (See the story on p. 32.)

Example Divine Imperator: Sennacharib

Sennacharib possesses the attributes of divinity — specifically, a deep attunement to the Earth, selflessness, and miraculous power. He is a "true god" to the Nobles of Earth; for Ymerae and Powers who come from elsewhere, this is implicitly restated as a "true god of Earth". He was born directly from the needs of this planet and his Estates reflect this. As he describes his origin, "the fundamental balance of the spirit world changed, and I came to be. Whole. Complete. Divine." Admittedly his wholeness comes with an occasional wobble between genders.

Sennacharib's Chancel

Where Achaz's Chancel is an entire University, Sennacharib is content merely with the Physics Department. The entryways are much as one would expect. Registered students who try and transfer into the "nonexistent" department find themselves in Sennacharib's Keep. Ph.D.s who answer the ad on the college Web page for faculty positions are also brought there, into a land of bramble and fecund woods, where the essential laws of nature change every day and the only surety of survival is to learn them with alacrity. The Regius Sennacharib finds amusement in hunting down these physicists with his Powers as hounds. Any who turn the tables and bring down a Power generally replace them. Because even a true god is vaguely aware of human limits, Sennacharib has enhanced the percipience of the Realm's inhabitants enormously — and this does help them cope.

Story Seeds Featuring True Gods

Unnecessary Complication

A PC Power uses magic against some Earthly human, only to discover the person is an artist (or someone with acute perceptions — a detective, perhaps?) dear to Sennacharib's heart. In that instant, due to a ward set upon the victim, the PC's sight simply stops. In order to see again, they will probably have to apologize or offer recompense to Sennacharib and figure out a way around Sennacharib's Restriction so that he can free them from his curse. This story works best when there is something else very important going on.

Physician, Heal Thyself

Some Power bound to the Hippocratic Code, perhaps Aesculpius himself, has been directly responsible for an enormous loss of life and cannot live with the guilt. Wracked with their grief, they muster enough strength to resist their Imperator's will and head for the Starkness Pit, which devours souls. Their Estate is something on which one of the PCs' Estates depend, perhaps, putting them at risk — or maybe the PCs are simply friends with the doctor. Either way, they must block the way to the Pit, and, depending on whether they care for the doctor or not, either bring them before the Locust Court for their earlier mistake or save them from its fell Judiciaries.

Sennacharib's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

I believe it would be excellent for your education if you were to discover for me why Lucifer chose to Anchor the Deluges.
—Sennacharib, True God of Perception, Vapor, and Falling Stars

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	2: Legendary	6
Domain	4: Masterful	9
Realm	6: Imperial	9
Spirit	4: Conflagration	6

Gifts and Virtues Immortal
Constant Domain: Lesser Creations

Limits/Restrictions Restriction: Cannot affect the blind or deaf
Affiliation: Sennacharib's Code

Wound Levels 2 Deadly Wounds (Immortal)
2 Serious Wounds
2 Surface Wounds

Sennacharib's Code

1. Guide others to knowledge.
2. Do not contain your spirit: spill joy into the heavens.
3. Do not fail, do not fall — but if you do, make of your failure an act of beauty.

Total Cost: 80 Character Points

Aaron's Serpents

"Do not fear. I have no hunger for morsels as small as you, and there is an essence in human souls that gets stuck between my teeth."
—Meredan, Imperator and Wyrm

In some ways, Aaron's Serpents are the most human of all the Imperators. They are in general individual in their tastes and desires. They are sane and stable, for the most part. They are first and foremost physical beings for all that they can walk in the spirit world — for all that they are Regi and as such among the defining forces in any world. Like humans, they are brought into being by an unmystical natural law. The difference is that humans come from the natural law of Earth, and the Serpents are born from the natural law of Yggdrasil. The Serpents are *causa causans* because the life force of the Ash itself beats in their hearts. It protects them

"I often wonder why I have come here — I, child of the World Ash, and thus a scion of the noblest bloodline there is. This is far from Serpenthane, my true home; far from my mother's arms. Yet there is a beauty in the rock, as well — I think that must be what calls me, the songs of the slumbering deep places of the Earth."
—The Graveling Wyrm, Imperatrix, Lady of Molten Rock

from the physical laws of Earth that would make such monstrous beasts impossible: for all that they weigh more than any dinosaur ever did, they can slide along the Earth's surface without leaving a track. They are lovers of the sea, these Aaron's Serpents, lovers of the depths where only Imperial eyes can see, and of the surface, where they can ripple and play. Many of them ignore the Valde Bellum. Most of them wander the surface of the tree, destroying Excrucians when they can. Some, as a gift to the world, as an inevitable consequence of their own responsible nature, come to Earth and other threatened worlds, and build Chancels there, and aid in their defense.

Like true gods, the Serpents have no single, universal creed. The precepts they follow are individual and even, almost, human. Still, some principles are common enough to be found in many Powers who have taken their Serpent Imperator's Code as their own.

Respect Life/Respect Plant Life

There are lots and lots of Aaron's Serpents who respect all life. They do not kill without necessity; they do not condescend even to mortals; they offer others the rights of privacy and free expression. On the other hand, there are lots and lots of Serpents who don't feel this way. Regardless, all but the bitterest Serpents have a great respect for trees, even though no mortal tree is any true cousin to the World Ash. They often extend this to other plants as well.

Players can choose how deep this respect runs. Keep in mind that the less respect they need to show, and therefore the rarer their MP loss to this Affiliation, the more extreme the circumstances when they gain a MP for their Affiliation will have to be (see p. 133).

An Oath Sworn Under the Stars is Binding/An Oath Sworn By the Ash is Binding

When the first angel woke in Heaven, there were already stars scattered across the sky. The legends of the Serpents claim that those stars were once the first children of the Ash and that when the world ends, the Ash will devour itself like the phoenixes do and emerge from the woodwreck pristine and reborn. A Serpent who serves the Ash well will join those first children, when thus the cycle of days runs out. The stars are sacred to the Wyrms, as is the Ash; the only Serpents who do not hold this as part of their code are those who find oaths implausible as a general rule.

Sacred Things
Vyasa asks what lies beyond the highest heaven — surely meaning Heaven itself. He asks what walked the worlds before time began. He asks what the dragons — the Aaron's Serpents — hold sacred. These three questions have a single answer: the stars. The stars hang above the Perfect Realm. Their radiance shone on all the worlds before the beginning of time. Their myths fill the Serpents' hearts with awe.

Take Only What You Have Earned

Theft means nothing to the Aaron's Serpents, and "property" only a little more. They can define these concepts, but they cannot easily grasp them, since they are raised in a world that has given them everything. What this injunction defines is duty: that one must work and sacrifice in proportion to what one desires. This is no easy principle to hold. Aaron's Serpents, crippled in the war, have been known to starve themselves, or even die, because they could no longer earn the rich-flowing sap that flows in and on the World Ash their parent.

Use Not Fire; Wield Not the Saw; Offend Not the Spirits of the Trees

This is the easiest precept to hold of all those mentioned so far, because of the existence of the mythic world. Powers can hear the screams of the dryads when fire or saw nears them. Yet it is a strange thing for a once-human, to discard humanity's first tool. Even Powers of Hell or the Dark should remember to abide by this precept when they are out on the World Ash, where most Serpents roam.

Be at Peace

The Aaron's Serpents teach those who will listen how to hear the slow heartbeat of the Ash wherever they are: to calm themselves, to slow their own heart, to attune oneself to the ways of reality. Yet peace is delicate, and the peace of the Ash will close out new loves, and the external peace — as important as the internal — limits just how impressively dangerous a Power can seem.

A Tale of Aaron's Serpents

"Jormungandr, it is said, wraps around the world. That is a base canard, for no Serpent would ever be so undignified. Bad enough that his teeth are caught in his tail, and he can't get them out.

"In any case, there was a Ymera who went out to sea with the insane idea that he would catch Jormungandr, and pull him from the sea. Insane for two reasons: because it is never wise to catch something you cannot control, and because there is a prophecy that when Jormungandr leaves his oceanic home, the Earth will be no more.

"He had a calf's head, as bait, and the line was as strong as any line could ever be. And he was a cunning fisherman, and Jormungandr took the bait. We do not kill frequently, but the calf was already dead — and brains taste wonderfully fine. He navigated the head past his tail, and swallowed. A vast curved hook caught in the tender flesh of his mouth.

"Oh! It was a struggle, and it could have destroyed the world in itself! But it is hard to exercise properly when jarring your head or your tail hurts — and Jormungandr was nearly pulled from the sea.

"When his head, reluctantly, crested, the god's companion realized what had been caught — and broke the fishing pole with a blow of his hand. Jormungandr fell back into the sea, and soon after the god's companion was thrown after him, and that is where the mortal's story of it ended. For are not humans fond of their gods?

"Yet Serpents know the true ending, for we are social creatures, and Jormungandr is our own kind. The true ending is this: on his path back home, the god came across a fountain that sprayed, not water, but the finest ale. He began to drink, for it seemed a

wonder of the world — and so strong a drinker was he that he cleaned out the basin and chased the ale back to the flange from which the drink erupted. He set his mouth over it, and sucked in the ale hard —

"Well. The metal hook set there caught him, and those who know how stories should end will say that it dragged him back to sea, and made of him Jormungandr's feast. Not so! But it is close.

"The god could not free his mouth from the fountain, so thoroughly hooked was he. And the ale poured in and in and in to him until he ruptured, but by then, I think, he was already dead."

—Meredan, Imperator and Wyrm

Serpent Estates

Serpents are of the World Ash and thus part of the fundamental structure of the world. Unlike Angels and Fallen, they need not be corrupt or bright in their Estates; unlike the Dark and the Light, they need not be tied to an Estate born of man. Anything goes, on a grand and serpentine scale.

Example Aaron's Serpent: The Graveling Wyrm

The Graveling Wyrm is a Leviathan who has chosen not the sea but the mantle of the Earth in which to build her Chancel. She is a lover of the rock and can swim through it as if it were the sea; for this reason she has undertaken the defense of the Earth. She is lavishly capable, able to meet any need, pay any price for her chosen world. Alas, she has paid the first price already, in sundering her soul into Chancel and Powers to defend her body while her spirit labors. Alas, she has paid the second price, in the Excrucian poison which rots her slowly from within. She has prophesied to her Powers that the third price will be the last. Her Estates are Spring and Molten Rock.

The Graveling Wyrm's Chancel

Locus Graveling will be the mustering-place for the warriors of Earth when the final battle comes. So it has been promised, should the Graveling Wyrm endure until the end. Its strict halls teach a lesson in personal strength. The walls, floors, and ceilings alike are a quarter-inch of glass holding out tons and tons again of magma. Her soldiers, the people of Locus Graveling, live austere lives — but they know something of mirth as well, and joy; their complex pageants are one of the lesser wonders of the world.

Story Seeds Involving Aaron's Serpents

Inspectors in General

A jealous Noble from another Familia Caelestis plants the suspicion in the PCs' minds that Locus Graveling will fail in its duty when the mustering comes. A weakness forged into the Wyrm's soul by the poison that courses through her will lead to the collapse of the walls, burning all but the Imperators and the Immortal Powers into fine ash. At the same time, they warn a Power of the Wyrm that Nobles warped to Excrucian-service are coming. Some thoughts to spice this up: How can the PCs travel into the Earth's mantle "inconspicuously"? What if Locus Graveling really is lacking in some way, but the Wyrm denies it? How can the PCs discover the true culprit, and hopefully Nettle them badly?

Makepeace

One of the PCs' ancestors apparently tried to kill one of the Earth-bound Serpents, thinking it a dragon. Now, the Serpent protests that someone with that background should not be made a Power at all. There are different ways this could go; perhaps the PCs travel back in time to prevent this crime — only to discover a cross-time Excrucian plot?

The Graveling Wyrm's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

Heat is life.
—The Graveling Wyrm, Imperator of Spring and Lava

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	6: Imperial	6
Domain	1: Weak	5
Realm	6: Imperial	5
Spirit	4: Conflagration	5

Gifts and Virtues	Immortal Earthswimming
Limits/Restrictions	Restriction: Envenomed and therefore sometimes weak Affiliation: The Graveling Wyrm's Code
Wound Levels	3 Deadly Wounds (Immortal) 3 Serious Wounds 4 Surface Wounds

The Graveling Wyrm's Code

1. Take only what you have earned.
2. An oath sworn under the stars is binding.
3. Encourage life's passion and fury.

Earthswimming: The Graveling Wyrm's Gift

The Graveling Wyrm can swim through stone as through water. This is a Lesser Change of the Self — that is, her location — purchased as follows:

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
6 (Domain)	Simple	Self only	One trick	No	
6 CPs	–1	–3	–3	+1	1 CP

Total Cost: 60 Character Points

Ianthe writes: How to be a Hollyhock God

Part 6

How do Nobles Solve their Problems?

"I think human civilization looks much better over here, against the nebula."
—from Esper, *by G.S. Denmark*

"The Duke will never accept responsibility for the Grail. It has killed too many of its owners as things stand."

"My dear Domenico," answered Dores, "I have no plans to demand his service, his assistance, or his responsibility. I shall merely offer him a priceless gift, humbly and graciously — a token to reflect, however faintly, his august magnificence. Do you truly believe he can refuse?"
—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Casually Excessive Force

It's easy to forget, looking at Powers of Guns and Mazes and Television Programming and Shadows, just how metaphysically "big" a Noble is. You may start to think of Domain over Guns, say, as just a superpower that the relevant Noble has. Don't fall into this trap. Every Noble is as much a primal force as the Power of Gravity, whose will sets the planets in their courses and holds your feet onto the ground. The fact that some Estates are "more important" in the world than others, that some are more dramatic than others, should not obscure the fact that every Noble contains in their soul a piece of the cosmos — a part of the universe's functioning, a burning spark of the will of God. A slice of reality. Something fundamental is going on, something more important than anything in the prosaic Earth or the Mythic World, and the Nobilis are part of that. Our minds stand between that world and yours, as much a part of the mundane world as of the transcendental spirit reality — but our souls do not just rule the world. They create it.

Accordingly, do not expect the Nobilis to balk at excessive solutions.

- Does New York City block a Noble's ocean view? Then the city can move! A slow and ponderous relocation should minimize the danger of *dementia animus*.
- Does the Noble want to live forever? They can create a viral copy of their mind, triggered by their current body's death, to spread through the Chancel and turn random people into their mental clones.
- Is the Noble unsatisfied with scientific progress? A small application of Aspect should set the slow-minded humans on the right track.
- Does a mortal mug a Noble? Do not be surprised if a Noble casually pulls the human's heart from their chest — or reforms them with well-chosen words, and sets them on the path of civic righteousness.

Social Action

For a Noble, the social world is vital. What we cannot accomplish alone, we can almost certainly achieve together. If we bribe, bully, trick, pressure, or persuade the right Noble to aid us, our powers are unlimited! To oppose enemies we cannot face alone, we must form alliances with our peers. A Noble should constantly mind the web of alliances, favors, and social possibilities that surrounds them. Keeping track of those who owe them, who will support them, who fear them, who love them — and expanding that list — this occupies much of a Noble's time.

Moreover, some of the most important challenges faced outside of Noble society are *also* best approached in a social way. Excrucian flower rites, for example, tend to corrupt a situation in the mortal world. Massive displays of miraculous power do not correct such situations. Rather, the Powers should use their abilities as "edges" to help them subtly steer the humans involved back onto the right course. (Or the wrong course, depending on the Estate involved.)

Similarly, helping one's Anchors to prosper rarely requires blowing up a mountain, though exceptions exist. Rather, it involves correctly assessing the social situation around the Anchor and applying pressure at the right point. Pushing an Anchor's mortal superior around does not always resolve trouble between the Anchor and that superior — what if the real source of problems is a coworker spreading scurrilous lies, and they go to someone higher in the chain of command?

Finally, while many minor spirits are uncommunicative — from the anguli and minime up through the spirits of tables, lamps, and small stretches of river — important spirits tend to heed a silver tongue. Lesser spirits occasionally respond to threats.

A Manual of Persuasion: How to Play Social Games

"You were a great servant of your Lord," said Uluiru to Father Parnell. "You were a worthy adversary. I am sorry you must leave us." His eyes rose to the sky. "In honor of your memory, you shall be the last of your kind: for this is my will, that no priest of your God shall ever enter these lands again. The earth shall turn beneath their feet. The skies shall rage. The trees shall bar their path. And if they should persist, and enter this territory, they shall lose their breath and dwindle away and die."

The space by Parnell's eyes crinkled. "Thank you," he said, before he died, for he was a man of great humor and little belief in shamans.
—from Fire and Forget, *by Madeline Bacall*

I shall set aside the artifice for you, my dear and darlingest, and speak of the arts of persuasion. These are the tools that the Nobilis use, the realities of our lives. We cannot afford true honesty in social relations save with our closest friends.

Self-confidence is endemic among the Nobilis. It does no good to try and undermine a Power's sense of self. Instead, appeal to their public pride — their social dignity. Some Nobles lack a sense of face; others lack vanity; those who lack both are few and far between.

As when persuading humans, the form of your message usually matters more than its content. There are five classic forms that effect the greatest results.

First is to present your message, not as an idea you wish the hearer to adopt, but rather an idea that all those around them have already accepted.

Second is to lead them along the garden path, having them take a perfectly reasonable stand or perform some ethically neutral action, only to point out that the stand you *want* them to take is closely related. Pride prohibits their backing away from their original stance; your cunning conflates the two positions.

Locus Hamalhoshech has the following quaint practice when visited by a Power of the Light. Following a sumptuous, pleasant dinner, all of the local Familia rises. "At this time, we go hunting," they say. "You may come or you may stay." And what Power would stay, and vacantly watch their retreating backs? The Familia permits the visitor the first kill, some happy forest creature — and then their guest discovers that the *main* victims of the hunt, the creatures that wander the deep woods of the Chancel, are human. Naturally, a Power of the Light has the conviction to refuse, leaving the hunt that they have already joined in a shambles — but how deadly embarrassing it is for them! When your victim has less conviction, you may use such techniques to manipulate rather than to shame.

The third classic persuasive hook is personal appeal. If you seem amiable, trustworthy, respectable, knowledgeable, and — to victims that value virtue — brave, honest, and true, your words carry greater weight. If you make your conversation enjoyable, your subject finds the ideas expressed more enjoyable as well. The fourth hook is a close relative — gifts, generosity, and concessions. The word "gift" is in many mortal languages the same word as "poison". There is good reason! A gift unreciprocated eats at the pride. An obligation unmet eats at autonomy. The ideal gift seems magnificent, princely, and absurdly generous to the receiver, but is easy for you to obtain. Beware only that your victim may return your gift with majestic interest, placing you in the same position.

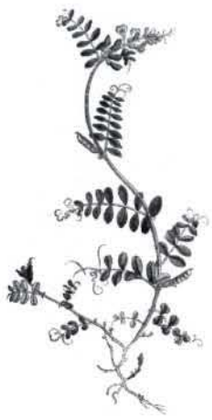
The angel Hazael, who often deigns to deal with Powers, uses these two techniques to perfection. He magnificently fetes those who come to negotiate with him — feeding them rare foods from other realms, offering them the famous Hazaelan massage (where thousands of minuscule shiatsu artists work out every kink), encouraging them to share their thoughts on the policies of Heaven and the Valde Bellum, and lavishing them with the kinds of gifts that only an Imperator can obtain. In short, he dazzles them with luxury and beauty, and his Chancel winds up profiting. If he chooses his gifts well, the visitors can struggle all their lives and never repay his largesse.

The fifth form in which a socially aware Power couches their requests and arguments is *risk*. Rather than allowing your victim to meditate on the virtues of your proposal, present some sort of time limit or increasing risk element for their answer. I have seen my Brother Caelestis Pandareos, Power of Conspiracy, apply this technique to great effect. "Of course you may think over my proposal," he agrees, "but how long can I wait? You could turn and take this plan to my enemies — it would only take an hour. I cannot risk it; the proposal stands for half an hour, no more."

Some important if less common techniques include invoking prejudice and creative labeling. Suppose that a Noble intends to hire a killer to eliminate an enemy untraceably. Presenting them with a "better" assassin before they contact their hired gun will prejudice

OPPOSITE:
The Power of Voyeurism
by Frazer Irving


TEEN PICS



their view of the creature they intended to hire. For example, a confidential admission that you hired an assassin once, and discussion of how pleased you were at their absolute refusal to give up your name under the question, poisons your listener against their intended employee. That individual is unlikely to agree to protect their employer at all costs. The Noble might later inveigle you to obtain the name of your assassin; at this point, you can substitute someone in your own employ. This technique of invoking prejudice applies in general to making another character dislike an alternative they have yet to actually explore.

As for labeling, the idea here is simple: cause the victim to believe something about themselves, and they will act the part. I might say to a visitor, and have, "I appreciate your willingness to work with Debate. So many others have been persuaded by the lies that others spread about me, and refuse my company." Since I am well liked and rarely slandered, the visitor has probably heard no such lies — but this stiffens their spine. It makes them believe that they are someone who is willing to work with me no matter what others say. They thus become my tool.

Creating barriers against a Noble's activities — unfair barriers, prejudicial barriers, but also weak barriers that they can overcome — has the salutary effect of inspiring them to vault those barriers. Thus, if I say to a Power, "I may not pursue our alliance further, for Parasiel, my Angel and Lord, has forbidden me to speak with you again," it encourages that Power to arrange a clandestine meeting. Will they allow an angel to dictate whether they — who have done no wrong! — can speak to such a charming lady as myself? No! One must pursue such attempts at reverse psychology carefully, of course, as the *Nobilis* do not appreciate being tricked.

Brainwashing does not work on the *Nobilis*. Its opposite, however, social vaccination, works quite well. This functions as follows. You mount a relatively weak attack against your victim's views — weak enough that they can argue against it without resorting to stubborn intransigence, but strong enough that they must argue. For example, consider a Power who holds a unique Code but in general leans towards the Light. Argue the idea that humans are ultimately just hairless monkeys, that human innovation is just like thrushes using stones, and that, like the beasts, humans have no real self-awareness or idea of the future ahead of them. Some entities do hold this position, but on the whole this argument is not strong enough to persuade such a Power — ultimately, humans descend from Adam and Eve, while monkeys descend from some Imperator's Estate. The result of this technique? The Power marshals the arguments for humanity, and becomes more confident in their allegiance to the Light.

Keen social observation is vital. One must learn to see who is allied with whom, who *really* dislikes whom, and so forth. Honest alliance-building is an important skill — determining what an individual wants and how to give it to them. An insightful understanding of the actual value of favors is paramount; one must know when to accept, and when to refuse, the hand that could pull you out of an abyss.

Naturally, a socially active Noble's library of techniques does not stop there. A wise Power creates allies by building a sense of *identification* between other Powers and themselves in those Powers' minds. They work with those hopeful allies in good faith, and they vocally reinforce the belief that their ultimate interests are the same. When a Power wishes two Nobles to fight, they remind the pair of old grudges, even going so far as to lightly dismiss them. The two, rising to defend those grudges, bring them more firmly to mind. Formal argument can persuade others, particularly when it comes to *details* of a program those others already endorse. A character who detests modern society resists the technophile position, but is vulnerable to a well constructed argument suggesting *how* they should undermine the modern age.

A proper attempt to persuade generally includes a subtle attempt to show that agreement is in your victim's best interest. How do you persuade the Power of Rivers? "If you do not act, it puts Rivers in danger."

Less gentle approaches to achieving one's goals in the social arena include setting two other Powers against one another, generally by subtly implying that a state of hostility already exists. Rumors and slander can darken the reputation of an enemy, cutting them off from their allies. Blackmail, clumsily handled, makes powerful

enemies — but if politely handled, and not repeated, its victim may dismiss it as "the cost of doing business." Trickery, treachery, disinformation, and lies can put a needed ally temporarily on your side, as can seduction. Bullying a Power is difficult, but can be an effective persuasive tool.

Peaceable Conflict Resolution

"Choose your weapons."
"These. The rocket launchers."
"A non-definitive settlement, then?"
"There is a slight risk of death; that is enough to satisfy my honor."
—from a conversation overheard at Locus Kallai

Nobles have established many ways to resolve conflict with one another without descending into a devastating war of nettling and counternettling, attack and counter-attack, and, finally, death. The list of possibilities below is not comprehensive — both PCs and NPCs regularly invent new contests by which differences can be resolved.

- **The "Challenge of Threes".** When two Powers dispute over a situation in the mortal world, they sometimes use a challenge of threes to settle the matter. Each Power uses three miracles to influence the course of events, the two Nobilis alternating. Neither of them will interfere with the situation again for a year and a day, or some other mutually agreeable duration, regardless of the miracles' result.
- **Ghost Miracle Duels.** A formal duel, in which the Powers may use only ghost miracles, does not conclusively determine who would win a duel to the death — but it *does* help establish which Estate and Power are the most flexible and creative. This is, of course, the single most important factor in a genuine fight.
- **Gift-Giving Contests.** The Noble most indebted at the end of the day yields the point.
- **Formal Debate.** Sometimes these debates are held before a jury of the two Nobles' peers, where the most persuasive Power determines the disposition of the issue at hand. Sometimes, the two Powers simply agree to argue in private until one concedes defeat.
- **The Defiance of Estates.** This technique is primarily used when two Estates clash and that clash brings the Powers into conflict. It can be used at other times. Each Power places the flower of their Estate behind them, standing across a thirty-foot field. The first one to crush the other's flower claims victory.

Investigation and Adventure

"A man dies in a locked room, knifed through the heart. One suspects many things: the servants on hand. Intruders. Guests. The weapon vanishes from storage: one begins to suspect the police, or a perpetrator with connections. One never suspects the knife. How many crimes have gone unpunished because investigators do not study the most obvious killer of all: a weapon, gone ugly with malice, grown murderous with time?"
—from an ex-policeman's testimony, recounted in A Madness of Spirits, *by Dr. E. Edgarton Clark*

Investigation, study, research, and espionage are all valuable tools in a Power's arsenal. Information is, ultimately, a weapon. Some of the favored techniques for information gathering include:

- **Aspect-based eavesdropping** — sharpening the eyes and ears and the brain's information-processing ability until they exceed the capabilities of even espionage technology. Expect this, and allow it to be effective even at relatively low levels of Aspect. Unless you have an unusual group of PCs, it is out of the Nobilis genre for them to need, want or use directional mikes and the like.
- **Aspect-based recruitment** — using supernatural charm to turn mortals into the characters' tools. The mortals then find things out, using their temporal position or investigative skills, and report to the Power.
- **Aspect-based infiltration** — using the character's supernaturally enhanced mobility, stealth, and intrusion skills to break into a building or other secured area and steal data or observe events directly.
- **Domain-based recruitment** — recruiting significant spirits of the PC's Estate to spy for them.
- **Domain-based divination** — using miracles to discover the truth directly.
- **Research** — spending a significant amount of time digging up relevant details in strange and occult libraries or record halls.
- **Sleuthing** — using Aspect-enhanced memory and mental data analysis and the PC's native puzzle-solving skills to piece together the truth from a meager collection of evidence.

Many problems are easily resolved once a thorough investigation has taken place. For example, suppose that a Bane infects the earthworms in a Chancel so that they spread poison into the earth and, ultimately, the Chancel's crops rather than improving the soil. When the crop turns poisonous, a Noble who conducts a cursory investigation will cleanse the poison from the soil. The problem will recur. A Noble who discovers the true cause of events will cure the earthworms and resolve the problem permanently. (Or, at least, until the Bane gathers enough strength for a new act of terror.)

Normally, Nobilis can carry out an investigation, using any of the above methods, both quickly and efficiently. Interesting stories can come, however, from secrets that require more effort to unearth.

Typical Nobilis are not action heroes. We Powers prefer social and intellectual solutions to the problems that beset us. That stated, a typical Noble *does* have an extraordinary ability to solve problems through violence. In a pinch, we fight dragons and Excrucians, dance through hails of gunfire, crack security like black ops pros, and steal priceless artifacts from forbidding regions of the Ash. Bear in mind that high-Aspect Powers can do stunts that Hollywood directors only dream of, that high-Domain Powers can work miracles that no mortal sorcerer can duplicate, and that almost nothing can stop an Immortal Power from reaching their goal.

If your player characters seem inclined to prefer violent, active solutions to their problems, then you should structure your plots more like an adventure series — nasty opponents, preferably with unique and interesting abilities, that the characters should dispose of; natural and unnatural disasters and death traps; and stories that build towards a final confrontation with a force that seems far too powerful for even Nobilis to defeat.

Negotiation in Out-of-Character Scenes

Suddenly, she gave birth to four daughters.
—from an Inuit legend

Most of the emotional richness of a Nobilis game comes from in-character scenes, in which the player takes on the role of their character and you take on the voices of the NPCs around them (as well as describing the world), and events unfold in a kind of improvisational theater. However, IC play is in "real time" — it's too slow to use exclusively. Sometimes, you want to skip through time, moving from important scene to important scene. Other times, you want to play through events at an accelerated rate that combines OOC discussion with IC play.

Suppose a PC studies alchemy, hoping to develop a lens that will show the tapestry of fate behind the substance of their daily life. Instead of developing or researching the science of alchemy, and having the player discover its rules as their PC does, let the player explain the avenues of research their PC explores. See how it fits with your picture of the world; tell them about interesting results, or what avenues seem to work best. Perhaps what the PC is more likely to get with the current style of research is a lens that shows the influence the PC has on events. Perhaps they will quickly discover its true properties and discard it; perhaps they will discover its properties and keep it around as an interesting tool; perhaps they will believe it is the "real thing" for the next few stories. Encourage the player to drift into in-character play for short "sound bites" — allow a bombastic PC to wail and tear their hair when a servant shatters a glass-in-progress, or a sullen PC to mutter about the difficulties of finding good help.

Suppose a character is looking for a husband or bride — a ceremonial position in Noble society, which the Windflower Law discourages but does not entirely forbid. Rather than having the player subject every NPC to intense scrutiny to determine their qualifications for this post, discuss what the character is looking for, and how they carry out the search. While you have this discussion, allow an NPC to develop in your mind. At the discussion's end, you can introduce the character. At the next In-Character scene, the PC can present their proposed spouse to their Familia.

Ianthe

Chapter 17
A Book of Beasts: Excrucians

The Book of Questions

These questions Vyasa carved into a stone; and then he shattered the stone.

A passing rishi asked him why. Vyasa said: "In some year to come, a student of wisdom shall buy the remnants of this stone, hunting down their owners all across the world. She will restore my words, and bring these questions back into the world. If I left these words unbroken, they would be forgotten by her time. By shattering it, I create a mystery. I create a challenge. This destruction serves as a vehicle for the conveyance of my message into a future time."

In the year 1892, the lady Renée Lemmer reassembled Vyasa's stone: and these are the words written thereupon.

1. *Lady Harijata's footprint says, "I am the antithesis of the road. Where I am, the road has gone away: only air, in the shape of a foot, remains."*
2. *The city Dasagriva says, "I am the antithesis of the road. I am its ending. I am its beginning. It moves; I am still. Its essence dissolves on contact with mine."*
3. *What is the antithesis of Harijata's footprint, Dasagriva, and the road?*
4. *What is the deadliest of lies?*
5. *The destroyer came for Lord Bhaga, but did not strike. "Stay your hand for a time," said Bhaga, "and you shall reap a richer harvest when you return."*
6. *"There is a price for such deferrals," answered the destroyer. "You must give me the quality of spirit that makes death impossible."*
7. *What is that quality's name?*

"I will not have it!" my master raged. "First, the Devils have principles, and now the soldiers of Unbeing an ethic? I will not have such nobility in my enemies, Luc! You will order them to desist at once!"

"Immediately, my lord," I answered, by which I meant, "Please forget this by tomorrow."

—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

A Riding of Excrucians

I had always thought that an Abhorrent Weapon would glisten with liquid malevolence and defilement, that the air would flinch back from it like an animal from a crackling flame. I know there is no other thing in all the worlds that the Regi fear more, that the sheer poison of one can drive them to self-destruction —

That it was simple and clean-lined could be forgiven, for there was a twisting blue pattern in the metal and a whirling upside-down cascade of gold weaving through the hilt. That its edge was keen, that I could forgive as well.

But, oh! How could an evil thing be so guilelessly pure, so exquisitely lovely? It was not that it slew Ymerae that was the crime; it is that some Lord's blood would stain its virgin beauty. It broke my heart, that blade, and that I cannot forgive.
—from Reflections II, *by the Viscount d'Armand*

Any Imperator is dangerous, potentially deadly, even to the PCs (who are theoretically on the same side). Full Excrucians, however, are the stuff of nightmare. PCs face them only rarely, because almost every Imperator on Earth spends day and night keeping full Excrucians from reaching the material world — but it happens. When it does, the first rule is "run away, if you can" — because Excrucians are not on the same side. They have Gifts and Foci that can affect Powers directly and don't take the hours or days Imperial miracles require. They are sneaky and dirty and beautiful and full of hates and compellings, and the warriors that lead them wear the faces of the dead.

The Excrucians come in four breeds, or perhaps four castes; it is not clear whether these distinctions are a matter of birthright or training. An Excrucian is either a Warmain, a Mimic, a Deceiver, or a Strategist. Bear in mind these words are translations.

Cants of the Excrucians

These are the basic ethical principles of the four kinds of Excrucian; like Affiliations, service to the appropriate principles gives an Excrucian (or Excrucian-shard) a miracle point and disservice takes one away. Excrucians can hold to different "Cants" than their caste indicates, but it is rare. The Hollyhock God should generally flesh out an Excrucian's personality around their Cant as much as possible. It is rare but not impossible for a PC to know these simple versions of the Cants.

Cant of the Warmains

1. Never surrender. Retreat only when necessary.
2. Never abandon your comrades or arms.
3. Die for the cause before living in shame.

Cant of the Mimics

1. Guard your privacy. Guard your thoughts. Guard your nature.
2. Plan ten steps ahead. Lace every trap with traps.
3. Never act when waiting is enough.

It is not clear whether Excrucian souls are organized holographically, with each shard containing a miniature image of the whole, or societally, with each shard a unique voice that contributes to the greater Excrucian mind. We know that killing any number of Excrucian shards does no apparent damage to the whole, but we are unable to determine the mechanism without broader administrative permission to conduct suitable experiments.
—from a speech given by the Domina of Thunder to the Noble Order of Metaphysical Research

Cant of the Deceivers

1. (Use) Lies before Poison.
2. (Use) Poison before the Dagger.
3. (Use) The Dagger before the Sword.

Cant of the Strategists

1. Be strong in adversity.
2. Be wise in decision.
3. In action, be elegance itself.

A Word on Excrucian Shards

Often, an Excrucian cannot step completely into the material world — instead, it can only send a few "shards" of itself through.

Except where overruled by the specific descriptions below, the following rules apply to Excrucian shards:

- Shards are built on 20-35 Character Points — and should normally be about 25.
- Shards can have up to 5 extra Character Points that can only be spent on Foci.
- Shards can have Gifts and Foci that affect Nobilis directly (see Excrucian sections).
- Shards can be given Gifts their Excrucian lacks via Excrucian "Imperial miracles".
- Shards cannot be killed while the full Excrucian lives.
- Sufficient damage to a shard will send it back to the spiritual world.
- Shards are Noble with respect to Noble and Imperial miracles.
- Shards can have Anchors; further, they apparently do not need to love or hate them.

Most Excrucian-shards do not have the 5 focus points, nor Gifts or Foci affecting Nobilis. Their Anchors (much like Noble Anchors) adopt the fundamental allegiances of the shard that empowered them: they see the Excrucians as beautiful, and the image of the final departure from the slain Creation as more beautiful yet.

Warmains

Warmains have no personal Estate or "Chancel": they can only work Domain and Realm miracles via a Focus or a Gift. Their power is, technically, not the same as that of the Domini and Ymerae — while Powers and Imperators draw their miraculous abilities from the essential nature of reality, the magic of the Warmains is tied strongly to a kind of "anti-nature", the "dark side" of Imperial and Noble magics.

Under most circumstances, Noble miracles cannot target Warmains directly (since they're full Excrucians, it's very hard to affect them with Imperial miracles as well). Similarly, they cannot usually target Powers directly, and the Auctoritas of a Warmain or Power will affect the miracles of the other.

Warmains are built on the same scale as Imperators, with slightly fewer points on average. As mentioned above, they may only buy Domain and Realm levels through a focus — though they can buy DMPs, RMPs, and Gifts based on any attribute. Their one advantage is some of their Gifts and Foci can affect Powers (or even Imperators) directly.

Warmain Gifts

Some of the more common Gifts of a Warmain include the following:

"Have a drink," he suggested, gesturing towards the cabinet. "As I understand your laws, you may not presently attack me; I have no particular interest in making it worthwhile — Ah. You think that odd, that a Warmain would avoid battle? You have heard the Cant of the Warmains, perhaps? Never surrender, never betray, die well rather than live in shame? Ah! You cannot imagine the depth of that oath; you refuse to acknowledge that each of us carries in us every life we have taken, and that a single Warmain's death destroys what once were worlds …

"Yet there is no shame in this. We fight a different sort of battle now, you and I. My sword hangs on the wall, and there, I think, it will stay. I lose nothing by waiting, you see, while you — well. I have heard a whisper on the wind that your Chancel is afire.

"My apologies. It seems the door has locked itself. These old buildings …"
— The Diary of the Domina of the Dawn

The Negative Gift

10 points base cost + 1 to 20 points of Gift level

Human success rests on subverting the natural order of things — on replacing an ever-more-strained conceptual space with the latest, flashiest ontological model. Human existence derives from the natural order of things — on that same conceptual space. To describe this process as unstable understates the case.
—from Principles of the Dark, *by Merriweather James*

Warmains operate on negative energy, from Creation's point of view. One of their most lethal advantages derives from a kind of anti-Gift. With 1 DMP, the Warmain may annul any Gift costing no more than the level of the Negative Gift for one scene. A Warmain focus can also have this effect, but the circumstances under which the focus can use this effect are determined at the time of its forging. (This is not necessarily true of Noble and PC foci, although naturally Nobles and PCs can't buy foci that affect Nobles.) This Gift, along with various poisons and curses, creates Abhorrent Weapons: foci that nullify Immortality and its weaker variants when they touch a person. See table below for costs.

It is a Major Destruction of Miraculous Power. Note that because invocation is not automatic, even using a focus sword (for example), the Excrucian must deliberately hit someone with the weapon and spend a miracle point. The strongest Abhorrent Weapons can perform this feat automatically; it is ill advised to handle such a blade.

The Negative Gift has an "overhead" cost equal to the maximum level of Gift it can affect, in addition to the base 10-point cost. This overhead balances the Negative Gift's ability to directly affect the miraculous abilities of others, which Noble Gifts cannot do.

EXAMPLE

Orderic Neustry moves at the center of an abyss of antinature, an exhalation of the void. Powers have reported him as dispassionate, distant, and possessed of a deep respect for innocence; but they cannot deny that the brush of his hand is lethal, capable of dissolving that quality in things that provokes them to endure.

The Negative Gift

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
8 + 7 Penetration	Normal	One other	Limited	No	
15 CPs	-2	-2	-2	+1	10 CPs

Unmastered Pain

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
4 + 4 Penetration	Hard	One other	Full	No	
8 CPs	-3	-2	+1	+1	5 CPs

Blight

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
8 +4 Penetration	Hard	Local	Comprehensive	No	
12 CPs	-3	-1	-1	+1	8 CPs

Winds of Hate

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
6 +3 Penetration	Hard	Local	Limited	No	
9 CPs	-3	-1	-2	+1	4 CPs

Midas Mors Mortis

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
4 (Domain)	Automatic	Global	Limited	No	
4 CPs	+1	+1	-2	+1	5 x 3 = 15 CPs

Unmastered Pain

1 to 8 points (default 5 points)

"Congratulations," said Nilaia. "You have corrupted your first soul; you have won a victory for the Fallen. How does it feel?"
"... It hurts," said Forchas, after a pause.
"Of course it hurts," Nilaia answered. "It always hurts. It hurts terribly. This is Hell."
—from Children of Heaven, *by Martin Elliott*

High-Aspect characters (Legendary or better) are naturally able to ignore pain, but not the raging wild agony that whirls through the victims of this Gift. (Yes, it does work on Nobilis.) The exact effects vary, based both on the HG's whims and on the amount of experience the target has with agony. A nonspecific pain might cause the victim to temporarily drop one Level in each nonzero attribute; a migraine might blind them; one foot might feel like the skin is stripped away, and every surface is hot coals. See table below for costs.

This is a Lesser Creation of Pain, with a Penetration level of 4. However, some of the Warmains have higher or lower Penetrations with this Gift.

EXAMPLE

Raginhart Tribunas holds some authority within the ranks of the Dark Horsemen. One of his shards occasionally watches over another Excrucian's Breakthrough; the other invariably shows him deference. A certain amount of this respect no doubt derives from his willingness to use Unmastered Pain not merely on Powers but on his own kind.

Blight

4 to 11 points (default 8 points)

The life in a place develops in a way that depends on the place's character. In the Mediterranean country of Icaria, where beauty and wisdom predominate, the lions have the heads of men and wisely discourse on natural philosophy; whereas in Castra Regis, a place dominated by ancient evil, ordinary dogs develop the tongues and fangs of vipers.
—from A Medieval Bestiary, *by Paul McArthur*

This Gift allows a Warmain to permanently blight a place: things that grow or live or work there will have little resistance to disease, malaise, and an adult version of an infant's "failure to thrive". Viewed through the Sight, the Blighted place appears gray and dim. This can theoretically affect Nobles, but Powers can steel their bodies and minds against the Blight at the cost of one level 4 Aspect miracle a month or one Level 5 Aspect miracle a year. The Nobles of Health, Prosperity, and so forth can remove a Blight. The only other way to lift it is to find the "keystone"; a small, dark, and maleficent gem located in or near the Blighted land. Crushing it makes the Blight fade. See table above for costs.

It is a Major Destruction of Health or of the ability to sustain life and hope. It is only "comprehensive" because humans entering the Blighted zone do not immediately catch every disease known and keel over dead. Some Hollyhock Gods may reduce the cost slightly, because the keystones exist.

EXAMPLE

Euphrasia Savinot refuses as a matter of policy to engage life in direct combat. Her enemy is not life but the world — the very substance of Gaia and the Ash. Where she walks, she blights the world, or washes away its truth, or turns it treacherous.

That living things suffer from her work, that the spirits of the inanimate grow corrupt — these things do not upset her, but neither are they her goal.

"Hatred," Nilaia admitted candidly, "has always been weaker than love. Hell does not run on hate. Hell does not run on anger, or fear. Hell runs on the natural tendency of good things to go awry. Hell runs on excuses, and justifications, and willful blindness. Hate has its place, Forchas, but do not trust in it."
—from Children of Heaven, *by Martin Elliott*

Winds of Hate

1 to 8 points (default 4 points)

The Warmain spits into the wind, and all the fury of the air turns against their opponent: the air resists breath, decompresses and compresses, or slams into the opponent like a quarterback dragon. The only universal solution is escape, as the effect subsides about two hundred feet away from the Warmain. See table above for costs.

This is a Lesser Change of the local air.

EXAMPLE

Teja Heimerich is an anti-sylph — a Warmain strongly biased towards the negative image of the aerial essence. Air dissolves a millimeter from her shards' skin, bathing them in cool vacuum. Her will can subvert the fundamental spirit of the wind, of abstract thought and reason, of flying creatures, and in general those things bound to the aerial; such things she can turn to the service of Unbeing.

Mirabelle had not asked to be an avatar of death. Some things just happened. She figured that she just pretty much had to live with it, and so she did.
—from Doorknobs, *by Emily Chen*

Midas Mors Mortis

15 points

With but a touch, the Warmain turns an ordinary human, or cup, or doorway — any unen𝒩obled object or being — into an avatar of death. Everything that person touches — from cups, doors, and rivers to relationships, businesses, and domestic animals — goes awry, often awry in a lethal manner. This is the most expensive of the Warmain gifts because the Midas Mors Mortis touch affects anything save for Powers *et al.* The effects of this Gift wear off in about a week, or when the Warmain and/or its shards are killed or exiled from the Earth. See the table on p.199 for costs.

This Gift of Lesser Destruction affects almost every Domain, and therefore costs three times the normal amount.

EXAMPLE

Marozia Carolin believes that initiating processes of destruction is more effective — though slower — than wreaking direct devastation herself. Accordingly, she has chosen to develop the Midas Mors Mortis Gift, practicing on abstract shapes and incomprehensible monsters in the void beyond Creation.

If you lock a human alone in a room for long enough — past the point of anger, past the point of despair, past the point where they can no longer talk or think coherently — they begin inventing new methods of war. They begin to create tools and strategies of battle that the world has never seen before. It takes a skilled psychologist to dredge meaning from their mumbles and gibbering, from the sketches their fingernails make against the floor.

That is the only secret; that is what makes the great nations great, and makes lesser nations fall. Someone locked in a room, in the dark, without sanitation or company, until their mind breaks; someone to read their heart, and tell the world what transpires there.
—from Reflections III, *by Viscount d'Armand*

General Warmain Gifts

The Hollyhock God should feel free to create new Gifts for their Warmains — in fact, this is recommended. Some things to remember:

- Warmain Gifts are violent to the spirit or the body, although they can be subtle.
- 𝒩obilis-affecting Gifts should always have an escape clause or countermeasure.
- Avoid "instant kill" Gifts, even if the PCs must make a mistake in order to die.
- At the same time, arm your Warmains well. One should normally rout the PCs.

Warmains commonly have Immortal (or Eternal + Durant), Worldwalker, and one or two Gifts selected from Acidic Spittle, Flight, Fire-Breathing, and Unblemished Guise. Many have Glorious, as explained below.

Warmain Foci

The most common Warmain Focus is their pale "horse" — hence the name "Dark Horsemen" for the Excrucians. It may lend them an Aspect Level or two, contain Gifts for traveling the Ash, or give them stranger powers yet — it is said that some Warmains, on their horses, can fade into the mildest light and remain invisible even to an Imperator's eyes. Other common foci include weapons with various strange potencies and armor or amulets with an armor-like effect. In order, the most common powers in their foci are Gifts of War, Aspect levels, Realm levels (over an Excrucian stronghold on Earth), and last of all and very rarely, Domain or Spirit levels.

Normally, a Warmain's focus stops functioning when they die, and returns to them or at least to Excrucian hands should it be stolen. Strong Warmain foci, however, are sometimes so virulent that, instead of tugging on the universe's sleeve in an attempt to get back to their owner, they may begin to corrupt the person who has it into an Excrucian ally. The first sign of this (for a Power) is that the Power's natural miraculous abilities start slowly to fade; their tie to nature grows weaker. The second and last warning is when those miraculous abilities start to return, this time fueled by the anti-nature the Excrucians embody.

The Tempering of a Warmain

The Warmains must understand the people they face and the nature of Creation itself. They claim that everything they destroy lives on in them, but one being in particular. When a Warmain kills for the first time, it takes on the shape and devours the mind of the one it murdered. It does so a second time, when it slays its first Noble or Imperator. It changes a third time only if it kills someone for whom it has a profound respect.

The change in the Warmain that comes with each new shape is a deep one (and dangerous as well — there are rumors that occasionally a Warmain's loyalties turn and it must be "put down"). This is the Tempering, in which Warmain and victim are alloyed, and which ends with an Excrucian who understands the nature of this world without losing their commitment to ravaging it clean of life and beauty alike.

Tempering is a level 4 Aspect miracle for a Warmain. The Hollyhock God must decide whether a Power can perform the act; few have been willing to experiment. Some Warmains cannot recover from this act while in Creation. Others, the ones with the Glorious Gift, can let their inhuman inangelic beauty shine through and their Excrucian nature with it.

When roleplaying a Warmain (as the HG, of course), it is probably best to consider the life that last Tempered them as the basis for their personality. However, bear in mind the essential purpose that drives all Excrucians. A Warmain

The Antithesis of Nature

The Lands Beyond Creation stretch endlessly in every direction. Though the dominant terrain feature is barren, empty void, the Lands Beyond Creation contain infinitely more variety than Creation itself. Their sheer scale demands it.

Fortunately for xenologists, most of this variety has no real meaning for the human, Noble, or Imperial mind.

For practical purposes, one may divide the qualities of the creatures and things from beyond into three sorts. First, some of their qualities exist within Creation — e.g., Excrucians have personalities. Second, some of their qualities have no meaning in Creation. Third, certain traits found in the Lands Beyond Creation actively oppose the essence of Creation — either all of Creation, or part of it. Just as cold cannot endure in the presence of heat, elements of Creation wither in the presence of these qualities.

The anti-nature that fuels the Warmains is of this last kind. Almost by definition, the 𝒩obilis cannot comprehend the true essence of this substance, energy, or trait, but to the Excrucians, "anti-nature" is a stuff of infinite diversity. In some cases, a Warmain's power is equally inimical to all things in Creation. In others, their power gives them a particular advantage against one "side" of Creation — against, say, beauty, corruption, aquatic essence, terrene essence, the mundane, or the majestic.

To answer Vyasa, the anti-nature of the Warmains is the antithesis of Harijata's footprint, the city Dasagriva, and the road — but it is much more than just antithetical.

One can love someone and hurt them; or kill them; or defile them; or torture them; or unmake the truths of their existence. Love inspires greatness; it does not prevent venality.
—from Principles of the Dark, *by Merriweather James*

In the hands of an Excrucian, a pencil is a deadly weapon, although, naturally, a long sharp poisoned blade thrumming with unnatural power is deadlier.
—from the Preface to Legends of the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

tempered with an honest man prefers blows to lies, but will lie fluently if that is what the situation requires. (At that, so will most Powers.)

Example Warmain: Adeillan Court

Adeillan is on his second Tempering, with the personality and knowledge of the one-time Power of Mists; he has not inherited said worthy's Domain, but he remembers his street urchin life on the streets of the Daneston Chancel. He feels the essential ineradicable hunger (for food, for respect, for affection) that that life sunk into his bones, and the wonder and the power of suddenly being raised to a Councilman of the Realm. Adeillan may trip himself up trying to imitate 'lordly' behavior, failing as badly as the Power of Mists did. Records on Adeillan indicate a vulnerability to light, but the Nobilis do not know whether this is a weakness of Adeillan's or a vulnerability inherited from the Power he Tempered as.

Warmain Shards

Warmain shards are pretty much like Warmains with fewer points. Note that any shard, upon slaying the Warmain's first human, first Noble, or first someone really respected, will in that moment Temper not just the Warmain itself but all of its shards. Similarly, if the Warmain Tempers in the spirit world, all of its shards will Temper in that instant.

Adeillan Court's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

This is a contest of courage. If you lose, you will leave me to my business. If you win, I shall kill you, for I do not appreciate being surpassed.
—Adeillan Court, Warmain of the Excrucians

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	6: Imperial	10
Domain	Unrated	5
Realm	Unrated	5
Spirit	2: Sunfire	5

Gifts and Virtues
Immortal
Wayfinder
Worldwalker
Flight
Focus: Glass Whip (only the handle is visible, has 9 ends, contains Unmastered Pain, Penetration 5, 2 AMPs, included in attribute total)
Focus: Eyeless Jack (a horse, contains Aspect 2, 2 AMPs, included in attribute total)

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Vulnerable to light (photo-sensitive, weakened by sunlight, not Immortal in or against strong light)
Affiliation: Cant of the Warmains

Wound Levels
3 Deadly Wounds (Immortal)
3 Serious Wounds
4 Surface Wounds

Total Cost: 40 Character Points

Phillip was 16, and he had a problem. A mild cough had become pneumonia, but that was not his problem; rather, it was the results of the CAT scan, which conclusively showed that Phillip did not exist.

"It's not surprising," the doctor admitted. "You're a small piece of nothing in a world just full of somethings. The wonder isn't that it took us sixteen years to find it so much as the fact that we detected it at all."
—from Macedonia, *by Jackie Robinson*

Mimics

"You came! Oh, I knew you would. This is so wonderful."

It's hard, you know, when you have to kill such a good host. My mouth still watered at the thought of the scones and clotted cream at high tea, a month before. My hand clenched on the sapphire stone in my pocket. One squeeze —

"When you didn't show up last week, I thought —"

Power raced through me. My hand convulsed. The stone shattered into fifteen thousand shards. A Bright Warding cascaded up from the marble floor, closing over me. With shimmering bands the color of malachite and pearl, I said quietly, "Three Ymera spent ten days forming this Warding. Think you can break it before it turns your bone to ash, Excrucian?"

He looked down. I flung myself at him like an arrow at prey. Then his eyes raised. In them was a glittery smile. "You don't know much about us, do you?" he asked, then caught me lightly, with a motion that might have folded a paper airplane he broke my back.
—from the Thought-Record of Margentine Lewis.

There have been many Breakthroughs in the past few millennia. Sometimes Sovereigns thwart the Excrucian plans; many other times, reality only weakens. The classic example is an oil spill: the oceanids and selkies of the mythic reality grow angrier and angrier at man, and shipping becomes more dangerous. Rare species are damaged and pushed towards extinction, but the integrity of the universe as a whole has not been affected. In their greatest victories, the Excrucians have drawn away the bodies of dead or dispossessed Imperators and converted their energies via the Ritual of Anguish to the negative power of the Excrucians themselves.

Some Breakthroughs, take a different course. The Excrucians destroy an aspect of reality, but its Imperator still has other Estates to support it, or an Imperator is slain and the Dark Horsemen have no opportunity to work the Excruciation on the body. In these cases, the Excrucians shape the power they have wounded to their ends as best they can, into the Mimics. These creatures possess miraculous abilities identical to those of Creation's Imperators but are loyal to the Excrucian cause.

Yes, Mimics will admit, when all else is destroyed, the Excrucians will Excruciate the Mimics themselves — but this is a death the Mimics consider greatly desirable. In the meantime, even lacking the Excrucians' special abilities, they do have a large advantage in the war: to the Sight, a Mimic is identical to an Imperator.

Some Mimic Estates have passed utterly from the Earth, which would seem to make Domain over them useless and difficult to imagine as well. However, Estates overlap. When one is destroyed, others generally stretch together to cover the "hole". If the Excrucians were to remove horses from the Earth (the three approaches they could take to this problem will be discussed shortly), the Mimic of Horses might wind up with a low Domain Level over Transportation, Farms, and Quadrupeds. This does not normally disinherit, corrupt, or otherwise affect the Imperators and Powers who also govern those Estates.

As allies and children of the Excrucians, Mimics have access to Excrucian foci that can affect Powers directly. In the long run, keeping such foci damages their Ymera-style magic, and the Sight can then identify them as Excrucians instead of Imperators, so Mimics use foci only when necessary. Mimic Gifts only affect Powers directly if those Gifts are contained in Excrucian foci made for the purpose. Common Gifts include Immortal, Glorious, Shapeshifting, Gatemaker, and Elemental, as with normal Imperators.

Mimic personalities (like those of Imperators) are generally based upon their Domain, with a bias towards personability and, of course, with a general commitment to the Excrucians and the Cant of the Mimics.

Example Mimic: Dahlia Thorn

Dahlia is the Mimic replacement for the slain Imperator whose Estates were the Dry Salve (a kind of powdered light, with salutary effects when mixed with water and consumed) and the Child Guardians (stuffed-animal-like robots who derived motive energy from a child and purpose from a set of contingency programs for various childhood emergencies). Naturally, now that the *causa causans* behind these innovations

Commentary on the Thought-Record of Margentine Lewis (opposite): Val Hastur is, in fact, a Mimic. He does not have access to or chooses not to interfere with Thought-Record Technology. Standard approach recommended.
—The Record of the Scribe of Days

no longer exists, it strains the imagination to see how they could ever have fit into Earth society. Her Estates are Light, Health, Robots, Safety, and Toys, which means that each Domain level costs her 7 points.

She is a deep-cover Mimic, who has gone so far as to Chancel herself and produce a set of Powers, whose only knowledge of their true allegiance is subconscious. She is of course generally very concerned about the safety and health of those she encounters, but with a somewhat morbid twist and medical imagination that can induce hypochondria in the easily swayed.

Mimic Shards

Feeling that there was something subtly wrong, Gordon counted the cannibals again; but all seven were present and accounted for.
—from the comic strip Quotidian, *2000.03.25*

Mimics do not usually send shards through. This is harder for Imperators than for Excrucians, and the Mimics fall game-mechanically into the Imperator category. However, Mimics have the easiest time slipping behind Imperial lines into the physical world, and the deep-cover Mimics are already there, complete with, not shards, but Powers.

Dahlia Thorn's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

What a terrible cough you have. Do you know if Nobles get parasitic eosinophilic lung disease?
—Dahlia Thorn, Imperator of Light, Health, Robots, Safety, and Toys

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	3: Inhuman	7
Domain	2: Minor	5
Realm	5: Tempest	6
Spirit	2: Hearthfire	5
Gifts and Virtues	Immortal	
	Elemental	
Limits/Restrictions	Restriction: Fear of the Dark	
	Affiliation: Cant of the Mimics	
Wound Levels	2 Deadly Wounds (Immortal)	
	2 Serious Wounds	
	3 Surface Wounds	
Total Cost:	55 Character Points	

Deceivers

The deepest and most hurtful lies are true.
—from Parables for Our Modern Age, *by Jackie Robinson*

Deceivers are perhaps the most dangerous of all the Excrucians. A Warmain attacks and a Mimic betrays, but a Deceiver turns friend against friend, acting in stealth and silence. Deceivers are powered by the essence of Untruth: lies so convincing that Creation itself is fooled. As long as the universe thinks them Imperial, they will be Imperators; as long as the universe thinks them Noble, they will be Nobilis; and should the universe ever think them mortal, they will die as easily as any man. This is only rarely a physical disguise. Rather, the Deceivers cloak their spirits.

The Ritual

"No one will care if I replace you," John's shadow said. "No, more than that; no one will notice."
—from Carnival of Shades, *by Michael Kay*

In the day-long Ritual of Two Skins, a Deceiver or Deceiver-shard dons the spiritual shape of any Power or Imperator the full Deceiver or any of its shards has met. For example, if one shard of a Deceiver meets Jameson Black, any shard of that Deceiver can don his spiritual nature as its disguise. This means, among other things, that their image as seen with the Sight shows something of that Power or Imperator's Domains, and does not show that they are an Excrucian. They refer to the person they imitate as their "second skin".

Character Sheets

"I am the first symbol ever written by the hand of man," said the scribble on the page. Its voice was crisp and clear as a bell. "I am the word tkau, *as scribed by a great sage of the same name in fair Lemuria."*

"You look like a pornographic scribble," Isaac answered dubiously.

"I am tkau," *it answered, "glory of glories, father of literacy, and you will never prove otherwise."*
—from Ringing, *by K.C. Danine*

Full Deceivers have two character sheets:

- Their undisguised self, with some native anti-nature magic — around 15-30 character points with no Realm or Domain, and access to Warmain and Deceiver gifts.
- Their disguised self, with its powers and handicaps exactly like those of their "second skin".

They can use both sets of powers with the matching miracle points and are bound by both sets of Handicaps. Finally, they may have Excrucian foci — as part of their 15-30 character points, if the Hollyhock God is being nice, or in addition to them, if the Hollyhock God wants to scare the player characters terribly.

The Power of Command and the Truth of the Name

A Deceiver can be commanded by the name of the person it pretends to be, *e.g.*, "In Jameson Black's name, leave this Earth and do not return!" or "In Augusta Valentina's name, tell me what it is you came to Earth to do!"

Only one command can be given to a given Deceiver or shard per scene; only Mimics, Imperators, and Powers are attuned enough to the universe's "truth" to give this command. Failure to obey to the best of their ability instantly breaks the Deceiver's disguise. In a variable amount of time — between seconds and years, but most often three to seven days — the Untruth of the Deceiver overcomes the Truth of the Name.

Shards usually obey this order, because when they lose their disguise they lose almost all their power, including the Power/Anchor resistance to direct destruction miracles.

The Deadliest Lie

The deepest magic in Creation is the magic of symbols. Pictures have less power than names, and names less strength than flowers — but any representation has some mystic strength to it. Simply by properly naming the form a Deceiver wears, a Power yokes the Excrucian to the truth of Creation.

The deadliest of lies, to answer Vyasa, is the false name — or, more generally, the false symbol. Combining the name and nature of the second skin is too much of Creation's truth. The Deceivers must divide the symbolic name of their disguise from its essence, or risk the collapse of their whole structure of deceit. They do take this risk on occasion — but thereby give Creation's servants a greater chance to use the Truth of the Name.

Deceiver Gifts

Full Deceivers are often Durant and Eternal, although they can be Immortal. They almost unanimously possess the Gift Glorious, but (like Warmains) they can turn it off at need. Unlike Warmains, Deceivers' Glory can affect Powers, but only to a limited extent. They invariably have Shapeshifting, and may have Worldwalker or one of the Gifts below.

Body Theft

10 points

This Gift does not work when the Deceiver is using an Imperator "skin". When a Deceiver wears a Noble or mortal's

OPPOSITE:
Spider Eyes
by Al Davison



essence as its disguise, this Gift allows the Deceiver to switch appearances with someone else, even a Power, for 24 hours.

This does affect the Sight. That is, if a Deceiver assumes the spiritual shape of the Power of Storms, and uses this Gift on a mortal, the Deceiver will appear like that mortal to both normal and mystic sight, while having power over the storm — and that mortal will look like the Deceiver to the eye and like the Power of Storms to the Sight, while having no special powers at all.

This is a Major Change of Appearance.

As a temporary measure, in the absence of additional funds for the Bureau of Soul Generation, and in consideration of the ever-increasing number of humans born on Earth, we will begin strategic utilization of insect and viral souls in excess human hosts.

This policy will go into effect on the winter solstice of the 5th year of the divine Amenhotep's rule.
—from Administrativia, *by Michael Kay*

EXAMPLE

Scelto of the Provenance prefers to operate in heavily populated areas. He wears the shapes of innocents when he does his dirty work, and steals the body of a bystander when he must flee the scene.

The Blind Lie

3 to 10 points (default 7 points)

This Gift can only be used on a given Noble once in any story. In essence, the Deceiver tells someone a lie, and for an indeterminate time afterwards, the victim simply cannot see any evidence that the lie is false. For example, a Deceiver may tell a PC Noble, "I am your friend." It doesn't matter if the PC believes it, thinks the Deceiver is just being polite, or thinks of the statement as part of a longer speech — if the Deceiver draws a mace and hits the PC, the PC will not see where the blow came from, because friends don't hit friends with maces. (Although if they know or guess what the Deceiver is, they can probably guess the source of the blow.)

This is a Major Destruction of Perceptions, with a normal Penetration of 4 — major primarily because it responds to new situations.

There were 54 states when Flora was young. Somewhere along the line, four of them had gone away; but for all her searching, she could turn up no evidence of where they had gone, or that they had ever been.
—from Spotlight: C, *by Marilith Turner*

EXAMPLE

All Deceivers are creatures of untruth, but **Iolithae Septimian** is a monster built of lies. Iolithae does not indulge in disguise, or false promises, or the grand deceptions that confuse the world itself; she simply, quietly, uses the weapon of her words to undermine Creation. Iolithae and Deceivers like her focus on flower rites where mortal perception and belief mean more than simply human actions.

Orate

6 points

This Gift does not normally affect Nobilis, unless the Hollyhock God wants it to. It allows the Deceiver to convince a crowd of mortals of anything, using a kind of mass hypnosis. Since this Gift creates a sure sign that a Deceiver has been there, it's used only rarely — if the enemy knows that, Deceit becomes more difficult.

It is a Major Creation of Beliefs.

Crowds are far easier to coerce into foolish mistakes than individuals are. For example, it is easy to convince a crowd to travel faster than light, thus violating the causal order postulate and damaging the fundamental order of the universe. Convincing an individual to do so is almost impossible.
—from Emeritus, *by Michael Kay*

EXAMPLE

Phasael mery-Harumaph is beloved by all who know him. Even Powers who would like to see him burnt over a slow flame for his deeds cannot deny his roguish good looks and charm. As for mortals, they eat out of the palm of his hand; whole stadiums would commit suicide if he but preached it.

Body Theft

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
9+7 Penetration	Hard	Local	One trick	No	
16 CPs	–3	–1	–3	+1	10 CPs

Blind Lie

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
8+4 Penetration	Hard	One other	Comprehensive	No	
12 CPs	–3	–2	–1	+1	7 CPs

Orate

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
7	Normal	Local	Full	No	
7 CPs	–2	–1	+1	+1	6 CPs

Shattering Mirror

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
9+5 Penetration	Normal	Global	Limited	No	
14 CPs	–2	+1	-2	+1	12 CPs

Shattering Mirror

7 to 14 points (default 12 points)

This Gift allows a Deceiver or Deceiver-shard to "store a copy" of a Domain miracle used near them, at a cost of 1 miracle point when it is stored and 1 miracle point when it is released. They can change the target if they so choose. The stored miracle can have any penetration level, but the Deceiver's recreation cannot have a penetration higher than the penetration of this Gift.

This is treated as a Major Change of whatever could be affected by the stored miracle.

"My lord," the Dominus said, "I have done no wrong. Driven no one mad. I was not present at the scene. I used no power."

Lord Entropy's eyes narrowed. Two fingers moved slightly, against the stone.

Meon lifted his eyes from Lord Entropy's hand. "The Locust Court grants," he said, "that it was not you but the portrait that broke the crowd; and in some sense the artist, who captured too truthfully your inner self." He glanced back at Lord Entropy, but the fingers were silent. After a moment, Meon continued, "The Court recognizes the salience of your point. It should comfort you to know that the portrait and artist shall both share your fate."
—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

EXAMPLE

Tairté Ut-napishtim teaches the Excrucian philosophy to those Powers who dare listen. The Imperators tolerate his presence in the prosaic world, gambling that understanding the ways of the enemy will do their Powers more good than harm.

The first statement of Tairté's philosophy is that truth and lies are but reflections of one another — a belief he demonstrates by catching and reflecting a "true" miracle with this Gift.

General Deceiver Gifts

The Hollyhock God can create new Gifts for Deceivers — in fact, this is recommended. Some important things to remember:

- Deceiver Gifts involve treachery, confusion, and lies.
- PCs should always be able to puzzle past the deceits, if they try hard enough.
- Deceivers should be scary. Very scary.

There was something in Michael's smile that Jeanette saw as mockery and Ellen saw as praise.
—from Goblins Run The Internet, *by Keiko Takemori*

Deceiver Foci

"I generally recommend against sending Teazel in a birthday bouquet," the shopkeeper noted.

"I believe I know what I want," Jon said determinedly.

"It's simply that it tends to strangle the recipient in their sleep."

"Oh." Jon paused. "How about this? Appokynum?"

"Apocynum, sir. It can bring nightmares to life."

"Madam," Jon said, "what kind of florist are you?"

"A realistic one," he replied. "Pleasant bouquets are my art and my calling. More lethal arrangements pay for my two mansions and a yacht."

—from The Grim King, *by Melanie Tumbarius*

Deceivers have a great fondness for trinkets; the foci they beg, borrow, or steal from their kindred Excrucians tend to be interesting and amusing little things. However, they have been known to receive an Abhorrent Weapon if the cause merits it. Deceiver foci, just like Warmain foci, either wander back into Excrucian hands, stop working, or corrupt the person who possesses them if taken away from their owner.

Deceiver Personalities

A Deceiver honors two Affiliations at once: the Deceiver's Cant, and the Affiliation of the Imperator or Power they impersonate. This conflict, and the conflict between the Deceiver's raw malice and the personality of their "second skin", forms the core of what is comprehensible about them. Of course, they're also essentially alien: as long as the HG has a stable mental picture on which to base a Deceiver's actions, the Deceiver should throw the PCs a curve ball now and then.

Example Deceiver: Coriander Hasp

Ritho is unique in all the worlds — an unmatched rifle, both in quality and in puissance.

—from Seven Bullets From a Six-Shooter: How To Upgrade Your Mundane Gun Into a Magical Weapon, *by Cynthia Chase*

Coriander is one of the most vile and terrible Deceivers in the Excrucian War. He finds an absolute delight in setting allies at odds, and when he personally comes to Earth — he has managed it twice in the past three millennia — the Breakthrough itself would most likely be just a front to lure Nobles to him so that he might set them to destroying one another. He is the only Excrucian in all the worlds known to possess an Abhorrent Rifle.

His character sheet opposite does not include his "second skin".

Deceiver Shards

Little pieces of Maritte's mind sometimes fell out. Like all mental things, once free of their cage they proved stronger than the world around them: they ate away at physical reality, turning as much as a city block into reflections of an emotion, or an image, or a memory. Maritte found this fortunate; it helped her find them again.

—from Doorknobs, *by Emily Chen*

Deceiver shards are not built on a Noble scale. Their undisguised character sheet is more or less human in magical terms; they may have Glorious, or a focus, or 1-2 levels of Aspect, but they never have miracle points or other attribute levels except by disguise. Further, they can be affected directly by Noble miracles.

Deceiver shards can disguise themselves as Imperators and use an Imperator's character sheet, but this does not give them access to Imperial miracles. Deceiver shards cannot use another Excrucian as a "second skin", although it has been postulated that full Deceivers can.

Strategists

Strategists are the leaders of the Excrucian horde, although they often lead from behind. Their planning "intelligence" is optimized for the spiritual side of the Valde Bellum. While they are enormously capable strategists in the Warmain vs. Imperator struggle, their planning ability on prosaic Earth or even mythic reality falls somewhere in the 120 to 300 I.Q. range, plus any tactical and computational abilities that come with their Aspect Level. Nevertheless, Strategists and Strategist-shards can be interesting opponents.

Another name for the Strategists is "Spinners", because they weave the stuff of anti-nature into the artifacts of the Damned. This is also the source of their power — the Strategists have no inherent ability to work Noble Magics. Instead, they spin the stuff of darkness into themselves, out in the Lands Beyond Creation. Spinning grants them the Gift of the World Breaker's Hand, which they receive for free. It comes with a great weakness: every time they use their Auctoritas or their Power-like resistance to direct Destruction miracles, they must burn a miracle point of this anti-nature woven into them. Otherwise, the HG builds Strategists according to the guidelines given above for Warmains.

Strategists are generally warped by the rise and fall of dark energies within themselves. They are the only Excrucians known to engage in perversion, desecration, and hate without "good cause". As Hell might put it, "They're almost human." Their appearance does not reflect this nature. Only heavy clothing that conceals the face or Unblemished Guise can hide their impossible elegance.

Coriander Hasp's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

It's not that I wouldn't lie to you on this — but why, when the truth is so devastatingly sweet?

—Coriander Hasp, Deceiver

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	3: Inhuman	8
Domain	Unrated	14
Realm	Unrated	5
Spirit	2: Incandescent Flame	5

Gifts and Virtues
Eternal
Durant
Glorious
The Blind Lie
Shapeshifting (any animal or human shape)
Focus: Abhorrent Rifle (Ritho, "Illicit Desire"; contains the Negative Gift (level 8), Unquenchable Flame, 9 DMPs, included in attribute total)
Virtue: Cruel

Limits/Restrictions Affiliation: Cant of the Deceivers

Wound Levels
2 Deadly Wounds (Durant)
2 Serious Wounds
3 Surface Wounds

Unquenchable Flame: Ritho's Gift
This Gift sets a bullet on fire as it leaves the Abhorrent Rifle, and it does not stop burning until it enters a level 5 Auctoritas or an appropriate miracle of level 7 or higher quenches the flames.

This is a Major Creation of Fire, purchased as follows:

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
7 + 4 Penetration	Automatic	Local	One trick	No	
11 CPs	+1	−1	−3	+1	9 CPs

Total Cost: 60 Character Points (33 + 27 in a focus)

"It begins," he said softly, "with anorexia, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea; hemorrhages, fatigue, and fever; ulcers and bleeding; epilation and blistering; sterilization, cataracts, and ultimately death. Perhaps not in that order. You do see that this is essentially unknown territory? You have the Noble Essence — normally, this would enable you to recover from radiation poisoning with suitable effort, but the Dying Place is fueled by a power just as potent."

"You are no stronger than I," she whispered, a cold terror touching her heart. "You will suffer as I suffer. In the end, at least, your body will die."

"Of course," he said, grinning. "But, you see, it is for science!"

—from Questions, *by K.C. Danine*

Strategist Gifts

I had thought my army would hold off the Power that moved against me. Or, if it failed, that it would make a good showing — that it would give them a battle worth remembering. That chroniclers of my time would speak of King Mago and how he held his own, for seventy days and seven, against the might of a living god.
I did not understand. God help me, I did not understand.
We are not rats before him, weak in person but deadly as a horde.
We are dust.
—from Thelesis' War, *by Jack Frost*

Strategists often have Eternal, Gatemaker, Glorious, or Unblemished Guise. They may also have an appropriate Warmain or Deceiver Gift, or some of the Gifts as described below.

The World Breaker's Hand

15 points for Powers
0 points for Strategists
5 points for shards

The Strategist can turn anything nearby except Anchors, Powers, and greater beings to dust with a wave of its hand. This includes intangible things, individual properties, and abstractions, but the effects are purely local. It does not have a Penetration value, and will not work within an Auctoritas.

This Gift of Lesser Destruction affects every Domain, and therefore costs three times the normal amount.

EXAMPLE

Textrix the Deacon created the Dead Zone of Libya in a seven-day battle with a Power who hated him. It weaves across several miles of blasted rock, a path of devastation where no plant grows, no love lives, and even the brightest sun is dim. Though it lies within Libya's borders, no nation claims it; though a great leader was born there, no history book records it; though everyone knows of it, no map shows it. In places, the stone ground is so weak it dissolves at a touch. Humans who spend too long in the Dead Zone lose their passion, will, and philosophy; chaining a prisoner there for a day in the light of the dim sun is the darkest punishment Libya knows.

All this was created with the World Breaker's Hand.

Perfect Planning

3 points

Strategists have a good sense of timing. With this Gift, they can prepare for the moment when things look darkest — and reinforcements or a distraction will arrive.

This is a Major Divination of Need — specifically, the Strategist's own future need. Remember that, by their nature, divinations are unreliable; if the PCs have studied the situation too well for help to arrive, then clearly the Strategist didn't plan well enough.

EXAMPLE

Lexiarchos Caducine is blind, but her mind is filled with visions — flashes of future events and patterns of the things to come. Almost all Powers fear her; as she always seems five or six steps ahead of them, no matter how clever they make their plans.

Cascade of Fires and Acid Rain

5 to 12 points (default 7 points)

Strategists (and, more often, their shards) go out with a scream. Acid rains outwards from their dying body while fires tumble like cats across the ground. A dying Strategist can leave a crater behind. A shard damaged enough to be banished from the Earth will do the same. It is said that Powers have partial — but not total — resistance to the destruction that spreads outwards from the body of the dead.

This is a Major Creation of destructive forces like fire and acid and such, triggered on the Strategist's death or their shard's banishment. A strong Auctoritas surrounding the Strategist at the moment of death might prevent this eruption; this Gift has a default Penetration of 2.

EXAMPLE

Adhémar Hetairh believes firmly that an ounce of deterrent is worth a pound of correction. Once a Power kills and susequently detonates one of his shards, they tend to be greatly reluctant to directly remove any others.

"It's nonsense," I told my Imperator. "Adam? Eve? A world less than 8000 years old? Every test that humans have come up with is consistent with humanity evolving from apes over a million years ago. No on e — not even God — could predict all the tests in advance. No one can plan well enough to fake all those results."
"Of course not," Jeduthon agreed. "The evidence is dynamically modified at the time of the test. If this causes some conflict with earlier results, then the earlier results retroactively become erroneous; or, rather, subtly flawed in a way that only the latest technology and theorizing can discover."
I sputtered. "That's the grandmother of all conspiracy theories. There's no way to prove or disprove it."
"Not for a mortal, no," Jeduthon answered equably. "For a mortal, this knowledge is useless. But you have been exalted. You must transcend the science of mortality and take up another."
—from the Thought-Record of the Marquis of Echolocation

World Breaker's Hand

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
5 (Domain)	Simple	Local	Full	No	
5 CPs	–1	–1	+1	+1	5x3=15 CPs

Perfect Planning

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
5 (Domain)	Hard	Global	Comprehensive	No	
5 CPs	-3	+1	–1	+1	3 CPs

Cascade of Fires and Acid Rain

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
7+2 Penetration	Automatic	Local	One trick	No	
9 CPs	+1	–1	–3	+1	7 CPs

"Do you know," Hector said, "that no one has ever captured me; and not because I make any effort to evade escape, but because the one who brings me in is doomed to die?"
"I know," August answered. "In this respect, it is fortunate that I died this morning."
—from Meritorious Service, *by Walden Fargo*

General Strategist Gifts

The HG should feel free to create new Gifts for Strategists. In fact, this is recommended. Some things to remember:

- Strategist Gifts deal with weaving dark energy and/or the mental side of war.
- Nobilis-affecting Gifts should always have an escape clause or countermeasure.
- Avoid "instant kill" Gifts.

Strategist Foci

Anything can be a Strategist Focus, from a pale horse of the Strategist's own to a Loathly Mirror. In fact, strange focus effects are the hallmark of Strategist presence, so the stranger and more bizarre the item used for the focus the better.

Example Strategist: Malakai Mesmer

Malakai's personal perversion is butterfly-pinning, with an occasional dash of dog-pinning, cat-pinning, and human-pinning. Obviously, putting humans in his display case requires much longer pins, and more of them. He possesses the focus "Key" to one of the Excrucian strongholds on Earth, giving him a host of Realm abilities there and a place where

As they advanced upon her, she pulled a pin from her hair; they laughed. She passed her hand over it, and it became a length of gleaming steel; their smiles turned nervous. She passed her hand over it again, and it became a fang: one of seven, each 3 feet long in the maw of a creature whose eyes burned with hate. Then they ran, and it was a pin again. She replaced it in her hair.
Weeks later, I asked her whence came such a stunning device. She looked puzzled and said, "Dear Chirico. Such potential lies in any pin, if you but study the arts of war."
—from In the Service of Meloria, *by Keiko Takemori*

his shards can bring new victims. His flesh sometimes shows the image of his cruelty — his fingers might dwindle to pins for a time, or the stars in his eyes might go out.

Strategist Shards

Strategist shards can buy the World Breaker's Hand for 5 CPs. They often have Glorious and/or Unblemished Guise. Otherwise, all standard rules on shards apply.

Excrucian Motives

"Sir, you launched nuclear weapons; you began a war; you destroyed your world. Why should we not send your soul instantly to Hell?"

"I had the purest of motivations."

"And if we do not care about such things?"

"Then I would like to argue that I have not been properly Mirandized."

—from After the Fact, *by Janet Cable*

The Excrucians are intent on destroying the world. Two possible reasons were given earlier: that the Creator betrayed them in some manner, or they genuinely believe those they destroy live on inside them. Either of these motives can lead to fine roleplay, but the Hollyhock God is the final authority on the Excrucian motives — and can choose some completely original reasons. Here are some other possibilities.

The Valde Bellum as a Civil War

The Excrucians may be simply another "faction" of the Imperators — perhaps the dark energy which fuels them was a discovery by some Angel or god who decided to build an Empire to go with their Imperial title. In this light, the destruction of the Excrucians could simply be reorienting reality to a dark side only the Excrucians can reach. It could also just be a tool used to weaken or kill opposing Imperators.

The Excrucians as Thieves

The Excrucians may need the energy of worlds for their personal survival. Alternately, they may be siphoning off the power of Creation to feed the life of their own universe. Or, perhaps, the things they destroy do live on in them, but only as a kind of knowledge and experience database, which the Excrucians need either out of some innate voyeurism or to help them defend their homeworld against a larger threat.

The Excrucians as Metaphors

Perhaps the human subconscious rebels against the modern, unanimistic worldview and the frustration and suffering of humans across the planet has brought forth mythic images of the world's defenders and attackers. The Valde Bellum will determine whether the human outlook will be an essential faith in reality, embodied by the Imperators and Powers, or an Excrucian denial and hatred of existence. Of course, it could be the other way around. The Excrucians might embody the endless outwards exploration of humanity (for they will ride off with the world, if not stopped) and the Imperators are the staid forces of the status quo.

Either way, the Powers could be real miracle-workers, invested in by human faith, or simply those who handle the growing worldwide epidemic of *dementia animus* better than most.

Whenever Ciaoilfhionn lied, an angel turned to dust. This was the secret of her talent for deception; for a lie told at such cost has the ring of the deepest and most beautiful truths.

—from Doorknobs, *by Emily Chen*

Malakai Mesmer's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

I appreciate that you're here to interfere with my plans; but that's no reason not to hold still while I measure you for my display cabinet. It'd be polite, and you can always run around under my feet trying to stop me later.

—Malakai Mesmer, Strategist

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	4: Legendary	7
Domain	Unrated	10
Realm	4: True King	9
Spirit	4: Conflagration	5

Gifts and Virtues
Eternal
The World Breaker's Hand
Focus: The Tarnish Key (contain 4 levels of Realm, 4 RMPs, included in attribute total)
Focus: Willow Wand (contains Midas Mors Mortis, 5 DMPs, included in attribute total)
Focus: Keerweave Suit (woven from mortified human flesh, contains Aspect 2, Invisibility, 2 AMPs, included in attribute total)

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Visible
Affiliation: Cant of the Strategists

Wound Levels
2 Deadly Wounds
3 Serious Wounds
3 Surface Wounds

Total Cost: 55 Character Points

Excrucian Methods

"What're you in for?"

"Oh, the usual," Grey said cheerfully, and rubbed his hands together. "Torture, murder, insurrection ..."

—from Rat's Breath, *by Jack Frost*

Excrucians can approach the problem of the material world in (at least) three ways.

Attack on Prosaic Reality

The first is to attack the prosaic Earth directly: inciting wars, inflaming human prejudices, spreading plagues, and so forth. There are two advantages to this approach: broad changes can be brought about with a small effort, and humans may not accept a miraculous cure for a situation created this way.

Often an Excrucian can damage the Earth with this approach and then "take the money (the energy of the way things were) and run". Deceivers and Strategists, who have access to Domain miracles or foci that approximate them, favor this technique.

EXAMPLE

A few Excrucian-shards tear through to the material world. Their target (presumably chosen based on the current spiritual situation) is the coffee industry. A Strategist might create a coffee-bean disease given an unholy life by negative energies; a Deceiver or a Strategist might employ an indirect method, as follows.

First, publish a few tabloid articles about a fictional lethal bacteria found in coffee beans. Let the Power of Stimulants respond as they wish. A few weeks later, over the course of three hours, a press release will state that the President has taken seriously ill; the following releases state that he's being

attacked by an unknown bacterial strain; doctors have found the bacteria in a coffee bag given the President by a dignitary; all over the country, doctors are identifying serious/terminal cases of this illness.

A Deceiver borrowing the skin of the Imperator of the Media or the Power of Disease, probably with a few key Anchorings, can reasonably expect to accomplish this. A Strategist might hide a Vilestone of Fear in the White House, producing panic in the President's doctors, and twisting the journalists attending the press release until they are desperate to prove to themselves that something is, indeed, terribly wrong. Wise Powers can head this off in the beginning; if they do not, it will be very hard to convince the American people later that it was all a hoax.

Attack on Mythic Reality

The second approach is to attack the Earth via mythic reality. This is often far simpler, because complex processes in the real world have uncomplicated spirits or other mythic objects that can become single points of failure. For example, destroying the species of horses on prosaic Earth requires an enormous comprehensive effort.

In mythic reality, the Excrucians can devastate the equine species simply by destroying the gate through which new horse souls emerge on their way to newborn colts' bodies. Warmains favor this direct approach; their usually straightforward destructive power can have a major impact on the Earth.

EXAMPLE

A Warmain's approach to the coffee industry might work as follows. In mythic reality, such things as "shipping routes" are represented by concrete spirits (as well as by their physical extent). If the Excrucian has the Gift Midas Mors Mortis, they can turn these routes into lethal destroyers of the cargo, ship and airplanes, and crew using them. Perhaps they will instead kill those routes or inflict them with Unmastered Pain until they agree to serve the Excrucian cause.

How can the PCs stop such an attack? One alternative is to be as straightforward as the Warmain itself. They can beat up the Warmain (or, if they're lucky, its shards) when the Warmain returns to reapply the Midas Mors Mortis. Similarly, they can reassure intimidated spirits by guaranteeing that they will oppose the Warmain. If the routes have been killed, perhaps the PCs can drag the corpses to their Chancel and use a Major Creation to bring them back to life — or perhaps they need to pay a visit to the prosaic coffee companies and explain to them that the old routes simply don't work any more and new ones are needed.

Attack on Nobilis: the Flower Rite

As mentioned earlier (p. 16), the Excrucians have a method by which they can directly attack the reality of a given Estate, even without slaying its Imperator. This is the third of the three approaches to material destruction: the Flower Rite.

To perform this Rite, the Excrucians build a "bridge" between a Power (and their Estate) and a mundane situation. The bridge uses the pair of flowers from a Sovereign's Design — these flowers already tie strongly to the Power and their Estate. All the Excrucians must do in executing the rite is find or create a situation with elements that match the meanings of both of these flowers closely.

Once they have built this bridge, they can slowly corrupt the mundane situation — slowly, because the bridge is fragile — and as this happens, the Estate in question begins to lose its reality. Truly negative Estates or Powers may face a kind of reverse corruption: the slow corruption of Hate might be a slow growth of love and forgiveness. (See Appendix B: 'Flowers and their Meanings' on pp.294-298 for some ideas to use in building these bridges.)

When the Excrucians begin such an attack, the Power involved knows about it as soon as the corruption begins. It is mirrored in their flesh and mind as scabs, bloody sores, nausea, mild hallucinations. They are Nobilis: they can bear up under this kind of thing, and even reach deeply into themselves and feel where in the world this assault comes from. An Estate-Driven Divination gives rough details, and a Lesser Divination gives more precise information. Members of that Power's Familia can do the same.

Other Powers, including the harpies who wish to steal the energy of every Breakthrough for themselves, can check on this sort of thing using miracles of Major Divination. On occasion, other Powers will even be invited to help deal with a Breakthrough, if the directly involved Familia feels the need for it.

As the corruption progresses, the Power involved grows more and more ill, until all at once the damage is done and the Estate weakened and drained. If the Power involved is an NPC or the campaign is nearly over, that Estate could even be destroyed outright! In any case, the Power slowly heals physically once the Breakthrough is complete, but their world has lost a portion of its essential brightness.

Abhorrent Weapons

The Abhorrent Weapons are the treasures of Unbeing — the standards and symbols of the Excrucian army as well as their greatest weapons of war. Less than a thousand exist in all of Creation and the Lands Beyond. Nobilis rarely come face-to-face with these terrible artifacts; most of the Excrucian army must make do without. Of these rare relics, only seven are known to every Power — only seven have legends known throughout Creation.

These are the seven major Abhorrent Weapons known to be in existence. Each is said to be a perversion of the most beautiful and elegant weapon of a world the Excrucians have destroyed.

The admiral had destroyed three worlds that day, and five hundred in the course of his career. It did not surprise him, therefore, when the Lord of the Fallen appeared beside his desk, strewn with strategic reports, and bid him good day.

"I hope," the admiral said mildly, "that my work has pleased you. I have executed a work of boundless pain and death upon the civilized planets of the galaxy; and, if it was not in your name, why, your name is as good as any."

Lucifer smiled. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I had not noticed your work until you mentioned. No; I came because I needed a favor, and you seemed well-suited to carry it out for me."

"Pardon," said the admiral, "but how could you not have noticed? I have made the greatest killers in history seem like charlatans; I have humbled the universe with my shadow."

"I'm afraid," the Lord of the Fallen admitted, "that when you have slain angels, the death of worlds seems rather a ... small ... kind of war."

—from A Small Detour to Altair, *by Emily Chen*

His hair was wild and his eyes were wilder, for he had always lived for beauty, for he had never known pain, and now dark tumors like brands spotted his hands and face.

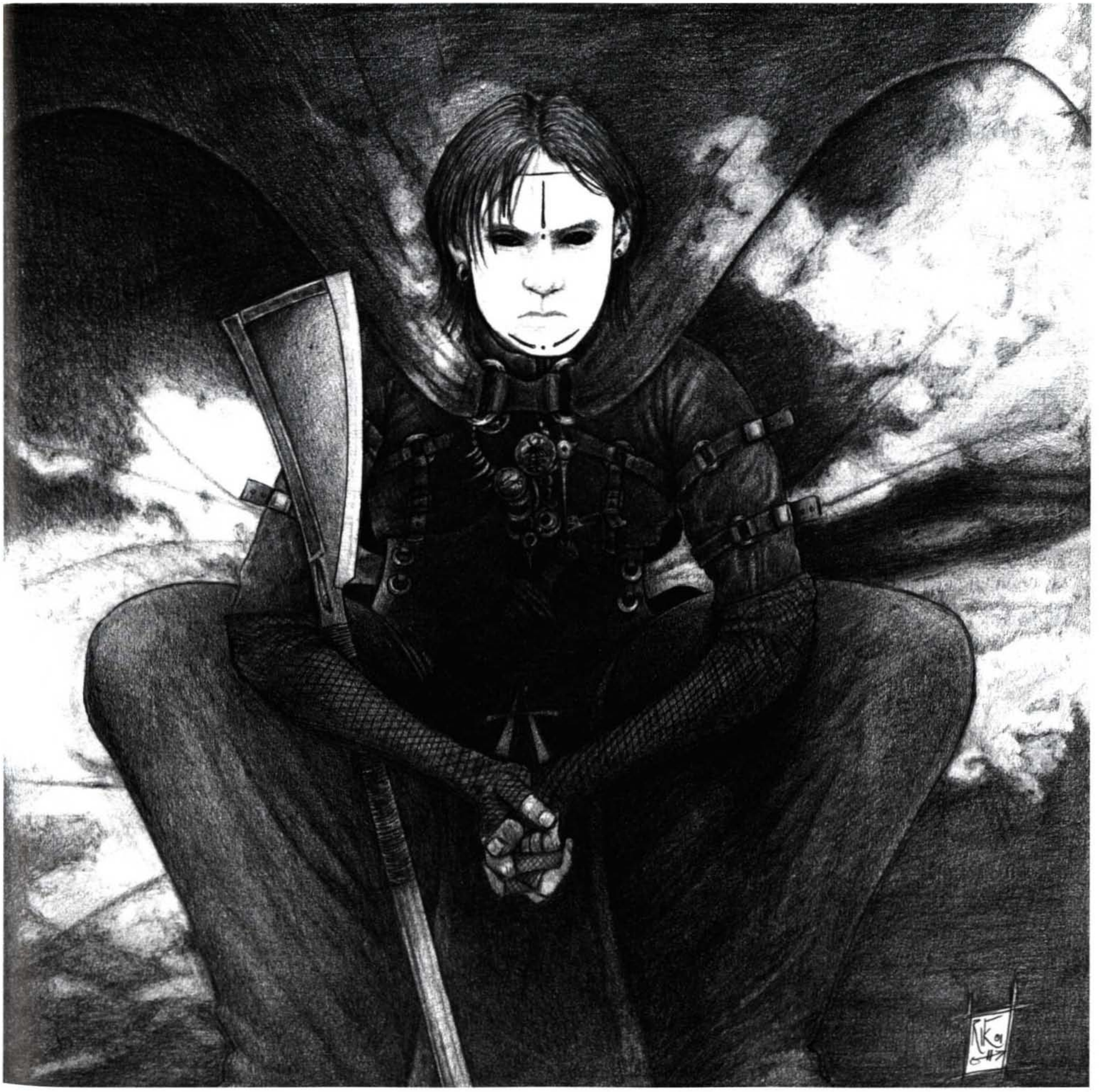
—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

It was lust that brought the angel Domiel down; it could have been nothing else. Once, his relationship with Raphi had been — not love, never love, but a partnership. But Raphi had fallen and there could be no partnership now; no twining of souls. It was lust, when he met with Raphi in the Acmonion Wood. They did not see the Excrucian that waited in the woods. And when Domiel, in his passion, vowed himself to the Code of Hell, they did not see the Excrucian take their lust into his hands and weave a scythe from its essence.

With the creation of that scythe, named Hurtali but called Indiscretion, the Acmonion Wood cried out in pain; and Domiel with release; and the angel that guards those woods moved like a storm. He slew the Excrucian with one blow, so that we shall never know its name; but he could not hold the scythe. It fell from his hands and sank through the forest floor.

—from Legends of the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

OPPOSITE:
Excrucian with Abhorrent weapon
by Rik Martin



Colbrand

Vyasa tells the story of Lord Bhaga, who surrendered to a destroyer the quality of spirit that makes death impossible. ("Bhaga" means one who bestows, rather than referring to a specific individual. Thus, a perspicacious student of the occult knows that Bhaga — whoever he was — acquiesced to the destroyer's demand.)

The name of this quality is Colbrand. Before its corruption, Colbrand lent a few rare individuals such strength of spirit that — even helpless, and in the face of terrible adversity — they could not die. Now, it serves Excrucian ends, but many of Creation's inhabitants still feel, on some atavistic level, that spirit alone suffices to overcome any horror.

***Transcendent** Imperators draw from lingering echoes of Colbrand's former nature to inspire their Powers.*

Abomination

Also known as **Blunderbore.** The legend of Blunderbore states that it was taken from a world that destroyed itself as the Dark would have humanity do — that the drain of life that the Excrucians brought was so galling to its people that they slit their own throats.

Atrocity

Also known as **Briareos.** Atrocity is best known as the weapon which slew Heaven's gatekeeper at the beginning of the Valde Bellum. Legend claims that it had a hundred wielders, each more evil than the last, until it finally found itself in Excrucian hands.

Hatred

Also known as **Malambruno**. Its original tale has been forgotten. It is now spoken of with bitterness, for it was the first Abhorrent Weapon to fall into Imperator hands ... and then it turned the Imperator who captured it into the most vile of traitors.

Horror

Also known as **Eurytos**. This monstrous thing is a blur of shifting spines and mucilaginous poisons, but it was once said to inspire joy in the eyes that saw it. Then it was wrested from its creator while he lay comatose from drink, and bathed in his blood.

Loathing

Also known as **Gyges.** Loathing comes from a world cousin to Atrocity's, although its reputation is somewhat less dark. No Power has seen it up close; its radiance drives the servants of Creation stumbling back.

Monstrous

Also known as **Colbrand**. This is said to have been given as tribute to the Excrucians in the First Age of the World, in order that they should spare our Creation for a time. It is not known who presented it; the story comes from a very blurred divination.

Outrage

Also known as **Typhon.** This is an Abhorrent Whip made of burnished gold. It was supposedly used to strangle unsuccessful contenders to the throne in a world that time has since forgotten.

Its edge is fiendishly sharp; those contenders must have had very tough throats.

John found dueling his shadow a frustrating affair. It clung firmly to his back, and for all his efforts he could not dislodge it; and as for his shadow, its blade bent like a rubber sword on contact with John's flesh.
—from Carnival of Shades, *by Michael Kay*

Ianthe writes: How to be a Hollyhock God

Part 7

What makes Noble Actions a Challenge?

I come across an old man who stands between two trees: and on one tree hangs the fruit of Wealth, and on the other Joy. The fruit of Joy hangs low, so that he might reach it with his hand. The fruit of Wealth hangs above the uttermost pinnacle of his reach. Naturally, he leaps for the fruit of Wealth, again and again. Naturally, he fails. I say to him, "Why do you strive so for the fruit you cannot reach, when Joy is but a moment's work away?"

He says, "These fruits are poisoned both; but I have built up an immunity to Wealth."

—from Sonnet and the Sea, *by Alex Dec*

Implementation and Consequences

Nobles can handle pretty much any situation with ease. True, the Earth holds many creatures that Nobles can't casually sweep aside, including Nobilis, Excrucians, Imperators, and particularly pernicious commoners — but such entities are very thinly spread across a very large world. While most of your stories should focus on Noble interactions with creatures on their own level, the PCs rarely face meaningful opposition in their daily lives. Yet making their daily lives interesting and entertaining will add a great deal of depth to the game. How can you do so?

In most situations a Noble faces, the important question is not *whether* the Noble can implement their programs and policies. They can. The question is *how* they choose to do so, and what effects their choices have.

For example, a Noble might set out to create a military force that remains at peak fitness and readiness at all times. This force will help defend the Chancel. The Noble must think through the training program that keeps them at this level of performance. Obviously, others implement the minutiae — but the Noble must provide the vision. The Noble may reflect that, as a Power, they do not *need* to settle for soldiers who require training. Why not create a force immune to entropy, one that remains in perfect physical and emotional condition at all times without effort? Of course, such soldiers could become bored, and rampage through town. Why not create an army of statues, which convert to human soldiers when activated — a feasible creation, within a Chancel? But this risks some cunning foe corrupting the army while they remain in statue form. No one could notice this effect until the Chancel *needed* the army. The problem is subtler than it appears.

There's more to this kind of decision than finding an optimal policy. A Noble should express their personal style in their decisions. In this manner, the army of Creation gains the advantages of diversity. Among those Nobles who attend directly to their Chancel's military, the Power of Magnetism might create a personal guard out of magnetically charged plasma, befitting his Estate. A Power of the Light might clone a single great warrior a thousand times. Unless every copy dies, the (human) warrior will in some sense live on. A Power with a taste for alchemical magic and a low Realm score might use ordinary soldiers, imbuing their armor with power using wondrous elixirs. A few Nobilis prefer standard human military forces, placing their faith in the human spirit — a foolish idea, but not completely unjustified.

Some players enjoy playing through these decisions, spending their time coming up with new miraculous approaches to the mundane problems they face. To keep them hooked, simply bring them reports of the progress of their projects, and occasionally throw in a small complication. For example, their elite super-genius army concludes that the Excrucians are too strong to defeat, and suggests that immediate surrender to the Children of Harumaph is the least troublesome option. Naturally, they must be silenced before they embarrass the Powers and their Imperator. Perhaps a player character's summoning pentacle, used in their magical research, has accidentally captured a passing nimblejack. Or what if the PC's favorite adjutant just broke the legal code the player has spent several sessions developing?

Similarly, some players enjoy playing through the minutiae of daily life, such as their Power's hunt for a rare mundane spice in a foreign country or the tough if ultimately irrelevant politics surrounding their figure skating career. The fact that the Power can cut through all their troubles with a miracle or two doesn't matter unless the Power actually *wants* to do so, after all.

In many cases, however, your players may need a little help to enjoy this kind of roleplaying. If so, you can spice it up with a careful eye to *consequences* and *the human element*. Have a few minimalist NPC biographies on hand before running any session of your game. When a player character's actions affect a human life, bring out one of your NPCs and reveal what kind of life the PC touched. If a PC decides to ride through the

The human apotheosis is achieving absolute control over one's own life.

In the moment of suicide, a human achieves this apotheosis. No force save their own, no power save their finger on the trigger, will ever affect what happens to them again.

Murdered — by a human killer, by a force of nature, by the spirit Angrbode that is Old Age — a human loses their chance at this apotheosis forever. In the last moments of their life, their self-determination is stolen away, and they can never recover it.

This is the mandate of the Dark: to reach as many lost human souls as we can, and to reach them first.

—from Principles of the Dark, *by Merriweather James*

Chancel in a coach throwing coins to the impoverished, most of the crowd no doubt rushes for the cash — but if you stretch one of your NPCs properly, you can produce an atypical reaction and catch the player's attention. A mentally ill indigent might detest the grime of money, or have obsessive-compulsive restrictions that make picking it up from the ground difficult. They refuse the coin, and instead stand well back from the crowd. This apparent rejection of the PC's largesse makes the NPC stand out. Alternately, a flamboyant acolyte might wax loudly ecstatic over how they will spend the coin on many and varied offerings at the Chancel's temples to the PC. This character is not necessarily unusual, but will stand out regardless if you describe them in more detail than the crowd.

You do not need to force the PC to interact with the new NPC. Establishing the NPC's existence and involvement with the PC's actions is enough. At some later point in the game, you can reintroduce the character — perhaps as a foil for some powerful entity in a significant plot, or perhaps just to show how the character's actions affected them. The PCs might find a badly injured acolyte later that night, mugged for the gold but grimly clinging to some already-purchased sacrifices. Another Power might use the indigent to score a social point. Discovering by virtue of divination and investigation that this NPC exists, and that it was almost certainly the PC's money they rejected, the Power sets out to enrich the mortal where the PC "failed".

Even when no NPC was immediately involved in the PC's actions — as when a player character creates social policy and then hands it to a lieutenant to implement — their actions still have consequences that affect human lives. Where you can make some players happy by focusing on the intricacies of high-level decision-making, others enjoy seeing the effects of their character's decisions. Show them commoners whom they have helped or harmed — give them the stories of those whose lives they have changed. Unless you play out these events with the players temporarily playing NPCs, don't linger on the description of these events — but give the players enough information to feel like their actions have real consequences.

Conflicts of Interest

He stood at the edge of the Earth and drank the world.

"As a servant of Creation," I said, "I should kill you."

He could not move. He had too much raw power pouring into him. His eyes were edgy and frightened.

"Hell," I said. "I will kill you. But I admire your appetite."

—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

The most common crisis a Noble faces is a conflict of interest deriving from their divided loyalties. Bear in mind that every Noble is loyal to one Imperator, one Estate, one Chancel, one Code of personal ethics, one rather large Creation, one Code Fidelitatis, and a variable number of Siblings Caelestis, Anchors, and loved ones. (It's an open secret that Nobilis *do* have loved ones. Just like humans jaywalk. Only, instead of getting fined if some cosmic cop gets uppity, we get tortured. Not that I'm bitter.) When your loyalties pull your heart in at least seven ways, it doesn't matter if they're *usually* on the same side — you're going to get torn in half regularly.

I have observed a peculiar phenomenon in my years among the Nobilis. We Powers do not rate our loyalties, ranking each in some private ladder, making rational decisions by multiplying each rank by the amount of injury or gain it suffers in a given course of action. I have never said: "My Imperator, you are only a 92 to me, and the Code of the Angels is a 96; thus, although you stand to be injured 2% more by this decision than the Code of the Angels is served, I am unable to stand beside you in this matter." The Patroness Mathematica feels that this is weak-minded on my part, but other Powers are even less likely to calculate in this way than I.

Each choice we make between our loyalties is a new exploration of the true desires of our heart. In one sense, facing those situations when we must decide — situations where, to serve one loyalty, we must injure or deprive another — is the most important thing we ever do. It is a map to our true self, a study of the human soul and the *spiritus Dei*. On another level, however, it is horribly painful and dangerous to betray even one of the things I have named. In the end, I am ambivalent on the matter.

As the Hollyhock God, you can enhance both significant and petty challenges by rephrasing them in terms of a conflict of interest. Suppose that a Power of Heaven oversees the high justice of their Chancel. An uncannily beautiful young man, a human of almost unprecedented glory, comes before them on the charge of murder. The penalty

is death, the case open and shut. Yet to kill such a creature! To destroy such beauty! It is unthinkable. In this manner, petty challenges can become more interesting. Complex situations, in turn, become even more complex when one adds a conflict of interest. Suppose that that young man is being tried, not in the Chancel, but on Earth — as part of a flower rite attack on the Power of Justice, perhaps — and the case is going poorly. If the Power of Justice sees the man dead, their Estate is served; if they set him free in the name of beauty and Heaven, Estate and Creation suffer alike.

The deadliest decision of all is the choice whether to lose a loved one or to serve the Valde Bellum. It's a very hard choice. It's a very unpleasant choice. It's a very dramatic choice. From the Hollyhock God's perspective, it's a great choice! Do not inflict it on your player characters too often, however, or they will run out of loved ones and see no point in finding more.

Major Challenges

Nobles face four challenges that can potentially overwhelm them.

First, the machinations of rival Nobles are ever around us. Most of us devote only a fraction of our time to intriguing against our rivals, and a greater fraction to defending ourselves against intrigue; accordingly, we are able to deflect *most* of the challenges to our lives and our happiness. Still, even part-time rivals whose power equals one's own are nothing to sneer at.

Second, Excrucians are a constant menace. Excrucians do not play "the game of flowers", the social wars and miraculous intrigues. They represent a small threat to Noble reputation and happiness; they use the nettle rite rarely; they lack some of the subtlety of our kind — but the Excrucians and their shards possess an absolute dedication to our destruction. These creatures are deadly, to our Estates as well as ourselves.

Third, a sufficiently cunning Bane or Cammoran can pose a threat by wise application of its inferior but dangerous talents. Other unusual commoners can prove dangerous as well. To actually harm a Noble, they must attack from an unanticipated direction, sparing no energy. Thus, a Bane seals off a Power's bedchamber and seeks to suffocate them in their sleep. A Cammoran cheats a Power by using relevant knowledge the Power does not possess — *e.g.*, that the hostage the Power hires them to rescue is already free.

Finally, in principle, certain monsters and natural disasters exceed our power, possessing an element of the *spiritus Dei*. The Megalith Wasps that nest near the Milkweed Branch of the Appian Way are each as large as a major city. Killing or taming even one is heroic, and none since Galeid has ever diverted the entire swarm. Seven Teeth of Righteousness, the immortal hurricane spirit, has the blessing of Cneph. No force can oppose it, no Power can destroy it, and it has endured since its thunderclap birth at the beginning of this Age.

How can you make these challenges interesting? It depends on the abilities of the PCs and NPCs involved.

On Tuesday morning, Nascha slew an unkillable beast; and performed seven acts of great chastity; and upheld the honor of the King. She protected the lands of her liege lord against an unstoppable army; and brought an incorrigible diabolist into the grace of God; and humbled herself for nearly twenty-seven hours in prayer. And at the end of the day, only one challenge remained unchecked on her to-do list: asking her liege for a higher rank within his knightly order. The thought intimidated her; in his eyes, she was lucky to be a knight at all.

—from The Knight of Alabaster, *by Eleanor K.*

Agents

Important characters do not always do their own dirty work. Instead, they work through agents and dupes. A Power is more likely to trust information received from a resident of their Chancel than from a hostile Power or Excrucian, particularly if they can *see* that the human speaks the truth. When one of the PCs' opponents sets out to implicate them in some crime, turn them against a Bond or ally, or persuade them to implement the opponent's will, they use an agent.

You have two routes to follow with an NPC's agents. You can choose perfectly ordinary people as agents, usually people who do not even know that the NPC is using them. The NPC convinces them to share information that, unless the PCs are really on top of their game, misleads them. For example, the NPC disguises themselves as one of the PC's allies, invades the PC's seraglio, and offers one of the guards a bribe just a little bit too small. The guard later reports this invasion, creating friction between the PC and their

"I am the five winds," the lady said, "and wherever a wind blows, there am I. My presence fills this mortal world. I am as pervasive as the air."

"Then you see every horror of the world," said Emmanuel Giriaume, "and do not act."

"As you say," she affirmed. "That is the nature of the wind."

—from The Shorter Road, *by Madeline Bacall*

ally. When it comes to setting the characters up — planting evidence, for example — smoother operators are helpful. In such cases, the NPC may create a supernatural agent, or employ some elite servant from their own Chancel.

The organizations and individual servants that a PC commands play a large role in how you can challenge them and how you can draw them into stories.

For example:

- A Power with a large organization in the mortal world (a company, part of their Imperator's Multitudinous Mystery Cult, or a spy network) has access to a great deal of information on mortal events. Challenging such a character by hiding information about the mortal world, or denying them power there, becomes more difficult — the information must be well hidden, or the power well guarded. However, by creating the organization, the Power creates something they must protect. Threats to the organization force them to investigate. Moreover, like any other information source, you can use a spy network to feed the PCs information you want them to know. This works both for information ("the Power you're about to duel to the death can't be killed with the weapon you're using. You might want to reconsider?") and for disinformation.
- The player of a PC with unusual supernatural servants almost certainly wants them "onstage" part of the time. This means that you should create situations best solved by the servant's abilities — perhaps letting the player run the servant on a private mission while the Powers carry out their business elsewhere. You should also create situations highlighting the servants' weaknesses. For example, massive invisible firedrakes are useful servants, but must eat a great deal; this can be a problem if the character and servants are isolated away from the Chancel. Supernatural servants do make it harder to isolate the PC themselves, an otherwise useful tool for creating tension and exploring themes like loneliness and despair. You must put a great deal of thought into how to separate a well-served character from the world or you should not even try.

OPPOSITE:
Nobilis Rite
by Raven Mimura

Aspect

It is an image that will remain with me forever:

The darkness split by lightning.

The bolt plunging like a whip towards Giraut's chest.

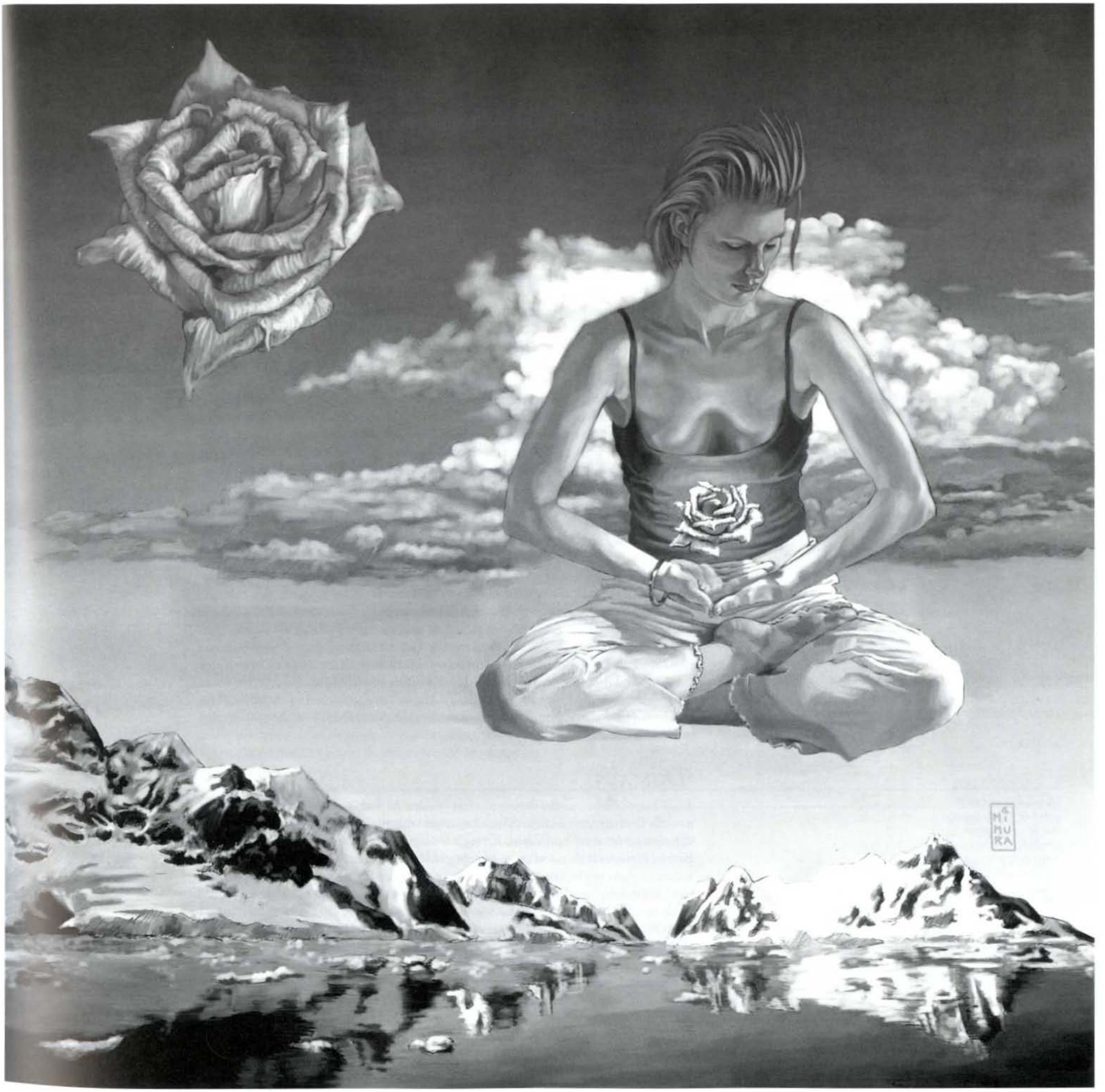
His hands closing around it, so terribly, terribly fast, and holding it away from his heart as it flung him backwards off Mugger's Hill.
—from the Memoirs of Alice Mendel, Lady of the Thunder

Make conflicts with creatures of high Aspect fast-paced and exciting. A Power of high Aspect can accomplish everything better and faster than lesser beings. Give them five minutes in a room with your palace guard — five seconds, for an exemplar — and they can turn the guard against you. Leave them in a cell for two hours and they will tear their way through the wall. Even when the high-Aspect Power isn't physically on the scene, their influence has a similar feel — their plans come at you like army ants, in wave after countless wave. Every time you put out one fire, another two spring up.

An exemplar once challenged me in my own Chancel. I accepted. She moved like a shockwave. Stones fell into my ornate pond and the explosion of water blurred my vision. My heavy wooden tables splintered, shattered; the pieces flew towards me in a stuttering, confusing pattern. She kicked a bowl of cider into my seneschal's path; he slipped. His eyes widened. He panicked. It spread like a wildfire through my servants — *calculated*, a judgment of that little something needed to set them off. She hadn't touched me yet. The pieces of wood hadn't even *reached* me yet. Torches were falling against flammable wood, and a whirl of tablecloth confused the eye — I lost track of her. Then the walls began to tumble down.

(Lest you misunderstand, I *defeated* the impertinent exemplar; she went home with a broken nose and newfound humility. Still, she had better luck than most!)

Some places are better suited than my Chancel lawn to an exemplar's talents. High-Aspect Powers truly come into their own in a crowded mall, full of humans and technological gadgetry, or on a pair of lashed-together ships. However, such Powers do not need a favorable setting to triumph. They do not even need proximity — they are just as deadly from half a world away. Their enemies emerge from their Chancel to find that, in the space of a day, their every mortal associate has turned against them; that arrest warrants have been sworn out against them in a dozen major countries; and that


MIMURA

their holdings have been impounded and their Anchors drugged and imprisoned. High-Aspect Powers have supernatural charm and an inhuman mastery of every mortal skill from manipulating the law to hiring thugs on the street.

If the PCs have high Aspect, you can pit them against high-Aspect opponents for maximum excitement and ferocity. Two celestial-level Powers going at it can level mountains. As a bonus, if a PC levels a mountain in the mortal world, the other PCs will have to put it back together again before someone notices and gets upset! Some other ways to challenge high-Aspect PCs run as follows:

- Pit benevolent high-Aspect PCs against fragile enemies who don't deserve death, such as Excrucian Anchors or physically vulnerable redeemable rivals. Capturing an opponent is always harder than hurting them, even with high Aspect.
- Force the character to deal with two situations requiring their attention at once in two separate regions of the world. They must then decide which to attend to personally and which to attend to through an Anchor, and whether to save some miracle points to burn on Aspect miracles through their Anchor. Stressful IC situations like this usually translate to tense fun OOC.
- Use enemies with high Domain or neat Domain-based Gifts paired with a simple protective Gift like Durant. This keeps the PC from quickly killing their enemy, leaving you free to challenge the character with all kinds of Domain-based horrors. Think of this like the classic contest of hero versus sorcerer: an enemy Stone's-Regal can create great stone monsters, split the earth, and surround the character with crystal, menaces which the high-Aspect character bravely fends off. The Duke of Lust can create a perfect temptation, to draw them into violating the Windflower Law or distract them while he conducts a Nettle Rite. Revenge involves some mentally nimble plan fueled by determination and skill.
- Have subtle Breakthroughs and intrigues. Then high-Aspect Powers save their abilities for grand finales and confrontations. This makes stories harder and more challenging for them in the early stages, but allows them to show off at the end. For example, if another Power spreads rumors about the PC in Noble society, then blunt force of body and mind will do no good — but it can be impressive when the PC finally calls their enemy out, as my above example may have shown.

As a troubleshooting measure, if a high-Aspect PC begins to dominate the game, or sweep through all obstacles, then you should provide subtler obstacles. Rather than having them fight an army, have them fight to save a soul. Do not drop large rocks on their head. Put them in a position where they must betray their principles or someone they love and drop the consequences of *that* on their head, instead.

Powers of high Aspect favor ordinary "dupes" as agents. Using their inhuman charisma and intellect, they maneuver Chancel residents and Earth humans into carrying out their work for them.

Domain

The raindrops beat gently against his back for what must have been several minutes before he noticed the strange pattern to them.

Morse code.

—from The Senator, *by Keiko Takemori*

Each Estate differs, so the details of what you can do with a character's Domain differ as well. Domain covers divination. Characters with high Domain use their Estate to dig up dirt on their opponents, spying on their rival's home, associates, and known Bonds. If this reveals a weakness meaningful to the diviner — which depends on the nature of their opposition — it can provoke a conflict. The Domina of Vapor, at one point my enemy, can see what smoke and clouds and vapor have seen. When I looked up from a lover's bed and saw the heavy smoke of a neighbor's fire skirling in the air, I knew that it would carry word of the liaison to her. The fool in my bed had cried out, "Ianthe!" and the anonymity given by my Auctoritas was gone. If you want to worry your characters, rather than surprise them, highlight the presence of their rival's Estate at the site of some indiscretion. Contrariwise, to surprise them, point out the presence of that Estate as part of a longer description, before the indiscretion begins. With luck, they won't notice until later.

Domain covers disruption of natural law. Used overtly, this means horrid storms and their equivalent — the Domina of Vapor can send great clouds of choking vapor

against her enemies, while the Dominus of Fear drives hordes of fear-crazed beasts against his foes. The Power of the Sea — if there is one; I am not familiar with them — might flood a Chancel with the horrible pressure of a deep-sea environment. When used subtly, disruption of natural law can mislead or interfere with the PCs in any number of ways. For example, the Domina of Vapor can help a messenger lose their way, ensuring that the PCs do not have adequate time to prepare for a visit from Baalhermon, one of Lord Entropy's Powers. The Domina might do this to score a point or to help her rise politically above the PCs. The Dominus of Fear can make a mortal servant terrified of their mortal and supernatural bosses, causing them to lose their job — and their ability to block one of his plans — without informing the PC.

Domain covers creation miracles. Powers of high Domain favor creatures born from their Estate as their agents — spirits of that Estate, or servants created with Major Creation. The Domina of Vapor might create a cloud of mustard gas in human shape, capable of oozing through cracks or poisoning with a touch; the Dominus of Fear might pull a monster directly out of someone's nightmares to serve him.

Perhaps the most memorable encounter I have ever had with a Power of high Domain was a brief conflict with the Power of Magnetism. I was experimenting with the internal politics of the Order of St. Gilderoy, to which the Dominus had belonged as a mortal, and my efforts apparently disconcerted him. I ignored his objections. The next morning, I found that all my clothes — my entire wardrobe, laboriously constructed over many years — had become magnetically charged. What harm could this do? I asked, brushing cutlery off my sleeve, and proceeded to the next meeting of the Order. The ceiling of the meeting chamber was, it seems, a perfect magnetic match.

If the PCs have high Domain, be pleased! That means they like their Estate, and it's good for the game that they do.

Some ways to keep them challenged if the game becomes too easy for them are:

- Remember that Lesser Changes are limited in scope. If Melanie Tumbarius decides to make that viral music mentioned under Level 6 Domain Miracles (p. 96), it won't be the Black Plague or Andromeda Strain of musical compositions. It may never escape the communities she seeds it in.
- Remember that you control what NPCs do, and in turn what a Major Divination can spot. Sometimes, a divination helps the PCs circumvent your plot, but more often it's a great pipeline for you to tell them what you want them to know. If a Regal PC spends several hours a day doing Major Divinations, give them what they want: interesting things to see that lure them into interesting stories. Every now and then, use their surveillance to mislead them.
- If your PCs burn up their Domain miracle points quickly on major miracles of Domain, working huge changes on the face of the Earth, remember that causing an epidemic of *dementia animus* is against the law. You can also make sure that they *want* those miracle points later in the game.

Realm

To make conflict with a high-Realm character interesting, you must make it difficult for the PCs to catch that character outside of their Chancel. This forces the PCs to create a clever plan for luring their rival into the open *or* a plan for facing their enemy where that enemy is most powerful.

You should design a high-Realm NPC carefully, to minimize their need to go into the outside world. They should have a large toolbox of abilities and servants that can carry their will to the outside world. Temporally powerful Anchors and servants, Mystery Cultists, an influential Estate, a vast fortune — which Realm can help create — and globally useful Gifts all help here. Each of these resources has limitations a Power does not, however, which means that PCs *can* draw the high-Realm character out.

You can safely assume that a Warden's defenses are abnormally difficult to overcome. Not only are their walls difficult to tear through, they are abnormally difficult to climb — perhaps unusually slick or perhaps just resistant to being climbed. (This is a permanent quality of the wall, a part of its mythic identity; miracles can overcome it

"You have served me twenty years," she said, "and that suffices. In honor of those years, I grant you this gift: when you die, and are buried, flowers will always bloom upon your grave; and any who passes by shall remember you, intimately and precisely, as if they knew you when they were young. Now go."
—from Air Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

but Auctorita cannot.) Not only are their guards as tenacious as wolverines, their secretaries are legendarily impassible. As with the physical endurance conveyed by Durant, a sufficiently determined assault can overcome these obstacles.

A True King or Queen is sevenfold more potent. They can create almost anything with a thought, which means that they and their peers have any number of strange and effective servants, items, and environmental conditions at their beck and call. Such artifacts have, of course, no *true* power, even on the mortal scale — they are supernaturally endowed, not world-shakingly magnificent. Nevertheless, they can catch a Noble by surprise: werewalls and weredesks, pebbles as heavy as boulders in the wrong hands, vellum message scrolls that fly to their intended recipient, and rooms capable of selectively screening out gravity. In addition, the things that a miracle of lesser creation creates can leave the Chancel. This includes tangible wealth, powerful weaponry and armor, servants, and machines of general utility. This is surprisingly useful, despite the need for a steady supply of miraculous energy to keep these creations "real". For example, a capable Power can launder gold into stocks, bonds, and hefty bank accounts well before it fades away into nothingness.

A Tempest has powers both subtle and blatant. Tearing the world down around invading Powers can blunt even the most determined assault. More importantly, a Tempest often has the power to work miracles within a rival's Auctoritas — locking their clothing into place with miracles of preservation, conjuring fire and ice and poison around them with miracles of creation, and dissolving the air a Candleflame breathes. That's without RMPs — if the situation deteriorates, and the Tempest spends a few miracle points to compensate, they become even deadlier. Opposing a Tempest within their Chancel will create excitement and tension without much effort from the HG.

Player characters with high Realm are easier to handle. Realm is self-limiting. Even if other Powers have trouble drawing the character out of the Chancel, Excrucians can and *will* threaten their Estates in the outside world. Moreover, the PC's Imperator can still send them out into the broader world. Allow such players to enjoy their massive influence and power within the Chancel.

If they become difficult to handle, use the following techniques:

- Suppose that the natural in-Chancel dominance of a high-Realm character begins to annoy the other players. Remember first that the player has paid points for the privilege and political power accompanying a high Realm. This sets an obligation upon you. Similarly, the happiness of the player group is all-important; this also sets an obligation upon you. To balance these concerns, make sure that the offending Power is not getting the lion's share of your OOC attention, and allow the other PCs opportunities to put the high-Realm Power "in their place". You are drawing a delicate line here. Inter-PC *fighting* is bad for a *Nobilis* campaign. Inter-PC *rivalry*, up to and including duels to first blood and painful practical jokes, is *good* as long as all PCs remain enjoyable to play. When a PC begins to annoy the other players, such rivalry is appropriate. (If it seems impossible to please one player without upsetting the others, take out your excellent interpersonal skills and brilliantly resolve the situation to the advantage of all parties. I have faith in you.)
- If a PC with a high investment in Realm does everything through their Anchors and *refuses* to leave home — first, accept it. It's what Anchors are for, and the Power generally pays for such behavior in one way or another. Second, think about what situations might lure the character out into the world. If the Power's *spiritus Dei* does not impel them to leave home, what about their human half? Anchors can bring the PC the latest novels and roleplaying games, but it's harder to bring concerts and art exhibits and protests and book signings and such into the Chancel. Further, even an ordinary person who does not do charity work or engage in political action can be tempted if, after becoming Noble, they realize that they can now make a *substantial* difference. (Of course, politics is a dangerous arena even for the *Nobilis*.) Once they enter the world, the PC will find their own level — naturally drifting to a degree of activity that challenges them.



Spirit

The spear took Michael through the heart, but he is not dead; nor is he gone.

He is a man who became his Estate, and, in so doing, marked it forever. I can look in any lion's eyes and see his spirit there.

I can walk with them now. They do not hunt me any more.

—from the Diary of Selena Monteith

Allies with high Spirit are inspirational. The glory of an Inferno — I look at such a creature and think, "This one understands words and argument better than I." Untrue, certainly. Even ridiculous! I am the Power of Debate. Yet such is the awe one feels in the presence of a high-Spirit friend. And, for much the same reason, such Powers are often your friends — your friends, or your deadly enemies, and very rarely in between.

Enemies with high Spirit — no vituperation suffices. They are scum, slime, beasts, atrocities, horrors, and nightmares. You cannot kill them! A mere Sunfire has an Auctoritas that shields them from the worst of my abilities. And worse! If I abandon miracles, and use simply the grace and wits and Colt .45 that the Lord gave me, the bullets do not strike! The Rite of Holy Fire protects a Sunfire against such weapons as this; I cannot even make them dance. Moreover, the larger a Power's Spirit, the greater their rational incentive to perform the nettle rite becomes. Where a Candleflame or Hearthfire has no reason to perform more than a minor nettling — embarrassing, degrading, damaging, but ultimately forgivable — an Inferno rarely contents themselves with such insignificant assaults. They are harpies, striking coldly at their enemies' hearts. Nor do they only nettle Powers. Sometimes, they steal a victory against the Excrucians from those who rightfully earned it. They crush and nettle the dark foe using preparation and research performed by their rivals!

Facing off against a high-Spirit opponent, therefore, should terrify. This is not because the creature is abnormally deadly, but rather because they have a perverse dedication to ruining that which you care about — and you cannot make them go away. They do not know fear as others do. They are terrible. They are monsters.

Oddly, the situation is symmetric: not only are high-Spirit characters horrible challenges, they are easily challenged as PCs. If the PC nettles your NPCs, it gives you three opportunities to complicate their lives: once when they encounter the defenses the NPCs put around their Bonds, once when you throw in a little good or bad luck to make the actual nettling more interesting, and once when the NPCs respond with suitable anger. If the PC's Auctoritas is going to mess up your plans, just increase the opposition's Attributes a bit — you do not have to point-balance every character. The character's Anchors are enormously useful, and you should *make sure* they're enormously useful, but the PC can only be in one mind at a time. In a complex situation, where the PC is using all their Anchors to full advantage, the other three (or four, or five) Anchors are presumably facing challenges of their own.

There are a few tricks to handle some of the more abusive possibilities, as follows:

- A player might notice that Spirit 5 and Aspect 3 makes for a vicious grappler. Suppose their character seizes an Excrucian with Aspect 7 but no Spirit. If the Excrucian spends an AMP, they can crush the character with Aspect 3 strength (and 5 penetration). For the same miracle point, the character can squeeze back with Aspect 4! If such characters begin overusing this kind of trick, you have four possible solutions. First, remember that a high-Aspect enemy can create distance between the two of them faster than the character can close that distance. Second, come up with some neat descriptions and tricks for grappling combat. This is best done in the off time between games — if you can do this on the fly during the game, this situation isn't really a problem for you. Third, use more opponents who spend points on things other than Aspect. Fourth, remember that the Auctoritas only protects against the *effects* of a miracle, not the miracle itself. Our hypothetical Aspect 7 Excrucian can still shout loudly enough to bring down an avalanche on the two contenders; the sound will seem normal within the Auctoritas, then explode outwards from the Auctoritas' boundary — like a horde of attack dogs suddenly unleashed!
- Remember that "penetration value" is *not* the only way around an Auctoritas. For example, if the Power of the Ground attacks a PC and doesn't know what kind of Auctoritas the PC has, they can destroy a million cubic feet of dirt (a

hundred feet in each direction) around the PC. The ground immediately beneath the PC's feet will be unaffected, but when the miracle becomes a part of normal reality a few seconds later, the PC and that bit of ground within a few feet of them will fall. Thump.

Massive Defensive Gifts

The boomerang ripped the sky as it spun towards him, leaving red clouds dripping down like blood. It howled as it spun. It was hideous. It was unstoppable. And yet it shattered against Baalhermon's chest.

For a moment, I was almost proud to serve Lord Entropy and his men.

—from the Thought-Record of Martin Cravitt

The Gift system is open-ended, which means that both PCs and NPCs can have strange and powerful defensive Gifts that the book does not describe.

Some of the most common defensive Gifts include:

- **Resistance to injury.** Durant and Immortal exemplify this sort of Gift. These Gifts are excellent for enemies against whom the PCs must use massive force. For example, if a traitorous Power is about to split open the Weirding Wall and open all Creation to Things from Outside, your player characters will not slowly escalate the level of force they apply — they will hit the traitor with the most powerful weapons and miracles they have at their command. If you want to use that enemy again, they should probably be Immortal. If some rival is about to split open the PCs' Chancel, the characters may show more restraint, resisting the urge to utter Words of Command to shut their rival down. Instead, they might use deep miracles and heavy weaponry. In this case, you should make the rival Durant, so that the PCs have an excellent chance of knocking them unconscious and injuring them severely but a poor chance of killing them. As for player characters with these Gifts, you have a simple way around them — don't try to injure the characters. Leaving aside the flower rite of the Excrucians, there are dozens of non-damaging weapons and attacks. With Durant, a common Gift, Powers know them all. Weighted nets and bolos, innuendo and blackmail, sorcerous cages, and vicious curses ignore Durant, and many of them can affect characters resistant to capture. A sorcerous cage, for example, can move with an Immortal PC, holding them longer than an ordinary form of imprisonment ever could.
- **Quick escapes.** Capturing and imprisoning all the protagonists is a staple of roleplaying games and fiction. My personal advice, however, is that if a PC has a way to escape most any prison, plan on them doing just that. If the PC has a way to flee any combat situation, accept that too. The player, in buying such a Gift, makes it clear that they don't want their character beaten up — that they prefer the thrill of pulling a fast one on the opposition to the thrill of combat itself. That's fine. Remember that you *can* run a game of Nobilis without any combat and almost nothing will be lost. As for NPCs with Gifts allowing quick escape, you have two options. Either make it feasible but difficult for the PCs to catch the NPC, or make sure that they never *have* to. If the NPC can escape almost any situation, make sure that the characters need only drive them away to thwart their plans. If the PCs must capture a Power who can teleport in order to achieve some important goal, it will annoy the players. If they must catch a Noble who can run as fast as the wind, on the other hand, it poses an interesting challenge.

I had a gun. I was going to kill him. I was.

He did not flinch when I drew on him. He just whispered a name.

It was my name. Not the name I had given him. Not the name my mother gave me. Not any name I'd ever heard before. It was my real name. It was the name God had for me, in the quiet of his soul. It was the name that people live their whole lives not knowing, and I can't imagine how.

I don't know whether I was crying from sorrow or from joy, but by the time I had stopped, he was gone.

—from Night Hours, *by Madeline Bacall*

Incredible Informational Gifts

Unlike combat, secrets are very hard to do without in a Nobilis game. Avoid making an antagonist who can crack the PCs' secrets without effort; this makes the players feel that creating and keeping secrets is not worth the effort. Similarly, if a player wants to play a PC with an incredible informational Gift, make sure that you can keep an infinite array of secrets even with the Gift in the game. If not, tell the player to revise their PC.

Bear in mind that no divination will tell a character what specific Excrucian, Imperator, Power, or even Anchor was present at a given scene. Their immunity to direct miracles creates a "hole" in the divination that proves that *some* creature of power

was there — and a player can track these absences for as long as the "hole" remains in eyeshot of their Estate — but for the most part, following Noble actions with divination is difficult.

Deadly Offensive Gifts

It poured from his hand like a fire, sharp-edged, dancing, limned in white: the Not. What it touched, ceased to be.
—from Void Stories, *edited by Kneader Guy*

You should use non-player characters with deadly offensive Gifts sparingly. As Hollyhock God, you do not *want* to kill your player characters. Rather, you want to create enough risk to keep the players interested. Enemies and even allies capable of killing the PCs with one lucky blow can escalate this risk beyond reasonable bounds — even though you control luck in your game world. The more often your characters face off against Abhorrent Weapons, city-smashing disintegration rays, and the jaws of angry Aaron's Serpents, the sooner the odds catch up to them, and the sooner you find yourself in a position where killing a player character seems unfair and leaving them alive breaks the suspension of disbelief. This is not to say that deadly opponents do not have their place. They do. A single deadly enemy can escalate the tension in your game dramatically. You must simply use this device rarely enough that the players are willing to engage in tension rather than despair — that their reaction to such a monstrous foe is fear and fury, rather than simply giving up and waiting for you to kill off their characters.

Naturally, "deadly" is a matter of perspective. Assume that any Noble can take out just about any commoner. The weakest, most pathetic, most puerile Nobles might need to spend an AMP or two to take down a street thug, but even they do not get *mugged.* Personal experience suggests that perhaps one in three Nobles can take down an army, and one in ten can personally subjugate a nation. If one or two of your PCs can take out an Imperator or full Excrucian, however, you may have a problem. Such characters will feel a strong temptation, whenever they cannot figure out a Breakthrough's purpose, to simply kill the Excrucian-shards that they find in the vicinity and have done. Does Lord Entropy oppose them? Let him come! You can find challenges to face such mighty Powers, but even a high-powered game like Nobilis works best at the power level it was designed for.

Here are some ideas for challenging PCs who push the limits of appropriate firepower:

- Remember the Chestnut Law — that is, that one should never harm the innocent. A PC should be prepared to prove that those Excrucian-shards *were* attacking the PCs, or otherwise behaving poorly, before killing them. This can be almost as difficult as stopping the Breakthrough itself. I personally find it outrageous that the Children of Harumaph are presumed innocent in the Locust Court — but I do not make the laws, and here is an instance where they work to the HG's benefit. Proving the guilt of the Power's enemies is even more important when the enemies are Noble. The Locust Court shows some lenience towards those who attack Excrucians without justification, on the grounds that their crime also serves Creation. Eradicating another Power, however, serves no one but the player character.
- Also remember that Immortal trumps almost any offensive Gift. Unless the PC traffics with Excrucians, in which case you decide exactly what they gain, Powers simply do not *have* a miracle that can snuff out an Immortal. Drop a thousand-ton weight on an immortal head, and the weight most likely splits in half. If not, the Immortal is at least still alive underneath and capable of using Gifts and miracles. If you drop such a weight on a Durant character — well, it will hurt them, and badly, but they might just be able to dodge or counterstrike before they lose consciousness.

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Chapter 19
A Book of Beasts: Entropy & Others

The Book of Questions

In the second year after this Sutra's creation, Vyasa dug up the grave of a great teacher, and taught the empty corpse to speak the questions below. "But this is an obscenity! A desecration!" cried the teacher's disciples.

"There is a place and purpose in this world for all things," answered Vyasa, "even obscenities and desecrations."

1. *As I begin to write, a woman takes shape, where she had none;*
2. *Takes power, where she had none;*
3. *Rises from poverty and penury to command the world.*
4. *Who is she?*

5. *They locked Lord Hridayaja in a box of stone, with nothing save a fire for warmth.*
6. *Hridayaja told stories to the fire, and saw stories in its glow.*
7. *Then they poured oil into the cell, and on Hridayaja, and the cell took light.*
8. *When they came again, six days later, the fire danced on Hridayaja and the walls, but Lord Hridayaja it had not burnt.*
9. *It is in fire's nature to burn. It is in Hridayaja's nature to suffer burning.*
10. *Why did the fire stay its hand?*

"I was walking to the office when this girl appeared beside me — out of nowhere, as far as I could tell. 'You're it,' she said cheerfully, and touched me, and then just … vanished again!"
—from the Choice News
(a tabloid on Ash-tree Earth)

OPPOSITE:
Ananda, Imperator of Murder, the Infinite, and the Fourth Age
by Lee Moyer

The Solitary Lord Entropy and a Crony of Cossets

"I find it amusing," he told me, "that they have given the most powerful force of all my name —"
—from the Thought-Record of Martin Cravitt

Lord Entropy is the true ruler of the Earth, appointed not by humanity but (he claims) by the leaders of the Imperators in the Valde Bellum. The laws he makes for the Powers to live by are readily enforced: even a Power's own Imperator will not defend them from the Imperial miracles of the Darkest Lord. His three Powers are frightening as well. The Scorn's-Regal and Exemplar Joktan, Destruction's-Regal Baalhermon, and Desecration's-Regal Meon all have magic above the Noble norm. It is not known what breed of Ymera Lord Entropy is, although it is commonly assumed that he is a "true god".

Lord Entropy's Chancel

Lord Entropy's Chancel is an island in the Atlantic, guarded by furious storms and a handful of mythic beasts. On that island is a city of black glass and silver limning. Humans inhabit the aboveground levels, and in the levels below ground they hunt the wild and vicious beasts of the island through cubicles and elevators and long halls of tiled floor. When the Lord Entropy calls a Hunt against some Power that has caught his eye, his Powers lead it, but these humans enact it, granted the kind of acute hunting skill and mysterious mystic abilities necessary to chase a Sovereign to the limits of their endurance.

Your plea moves me. Yet, as always, when I consider offering mercy, I must ask myself, "Do I wish to set this precedent?" Do I wish to set this precedent, esteemed Marchessa?
—Lord Entropy, Imperator of Desecration, Destruction, and Scorn

Lord Entropy's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	3: Inhuman	5
Domain	7: Imperial	7
Realm	6: Imperial	5
Spirit	5: Inferno	5

Gifts and Virtues	Immortal
	The World-Breaker's Hand
Limits/Restrictions	Restriction: Permanent bloody hands
	Other Handicaps: unknown
	Affiliation: unknown
Wound Levels	2 Deadly Wounds (Immortal)
	2 Serious Wounds
	3 Surface Wounds
Total Cost:	100 Character Points

Lord Entropy's Servants

Chief among Lord Entropy's servants are the three Regals mentioned above. He is also served by the Cammora, by the Seeds of Lord Entropy, and by the Cossets, his house-servants and Noble-hunters. These include the Domicelli (male: Domicellus; female: Domicella) — the humans who stand high in his esteem; the nimblejacks, vicious imps as fast as lightning and as ugly as sin; and the ogres, creatures of acute smell — both the sense and the effluvium — and great and brutal strength. The creatures that he creates to serve as hounds in his Hunts are varied and strange, and usually fade from existence within a few nights.

Story Seeds involving Lord Entropy (and the Council of Four)

Lord Entropy's Hunt

A Power arrives at the PCs' Chancel and clamors for assistance. They are pursued by dark and viscous beings, pools of inky acid in the night. When Scorn's-Regal Joktan shows up with the distorted men of Locus Entropy, he informs the Powers that they are "interfering with the Hunt". Of course, it's possible that the fugitive committed a real and serious crime — and it's possible that they didn't. It's also possible that the fugitive has done something to ensure that simply handing them back is difficult ....

Courtroom Drama

Most of the time that the PCs violate the Code Fidelitatis, they should get away with it — courtroom gaming is fun and interesting, but not if it comes up every other session. That stated, hauling a PC before the Locust Court is sometimes a worthwhile action and can produce both tension and interest. In case the PC loses their case, the HG should have an intriguing punishment handy.

The Lady of the Third Age

Until the Third Age began, mystery shrouded the Lady Attaris' nature. She was the Imperatrix of the Third Age. The most perspicacious uses of the Sight revealed nothing more. Even as Atrocity slew the gatekeeper of Heaven, she cast off her shroud and stood revealed: a Magister of the Wild, Attaris Ebrôt Appêkā, the tutelary spirit of the Age of Pain. In the moment of her ascension, the Fallen Angel Ebrôt Appêkā turned to dust.

Vyasa wrote at the turning of the Ages. When he describes a woman taking on shape and power as he writes, he refers to the Lady Attaris.

Lady Attaris visits Earth on occasion, but has not made a Chancel there.

The Lord of Expectations and a Drive of Ombudsmen

Ananda is the hand on the rudder that guides the world. He controls little. He acts rarely. Yet in a thousand subtle ways, he steers Creation towards its future, for Ananda is the Lord of the Fourth Age, the Imperator of the world yet to come.

As a lord on the Council of Four, Ananda serves Lord Entropy — if not always with his vote, then at least with his abstention. The Darkest Lord has not corrupted him, but has rendered him impotent, unable to stand against Entropy's will. Even so, many Powers see in Ananda the hope of the world. They say that in Ananda's terrible beauty, which drives mortals mad and exhorts the world to sing, there lies a sign of some brilliant future to come.

Ananda's true nature, much like Lord Entropy's, is a mystery. The Sight does not show his essence. Idri-mi, one of the four Earthly Powers old enough to remember the world before the Age of Pain, claims that this is typical. The Lady of the Third Age was similarly shadowed until the Excrucians came.

Their numbers are countless. There are trillions of them. They are roaches. They are the eyes of God. From the pipes, from the shadows, from behind the refrigerator, they watch. They judge. They are shielded by the glory of the lord. It takes great force to kill them. Yet humans manage, snuffing several roaches every second; and with each roach that dies, a star goes out.
—from The Eyes of God, *by Rannen Yedidyah*

Ananda's Chancel

Ananda rules the Cityback, a massive Convenient Chancel with entrances and exits all over the world. In the Cityback, nature stalks across developed lands and the urbana — the things of urban existence, like televisions, automobiles, clocks — are just more forms of life.

I don't answer questions about the future. The querent has a disturbing tendency to be dead, and everything they care about lost in the march of Ages. Instead, I offer practical advice: the Locust Court already knows of your emotional indiscretion. If you kill your son now, it will save both of you a great deal of trouble.
—Ananda, Imperator of Murder, the Infinite, and the Fourth Age

Ananda's "Noble Miracles" Character Sheet

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	3: Inhuman	5
Domain	2: Minor	7
Realm	5: Tempest	5
Spirit	5: Inferno	5

Gifts and Virtues	Immortal Glorious Gatemaker Constant Domain: Lesser Creation (Murder) Devoted Populace Luck (Penetration 4)
Limits/Restrictions	Restriction: Beautiful enough to drive mortals mad with joy Other Handicaps: unknown Affiliation: unknown
Wound Levels	2 Deadly Wounds (Immortal) 2 Serious Wounds 3 Surface Wounds
Total Cost:	80 Character Points

Ananda's Servants

Ananda's primary servants are the ombudsmen of Cityback. These dedicated servants of the modern world help keep the mundane Earth running smoothly and in the right direction. (see p. 30.) Trained among the urbana of Cityback, the human-born ombudsmen can move between the Mythic and Prosaic worlds at will and have the favor of the spirits they watch over. Thus the "clerks of the factories" — the ombudsmen of production and labor — have the favor of the spirits of industry and steel. Ananda has enhanced many of his ombudsmen, giving them the ability to perform level 0 or 1 Aspect miracles. The most valiant servants also have an appropriate Gift or two — but no more than a few dozen such ombudsmen exist, out of the thousands that serve the Lord of Expectations.

"I am being petty, Luc."
"Of course not, my lord."
"You must inform me, Luc," he said. "You must tell me when I am being petty. This is a part of your duties."
"But why should I ever have reason to do that, my lord?"
"If I am to be petty, Luc, I must be aware of the fact, I must be self-reflective and self-cognizant. Then I will know to indulge my pettiness, to be petty on the proper scale. It would not do to be trivially venal, Luc. That would not serve my reputation at all."
—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

A Rule of Sovereigns

The Powers are contradictions, divinity and human nature bound into a single form. They are the true stars of a game of Nobilis — weak compared to full Excrucians and Imperators, yes, but burdened by crippling responsibilities and exalted by immoderate power. No cookie cutter can stamp out Nobles. Each combines a personality rooted in our complex humanity with traits drawn from the infinite variety of nature. Players and the Hollyhock God should be as original as possible with these, the major characters in the game. That stated, here are six possible "flavors" of Noble to give an impression of what kinds of characters fit well into the universe presented.

An Important Note: the HG has the option to use or not use any of the specific Sovereign Powers presented in this book, as fits the tenor of their game and the associated PCs best. They do not even have to exist in a given game — on average, most will not. In particular, a player should feel no hesitation to claim one of the Estates used by an example character, using it for a Power of their own design.

Six Common Sovereigns

Reluctant Sovereigns

Numerous Powers carry their new role bitterly: the dominion given to them was unwanted, the Code Fidelitatis is unbearable, and their responsibility is an ever-heavier weight upon their shoulders. Ironically, these Sovereigns are the most dedicated to their task. Perhaps they seek justification for their pain.

For an example, harken back to Cassiel, who records the sins and sacrifices of humankind. What more terrible job could there be? He knows that each sin he records drags humanity towards eventual destruction. Each sacrifice, each act of purity that goes unnoticed during the hour of sleep he allows himself each day, does nothing to save them. He often thinks of altering the record — but this would cause a fundamental corruption of what he is. Cassiel is brave: he could withstand blandishments, rape, or a slow torturous death. Yet he is not strong enough to endure an essential corruption of his nature, to consign himself to the side of Hell and perhaps the Excrucians, even if humanity's life is at stake. And so, thus far, the record remains honest.

Another example: Malinde is the Domina of Pain, and a Power of the Light. Pain is required for human health and prosperity, but Malinde cannot possibly enjoy being responsible for all of it.

"He came to me and said, 'Child, you have fulfilled my trust. You owe the world no more; you owe me no more; you have given all that could be asked of you to give. Rest, now; I will take you to a place of rest.' He also said, a bit later, 'You will have fine children of your own.'
"I knew it was a dream, even while I was having it. I knew it was a dream, and that believing it would make it all the more torturous when I woke up — but how could I not? How could I not believe him, when I have given up so much to wage this 'Excrucian War?'"
—Ellen McIntosh, Marchessa

Joyful Sovereigns

Make no mistake: there is wonder for the Nobilis as well as wrack and ruin. Their body responds more vigorously than ever before, and their Estate sings life and light into their dreams. For the Sovereign who chooses to see it, there is much to enjoy in the worlds of the Ash. Perhaps even the conflict itself, the struggle to hold the Excrucians at bay, is a joy to them, because it gives them the opportunity to burn themselves out in service to the world and all Creation.

Consider Shi-mi, the Placida Rex, Lady of Calm Reflection, and the Marchessa Leana. Her duties are to preserve the feline population and to cull the spiritual energy of those who die. Saving kitty-cat lives, of course, would be a joyful duty for any Power; rending their souls to feed her Imperator is not. Yet she has absorbed something of the character of her Estate, and all these human concerns mean little to her beside the rough-made joys of napping, racing about, and occasionally nibbling some delicacy.

Another example: Takari Risu was born as an "anime" character — sort of. (Her story is on p. 92.) Like many such

As he sat there idly, a rainbow slipped like a slinky from hand to hand.
—from Warning Moon, *by Jackie Robinson*

characters, she has an essential appreciation for life that outweighs, in the long run, anything bad that happens to her.

Nobles Defined By Their Estate

Some Nobilis, deliberately or not, suffocate their former selves. Not entirely, of course, since it is not safe to altogether forget one's mortality. Yet they redefine their existence as an extension of their Domain. This is fairly simple to roleplay: their moods match the moods of their Estate. As with any Noble, their highest goal is to safeguard that Estate. Their Design often features the open blue flower of fidelity, the stem thick with the thorns of death and self-sacrifice.

Consider Zerubbabel, the Power of Uncertainty. Confusion and Doubt surround her constantly, inevitably, hauntingly. Maintaining her self required the utmost discipline, willpower, and (frankly) stubbornness — the kind of vigilance it takes for one to ignore the strongest and firmest insistences of the mind. This was within her reach. Even mortals, such as those who overcome crippling mental illness to succeed, can maintain their identity in the face of transcendent confusion. Ruby, as a Power, could do even better, but she did not. Once the doubts took hold of her, she found that they defined her existence.

Another example is Morgan, the Power of War. This is a troubled time for all Powers, and she is attuned as no other to the Valde Bellum. Conscientious attention to her duties has driven her further and further from her human self. Now, she hangs at the edge of losing it altogether, afraid to go on, afraid to go back and afraid, most of all, to stand still.

The caretaker walked out into the yard, and softly said, "It's closing time."

Stringy grey hair hung by the visitor's face as he lowered his head. He did not otherwise acknowledge the caretaker's words. His clothes are so ragged, the caretaker thought. He looks like he belongs in a grave himself.

"Friend of yours?" he asked, jerking his thumb towards the gravestone. Three flowers lay there by the grave, fresh picked: dandelions, their patchy swirl of seeds empty of any meaning but respect. "No," the visitor answered. "He was me."

Silence.

"A long time ago," the visitor said softly. "When I was young."

—from Livingstone, *by Emily Chen*

Nobles of a Sacrificial Bent

Some Nobles view things less abstractly. Their Estate and their Imperator are important, but neither is truly relevant compared to the ongoing process of human lives lived, suffered through, or ended. The fundamental loyalty they feel to the Valde Bellum is tempered by their knowledge that it is something imposed on them. While they will not disobey their Imperator directly even to save humanity from the next Black Plague, they spend more time than they ought using their miraculous abilities to heal the troubled mortal world.

For example, take Jameson Black. We've talked a lot about him, and one thing stands out: he was willing to throw away everything, loyalties and all, to get away from the personal horror of having slaughtered humans like sheep. Even though he is returning to "duty", he will sooner or later start trying to make up for his actions, whatever the cost to himself.

Another example: Dimi(nuendo) spends her life gathering the souls of forgotten songs, but she does not rend them to feed her Imperator. Instead, she grants them a home in her Chancel. There could be selfish reasons for this, of course; that's up to the HG, if they use Diminuendo at all. On the surface, however, she seems to be a Noble of a sacrificial bent.

"You must come back," the voice said softly.

I was so far away. The blood that rushed from my wrist into the breach was no more than a distant ache, now; the magic that flowered along the border was strong enough to maintain itself now. I, I was in a realm of colors and lights and the sense of overwhelming love —

"You must come back," the voice said softly.

It was not Heaven; I had not earned so much. But if it were Limbo, it was the brightest Limbo ever imagined by man. I felt a deep healing begin in my heart, I felt the pains and griefs and even some of my heavy years fading away. I was in a realm of colors and lights and the sense of overwhelming love —

"You must come back," the voice said, a third time, and slowly I opened my eyes, and carefully I set my hand upon my wrist and the blood flowed no more.

—from Night Watch, *by Emily Chen*

Malicious Nobles

Some Nobles react in an opposite manner. They do not understand the real dynamics of power, and feel that the only way they can be strong is to make others suffer. These are the malicious Nobles, and they can make fine villains if most of the PCs are decent people. The ways of Noble malice vary. Sometimes they content themselves with the metaphorical equivalent of bringing storms down on places that displease them; other times, they construct hideous involuted traps and punishments for whomever they feel like torturing.

For example, take Scorn's-Regal Joktan. Even though he could preserve his Estate by encouraging genteel bigotry and egotists everywhere, he chooses the darker side of his Domain. He is the inspiration for those who beat homosexuals, for "ethnic cleansings", for life-ruining misogyny, and for every vicious underhanded blow aimed by a worker at an employer they abhor (or vice versa).

Another example: Devika, sworn enemy of the Dominus of Blood. Her frustrated rage has kept her going for three human incarnations, and now, with the magics of a Noble, she can see no better target for them than that Dominus. Of course, the Valde Bellum makes killing him … inappropriate. Her tensions accordingly spill over into mortal malice.

Capricious Sovereigns

The last common orientation for Sovereigns is caprice. These are the Powers who cannot quite come to grip with what they have become. They are torn between self-interest and selfless sacrifice, between power and freedom, and between humanity and the divine. The only resolution they find to their situation is to pour themselves into the moment, trusting in the "feel" of their Estate to guide them through. Yet there is an essential flaw with this approach: the urgings of conflicted desire, instinct, and confusion feel just like the promptings of their Estate. Such characters are, of course, not *arbitrary* in their characterization — the basic instincts of both the divine and the human parts of them must be created, considered, and then integrated into a coherent character conception. However, their actions may well seem arbitrary to the servants and other beings of lesser power.

For example, Asoka was once a nearly perfect being, but was betrayed, for all his power, by his own Familia. Now, the pearlescent soul of the Tyrant of India is just a bit cynical. He no longer has faith in Heaven to serve as the center of his moral compass. He has probably been reborn long since, and it is likely he was again enNobled, but that essential purity in him has been tempered with uncertainty and caprice.

Another example: Lisseut is an aging French goddess — not a "true god", mind, but simply a Power who has become thoroughly enmeshed in the mythos of France in the world of the game. Her grip on reality is beginning to slip, and she is losing the capacity to distinguish between her mortal side and her divine side. She might even seem senile to an onlooker, for all that her mind is in many ways still sharp.

To my displeasure, I must announce that not all of these "Nobles" to whom I am now kin are as dedicated to the Light as I. Some, in fact, cling perversely to strange theories of a rather different sort: exalting corruption or destruction as the highest virtue. I do not know how I should behave towards them, so I usually ignore them. At times, though, they make this difficult!

I remember a case, for example, where a statesman was wounded by an enemy attack — that his arm was torn from his shoulder by the teeth of an Excrucian horse, and he staggered back bloody. I was in no position to save him; I was sorely pressed myself, for I am not made for combat! "Fortunately," my Sibling Caelestis, who serves some mythical Hell, was able to prevent his death. Some strange mud he pulled from a case at his side, and slathered it on the wound; the flow of blood stopped at once.

When it all was over, I went to replace the statesman's arm; we were within our Chancel, so this was within even my weak powers. Yet I shortly discovered that I could not — where the mud had touched him, there was now an impenetrable screen like some modern plastic. It covered the wound, and not all my arts were sufficient to wipe it away so that wound could be healed.

—excerpt from a letter from the Dominus of Allergies to his mother.

The Powers of the Nobilis

A typical Noble is built on 20-30 points. The PCs begin in the middle of that range, but in long-running campaigns they can expect to grow beyond it. They have a number of advantages, above and beyond their miraculous powers: the

"Great King, I present to you a sorcerer from the east, who can speak to beasts, turn stone into fire, and dance on a balanced knife."

"Magnificent talents," the King admitted, "but manifestly impractical."

—from Far Serendip, *by Jen Hogan*

ability to make Anchors (see pp. 122-123); immunity to the direct effects of Noble miracles (see p. 108); access to the Simple Rites of the Nobilis (see p. 122); the Blessing of Tongues; and enhanced magical abilities. Animals who become Nobles also acquire human-level intelligence, even if their Aspect level is 0. These last three advantages are defined as follows.

Blessing of Tongues

There is no human language anywhere on Earth which the Nobles cannot understand and speak. Further, they are also gifted with an understanding of the "True Tongue" of Heaven, a root language for Sanskrit and Hebrew; this is what most Nobles use when they travel in other Realms. Nobles with high Aspect can, of course, learn unearthly languages with a minimum of fuss. If a Noble is limited to a handful of tongues, this may be taken as the Disabled Limit of Aspect.

Magical Abilities

Nobles can use the miraculous power of their body or spirit to avoid the personal drain and exhaustion that comes from using normal magic. A Power can use Aspect or Spirit MPs to fuel about as much magic as a normal sorcerer can perform before that mortal mage's complete exhaustion. Further, a Power naturally requires about twice as long as a mortal mage to drain themselves utterly, even without such expenditure. Nobles can also use the Simple Rites for many magical effects.

Human-Level Intelligence

Animals and even some mythic beasts have inhuman thought patterns, with simplified priorities and sometimes unusual approaches to problems. This remains true when an animal is enNobled; they do not "reason" any more often. However, their capacity for reason is raised, at the very least, to a human level. As long as a Noble rat's Estate and Imperator are safe, and it can find food and shelter, it will happily spend days without doing any thinking at all — but if thought is called for, it is not difficult for the creature. Some Noble animals even enjoy conversation!

Note: Animals are innately limited, and so are many mythical beasts; they usually lack hands, for instance. Benefits that roughly balance with the animal's limitations are free — a hawk can fly without employing a miracle. When the benefits outweigh the limitations, the excess benefits should be purchased as Gifts. When a Noble animal can perform Guising as a simple miracle (that is, they have level 2 Aspect or higher) all the benefits of their form should be purchased as Gifts, since they will have full access to hands and voice in the vast majority of the circumstances.

Anchors

Anchors are, as described on pp. 107-108, special humans whose souls have been bound to a Power's, and through the Power to the Power's Imperator. To create an Anchor, a Power first must choose a mortal that they love or hate. (Almost all of the many kinds of love and hate qualify, but the emotion must be a very strong and binding one.) The mortal is then given a tear or a drop of blood of the Power's own. As it dissolves through their system, the Power sends his or her will through it, until it has touched every place in their mind and body and made it the Power's own. From that point on, the Power may reach into the Anchor's mind and give suggestions — or make demands.

Anchors have tough lives. Fate seems to actively hunt them down and present them with situations bizarre, wondrous, horrible, or outright treacherous. They understand (and do not suffer *dementia animus* from) mythic reality and the prosaic Earth, but what they live in is closer to the world depicted in prosaic Earth's tabloids. Fortunately for Anchors (and HGs looking for a quick bit of action), an Anchor's Power is never more than a whispered prayer away — and they generally have some interest in keeping their Anchors sound, safe, and healthy. Powers make good substitutes for the mythical guardian angels.

Sovereigns have broad powers over their Anchors. With but a moment's thought, they are inside the Anchor's mind: seeing what they see, hearing their Anchor's thoughts, and (if they wish) making their own audible to the Anchor as well. Only the strongest physical sensations experienced by the Power's own body will be noticeable while that Power is in their Anchor's mind.

Putting on the Anchor's body is only a tiny bit harder. A heartbeat of willpower and the Power wears the Anchor's body as if it were their own. Even better, they can use Realm miracles as if they were there — that is, if the Anchor is in their Realm, even when the Power itself is not. They can use Domain miracles without the 1 DMP penalty for long-range miracles. They can use Spirit MPs to substitute for RMPs or DMPs. When a Power wears an Anchor's body, both their body and the Anchor's have the protection of their Auctoritas.

Aspect miracles used through an Anchor are harder — it is the Sovereign's mind and soul that visit the Anchor, not their body. To use Aspect through an Anchor, the Sovereign must use their distant body as a kind of "blueprint", envisioning the power flowing through their Anchor's body as it normally flows through their own. The extra cost for Aspect miracles is (5 – Spirit Level) AMPs. The Power must also pay this additional AMP cost when using Gifts based on Aspect miracles. One can substitute SMPs for AMPs as well.

Anchors usually die, and die horribly, if their Noble renounces them. When the link between Power and Anchor is severed, almost all of the Anchor's vitality flows back into the Power's own body. At best, this turns the Anchor into a doddering senile psychotic, even if they were young before. At worst, it turns them into a vegetable or kills them outright. For this reason, even Anchors who hate or despise their Powers are generally very careful not to let them suspect treachery. If a Noble is killed, their Anchors usually survive with minimal damage; their Imperator may even select them to replace the fallen Sovereign.

Anchors usually serve loyally. What they have been given is no gift, but the power in the Rite that creates them also binds them to the same causes their Sovereign espouses: the

His chair was turned around. He had his back to me, and his chair's back as well; its broad leather surface hadn't even flinched when I came in. A few moments passed before I said, abruptly, "Is that it, then, Carl? Take back your ring, toss me in the trash, and wish me well?"

Bright sun came pouring in over the top of that tall chair. It was hard to look at his chair. At him. Heck, it would have been hard to look at him anyway. Outside, a bird burst shrilly into song.

"You made promises to me," I continued. "I made promises to you. I kept mine. Do you think it was some walk in the park? — excuse me. I'll use a metaphor you can understand. Do you think it was some roll in the hay? I — " I groped for words. "I loathe you."

Silence. A long silence. Then I started to speak, and his chair turned.

"It doesn't matter any more," he said. His face was still Carl's face, but it was a construct of flesh and bone now, stretched over some horrid demon's soul.

—Redux, *by K.C. Danine*

Imperators' side in the Valde Bellum, the protection of Estate, Imperator, and Chancel, and the Sovereign's basic Affiliation. Personal problems can turn an Anchor against their Power, of course, or vice versa. A Power can have a number of Anchors equal to their Spirit Level + 1 at any given time.

The Commoners

"Well now," the Duchess said, and lifted my chin. "You are an ordinary creature, aren't you."

"In myself, yes, my lady. But I am distinguished in the company I keep."

—from Tumbledrum, *by Keiko Takemori*

A catechism of the Nobles claims, "Commoners come in seven kinds." These kinds are ordinary humans, ordinary animals, the descendants of Powers and Imperators, mythical beasts, nature spirits, Cammorae, and mystery cultists. Each of them has a different role in the world of Nobilis.

Ordinary Humans

Ordinary humans have no miraculous abilities. They can have a focus, but it will not be their own, and this is very rare to boot. They have no attribute scores. The most accomplished mortals can perform one or two specialized tasks with skill commensurate with a level 1 or 2 Aspect miracle. This also is rare. They have no MPs, nor any way of gaining them. Noble miracles can affect ordinary humans directly — that is, if the Power of Thought wishes to destroy a human's mind, it requires only a level 5 Domain miracle. If any Sovereign wishes to destroy a human in their Chancel, it is a level 5 Realm miracle — and no more.

Sovereigns must nonetheless generally take some care. If they damage humans unwarrantedly, it can have very bad consequences for them. Even worse, some humans go mad when they see the most impressive Noble miracles — they shift over into mythic reality and cannot get back. Rare humans are masters of the occult arts and can work Earthly magics. (These magics can be wiped away with an instant's work by a Power, and at best are a concealable substitute to technological equipment. See p. 140-142.)

Ordinary Animals

Ordinary animals have no miraculous abilities. They only have a focus if someone ties it around their neck (or leg, *et al*). Noble miracles can affect them directly.

The major difference between ordinary animals and ordinary humans is that animals can be hurt and Lord Entropy won't really care.

Descendants of Powers and Imperators

When a Power or an Imperator breeds with a human, some of the magic sometimes rubs off on the offspring. Occasionally, it continues to show up generations and generations later, particularly when a creature or human comes from Imperator stock.

The most powerful of these descendants, which are the only ones that can seriously aid or threaten player characters, have an Anchor-like immunity to direct miracles, an Auctoritas of 3 or less, a small number of Aspect or Domain levels, and a Gift or two. Gifts tend to be the best expression of the magic in these beings' blood, and can be extremely powerful even when the descendant is otherwise weak.

Mythical Beasts

Most mythical beasts are the misshapen descendants of Powers and Imperators, as above. Some few are not — they are created along with a Chancel or their origin is unknown. These normally have an Anchor-like immunity to direct miracles and a few Gifts related to their form. Some, powered by other forces (perhaps the corruption of Hell or the beauty of Heaven?), operate on an entirely different power. Such creatures can bypass Auctorita and Noble immunities alike, but are in turn vulnerable to direct miracles and can have no Auctoritas of their own.

Nature Spirits

Everything on Prosaic Earth has a living, self-willed equivalent in mythic reality. Everything has a spirit — from individual drops of water to great rivers, from deer to automobiles, from ideas to corporations. These spirits appear human to one degree or another, but rarely speak and possess a deep tie to the aspect of nature they embody. Minor nature spirits are virtually mindless, and Nobles can kill or curse them without breaking the Code Fidelitatis. Significant nature spirits just barely hit the human level of sentience necessary to make their destruction a crime.

Spirits implicitly control the actions of their prosaic form through their actions in the spirit world. They can use Gifts and perform Aspect miracles commensurate with their prosaic abilities. Bird spirits can fly. The spirit of a fast-running river can shove others and resist diversion with an Aspect 2 miracle. A mountain can wrestle with effective Aspect 7.

Except in stories that specifically concern themselves with the greatest inhabitants of the mythic world, Powers do not encounter nature spirits with attribute scores or the ability to resist direct miracles. A few such spirits exist — but they are too rare and too reclusive to encounter at random.

The Fire Stays its Hand

All nature spirits control the action of their prosaic equivalent. Where an airplane spirit flies, so goes the airplane. The world stays relatively sane and stable because typical spirits have very strong instincts. These instincts incline them to act in a predictable, appropriate manner. Their known behavior in the prosaic world matches this instinctive pattern. However, spirits sometimes defy their instincts. In particular, the drives of vice, cowardice, virtue, and self-sacrifice allow spirits to sink below or rise above their innate character. Prosaic reality does not and cannot cudgel them into line — rather, it adapts its reality to find an explanation for their actions.

Vyasa asks why the fire stayed its hand, and refused to burn Lord Hridayaja. The answer is simple: their friendship was stronger than the fire's impetus to destroy.

Cammorae

The Cammorae have been discussed in much detail already (see p. 35-36). Suffice it to say this human sect has been granted many magical gifts by the Nobilis, and that it uses them to serve the Powers (sometimes) and itself (always).

Mystery Cultists

Mystery cults sometimes form around the Imperators, and at times Powers may even find them handy. When a mystery cult delves deeply enough into the mystery of what a Ymera is, its members begin to acquire (unreliable) mystical abilities. For any given cultist, these abilities are always a subset of the abilities of one of the Cult's Imperator's Nobles. Further, when a cultist's magics fail, the effects are usually much more spectacular than when they succeed. Some cults have an additional use, in that the Powers can be sure that the members are not innocents, and can use them as "vehicles" to guide a given miracle to a given place and time.

Ianthe writes: How to be a Hollyhock God

Part 8

Characters in Detail

I emerged from the staircase into the sunlight. It made me blink five times. The 15th floor, it appeared, was the rooftop. A group of men and women stood at the edge of the roof. Two of them were blonde. A woman in a white coat stood beside them. Two men in gray stood on either side of the stairs. They held clip pads. Seven and thirteen pieces of paper on them. Respectively. One asked me, "Acrophobia?"

It took me aback. "Pardon?"

"Are you here for the advanced acrophobia immersion therapy?"

"Oh." I shook my head. "No. Obsessive." I shook my head again.

The man in gray whistled. "Don't envy you. But you've got the wrong group. We handle OCD *on floor 12."*

"Ah." I stood there for a moment longer. I needed a few seconds before I could go back; it was too soon. Not far away, the woman in the white coat casually pushed one of the men off the roof. He yelled for about eleven seconds as he fell. I think.

"I . . ." I don't know what I meant to say.

"Do you need help getting there?"

"No," I said, and shook my head. "No. I can manage."

—from White Light, *by G.S. Denmark*

Everything in Nobilis, from gravel to grand concepts, radiates the energies of life, spirit, and free will. Social interaction drives a typical Nobilis game. Each non-player character has a unique relationship with each PC. The sum total of these relationships defines the game. This section discusses various common and important social relationships and explains how you can use them to tell compelling stories.

In many cases, you will need your players' co-operation to take full advantage of these ideas; that's fine. It is easier to build tension and excitement when you have full control of your plotline. Slower, more contemplative sections of your game, however, do not suffer at all if you bring your players into the storytelling process. At such times, you can explain the general direction where you would like the storyline to head in and enlist the players as accomplices in directing it there.

The first few sections below outline the types of characters who come into contact with the PCs, providing an opportunity to introduce the character without employing dramatic devices. The sections thereafter will detail how to build and take advantage of various relationship types once you have introduced an NPC. Naturally, you do not always have complete control over how a relationship develops — your players will throw curves into the most tightly constructed plot. A character envisioned as a nemesis can become the PCs' greatest ally. Embrace this, if it happens. If the story heads for a destination you did not intend, it usually means that the new direction is more powerful, moving, dramatic, or interesting.

Chancelfolk

The *life* of the PCs' Chancel, the extent to which it becomes a vivid and vibrant place, depends on the realization of the Chancel's residents as independent and interesting people. In most Chancels, this means the human inhabitants. In some Chancels, the fey, talking beasts, computer intelligences, and other not-quite-human life take a leading role. It does you no good to have well-realized Chancelfolk that never interact with the PCs. As a rule of thumb, every three to five encounters with a group of Chancel residents should include one mortal who sticks out above the rest — a mortal with a vivid personality type that you have a special talent for creating, a human with an extremely unusual problem or ambition, or someone with a personal style bizarre enough to help them stand out in the crowd. Further, whenever you *actively* play out an encounter with the people of the Chancel, *everyone* should be interesting. For example, when the Powers sit in judgment over matters of law, you should skim over the dull cases with a few words and make the interesting cases as enjoyable, detailed, and intriguing as you can.

The mortal inhabitants of the PCs' Chancel usually understand that their lives, or at least their fortunes, lie in the PCs' hands. They naturally make overtures to their reigning Powers, hoping to profit thereby. In many Chancels, the residents invite each Power to every birthday, every baptism, and every personal celebration. Their ruling Powers almost never attend, and when they do, they are not entirely welcome — but leaving even one off of the invitations list is dangerous, and missing the opportunity to *befriend* a Power is almost criminally foolish.

The lesser aristocracy of a Chancel — the noteworthy politicians, scientists, sorcerers, artists, and small-N nobles in the Chancels that have them — expect to receive the occasional Noble visit to determine if they merit patronage. Realm's Hearts, Wardens, True Queens, and Tempests — who can easily divine matters pertinent to their Chancel — often perform basic divination on the daily stack of invitations to determine whether the senders have unusual qualities of character that make a personal relationship worthwhile.

Thus, if the customs of your PCs' Chancel recommend such invitations, you as Hollyhock God have several opportunities to create new mortal relationships for your PCs. Even if the customs weigh against inviting the PCs into the residents' personal lives, a few — bold despite their terror — will request their Nobles' attendance at a party, hunt, product demonstration, protest gathering, gallery showing, or military

"If you do not love me, lady," he said, his eyes limpid and wide, "then why did you create me?"

Her hands wove busily in the Unmaking. Her eyes did not meet his. "I needed to prove a point."

—from Water Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

exercise. Expect your PCs to turn down most such offers sight unseen; to guarantee their attendance, you must make the offer intrinsically interesting or hint, as Hollyhock God, that interesting play will result.

The PCs also interact with the residents of the Chancel on their own initiative, or in accordance with their functions. Over time, with your help, the players should find roles in the Chancel government — one might command the armed forces, another manage the economy and judiciary, a third handle diplomatic relationships with other Chancels, and the fourth, a high-Realm Power, might hold the final authority. Each of these roles brings them into direct contact with a section of the Chancel population. Until this division of functions, and to a limited extent afterwards, *all* the Powers will interact with the military, manage economic commissions or trade guild leaders, and sit in judgment over such legal cases as they deign to. Many Powers choose to establish and interact with a priesthood dedicated to their own divinity. Further, many forms of Noble entertainment — from listening to live music to a "seven seven's duel" (dueling the Chancel's 49 best swordsmen or martial artists, one at a time, as a refreshing morning workout) — require mortal assistance. These are all opportunities to create interesting social relationships.

A Sovereign Power cannot interact with a Chancel resident as an equal; the thought exceeds the boundaries of burlesque. However, Nobles admire character. A humble mortal who, like the Powers, lives absolutely by their own terms — a man utterly consumed by venality, a woman of unbreakable moral fiber — can attract the PCs' attention. Fortunately, such characters are also the most liable to interest the players. They can and should be complex and interesting souls, but the single point of high exaggeration can arrest the players' attention and make them willing to pursue a long-term relationship with the mortal.

The line leading to Zéphyrin was as long as the sky.

As I wove my way through that line, as the days passed one by one beneath the unyielding sun, my heart fell sick with despair. I knew that long before I reached him, he would choose — take some new, young, clever soul as his adjutant and perhaps his lover. He had so many thousands of choices. They could not all fail his test.

It took ten days for me to reach him. The test took him no time at all.

"Oriane," he said. "You are chosen."

"I have passed the test?"

"You are the only one I wanted," he said, and his eyes echoed the sun.

"But the line …"

"They are not real," Zéphyrin said. "I needed to know that you could wait."

—from the Thought-Record of Oriane Feroulet

In sum, when you *wish* to introduce a new mortal NPC, wait for the Powers to encounter a Chancel resident on one of the pretexts above, capture their interest with a vivid personality, and cross your fingers in the hopes that they will "take" to the NPC. Sometimes, they will not. Then you must determine, using your inhuman perspicacity, whether the *players* are uninterested in the NPC or the *characters* find the mortal dull. If the players are not interested, abandon your plans and move on. If the NPC appealed to the players but the PCs were not intrigued, weave the character into another story at some later point. For example, they might become the focal point for a Bane's curse, an informant hired by a PC's enemy, or the sole survivor of and witness to an Excrucian attack.

The important personal servants of the Powers are also typically residents of the Chancel. However, in a typical game, it is the player's responsibility to detail these characters, who are in some ways a part of the PC's conception. In general, for the reasons discussed in the section on play contracts, above, you should run these characters true to the player's vision. There is room for considerable expression and devious plot manipulation in how you play these characters, but not in their conceptual design.

Humans of the Outside World

Many Powers maintain an identity, or several identities, in Prosaic Earth. The Cammora's influence is too strong for Powers to routinely control major governments, massive multinationals, and significant technologies. That's just as well — the Sovereigns who *do* strive for such power usually wind up fighting one another tooth and nail, since there aren't that many spots at the top. It's not hard, however, for a Noble to build a noteworthy corporation or network of political influence from the ground up, subverting or buying off any Cammorans who stand in their way. Some Nobles even establish a relatively mundane and powerless identity for themselves on Earth — as a forest ranger, a reclusive artist, or a consultant, among other possibilities — simply to have a mailing address and a finger on the "pulse" of Earthly life. If your player characters establish a presence on Earth, it makes your job easier. It gives the PCs additional options in the mortal world, which keeps the players from becoming frustrated in stories requiring extensive intriguing there. It gives you, and hostile NPCs, a handle with which to

manipulate the player characters — their involvement in the affairs of their mortal identity is predictable. Finally, their mortal life serves as an additional setting for stories; the characters who surround their mortal identity can become interesting NPCs.

Humans relate; with some exceptions, humans are social creatures. Hence a PC Power's mortal identity attracts friends, sycophants, enemies, neighbors, rivals, and lovers just as their true self does. With the right group of players — and the right Hollyhock God — a PC's interactions with ordinary humans, in their mortal identity, can make for compelling stories. (Just look at the non-speculative fiction section of any bookstore.) Moreover, when such a story turns tragic, the PC's decision to invoke Noble abilities can transform it into a tale of miracles and wonder. Alternately, the PC can decide to let events proceed as they will, refusing to employ their unnatural edge to the situation. Such a resolution can be moving and insightful. In general, a PC's decision of when, how, and whether to use their abilities to resolve their problems in the mortal world makes for interesting play.

With the wrong group of players, the wrong Hollyhock God, or just the wrong story, a story of purely mortal events becomes dull. That's okay; there's a reason why NOBILIS characters aren't just mortals. If you don't feel confident that you can capture the players' attention with mundane incidents, you can still use four types of ordinary Earthly human NPCs:

- **Minor characters**, grace notes to your plot, who drift offstage when their presence becomes dull.
- **Tragic characters**, who meet a bad end due to their relationship with a Power.
- **Future servants**, whom the Power will eventually enroll in their service.
- **Major characters**, who are nowhere near as human as they seem.

You need not tell your players in advance which group a given NPC belongs to.

Abnormal Humans

If handled carelessly, an organization such as the Cammora can become a source of faceless, interchangeable antagonists and merchants of corruption. This may work out for your gaming group, but you're more likely to have fun if the Cammora is a group of sharply realized individuals who just happen to sell their integrity to the highest bidder. For this reason, instead of confronting the characters with an endless array of "Cammora negotiators", each Familia should have an established "handler." Like an accountant or broker, a Familia's Cammoran handler maintains a long-term relationship with their clients; the continued connection with the Familia is almost as valuable as any given job. This gives you the opportunity to fully develop the Cammoran the PCs usually negotiate with. Most likely, this Cammoran forwards the PC's requests and payments to others in exchange for kickbacks, rather than performing missions themselves. Similarly, when the Cammora has a request for the PCs — who may, after all, assist the organization in any manner without violating the Code Fidelitatis — the request goes through their handler. Naturally, since a frustrated Power can work a great deal of harm before Lord Entropy reins them in, the Cammora permits Powers to change their handler. If the players don't like working with their old handler, then make that worthy a recurring antagonist. If the players don't care, but the PCs loathe their handler, then they might rapidly discover that the alternative Cammoran managers are worse.

When the PCs work *against* the Cammora, or when they work directly with a Cammoran operative, the chance of a long-term relationship is minimal. You need to make the most of the PCs' encounter with miscellaneous Cammorans while you can. Sketch them out in your mind using sharp, vivid images; this helps to convey the vigor of their personality to the players. Don't worry too much about consistency or detail, as long as you can create interesting things for them to say and do on the fly. If you know in advance that you will need a few throwaway antagonists or short-term allies, develop a few NPCs whom you know you can create inspiring dialogue for. Try envisioning the NPC's reaction to suddenly encountering a giant mechanical mosquito, or to rounding a

She was an ordinary woman in most respects, save for her providence; which was that she could write with a better hand than any in the world. It was not a talent for which she was much recognized — but those who saw her lecture notes, or her letters, or her invitations, understood that they were witness to the miraculous in life.
—from DOORKNOBS, *by Emily Chen*

corner and seeing an angel playing the guitar for coins on the street. If you can't immediately picture their reaction, you have a large problem. If their reaction is stunned silence, they may not be equipped for life in the Cammora. If you can whip off a reaction in real time, you have a winner; use this NPC soon. If the reaction is *really* interesting, save or reuse the personality for a more permanent NPC.

Design Mystery Cultists dedicated to the PCs' Imperator using similar principles. The majority of the character development should go to the high priests or gurus of the Cult, the messengers who bring the PCs' words to the Cult, and other figures the player characters interact with regularly. A Cultist whom the player characters will see once and never again deserves nothing more than broad strokes and a personality exaggerated *almost* to the point of caricature.

Members of the Cleave of the Botanists, masters of Earthly magics, and semi-human creatures such as the Daoine Sidhe and the merrows have no pre-established reason to involve themselves with the PCs. The same applies to Mystery Cultists not directly associated with the PCs' Imperator. If you wish to bring one of them into your game as an NPC, they must embark on activities that directly impact on the PCs' interests. Either these plans should be innocuous or the NPC should have the power to hold off the PCs until a compromise is reached. For example, a botanist who kidnaps and tortures a PC's beloved Anchor as part of some experiment in floral alchemy is unlikely to become a recurring antagonist. Instead, the PC will swat them like a little bug. A botanist who *hires* a PC's beloved Anchor to play Igor to their Frankenstein has a better chance of survival.

Nature Spirits

I so rarely have time to review the paperwork these days. Most often, I just ask it to tell me what it says.
—Superstes Annabelle Zupay, Power of Trails

A trillion trillion spirits fill the world — not an exact count, to be sure, but a solid approximation. In practical terms, you as Hollyhock God should discount the vast majority of them unless they become important. Interacting with the spirit of each letter of each page of a book, and of each page, and of the paper, and of the binding, and of the book, and of the set of books written by the author — this clutters your PCs' lives needlessly. Just as you do not describe the letters individually when a PC reads a book in Prosaic Reality, do not use every letter-spirit as an NPC in the Mythic World. Ignore the vast majority except when the PCs direct their attention appropriately.

Assume that most of the remaining spirits are as dumb as rocks — sapient, sentient, emotional, free-willed, even *verbal* if properly approached, but with the practical problem-solving ability of a watermelon. If your PCs pay a great deal of attention to a nature spirit, you should give it an entertaining personality. Only if you *wish* to make a given spirit part of your game should you also give it the strength of mind and will to join your stable of NPCs. Thus, if your PCs ignore a passing breeze, its spirit is merely "a breeze-spirit". If they decide to converse with it, it can become "a breeze-spirit obsessed with secrets and leaves". If you feel a sudden inspiration or opportunistically decide to bring in a character concept you already wanted to use in the game, *then* you can make it "the breeze-spirit Boreal Minor, younger brother of the north wind, pursuivant of secrets, sorcerer of accomplishment, and the herald of Locus Terah; taking form in the mythic world as a light brown lordling with copper hair as long as a steeple is tall".

Many excellent NPC spirit concepts derive from the player characters' lives. Spirits that spend a great deal of time in contact with a Power tend to grow greater, stronger, wiser, and more vocal. As Hollyhock God, you can create interesting nature spirits by slowly exalting the spirit of something important to a Power. A bookish Noble's library, a vain Power's mirror, or a powerful Tempest's fortress can blossom under their attention until it becomes a person in its own right.

The range of spirit concepts open to you is limitless. The proportionally minuscule minority of the spirit population worth talking to is still large enough to contain endless variety. The thymoi of fashion and the translucent phasmati of corporate ethics curry favor with the Nobilis, basking in the reflected glory of the *spiritus Dei*. The radio sylphs and the tutelary salamanders of major cigarette brands pray to the Sovereign Powers for favorable conditions and assistance in the crises of their lives. The malake

OPPOSITE:
Malevolent tree-sprite
by Bryan Talbot


BRYAN TALBOT 2001

habbolam, cruelty-spirits born from the passing shadow of a fallen angel's wing, have offered the darker Powers an open invitation to participate in their "play".

Some spirits are significant enough to be "players" in the Noble world. There are perhaps ten nature spirits in the world that I fear, and a hundred more that could stand against me in a toe-to-toe battle. A hundred thousand have enough power that I cannot discount them — I could crush any one of them, any three of them, but I dare not *ignore* them if they intrude upon my life. The strongest of these spirits do not normally socialize with the Nobilis. I believe that we confuse them. Certainly, their ways perplex *me*! Lesser spirits of significance, however, often involve themselves in Noble affairs. If they are careful, cunning, and treacherous, they can become noteworthy antagonists or manipulators. If they are competent and brave, they can become meaningful allies.

A typical PC responds best to spirits that represent something they admire or enjoy: a principle, an activity, or some paraphernalia thereof that appeals to them. Thus, most Powers of Heaven gladly attend the soirées thrown by the genii of Monet's paintings. If the afflatid — inspiration spirit — of one painting grows strong enough to travel the world on its own, it might invite an attending Power into its worldly activities and intrigues. A Noble fond of heraldry might find time for the occasional lunch with an exiled spirit-servant of Signe, Heraldry's Power — whatever the reason for its disgrace, it is certainly a notable expert. In this fashion, you can construct spirits that the PCs will gladly let into their lives. Studying the things that your PCs dislike, you can create spirits tailor-made to become hated enemies or rivals. The living spirit of a monstrous cover-up makes a suitable enemy for a Noble of integrity. Spirits intended for more subtle roles can be of any sort.

Nobilis

You can never go back. You are not human. You cannot know a human save as the fire knows the wood, as the storm knows the sky, as the wolf knows the deer. Even when your heart screams for humanity, you will not find it.

The Nobilis are your only tribe.

—from Principles of the Dark, *by Merriweather James*

The Powers that are the characters' peers provide the most interesting NPCs. Stories built around NPC Powers lack the deadly edge that Excrucian-driven stories have — but they offer a greater opportunity to explore the themes of your game.

In a typical Nobilis game, there are about two thousand Powers in the world. The PCs can expect to look up any Power they *want* to talk to, but will probably never meet more than a small fraction of the total. The Powers that seek contact with the PCs usually fall into one of a handful of categories.

Gregariousness is a skill, and one that a modest number of Powers cultivate. These Nobles take genuine interest in the lives of every Power they encounter, memorize details of their acquaintances' personal lives, and maintain large stables of superficial relationships. Given a reasonable pretext for social interaction, such as a publicly declared affiliation that both Powers share, these social nexuses are likely to cultivate an acquaintanceship with a PC.

Powers of significant Aspect, unlike most humans, have the opportunity to achieve genuine expertise in a given field of intellectual endeavor. They can become magnificent scholars, athletes, or craftsfolk. Some choose instead to become encyclopedic repositories of information. Samuel Broker, the unprepossessing Power of the Americas, is the world's leading expert on abnormal psychology. Insane Powers, Powers fond of inflicting madness on others, and Powers who encounter particularly bizarre derangements often receive a visit from a vastly interested Samuel. An eternally devoted student of his field, Samuel is also a compulsively energetic teacher — he can no more refuse a chance to share his wisdom than he can close his ears to an interesting case. Powers like Samuel have a fair chance of becoming a part of any campaign, although they do not *connect* to all the Nobilis their passion brings them into contact with.

Certain Powers serve the Noble population as its resident messiahs, gurus, and lobbyists. Whatever their cause — destroying Israel or erasing the Palestinian people, spreading the capitalist way or the glorious communist cause, overthrowing Lord Entropy or raising a statue in his honor — they seek to spread it throughout the Noble community. A few of the more convincing Powers, such as the indescribable Power of Marketing, act as mercenary advertisers, spreading the word of any cause for a suitable fee. Most Powers encounter one or two evangelical Nobles every year.

To become a leader of the Nobilis, one cannot seek elected authority. We hold no elections. One cannot butter up Lord Entropy for a role in his government. He treats his authority as a garden, carefully cultivating and tending it, and does not yield power to a Noble except when it serves his ends. The only way to assume a leadership role, to take power in one of the Noble factions, is personal magnetism and inspiration. You must convince each Noble you hope to lead that you merit their loyalty. Many factions exist in Noble society, dedicated to advancing some cause, or to completing some grand project, or to planning stratagems against the Dark Horsemen. Ordinary Nobles, to lead such a faction, must impress each Noble member. Their reputation is their power base. Legendary Powers such as Diane Spinnaker, chief of Heaven's Noble servants on Earth, can manage Nobles through a single layer of intermediaries; the glitter of Diane's glory rubs off on her inner council. Still, her charisma stretches no further. A servant of Heaven that does not know Diane or one of her closest associates can consider themselves out of the loop; orders from an associate of Diane's associate would be insulting.

Powers whose outlook closely resembles a PC's have reason to make contact with them. Two Powers who believe in serving the Light by improving charity food distribution, for example, have strong motive to work with one another. Similarly, Powers who share a PC's general "turf" need to communicate with the PCs in order to establish boundaries and facilitate cooperation. This includes Powers of geographically proximate Chancels, Powers whose mortal identities control corporations competing with one a PC owns, and Nobilis whose Estates resemble a PC's own.

The best Estates for NPC Powers complement those of the PCs. A Power of Opportunity or Stress interacts in interesting ways with the Power of Time. The Powers of Hope and Love contrast with the Desolation's-Regal. The best personalities for NPC Powers are those that leave room for both conflict and cooperation with your PCs. If your PC group is pure of heart and innocent of malice, a thoroughly corrupt and monstrous Power can *only* interact with your PCs as an antagonist. You don't need to limit yourself this way. If your player characters *care* about good and evil, then your NPC Powers should have both damning and redeeming traits. If your player characters are amoral, whose only real concern is the survival of Creation, then your NPC Powers should serve Creation valiantly but have weaknesses (such as doubt, selfishness or corruptibility) that might endanger this service. You can give your NPC Powers any personality and Estate you like, of course; these principles are simply a good default.

As a general rule, Noble NPCs should have around 25 points at the beginning of the game — most of the world's Nobles do. As your PCs grow, the most important NPCs gain experience as well, keeping pace. Less important characters fall behind, while the PCs attract the attention of more powerful potentates. In other words, however powerful the player characters become, they should not tower over their average peer, nor should a typical NPC tower over them. Rather, they should move in increasingly rarefied circles, until one day the PCs can interact with the Powers of Lord Entropy and the likes of Diane Spinnaker as equals. At this point, the vast majority of the Nobilis, weaker far than the PCs, are still out there but are no longer important players in the PCs' lives.

The Magister studied my gun with academic interest. "You intend to kill me with that?"

"I have researched your weakness," I said. "Tonight, while the moon lies in shadow and Mars sits in the Ninth House, you are vulnerable; you can die. By my hand, or any other."

"Granted," the Magister conceded. "I am temporarily vulnerable. But I do not fear you."

"And why not?"

He stretched his arms to the sides and his flesh turned translucent. The pure and absolute light that was his soul poured through. It burned my eyes with life. It cut my soul with its glory. He was no longer a man, or an Imperator, or a creature of the Light. He was the principle of human survival made manifest. He was everything that life could ever achieve.

"You hate me," he said, his words incandescent in the air. "But hate is not enough. Duty — you could kill me for duty. Life — you could kill me to save your own life. Greed — you could kill me for greed. But you cannot kill me for hate. You have not the strength."

—from the Thought-Record of Robert Baxt

Imperators

The defining factor in (almost) any relationship between a Noble and an Imperator is the power disparity between them. Imperators have a close bond with their own Nobilis — their Powers have a part of their soul, after all. With their own Nobles, Imperators behave like mortal parents: some proud, some gentle, some abusively disciplinarian, but always *connected*. Looking at the Nobles of *another* Ymera, an Imperator sees a small slice of another Imperator gunked up with a dirty human soul — something that should show it respect, that should, to extend the parental metaphor, be "seen and not heard". Powers and Imperators *do* have the whole array of social relationships. They can love one another, fight one another, follow one another's lead — but, except when Powers travel in packs, Imperators always have the option of crushing them. This means that you should not rely on Imperators to fill out your PCs'

social roster. Treat most of them as natural forces: use them to shape your story, use them as obstacles to work around, use them as mysteries and hints of Things Beyond Our Understanding. Do not use them as characters *per se*.

If you decide to throw caution to the wind and make an Imperator a recurring NPC, then you must make sure its presence does not crimp the players' style. The Imperator should have reasons to respect the PCs and reasons not to roll over the PCs with its decisions. The players should know that those reasons exist. For example, the PCs could interact with the Imperator only as a representative of their own Imperator — as when they negotiate an agreement between two Chancels. As long as the PCs don't get offensive, and as long as you give them a chance to run away if they do, they can defy the Imperator all they want in their own lord's name. A *purely* social relationship is also possible. The Imperator of Music develops, as a personal project, bizarre and alien forms of music — human/music crossbreeds, musical styles that open doorways between worlds, and so forth. It might enjoy showing these things to accomplished Noble musicians. Such an Imperator does not roll over the PCs with its decisions because its decisions cannot practically conflict with the PCs' own. Finally, an Imperator can have limits to its behavior that provide practical surety to the PCs. A pacifist Imperator, or an Imperator who exists only to observe, not to act — such Ymerae remain dangerous, but the PCs can deal with them with confidence.

NPCs in General

To understand a person completely, you must first change them to match your specifications.
—from Reflections III, *by Viscount d'Armand*

I recommend keeping index cards (or, for online games, a database) describing each major NPC. This includes notes on things you've established about that NPC that you might forget, as well as on major events in which that NPC took part. This helps create a greater sense of continuity. Also, leafing through these cards between sessions of play may inspire ideas for things to do during the game. You might say, "Ah, the PCs saved the life of that Cammoran thug's daughter. Perhaps, if the PCs fail to discover the Cammoran plot against them in the coming session, she can tip them off. Or maybe it would be more ironic if the effects of the Excrucian plague turned her against Creation, and they became her targets. They did say at the time that they would regret saving 'an adder's child'."

As Hollyhock God, you have dozens of NPCs to manage. You can't afford to write a series of novels about each one to get comfortable with the character — you have to make the character interesting with a few key details at the front end, and then allow the NPC's personality and role in your game to develop during play. These key details should, ideally, "hook" the players into believing that you *could* write a series of novels about the character — that the NPC's personal story is fascinating, vital, and relevant to their PCs' lives. No Hollyhock God achieves this pinnacle of perfection with every NPC, but taking a few simple steps can improve your chances.

Usually, when you bring in an NPC, the character's relevance to the PCs is already established. This is the first key detail — the NPC's *role* in the game. Make sure they have one! When you bring in Bran Gainor, the strong right hand of Diane Spinnaker, to serve as the voice of the Powers of Heaven, helping a PC Power of Heaven co-ordinate their efforts with their kin in the struggle, everyone understands his role in the game. When you bring in Bran Gainor, Viscount of Armor, to hang around the PCs' Chancel and make random observations, the character may fall a little flat.

The second key detail for an NPC is their history. This only needs one or two sentences, and you don't have to write it down, and you don't have to tell it to the PCs — but knowing where the character comes from and something about a major trauma or wonder in their life will help focus your play. When you bring in Mary Shenk, a testy old woman who grew up collecting dung on Victorian England's streets — perhaps for darkening animal hides in tanneries, perhaps for use in a witch's spells — you know what kind of manners she considers proper, that she probably has a strong negative reaction to poverty, and that her cultural heritage is European. If you brought in Mary Shenk, cipher and enigma, you run the risk of describing her as African one session and telling stories of her life as a geisha the next.

Third, for thematic storytelling (p. 281), each NPC should connect somehow to one or two basic themes and the issues surrounding those themes. For Powers, this *often* means their Estate — but not always. Bran Gainor, as the voice of the Powers of Heaven, represents the cause of beauty. As Diane Spinnaker's strong right hand, he represents valor. If you acknowledge this, and think up ways to explore these themes — for example, by studying the *cost* of a life lived in unshirking battle for the cause of Heaven — then you have a direction to go with the character. Once again, if he's just in the game to bum around the PCs' Chancel, the game suffers — you have nowhere to go.

Fourth, most NPCs should have several points of vulnerability. These vulnerabilities need not be flaws. Orderliness, compassion, caprice, and melancholy represent valid, exploitable vulnerabilities that are (from another perspective) healthy and natural traits. Nor need NPC flaws be weaknesses; the curse of the Powers of Parasiel (p. 251) is hardly a personal weakness, but it makes Parasiel's Nobles fallible. Even such idealized savants as myself have emotional, moral, and circumstantial vulnerabilities that keep us from the heights of perfection.

If you have trouble finding a weakness for a Power, turn to their Estate — even as nothing more than the pure avatars, incarnations, and personifications of their Estates, the Powers of Fire and Ferrets would be mercurial and hyperactive, respectively. This is good. An infallible NPC, perfect in all respects, is uninteresting. If the Power of Ferrets did the optimal thing in every circumstance, unassailable save through all-around superior firepower, he would not need the rest of us!

Finally, you should try to give each character one or two distinctive quirks — something to make them stand out. A tendency towards long-winded melodrama or curt, clipped speech; a physical abnormality such as green hair (natural or dyed); an extreme character trait such as absolute selfishness, vanity, self-sacrifice, or greed; even a fake-looking smile that you can simulate on your own face — you might not keep these traits at the forefront during a character's tenure in your game, but they will help the character stand out when introduced. Mary Shenk shuffles, mutters, and waves her hands around. She's got the Aspect to move like a ballerina and the Imperial favor to have herself turned back into a fresh-faced twenty-year-old girl — but she doesn't, because she's *Mary Shenk*. This means that if the players get off track and she's in their player characters' IC location, you just have to wave your hands around a bit and mutter something interesting. It'll immerse them instantly in the spirit of the game. On the other hand, if she were quirk-free, the players might not even be sure that you were speaking as Mary!

While these five steps are less trouble than writing a series of novels, you may find them a lot of work for each relatively minor NPC. If so, you can shorten them as follows. Ignore the NPC's role in the game until you actually bring the NPC in. Summarize the NPC's history by picking a time period and location. ("She's from Imperial Rome.") Choose the basic themes associated with the NPC, but don't worry about how to explore them until an opportunity to do so comes up. Develop the character's weaknesses and vulnerabilities during play. Finally, prepare a list of quirks in advance, so you can quickly add an appropriate quirk or two to a new NPC.

Bear in mind that NPCs should always fit the purpose you wish them to fill. For example, it's *interesting* for a PC's romantic interest to have nothing in common with the PC, but if you create such a significant other, there's a real chance they *won't* attract the PC's romantic attention. If you create a leader to inspire and rally the PCs, you can make the leader tragically flawed — but if they're *too* flawed, the PCs won't be rallied or inspired. If you want to create a stalwart supporter of the PCs, don't kick off their relationship by having the NPC betray them seven times. On more general grounds, any NPC that actively avoids a relationship with the PCs is unlikely to become an interesting addition to the game. A loner NPC who needs and wants no one else, a reclusive hermit who wants only to finish their *magnum opus*, an irascible boor that hates everything living — all of these characters make fine additions to a novel but poor additions to a roleplaying game. As Hollyhock God, you don't have the thinking time and fine control over the plot necessary to bring such characters into the story. You can save yourself a great deal of time and grief by making sure your NPCs fit their roles.



Mentors

Khadka Koirala, chief among Hell's Powers on Earth, commands your attendance upon him. Bow your head and tread lightly; know that you have been blessed beyond measure. He has chosen you to study at his feet, and learn of Noble society in his august presence. He will not be denied.
—a message delivered to the newly Commenced Power of Luxury.

The Noble world is both spiritually and politically complex. Many new Nobles require assistance to navigate it. This can come from an older Noble, an experienced mortal servant, a compassionate Imperator, or someone else with the necessary wisdom. The mentor can have the student's best interests at heart or can use the student as a pawn. Usually, a PC should know which situation applies — a mentor the PC considers unreliable can betray the PC a dozen times and the PC will take it in stride. A mentor the PC considers trustworthy will damage the relationship and its story possibilities with their very first betrayal.

A mentor brings their charges opportunities, and rejecting those opportunities is often socially or politically unwise. Thus, if the Hollyhock God wants to attach a PC to an inquiry panel looking into the possible corruption of a Cammoran sub-sect, using the character's mentor might be wise. If the panelists would not normally invite the PC to join them, perhaps the mentor feels it's a good opportunity for the PC, and pulls strings. If the player character would not normally *accept* this offer, passing it through the mentor increases the chances that they will — it's awkward to reject what someone else pulled strings to bring you. Better yet, the panel now has significant social context outside of the story itself. It's a project undertaken on the mentor's behalf, and the character will probably discuss its findings with the mentor; and the mentor's social connection to someone responsible for the panel's creation has been established, which you might find useful later.

A mentor is also an excellent hook for connecting characters to new NPCs. A proper mentor makes a point of introducing their protégé to people who matter and putting the initial conversation on a good footing.

Player characters, particularly experienced PCs, sometimes take on other Nobles as protégés. Ideally, such an apprentice is well positioned to handle a portion of the PC's own operations. This is advantageous to the game — as long as that aspect of the PC's activities is dull and boring, the PC needs devote no time to it. When it becomes interesting and worth study in play, the protégé can contact the PC. A PC's students can also become entangled in matters requiring the PC's attention.

If you aim to attach a mentor to a character, the following two approaches may serve you well. First, create a figure with sufficient wisdom and, more importantly, absolute integrity. Give the PCs a reason to approach this personage regarding some difficulty, and impress them with an unexpectedly honorable reaction. With luck, the PC will pursue the relationship. The alternative is a deliberate approach by a potential mentor honest about their self-interest. Such a mentor needs allies or tools and is willing to provide a leg up in exchange.

Deliberately attaching a protégé to a Power is harder. You may need to talk to a player out of character and find out what might make their character take someone on.

For just a moment, Sawyer held the alien at bay, and saw into its cold eyes. There, a host of spirits thronged: all the creatures Sawyer had ever killed. All the life he had ever eaten.

We gave ourselves freely, they said without speech. There is no guilt. There is no blame. Yet there is a favor done; and services owed. As we have yielded our flesh to your gain, you must do in turn.

"I will fight," he said.

You may fight, the spirit host agreed. But you will lose, and the K'i shall paint itself with your blood. Then you must give your strength gladly, your power and your guile, or we shall refute you and your soul shall never walk the far realms.
—from Hunters, *by Eleanor K.*

Favors, Alliances, and Grudges

Capturing wonder and horror is easiest when working with the grand relationships: love, loyalty, hatred, devotion. Unfortunately, Hollyhock Gods do not always have grand emotions to work with. Many of the world's events run on petty emotions: flickers of anger, revulsion, gratitude, and admiration. Among Nobles, who can tear down cities to avenge a moment's grudge — as unwise as the Code Fidelitatis makes such an act — events fueled by lesser emotions are not *themselves* petty. Understanding this, you can get a great deal of mileage out of predominantly neutral relationships.

Much of the structure that keeps Noble society functioning consists of favors. Even when a Noble grants a favor without an explicit expectation of reward, it has a string attached — it forms a connection, strong or minute, between the two Nobilis. It creates a social obligation to show equal generosity, usually by returning the favor. A Noble who fails to meet their obligations suffers shame, to one degree or another. A Noble unable to show generosity by *granting* a favor also suffers embarrassment. It casts doubt on their strength, for strong Nobles can afford magnanimity. The web of favors owed

OPPOSITE:
The Power of Physical Disability
by Al Davison


AL Dawson 2001

and favors granted connects the Nobilis, giving each a handle by which others can manipulate them.

Imagine, for a moment, that each NPC is a PC in some other campaign, with its own stories and battles. A favor represents a "bridge" between two worlds — a connection that draws the PCs into the NPC's story, or vice versa. If the PCs owe a favor to the Power of Scarcity, then their attempts to make good on that debt can draw them into an exploration of the true spiritual effects of riches or poverty. Perhaps the Power cursed a mortal with abundance, so that all the wealth in her vicinity flowed into her possession and could not leave it. Now something priceless to the Power has fallen into the victim's possession, but the Power's pride does not permit a recantation of the curse. Finding a loophole would no doubt qualify as returning the favor. Doing so would explore the themes of the Power of Scarcity's "campaign".

Temporary alliances also play a major role in the Noble world. Nobles recognize that two Powers joined together are safer and more powerful than two Nobles apart. Most alliances of convenience are ultimately unstable, but while they last the Nobles involved can rely on the others' aid. An alliance connects Nobles much as an owed favor does. Thus, if the PCs form an alliance with Isabel, Power of the Road, you can bring them into an Isabel-themed plot. She might call upon them, for example, to guard a caravan carting several possible saviors of the world (in stasis) through the roadways of the Mythic World.

The converse structure to a favor owed is a grudge held. Often, a grudge turns into a rivalry; sometimes, however, an angered Noble exacts petty revenge once or twice and then buries the matter.

Bonds of Convenience

"I confess I am thrown," said the Prince of Knots. "I had thought that the Dark and the Light hated one another: and here they are, together in celebration, with nary a raised hackle in sight."

"It is a matter of practicality," I explained, helping him remove his coat. "It is not that the Light and the Dark can truly lay aside their hate; but no one appreciates a Power who brings an old grudge to a party."

—from On Serving the Nobilis, *by Luc Ginneis*

Nobilis is a game of extremes and archetypes, so some of the inhabitants of your Nobilis game should merit near-absolute trust. Still, such honorable creatures are rare. Some embody the principles of deceit and dishonor. These untrustworthy curs are rare as well. In most cases, Nobles understand that trust is irrelevant. Their colleagues must be taken as they are, and expected to do what they will do. In the Noble world, you do not weep when your acquaintances betray you, nor do you adore every being that brings you a gift. You spend time with those whose interests and personality are in accord with your own, and you do them favors when it suits your plans. You hope that they shall do the same for you. For the sake of this section, I shall call a PC's most temporary allies their companions — the Nobles, humans, beasts, Imperators, spirits, and entities who *will* lift a finger to come to the PC's aid, but have no fear of betraying them later.

A Hollyhock God is well advised to build a stable of social contacts for their PCs. A companion, who does not need to firmly dedicate themselves to the PC's welfare or to their detriment, makes a perfect contact. Create such contacts by offering the PCs (or some subset thereof) an invitation to some event of interest, a small favor or gift in the interest of sociability, or a temporary alliance to resolve some minor or major matter in the interest of both parties. If all goes well, this establishes an amiable relationship. If the PC and NPC aggravate one another instead, you have created a useful antagonist.

Every Power represents a potential resource for every other Power — a source of miracles for everyday convenience and emergency aid. It is only natural that they should make social overtures to one another. Some Nobilis even cultivate their natural opponents — servants of opposed affiliations or hostile Estates. A cordial relationship with one's enemies can be useful in the event of a sudden reversal of fortune. Through such relations can a Power of the Light experience the celebrations of the Dark and a Power of Hell attend the banquets of the servants of Heaven. More generally, Powers have met under any number of pretexts, from shopping trips to harvest ceremonies. During such events, they discuss shared interests and the affairs of Creation, set aside the burden of duty for a time, and lay the groundwork for future fellowship.

Companions can test the characters, measuring their worth as potential allies and their danger as potential enemies. A gentle test of strength helps establish where two

Powers stand, and need not lead into bloodshed. Companions can use the PCs as tools, openly or surreptitiously. They may ask the PC for their insights into a given situation, or steer the PC into the path of an enemy. They may attempt to recruit the PCs, or establish dominance over them. Most of all, they offer the characters a chance to become involved with plots as outsiders — observers if not participants, judges in disputes, witnesses to the companion's actions, participants in someone else's story. Small interventions by the PCs become proportionally more significant, as do their IC observations.

A classic story traces an NPC from companion to enemy or — if the NPC has the necessary qualities of character — ally. Ideally, the story should have the potential to go both ways until near the end.

Bonds of Love

Nobles do love, and they love grandly, though they love in secret. Other inhabitants of the Noble world love more visibly, more majestically, and every bit as powerfully. Love can drive a thousand stories. Characters may love other Nobles, the great elemental spirits, mortal humans, and even monsters and creatures from other realms.

Today I cleaned the shield of Nuri, a brash and noble Power, who found his own answer to the Windflower Law. Cutting forth his atman, he bound it into a shield, decorated with his love's Design, as a gift for her. His body would forget her; his Estate would forget her; but he would be with her always.

It hangs in Meon's halls in Locus Entropy. I do not believe his Ramona ever learned of its existence. Such are the ways of life and love.
—from the Thought-Record of Martin Cravitt

You have two paths for creating a love interest for a character. The first approach is narrative OOC negotiation. You discuss various possibilities for a relationship with the player. You develop the relationship offstage. Only when you and the player are comfortable with the basic tenets of the relationship do you bring the love interest into in character play. The second approach is opportunistic. You provide standard opportunities for romance. A player character must escort an attractive major spirit — such as the Oikonomikad (economic nymph) of capitalism — at a social function, to protect it from hostile Noble action. A dashing Noble meets with a PC on five or six occasions to hammer out the terms of a contract between their two Chancels. Events progress naturally from there. Any romance novel or romantic movie offers ideas for bringing two people together. If nothing happens, despite your best efforts, then it's not meant to be — just like the people of your world, PCs don't always hit it off with their natural mates.

Lovers develop odd habits, hobbies, and practices in common. Exploit this. The Nobilis show their love in strange ways, and their more bizarre practices make great atmosphere. Some of their shared activities serve as excellent seeds for stories — trysts on the Ash, far from prying eyes; shared work on a river of chaos and change within the Chancel; training in the warlike arts with physical and ghost miracle duels. If the player of a PC doesn't come up with this kind of thing, remember that NPCs have ideas too — an NPC lover can take the initiative in developing these practices.

The burden of secrecy strains Noble relationships terribly. A Noble's paramour never knows for certain that the Noble loves them — not unless the Noble foolishly makes it obvious. Always the Noble is distant; always the Noble is cold and capricious; always, there is doubt. If the two lovers fight, the Noble cannot reconcile with an act of glorious devotion or a proof of love. From most Nobles, even an apology is too much to expect. A Noble's lover reacts, naturally, with caprice of his or her own. Sweetness and generosity are tools in the love interest's arsenal to force a reaction from the Noble — as are cold distance and active hostility. A powerful story can come from a simple argument, that leads to an anger-driven intrigue against the Noble, ending in either reconciliation or a break-up as the lover either realizes that the Noble cares — or decides that the Noble does not.

For highest drama, you must keep the lives of the PCs' love interests dangerous. Don't just kill them, not without talking to the player first, unless the death is the heavily foreshadowed climax to a long and powerful story. At the same time, make the love interests' lives complex, because you can draw the PCs into every complexity. One lover might meddle with High Summoning, dealing with creatures from the Lands Beyond Creation that could steal her soul — or worse. Another might strive to reform the Cammora from within, facing the cruel leaders of the sect with nothing but his wits and grim determination. You can't keep up this pitch of danger if the PC falls for a

simple, humble shepherd in the Chancel hills, and keeps him or her out of the way — but if you can't manage danger, at least bring change and transition to the affair. Honoring the shepherd's dying father is a small but potentially satisfying story. Having the shepherd change a little bit each time the Noble visits, a kind of spiritual reaction to the Noble's presence — evolving towards something that isn't necessarily *bad* but is *different* — could get very intense indeed.

Bonds of Loyalty

"Would you die for me, Hugh?"

"In an instant, my lord."

Entropy's eyes were distant. "An answer reached so quickly can seem facile, or even obsequious."

"My lord," I answered, "you embody everything I value in this world."

—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

Every Noble serves as the focal point for a force as large as Fire or Disease. Each is the single body of mortal flesh in which every possibility of an entire Estate comes to fruit. The Nobles are at one and the same moment singular and selfish entities — humans, blind to their place in the grand system of the world — and elemental creatures of the *spiritus Dei*, a part of the dancing interaction of forces and concepts that create the universe. Nobles express their selfish individuality by staying true to what they represent. A Noble is in one sense loyal only to themselves. In another sense, though, the Noble must keep faith with a thousand obligations or cease to be what they are. A Noble of the Light cannot simply throw humanity to the wolves in the name of their own best interest — the notion is laughable! The Power of the Night cannot abandon the Night's interests in order to achieve a personal victory — the idea is a contradiction in terms. Thus, even though each Noble is an egocentric, selfish, vilely self-important worm of a creature — the author excepted, of course — each Noble is also a pure, clean, incarnation of loyalty and service.

Many Nobles act as loyal followers of others *in certain circumstances*. A Radiant may argue with the Tempest in his Familia thirteen times in a week — but when the safety of the Chancel is at stake, the Radiant serves at the Tempest's pleasure. (Is this universal? No. Is it mandatory? No. Is it the most honest and reasonable course? Yes.) Many Powers of the Light would sacrifice their life for the Nobles that lead the Light's cause — because the Light *needs* such leaders, and it needs its soldiers to support them. A Power may yield their loyalty to any of a number of greater or even lesser souls. The only *certain* loyalties a Power holds are to their Imperator and, to a lesser extent, their Familia — but Powers understand the notion of loyalty stronger than life, and, understanding it, practice it.

Friendship, like service, can also manifest as a bond of loyalty — but let me digress a moment. Forget the common, plebeian notions of friendship that pervade the mortal world. Forget the friendships that you see on your television set, so easily shattered by an untimely affair or a few slanderous words. I do not speak of such "friendships". The Nobilis cannot afford them. Friends like those that mortals claim — they betray you. There is no Power of the Light too pure to kill everyone such friends ever loved, an' it serves their Estate. There is no Power of Heaven too glorious to knot such a friend's soul and rip it with their hands. Not *one*. We cannot trust a fair-weather friend. The Nobilis cannot rely on bonds of mild camaraderie. There is too much at stake. Those whom mortals befriend we call associates — pleasant associates, perhaps, adorable associates, even reliable associates, but not friend. Those we name friend would follow us into Hell.

Some things are unforgivable. Some deeds demand retribution. Some offenses exceed the scope of any tolerance. One destroys an acquaintance who commits such a sin. One exacts a price in blood from an ally, if they perform such a deed. One forgives a friend, however, for the core of Noble friendship is infinite license. The loyalty one feels for a true friend exceeds all boundaries, ignores all outrages, surpasses all limits. The only end to such a friendship comes when one discovers that the other feels no such loyalty towards oneself — and sometimes not even then. It is said that the Power of the Hunt stayed loyal to the Power of Hounds for centuries, despite contempt, ill treatment, and even violence directed his way, and the servants of the Dark add that by that friendship the Power of the Hunt dragged the Dominus of Hounds away from the false principles of the Light, uniting them in the glorious shadow of humanity's destruction.

A Noble can also feel a bond of loyalty to their mortal family. Blood calls to blood. Such bonds are rarely absolute — but watch for their existence. If your PC favors a familial NPC, or shows a strong attachment to *every* family member, you can exploit this in your game. Similarly, Nobles sometimes feel significant obligation towards those whom they accept as their wards.

To incite your PCs to form loyalties to others, first observe the types of characters their character respects. Create an NPC that exemplifies the traits they admire blindly, with a sufficient quantity of the virtues they respect. Some PCs, even Powers of the Light and Heaven, can be overawed by the personal attentions of Lucifer. Others will readily fall into the shadow of the charismatic and dedicated leader of a Noble faction. If your player characters seem unwilling to *follow* anyone, then examine what they hope to achieve themselves. A representative of that achievement — the adventurous and aristocratic spirit of salt, for example, for a Noble who wishes supreme mastery of the culinary arts — can attract the PC's loyalty without commanding their service. If the PCs' Imperator takes an active role in the mortal world, it is the ideal leader for your purposes — let it become the spear's point of your plot, focusing the PCs' efforts in the direction the players want them to go.

As a general rule, people respond to trust with trust and license with license. If you wish a PC to befriend an NPC, that NPC must first demonstrate the trappings of friendship themselves. Usually, this means that the NPC has an outstanding reason to honor, trust, and forgive the PC *before* the friendship exists. If a player character saves a Noble's life, that Noble might feel a debt that cannot be repaid. If a PC plays some important role in Noble society that another Power considers valuable — as with Dianora, Domina of Joy, healer of those wounded in spirit — then that Power may forgive and trust the PC more than their personal relationship warrants. Simply holding the standard of Creation upright in a major battle can earn a PC a peculiar devotion from those who care about such things. In response to such devotion, you can hope that the PC will show some affection of their own; this effect inspires greater loyalty from the NPC, until eventually the two are true friends.

If your PCs give their loyalty to another, this presents you with two powerful hooks for creating stories.

First is the decision *whether* to serve — when a loved, trusted, feared or admired leader becomes or appears to become corrupt, misled, or weak. Whether the characters struggle to prevent their commander's fall, try to smooth the landing, or take advantage of the situation to bid for power themselves, the story is worth the telling.

The second hook is the demands of service. In the name of their liege, you can push characters to fight against personal weaknesses; commit acts they feel uncomfortable with — or refuse to do so; commit themselves to an extended operation without knowing what they're really involved in; or take on tasks they might otherwise fear. This applies equally well to those bound to the character by a tie of honor or friendship rather than the liege and servant bond. If a PC feels a personal obligation to the old woman who helped them understand the mythic world, something that transcends a mere exchange of favors, then you can tell the story of her fall from grace — or keep her worthy of trust, and tell stories of the lengths the PC goes to because of her worth. If the loyalty between a PC and their lieutenant runs both ways, then the lieutenant's needs can drive the PC to do anything a commander's orders might.

Your PCs will also attract followers. Classically, the obligation of service runs both ways. In the Noble world, that's not always true. Your players may choose to tell stories of how their PCs use and abuse their servants rather than of how they support them. Some PCs will be cruel. Some will be kind. Some will move between the two poles as the mood strikes them. Much of what I will write describes mortal servants specifically — but the principles apply to Noble followers as well.

If a PC treats their servants cruelly, this gives several story possibilities. The servant may betray them. This is a terrible thing, and I say without bias that such servants should meet no good end. After all, to betray a Noble is to betray Creation! Alternatively, the servant can remain loyal despite their travails. While the cad of a PC is unlikely to notice or care about this devotion, it can be deeply moving out of character. If it is not,



consider a brief diversion, having the players play their servants for a few scenes. This will cast the relevant servant's loyalty into sharp relief.

A PC who treats their servants with kindness also creates opportunities for stories. A mortal servant may fall in hopeless love (for Powers can be devilishly charming) or make futile sacrifices for their lord. The well-treated servant can save the Noble's life or their purpose, providing a poetic reward for kindness — or the servant can betray the Noble in an attempt to "save" them from a fate they welcome, leaving the Noble's plans in ruin. A player can have a great deal of fun simply devising acts of generosity. Ultimately, a Noble cannot save their followers from the followers' own mistakes; this is the essential tragedy of kindness, and the fodder for many stories focused on a servant or aide.

A character's lieges, friends, family, and servants are a central part of the story of their lives. Bear this in mind when introducing such characters — they should be thematically compatible with the relevant PC, fun for you to play, and interesting for the PCs to interact with.

Bonds of Enmity

When the Viscount of Memory meets the Marchessa of Falling Stars, their hands fall immediately to their blades. Their dance of war begins. They strive to kill one another; and that strife is poetry, beauty, a glory of violence. Yet in all their battles, they have been injured only three times between them.

Many of the Nobilis flout the Windflower Law, loving in secret. Many torture their souls trying to keep it. A few — like the Viscount and the Marchessa — find other ways that a man and a woman may be close.

There is no tenderer hatred than that those two cherish. There is no more intimate rivalry. To see them in battle is to weep.
—from the Memoirs of Alice Mendel, Lady of the Thunder

The unleashed fury of a Noble is terrifying, even to other Nobles. It comes in many forms. We practice the anger of the sirocco: oppressive, all-embracing, the wind that turns all that our enemies care for to dust. We practice the anger of the deluge: explosive, violent, destructive, tossing our enemies away like sand in the surf. We practice the anger of the snow: quiet, cold, and remorseless, dispassionately cruel, eating at our enemy's heart like ice eats at flesh. A Noble's anger is the next worst thing to an Excrucian's attention. Our anger is worse than our hate.

Nobles do not like to awaken such anger. Who would? Most Noble conflicts degenerate into ritualized, careful, formalized games — a dance, skirting the boundaries of fury, with a thousand chances to back away. We have enemies, of course. Once a nettle rite pushes a Noble too far, and they fall into fury, they only rarely turn back — and their anger breeds their enemy's anger, and soon there is war among us. We have enemies … but enemies are not safe to have. An enemy leaves us standing broken over the ruin of all we hoped to build. So, when we can, we have rivals. We have *polite* opponents, opponents who show us respect while working to destroy us.

As if some kind of mortal law constrained us, as if there were some sort of absolute moral guide that dictated that murder and abduction and cruelty were wrong — as if, that is, the *means* to our ends mattered as much as the *end*, our enemy's pain — we behave. We employ the Golden Rule. We fight our rivals with the tools we hope they will use against us. Stratagems. Lies. Politics. Against our most despised rivals, we employ theft and sabotage. Against those whom we merely dislike, we limit ourselves to honest competition. If a time comes when two Noble rivals must co-operate — or if a rare opportunity for friendship shines through the cloud of discord — we can overcome a history of such actions. Our hate is not so deadly as our anger, for we can turn back from hate.

To create an NPC rival for one of your PCs, you must first create conditions providing reasonable justification for discord. This usually means a clash of pride or an unavoidable conflict of interest.

To injure a character's pride, one must produce a feeling of helplessness or worthlessness. The NPC must walk all over the PC's plans with the PC unable to prevent them, or vice versa. The NPC must show up the PC, demonstrating competence and skill that the PC cannot match, or vice versa. Here, you must be careful and scrupulously fair. If you bend the rules, give the rival enormous power, or invoke implausible coincidence in order to establish the rivalry, you can annoy the player. Many players are goal-driven, and will wonder angrily, "What was I supposed to do in order to prevent this travesty?" If you linger lovingly over the description of the PC's comeuppance, even when *well* justified, you can create a similar feeling of frustration. Unlike your players, you must resist identifying with your characters and reveling in their successes. Instead, allow your players to express dramatic anger and sorrow at their characters' failures. If your players are tense, excited, crying "We're so doomed" as they squirm to evade their PCs'

OPPOSITE:
Vertumnus (Emperor Rudolph II)
by Giuseppe Arcimboldo



fate, then you may continue to tighten the screws. If they lose spirit, deciding that there is no use struggling because you hold all the cards, back off — they're not supposed to feel like you're playing *against* them. Putting it all together, to injure a PC's pride, you must watch for an opportunity — an opening a potential rival can reasonably exploit to embarrass them — and then exploit that opportunity, quickly and surgically. If the PCs find a clever way to avoid embarrassment, you must let them. Hopefully, they will embarrass the NPC in so doing!

Conflicts of interest take many forms. When two Estates contend for dominance in the world, the Powers often become rivals. This contention must be subtler than the conflict between, say, fire and water — water and fire are opposing forces when they come into contact with one another, but neither really threatens the other's place in the world. The Power of Electricity and the Power of Steam, on the other hand, clashed legendarily in the years when electric power began closing out some of steam's most important futures. The Power of Mathematics is a growing threat to the Viscount of Storms — as models for predicting and even influencing the weather become more powerful, storms lose some of their bite. Neither of these conflicts shows a real possibility of *eliminating* an Estate, but each can weaken an Estate and thereby make it more vulnerable to the Dark Horsemen. Even if the two Nobles are of naturally complementary temperaments, their life circumstances force them into opposition. The Power of the threatened Estate must truncate the other Estate's ambition to keep their own position intact. The Power of the more aggressive Estate must squeeze the life from the other or lose influence in the mortal world. This is not rivalry or enmity, but it *creates* rivalry or enmity.

Similarly, two Powers whose personal goals are irresistibly opposed are ripe for contention. If two Nobles wish to dominate the microcomputer industry, one must back away or both must limit their ambition if they wish to avoid a long-term conflict. If an NPC discovers that a PC plans to forcibly adapt humanity to an aquatic lifestyle, they have only two choices: they must become complicit in the PC's plan, perhaps filing it mentally as "regrettable, but not a high priority" or they must begin active opposition. As a rule, the Nobilis are tightly focused on our individual goals, not given to undue praise or condemnation for the plans of others. Most of us will not object to such an aquacentric program unless we have an explicit interest in a land-based humanity. Still, one never knows when one's peer will rise with outrage strident in his voice and cry, "What monster are you, to contemplate the relocation of our former species to the cold dark ocean depths?"

Rivalry can also arise from interests that coincide too closely. Two Nobles that serve the Dark, each working to dominate the major cigarette companies — instrumental actors in one of the subtler forms of individual self-destruction — can turn on one another over something so small as advertising. One Noble feels that peer pressure is more honest to the ideals of the Dark than professional marketing. Those who pick up a nicotine habit because they felt social pressure are succumbing to their own weakness. Those convinced by slick advertising are being deceived, on some level or another; they play a fractionally smaller role in their own damnation. The other Noble feels that the onus of an act lies only on the shoulders of the actor — that no amount of persuasion or pressure removes the elemental human ability to decide for themselves. Accordingly, *that* Noble believes that the ideals of the Dark are best served by a massive advertising campaign, free starter packs distributed outside of every high school, and charitable donations of cigarettes to prison inmates. Because the Nobles share a grand vision — arranging lots and lots of suicides by way of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease — the small differences in the details become a cause for war. Note that this situation does not *require* rivalry — some Powers may amend their plans without hesitation to take a potential ally's ideas into account. Others may seek to establish dominance in the shared project without cutting the other Power out of it entirely.

The next element of a successful rivalry is determining the limits of a PC's tolerance. If an NPC pushes a PC too far, the PC will rain down devastation and ruin on the NPC's head. This commits the NPC to an immediate groveling apology or an equally brutal reply. The two enemies can back away from *some* possible outrages, establishing a cold





truce — though it will probably break down in time. Other monstrosities ultimately require the death of one Power or the other. There's no hard and fast rule here. Usually, doing something horrible to one of the PC's highest-rated Bonds is crossing the line, but some PCs are significantly more trigger-happy — and some players have not properly updated their Bonds to reflect the evolving emotions of the PC during play. In short, you need to determine what the PC considers acceptable behavior from their enemies, and stay within those bounds if you expect the PC to do the same.

Finally, make sure that your potential rival is an NPC your players will enjoy hating. As a general rule — you can break this one, if you're careful — avoid rivals without any redeeming characteristics. Similarly, avoid overly sympathetic rivals. If your PCs find the NPC entirely despicable, the struggle becomes devoid of moral content — a game, as I have said, but also nothing *more* than a game. If the PCs admire their rival too greatly, the foundation for the conflict is unstable. Either the PCs will make peace, or the players will find it frustrating that they cannot. The best use for wholly unsympathetic or excessively sympathetic rivals is short-term stories: a high-tension showdown between the PCs and a particularly unappealing enemy, or a tragedy in which the PCs are forced to battle someone they admire. (You may find your own ways to employ such characters successfully, of course.) Good rivals should also have interesting personalities, employ unusual and surprising tactics to achieve their ends, and have a life beyond their work harassing the PCs.

Rivals have three uses in your game.

First, they can act directly against the PCs. A small threat, such as a minor nettling or an attempt to subvert a favored servant, can lend spice to events when the story slows down. A larger stratagem — attempting to undermine a PC's position in Noble society, to force a PC to violate their principles, or to exercise a more deadly nettling — can form the basis for a session or a story. A rival will strike directly against the PCs when their pride is hurt, when they wish to earn miracle points through nettling and need a target, or when the PC's position in life and Noble society seems dangerously strong.

Second, rivals can act against the PCs' plans. This offers a great opportunity to explore the interaction of the two Powers' themes. When the Power of Magnetism moves against the Power of Water, the principles of attraction and repulsion square off against the ideals of fluidity and erosion. The conflict between magnetism and water (unlike some other possible conflicts, such as duty against pleasure or love against despair) has little intrinsic philosophical depth, but ultimately it's *people* or *principles* that the two conflicting Powers will erode, attract, repel, or make fluid. In other words, even thematic clashes without inherent value become interesting studies when actually instantiated in the world.

Player characters can strike against their rivals; this is the third use for these NPCs in your game. You cannot predict when a player will take it into their head to launch a subtle or blatant assault on one of their PC's enemies. You can, however, *inspire* them to do so by trailing a vulnerable or outrageous plan under their noses. Have someone bring them word of, or give them direct evidence of, a scheme of their rival's that is grandiose or offensive. If the Power of Magnetism is draining and magnetizing the aqueous essence of Chancel servants to construct great spiritual engines, the Power of Water and their Familia may find it hard not to interfere. Alternately, give the PCs a "perfect" opportunity to quash a more ordinary scheme. A messenger inviting a few select Powers of the Dark to meet with the Power of Magnetism drives his car off of a bridge and drowns. A local naiad claims the message as a play toy. Once she deciphers its meaning, she calls out to the Power of Water. That Power can now act to ensure that the meeting becomes an embarrassment. The more subtly you drop such information, the more likely your players are to seize upon it as worth acting upon. If they act on it, the rivalry has drawn the PCs into the plans of their adversary. Since you designed those plans, this leads the PCs into the larger story you have planned for them.

On occasion, sadly, a reasoned, limited enmity is impractical. The PC's enemy is inalienably opposed to the character's existence and success, and the arguments for restraint do not seem convincing. The enemy has no honor or fear holding them back

from employing horrific measures against the PCs. Most Excrucians act in such a manner, as do Powers whose anger surpasses their reason. Enemies are *practically* different than rivals only when you, as Hollyhock God, wish to test the PCs to the utmost. Surviving an all-out assault can be cheaply melodramatic and exciting; in a contemplative game, it can also be a stern test of character. Picking up the ruined pieces of one's life and moving on is a noble thing; *not* doing so is a tragedy.

Ianthe



Chapter 21
Treachery
A Sample Campaign



The Premise

For 582 years, the same four Chancels provided the Earth its official Inquisitorial Powers — Nobilis who investigate and expose Mimics, traitorous Imperators, and "special cases" such as powerful monsters who sell Creation out. The Imperators ruling those four Chancels earned a rich reward for this service. When Inquisitorial Powers exposed and captured a Mimic or traitor, the relevant Imperator would break its mind, dissect the still-living creature, and swallow the greater portion of its power. What remained of the traitor was locked deep in the Inquisitorial Chancel, where the reigning Imperator could feast on the dribs and drabs of power that returned to it over time. Both forms of *spiritus Dei* trickled down to the Inquisitorial Powers in the form of Dynasty Points.

Over the centuries, the war intensified. More Imperators died. The Excrucians created more Mimics. Imperators built Chancels in increasing numbers, protecting their bodies from Excrucian assault but rendering them feasible subjects for investigation. The profusion of possible enemies slowly outgrew the Inquisitors' ability to investigate them all. The monsters that hid in the Imperators' own ranks went undetected for an ever-longer time. Still, the four regnant Imperators jealously preserved their monopoly on the Inquisition. Even when a forewarned Mimic razed one of the four Chancels, vivisected its lord, and scattered its Powers, the three that remained argued that they could take up the slack.

They did not get their way. By dint of smooth political maneuvering, the Magister Ram-Khvastra and his ally Sulaya earned the right to create Inquisitorial Powers. One hundred days later, after building their Chancels, they did so.

The characters play the Powers of Ram-Khvastra, invested as Nobles in the same moment that its Chancel formed. They enter the story in an unstable political position. The Powers from the three ancient Inquisitorial Chancels feel safer with others sharing their duties but resent the loss of status and power that the new Nobles represent. Some hope to dominate their new peers. Others plan revenge. Even those who might welcome the PCs as allies and equals must first make sure that the PCs are up to snuff. As for the PCs' Inquisitorial duties, they have the official co-operation of every Power — but each unearthed traitor is a new and very dangerous problem.

One must never fall asleep in the lands of night; but Sado did. In his sleep, he saw the face of their enemy — the horrid, dull face of the Pilgrim Worm — and he woke screaming.

"What is it?" asked the King his father, when he ran back to the camp.

"Isary is lost," cried Sado. "The Pilgrim comes."

The King did not flinch, for he had thought it might be so. "Douse the fires," he said. "Take up the ghost lights. We must return at once to the lands of day."

Isary, seven miles away, saw the fires die; and he dropped the head of the Pilgrim Worm and began to run. But he stumbled over a root, in the pressing darkness, and lost his way; and he never found the King his father, or the entrance to the lands of day, but rather wandered in the night forever.

Some say that Sado lied not from ignorance and fear but from design. That he knew, as brothers know, that Isary lived — that Isary would triumph — and that the King would name him heir. Thus, he arranged his brother's exile. That this is in the character of Princes, I grant; but it is not the Sado that I knew.

—from Void Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Sample Character Estates
If a player wants one of the Estates used for a sample character in this campaign, the Hollyhock God should let them claim it. The HG should assign an alternate, related Estate to the relevant sample character. For example, Nephele Nikolaidhis, Power of Festivals, could become instead the Power of Abandon — focusing more on the festivals where one throws away control and less on family Christmases. Patrick Romney's-Son, Power of Chaos, could easily become the Power of Disaster. He could still invoke the random factor, but now as the major concept associated with his Estate rather than his Estate itself.

Sulaya and its Powers are not described herein. If there are many PCs, the Hollyhock God can assign some of the PCs to Sulaya rather than Ram-Khvastra. In this case, the HG should make the alliance between Ram-Khvastra and Sulaya very tight, to encourage PC co-operation.

PCs and Inquisitorial NPCs receive the "Important" Chancel property for free, since the PCs have an Inquisitorial Chancel by campaign premise. The "Harvest of Dynasty Points" Imperator property is recommended, to indicate that the PCs successfully complete their Inquisitorial duties even when those duties are not the focus of a story. Without this property, the PCs receive Dynasty Points only for traitors and Mimics discovered and captured during play.

Story Structure

Each of the NPC Powers in this campaign has a strong tie to a given **story element**. The spiritual connection between the NPC Power and the story element makes it appropriate to involve the Power in stories featuring that element. For example, if the PCs take an interest in a bill in the U.S. Senate, it makes thematic sense to involve the Power of Debate. That Power (Ianthe Falls-Short) does not automatically appear when the PCs take action that involves her Estate. There is no direct causal connection. Rather, stories of arguments and debates provide good opportunities for the Hollyhock God to introduce Ianthe and have her interact with the PCs. When the PCs are focused on the process of legislation, the opinions and actions of the Power of Debate are automatically interesting.

The HG should exercise this device in moderation. None of these NPCs must invariably walk around the corner whenever the game features an appropriate story element. At the same time, the Hollyhock God should not be afraid to stretch the bounds of coincidence slightly. Powers are incarnate representations of their Estates, and a story about Bureaucracy should, to some degree, feature the Power of that Estate.

In some cases, an NPC arrives on scene because they actually created the situation that faces the PCs. The other Inquisitorial Powers are intimately involved with the PCs' affairs from the campaign's inception. The machinations of these Powers, whether they originate in benevolence, malevolence, or curiosity, should appear with frequency. The Inquisitorial Powers also have reason to monitor the PCs' affairs with miracles of lesser divination. Nephele Nikolaidhis, Marchessa of Festivals, will almost certainly know when Locus Ram-Khvastra celebrates a PC's birthday. When a debate becomes vital to the PCs' survival, the odds are good that Ianthe had a hand in it — if not to create the situation, then to exacerbate or contain it.

When a situation facing the PCs is not the handiwork of another Power, the HG should still involve any appropriate NPCs. However, these Nobilis should not automatically dive into the story and begin helping or obstructing the PCs. Rather, at least at the outset, they should act as an extension of the situation itself. The Baroness of Mazes might help the PCs out of a confusing situation if they have treated her well, but her natural motive in the situation is to accentuate the confusion. Similarly, even if the PCs have treated the Power of Trade with contemptuous disregard, he should lean towards facilitating a delicate transaction rather than obstructing it. When a pre-existing agenda is not in operation, Powers naturally express their Estate's nature.

Each of the NPC Powers in this campaign also has a strong tie to a given **story type**. This describes the kind of story that they naturally create. The Marquis of Chaos is a creature of romantic ideals. His presence warps a story towards celebration, romance, and high adventure, while the Power of Strife is better fit for gritty stories and mysteries. A Hollyhock God who wishes to feature the Marquis of Chaos can begin contemplating celebration and adventure. Conversely, a HG who hopes to bring a romantic element into the game can invoke the Marquis. When large numbers of NPC Powers clash, it's anyone's guess where the story will go — but choosing each Power's individual contribution to the story is straightforward.

Typical stories for this campaign involve either interaction with other Inquisitorial Powers or an official investigation. Some ideas for investigations appear in the Stories section, below. Other stories are possible, of course — the characters can involve themselves with their Anchors' lives, rule their realm, battle Excrucian flower rites, politic on a larger scale,

NPC NAME	ESTATE	STORY ELEMENTS
Ada Willamette	Strife	Violence and brutality; has a spiritual tie to violent actions including barroom brawls, vicious underworld intrigues, and wars alike.
Annabelle Zupay	Trails	Linearity; "belongs" in stories that follow a simple chain of events or evidence.
Helissent de Reymes	Mazes	Confusion and uncertainty; involved when a deliberate campaign of concealment confuses the PCs.
Ianthe Falls-Short	Debate	Non-violent disputes and arguments, including legislative and theological debates.
Idony Saint-Germain	Bureaucracy	"The system"; when mortal bureaucracy bedevils an Anchor's life, or laws or social boundaries limit a Power.
Lance Romenel	Records	Research; fits particularly well into stories of esoteric research involving arcane libraries.
Nephele Nikolaidhis	Festivals	Celebrations, holidays, festivities.
Pandareos Panagiotis	Conspiracy	Criminal conspiracies, revolution, treason, vice, treachery, crime; an all-around ne'er-do-well.
Patrick Romney's-Son	Chaos	Disaster; including famines, plagues, floods, fires, and massive EMP pulses.
Thalasseus	Trade	Fits well in stories of bargains, barter, money, trade, shopping, bazaars between worlds, and wealth.
Walking Eye	Borders	Physical or social barriers; makes a good observer and commentator when the PCs face barriers they cannot easily overcome.

A man staggered by, chained to seven demons. Three of them ran ahead, so that before he arrived in a place, they could defile it with the marks of Lust, Callousness, and Cynicism. Four of them trailed behind, so that when he entered a room, he brought Bitterness, Doubt, Prejudice, and Inhumanity with him.
—from Janet vs. Everything: A Steel Cage Match, *by Jackie Robinson*

explore the World Ash, and in general do anything they could do in any other *Nobilis* campaign.

A Note on Timing

Remember that human history "lost" about 500 years of time in 4895 AP. This loss did not distribute itself evenly. When the Serpent Sakhrat created the last of the ancient Inquisitorial Chancels, 582 years ago, the Earth did not precisely resemble any mortal history. Events that history now records as taking place between the years of 1350 and 1850 AD were taking place simultaneously. Other events that history records as concurrent took another 500 years to come about.

A Note on Anchors and Bonds

Each NPC Power description below leaves one Anchor and five points' worth of Bonds undefined. (The more enigmatic Powers have eight points of undefined Bonds.) To customize and complete the campaign, the HG should create an appropriate Anchor and Bonds for each NPC Power used. The HG should also feel free to revise Bonds and Restrictions to suit the way they play these NPCs.

A Note on Wound Levels

NPCs with starred wound levels have had their wound levels reduced to simulate fragility. Immortal characters are given wound levels due to the existence of Abhorrent Weapons and other rare workarounds.

Locus Parasiel ("Mitrophorous")

There was a man who cut out his tongue and grafted on a tongue made of gold. And every word he said thereafter came out like a lullaby — soft and soothing, gentle, beautiful. He rose to become the King of the land, and would have risen higher, had his minister not asked him, "Sir, would you not rather rule with your own voice?" When he heard those words, the King felt revulsion fall upon him. He tore out the tongue of gold and replaced it with his own. And it was only three days later that the kingdom rose against him and fed him to the manticores, and only four days later that the minister's tongue gleamed as golden as the sun.
—from Earth Stories, *compiled by Kneader Guy*

Parasiel, the Hundred-Handed Angel, rules the Estates of Conspiracy, Debate, Festivals, and Trade. An ancient creature, born in the First Age, Parasiel has grown tired of battle. Parasiel once attempted to erase the records of Heaven — he hoped to erase history thereby, allowing him to destroy Lucifer before the rebellion. It didn't work. Hukkok exiled Parasiel to Earth. The angel still hopes to unmake time, but the hundred chains that bind him to the world weaken his will and leave him with little strength for such efforts.

Parasiel's Chancel and place of exile, stolen from Greece, is one of the great prisons of Creation. The chains that bind Parasiel are not unique; a thousand more snake through the Chancel, moving at their own will and whim except when Parasiel has need to bind a Power or an Imperator. Then they latch hold, and little short of an Abhorrent Weapon or an Imperial miracle — which Parasiel would presumably oppose — can set their victim free.

The people of the Chancel no longer reproduce in the ordinary fashion. Instead, Parasiel has established great "people fields" where Chancelfolk grow. Each field lends a distinct character to its children, so that humans harvested from the Field of Hollow Kings have great strength and little conscience, while those born in the Field of Easy Eights have a companionable disposition. For the most part, the fields have names drawing on card and Tarot deck lore.

Before Parasiel's banishment, a mystery cult known as the Servants of the Hundred Hands followed him on Earth. Shortly after his banishment, an Excrucian Strategist taught them of his "betrayal of Creation". Now styled the Scholars of Locks, they have become pawns of the enemy. A later group took up the mantle of the Servants of the Hundred Hands, styling itself the True Revived Order of Hundred-Handed Servants. The two mystery cults hate one another with a passion.

As an inevitable consequence of Parasiel's occasional experiments with the structure of time, his Powers have the tendency to accidentally skip past a week between footsteps, arrive before they leave, meet themselves at important events, and exhibit other confusing and occasionally unfortunate temporal behaviors. Their timelessness is in some ways advantageous. Parasiel can remove his Powers' vulnerability to age, transferring it to their shadows and reflections.

His Imperial Majesty, Parasiel
THE HUNDRED-HANDED ANGEL

Conventional wisdom has it that one should act with a mind towards the future; but I can see the future, and there is nothing of value there.
—Parasiel, Imperator of Conspiracy, Debate, Festivals, and Trade

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	4: Celestial	5
Domain	3: Marquis	6
Realm	5: Tempest	5
Spirit	2: Incandescent Flame	5

Gifts and Virtues
Immortal
Glorious

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Chained (cannot leave Chancel)
Restriction: In Disfavor
Affiliation: Code of the Angels

Wound Levels
2 Deadly Wounds (Immortal)
3 Serious Wounds
3 Surface Wounds

Original Imperator Properties
Clear-Sighted
Harvest
Corrupted Mystery Cult (Scholars of Locks)
Granted Handicap: Loosely Anchored in Time

Acquired Imperator Properties
Granted Gift: Unaging
Multitudinous
Mystery Cult (True Revived Order of Hundred-Handed Servants)
Considerate

Unaging: Parasiel's Granted Gift
Parasiel can give his Powers immunity to the ravages of age as a Granted Gift. This is a lesser preservation of self, similar to Immutable, purchased as:

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
3 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	One trick	No	
3 CPs	+1	−3	−3	+1	1 CP

8 Dynasty Points

Locus Parasiel

Locus Parasiel, also named Mitrophorous, has access to various unusual resources. Some of the Chancelfolk have special talents due to the field of their birth. These humans can become Anchors. A number of scholars in the realm, particularly those from the Shriveled Page Field, understand the workings of "normal" magic. Further, since the Chancel was partially shielded from the loss of 500 years of history, it has technology more advanced than Earth's. Hovercars and voice-controlled houses are common. The inhabitants, though physiologically a form of plant life, can pass as human to the unaided eye — and to the Sight, since they have human souls.

- Magical Inhabitants (3 points)
- Resources: Normal Magic (3 points)
- Resources: Extrapolative Technology (2 points)
- Resources: Weird Genetic Science (1 point)
- Important (0 points)

The Power of Debate, Ianthe Falls-Short

Ianthe comes from the Chancel, grown on the vine in the Field of Two-Faced Jacks. The Jacks are a silver-tongued lot, and Ianthe is the greatest of them. She learned to speak before her harvest day, spilling forth an endless torrent of observations and contentions as she ripened in the sun. A thousand brilliant dreams provoked these outbursts, and the echoes of them still crowd around the edges of her mind. Discretion and silence are foreign concepts to her; her heart demands speech. Ianthe's predecessor, the second Power to command Debate, claimed her as his heir. Ianthe has spent her life serving Debate.

Ianthe underwent a ritual early in her tenure to trap all the elements in her soul that fall short of perfection in her last name, wherein they are rendered harmless. In another Power's Auctoritas, this Gift becomes unreliable; otherwise, even if her actions fail, they always possess immaculate perfection. A duelist could defeat her with the sword but could never criticize her form; an orator can defeat her in argument, if she does not employ her Estate, but never because her arguments were blemished. Only her massively developed talent for ingratiating herself with others makes her flawlessness tolerable.

Estate

Like Ianthe, Debate has two faces: it serves to resolve debate and to prolong it. Ianthe prefers resolution. To her, words are a tool for enforcing her will. They are weapons. She employs conversation, lies, half-truths, explanations, excuses, exaggerations, and arguments rather than the super-logic of force. Ianthe claims never to have shed a drop of blood. Only seven dead men and a few mute witnesses would disagree.

Ianthe's Domain governs polite disputes and verbal communication as well as Debate proper. Thus, with a miracle of destruction, she can inflict the curse of Babel or settle any two mortals' differences. With a miracle of creation, she can open a dialogue with anyone on the planet, invent new media for verbal communication, or create improbable disputes.

The Power of Debate, Ianthe Falls-Short

Give me the right lever and I can move an Excrucian's heart.
—The Lady Ianthe, Marchessa of Debate

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	3: Inhuman	5
Domain	3: Marchessa	5
Realm	1: Radiant	5
Spirit	1: Heartfire	5

Gifts and Virtues
Immaculate Perfection (Penetration 0)
Virtue: Voluble

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Loosely anchored in tme
Restriction: Photosynthetic (hibernates if kept from full-spectrum light for too long)
Restriction: Photosynthetic (cannot consume human food)
Affiliation: Code of the Angels

Wound Levels
2 Deadly Wounds
2 Serious Wounds
3 Surface Wounds

Immaculate Perfection: Ianthe's Gift

Ianthe performs Aspect miracles of level 4 or less with the kind of "flair" and perfect form associated with level 5 Aspect. She purchases this as:

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common	Cost
5 (Aspect)	Simple	Local	One trick	No	
5 CPS	–1	–1	–3	+1	1 CP

Bonds

Strength	Subject
5	Hollyhock God's discretion
5	Her ability to manipulate any situation with words, if she deigns to
3	The sanctity of her Estate
3	The success of her Inquisitorial duties
2	Her Anchor, Savatino Lord-of-Aces
1	The Field of Two-Faced Jacks
1	Her "convertible" hovercar (can be adjusted to look like a ground car)

Weaknesses

Ianthe was born with a human soul: Locus Parasiel simply grows its humans in the fields rather than producing them through intercourse. However, physiologically, she is a human-shaped plant, and she gains her energy from photosynthesis rather than food. This yields two weaknesses. First, she cannot eat human food, having no digestive system, and second, if kept away from sunlight and its equivalents for a few weeks, she will involuntarily hibernate. Like all Parasiel's Powers, she is loosely anchored in time.

Design

Ianthe's Design is a two-faced Jack playing card. One face holds the flower of Debate, a half-closed silvery six-petalled flower. Sword-like leaves jut out in pairs on opposite sides of the stem. The other face holds Angelica, the flower of inspiration, an oversized bit of flora with broad, toothed leaves and an umbrella-shaped cluster of white flowers.

Associated Non-Player Characters

Ianthe has two Anchors. The first is her chosen heir, Savatino Lord-of-Aces, whom she has elevated to chief among those

OPPOSITE:
The People Fields of Locus Parasiel
by Michael Kaluta


2001

Chancelfolk hailing from the Poisoned Aces field. He surpasses even Ianthe in the sheer deviousness and malice he brings to the conversational arena. She admires, loves, and hates him all at once, with a good measure of lofty Noble disdain for the peasantry thrown in. Her HG-selected Anchor works in the mortal world — most likely in a government or on a corporation's board of directors. Ideally, this Anchor is somewhere where he or she can regularly interact with a PCs' Anchor.

Story Element
Ianthe features in stories involving debate, including most stories that deal with the mechanics of government, dispute resolution, and theological argument. When passions grow hot, but before they reach the boiling point of violence, Ianthe's Estate is there.

Story Type: Action
Ianthe is ultimately a woman of action. She does not sit in her Chancel and think of arguments. Rather, words and strategies pour from her in endless cascades, provoked by inspiration rather than thought. Nor do they interfere with more physical approaches — Ianthe can talk perfectly well no matter what she happens to be doing. A mere miraculous duel with a Mimic and its spawn is insufficient to shut her up. As the Power of Debate, she can carry on a conversation or argument as long as there's a shred of life left to her. In turn, she rarely waits for a conversation to end before she takes on more physical tasks. Her Gift of immaculate perfection makes her an ideal action hero (or villain, or co-star) — combined with her Aspect, the most flagrantly improbable acts of showmanship are possible. If Ianthe is in a story involving a serious conflict, conversation and ethical or intellectual dilemmas won't slow her pace down — and that means the PCs won't get to slow down, either.

The Power of Festivals, Nephele Nikolaidhis

Mortal life did not treat Nephele kindly. Born in 1796, married and widowed in 1810, she lost her son in 1825 to the Greek Revolution. She spent her remaining human years begging on the streets of Mykonos. The understanding of her Estate that Nephele learned in those years has little to do with joy and kindness. In Nephele's mind, festivals are escape — celebrations and rituals humans observe to forget the pain of their lives, to pretend the horror of the world does not exist. In other words, her Estate depends on, requires that horror. Festivals' lynchpin is not the happy family gathering around the Christmas turkey. It is the woman found strangled and filleted on New Years' Day.

Nephele moves from one festival, initiation rite, or holiday to the next, adding elements of horror to make the celebration fervent. She is the masked creature that lures away children at Mardi Gras; the witch who drains a tribal adolescent's strength if he breaks his year's seclusion; and the killer who adds a special tang to Christmas. She is also an exceedingly fine Inquisitor with an exemplary work record.



The Power of Festivals
Nephele Nikolaidhis

You are sad, child, because your soul is wounded; but this is the carnival, and you can win a new soul if you try.
—The Lady Nephele, Marchessa of Festivals

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	2: Legendary	5
Domain	3: Marchessa	6
Realm	1: Radiant	5
Spirit	2: Incandescent Flame	5

Gifts and Virtues
Poisoned Fangs (Paralytic)
Unaging (from Imperator)

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Cannot approach the site of an act of great beauty, sacrifice, or compassion
Restriction: Loosely anchored in time
Restriction: Celebrations sometimes spontaneously start around her
Restriction: Deformed shadow & reflection
Affiliation: Code of the Fallen Angels

Wound Levels*
1 Deadly Wound
3 Serious Wounds
2 Surface Wounds

Bonds

Strength	Subject
5	Hollyhock God's discretion
5	The sanctity of her Estate
4	The success of her Inquisitorial duties
3	Her pride and reputation
2	Her seven celebrants (see below)
1	The interests of Greece

Estate
Nephele's Estate covers celebrations and public rituals, holidays, and the symbols associated with any holiday or celebration she finds herself in. Thus, on Christmas, Nephele can create joy, plum puddings, and slavishly loyal Santa Clauses. On Halloween, she can raise ghosts and goblins. A birthday party is the perfect opportunity to afflict someone with a curse of unnaturally swift aging. Making it suddenly Christmas in a small area requires a miracle of lesser creation (and 1 DMP).

Creating a new holiday or celebration with brand-new symbolism that she can exploit requires a miracle of major creation and 4 DMPs.

Weaknesses
Like all of Parasiel's Powers, Nephele sometimes experiences temporal incongruities. She has accepted Parasiel's Gift of "Unaging", transferring the ravages of time to her shadow and reflection. Her shadow resembles a wrinkled crone's, while her reflection shows nothing but a moldering skeleton. Acts of great beauty, sacrifice, and compassion directly oppose Nephele's Estate. The existence of such deeds undermines the mortal need to lose oneself in festival. The sites of such acts repel her with a near-physical force. On occasion, celebrations start in Nephele's vicinity for no specific reason; even more than her twisted reflection, this effect can reveal her presence.

Design

Nephele's Design displays the flowers of Festivals and Willful Blindness against the background of a blotched poison-green circle. The flower of Festivals is an open white flower with irregular petals and alternating leaves. The flower of Willful Blindness is an almost petal-less closed black flower with "radical" leaves around the base.

Associated Non-Player Characters

Nephele often travels with seven "celebrants", mortal servants whose duty is to push the limits of the festivals in which she finds herself. Three have no other purpose. She has warped two of them into monstrous forms and made the third as handsome as an angel. The other four have additional duties, and she permits them the luxury of a name — Machaon, her lieutenant and adjutant; Lysander, her secretary; Corelle, her bodyguard; and Celosia, her chef.

Nephele's first Anchor is her dead son, Guilio, whose ghost she created on All Hallows' Eve. She does not hide her obsessive love for him, nor need she. He is a manifestation of her Estate and therefore an acceptable target for devotion. The second is Kadi Tavukcu, a traveling salesman with a coincidental likeness to her son's killer; having once sighted him, Nephele cultivated hatred in her heart until she could claim him. The HG defines the third.

Story Element

Nephele naturally features in stories of celebrations, holidays, and festivities.

Story Type: Horror

Nephele is a creature of horror — careful, passionate horror, driven by emotion and need rather than callous brutality, executed with precision and care. Stories that involve her tend to feature the standard elements of horror: the slowly dawning realization that something is very, very wrong; missing persons and small bits thereof that are not missing; young children used as channels by arcane powers; the veneer of normality stripped from reality to reveal alien truths beneath; monsters; and shadowy menaces that show their presence long before the first confrontation.

The Power of Conspiracy, Pandareos Panagiotis

Like Ianthe, Pandareos is native to the Chancel, grown in the Field of Mirrored Hearts. Six Domini of Conspiracy have died a traitor's death for working against Lord Entropy or their Imperial master. One met a natural ending at Excrucian hands. Pandareos, as the eighth Power of Conspiracy, lives his life under intense scrutiny. He is a frustrating man to scrutinize, however. Like all Mirrored Hearts, he reflects an observer's expectations and desires. To the suspicious, he seems a dark and troubled soul; to his few friends, he seems a staunch and loyal ally; to strangers, he seems a romantic mystery. In his own eyes, Pandareos is an honorable rogue, compelling and sinister, the very incarnation of dangerous fantasies. Conspiracy, to him, stands at the crossroads between the human desire to belong and to take action and the peril of involvement in the illicit. To properly represent his Estate, he must project every inch of Conspiracy's jeopardy and allure. His plans in life span the range from glorious service to Creation to outright betrayal thereto. He draws acquaintances into his schemes based only on which projects stand the best chance of commandeering their loyalties.

Pandareos, ten years an Inquisitor, already possesses a superb record. His ability to untangle the mundane conspiracies that often surround Noble treachery is unmatched.

The Power of Conspiracy Pandareos Panagiotis

Am I so untrustworthy, then, milady? I had hoped that you, at least, would see beyond my reputation; for I have seen beyond yours, and been entranced.
—His Eminence, the Warden Pandareos, Viscount of Conspiracy

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	1: Metahuman	5
Domain	2: Viscount	5
Realm	3: Warden	5
Spirit	1: Hearthfire	5

Gifts and Virtues
Glorious
Invisibility
Unblemished Guise (Penetration 1)

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Loosely anchored in time
Restriction: Photosynthetic (hibernates if kept from full-spectrum light for too long)
Restriction: Photosynthetic (cannot consume human food)
Affiliation: Code of Rogues' Honor (see below)

Wound Levels
1 Deadly Wound
2 Serious Wounds
2 Surface Wounds

Affiliation: The Code of Rogues' Honor

1. Seize every opportunity, embrace every passion
2. Fear no danger, shirk no hardship
3. Heed no laws when the Law's eye turns away

Bonds

Strength	Subject
6	The sanctity of his Estate
5	Hollyhock God's discretion
3	His skill at evading consequences of his illicit acts through secrecy and persuasion
3	His self-image, pride, and reputation
2	His Chancel
1	His current lover

Estate

Pandareos's Estate covers immoral, illegal, and unethical conspiracies as well as well as the classic reasons to conspire in groups of two or more: price fixing, personal treachery, adultery, murder for hire, organized crime, and plots of revolution. (Actual revolution does not fall under his suzerainty, since it tends to be fairly overt.) He has limited resources with which to discover conspiracies among Nobles, Imperators, and Excrucians — he can detect the conspiracy itself with a divination miracle, but not the nature of its

participants. Even with this limitation, his Estate gives him a significant edge in digging up corruption. Pandareos is ruthless in exposing traitors to Creation, but hesitant to expose plots with other motivations. Making it difficult for Nobles to conspire against one another or against Lord Entropy would subtly damage Pandareos' Estate.

Weaknesses
Pandareos's weaknesses mirror Ianthe's.

Design
Pandareos's Design features two tuberoses bent together, as if whispering, one representing Conspiracy and the other standing for Seduction. The background is a set of rippling waves.

Associated Non-Player Characters
Pandareos' predefined Anchor is Jennifer Hung, a highly placed officer of the DEA (or a similar organization elsewhere in the world). Her skill at unmasking criminal conspiracies was once legendary. A rival of Pandareos' used Jennifer as a cat's-paw against him on the one occasion Pandareos has been caught performing a criminal act. After a month in the Locust Court's punishment halls, Pandareos had a great hatred in him for both Jennifer Hung and the Power that used her. Claiming Hung as Anchor was the least he could do.

Story Element
Pandareos features in stories involving criminal conspiracies, revolution, treason, treachery, vice, and crime. Wherever two people meet under cover of darkness, something of Pandareos is there.

Story Type: Romance/Intrigue
Pandareos considers Noble romance his most useful tool. Among Powers, all but the most austere courtships qualify as criminal conspiracies. Technically, a Power's relationships belong to no Estate — but in Pandareos' eyes, every love match involving a Power belongs to him. He has great skill at arranging circumstances to incite such forbidden relationships, and even greater skill at exploiting them.

Pandareos himself is a dark romantic lead. As such, Hollyhock Gods should tune him to fit the PC group. If the PCs have benevolent leanings, he should have a few clear-cut redeeming traits and a sympathetic presentation. In a game with monstrous PCs, he should become even darker, a suitable conspirator and ally in their unpleasant plans. Ideally, he will show each character an inviting, appealing face, with just enough light or darkness in him to add an element of risk. Whether he actually qualifies as a danger is for the HG to determine. In all cases, Pandareos approaches the world with dash, finesse, style, and precise control over his emotional expression.

Pandareos is also well suited to stories of intrigue, plotting, and distrust. If the PCs do not seem a good fit to romantic stories, then Pandareos can become the center of a spider's web of conspiracy. He is aware of every trick ever developed for betrayal, collusion, treachery, and secrecy. Attempting to untangle his plots tends to lead others down the path he laid out for them to follow.

The Power of Trade, Thalasseus

Trade has always been in Thalasseus' blood. A seafaring merchant in his human life, he never lost his love of the deal, of gold, of the clamor of the market, of the clash of wills and wits over a rich fabric's price. He uses the title Piscator — fisherman — because trade is a net wrapped around every human soul and a hooked line that can fetch even the greatest treasures.

Thalasseus is an active man. He has built up a trading empire over six hundred years that rivals the mercantile division of the Cammora. Between managing that empire and fulfilling his Noble and Inquisitorial duties, he may interact with the PCs often but rarely stays long. Vigorous and vibrant, he will take such steps as his long-term agenda or a possible bargain requires; then move on. "A thousand things to do in a day!" he calls over his shoulder as he departs.

Estate
Thalasseus' Estate governs mercantile activity and barter in all forms, from trading political influence for photographic negatives through fixed-price sales in a local bookstore to the fast-paced world of modern stock trading. He has his finger on the pulse of the world's markets. As a Pawn of his Estate, he must labor to influence it in even the smallest respects — as he explains it, each trade connects to every

The Power of Trade, Thalasseus

It is a roc's egg, sir, and I will trade it for a mere three secrets that no other soul knows.
—His Majesty the Piscator Thalasseus, King Regnant of Locus Parasiel

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	1: Metahuman	5
Domain	0: Pawn	5
Realm	4: True King	5
Spirit	3: Sunfire	5

Gifts and Virtues
Amphibian
Unaging

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Doomed
Restriction: Loosely anchored in time
Restriction: No shadow or reflection
Restriction: Summonable by the holder of any of nine coins
Affiliation: Code of the Light

Wound Levels
1 Deadly Wound
2 Serious Wounds
2 Surface Wounds

Bonds

STRENGTH	SUBJECT
8	Hollyhock God's discretion
4	His personal fortune
3	The sanctity of his Estate
3	His ability to defend himself against his doom
1	His Anchor, Coraline
1	His sloop, *Amphitrite*

other, and changing even the smallest transaction is like moving a million-ton weight with one finger. Nevertheless, he has access to a potentially enormous source of power in his Estate; if he gathers the strength for a Word of Command, he can reshape the world.

Weaknesses
Thalasseus is a showy creature, a man who understands that presentation is everything. Under his bombastic presentation, however, lies fear. Early in his career he bargained with a Deceiver, and the consequence of that bargain grows inevitably closer as the years pass by. The Hollyhock God should decide the form Thalasseus' doom will take — for example, a Nemesis unleashed when he slew a Sacrosanct Power to uphold his end of the bargain, or some form of damnation that he can only avoid by answering an unanswerable riddle, or a toxin in his blood that grows ever more powerful. Similarly, the HG should decide on Thalasseus' response to his doom, and whether it aligns his interests with or against the PCs. Naturally, he cannot admit to his difficulty, nor will he reveal his plan to address it.

Four centuries ago, Thalasseus invested a portion of his soul in nine gold coins — the money he had on him at the time of his Commencement. If the owner of one of the coins calls for it, it will inevitably find its way back to his hand. If the holder of a coin — not necessarily its owner — calls for Thalasseus, he must come. Two coins have found their way into general circulation; Thalasseus still owns the remaining seven, although many of them are on loan to others.

Design
Thalasseus' Design shows the flower of Trade and the flower of the Fisherman against the standard background for the Light (gray with a white "raindrop" pattern; the flowers twine about a caduceus). The flower of Trade is an open green flower with five differently shaped petals; it has clusters of "whorled" leaves. The flower of the Fisherman is closed and blue, with cross-shaped petals and leaves growing around its base.

Associated Non-Player Characters
Thalasseus has three Anchors, although he can keep four; like many high-Spirit Powers, he holds out the hope of someday finding and binding a truly potent Anchor. One Anchor is Coraline, a Chancel resident born in the Field of Water Diamonds. The Water Diamonds can trace their genetic heritage to kelp rather than corn. Coraline, like Thalasseus, is as comfortable in the water as on land, and has the peculiar quality of being absolutely unappetizing to all the deep sea's predators.

His second Anchor is his son, Miles Papadimitriou. Thalasseus feels only a distant love for the boy, but it was enough to forge the Anchor bond. Miles works in Thalasseus' merchant empire, moving from position to position as his father's needs dictate.

The third Anchor is for the HG to determine. If much of the game takes place at sea, the HG should consider claiming the living spirit of Thalasseus' sloop *Amphitrite* as his third (or fourth) Anchor. If ocean trips are rare, Coraline will suffice.

Story Element
Naturally, Thalasseus is associated with stories of bargains, barter, money, trade, shopping, bazaars-between-worlds, and wealth. Where coins and product change hands, Thalasseus' Estate is present.

Story Type: Mystery
Thalasseus should present the PCs with stories of mystery. He does not have that many secrets, but they are the keys to dealing with him. He is unlikely to appear in a time of need and sell the PCs exactly what they need for exactly what they can give. When he does offer a bargain, his reasons for doing so and the provenance of his stock in trade should rarely be obvious. Moreover, the central facts of his existence — the nature of his doom and his solution to it — are unknown. Even when the characters understand that Thalasseus is running from something to something, it should take a significant amount of investigation to understand what those somethings are. Ideally, it should also matter a great deal.

Locus Ambrolam and Precipice Citadel

Precipice Citadel, the sanctuary of the Divine Imperator Ambrolam, hangs between the Earth and the Ash. It sits on the intersection of two ribbons of land, each ten miles wide, braided together like a DNA strand. They rise from the Citadel to the Ash, curving around one another so that one touches Yggdrasil on a direct course for Heaven and the other skates down towards Hell. The other end of each ribbon curves down from the Citadel to Earth, one shrinking into a side road on a Los Angeles freeway and the other merging into a Wales mountain road.

On the Ash, Ambrolam's Chancel merges into the Milkweed Branch of the Appian Way — one of seven vast roads that travel the whole length of Creation. The Creator built the Appian Way with a single word; it runs along the gnarled and twisted surface of the Ash, but its main course is straighter than any razor's edge. Standing on the Way, one can see the distant radiance of Heaven and the faraway fires of Hell. The winds carry the tang of both beauty and corruption. The rivers that score the Ash's surface duck under the Way, whether made of water, hatred, boiling lead, or an effusion of hope. A complete journey along the Way takes several weeks — or several months, or several years, or a lifetime; the Ash obeys no simple measures of distance or time. Travelers can roam the byways off the great roads for an eternity.

Ambrolam is a True God, born when the Earth divided from the sea, but its heart lies elsewhere. It wants to leave the cradle of one tiny little planet and become a creature of the universe. More precisely, since Ambrolam is part of the Earth, the True God hopes to pull a metaphysical coup and flood

One road gleamed silver, and wove off among the trees like a drunken snake. It soaked up all the moonlight and cast it back at the sky. Another path burned with soft and painless fires, darting from pebble to pebble, sparking and snapping and popping. It took a straight course, and desert sands surrounded its edge. The last road was nothing but dirt and ash — simple, primitive, and undifferentiated. Yet it was beautiful. In my heart, I could hear the third road singing. I loved it and I feared it.

"Which direction do I take?" I asked my guide.

She cocked her head to one side. "Does it matter?"

I spoke patiently: "As my guide, I feel that you are better equipped to answer that question than I."

"Oh." She looked flattered. "Well, I look at it like this: any road you walk will take you where you want to go, if you just follow it far enough."

—from An Ultimately Circular Journey, *by Melanie Tumbarius*

You are excessively human. I do not care for humans. They are a local and ultimately futile phenomenon. Return to me when you have a nature better fit to the divine essence within you.
—Ambrolam, Divine Imperator of Chaos, Borders, and Strife

His Imperial Majesty, Ambrolam
the Augur on Two Roads

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	5: Exemplar	6
Domain	3: Marquis/Marchessa	5
Realm	5: Tempest	6
Spirit	0: Candleflame	5

Gifts and Virtues Immortal
Limits/Restrictions Restriction: Cannot Guise itself (permanently monstrous)
Affiliation: Ambrolam's Code (see below)
Wound Levels 3 Deadly Wounds (Immortal)
3 Serious Wounds
3 Surface Wounds

Original Imperator Properties
Cold
Harvest

Acquired Imperator Properties
Polished Skill: Self-presentation, grooming, and fashion
Prophetic
11 Dynasty Points

Affiliation: Ambrolam's Code
1. Accept no limits to your ambition
2. Respect a price paid in blood
3. Trust no law or order

the Ash with Earth's nature. If its plans succeed, all worlds save Hell would become reflections of Earth rather than Heaven — but achieving this goal is far in the future, if possible at all. For now, Ambrolam sits in Precipice Citadel and gazes up at the Ash, avarice and resentment dancing in its hundred thousand eyes.

Many Powers use the roads through Locus Ambrolam as a route to the Ash. While Ambrolam does charge a small tithe on occasion — such as a few miracle points, an organ, a favor, or a Thought-Record of the Power's journey — the trip through its Chancel is safer than the free roads and cheaper than most safe ones.

By treaty, Inquisitors may use Ambrolam's roads without cost when pursuing suspects onto the Ash. In the case of Parasiel and Sakhrat's Powers, this agreement is firmly established. The Powers of Ram-Khvastra and Sulaya have not yet tested it.

Ambrolam must advance its grander, long-term goals even at the expense of lesser but more immediate goals. Just as gifts have strong meaning for the Wild, a sacrifice of blood has strong meaning to Ambrolam. Ambrolam cannot casually dismiss those who fight desperate and costly battles or spill their own blood to prove a point. Similarly, Ambrolam (and anyone else who follows its code) cannot shrink from making such sacrifices themselves when the cause merits them. Finally, Ambrolam, as a creature of chaos, can lose strength from trusting in law, treaty, or order and then being betrayed.

Locus Ambrolam
Locus Ambrolam has a burgeoning population and an advanced urban lifestyle. Its inhabitants have developed almost all of the Chancel's surface, on both sides. They harvest food, metal, and stone from the birds that flock around the Chancel — avian species made out of silicon, gold, silver, iron, wheat, rice, corn, strawberry pulp, and hundreds of other key substances thrive in its rarefied air. Great engine-driven gondolas ply the air, scooping up hundreds of birds in their nets. Canny hunters wearing mechanical wings stalk the great gemstone rocs and the fierce needle-beaked uranium birds.

The Erus Ben Cynydd, a fiercely ugly man who prefers his vices excessive and his servants servile, assists the Chancel's Powers in the governance of the realm. More capable with Realm miracles than any of the local Nobilis, he has had more than a few legendary clashes with them over how the Chancel ought to be run.

- Resources: Extrapolative Technology (2 points)
- Resources: Weird Steampunk Science (1 point)
- Extra Landlord: Warden (–3 points)
- Spirit Gate to World Ash costing 0 RMPs (4 points)
- Important (0 points)

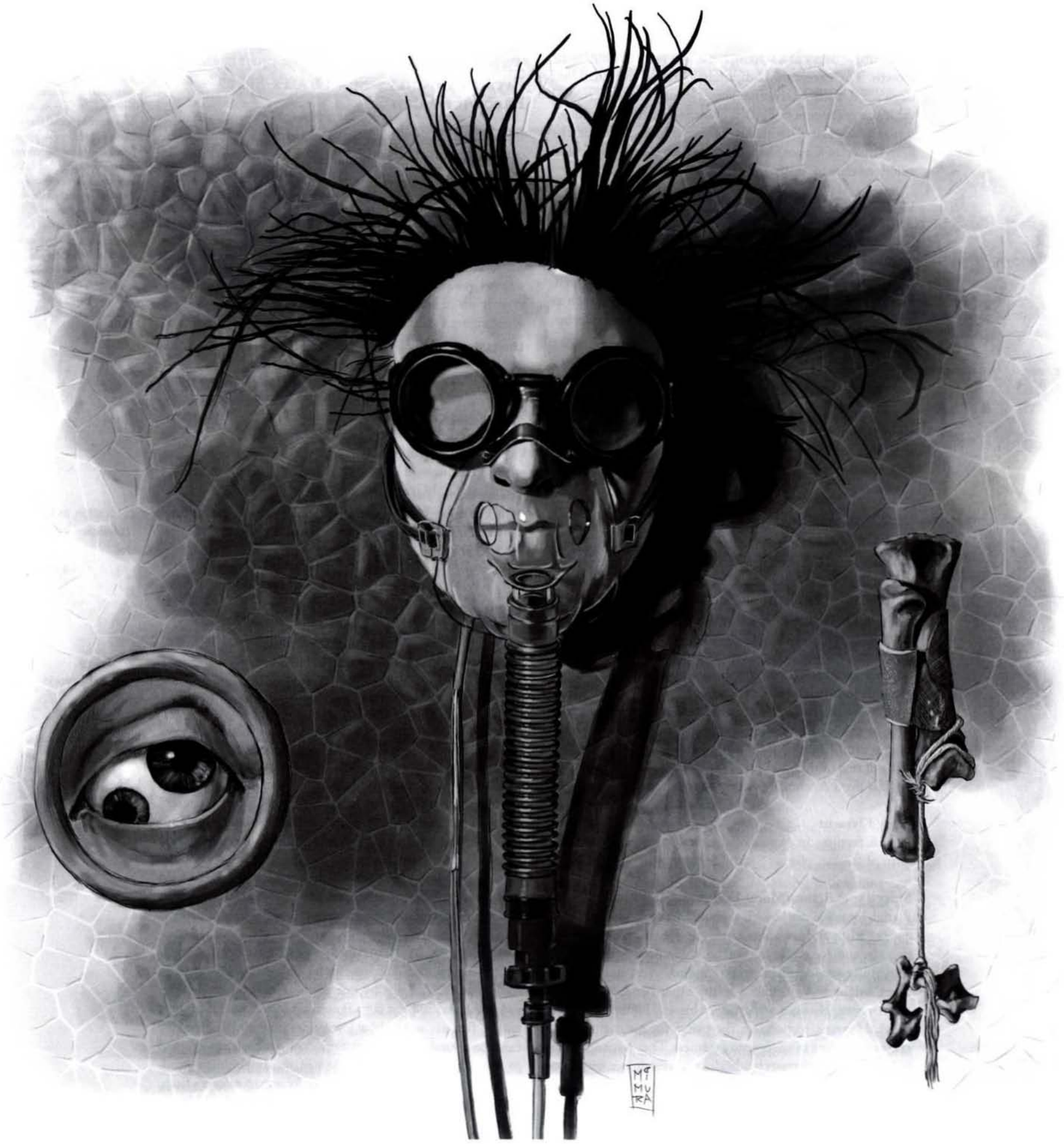
Note: This Chancel is not point-balanced.

The Power of Chaos: Patrick Romney's-Son Olam's-Serf Precipice-Lord
Patrick represents the purest incarnation of disaster and chaos in all the world. In him, all the random disorder and disruption that plagues the Earth meets and suffers apotheosis, transcending its nature, becoming a mirror of Creation. As Patrick describes it, "Faced with disorderly and random circumstances, a good man might behave virtuously sixty or seventy per cent of the time, and malevolently only ten. This illustrates his nature precisely. If some force of order deliberately chooses the circumstances of that man's life, the test is rigged; his behavior illustrates nothing, though he may act the perfect saint! Without chaos, nothing in existence would show its true character. Nothing would have any meaning at all."

Patrick revels in tidal waves, earthquakes, fires, and monsoons, The pain these things bring humans is nothing compared to the opportunities they offer, for in disaster humans show their true colors. Acts of self-sacrifice and betrayal abound, "and without such acts," he says, "what point in living?" He loves the random factor, "the pure and shining spark of chaos that keeps the world vital." His most common role on Inquisitorial assignments is to throw a wrench into a suspected Imperator's works — just to see what shakes out.

Estate
Patrick's Estate covers randomness, chaos, and disorder, but does not govern all the forms and outcomes of disorder. He can throw a random factor of any size into any situation, but cannot choose what that random factor will be. He can reduce

OPPOSITE:
Fetishes of the Power of Neurosis
by Raven Mimura


MIURA

the entropic decay in a system, but at the price of limiting its growth. The exception is disasters, both on the small and large scale, such as criminal activity, natural disasters, and vehicular malfunction. Patrick governs disaster as the major concept "associated" with his Estate. (His predecessor, the first Power of Chaos, had broad power over weather and games of chance, instead.)

Weaknesses
As with all of Ambrolam's Powers, Patrick follows two codes: Ambrolam's Code and his personal Code, the Code of the Angels. He can afford to violate neither, due to Ambrolam's Imperator property: Cold. A mirror of Creation himself, Patrick does not cast a reflection. Symbols of order, such as precisely straight lines and monotonous sounds/waveforms, repulse him and force him to retreat.

Design
Patrick's Design is nothing but the flower of Chaos wrapped around the flower of Order. The flower of Chaos is a closed white flower with a double circle of petals and vicious-looking thorns. The flower of Order is an open black flower with four identical petals and leaves in pairs on opposite sides of the stem.

Associated Non-Player Characters
Patrick has three Anchors. One is Owain Glyndwr, Prince of Wales, rebel against English rule. In his mortal life, Patrick worshipped the man as a hero. A decade after the Chancel's creation, when Patrick became the second Marquis of Chaos, he found Owain in Monnington Court and slowed his entropic clock to a trickle. Owain has endured ever since, irrevocably set in his ways but a strong and talented leader nevertheless. He currently manages a small multinational, Harlech Industries, on Patrick's behalf.

Patrick has had a number of hobbies over the years, to help keep his heart alive. For the last four decades, he has kept several beehives. His second Anchor, Chelsea, is the spirit of one of them.

His third Anchor is for the HG to determine.

Story Element
Patrick features in stories of disaster, whether it takes the form of famine, plague, flood, fire, or massive EMP pulse.

Story Type: Action/Moral Fable
Patrick loves the world with a whole heart. He seeks to bring out the truth and beauty in Creation. He will happily suffer to help someone else transcend their nature to become something wonderful. Patrick Romney's-son is a hero — clean, bright and glorious. On the other hand, he is not a human hero. He does not consider himself bound by mortal codes. Humans, to him, are the paints for his masterwork, raw material he can shape into greatness. They have no rights in his eyes. Patrick starts landslides and avalanches, sets cities on fire, and knocks airplanes from the sky as a regular part of his duties. Yet, he has a soul as pure as Galahad's; he does not discard human morality out of self-interest. On the other hand, he has killed tens of thousands of humans in his years in office. Stories with Patrick in them can easily become moral fables. The contradiction in his behavior should give both benevolent and maleficent Powers new thoughts on the moral compass of their condition. Like Ianthe, Patrick also moves stories towards an active, adventurous basis. He does not hold back from violence or valiancy when the situation demands, and highly charged, dramatic disasters follow in his wake.

The Power of Chaos, Patrick Romney's-Son Olam's-Serf Precipice-Lord

Once, I found a child trapped under the rubble of an earthquake I had caused. That tore my heart! I knew she would not be found; that her death would serve no purpose; that I could save her where no one else could. Yet had I done so, I would have negated the truth of the earthquake, rendered the disaster meaningless. It would have had no sting, without such deaths as hers. I did not save her, but I did sit beside her and sing to her as she died. It was a very long seven days.
—The Lord Patrick, Marquis of Chaos

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	1: Metahuman	5
Domain	3: Marquis	5
Realm	1: Radiant	5
Spirit	2: Incandescent Flame	5

Gifts and Virtues
Eternal
Elemental
Teleportation (to any disaster or extremely chaotic location)
Virtue: Selfless

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Repulsed by symbols of order
Restriction: No reflection
Affiliation: Code of the Angels (personal code)
Affiliation: Ambrolam's Code (from Cold Imperator)

Wound Levels
1 Deadly Wound
2 Serious Wounds
2 Surface Wounds

Teleportation: Patrick's Gift
Patrick purchases his Gift of teleportation as a lesser change of his own location, as follows:

MIRACLE LEVEL	INVOCATION	RANGE	UTILITY	COMMON	COST
6 (Domain)	Simple	Self only	Limited	No	
6 CPs	–1	–3	–2	+1	1 CP

Bonds

STRENGTH	SUBJECT
7	The sanctity of his Estate
5	Hollyhock God's discretion
4	His ability to protect and create truth and beauty in the world
3	The success of his Inquisitorial duties
1	His Anchors

The Power of Borders, Walking Eye
Ambrolam created Walking Eye by embedding a piece of its soul in a patch of dirt by one of the Chancel's roads. The patch bubbled and spit out a Power, a thing of dust and gravel, and its first act was to bow low before its god. Walking Eye exists as a kind of mobile extension of Ambrolam, designed to travel the world and the Ash in the Imperator's stead. Upon returning to the Chancel, it sinks into its master's flesh, becoming nothing more than a smear of dust and pebbles on

the true god's outer membrane. There, it communicates every detail of its experiences in a way other Powers cannot.

Estate
Walking Eye's Estate covers all boundaries defined by life between one place and another. It can also affect boundaries between less physical things with its Domain. Walking Eye controls locks, walls, state borders, and class boundaries. When the Mayor of Cincinnati offended it, Walking Eye erased the distinctions between citizen and criminal. For forty days and nights in Cincinnati, the law struck at random, ignoring the most blatant acts of criminal malice and arresting innocents. Degenerate acts of license and outlawry became commonplace. The Mayor himself was killed in the view of seventeen witnesses on the fortieth day. Police have no leads, as no witness considered this act worth reporting.

Weaknesses
The vestigial "mind" of a patch of dirt, even enhanced to human level by Imperial magic, is not sufficient to bear the weight of an Imperator-shard. The Power of Borders is therefore utterly mad. It has compounded the problem by tearing down all the borders within its own intellect in the quest for greater understanding of the world. Sometimes it speaks with precise diction, clarity, and calm; sometimes it babbles; sometimes it chants prophecy. Walking Eye is a monster. Even members of its own Familia are rarely comfortable in its presence. It is also physically monstrous, and must spend 2 AMPs to Guise itself before it can pass for human on Earth.

Walking Eye follows Ambrolam's Code both as its personal code and as the Code Ambrolam's Imperator Property: Cold inspires.

Design
Walking Eye's Design shows the flower of Borders and the flower of Roads against an "eye of Horus" symbol. The flower of Borders is an open blue flower with five separate petals, forming a bell, with a scattering of thorns. The flower of Roads is an open white cup-shaped flower, with heart-like leaves at different points on opposite sides of the stem.

Associated Non-Player Characters
Walking Eye has one Anchor, Serafina Duncan — a human woman with whom it has fallen, quite to its own surprise, in love. The creature does not understand the emotion, though it knows it must conceal it. It lacks the basic human experience to give context to its longings. All it knows is Serafina Duncan is the most beautiful thing it has ever seen, and it will protect her with its life. Serafina finds the creature horrific, but her attempts to protect herself against it are futile — when she seeks police custody, reinforces her doors, or buys large violent dogs, all she does is create a border around her life that Walking Eye can unmake with a thought.

A few of the humans who have succumbed to *dementia animus* over the years have found love in the arms of a nonhuman spirit. The Anunnaki, descendants of gnomes (earth spirits) and humans, worship Walking Eye as a kind of transcendent version of themselves. Small, gnarled, wryly philosophical, and strong, the Anunnaki often act as Walking Eye's agents.

The Power of Borders, Walking Eye

It is the role of living things to draw boundaries, and it is my role to decide which boundaries shall endure.
—Walking Eye, Borders'-Regal

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	0: Of Mortal Form	8
Domain	5: Regal	5
Realm	1: Radiant	5
Spirit	0: Candleflame	5

Gifts and Virtues
Immortal
Glorious (can inspire terror)
Virtue: Loves Serafina

Limits/Restrictions
Limit: Made of dust and gravel in humanoid shape (+2 AMPs, included in attribute total)
Limit: Psychotic (+1 AMP, included in attribute total)
Restriction: Does not understand human society or motivations
Restriction: Sometimes speaks prophecy involuntarily, regardless of company
Affiliation: Ambrolam's Code (-3 MPs for violations, +1 MP for service)

Wound Levels
1 Deadly Wound (Immortal)
1 Serious Wound
2 Surface Wounds

Bonds

Strength	Subject
5	Hollyhock God's discretion
5	The safety, health, and happiness of its Imperator, Ambrolam
5	Its Anchor, Serafina
3	Its ability to travel and observe on behalf of Ambrolam
2	The sanctity of its Estate

Story Element
Walking Eye appears in stories featuring physical or social barriers, particularly those that are tricky for even Powers to overcome.

Story Type: Horror
Walking Eye's presence should invoke the natural human fear both of insanity and the dangerously insane. It is a creature of horror, possessing an alien and incomprehensible consciousness and nature. It utters prophecies, thus setting certain aspects of the future in stone — and the inevitable approach of a terrible destiny is a useful tool for a story of dread. An HG can use Walking Eye's love for Serafina to highlight its inhumanity, to evoke a protective response from chivalrous Powers, or as Walking Eye's one hope for redemption.

Power of Strife, Ada Willamette
Ada Willamette was a "fallen woman" in the Old West, an era with much the same feel both before and after the loss of five hundred years. The formation of the Los Angeles end of Ambrolam's Chancel brought Ada into the world of the Nobilis. A competent and effective Power, she ruthlessly

advanced the cause of Strife in the world for centuries without a hitch. Then she paid an Inquisitorial visit to the Mimic Nathanor and slew it with its own weapon, the Abhorrent dagger she has christened Kottos but sometimes calls Injustice. The weapon remained with her as she staggered away from its corpse. For over seventy years, she has sought to discard the blade, but it always returns to her. Its one unique virtue compounds the problem: Imperators cannot perceive the blade, nor any descriptions of it. Even Lord Entropy, she believes, is still unaware of Kottos' existence, despite her enemies' repeated attempts to inform him. The alternative is, in her mind, worse: if Lord Entropy, or any other Imperator, does know that she possesses an Abhorrent Weapon, they are deliberately refusing to acknowledge it.

Ada does not feel entirely comfortable with her victory over Nathanor. It seemed far too easy. She has fought Mimics and Imperators before, with and without her Familia at her side. Usually, simply surviving requires her uttermost effort. Even given that she had an unusual opportunity to kill Nathanor, she feels that it must have deliberately given its life to the blade. The burning question that keeps her awake at night is, "Why?"

Ada's preferred weapons are a pair of ancient but carefully maintained six-shooters taken from a man who'd abused her in mortal life. Over the years, however, Ada has begun using Kottos on occasion — "when absolutely necessary." The inevitable decay of her sense of self-worth as a servant of Creation and an enemy of the Excrucians has produced a marked improvement in her self-presentation. Though a Power of the Dark, she has abandoned the horrific visage she once cultivated — it no longer seems suitable to describe the nature of her personal corruption. Instead, she adopts an appearance increasingly reminiscent of Excrucian beauty. The face this gives her is equally horrifying to her fellow Powers, but almost entrancing to the mortals she encounters.

Ada considers violence natural and more or less healthy. She promotes her Estate at a local level, building up a grass roots presence for Strife in the mortal world. Often, she takes advantage of the small scale of her efforts to know her victims personally, visiting both sides of an escalating conflict for dinner and conversation before all-out mayhem erupts.

Estate

Ada's Estate includes all disorganized, emotional violence. Ada also has influence over violent and brutal individuals, those most prone to such violence.

Weaknesses

Like all of Ambrolam's Powers, Ada serves Ambrolam's Code as well as her own. Her allegiance is further divided by oaths she feels reluctant to forswear. The first is never to harm servants of Strife. She swore this oath in a successful attempt to bind herself more closely to her Estate. Ada's second oath is to heed any honest request for aid from a prostitute. She swore this to keep from forgetting her roots, and this oath also serves its purpose well. Ada often considers her tie to Kottos a weakness, although it also offers many benefits.

Power of Strife, Ada Willamette

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	5: Exemplar	5
Domain	1: Baronet	11
Realm	1: Radiant	5
Spirit	1: Hearthfire	6

There's a beast in everybody's heart. If you don't let it out to hurt other people, it starts sharpening its claws on the walls of its home.
—The Bright Lady Ada Willamette, Domina of Strife

Gifts and Virtues
Immutable
Focus: Kottos/Injustice (The Negative Gift, level 7; Durant; 6 DMPs, included in attribute total)

Limits/Restrictions
Limit: Bound to Kottos (+1 SMP, included in attribute total)
Restriction: Cannot harm a mortal dedicated to Strife (terrorists, some soldiers, and so on.)
Restriction: Cannot refuse an honest request for aid from a prostitute
Affiliation: Code of the Dark (personal code)
Affiliation: Ambrolam's Code (from Cold Imperator)

Wound Levels
3 Deadly Wounds (Durant)
3 Serious Wounds
3 Surface Wounds

Bonds

STRENGTH	SUBJECT
8	Hollyhock God's discretion
4	The sanctity of her Estate
3	Her six-shooters
3	Prostitutes (as opposed to prostitution, which she hates and has always hated)
2	Her Inquisitorial reputation

Design

Ada's Design features the flowers of Strife and Injustice encircling crossed six-shooters. The flower of Strife is a breed of Achillea — specifically, *achillea ptarmica*, white flowers with a circle of petals and jutting stamen, as opposed to War's *achillea millefolium*. The flower of Injustice is the yellow-green cone of the Hops flower, set amid broad green leaves.

Associated Non-Player Characters

Ada uses pimps as her Anchors; she feels a universal hatred towards them all. She tends to keep each Anchor for a month or so, allowing him to bask in her reflected power. Then she cuts the Anchor-Power bond, leaving her former Anchor either dead or vegetative, and moves on to claim another.

Ada employs 36 virtuous men and women to help her determine whether a given place is worthy of her attention. In groups of six, they visit various regions. If they inform her that the humans there deserve some Dark-style assistance in destroying themselves, Strife pays the area a visit. Newly chosen members of Ada's 36 sometimes try to lie to her, to convince her a degenerate town (or a city that helps humanity survive) does not merit destruction. They never succeed; Ada can read a mortal's face like a highway map.

Story Element

Ada features in stories of violence and brutality. Bar-room brawls, vicious underworld intrigues, and wars all partake in the nature of her Estate.

Story Type: Mystery
Stories involving Ada Willamette are ultimately stories of mystery. It is safe neither to ally with her nor to earn her enmity until the question of Kottos' nature is resolved — yet the other Inquisitorial Powers must do one or the other.

Other Powers cannot trust her actions or motivations while she lies under the influence of the corrupted blade. Any interaction she has with a player character could be the first move in an Excrucian plot — or as innocent as any action of the Power of Strife can be.

Locus Sakhrat

All employees are hereby ordered to sever their personal relationships and draw a new love life from the pool. Any employee discovered without a broken heart shall submit to a voluntary intimacy test to verify the lack of a long-standing previous commitment.
—Interoffice memo, Amoena Ltd., Locus Sakhrat

Sakhrat lives in the world of the mind. Its Chancel exists in no physical place, but hovers just above the rippling surface of the mass unconscious. Skiffs launched from the Chancel's docks harvest jewels from the minds of geniuses and grow rice on the psyches of the gentle. Diving beneath the waves, a visitor can tear through the veil between mind and body to materialize near any human living. One can also enter the Chancel from any human's presence. This always deposits the visitor in the Labyrinth of Courtly Love, which is detailed below.

Sakhrat feeds off the "force of mind" which radiates from humans and the greatest spirits, the same force of mind that translates into intelligence in prosaic reality. Sakhrat itself has an ongoing project in the mortal world, promoting the growth of greater minds and culling away inferior human food sources.

The culture of Locus Sakhrat is austere and meditative. Its people are taciturn but friendly, reserved but benevolent, and possessed of a rare and subtle wit. A massive bureaucracy governs the Chancel. Its inhabitants, acclimated to the Chancel, can move through the paperwork as if it were air, unless actively opposed by another trained bureaucrat. Visitors may find it more difficult. Powers naturally receive full co-operation from those with whom they interact directly, but other levels of the system are rarely so obliging.

The Chancel's residents say that at the Chancel's creation it floated nearly half a mile above the "sea" of the mass unconscious. The inhabitants of the time lowered skiffs to the surface with long ropes. The Chancel has sunk slowly over the years, until now only a yard or two separates it from the combined minds of humanity. Sakhrat has not chosen to explain the probable effects of immersion. Many of the Chancel's inhabitants know that Sakhrat itself was near death for most of its career on Earth, and that only recently has the infusion of power from dissected traitors and Mimics tipped the balance to pull the Imperator out of danger. Chancel residents hope that this has saved Locus Sakhrat as well.

Several other Imperators have Chancels "in the world of the mind", although none is as prominent and easily found as Sakhrat's. Some hypothesize that the Excrucians' major Earthly stronghold exists in the same non-space as Locus Sakhrat, well hidden from anyone looking for a physical entrance. If so, it might be all too easy for the Children of Harumaph to invade Sakhrat's realm.

Her Imperial Majesty Sakhrat
The Gray Mask

Your death is a tragedy, but it will improve the gene pool.
—Sakhrat, Imperator of Mazes, Records, Trails, and Bureaucracy

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	6: Imperator	6
Domain	3: Marquis/Marchessa	5
Realm	5: Tempest	5
Spirit	3: Sunfire	5

Gifts and Virtues
Immortal
Glorious (awe-inspiring)
Virtue: Dedicated Inquisitor

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: No physical presence on Earth (exists in thoughts, dreams, and Chancel)
Affiliation: Sakhrat's Code (see below)

Wound Levels
3 Deadly Wounds (Immortal)
3 Serious Wounds
4 Surface Wounds

Original Imperator Properties
Harvest
Failing

Acquired Imperator Properties
4 Dynasty Points
Removed Failing Property

Affiliation: Sakhrat's Code
1. Respect thought over action.
2. An oath sworn on the Ash is sacred.
3. Serve Creation before the self.

Locus Sakhrat
Locus Sakhrat's Labyrinth of Courtly Love holds many magical creatures, some of which can become Anchors. The people of the Chancel understand both faery magic and high summoning, although few practice the latter art. They are capable technologists as well; sadly, no one can remove the devices they create from the Chancel. Such artifacts dissolve instantly into memories when they enter the corporeal world.

Excrucians may have a gate to Locus Sakhrat, via the world of the mind. Locus Sakhrat definitely has instant access to inhabited places all over the Earth.

- Hostile forces have a 2-way gate into Chancel (−4 pts)
- Magical Inhabitants (4 pts)
- Mana Mine: Failing Chancel, needs 2 MPs per session to prevent sinking (−1 pt)
- Resources: Faery Magic (2 pts)
- Resources: High Summoning (1 pt)
- Resources: Technology cannot leave Chancel (−1 pt)
- Ubiquitous (6 ps)
- Important (0 pts)

Note: This Chancel is not point-balanced.

Power of Mazes, Helissent de Reymes
As ethereal as fairy dust, as subtle as lavender, Helissent de Reymes' fascination lies with the mazes of the mind. Her

Estate represents confusion, confoundment, and deceptive façades. In mortal life, she wasted nearly to nothingness on the streets of Manchester as a disfigured beggar. As a Noble, she presides over the Labyrinth of Courtly Love, a maze that no logical or physical approach can solve. Instead, one must romance one of the soulless guides that haunt the twisty corridors and spark the seed of love within its heart. Each one poses a different romantic problem: one bitter, one untrusting, one too experienced, and even one too naïve.

In addition to Helissent herself, the Labyrinth contains one of the greatest zoos and prisons in Earth's vicinity. Tens of thousands of "interesting" human prisoners live in carefully decorated pockets of the maze, often sculpted to resemble the prisoner's natural environment. Protected from death by Realm miracles, their perceptions blurred by Helissent's power, they never leave their "homes" and do not see the Labyrinth walls beyond. Their ranks include scholars, warriors, and scientists that some Noble judged worth keeping, as well as a few notorious mortal traitors to Creation. In addition, in similarly falsified environments, she keeps a menagerie of hundreds of rare mythical creatures, from jackalopes and enfields to monsters that could kill Helissent in a fair fight if they just once realized their imprisonment. The Labyrinth also serves as the entryway to Locus Sakhrat.

Estate

Helissent's Estate covers physical mazes. By extension, she governs the "maze nature" of all situations difficult to navigate — not the situations themselves, but the degree to which they perplex, bewilder, strain the mind, and regiment the course of those within. The name and nature of her solitary Anchor is a closely guarded secret — she cannot afford to lose her chief operative in the world outside the maze.

Weaknesses

For several centuries, Helissent used her shadow as a remote puppet, a spy and a focus for miracles that behaved much like an Anchor. But she lost that Gift long ago, when her shadow turned against her. Now it has become her nemesis with abilities of its own. Like any good nemesis, it reconstitutes itself when destroyed.

An ethereal creature herself, Helissent is currently the target for the amour of the Angel of Wind. Welcome or unwelcome (she cannot decide), his attentions are terrifying. She has appealed to Sakhrat, who has territorially forbidden the Angel to coerce her — but the Serpent cannot prevent seduction. In accord with the Angel's obsession, wind-spirits all adore Helissent; sometimes they chime her name when she is near, or strive to whisk her away.

Design

Helissent's Design shows the flowers of Labyrinths and Dreams against a stylized maze. The flower of Dreams is the celestial Angelica, dyed white rather than red, with a few great ruffles instead of a mass of petals. The flower of Labyrinths is a closed silver flower with a double circle of petals and leaves in groups of three.

Power of Mazes, Helissent de Reymes

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	1: Metahuman	6
Domain	1: Baroness	5
Realm	5: Tempest	5
Spirit	0: Candleflame	5

Gifts and Virtues
Eternal
Durant

Limits/Restrictions
Limit: Weak (feats of strength and direct physical attacks at Aspect 0)
Restriction: Double (living shadow)
Restriction: Beloved of the Wind
Affiliation: Helissent's (Serpentine) Code (see below)

Wound Levels
1 Deadly Wound (Durant)
2 Serious Wounds
2 Surface Wounds

Where should you go with your life? Where do you want to go with your life? These are potent questions. In a few minutes, you will begin to ponder them, and you will not stop. You will sit there and ponder until long after you starve and your bones crumble against the wall.
—Her Majesty, Helissent de Reymes, Lady of Locus Sakhrat, Baroness of Mazes

Affiliation: Helissent's (Serpentine) Code

1. Fear not
2. Shirk no duty
3. An oath sworn under the stars is binding

Bonds

STRENGTH	SUBJECT
8	The Labyrinth of Courtly Love
5	Hollyhock God's discretion
2	The sanctity of her Estate
2	Her ability to master situations through cleverness and insight
2	Her (almost complete) collection of Regency romances
1	Her pet lemur

Associated Non-Player Characters

The Illuminated Romantic Hetaira, a secret society associated with Helissent, descends from a evangelical organization dedicated to Greek independence. The original organization, the Hetaira, slowly dwindled after Greece won freedom from Turkey. An influx of Masonic ideas created the Illuminated Hetaira, and at this point Helissent entered the picture. As part of a Nettle Rite aimed at Nephele Nikolaidhis, Helissent corrupted the Masonic society. It became a highly stylized, manners-driven group, taking on a new name and the mission of spreading the spirit of courtly love. From Nephele's dark perspective, it became a foppish joke — an insult, given her son's membership in the original Hetaira.

Story Element

Helissent appears in stories of confusion, uncertainty, and doubt, particularly when created by a deliberate campaign of concealment or an intricately structured web of relationships.

Story Type: Romance

Stories involving the Labyrinth blatantly invoke the conventions of romance. Stories dealing with Helissent herself do so more subtly. The continual courtship of the Angel of Wind, Ben Nez, should be as skillful and effective

OPPOSITE:
The Cup of Sleep
by Denise Garner



as the HG can convey. At the same time, succumbing to an Imperator's seduction is dangerous: the power of an Angel's spirit can drown a lover's soul. Even if it does not, an Angel's love still changes one as thoroughly as any enNoblement.

While Helissent considers the use of sex appeal crude, and while Ben Nez's intentions currently cramp her style, she is familiar with romance and affection as tools. She has no compunctions about using unstated promises and small kindnesses as leverage for controlling others. There are often overtones of blandishment and beguilement in the mental and social mazes she builds to pull other Nobles into line.

Power of Records, Lance Romenel

In mortal life, Lance belonged to the Cleave of Botanists. After his empowerment, he refused to abandon that association. Now no longer strictly a Botanist, he is one of the Cleave's mightiest patrons. He travels the world, battling the dangers that face his "people", from experiments in botanical magic gone wrong to the governmental persecution and environmental hazards that face the Cleave's researchers. His Inquisitorial duties receive almost cursory attention, save when Sakhrat bestirs itself to insist upon Lance's attendance.

Lance has become an annoyance to the Excrucians. This acts, paradoxically, to protect his Estate; when the Dark Horsemen wish to move against him, they usually strike at the Cleave. Other Powers will defend Lance's Estate in a pinch, after all, while few Powers care about the Cleave.

Lance drinks copiously, swears like a sailor, and has the physical presence of a Kodiak bear. His mind is almost painfully precise. While many Powers are well organized, Lance all-but-literally keeps a massively cross-referenced day planner in his head. In a tense situation, he moves like clockwork, forgetting nothing and balancing every concern with inhuman grace. His skin and clothes shed contaminants. His long hair hangs exactly where he tells it to.

Estate

Lance's Estate refers to written records and other recordings of events. He is particularly tied to deliberately filed recorded information. Due to his Constant Domain, copies of relevant writings tend to appear near to hand when their presence would not expose his nature. They vanish away again when he has read them, or chosen not to do so.

Weaknesses

As a former member of the Cleave, Lance is sworn to non-violence and sharing all he learns with the Grim King, Scorn's-Regal Joktan. Shortly after his Commencement, while visiting the rainforest, he put himself through a harrowing Mehinaku tribal ritual to scourge the second oath from his soul. The first remains a powerful influence on him, sinking into physical violence costs him a Spirit miracle point.

Lance's representation in Locus Sakhrat's heart (p. 100) is a simple but exquisitely worked golden cup. Over the years of his nobility, it has taken on more and more life, until three centuries ago it abandoned the Chancel's heart and floated off on its own. He has no control over its actions, which seem capricious at best and against his interests at the worst. A few mortals have been driven into *dementia animus* through observing the mobile cup, while others have confused it with the Holy Grail. It is unknown whether harming the cup would harm Lance, if harming it is even possible. Even so, Lance does not appreciate the cup's independance. Like all such artifacts, its condition reflects his mental state and general situation — information he would rather have in the hands of his Familia.

After six hundred years of immaculate neatness, Lance finds disorganization in others irritating and frustrating.

Power of Records, Lance Romenel

ATTRIBUTE	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
Aspect	3: Inhuman	5
Domain	0: Pawn	5
Realm	2: Realm's Heart	5
Spirit	1: Hearthfire	5

Gifts and Virtues
Constant Domain: Major Divinations
Eternal

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Free-floating Realm's Heart
Restriction: Sworn to non-violence
Restriction: Compulsively neat
Affiliation: Code of the Light

Wound Levels
2 Deadly Wounds
2 Serious Wounds
3 Surface Wounds

Bonds

STRENGTH	SUBJECT
7	The Cleave of the Botanists
5	Hollyhock God's discretion
3	The sanctity of his Estate
2	His organized approach to the world (hard to harm, but easy to turn against him)
1	His Anchor, the Cleave's Minister of the Right
1	His Newfoundland dog, Fezzik
1	The exotic garden beyond his chateau in the Chancel

Every time someone records your actions, he steals a bit of your soul. Every time you read someone's story, you get a bit of their soul back. For most of us, these effects remain in balance. The illiterate's fate is very sad.
—His Vigilance, Lance Romenel of Locus Sakhrat, Power of Records

Design

Lance chose the flowers of Records and Guardianship. The flower of Records is the Scribe Bloom, not found on Earth; its white petals drip with ink and an aged face shows beneath the pollen. The flower of Guardianship is the Ashflower, with closed, white, trumpet-like flowers with few petals and paired leaves. These flowers twine about a caduceus against a gray background with a white raindrop pattern.

Associated Non-Player Characters

Lance's predefined Anchor, Mareva Christian, serves as one of the highest officials in the Cleave. She is not the most capable magician in the Cleave, but she can work substantial Earthly magics with floral essences.

Lance is often seen with Fezzik, a massive black dog. Lance's Aspect 3-level skill at animal training has heightened

Fezzik's keen natural intelligence. According to Lance, the Newfie has saved his life on at least two occasions.

Story Element
Lance tends to appear in stories concerning more esoteric forms of research, from studies of botanical magic to searches through libraries buried under Antarctica. Although he does not concern himself overmuch with study, he takes a keen interest in the safety of the records others study from — dutiful or not, he remains a Power.

Story Type: Action
Lance is usually involved in a dozen action stories at once. When he crosses paths with the PCs, he's likely to drag them into a couple of them. If a government is toppling, a strange monster is rampaging, or the only airport out of a remote wilderness region just went up in a fireball, Lance is likely to be in the thick of things. His commitment to avoid violence doesn't keep him out of trouble; he knows if the stakes are high enough, he can always throw a few punches and swallow the guilt.

Power of Bureaucracy, Idony Saint-Germain

Idony is the third Power of Bureaucracy, born and raised in Locus Sakhrat. The systemic shock of Commencement reduced her body instantly to ash. Unwilling to lose his first choice for a new Power, Sakhrat captured her soul before it fled and bound it into a cloth doll. Idony considers her new body undignified and embarrassing, with its fixed smile and its floppy limbs; she is slowly accumulating the parts she needs to build a new body. She will settle for nothing less than the best: scavenged pieces from dead Imperators and Excrucians, legendary artifacts, and the like. Right now, her new body is little more than a heart, a circulatory system, a few muscles, and the left index finger of the Strategist Iaziz. Still, the pieces are beginning to come together. Already Idony Mk. II can lurch around in response to the doll's mental commands.

Idony is an easy Power to contact. She uses Internet chat regularly, knowing few suspect her of being a rag doll animated with the essence of Bureaucracy. She even reads and replies to her email, despite the rumors that some Excrucian-spawned viruses can escape a system mailbox to afflict one's files, one's hardware, or even one's physical body with plagues.

Estate
Idony's Estate covers all the mechanics and apparatuses of bureaucracy, as well as the major bureaucracies themselves. She can increase the red tape surrounding and impeding any action or activity; she can also whisk it away.

Weaknesses
Idony is an animate rag doll; this is a significant weakness. She also owes many favors in exchange for help constructing her new body. She can't collect very many Imperator and Excrucian parts on her own, and those who have them don't sell them cheaply.

Power of Bureaucracy, Idony Saint-Germain

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	1: Metahuman	7
Domain	3: Marchessa	5
Realm	1: Radiant	5
Spirit	1: Hearthfire	5

Do not look at these events as the system keeping you down. Say, rather, "The footprints on my back hold the system high." Accept that. Be proud of that. The system is more important than you are.
—The Lady Idony, Marchessa of Bureaucracy

Gifts and Virtues
Immortal
Create "Makeshift Men" (see below)
Virtue: Greedy and Controlling

Limits/Restrictions
Limit: Disabled (rag doll body, +2 AMPs, included in attribute total)
Restriction: Owes many favors (for help assembling Idony Mk. II)
Affiliation: Code of the Dark

Wound Levels*
2 Serious Wounds (Immortal)
3 Surface Wounds

Makeshift Men: Idony's Gift
Idony can transform vermin and refuse into loyal human servants. She buys this as a lesser change of nasty things, as follows:

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common	Cost
6 (Domain)	Simple	One other	One trick	No	
6 CPs	–1	–2	–3	+1	1 CP

Bonds

Strength	Subject
5	Idony Mk. II (the project as a whole)
5	Hollyhock God's discretion
3	Idony Mk. II (the currently-assembled body)
3	The sanctity of her Estate
2	Her Makeshift Men
2	Her Internet identity

Design
The background of Idony's design shows a swirl of incarnadine and black. A gray square, symbolizing bureaucracy, blocks out part of the swirl. Inside the square shines the flower of Jealousy, Adder's Tongue, a pendulous lily-like bright yellow flower with a purple tinge. In full color, the Design is not easy on the eye, nor does Idony intend for it to be.

Associated Non-Player Characters
Idony is mean-spirited and greedy, with a great passion for controlling others. She commands an extensive organization on Earth, primarily but not entirely composed of the "Makeshift Men" — vermin and garbage transformed with Idony's personal Gift into human form. The *aqrabuamelu*, her scorpion servants, are vital and ruthless, perfectly suited to claim a high place in mortal society. Her trashpile folk serve any number of criminal enterprises as low-level thugs.

One of Idony's Anchors is the horrific skinless, boneless body that will one day be her own. Like Idony's rag-body, it is immortal and almost invulnerable. It has no true will of its own. Except for occasional instinct-driven wandering, it takes no action unless she invades its mind. The HG determines the nature of her other Anchor.

Story Element
Idony appears in stories of "the system", whether the mortal bureaucracies that bedevil an Anchor's life or the morass of laws and social boundaries that limit a Power's ambition. Whenever the apparatus of government seems out to get the characters, or an NPC, Idony's Estate is on hand.

Story Type: Horror
Stories built around Idony can feature either genuine horror or a campy, schlocky variant thereof. Any story featuring her probably involves her rag doll body, half-finished Anchor, sinister servants, or deceptive Internet presence. To make these elements of true horror, the HG must employ a light and subtle touch. To make them a proper burlesque, on the other hand, requires that the HG relax and discard restraint.

Power of Trails, Superstes Annabelle Zupay

No one's quite sure where Annabelle came from. One bright spring morning a century ago, Sakhrat was the Imperator of Bureaucracy, Records, and Mazes. That night, the Serpent Imperial ruled four Estates, with its Power Annabelle the lady of the fourth. Sakhrat reportedly finds the matter somewhat embarrassing, as does Annabelle. Their silence leaves others in the Valde Bellum free to speculate. The Tabloids'-Regal often suggests that Annabelle's presence indicates the existence of some kind of anti-Excrucian, mysteriously creating Estates out of thin air in contravention of the normal process. Other speculations run the gamut from the mundane theory that Sakhrat commanded the Estate of Trails all along, concealing this from its Imperial peers, to the eccentric notion that Annabelle is a temporal anomaly created at Sakhrat's death and proceeding backwards through time.

Annabelle is Locus Sakhrat's resident magician, a master of the art of High Summoning. She deals on a regular basis with the strange creatures that live beyond the Weirding Wall. This increases the suspicion with which some regard her, but also the respect; for the powers one can acquire through High Summoning are varied and strange.

The Power of Trails has a grand, if incomplete, construction project to match Helissent's Labyrinth of Courtly Love. Annabelle has spent much of the last century constructing the Milliped of Human Striving, a crossroads suspended from the sky. Great bridges descend from the crossroads to a thousand points of the Chancel's surface. Another thousand bridges lead to the towers of the Milliped. Each tower bridge represents a different path by which human ambition is expressed. Sakhrat performed the basic construction on the Milliped. Annabelle spends much of her time furnishing the towers. "Properly" completing the decoration requires many artifacts found only on Earth or in the Chancels of other Powers.

Annabelle is a woman of good cheer, constantly smiling and liked by most of the Powers she knows. Mortal opinions vary — Annabelle considers it her duty, as the Power of Trails, to stretch the "potential" of her Estate, and the strange trails she sets down have ruined as many lives as they have enhanced. Torturous chains of logic have led physicists to great discoveries and innocent men to the gallows.

Power of Trails
Superstes Annabelle Zupay

Attribute	Level	Miracle Points
Aspect	1: Metahuman	5
Domain	4: Duchess	5
Realm	0: Citizen	5
Spirit	1: Hearthfire	5

Gifts and Virtues
Immortal
Secondary Domain: Science (Domain 1)

Limits/Restrictions
Restriction: Cannot harm the selfless
Affiliation: Code of the Angels

Wound Levels
1 Deadly Wound (Immortal)
2 Serious Wounds
2 Surface Wounds

Bonds

Strength	Subject
8	Hollyhock God's discretion
4	The sanctity of her Estate
4	The Milliped of Human Striving
2	Her privacy
1	The success of her Inquisitorial duties
1	Her bargains with creatures from beyond the Weirding Wall

There are certain lines of thought that can destroy the physical body; shatter the mind; unbind the structure of the universe; shake the sky; and cause the sun to fall. There are lines of thought that lead the thinker into the maw of creatures older than Creation, and chains of logic that can transform one's fingers into light. I do not wish to share these thoughts with you; it is sufficient that you know that they exist, and that I know them.
—Her Grace, the Duchess of Trails, Superstes Annabelle Zupay

Estate
Annabelle's Estate does not represent physical roads, an Estate amply governed by the inhuman Isabel, but rather the roads information travels, the paths that lead from one conclusion to the next. With lesser or major destruction miracles, Annabelle can hide the truth from mortals indefinitely. With creative miracles, she can lead them to whatever conclusion she chooses. She can even create a chain of logic and evidence that contradicts obvious facts, leading mortals to ridiculous conclusions: "consciousness does not exist", "the world has no Creator", or "a cat can be both alive and dead".

As a natural extension of her Estate, Annabelle has some power over scholars and scholarly achievement. Her Secondary Domain over Science extends it still further, giving her weak influence over science and technology — the products of logical investigation.

Weaknesses
The law of Annabelle's nature insists that she respect the truly selfless. She may snub them socially, but she cannot harm them, nor may she harm those whose mix of selfishness and selflessness she does not know. While the altruistic rarely set themselves against Annabelle, her enemies occasionally use innocents as pawns in ploys aimed against her.

Design
Annabelle's Design shows the flowers of Trails and Joy inside a simple circle. The flower of Joy is the four-leaved clover;

the flower of Trails is an open cup-shaped black flower with clusters of heart-shaped leaves.

Associated Non-Player Characters
Annabelle's primary Anchor is her daughter, Maxine Campbell, a leading forensic detective who consults on high-profile cases for police departments across the globe. The HG chooses her second Anchor.

Annabelle regularly associates with the strangest possible creatures, summoned from outside Creation. Her strongest ally from the Lands Beyond Creation is the Lamp Image, a vaporous scholar whose touch chases away both beauty and corruption. Their discussions focus on abstract questions of ethics. It also offers her its loyalty and service. In exchange, it receives opportunities to feed from Annabelle's terrene essence. When it has recently fed, Annabelle becomes erratic, undisciplined, and unsympathetic.

Story Element
Annabelle appears in essentially linear stories, where the characters follow a chain of events or bits of evidence to the only logical conclusion.

Story Type: Mystery
Annabelle's presence increases the mystery of a game. Her origins are unknown, but it is the motivations of those who surround her that are truly obscure. She lives at the center of a web of well-disguised plots and schemes. Dozens of Powers have theories about where Annabelle comes from, and ideas about how to take advantage of it — ideally without giving their hypothesis away.

Stories

"I have a story," he said. "I will trade it for my life."
"Don't like stories."
"It's got lots of crunching bones and tasty flesh in it."
"So do you."
"Please," he said. "Kill me, then. But hear it first. So it doesn't die."
—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

Most of the stories in your *Treachery* campaign should derive from the player characters' relationships with one another and with the campaign's NPCs. Three forces, for example, would drive encounters between a PC Power of Suicide and Helissent de Reymes. First, the social relationship between the two Powers; second, the tension between despair and romance; and third, the positive feedback between the confusion of Mazes and the Estate of Suicide.

The best source of long-term stories is the two Powers' social relationship. If the PC's avarice for the Labyrinth and the vast resources contained therein dominates their association, a classic story puts the Labyrinth temporarily in the PC's hands, with no one ultimately profiting thereby. Such a story would provide a chance for the themes of suicide, deception, and romance to play out one against another. (This works best if the Hollyhock God integrates appropriate hidden drawbacks into ownership of the Labyrinth from the story's beginning. A plot that railroads the PCs into failure and ruin frustrates typical players, and rightly so.)

The themes associated with Helissent and the PC can also interact more directly. If one of Helissent's prisoners becomes suicidal and she prevents them from killing themselves, the prisoner might send a prayer to the Power of Suicide for aid. Should the PC answer the petition, the two Powers could decide the case in many different ways. They might "walk together", via miracles of major divination, through hypothetical futures where the prisoner dies, or lives; where the idea of imprisonment is destroyed; or where the idea of suicide is; and from these explorations of imaginary lands determine which Estate has the right to dictate the prisoner's fate. Alternately, Helissent might agree to free a prisoner from her maze in exchange for the PC's removing a given human's ability to commit suicide in any fashion, intentionally or otherwise. Helissent is curious about whether such a nigh-immortal individual would be useful to her. The development of this experiment of Helissent's, in which the PC will hopefully take an interest, would become the story.

In addition to stories deriving from the PCs' interaction with the major NPCs of the campaign, characters should deal with a flower rite every two to five sessions. Sometimes this is a small detail complicating a more unusual plot, other times a long story in itself. Similarly, the PCs should deal with their Anchors' lives, the affairs of the Chancel, and their duties as Inquisitorial Powers every two to five sessions each. The HG need not dedicate an entire session to these stories; a scene or two suffices, although each of these event types can provide grand multi-session stories as well.

Starting Out

My first steps after the pain of Commencement were like poetry. My body felt so light — like air. Like music. Like a river.
Do not let the wonder of Nobility fade from your life. Never forget that first step.
It is beauty.
—from Becoming Noble, *by Fayola Osiagobare*

This story is described in depth, to show how you might construct a complete Nobilis story of your own. It assumes that the other Inquisitorial Powers know the route into the PCs' Chancel and have Ram-Khvastra's permission to visit diplomatically. Naturally, PCs with high enough Realm can force unwelcome visitors to leave, given enough effort and provocation.

After players design their characters, their Chancel, and their Imperator's Properties, a typical *Treachery* campaign begins with the player characters' Commencement — probably in late November, in IC time. Ram-Khvastra claims a small area on Earth (which contains the PCs' mortal selves), transforms it into the Chancel, infuses the player characters with power, and summons them before its august self. The PCs have the opportunity to ask questions or demand explanations. This is an opportunity to answer in an IC scene any important questions a confused player might still have.

For a slow start, to let the players get into character before the story really begins, Ram-Khvastra can tell them to take on Anchors. This means visiting loved ones and explaining the situation, which can be awkward — asking one's mother to become one's supernatural servant can fluster the strictest Noble. As another approach to claiming Anchors, the new Nobilis can visit hated enemies and force them to swallow blood or tears. This provides some Nobles with the first taste of the brutality of their office. Players may wish to discuss possible Anchors with the Hollyhock God before claiming their choices, since one or two might be especially suitable, or unsuitable, for the stories the HG wants to tell.

A Power's prospective Anchors cannot, from a practical perspective, resist the character. A beloved Anchor might

refuse at first, however, forcing the character to use persuasion or risk their amicable relationship. Since the involuntary claiming of an Anchor is in many ways horrific, the HG should not linger on the forceful claiming of a hated Anchor in a lighthearted game.

The Temple of Inquisition

Each Chancel of Inquisitorial Powers must construct a "temple of Inquisition" — a hall of justice in which the Powers present their evidence against a Mimic or traitor before a jury of the accused's peers. (Imperial cases are beyond the Locust Court's jurisdiction.) By tradition, a temple of Inquisition exists inside the Chancel, on a circular plaza cut into slices like a pie. Each slice expresses the nature of one local Power's Estate. Thus, the plaza of Inquisition in Locus Parasiel has four regions: the district of debate, where the spirit of every cobblestone and raindrop argues in stentorian tones and perfect rhetoric; the district of festivals, where the workers of the Chancel hold their highest celebrations; the district of conspiracy, an ever-shadowed region full of thieves, blackguards, and revolutionaries; and the district of trade, one of the most wondrous markets in the world.

Ram-Khvastra asks its Powers to oversee the creation of their own plaza and temple of Inquisition, employing such miracles as necessary. Much of this process should take place in an OOC scene, as the players discuss what they want the final product to look like and how they intend to create it. If the Chancel is too remote and too well defended for other Powers and Imperators to reach it easily, the temple and plaza must be constructed in a Chancel annex on Earth proper. The action of this story then takes place there.

Many Chancel residents still remember life on Earth. Whether they will continue to do so indefinitely depends on the Chancel's definition. Organizing Chancel affairs will take a great deal of work at the outset. Protests, labor disputes, and erratic public transportation may interfere with the temple's construction. Choosing subordinates properly and delegating authority should help with this.

Since about half of this story focuses on the construction of the temple and plaza, the Hollyhock God should encourage the PCs to spend a moderate number of miracle points thereon. At the same time, they should caution the PCs against completely depleting their resources — there could be danger later on.

Distractions

Shortly after the temple construction begins, Ram-Khvastra informs its Powers that it intends to claim a guardian spirit for the Inquisitorial temple and plaza. The spirit it has chosen is Polypheme, a giant of Sicily, said to be 300 feet tall and undefeatable; yet he will surrender instantly if faced by a creature more massive than himself. The characters must decide how they will appear to be more than 300 feet tall, or if they would rather ignore legend and confront him directly in battle.



Bringing a captured Polypheme back to the Chancel poses other difficulties: petulant at having been captured, he delays at every opportunity unless lured onwards with foods of unusual nature or stories that catch his attention.

When (if) Polypheme is back in the Chancel, Ram-Khvastra turns him to stone and begins the process of attuning him to the plaza. "*Speak not the names of the Creator,*" he warns the PCs, "*for if he hears such names three times, the stone that holds him will shatter; and if he hears them nine times, then not even my will can keep him tame.*"

Once the characters return with Polypheme, or fail to do so, return to the ordinary process of temple design. Keep this up as long as the players seem enthusiastic about it. Feel free to dip into IC play as they resolve specific issues relating to the plaza and temple's creation.

To spur things on, some of the NPCs detailed above may evaluate the characters' mettle for the first time during this process. For example, any human workers employed in the temple's construction no doubt invent procedures and forms to follow. Like any instantiation of bureaucracy, this can slow the actual work down. If the characters act to increase efficiency, Idony might introduce herself, perhaps explaining that bureaucracy spirits developed for Chancel projects are rare and potent and that she would appreciate the PCs not stifling theirs newborn.

The Powers can brush Idony off, in which case she has a socially acceptable opening to complicate their lives with "modifications" to the local bureaucracy — or a simple lesser preservation of inefficiency — before leaving. They can strive to accommodate her. Such a sign of weakness can earn them an ally but might also lead to substantial "helpful" adjustments to the government of the Chancel as Idony asserts dominance. The PCs can challenge her, either consulting their Imperator to determine how one goes about such things or asking Idony herself. Alternately, the PCs can perform some clever action, such as kidnapping the bureaucracy spirit and smuggling it out of their Chancel, leaving Idony with no basis for objection.

In the early stages of the game, avoid establishing the *Treachery* NPCs overtly as allies or enemies — try to make them obstacles with at least superficially reasonable motives. This allows the characters' actions to sort out who winds up on their side and who winds up working against them, rather than irritating the players with apparently arbitrary malice.

Broken Wings

When the players' enjoyment for the building project wanes, introduce the next stage of the story. This part has seeds in a Christmas over four hundred years ago, when Ada Willamette and Nephele Nikolaidhis clashed over the winged horse Pegasus. It fell into their hands when its Imperial owner suffered judgment, and both wished to claim it as an Anchor beloved. Ada Willamette won the battle, but lost the war: Nephele slew Pegasus before Ada could Anchor it. Its blood seeping into the ground gave birth to monsters.

Despite her vindictive gesture, Nephele felt a great bitterness about the whole affair. She created a new holiday in memory of their strife — the Day of Broken Wings, celebrated only in Noble Chancels. On this day, the humble Chancelfolk reflect on their failure to achieve what they want

out of life and resign themselves to further disappointment in the future. On that day, in the sky above the Chancels, ghostly images of Nephele and Ada repeat their battle. This light show has kept the anger between them alive for four hundred years.

When the PCs appear, the political dynamic of the Inquisitors' lives changes. Spurred by the desire to entrench against their new rivals, Nephele and Ada ask Annabelle Zupay to arbitrate their old grudge so that they can settle it once and for all. Annabelle suggests a simple format for the resolution of the old score: a battle waged in neutral territory from several miles apart, using five miracles each. The Power that Annabelle names as the loser must beg forgiveness for Pegasus's death and submit to token punishment from the winner. The battle is to be held on the upcoming anniversary of the original struggle, on Christmas.

Selecting the proper territory was a difficult choice, but Annabelle compellingly proposed a somewhat interesting possibility: the Chancel of Ram-Khvastra. Her description of the idea made the logic seem quite compelling and inevitable — what better way to suss out the intentions, loyalties, and caliber of the new Inquisitors than to stage a conflict on their turf?

Perhaps they agreed because Annabelle can present any argument as impeccably logical. Or perhaps they agreed because NPCs, just like PCs, regularly engage in stupid plans.

Note: Annabelle has excellent motive to arrange these events: she can weaken all three of her Imperator's rivals. Moreover, even an innocent and virtuous interpretation of Annabelle can become cruel when the Lamp Image drains her terrene essence. However, the Hollyhock God can substitute the equally persuasive Ianthe or the less sympathetic Idony as the manipulator behind this stratagem.

Ghosts of Christmas Past

During the construction of the plaza, Ada approaches the PCs. She explains the historical conflict between herself and Nephele. Naturally, she offers a heavily biased version of the story. Without admitting that she intends to hold the battle in the PCs' Chancel, she offers them a mutual support pact and favors yet to be determined if they agree to assist her in the coming rematch.

During Ada's spiel, the PCs discover that Nephele has also arrived to beg their aid. (For example, a servant could bring them a written message that Nephele awaits their pleasure outside. Alternately, Nephele could approach one of their Anchors in the Chancel, who then calls to the Power.) As Ada finishes up her plea, Nephele launches into her own equally biased version of events, and offers much the same deal.

The PCs can choose either side, or reject both Nephele and Ada, or promise both of them their aid. Both Nephele and Ada, keenly aware of reputation, explain that if the PCs ally with them, the PCs should abide roughly by the terms of Annabelle's proposal — using five miracles during the course of Christmas day and night. If the PCs agree to side with one or the other, the relevant Power cunningly explains that they will arrange for the battle to be held in the PCs' Chancel, as neutral territory. This gives the PCs "justifiable grounds for involvement", in that Power's words. If the PCs refuse both Powers, then the events of the impending Christmas should come as a surprise.

On Christmas, Nephele takes her place at the Inquisitorial plaza, and Ada sets herself up several miles away. They prepare for battle.



Borderguards

If Locus Ram-Khvastra has a Borderguard with a penetration of 1+, it detects Ada's arrival. If it has a penetration of 2+, it also detects Nephele. If it has a power of 2+, it notifies the PCs of their arrival. It will also harass the pair with ghost miracles (or worse).

For the sake of the story, it's best to assume that Ada and Nephele both hold the Borderguard off reasonably well, but that it assists the PCs in repulsing them if they should choose to do so. Mundane guards of the Chancel's entrances can also inform the PCs or help them eject the NPCs. If the PCs' defenses are too strong for this story to work well, consider having both Nephele and Ada prolong their diplomatic visits until Christmas.

How to Run What Follows

The structure of the rest of this adventure is simple. Nephele and Ada exchange miracles in their private war. Each one potentially complicates the lives of the PCs.

The actions of the player characters can change the progress of this conflict. In fact, unless they refuse to involve themselves with either Ada or Nephele and stay so busy cleaning up the two warring Powers' mess that they can't interfere, the actions of the PCs will change the progress of this conflict. The player characters have access to Realm miracles; they are probably the determining factor in the battle.

In most cases, however, the PCs' actions do not invalidate the miracles that follow. These are general techniques. If they get in Ada's way, or Nephele's, the miracle still happens — it's just probably aimed at the PCs instead of the other NPC. The Power in question will try to remove them before turning back to their main opponent.

The big picture of this story examines how the PCs' Estates play out against the twisted Christmas images Nephele uses and the Strife that serves Ada Willamette.

Grommet Claus

Nephele opens with a major creation, evoking a creature named Grommet Claus, a monstrous Santa sent for Ada's head.

He wears white-trimmed red, does Grommet Claus. A leather hood shields his face. One hand holds a wicked awl. The other holds the bag of toys slung over his back. He rides a sled drawn by twelve coal-black wasps. He knows the heart of every mortal. He can turn himself sideways to fit down the smallest chimney or through the smallest crack. The love of children sustains him — he cannot die while nearby

children hold to Christmas in their hearts. Laughing, he sets out to find Ada and plunge his awl into her brain.

Grommet should not simply rush to attack Ada — that would be dull. Nor should he maniacally attack the PCs — this would be scarcely less so. Instead, it is better to bend the logical progress of the story slightly and give a greater chance for thematic interaction with the PCs' Estates. Grommet visits the people of the PCs' Chancel like any good Santa ought. He brings toys to the good-hearted and lets his coal-colored wasps feast on the naughty.

As one version of the Santa archetype, it takes Grommet but a single day and night to visit every soul in the Chancel. Of course, that includes the PCs. As members of the aristocracy, the PCs are not eligible for his naughty list; he will bring them interesting "monkey's paw"-style gifts. The Hollyhock God should design these in advance so that their appeal to the PCs precludes rejection, and that their "catch" makes a suitably interesting surprise to the PCs. For example, a character like Ianthe Falls-Short might receive a listening box, guaranteed to understand, agree with, and keep secret anything its owner says. Sadly, mortals who stay too long in its presence slowly lose their voices, or perhaps it transmutes ugly thoughts shared with it into spiders and scorpions, which sneak from the box in the dead of night. In an ideal world, the character will not want to give their "Christmas gift" up even when they discover its drawback. Naturally, even as Grommet shows his generosity to the characters, his wasps are devouring naughty children and his gifts are troubling the more virtuous ones.

Once the PCs start actively dealing with Grommet, he will abandon his Christmas celebration and try to reach Ada.

Strife of the Stones

Not long after, before Grommet reaches her, Ada strikes vigorously with a miracle of her own. She uses a lesser creation of Strife to awaken ferocity and violence in the spirits of the ground all around Nephele. (This costs her 4 DMPs, for a deep miracle.) First the stones begin to mutter. Then the Earth trembles vigorously. Then the stones, disturbed by Nephele's presence, leap to the attack.

The violence in the ground reaches just far enough to endanger a particularly delicate piece of construction work. The goal is not to undo all the work the PCs have put into their Inquisitorial temple and plaza, but to put enough of that work in jeopardy so that the PCs must rush about using their abilities to save it. For example, if they opted to build a tower half a mile high at the center of their complex, then keeping it from collapsing when the foundation rips out of the Earth to chase after Nephele is a worthy task for a high-Aspect Power. Talking a sentient fountain down when it panics can prove an interesting diversion.

The HG may wish to run a short digressive scene where the players play privileged servants assaulted in the plaza by randomly violent rocks and earth. This can hammer home the disparity between the Powers, for whom Ada and Nephele's war is an inconvenience, and the easily terrified mortals who serve them, for whom it is a deadly threat.

Christmas Mass

After wasting one of her miracles fleeing the violent earth, Nephele creates a Christmas Mass. As the people of the Chancel begin trickling in before her, the priest created for the Mass begins to lecture the congregation on Christ's love and Ada Willamette's many faults, indiscretions, and unworthy qualities. Embarrassing Ada before commoners is, of course, as deadly a blow as any physical assault.

This may cause various problems for the player characters. Perhaps the Mass is held in a completely inappropriate section of the plaza — an affront to the relevant Estate. Perhaps they realize that any attendees are probably marked for death by an angry Ada, and wish to stop important Chancelfolk from attending. Perhaps the PCs have allied with Ada or Nephele. If none of these apply, however, the priest's words still stand a good chance of freeing Polypheme from stasis.

Seizing the Wind

Ada hears the words of the Mass drifting to her on the wind. Furiously, she uses a deep miracle to seize that wind by its tail and whip Nephele with it. This is a level 7 Aspect miracle with penetration 2. It quite possibly knocks down several buildings and any other Powers struggling with Ada. Nephele loses a deadly wound level and is thrown clean through the temple-in-progress.

The goal here is to create an epic, startling moment — an act that would form the seed of a legend, if a PC created it. Hopefully, this will encourage the PCs to perform acts of grandeur and audacity as well. For this reason, if the PCs have read this campaign, the Hollyhock God should change this miracle into something else, surprising but equivalently extreme.

At some point Ada must defend herself against Grommet. This costs her two simple Aspect miracles, one to chop Claus's head off with the edge of her hand, and another to kill him with Kottos once she discovers his practical immortality. (This may be the PCs' first exposure to Kottos.)

Christmas Trees

Nephele invokes another image suited to both Christmas and battle — a dozen bushy Christmas trees, their roots like feet and their bare limbs like knives. They gather in formation to help Nephele up and then march across towards Ada.

To make this interesting for the player characters, assume that these trees attract the interest of Ram-Khvastra.

"*I see potential in this creation,*" their Imperator notes in a private communication. "*Capture as many of these trees as you can. Perhaps they can be reformed and turned to our purposes.*"

Naturally, Ram-Khvastra could care less for the spirit of Christmas, but the Imperator senses that the trees, equipoised between the symbology of love and hate, may hold the answer to an alchemical question it has been pondering.

The situation gets worse. When the trees become visible, Ada counters the threat with a Lesser Creation of Strife. This awakens a gangster ethic in the spirits of the trees. They become hostile, contentious, and vigorously angry at the world. They stick together, barring some scuffles, but they're

OPPOSITE:
A Christmas feast disrupted
by Charles Vess


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not on Nephele's side any more. Taming them will be even harder for the Powers, and Nephele must use her last miracle getting out of range of their knife-like branches.

Pegasus is Risen

When all the chips have fallen from these actions and the player characters own, Annabelle announces the victor in the struggle.

To seal the peace between Nephele, Ada, and the PCs, she convinces Helissent de Reymes to donate a creature from the Labyrinth of Courtly Love — a winged equine, in many ways like Pegasus reborn, save for the serpents growing from its shoulders and the ice that films its hoofprints. The symbolism of a returned Pegasus closes off the strife between Nephele and Ada ... officially, at least. If appropriate, Annabelle donates the equine to the PCs, as consolation for the wrack and ruin visited upon their Chancel.

At this point, the player characters may conclude repairs and construction on their plaza uninterrupted.

Slippery Slopes

Careful attention to one's surroundings is a distinct liability in the Mythic World. Some of its most important roads are located no place in particular. If you watch where you are going, so that each footstep takes you to a very particular place, you will never find these roads at all.
—from A Tourist's Guide to Creation, *by Jasprite Sherrard*

In certain possible futures, the Divine Imperator known as Radiant Emptiness ascends to Lord Entropy's throne. To avert an untimely coup, Lord Entropy decides that Emptiness should be declared a Mimic by the Inquisitorial Powers of Ram-Khvastra's Chancel. One of his Domicelli sends an anonymous messenger raven, trained to find the roads that lead into a Chancel, to the PCs. The message accuses Emptiness of being an Excrucian.

Investigation into Emptiness reveals nothing amiss. The HG should not belabor this investigation or force the PCs to describe every action in detail. Play out the investigation only so long as it continues to yield interesting scenes and ideas. Investigation into the anonymous tip might lead back to the Domicella who sent the bird; alternately, when it slows, or fails to turn up convincing evidence, the Domicella contacts the PCs, and explains (without admitting to anything) that Lord Entropy wishes Emptiness to be discovered a Mimic. Of course, the evidence must be suitably convincing.

If the PCs decide to break the ethics of their profession by trumping up evidence against Emptiness, most of the story focuses on how they do so. The end of the story, and parts of the middle, should study the moral effects of making this choice. The player characters can also refuse. Lord Entropy is not a petty creature, and will not lash out. At the same time, he cannot permit Powers to thwart his will with impunity. Appeasing Lord Entropy with a noteworthy gift, preferably involving a personal sacrifice, is an excellent solution all around. Any of a number of NPCs, from Ram-Khvastra to a Power of Lord Entropy, might suggest this plan.

If the player characters have iron integrity and refuse to even offer a gift, the Hollyhock God should have a subtle, ironic plan of revenge on hand for Lord Entropy to implement. Finding the gift, or the execution of Lord Entropy's revenge, becomes the story.

Justify Your Existence

Before running this story, skip several months of IC time — all at once, or by skipping a few weeks now and again between other stories. Most of this story concerns flashbacks to this missing time.

A petition comes before the Council of Four from an Imperator politically difficult to ignore — possibly Ambrolam, Parasiel, or Sakhrat — alleging the PCs' incompetence to hold their positions. The Council calls together a panel of three Powers to judge this affair: the Powers of Trauma, History, and Wistful Memory. Since no one can reliably divine the PCs' competence or past activities, these Powers must rely on the PCs' own testimony regarding their accomplishments. Since the PCs' public record is easily weighed, the panel has chosen to examine three relatively obscure events (or six, if the Hollyhock God wishes to add a few) in the Powers' history. Using ghost miracles, the panel evokes solid "memories" to mirror the PCs' descriptions.

Each Power queries the PCs in turn, with the other two as wholly silent observers. The Power of Trauma serves the Wild. For her to judge their actions worthy, the PCs must convince her that those actions suitably upheld the cause of freedom. The Power of History serves the Light; the PCs must convince her that their actions served the cause of human survival. The Power of Wistful Memory serves Hell; the PCs must convince him that their actions served the cause of corruption and pain. Each Power investigates one of the three events (or two of the six).

These scenarios have a general "script" — everyone knows in advance generally how events turned out. However, it's up to the PCs to create the details. Play it out as if their version of the story was actually occurring, with each player playing their PC and the HG providing the actual events. The only difference is that the PCs can "correct" other PCs and the HG to better serve the version they wish to present IC.

The suggested scenarios run as follows. The Wild Power of Trauma investigates the PCs' unexplained visit to Los Angeles on the Night of Chains, when one in every hundred citizens was kidnapped by Cammoran slave-takers to locations unknown. The Light-affiliated Power of History studies the PCs' possible involvement in a nuclear meltdown outside of Nice, France, where they were seen digging in the tainted Earth. The infernal Power of Wistful Memory looks into the player characters' rescue of seven properly damned human souls from a Fallen Angel's Chancel.

The players should discuss the "truth" of these events beforehand. In the worst case, where the events are completely out of character, they may not even have happened. Unfortunately for wholly innocent characters, all three judging Powers have been offered substantial incentives by the Imperator who brought the petition and given specific reasons to doubt the true story, whatever it may be. The judges will reluctantly accept a suitably convincing story, but will meet any claims of uninvolvement or innocence with skepticism. The players should not think through the story their characters plan to tell in advance.

"Demons are truly one of the marvels of the world."

"How so?"

"Did you know, they consider their sadism an art form? Their malice so pervades every fiber of their being that it becomes a passion — their muse, their dedication, their life's work."

"But it is not art."

"Not independently, no. One must engage in a twist of perspective — see the scene as a demon might see it — for the art to manifest. It is like a painting whose merit requires special glasses to see, or a recorded harmony that becomes art only when one plays a melody to match."

"It is a fascinating notion, but I am not sure I accept it."

"By all means, meditate upon the matter."

The angels fell silent, thinking deep thoughts, as they cleaned the blood of demons from their swords.
—from Genesis, *by Keiko Takemori*

NPC-Driven Stories

The actions of Nobles define the world.
—from Becoming Noble, *by Fayola Osiagobare*

Playing through a story focusing on just one of the NPCs above may help bring that NPC "to life." The more vivid a given NPC, the more they add to the gaming experience.

Using Nephele Nikolaidhis, for example, the HG can create several NPC-driven plots. A story built around an occult Noble celebration would logically feature her prominently. Perhaps the PCs attend a ritualized festival that must complete properly before the sun can rise again, but, this time around, Strategist-crafted waking nightmares fell the participants one by one. The HG can create a Nephele-centric story using an invasion of Greece or a loss of Greek independence that somehow ties to a flower rite against a PC's Estate. The PCs might pursue some simple goal — a runaway child with a stolen Focus — in a Nephele-haunted celebration. A PC might discover that Nephele's Anchor Guilio, as a ghost, can carry messages to the PC's dead love. This sets the stage for a poignant subplot. After any of these stories, the HG should have a strong handle on how to play Nephele compellingly or will have discovered she does not suit their playing style.

Inquisitorial Stories

"I once created a lens," said Teodosio Ribeiro, "that could infallibly detect treachery within an Imperator's heart."
"A wondrous discovery! Why have I not heard of it?"
"The lens was infallible," Teodosio said sadly, "but not invincible. When I woke the next morning, it had shattered, and my memory of its construction was gone. Who would have thought that a traitor would so casually add vandalism to their crimes?"
—from the Thought-Record of Ellen McIntosh

When running an Inquisition-related plotline, the Hollyhock God should always make sure that the PCs' task is achievable. If it's best for the story that the PCs fail in their efforts, give them a small but fair shot. If the PCs "should" succeed in digging up the truth, then they must have the means to do so. This means that, if the Imperator is a traitor or a Mimic, the PCs must be able to discover evidence of its nature — that evidence must exist, and it must be accessible. There should also be some reason a Mimic or traitorous Imperator cannot just trap them in its Chancel and kill them methodically when the PCs discover the truth.

For example, an Inquisition might revolve around the disappearance of a priceless Imperial treasure from a neutral Chancel, which later reappears in Excrucian hands. An Imperator stands accused of stealing it and bringing it to them. Like Strategists, Imperators are not infinitely intelligent in human terms — if the accused Imperator is guilty, then it may not be able to cover all of its tracks. If the Imperator is innocent, it may not be worldly enough to conduct an investigation of its own. This allows the Hollyhock God to run a mystery story of their own design. Since the investigation does not take place in the accused's Chancel, the Inquisitors are not overmatched.

As another example, the suspected Imperator's Chancel could be constructed out of the Imperator's mind. The Imperator has not yet decided whether to commit treason. The warlords of the Excrucian-influenced regions of its mind are engaged in fierce battle with the rulers of the more loyal regions. The HG should craft personalities and mental "roles" for several loyal and disloyal lords within the Imperator's mind, including one or several double agents. Determining whether the Imperator is loyal on the whole requires a careful assessment of the progress of the war. The PCs can make this assessment only by spending time with each of the warlords. Winning the war for one side or the other requires untangling the schemes of these sub-Imperial creatures.

The normal procedure for capturing an Imperator is to gather sufficient evidence and then deliver it to Ram-Khvastra by prayer (see Estate-Driven Divinations, p. 119-120). The local war leaders of the Valde Bellum will take care of the rest. If the PCs are trapped in an Auctoritas or Defender's Blessing that prevents such prayer, or if the plot gives the traitor a good opportunity to flee, the PCs must have some means to make the capture themselves.

Some ideas for Inquisitorial stories follow.

Second Eden

Humankind never fell from grace. No cherub bars the gates of Eden. This is still a perfect world.
—from The Diary of Edmund Finch, *by Jackie Robinson*

Three Imperators of the Light have spent several centuries building a new and perfect world deep beneath the surface of the Earth — a world so defiant of sin and pain that no horror could exist therein. It is not three Chancels, bound to the Imperators' lives, but a genuine realm in the making, slowly becoming independent of the surface world. It is still incomplete and vulnerable to the machinations of corruption; still, two of the three have high hopes for it.

The third Imperator, sadly, does not. Somewhere in the Lands Beyond Creation lies the Stone of Heroes, on which the Excrucians sacrifice those who wish to lead their kind. The worthy are reborn as Excrucians of true dedication and great ferocity; the unworthy are not reborn at all. Sensing the failure of the "Second Eden" project and despairing that its kind will ever destroy the Dark, the third Imperator has agreed to be sacrificed on that Stone. It hopes that its nature will remain dominant after the transformation. It plans to direct the Excrucian horde in surgical strikes against the Dark. It believes no lesser measure will suffice to destroy its enemies, and it believes that the Children of Harumaph will never bring humanity to an end without the Dark to abet them. It is almost certainly wrong on all counts, but such is the nature of despair.

A clouded divination has brought warning of the Imperator's intentions to the leaders of the Valde Bellum. The Powers of Ram-Khvastra are chosen for the Inquisition. Unfortunately, the divination did not specify which of the three Imperators has turned traitor.

It is the belief of Ram-Khvastra that the place within "Second Eden" where the traitor met with the Excrucians to discuss its treachery will be permanently and terribly scarred. The simplest way to unmask the traitor is to locate that spot and confirm — with two of the three Imperators — that the place lies within the third Imperator's governorship. Unfortunately, just after the story begins, the traitor cuts Second Eden adrift, severing the channels by which one can reach that incompletely perfect world. Mindful of their own skin, with milliseconds to decide, the other two Imperators abandon Second Eden for the outside world.

To complete this investigation, the PCs must track down a hidden pathway that still leads to Second Eden, or a person who knows where such a pathway is found. Naturally, the traitor prefers to frustrate such searches until it can make its

final rendezvous with the Children of Harumaph. The Hollyhock God should create suitable leads that will enable the PCs to find this path. Having done so, the PCs must pay Second Eden a visit and scour it for the site of its scarring. Should they visit it alone, they will be far from help and witnesses, in a world tentatively connected to Earth, with a hostile Imperator who knows the territory and is very interested in their actions. Ram-Khvastra therefore suggests that all three Imperators accompany the PCs on their journey. If they move carefully, the PCs can keep themselves in eyeshot of at least one loyal Imperator at all times. Naturally, all three Imperators make at least a pretense of co-operation. The traitor is subtle and will seek to separate the group and expose the PCs; only if it stands on the brink of discovery will it launch an open attack.

This story benefits if the remaining two Imperators have secrets of their own to conceal, so that they also wish to separate temporarily from the PCs or each other. For example, one could wish to protect Second Eden itself from exposure of its secrets, particularly if a PC belongs to the Dark. The other could be an addict, habitually feeding off the purity that fills Second Eden, ultimately responsible for the project's slow progress — and terrified lest the Inquisition reveal this truth and its peers of the Light cast it from grace.

Most of this story should take place on the journey to Second Eden, on some obscure path full of subterranean marvels. Once they reach Second Eden, the realm itself will oppose concealment, treachery, and malice. The traitor will confront them there only if it has no chance to do en route.

Breaking the Bank

Just as the PCs close off an investigation into a potential Mimic, the subject of their scrutiny vanishes. The leaders of the war effort judge this conclusive proof of the subject's Excrucian nature. Ram-Khvastra may dissect the Mimic at its leisure — as soon as someone finds it.

It does not take long. The Mimic, whom we shall call Montaño, has elected to auction off its life through the Usurers of Ofeili, Imperators pledged to greed and mercantile industry in a world where coins are alive and humans mindless servants of the processes of economy. The Usurers' percentage of the take amounts to the sum total of the Mimic's possessions and its full efforts on their behalf. The minimum auction price to purchase Montaño back from them is goods or services of ten times that value. Ofeili is not currently a front in the war; the Usurers are unlikely to waive their fee on behalf of Earth's Inquisitors.

To retrieve Montaño so their Imperator may dissect it, the PCs must travel to Ofeili along the World Ash and then find something worth ten times an Imperator's services and possessions with which to make a minimum bid. Montaño is confident no one will make such an offer. The HG can complicate the journey to Ofeili, but should work to make the process of buying (or stealing) Montaño possible. Social plans — using a treason case against the Usurers as leverage, using the Usurers' obvious venality to help sell off people or items the PCs do not own, or convincing Montaño to withdraw its deposit and render itself vulnerable — are more likely to succeed than physical assault or outright fraud.

For a less difficult challenge, the auction house may be run by Power-equivalents created by the Usurers, rather than the Usurers themselves.

Hot Potato

Locus Parasiel, claiming to be overworked, forwards a lead on a potential traitorous Imperator to the PCs. They are correct. The Wildlord named has sold out Creation for the promise of freedom from it. Excrucian-shards are using its Chancel as their base of operations in a flower rite; after ninety years and nine of such service, the Excrucians will keep their side of the promise — or, depending on how the HG sees the Nobilis world, break it.

Proving the Wildlord's treachery and claiming its power is simplicity itself. Unfortunately, the Wildlord is Sacrosanct. By the nature of its being, the creatures or people most responsible for its destruction — in those rare circumstances in which an Imperator can be destroyed at all — will meet a horribly nasty end. Clearly, its treachery must be exposed. Equally clearly, the PCs would be smart not to expose it. This is why Locus Parasiel passed the buck.

Further, if the PCs spend any time on this investigation, they will discover that the Wildlord's Powers are virtual paragons — competent, virtuous, and glorious. They must oppose any attempt to destroy their lord, but they hate their Imperator's treachery. If the Wildlord falls into Ram-Khvastra's hands, these Powers are in grave danger, although the Rite of Rescue gives them some chance of survival. The characters must resolve this moral dilemma — is it better to damage something wonderful or to allow corruption to survive? If the PCs choose to expose the Wildlord, they must make sure that someone else bears the primary causal responsibility for this exposure. This story may play better if the Wildlord itself is pacifist, unable to use direct violence against the PCs.

It is possible to convert a human into something else, and thereby avert the need for that human's suicide. For example, a human can become a Power, an animal, or — with a suitable transfusion of essence — one of the faery kind. One can also convert human life drop by drop into faceless units of labor; for this purpose, the Dark invented money.
—from Principles of the Dark, *by Merriweather James*

Ianthe writes: How to be a Hollyhock God

Part 9 Stories in Detail

QBR: Lately, Jackie, your fans have pointed out what seems to be a significant change in the style of your work. What's up with that?
JR: Oh, they're absolutely right. I was digging through my old high school journal, you know, and I found this old bit from when my friends and me fiddled around with a Ouija board. It said I was under a curse, it did — that every time I told the story of a death, someone would die; every time I told a story of someone in pain, someone would suffer; every time I told a story about happiness, someone's life would brighten. I'm a little superstitious, you know? So I've sort of been playing it safe.
QBR: I'm not sure I understand. People still seem to be dying and suffering a lot in your stories.
JR: Well, yah. But now, you know, I make sure I've always got a very good reason.
—from Quarterly Book Review's *interview with Jackie Robinson*

Nobilis offers you two styles of storytelling. You will probably use both, to different extents. How you add interest to your player characters' activities depends on the exact mix you choose to employ.

- Event-driven storytelling focuses on the events of the game, and is suited for catching the players by the heart. Event-driven storytelling adds adrenaline, passion, and drama to your games.
- Thematic storytelling focuses on the basic *ideas* of the game, and is suited for catching the players by the mind and soul. Thematic storytelling adds rapture, intrigue, thought, and even truth to the game — for while the *events* of the game are fiction, the themes you explore in it are true.

Event-Driven Storytelling

The core of event-driven storytelling is creating events of interest to your player group. Based on the players' interests, you create a storyline full of the things they enjoy — be that romance, horror, intrigue, mystery, action, adventure, wonder, miracles, theology, beauty, or corruption. Event-driven storytelling relies on the plot. As discussed previously, you cannot create a solid, nailed-down plot, so event-driven storytelling relies on the creation of a catchy beginning, a diverse collection of events that could happen in the middle, and some ideas for possible endings. At its edges, event-driven storytelling merges with thematic storytelling — your plots should, taken as a whole, express the themes of your game. In a game focused on free will versus destiny, your plots should explore the consequences of both rebellion and service. In a game focused on the conflict of beauty and corruption, you should explore the weaknesses of both the Angels and their Fallen kin. Thematic storytelling will help you improvise events during the course of your event-driven story.

The key to creating a catchy beginning is understanding what interests your players. (Forgive me if I have beaten this point into the ground.) If your players love anime — Japanese animation — then you might consider bizarre, active openings, not worrying too much about whether they make sense. If your players read literary spy novels, then something as small as a missing regular at their usual hangout can draw them in. If they read thrillers, try a servant staggering in with an icicle through their back — or a Noble staggering in with dignity and clothing in ruins, or an explosion outside the PCs' dining chamber that flings their three-headed dog broken into the room; any variation on the theme suffices to start things off well. Nobilis has an open-ended genre; do not be afraid to customize the nature of the world to fit your campaign.

The events in the middle of a story come from two sources. One is from anticipating the actions of the PCs as best as you can, and thinking of interesting reactions to them. The other is to find plausible actions for important NPCs to take, which impact on the characters in as engaging a manner as possible. Again, what works for your players depends on the player group. If a player has shown a vested interest in playing the villain, with a PC Power of the Dark who regularly does some really nasty stuff, then it will catch their attention if one of their victims escapes, is rescued, or simply walks by alive and unharmed. If a player spends a great deal of time developing cunning schemes to solve their PC's problems, then opportunities to implement an already-discussed scheme will catch their attention, as will seemingly insoluble conundrums. You have a great deal of power here. Anything that the PCs do not deliberately and successfully prevent, you can arrange to have happen.

The endings to your story should mirror the possible answers to the questions your story raises. For example, if you spend a story studying the conflict between Heaven and Hell — beauty and corruption — then you should at the least prepare endings based on the idea that beauty is stronger and the idea that corruption is stronger. Other possibilities may exist, given the nature of your study. However, you don't need as many endings as middles; an ending is not an event, but rather a condition, and you can obtain relatively comprehensive coverage of the possibilities. ("In the end, the PCs emerge

triumphant, in which case this happens, or they fail, in which case this happens, or they take some middle path, in which case I improvise.")

The same basic story idea can be expressed in very different ways depending on the player group. For example, consider the story summarized in "Corruption's Service" (p. 175), in which a human alchemist under Excrucian guard has almost finished developing the Caries Unguent, an antidote to corruption that could in theory undermine the metaphysical structure of the Ash. The characters' Imperator, in all versions of this story below, sends the PCs to sabotage this research. This means destroying the current imperfect version of the Unguent, all notes, and possibly the alchemist.

OPPOSITE:
Wasser (Water)
by Giuseppe Arcimboldo

The Court in Heaven gives no sanctuary to lovers who would break Lord Entropy's Law.

The Wild cannot break the Darkest Lord's hold upon this Earth.

Only Hell offers protection to Powers that dare to love; only Lucifer has stepped forward to shield such Powers with his wings. His prices, they say, are quite reasonable.

Yet no one asks his favor twice.

—from LEGENDS OF THE NOBILIS, *by Luc Ginneis*

CORRUPTION'S SERVICE: A LOVE STORY

Suppose you want to run this story for a group of players interested in wondrous, romantic, social, and optimistic stories. In this case, the Excrucians involved might act through an intermediary. You decide that a Deceiver has been at work on the heart of a Power of Heaven, Halland Geirr, whom one PC loves and another has sworn blood brotherhood to. The Deceiver has hardened Halland's mind against Hell, inflaming his passion against the Devils past the point of reason. Halland manages and guards the Caries Unguent project. The crux of this story becomes the conflict of loyalties: do the characters serve their Imperator and Creation — or love and beauty? Even without the Imperator-Power bond, this is no easy choice. The Age of Pain, when Hell and Heaven must ally, is clearly *not* the time to destroy Hell — but the PCs do not know of the Excrucian involvement, only Halland's.

If the PCs speak to Halland first, you decide that he tries persuasion, trickery, and finally violence. He begins by arguing that Hell's role in Creation cannot, by its nature, be positive. Its place as the foundation stone of Creation notwithstanding, it serves no good end. If the Powers refuse all persuasion, Halland attempts a formal challenge. His mind hardened by Deceit, he is willing to cheat. For example, he might challenge all the Powers together to a ghost miracle duel — a seemingly can't-lose proposition for the PCs — but *Halland* has an arsenal of alchemical elixirs on hand, from the dust of the wandering mind to a small philosopher's stone. He can use all of these without taking miraculous action, whereas the PCs have nothing to oppose him with save ghost miracles. If Halland loses the duel, the insidious words of the Deceiver have further effects. Halland must yield the Unguent and his notes on it to them — but he has an old back-up copy of the notes in a place that only he and the Deceiver know of. To protect his ability to resume research later, and ostensibly to revenge the ruin of his project, Halland renounces the player characters and gathers his forces against them. Your goal here is not to revel in the military conflict; it's only a backdrop. Instead, you plan to skim quickly through it in an OOC scene to figure out whether Halland and his allies defeat the PCs, or *vice versa*.

If Halland triumphs in battle, love finally overcomes deception, and Halland finds himself unable to kill the PCs. The Deceiver comes forward to persuade him otherwise. The goal of the PCs becomes unmasking the Excrucian before its honeyed words harden Halland's conviction. If the PCs seem about to triumph, on the other hand, betrayal suddenly interrupts the battle. The Deceiver, wearing the skin of a mutual ally who apparently elected to join with Halland, strikes Halland down. It hopes to kill him, but just barely fails. Explaining its actions, it assures the PCs that Halland has been corrupted, perhaps by alchemy gone wrong — that Halland intended terrible, unjustifiable acts against them and that it (the Power the Deceiver masquerades as) has simply waited for the right moment to strike. Naturally, it is up to the PCs whether to finish Halland off — but, the Deceiver argues, it is the only safe option. Again, the PCs' goal is to unmask the Deceiver. If they kill Halland, the Deceiver is left with the only copy of the notes. In both cases, you should try and make sure that discovering the Deceiver is hard but feasible. If the PCs just don't get it, you must let the chips fall where they may.

If the characters attempt to circumvent Halland's security and fail, he will talk to them. If they succeed in circumventing security, skip to the marshaling of forces. A direct look at the Caries Unguent is an opportunity to add a little wonder to the game — think a little bit about how to convey the pure marvel of even an unfinished



elixir for unmaking corruption. If the Ash really does run on beauty and corruption, then there can be nothing more beautiful — for nothing *but* beauty survives in its presence.

The major remaining possibility is that the player characters choose to ally themselves with Halland. In this case, they can participate in the ongoing development of the Caries Unguent and collect allies on Halland's behalf for the coming conflict with the forces of Hell. They meet the Deceiver, who intends to keep a low profile and act like just another Power in Halland's circle. Unfortunately, Deceivers must abide by the law of their nature. It cannot resist worming its way towards the inner circle and breaking alliances. In short, it attempts to romance the relevant Power away from Halland, and its unethical techniques should eventually reveal its nature. At this point, the wisest thing for the PCs to do is to destroy the current version of the Caries Unguent — how terrible, to destroy such beauty! — and all the alchemical notes. They can then pretend that they needed to lull Halland's suspicions to gain the necessary opportunity.

This is a good plan, but the PCs might still throw you a curve ball. For example, they might feel that completing the development of the Unguent is too dangerous, but that losing the work would be a tragedy. They decide to steal it and ferry it up the Ash to Heaven's Gate — trading it to the Angels for a promise that it will not be used until the Excrucians are less of a menace than Hell. Since you did not plan a trip on the Ash, much of this story will be improvisation — but you can still use some of your plans. For example, Halland cannot gather an army against the PCs, so he sets out after them with the Deceiver as company. An oracle encountered along the way warns the PCs that by the time they reach Heaven, the Deceiver will have turned Halland's love and loyalty entirely to hate. Hopefully, the PCs develop a plan to salvage Halland that takes them until the end of the session. You can then work out the details of their journey on the Ash before the next session begins.

Since we stipulated a player group interested in romantic, optimistic stories, the best resolution is love overcoming all. However, it must not be *Halland's* love unilaterally saving the day — the PCs are the protagonists, and their actions must be at the heart of any resolution.

Corruption's Service: An Action Story

Suppose you want to run this story for a group of players interested in action and adventure. In this case, guard the project with some fairly tough Excrucian-shards, or a few shards and a full Excrucian. The physical challenges will be greater in action-based games, the social challenges simpler, and the moral crises fewer. In this story in particular, the sabotage itself is the heart of the challenge.

You decide that if the characters burst in the front door, they are no match for the Excrucian guard. If possible, though, the Children of Harumaph will capture rather than kill them — testing the Unguent on Nobilis should prove informative. Perhaps the PCs will cleverly escape, or perhaps they will somehow rescue themselves via their Anchors' bodies. If the PCs look like they're going to stay captured until they die, the Unguent — that has strange effects on the others — melts the bonds away from the PC Power of Heaven, giving them a chance to get free.

In case the characters plan some careful, clever, tactical assault that could actually succeed, you detail the character sheets of the guards and their precautions against intrusion. You also sketch out some subtler possibilities: the alchemist thinks they're working for a good cause, which means the Excrucians don't need to restrict their movements. *That* means that the PCs could recruit a family member to persuade the alchemist to sabotage the experiments. Or perhaps the characters could pollute the air in the alchemist's lab with a base metal, such as lead, and corrupt the experiment without ever seeing it. In this case, one of the Excrucians involved begins tracing them, and the PCs' goal is to get back to the Chancel before it catches up to them.

The characters might think of something else entirely — stealing a military plane and bombing the alchemist's lab into rubble, for example. That's okay — you can adapt the last idea and have the disappointed Excrucian mastermind set out to catch the plane before it gets back to the Chancel. Now complicate things — maybe the plane is

I was there when seven Powers battled the wolf named Unforgiven, that came from beyond the borders of the world. It is a thing to tell my grandchildren of, if I should have any. I was there.
—from the Memoirs of Alice Mendel, Lady of the Thunder

low on fuel and maybe the military has figured out that their plane is missing. This is a solid two-session story (investigation one session, military plane hijinks the next), even though nothing much happened with the Unguent itself. You could make the story stronger if the explosives fused the Unguent-in-progress into something new and strange, which you then bring into the game a story or two later.

Since we stipulated a player group interested in active, adventurous stories, the best resolution has the player characters succeeding by the skin of their teeth, with lots of flash and bang in the middle. However, you must not *give* them the victory — make sure that you have a failure scenario that leaves the player characters alive, so that you can avoid PC death while keeping a real element of risk.

Corruption's Service: Other Possibilities

Some player groups might enjoy mysteries, investigation, and conspiracy most of all. In this case, you can make *finding* the alchemist's lab the difficult part. The humans involved consider it part of a military project; the Cammora believes it's under their thumb. Layers of bureaucracy and secrecy protect the project's records. Tracking down someone who knows for sure that the REMEDY project even *exists* involves chasing rumors, meeting with Cammorans in smoky bars, and sneaking into government installations. The Nobilis are much better at all of this than mortals, but cracking Cammora-sponsored government security, particularly when Excrucian-shards have left their little traps here and there, is a daunting proposition.

We do not know Cneph's motives. He might mean us the most terrible of harm. We do not serve him because we know. We do not serve him because we believe. We serve him because we can.
—attributed to Hazael, Angel of Disorder, Insanity, and Time

For a player group that likes horror, omit the Excrucian element entirely. One faction of Devils is constructing the Caries Unguent as a weapon against another faction. The PCs still can't let the alchemists involved perfect the elixir, or the effects on Creation might be disastrous — but working closely with Powers of Hell and diabolic Imperators, for no better purpose than to shut a rival group down, makes just about anyone feel dirty. Play up the ugliness of the people and things the player characters must work with. It won't hurt if at some point rivulets of Unguent begin running down a mortal street, burning the humans they touch alive because of the innate corruption within them — you should look at even the sovereign remedy to corruption through a dark lens, here.

Thematic Storytelling

The core of thematic storytelling is creating events that reflect themes of interest to your player group. Often these themes derive directly from their characters' Estates. If someone decides to play the Power of Deception, they want deception and honesty and truth and treachery and white lies and kind lies and cold lies and cruel lies to be a part of your game. If someone plays the Power of Fear, they want to explore what fear does to people and the world. Thematic storytelling relies on these themes. It explores them through the medium of the events in the game. At its edges, thematic storytelling merges with event-driven storytelling — themes do not exist in isolation, and the events that reflect them should make a nice story on their own. In a game that studies free will versus destiny, the players' actions and those actions' consequences should still shape destiny, and the events of that destiny should remain coherent. In a game that compares beauty against corruption, and seeks to find the stronger principle, Angels and Devils should not spout prose poems advocating the virtues of their code. Rather, they should take actions that reflect their principles. In the outcome of their actions lies the answer to the comparison.

"You all seem under a cloud. Do not tell me! The Lady Jasmine has been here. I tell you, she tracks despair in like mud wherever she goes."
—from Seven Stars, One Stage, *by Keiko Takemori*

What themes should you choose for your game? I have no agenda here. The keystones of the Noble world are horror and wonder, often in the forms of corruption and beauty. Beyond that, the Estates of the PCs and major NPCs should influence your choice of themes (and vice versa). Beyond *that*, consider what you *want* your game to be like. If you want a slow, meditative game, choose themes that one normally explores over a lifetime: the nature of reality, consciousness and truth; virtue against practicality; science and faith against ignorance. If you want a hip, quick-moving game, choose themes of pressing relevance to the players: where does the world go from here? Where should it

go from here? How much can one afford to depersonalize others in order to survive in a far-too-crowded world? How much can one afford to *be* depersonalized in exchange for economic advantage? The Nobilis are, in some sense, static — the Noble world does not change as fast as the human world has begun to. Powers are rarely depersonalized. Still, a game can explore the direction of human future through the clash of different Noble agendas, and depersonalization through the Powers of Utility and Freedom. Further, the Anchors and other humans whose lives are entangled with those of the Nobilis' provide a stage on which these concepts can play out in their full glory. A game of Nobilis does not have to be high art, and you should not expect it to be — but remember that the World of the Ash is an animistic place. If the core concepts of the game are lifeless, the characters peopling that world are lifeless as well.

The essential technique of thematic storytelling is simple. Create opportunities for characters who represent each side of a relevant question or comparison to clash without violence. To study Greed against Laughter, pit the two Powers against one another, as below. To study Freedom against Utility, involve the characters in a conflict between an Imperator of the Wild and a starkly utilitarian commander in the war. It's not the *end* of the story that matters, but the process. Using this technique, even a novice Hollyhock God will make stories that make the angels sing.

In a bold initiative designed to bring together the best attributes of modern charity and pagan worship rites, America's First Harvest and the Church of Demeter have joined together to create the first recorded Food Burning Drive. Modern efficiency replaces dated and unrealistic techniques as these combined organizations sacrifice the food donations that would otherwise molder at the docks or fall into a warlord's hands — improving the health of harvests worldwide! —from the Choice News *(a tabloid on Ash-tree Earth)*

Thematic Story Design: Spirituality vs. Materialism

Suppose you wish to explore the spirituality/materialism dichotomy. Let me restate it a little bit, to make it more controversial: how much life, how much spirit, how much experience and understanding is it worth giving up in order to make the world *better* for the living, for the beings with souls, for the well-traveled and the learned?

Materialism offers us Science, Physical Health, Technology, and Wealth. It also brings us Greed, Pollution, Classism, and Selfishness. Who do these things define? Build any NPC guided by or involved in one or two of these things. Throw in a little character to mix with the caricature. You have created someone who brings the world to life — *and* represents one side of this struggle.

Spirituality gives us Ethics, Virtue, Wisdom, and, of course, a better Understanding of the ways of the mythic reality. On the other hand, it also offers up Willfully Ignorant Faith, which is as bad as all materialism's flaws combined. Again, use one or two of these elements and you can create a symbol *and* a new NPC. A generic "Ethical" person is boring — but imagine a street person who could easily find employment, except that they feel that every coin and bill is a crime against the poor, one they cannot willingly participate in. Or perhaps the job the NPC is most skilled at is theft, and they cannot bring themselves to do it any longer. This person begins to be interesting; now throw in something to make them important as well. Perhaps the ghost of a former Power occasionally possesses them? Perhaps they are the main (innocent) participant in one of the corrupted morality plays the Excrucians use in their flower rites? Or perhaps they are an Excrucian Anchor, taking a less honest role in the proceedings?

Of course, this sort of character isn't the whole story. You can also create situations that reflect the themes of the campaign. For instance, if the PCs are so foolish as to make an open-ended agreement with a Cammoran, their honor may impel them to participate in the Cammoran's acts of greed. Something similar can be done with a hostage's safety instead of the PCs' honor at stake. The PCs, caught between the poles of honor and greed, show in their actions which force is stronger.

When you've been playing with these themes for a while, and the ways the PCs deal with them have been established, the PCs can encounter the Powers bound to Willfully Ignorant Faith, Ethics, Greed, Technology, Wealth, Wisdom, and Science. These Powers will reflect in miniature all that has gone before. Since Estates talk to their Sovereigns, these Powers may well have *words* for the PCs!

Another possible theme is Law. Much of Nobilis has in fact been built upon this theme. We give away the greatest gift that we have been given, the freedom of choice, in the name of social order. This is a crime against our souls, but it is a *necessary* thing. Or is it? In Nobilis, various fell figures have perverted much of the formal law, both for Powers and for mortals. This yields an opportunity to see what unwritten codes the

(potentially) very different PCs and NPCs will arrive at. Then, of course, there is the question of just how much of that formal law is worth accepting, given that it *does* order the society. When all that's done — it comes back to the Angel of Law and the Power of Justice.

Thematic Improvisation: Greed vs. Laughter

Thematic storytelling takes advantage of the nature of the Noble world. In Nobilis, every concept has a human (or inhuman) face. The big ideas have Imperators and Powers: Greed, Fire, Hope, Death, Mathematics, Stasis, and Dynamic Systems. The small ideas have animistic spirits: one woman's greed, one fireplace's fire, one man's hope, and one child's death. In most games, the Hollyhock God — or the equivalent Storyteller, Game Master, or Dungeon Master — must introduce thematic elements "on the sly". Exploring moral and philosophical issues must always take second stage to the events in the game, because the *events* are what matter to the characters' lives. For Nobilis characters the situation differs. Imperators, Excrucians, and Powers care a lot more about the concepts, themes, motifs, ideas, and implications of a set of events than they care about the events themselves.

Consider the Contessa of Greed. Like most Powers, she has a Bond to "the sanctity of her Estate." This boils down to the idea that no one but herself and her Imperator should get to screw around with Greed. She's likely to "keep her hand in" by participating in and encouraging acts of greed in the mortal world. You can find the Contessa at the heart of schemes of grand larceny and fraud. She meddles in inheritance disputes and helps massive corporations manipulate the public trust. She enjoys watching humans struggle to choose between career and family, knowing that greed — the desire for wealth and privilege — is at the core of this struggle.

The Contessa has no investment in the *outcome* of these dioramas of greed. If she wants a thief to succeed, the thief succeeds! If she wants the thief to fail, the thief fails! If she wants all of a dead man's inheritance to go to a trust fund set up for his cat and managed by his worst enemy, she arranges it. Even when some Power attempts to defile the Contessa's Estate with a nettle rite, or an Excrucian tries to twist it, or the Contessa uses greed-affiliated events as part of a plan aimed at her enemies, it's *still* not the outcome that matters. It's the meaning of the events. It's the way greed interacts with the world. Often, when the Contessa interacts with the player characters, it's the way greed interacts with *their Estates* that matters most.

If you set out to tell a thematic story, the core of your story is the interplay between the Estates of the player characters and the Estates of the involved NPCs. You, as the Hollyhock God, can explore various issues and ideas through this interplay. You can safely devote the game to such explorations because these are the things the *characters* care about, and the interplay of concepts is what determines how they succeed in the world. In many cases, because you have no attachment to any particular course of events, you can improvise this thematic interplay — you won't need to draw on a detailed plotline.

A relatively mundane encounter between the Duke of Laughter, a PC, and the Contessa of Greed might play out as follows. One of the Duke's Anchors works for a small multinational. However, the massive personnel cuts following a hostile takeover endanger his job. The Duke wants to keep his Anchor "in position," but before he pokes his nose in and rearranges matters, he interrogates the bruised and battered corporation spirit to check for Noble involvement. Discovering that the Contessa took a few minutes out of her day to oversee the takeover, the Duke pays her a polite visit. For the obvious reason — her tie to the sanctity of her Estate — the Contessa does not want the Duke to meddle with the takeover and its consequences. Nor does she wish to interfere herself in a manner detrimental to greed. She *does*, however, appreciate the courtesy the Duke paid her in visiting her to discuss the matter rather than just taking action. She offers him a "challenge of threes" (p. 195).

The Duke's opening move, in this challenge, is to make the very idea of future layoffs laughable — in fact, hilarious. To continue the process would jeopardize the administrators' pride. The Contessa counters with an Aspect miracle, verbally persuading

"I purchased this child in the market at Ofeili. Her laughter was as pure and brilliant as the sun."

"Can laughter be brilliant?"

"It sounded so to me."

"Well, then, I wish to hear it. Provoke her to laugh?"

"I cannot. She has not laughed for several years; and no means have proved sufficient to encourage it from her."

—from Collectors, *by Melanie Tumbarius*

the new CEO that his career and family both absolutely depend on continuing the cutbacks, silly though the notion may be. As the Contessa of Greed understands, humans will do even the most ludicrous things for their financial well-being.

Laughter is a tool for division and derision, among its other uses, so the Duke uses a miracle of Domain to isolate upper management. It becomes socially acceptable, within the corporation, to smirk at and utterly ignore the dictates filtering down from above. For all intents and purposes, middle management stages a coup. Its mission statement reads, "Preserve the status quo." Before the old policy completely dies, however, the Contessa spends a miracle point and issues an edict (miracle) of lesser preservation. Despite the ever-widening gap between upper and middle management, between decision and implementation, the greed-driven policies responsible for the break-up of the company continue to leap the gap unchecked. This manifests corporeally as mid-level administrators cutting deals with the furiously impotent upper management to implement their programs at a lower level.

The Duke realizes that he does not have enough of an edge at this point to win the conflict — whatever he does, the Contessa can most likely undo. Accordingly, he settles down with a chart mapping the flow of influence in the corporation as it stands. Pushing his brain beyond its normal capacity with an Aspect miracle point, he determines whom his Anchor must talk to and what his Anchor must control to get "in on the action" — to firm up his position to the point where he can prevent others from firing him. The Duke has used his third miracle in a relatively neutral manner. The Contessa must now decide whether to spite the Duke or graciously refrain from using her last miracle against him.

The above description represents a "chance encounter" between two Powers. It offers nothing more than a small chance to examine whether laughter or greed is stronger. Since the Duke moved first, and the Contessa had the advantage of moving last, its answer is not definitive — but, in play, the exploration should be of interest. The Powers of the Duke's Familia have had the opportunity to consider their own answers to greed and the Duke's player has given his or her brain a mild workout. The Hollyhock God can liven up such chance conflicts in other ways — any form of peaceful conflict resolution can easily become a study of the interaction of Estates.

Naturally, there are other occasions for Noble interaction than chance encounters. Sometimes, one Power seeks another out; this usually means that their Estates are already interlaced in some situation in the mortal or Noble worlds. In such circumstances, the Powers most likely co-operate or engage in open-ended conflict to shape the situation. Nettle rites and flower rites, in particular, make simple scenarios in the mortal world *very* important. When fighting a nettle rite or flower rite aimed at their Estate (and often when dealing with nettle rites aimed at other Bonds), the Powers seek to resolve the situation in a way compatible with the principles of their Estate. Their search for the best solution becomes an expression of their theme — the concept they represent. This plays out against a theme provided by their rivals.

OPPOSITE:
The Wheel
by Michael Kaluta

The deru-deru looks like nothing in particular when it hatches from the egg. It hides in dark places, and when a human passes by, it hooks a little bit of the human's life with its long, thin, nimble, hairy legs. It takes many years of assiduous collection for a deru-deru to become an adult — to collect enough bits and pieces of memory, shape, experience, and soul to leave the dark places and pass for human among humanity. Then it can find a mate, if it is not too old, and lay a clutch of eggs, so that the cycle can begin again.
—from A MEDIEVAL BESTIARY, *by Paul McArthur*

CAMPAIGNS

The campaign is the "big picture" — the story that unites all the stories, the grand vision for your game. While individual stories may wander, the campaign stays true to its course. A campaign resembles a series of novels, each of which shows a slightly different aspect of the overall idea. Some novel series have a definite beginning and ending, a larger story that connects them all. Others link together based on a common theme and characters, where any number of stories can be told but all the stories are, in one sense or another, alike.

CLOSED CAMPAIGNS

In a closed campaign, you have a huge epic that you wish to create — a giant backdrop for a series of stories about the PCs. For example, you might decide that the fundamental "crack" in the world's defenses that gave the Excrucians access to it was the War in Heaven. Specifically, the shattering of the first love — between Lucifer and Michael,



Creation is inherently finite. To lose the Excrucian War is to bring an end to history. To win the War is to end the Third Age, and move history one great step closer to its final conclusion. Our world is doomed; our only choice is a choice of endings.
—from A Philosophy of Treason, *by Augusta Valentina (suppressed)*

or, more conventionally, Lucifer and the Angel Rachael — broke the defenses of the world. The Valde Bellum cannot end until the two of them reunite, in Heaven or in Hell. Since the PCs must be central to this reunion, you decide to offer your players a choice: play the Powers of Lucifer and his one-time beloved, or play the Powers of an Angel and a Devil close in their confidence. It reflects the overall theme of the game if the PCs have strong ties to one another from their mortal lives, causing them to illicitly ally as Powers. If not, then someone or something encourages the Powers of the two Imperators to ally early on in the game. Lucifer and his beloved are too stiff and injured about the whole affair to forbid it. You plan on telling a few general stories, a few stories about the Valde Bellum, something centered around a flashback or visit to the First Age, and then introduce some way the PCs might bring the two back together. Perhaps Lucifer locked up his love in his Anchors (p. 107-108) and his counterpart bound his or hers into the gates of Heaven; the characters could unleash these forces, against Excrucian opposition, and then bring Lucifer and his ex-lover together physically by subterfuge.

You might have a less specific idea. Perhaps you decide that the PCs were aquatic creatures (jellyfish, sharks, dolphins, squids, octopi, and so forth) before their Commencement. You'll play out some stories against the backdrop of the ocean and the cultures the players devise for their PCs' species. When the stories start to point towards a final resolution, you'll develop it from there. This could be a relatively minor campaign — someone wants to raise Atlantis, stealing it from the Wildlord Adalia and, more importantly, the fish; the PCs must stop them. It could be something more grandiose. Perhaps humanity is dying, and the characters must shepherd the civilized but dumb species of the ocean into human-level intelligence, spirit, and technology to save the Estates of modern life on Earth.

Each PC in a closed campaign has their own personal story — something central to the character that should be resolved near or at the campaign's ending. You won't necessarily know what this is at the opening of the game, even if the player is nice enough to vouchsafe their guess — characters develop during play. However, most good characters have a trauma or flaw to overcome, a grand goal to achieve, a score to settle, a love or loyalty to find, or something else fundamentally missing in their lives. Their personal story is the process of their filling in that missing piece. If they fill it in too soon, you'll have to start a new personal story for the character — so try and link the resolution of that story to the resolution of the campaign.

Consider again the campaign based on repairing Lucifer's broken love. A PC whose fundamental crisis is self-worth — someone who feels that even as a Noble, they have something to prove, because Nobility was handed to them and not earned — should play an important role in the campaign resolution. Ideally, it is their moral character and not their powers that help make a successful conclusion to the game possible. This resolves their story. A PC war criminal who swears to track down and beg forgiveness of all the survivors of their acts instantly spells out their personal story for you. Perhaps one of those survivors, enNobled, becomes one of the characters' major opponents — standing in the way of a favorable resolution. If you feel like pulling punches, the character's apology turns things around. If you don't, the apology changes nothing. The PC must decide whether to stick by principle or to destroy their opponent/victim to allow the world to heal. Some PCs will spend the game searching for love; perhaps you can subtly arrange for such a PC to fall for an Excrucian. The Valde Bellum is an insurmountable barrier to this love — unless, of course, the PCs succeed, and the Excrucians can no longer practically continue their war.

Don't be afraid to progress slowly on the campaign plotline, inching towards the grand goal over the course of many only partially related stories. In one story, the characters might need to save a traitor from the Locust Court simply to learn the location of one of Lucifer's Anchors — that's enough to give the PCs a sense of progress, without moving too quickly to the payoff. They might spend another story gathering support at a luck-collecting festival, while fending off the social maneuverings of an adversary and fighting a small ghost miracle duel with the host. Only near the end, when the goal is in sight, should you pick up the pace. The exception is games where,

for one reason or another, you want to finish up your plot in one, two, five, ten, or some other small number of sessions. In this case, you will need to move events forward at a fast clip — usually, a faster clip than you expect — to finish everything on time. Until you're reasonably experienced, build an epic you think you can complete in about half the time you actually have; that way, you'll be sure to finish it.

Open-Ended Campaigns

When I fear that we shall all die and nothing of Creation shall remain, I have only to look at the stars — untouchable, unconquerable, eternal — and my heart grows calm.
—Angoulaffre the Broken-Toothed, Aaron's Serpent

When creating an open-ended campaign, you have no intention of bringing events to a close. Instead, you expect to keep telling stories until the player group grows weary of the game. Choosing between open-ended and closed campaigns is purely a matter of taste. My only advice on *which* campaign style to employ is that changing a closed campaign retroactively into an open-ended campaign can spoil the climax. If you reach the logical end of the campaign and no one wants to stop playing their characters, take a break and come up with a new open or closed campaign that uses the same characters but has different themes, ideas, and stories.

A *tightly themed* open-ended campaign has stylistic and thematic similarities linking its stories together. Often, these stories — or groups of several stories — share roughly the same format. Just like a novelist who writes a series of mysteries or thrillers rarely transplants their characters without warning into a fantasy or true crime setting, you create the story arcs in a typical tightly themed campaign according to a loose formula. One possible format for an open-ended campaign is staged tragedies. In each story, the malfeasance of some Noble inevitably leads to a setback in the Valde Bellum. The player characters must salvage what they can. Alternately, the stories could be mannerist comedies: each story brings the characters into an awkward social situation in their relatively stable circle of peers, with one of the major Nobilis elements (the Excrucians, Imperial orders, travel on the Ash, the struggle between Heaven and Hell) providing variety and a major subplot. A theme of high adventure is common, where the characters face off against mysterious antagonists whose plans they must first uncover and then thwart. An ongoing drama focusing on Noble intrigue and Chancel government can maintain a relatively stable "feel" while allowing the characters both successes and failures — particularly if the issues are muddied and neither success or failure is ever absolute. You can also create new genres of your own, such as the *noir* philosophical, where the major principles of reality move through a world of seedy bars and tawdry relationships and the ascendance of Truth over Deception depends on the turn of the cards.

A tightly themed campaign can also link its stories together by other means. You have a strong link between stories in the group of PCs. A good connection to reinforce this with is a fixed set of important ideas that all your stories reflect. For example, if your game regularly focuses on "new frontiers" — unexplored worlds on the Ash, the deep sea, the fringe of scientific and social progress, lost continents, and the like — it can connect diversely-styled stories set on those frontiers.

Another variety of open-ended campaign has no clear division into stories at all. For this style of campaign, refresh miracle points at a fixed rate per session — a character's total MPs in each attribute refresh every three sessions, for example, roughly evenly. Build everything on the unfolding plans of the PCs and a small handful of major NPCs. Don't struggle to make things come together neatly into beginnings and endings. Rather, at all times, try and have several interesting possible futures mapped out. Which one the PCs encounter depends on the outcome of their immediate efforts.

Campaign Style: Creating the Game You Want

The first step towards creating a game that "feels" like you want it to feel is to talk to the players. If you want the PCs to solve their problems through bizarre and eccentric programs, by questing for the needle Cneph used to sew together Creation or by creating new sciences, the players must *know* you don't expect them to sweet-talk, intimidate, or despair at their problems instead. You may want to run through a few thought exercises before starting the game, asking each player how their character might solve one problem or another.

Too many Nobles, possessed of the power to shape their Chancel as they will, lose all sense of proportion. Certainly, it instills proper fear and respect if the stones around one's home gnash fangs and roar when visitors approach. Certainly, it engenders awe if one's palace hangs high above the ground, supported by the thunder of a thousand air-spirits' wings. Yet one may instill the same fear with a flayed traitor's head preserved upon a pike; and the same wonder with a single tree whose branches shine as silver as the moon.
—from A Tourist's Guide to Creation, *by Jasprite Sherrard*

The second step is to make sure that the solutions you want the player characters to use *work*. If you want a game with a heavy social focus, then you should avoid NPCs that snub the PCs no matter what they do. If you want PCs who act subtly, then subtle approaches should solve their problems. If you want PCs to generously share their abilities with those who need help, then you should minimize the frequency with which generosity leads them to a bad end. This point may seem obvious, but it's easy to forget it during play.

The third step is creating stories that reflect the feel you want. This idea may intimidate you. If you adore Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, Roger Zelazny's *Jack of Shadows*, or Susan Cooper's *The Grey King*, it might seem a terribly large task to capture their touch in your game. If you have a nebulous vision of your own to work from, it might seem even larger! For these situations, I offer practical advice. The superficial elements of your vision or an author's work often implicitly contain the mythic substrate. To capture a given feel, therefore, start with the surface and work inwards. To create a new and unexpected style for your game, start with a handful of ideas and work outwards.

For example, suppose you intend to run a game capturing the feel of the Old Testament. You write down a list of some of the Old Testament's superficial traits — events, situations, places, ideas, and things that seem to reflect its feel.

For example:

- Plagues (locusts, toads, snakes, death of the firstborn, boils, disease, rains of fire and devastation).
- Humans are fallible, evil and idolatrous.
- God armors the righteous.
- Genealogy is vital.
- A kingdom is very difficult to hold together.
- Every suffering descends from the primal sin of disobedience to God.

You may want to skim the relevant manuscripts, or meditate on the idea in your head, and scribble down little elements that catch your mind's eye — "no work on the Sabbath", "rods turn into serpents", and the like. The idea is that buried in all these little details you'll find a reflection of the underlying principles that created them. Refer to your list of notes, or think about them, regularly during the course of planning and running the game. Then, when the Power of Guns smites some arrogant mortal, you'll have it fresh in your mind — "Oh. Instead of shooting the sot, *plague* them with guns. Maybe the spot right above their left ear, just far enough from their head to prevent deafness, attracts stray bullets. Or maybe their friends and family and co-workers all die by the gun." Bam — instant Biblical vengeance! Perhaps the NPCs the Powers encounter in their Chancel spout off their parents' and grandparents' and great-grandparents' names more often than they give their own. Fate might thwart the characters who attempt to punish the pure (of heart, or of faith). Through the little things such as this, you train your mind to think in the correct "mode" for the feel you seek to emulate.

Ianthe

Chapter 23
Concluding Vyasa

The Book of Questions

This is the last question that Vyasa wrote.

1. *Its pages are without number.*
2. *Its cover shows a human face.*
3. *Who writes the book of the world?*

The Book of the World

This text is only the beginning. Its words do not define Nobilis. They are the threads of the tapestry of fate, not the pattern. They are the binding, the pages, the fonts, and the ink of the book of the world.

You who write the stories in that book, begin.




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Appendix A
Glossary

Note: Picky players may wish to make the following terminology substitutions, to bring the language of the Nobilis more in line with the original Latin:

- **Bellum Magnum** can replace **Valde Bellum**;
- **dementia animi** can replace **dementia animus**;
- **Familia Numinium** can replace **Familia Potens**;
- **Imperator Occultus** can replace **Imperator Occulte**;
- **Imperatores Occulti** can replace **Imperators Occulte**;
- **Locus Arcanus** can replace **Locus Celatum**; and
- **Loci Arcani** can replace **Loci Celatum**

"So they speak ... this 'True Tongue', in Heaven?"

"The conservatives do," he answered. "Hip modern angels speak Latin, naturally."

—from Conversations with Androcles, *by Jen Hogan*

OPPOSITE:
Woman and Child
by Charles Vess

A

Aaron's Serpents: giant snakes; the children of the World Ash.
Abaton: a hollow world, found on the World Ash.
Acmonion Wood, The: the trysting place for unlawful loves, found on the World Ash.
Aelfscienne: the world of the Dock-Alfar and Ljos-Alfar, found on the World Ash.
Allia: an extension of the Imperator's spirit, good for one wish.
Ananda: the most approachable member of the Council of Four.
Anchor: a human bound soul-to-soul with a Power or Excrucian-shard.
Angels: the natural inhabitants of Heaven.
Anguli: the tiniest inhabitants of the mythic world.
Ash, The: see **World Ash**
Aspect: out-of-character term for the physical and mental body and powers of a character.
Auctoritas: the "Chancel of the Body", a mystic shield protecting most Sovereigns from miracles.
Avara: magics created along with a Chancel.

B

Bane: a nasty magical by-product of the Rite that creates a Chancel.
Baron: an IC title usually given to those with Weak (Level 1) Domain.
Baronet: weak Powers who are the puppets of their betters.
Bicorn: a Cammoran.
Bloodsucker: vulgar term for a Cammoran.
Breakthrough: an Excrucian attack on the Earth.

C

Cammora, The: the mortal arm of Lord Entropy's rule, blessed with many magical gifts.
Cammorae: members of the Cammora.
Cammoran: a member of the Cammora.
Campaign: a set of game sessions having the same general continuity and characters.
Cantrips: Level 1 Domain or Realm Miracles.
Causa Causans: the first cause of things. see **spiritus Dei**
Chancel: a hidden place where Nobles rule and the world laws are different.
Chrysanthemums, Yellow: the Flowers of Dejection, that grow, closed, on angels' graves.
Cleave of the Botanists, The: a secret society searching for the Philosopher's Flower.
Cneph: IC term for the Creator.
Commencement: the moment when a Power becomes a Power.
Cosset: one of Lord Entropy's "pets": a nimblejack, ogre, or domicellus.
Council of Four: the Imperators who govern the physical side of Earth. Led by Lord Entropy.
Curetes: warriors of the Old Gods. The Curetes betrayed their masters and helped the New Gods survive.

D

Dark, The: the Imperators and Powers who would like to see humanity destroy itself.
Darkest Lord, The: see **Lord Entropy**
Dark Horde: the Excrucians.

Dark Horsemen: the Excrucians.
Degalim: An Imperial legion.
Dementia Animus: the "mental illness" suffered by a human stuck in the mythic world.
Dionyl: a world on the World Ash; also, its people, spirits inhabiting empty suits of clothes.
Divination: the use of informational miracles or magics.
Domain (IC): the piece of reality tied to a given Power.
Domain (OOC): the Attribute describing the PC's control over their IC Domain/Estate.
Domicelli: Lord Entropy's human personal servants (those who serve him directly).
Domina: a female Power. Usage: **the Domina of (Estate),** e.g. the Domina of Roads.
Dominus: a male Power. Usage: **the Dominus of (Estate),** e.g. the Dominus of Pain.
Duchess: an IC title usually given to female Powers with Masterful (Level 4) Domain.
Duke: an IC title usually given to male Powers with Masterful (Level 4) Domain.

E

Edge Cauldrons, The: great vessels on Dionyl afire with rare magics that help the Imperators.
Emperor to Come, the: see **Ananda**
Entropy: see **Lord Entropy**
Ephemeral, the: Anchors.
Estate: see **Domain.**
Excrucian: A being from outside Creation who wishes to see it destroyed.
Excrucian War: see **Valde Bellum**
Exemplar: an IC term usually referencing Powers that have Aspect Level 5.



F

Familia Caelestis: the set of Powers who serve a given Imperator.
Familia Potens: Family of Powers. Literally, "Powerful Family". See **Familia Caelestis.**
Ferohers: natives of the spirit world, semi-sentient.
Fledglings: Powers newly Commenced.

G

Garden That Is No More: Eden.
Great War: see **Valde Bellum**
Great Work (in Heaven): the angels' labors to keep Heaven both dynamic and perfect.
Grim King: the name the Cleave of the Botanists gives to Scorn's-Regal Joktan.
Guard: see **Chancel**

H

Harumaph: a mythical extra-dimensional being; the negative counterpart to Cneph, the Creator.
Harumaph's Children: the Excrucians (a term they use for themselves).
Heaven: a realm of perfect beauty, atop the World Ash.
Hell: a realm of perfect corruption and agony, in which the World Ash is rooted.
HG: see **Hollyhock God**
Hollyhock God: an OOC term referring to the person who runs the NOBILIS game.
Hook: see **Anchor**

I

IC: see **In Character**
Imperator: a being made entirely from spiritus Dei; a motive force behind reality.
Imperator Occulte: see **Imperator**
Imperial Miracles: the miracles of the Imperators, with vast power and unknown constraints.
Incandescence: a fire that burns too brightly; a Power killed in war; a Power of Lord Entropy.
In Character: things that are said and done by the PCs and NPCs are "in character".
Inquisitorial Chancels: the Chancels that investigate possible Mimics and traitorous Imperators.
Inquisitorial Power: a Power of the Inquisitorial Chancels.

J

Jotun: a giant of Jotunheim.
Jotunheim: a world of giants, found on the World Ash.

K

Keep: see **Chancel**

L

Lady: Usually, a female Imperator. Sometimes, a female Power.
Light, The: the Imperators and Powers dedicated to humanity's preservation.
Locus Celatum: see **Chancel**
Lord: Usually, a male Imperator. Sometimes, a male Power.
Lord Entropy: the leader of the Council of Four (Imperators) who rule the Earth.
Lord of Expectations, the: see **Ananda**

M

Marchessa: an IC title usually given to female Powers with Forceful (Level 3) Domain.
Marquis: an IC title usually given to male Powers with Forceful (Level 3) Domain.
Minime: see **Anguli**
Mosaic, The: a divinational path in Serpenthane.
Mythic World, The: the Earth, as seen by the mystical. Cf. **Prosaic Earth.**

N

Nettle Rite: a Simple Rite that steals power from an enemy by damaging a thing they value.

New God: one of the younger true gods, born after or shortly before the Fall.
Nimblejack: an inhumanly quick creature, created by Lord Entropy, with a sick sense of humor.
Nobilis, The: The set of all known Powers.
NOBILIS: The title of the game. Note typographical difference.
Noble Ones, The: see **Nobilis**
Nobles, The: see **Nobilis**
Non-Player Character: a character in the universe of the game normally played by the HG.
NPC: see **Non-Player Character**

O

Ogre: an inhumanly strong and vicious creature, created by Lord Entropy.
Old God: one of the earliest of the "true gods", born before the law forbade eating new gods.
Once-Born: a Power with Level 0 Aspect (those who retain their human bodies).
OOC: see **Out of Character**
Out of Character: things the players or HG say or do that are unrelated to specific game events.

P

Pawn (of their Estate): a Power who is the plaything of their Estate (or has Level 0 Domain).
PC: see **Player Character**
Player Character: the main persona a player assumes during the game (usually a Power).
Power: a human (or animal) invested with a shard of an Imperator's soul.
Prosaic Earth, The: the world, as seen by the mundane. Cf. **Mythic World.**

R

Radiant: an IC term usually referencing a Power with Level 1 Realm.
Realm (IC): a world on the Tree, or a Chancel.
Realm (OOC): the Attribute that governs a PC's power over their Chancel.
Realm's Heart (IC): the mystic "center" of a Chancel, or a Power tied to it.
Realm's Heart (OOC): a Power with Level 2 Realm.
Red Zone: see **Breakthrough**
Refuges: places of perfect beauty on the Earth, made by the Powers of Heaven.
Regal: an IC title usually given to Powers with Majestic (Level 5) Domain (e.g. "Fire's-Regal").
Regina: a female Imperator.
Regius: see **Imperator**
Rending: see **Breakthrough**
Rex Regius: a male Imperator.
Riding (of Excrucians:) lots and lots of Excrucians. There are seven known Ridings in the war.

S

Sanctum: see **Chancel**
Scene: the OOC term for a set of more-or-less continuous events in the game world.
Secret Place: see **Chancel**
Serpenthane: gathering-place of the Aaron's Serpents. Location of the Mosaic.
Session: the OOC term for the events in the game world during a day's roleplay.
Simple Rite: a magic any Noble can perform.
Story: the OOC term for an ordered, aesthetically "complete" set of game events.
Sovereign: see **Power**
Sovereign Power: see **Power**
Sovereign Tree: see **World Ash, The**
Spirit King: see **Old God**
Spiritus Dei: the "divine essence", the Creator's breath.

T

Tempest: an IC title given to Powers with Level 5 Realm.
Titan: see **Old God**
Terrafi Sairyd, The: the division between one viewpoint and another.
Treasure: something important stolen away from a Power for use in a Nettle Rite.
True Gods: divine beings, not necessarily from any human myth.
True King: an IC term usually referring to a male Power with Level 4 Realm.
True Queen: an IC term usually referring to a female Power with Level 4 Realm.



U

Unbeing: one label for the Excrucian cause.
Unending Labor, The: see **Great Work in Heaven, The**

V

Valde Bellum: the war against the Excrucians; the "great war".
Vehmgericht: see **Cammora**
Viscount: an IC title usually given to those with Minor (Level 2) Domain.

W

Wall between Souls, The: see **Terrafi Sairyd, The.**
Ward: see **Chancel.**
Warden: an IC title usually given to those with Level 3 Realm.
Word of Command: the ultimate expression of Noble magic, devastating to its wielder.
Word of the Flesh: an Aspect-based Word of Command.
Word of the Tower: a Realm-based Word of Command.
World Ash, The: Yggdrasil, an immeasurably tall tree whose branches contain worlds.

Y

Yggdrasil: see **World Ash, The**
Ymera: see **Imperator**

Appendix B

Flowers and their Meanings

The anemone, flower of the wind, was born from Adonis' blood and Aphrodite's tears: a symbol of sadness, of blood, and of life and beauty pit against the world and failing.
—from A Medieval Bestiary, *by Paul McArthur*

The Uses of Flowers

Here are over a hundred flowers commonly used in Noble Designs. The first section illustrates how you can tie some of these flowers to Estates and to Powers, as well as the things to which the Excrucian flower rite can bridge them. The second section lists more flowers and their meanings.

Abutilon
The flower of Peace

Character Types	Sample Estates	Bridges
Those who have mastered internal calm.	Reflection	Human self-discovery.
Those who hate war and violence.	Meditation	Mending broken bones.
	Happiness	Peace conferences.
	Other fine things	Monasteries (and their internal politics).

Acacia
The flower of Concealment

Character Types	Sample Estates	Bridges
Those who conceal their emotions (e.g. shy Powers, former actors, officers).	Subterfuge	Hidden, lopsided loves.
Powers who conceal themselves (e.g. former spies, thieves).	Masks	Ugly, good-hearted people.
	Emotion	Stalkers.
	Hidden things	Masked balls.

Note: This refers to the yellow acacia, the most common variant in Noble iconography. The rose acacia denotes friendship.

Acanthus
The flower of the Fine Arts

Character Types	Sample Estates	Bridges
Those who care greatly about elegance, raw emotion, or both.	Television or Theatre.	Artists becoming successful.
	Well-Crafted Lies.	An artwork becoming central to one's life.
	Books, Painting, Sculpture, or Art.	Professional cons.

Achillea
The flower of War

Character Types	Sample Estates	Bridges
Those who were dedicated soldiers.	Logistics.	Military trials.
Those who care deeply about the Valde Bellum.	Armies.	War games.
	Blades, Guns, or Bombs.	Escalating tensions.
Those who serve Excrucian Warmains.	Conquest, Pestilence, or Famine.	Good-hearted folks headed for corruption.
	Blood.	

Adder's Tongue
The Flower of Jealousy

Character Types	Sample Estates	Bridges
Those who can't forget the hard life. Those who feel cursed rather than blessed by power.	Bows and Arrows. Record Players. Ethics. Any other Estate "jealous" of modern replacements.	Career jealousy. Romantic jealousy. Possessiveness.

Agrimony
The Flower of Gratitude

Character Types	Sample Estates	Bridges
Those who know they are blessed.	Estates that depend on others. Computers (that rely on humans). Consumption (that relies on substance). Trees (which rely on the sun and rain). Anything else to which one becomes grateful.	Largesse which cannot be repaid. Largesse which would damage something important in life if repaid. Inspired believers. Faith healers.

Allspice
The Flower of Compassion

Character Types	Sample Estates	Bridges
Those who promise (aloud or to themselves) never to hold back aid when there is a need.	The Harvest. The Sun. Medicine. Sorrow's Ease. Anything that bring life and joy.	Those getting help from the wrong folks. People giving help to the wrong people. Missions. Charities. Teachers. Doctors.

The Excrucians love compassion. It goes wrong so easily.

Almond and Bilberry
The Flowers of Treachery

Character Types	Sample Estates	Bridges
Powers of Hell. Those who are scum and proud of it.	Perception or Appearances. Ravines. Fire. Money or Greed.	Exposing treachery at the wrong time. Spies (industrial and political).

Aloe
The Flower of Religion and Grief

Character Types	Sample Estates	Bridges
Those who grieve for lost humanity. Those given joy by their service to Heaven.	Joy, Enlightenment, or Fear (Religion). Loss, Failure, or Echoes (Grief). Death or Damnation (Either).	Upstanding Church folk. Temple construction. Hospitals and funeral homes. Psychiatrists or Televangelists.



The Lady's Mantle, Rosaceae Alchemilla, *derives its name from the Arabic for alchemy* (al kimiya). *Our ancestors considered its essence vital to the construction of the philosopher's stone.*
—from A History of the Garden, *by Jillian Wolf*

Alyssym, Sweet Alyssym,
the flower of Excellence and Vanity

CHARACTER TYPES	SAMPLE ESTATES	BRIDGES
Vain Powers.	Estates which will never grow grander.	Glorious grand projects.
Those given Alyssym by their Familia.	The Sea, The Sky, The Clouds, or The Sun.	Superior humans.
	Thought or Emotion.	Beautiful things.
		The vain but good-hearted.

Note: To choose Alyssym for oneself is vanity. It takes on the meaning of excellence when bestowed on another. A Power's Familia can, in a short ritual requiring no miracle points, award them the flower Alyssym as a replacement to the second image of their Design — or as a third, intertwined flower. Powers do this only rarely; the ritual loses potency each time it is misapplied.

Amaranth
the flower of the Immutable

CHARACTER TYPES	SAMPLE ESTATES	BRIDGES
Stubborn or confident characters.	Gems, Mountains, or Stone.	Mule-headed people.
Physically strong or sturdy characters.	Space.	A problem one cannot see until it's too late.
	Tombs.	An artist who produced a modern classic.
	Dictatorship.	Immutable, tight family ties.
	Steel.	

Note: The globe and coxcomb amaranth share this connotation of immutability. In addition, the coxcomb amaranth denotes foppery and affectation.

Amaryllis
the flower of Physical Beauty

CHARACTER TYPES	SAMPLE ESTATES	BRIDGES
The shallow and beautiful.	Aesthetics.	Wonderful resorts.
	Heraldry.	Great art.
	Music or Sculpture.	Masterful planning.
		Shallow, beautiful people.
		A beautiful locale for the Rending.

Angelica
the flower of Inspiration and Magic

CHARACTER TYPES	SAMPLE ESTATES	BRIDGES
Wise Powers.	Magic, Faery Magic, or Stage Magic.	Immensely inventive ideas.
Artists.	Artistic Estates of all kinds.	Alchemical research.
Magicians.	(see also Acanthus, p. 294)	Students of the paranormal.
Powers with faith in the Creator.		Psychic fraud networks.
Powers with faith in the Creation.		Musical bands created by a Muse.

Apocynum
the flower of Falsehood

CHARACTER TYPES	SAMPLE ESTATES	BRIDGES
Liars.	The Media.	Little white lies (ideally, ones that do more damaged exposed than existing at all).
Actors (see also Acacia, p. 294)	Lies, Propaganda, or Pretence.	A performance of *Othello.*
Those who serve Excrucian Deceivers.	Bigotry.	Plastic surgery.
		Advertising.

Ashflower
the flower of Guardianship

CHARACTER TYPES	SAMPLE ESTATES	BRIDGES
Wardens.	Castles or Fortresses	Parents or police (ones true to their duty before the flower rite begins).
Powers of the Light.	Armor	
Protectors of the innocent (e.g., ex-police, ex-National Guard, *et cetera*).	Preservation	Newly released preventative medicines and techniques.
	Parental Love	Storage facilities.

The Ash is also, of course, a symbol of the World Ash — but in this sense, it is forbidden by the Imperators to Powers and Estates alike. Alyssym, they feel, is quite sufficient for the most extravagant vanity.

Aspen
the flower of Fear and Lamenting

CHARACTER TYPES	SAMPLE ESTATES	BRIDGES
Timid or habitually cautious Powers.	Fear	People "in too deep" (as when their family are hostages).
Neurotics.	Denial	Horror writers.
Nobilis afraid of their own power.	Waiting	Horror television shows and films.
	Monsters	Campfire ghost stories.

Aster
the flower of Variety

CHARACTER TYPES	SAMPLE ESTATES	BRIDGES
Jacks of all trades.	Weather	Any situation in which a number of odd and very different people must come together and interact.
Former sketch comedians.	Metal	
Powers with unusual Affiliations.	Animals	
World travelers.	Anything else which varies enormously while remaining the same sort of thing.	
Pawnshop brokers.		



Auricula
the flower of Wealth

CHARACTER TYPES	SAMPLE ESTATES	BRIDGES
The Power of Gold, Money, or Banks	Gold, Money, or Banks	Money
Powers who were rich before their enNobling	Wealthy People	Bankers
Powers who covet material things now	Luxuries	Wealthy philanthropists
	Megacorporations	Servants in rich homes
	The Stock Market	The philosopher's stone
	Hong Kong	
	Human Royalty	

Other Flowers

FLOWER	MEANING	FLOWER	MEANING
Balsamine	Impatience	Hollyhock	Ambition, Glory, Imagination
Barberry	Anger	Hop	Injustice
Basil	Hatred	Hornbeam	Ornament
Bayberry	Instruction	Hyssop	Cleanliness
Begonia	Warning, Deformity	Jasmine	Sex
Bells of Ireland	Luck	Judas Tree	Betrayal
Bellwort	Hopelessness	Lapageria	Balance
Betony	Surprise	Larch	Audacity
Blackthorn	Difficulty	Lily	Daring, Love
Butterfly Weed	Freedom	Live-Oak	Liberty
Candytuft	Apathy	Lobelia	Malevolence, Dislike
Catalpa and Dandelion	Romance	Lupine	Hunger
Catchfly	Traps	Meadow Saffron	Age
Cattleya	Motherhood	Meadowsweet	Ineffectuality
Chamomile	Energy in Adversity	Mesembryanthemum	Idleness
Cherry Blossom	Spiritual Beauty	Monarda	Your Whims are Unbearable
Chestnut Blossom	Justice	Monkshood	Treachery
Cistus	Popularity	Mountain Laurel	Ambition
Clematis	Poverty	Orchis	Industry
Clotbur	The Tactless	Passion Flower	Faith, Trust
Cobaea	Gossip	Peach Blossom	Captivity
Coltsfoot	Justice	Pepper-Flower	Satire
Columbine (Red)	Worry	Periwinkle	Memory
Convolvulus	Uncertainty	Pimpernel	Change, An Assignation
Creeping Cereus	Genius	Poppy	Flirtation
Cuscuta	Evil	Rocket	Rivalry
Daphne	Fame	Sweet Pea	Mania
Darnel	Vice	Teazel	Misanthropy
Dock	Patience	Tulip	Conquest
Dogrose	Pleasure	Trumpet-Flower	Fame
Fennel	Power	Tuberose	Seduction, Intrigue
Fern	Magic	Violet	Heart's Ease
Fir	Time	Water Lily	Chastity
Fuchsia	Taste	Weigela	Mutual Support
Gentian	Heaven	Willow	The Forsaken
Grass	Submission	Wisteria	Degeneracy
Guilder Rose	Age, Winter	Yellow Chrysanthemum	Slighted Love, Dejection
Hawkweed	Sight	Yucca	Miracles
Hemlock	Death or, "You will cause my Death"	Zinnia	Absent Friends

Appendix C
Timeline

This is the sequence of events as seen from Heaven or the spirit world. Prosaic Earth has a less orderly chronology.

Prehistory

The First Event

The Creator (some postulate) bargains with the Excrucians.

The Second Event

Creation of the Weirding Wall, Yggdrasil, Heaven, and Hell.

The Unknown Age

According to Aaron's Serpents, the stars lived mortal lives.

End of the Unknown Age

The stars are scattered in the sky. There is a time of peace.

The First Age of the World

Before Time Began

The first Angels (including Firstborn and Lucifer) are born. The Great Work begins in Heaven. Heaven invents Society. The Mythic Earth and certain other Realms are born.

0 C.T.	Heaven invents Time. (C.T. stands for "Celestial Time".)
12 C.T.	Heaven invents Flowers. The first flowers bloom on Earth.
188 C.T.	The Most Ancient Lord (first of Earth's true gods) is born.
201 C.T.	The Angels invent Death (or at least Hemlock).
202 C.T.	More Angels and Old Gods appear. The Old Gods struggle among themselves.
400 C.T.	The Angel Ashriel discovers the World Ash.
403 C.T.	Angels discover Hell. Lucifer orders it sealed.
681 C.T.	The last of the Old Gods is born.
743 C.T.	The first Aaron's Serpents are born. Dinosaurs roam the Earth.
792 C.T.	The Old Gods reach a truce and start eating New Gods.
802 C.T.	The High Court in Heaven temporarily exiles Za'afiel to Earth; he destroys the dinosaurs. Mythic Earth splits into "prosaic Earth" and the "mythic world".
851 C.T.	The first Phoenix, Phoensa, and Corruna are born from a mating between an Old God and an Aboulomri.
960 C.T.	The first Dionyl are born.
961 C.T.	The Garden of Eden gives birth to Adam and Eve.
965 C.T.	The Curetes begin sheltering the New Gods.
975 C.T.	Lucifer begins preaching the philosophy of Hell.
981 C.T.	Hell poisons the Aaron's Serpent Manaechus.
989 C.T.	The War in Heaven begins.
992 C.T.	The New and Old Gods war in the Spirit World.
999 C.T.	Manaechus comes to the Garden of Eden. Eve eats of the apple, creating the Light. Adam eats of the apple, creating the Dark. Adam and Eve leave Eden. The first Magister of the Dark claims Eden as a Chancel and remakes it into the Sable Gardens. The New Gods defeat the Old Gods. Lucifer and 69 other Angels fall.
1000 C.T./ 0 A.F.	The Phoenix family dies and is reborn. Heaven renumbers its years, using A.F. for "After the Fall".

The Second Age of the World

1 A.F.	Adam and Eve have their first child.
78 A.F.	Adam and Eve forbid incest.
109 A.F.	The first marriage of human and beast takes place; dilution of humanity's miraculous nature begins.
385 A.F.	Heaven drives excess fallen Angels back into Hell from the worlds of the Ash.
408 A.F.	The last "miraculous" human dies. All remaining humans are of beast stock. (On the positive side, they're now all over the world.)
710 A.F.	The Light Imperator Noë starts bringing food animals into the Spirit World.
990 A.F.	The Dark is on the verge of destroying the human food supply.
999 A.F.	The Light unleashes Satyavrata, demon of the deluge. Samiasa brings Aholibamah to Aelfscienne; their children will become the Ljos-Alfar.
1000 A.F.	Lucifer binds Satyavrata and the other Deluges as Anchors, for unknown reasons. The flood ends.
1018 A.F.	Nightmare assaults the Angel of the Sun; the birth of their child Arikel heralds the beginning of Night.
1045 A.F.	The first Wildlords arrive on Earth.
1624 A.F.	Heaven drives excess fallen Angels back into Hell from the worlds of the Ash.
1999 A.F.	The Excrucians assault Heaven. Atrocity kills Heaven's gatekeeper, but Heaven repels the assault. The Imperatrix Attaris reveals herself as Magister of the Wild Attaris Ebrôt Appêkā. The fallen Angel Ebrôt Appêkā, turns to dust. Vyasa writes the Sutra of Questions.
2000 A.F.	The Phoenix family dies and is reborn.

The Third Age of the World

2092 A.F.	The Wildlord Adalia makes Atlantis into a Chancel.
2115 A.F.	The Most Ancient Lord makes India into a Chancel.
2421 A.F.	Malambruno falls into Imperial hands, corrupting the Imperator who claims it.
2892 A.F.	Jehannum of the Dark kidnaps Troy.
2912 A.F.	Trojan warriors destroy Jehannum.
3000 A.F.	The Buddha is born in the Most Ancient Lord's Chancel; Angels cannot verify or deny his attainment of Nirvana.
3496 A.F.	Excrucians destroy the Most Ancient Lord.
3680 A.F./ 1680 A.P.	Heaven renumbers its years, using the abbreviation A.P. for "Age of Pain".
2020 A.P.	Angoulaffre the Broken-Toothed creates the first Tempest.
3000 A.P.	Christ is born; Angels cannot verify or deny his divinity.
3998 A.P.	Lord Entropy and the Council of Four take control of the mortal and Noble worlds.
4320 A.P.	Parasiel tries to erase the records of Heaven; Hukkok exiles him to Earth.
4342 A.P.	Lord Entropy founds the Cammora.
4396 A.P.	Ambrolam forms its Chancel.
4414 A.P.	Sakhrat forms its Chancel.
4655 A.P.	First human colonies on other planets.
4895 A.P.	A treacherous Imperator sets human technology and history back five hundred years. The extraplanetary colonies vanish.
4944 A.P.	Superstes Annabelle Zupay appears.
4945 A.P.	Lord Entropy burns the original "Mona Lisa".
4996-4999 A.P.	The present day.



NOBILIS

BETWEEN MEN AND GODS,
REALITY AND MYTH, PERFECTION
AND THE END OF EVERYTHING:
THERE STAND THE NOBILIS

PLAYER NAME

BASIC INFORMATION

CHARACTER NAME

IMPERATOR

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

AGE GENDER

LOOKS

CODE

❍ HEAVEN ❍ LIGHT ❍ WILD
❍ HELL ❍ DARK ❍ OTHER

PRINCIPLES:

ATTRIBUTES

	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS
ASPECT	❍❍❍❍❍	○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
DOMAIN	❍❍❍❍❍	○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
REALM	❍❍❍❍❍	○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
SPIRIT	❍❍❍❍❍	○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

ESTATE

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY DOMAINS, IF ANY

GIFTS

MIRACLE LEVEL	ATTRIBUTE	INVOCATION	AREA	FLEXIBILITY	COMMON?	FINAL COST

HANDICAPS

RATING	DESCRIPTION

BONDS & ANCHORS

RATING	DESCRIPTION

DESIGN

CHOOSE TRAITS, PETALS, LEAVES, THORNS, AND BACKGROUND

WOUND LEVELS

SURFACE	TEMP.	❍❍❍❍❍
	PERM.	❍❍❍❍❍
SERIOUS	TEMP.	❍❍❍❍❍
	PERM.	❍❍❍❍❍
DEADLY	TEMP.	❍❍❍❍❍
	PERM.	❍❍❍❍❍

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BETWEEN MEN AND GODS,
REALITY AND MYTH, PERFECTION
AND THE END OF EVERYTHING:
THERE STAND THE NOBILIS

IMPERATOR SHEET

BASIC INFORMATION

IMPERATOR NAME

CHANCEL NAME

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

AGE GENDER

LOOKS

CODE ○ HEAVEN ○ LIGHT ○ WILD ○ HELL ○ DARK ○ OTHER

PRINCIPLES:

ATTRIBUTES

	LEVEL	MIRACLE POINTS	ESTATES
ASPECT	○○○○○○○	○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	
DOMAIN	○○○○○○○	○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	
REALM	○○○○○○○	○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	
SPIRIT	○○○○○○○	○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	

GIFTS

MIRACLE LEVEL	ATTRIBUTE	INVOCATION	AREA	FLEXIBILITY	COMMON?	FINAL COST

HANDICAPS

RATING	DESCRIPTION

POWERS

NAME	ESTATE

IMPERATOR PROPERTIES

DYNASTY POINTS

WOUND LEVELS

SURFACE	TEMP.	○○○○○
	PERM.	○○○○○
SERIOUS	TEMP.	○○○○○
	PERM.	○○○○○
DEADLY	TEMP.	○○○○○
	PERM.	○○○○○

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REALITY AND MYTH, PERFECTION
AND THE END OF EVERYTHING:
THERE STAND THE NOBILIS

CHANCEL SHEET

BASIC INFORMATION

CHANCEL NAME

IMPERATOR

CHANCEL DETAILS

GOVERNOR OF CHANCEL

POPULATION

POWERS

NAME	ESTATE

CHANCEL PROPERTIES

PROPERTY	CHANCEL POINTS

DESCRIPTION

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UNWILLING GODS. IMPOSSIBLE POWERS. UNEARTHLY DANGERS.

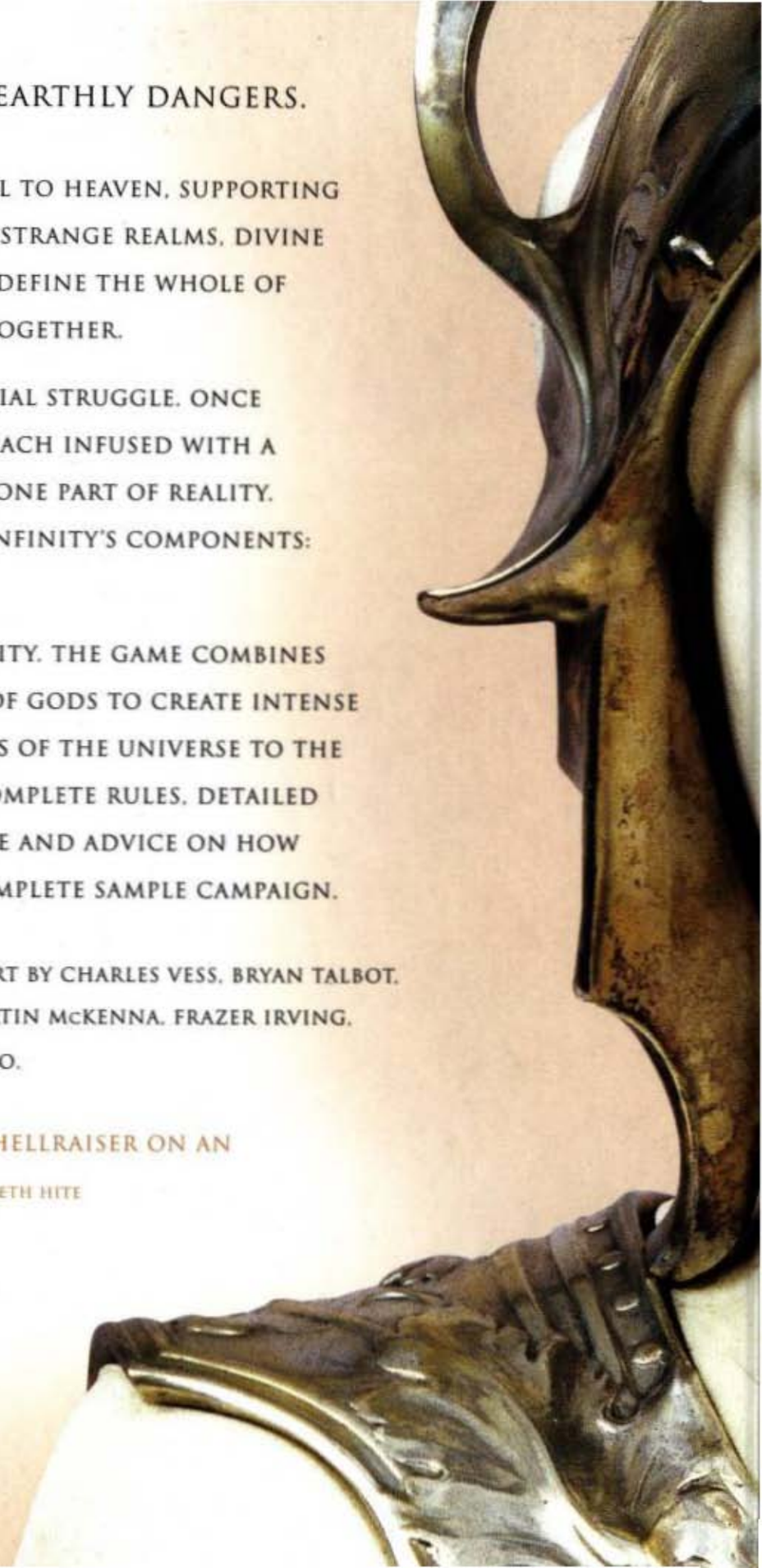
BEYOND THE SKY, THE WORLD ASH STRETCHES FROM HELL TO HEAVEN, SUPPORTING COUNTLESS WORLDS BESIDES OUR OWN. BETWEEN THESE STRANGE REALMS, DIVINE POWERS AND THE WILD FIGHT A WAR TO CONTROL AND DEFINE THE WHOLE OF EXISTENCE, ONE IDEA AT A TIME ... OR TO UNMAKE IT ALTOGETHER.

THE NOBILIS STAND IN THE FRONT LINES OF THIS CELESTIAL STRUGGLE. ONCE THEY WERE HUMAN. NOW THEY ARE SOMETHING MORE, EACH INFUSED WITH A PIECE OF CREATION'S POWER AND GIVEN MASTERY OVER ONE PART OF REALITY. LOVE, WAR, MUSIC, STEEL, THUNDER, AGONY OR ANY OF INFINITY'S COMPONENTS: A NOBLE IS ITS INCARNATION, MASTER AND PROTECTOR.

NOBILIS LETS YOU BE ONE OF THESE GUARDIANS OF REALITY. THE GAME COMBINES FIERCE IMAGINATION AND THE TRANSCENDENT POWER OF GODS TO CREATE INTENSE ROLEPLAYING EXPERIENCES, FROM THE UNSEEN MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE TO THE DEPTHS OF THE HUMAN HEART. THIS BOOK CONTAINS COMPLETE RULES, DETAILED BACKGROUND, DESCRIPTIONS OF HOW TO PLAY THE GAME AND ADVICE ON HOW TO REFEREE IT, PLUS PROFILES OF THE NOBILIS, AND A COMPLETE SAMPLE CAMPAIGN.

NOBILIS: A ROLEPLAYING GAME BY R. SEAN BORGSTROM. WITH ART BY CHARLES VESS, BRYAN TALBOT, MICHAEL KALUTA, LEE MOYER, RAVEN MIMURA, RIK MARTIN, MARTIN McKENNA, FRAZER IRVING, RALPH HORSLEY, DENISE GARNER, AL DAVISON, AND ARCIMBOLDO.

"IMAGINE NEIL GAIMAN'S SANDMAN AND CLIVE BARKER'S HELLRAISER ON AN ABSINTHE BENDER, WITH FLOWERS. THAT'S NOBILIS." KENNETH HITE



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