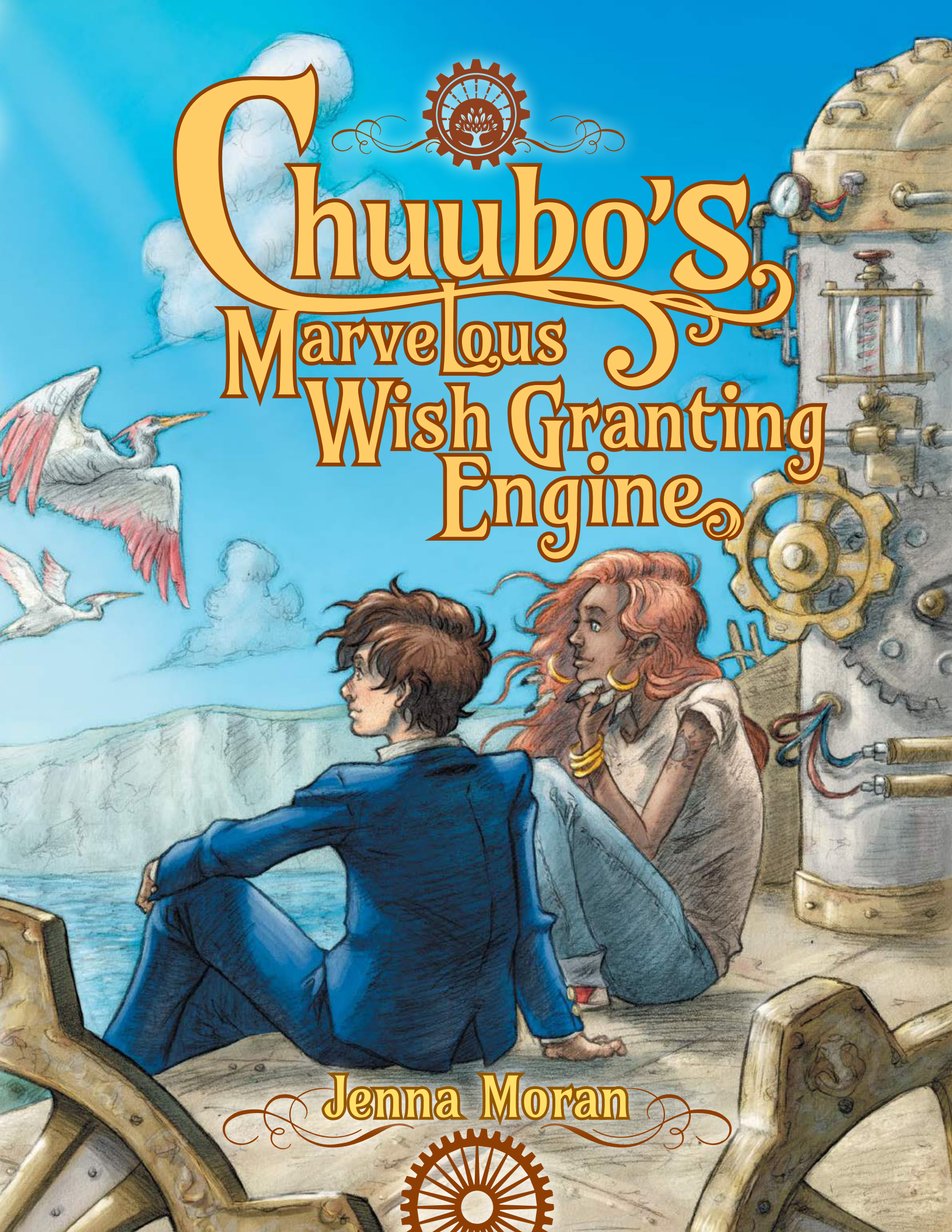

Chuubo's
Marvelous
Wish Granting
Engine
Jenna Moran

Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine

The Roleplaying Game

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This book uses fantastical and supernatural elements in its setting, for its characters, their abilities, and themes.
All such elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only.

This book contains mature content and reader discretion is advised.

Dedication

For Robin Michael Alexander Maginn, who wanted to visit me in China;
for Lillian Elanor Tewson Heino, just in case you get into gaming someday;
and for Killian James Sebastian Maginn, whom I haven't had the chance to meet yet.

Also for Cync Brantley, Rand Brittain, Cheryl & Joseph Couvillion, Anthony Damiani,
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To Karl Friedrich Borgstrom, for teaching me the joy of sailing.
Fortitude would be different without you.

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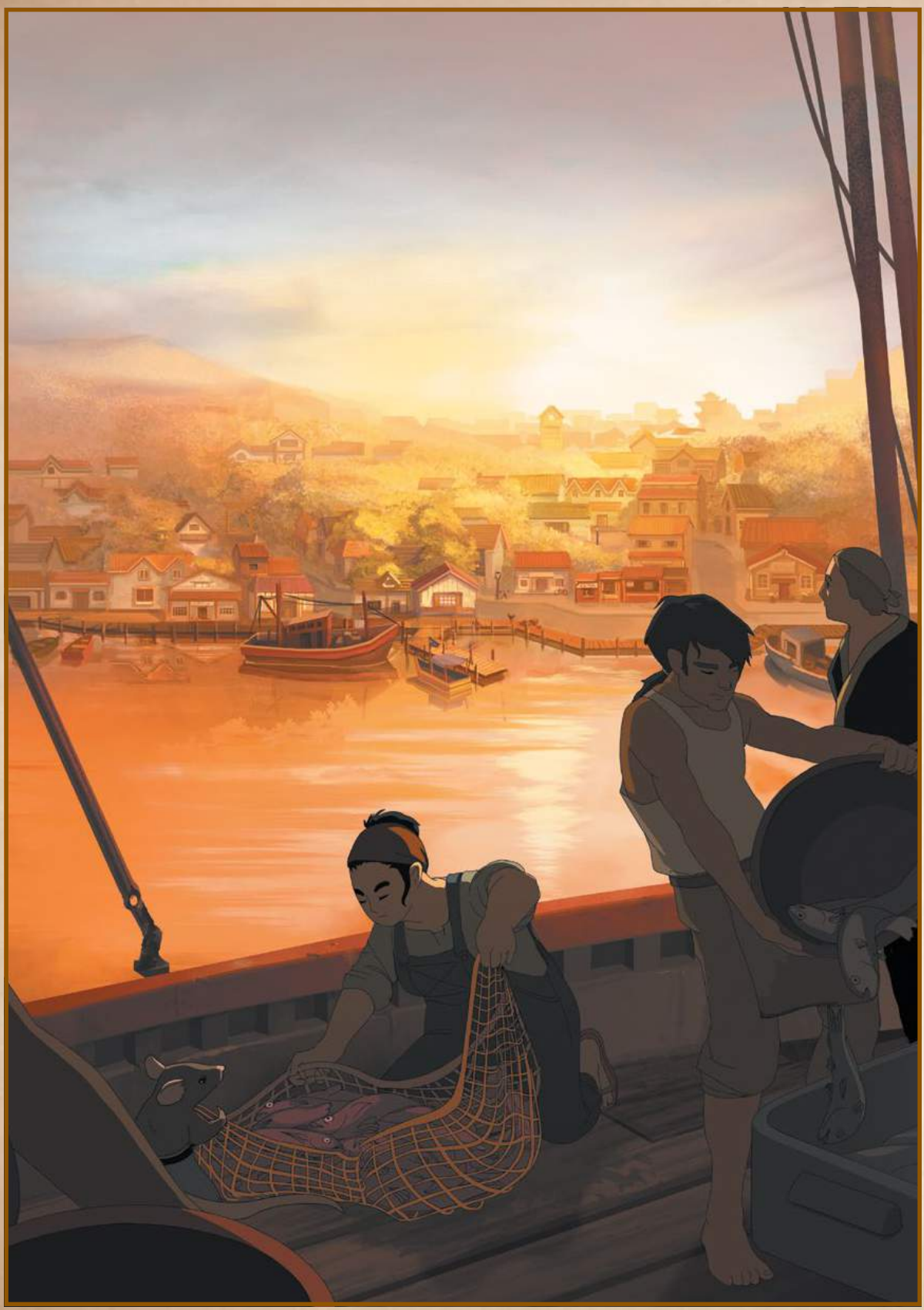
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Introduction

Sometime after the world drowned I found myself on one of the boats that go to Town.

I didn't know yet that the world had fallen.

Being and nothingness were swallowed, both of them, by the tidal wave of the Outside, but I hadn't noticed yet, because I'd been living in one of the places that got covered by it, and so I'd stopped existing in any kind of defined way for a little while.

Then one of the exploring boats found Suzhou, where I'd been living. It made Suzhou exist again, more or less. It stopped being a wild, chaotic delirium and became a place again... more or less.

I don't think I was fully real again yet when I boarded.

I didn't wake up, not all the way, until the boat crested the horizon of Big Lake and I saw the dockside settlement of Fortitude for the first time. Then it was like my heart woke up, and everything that had been black and white became color, and the textures of the world came back, and sound had richness and deepness once again.

It wasn't because I'd been unreal, exactly.

It was part of it, I think, but only part of it. It was because... it was because as soon as I saw Fortitude I understood that work would be rewarded; that things had a beautiful simplicity; and that I had a home.

I guess that if you're reading this then you are real. As I write this, you are mildly notional, of course. You can't possibly be as real as the wood of the buildings, the depth of the air, the sounds of fish being sliced open and the smell of marlin cooking on a limestone slab. You're part of the diffuse potential of "you could be reading this."

But by the time you *actually* see this I guess you must be someone real. You must be a real, physical person, in one of the reclaimed regions, and maybe not even knowing that the world was lost. You might not even realize that you've been cheated, that there could be—

That there was *more*.

So come. Come to a little place called Town, in the middle of nowhere, circled by its reborn sun. Come, at least in play, and maybe in person if you can stand giving up some of the modern luxuries, and feel what it's like to really live.

There is so much to experience here. You could *live*.

What is this?

The ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** RPG is a guidebook to finding magic and wonder in your everyday life. It's designed for telling charming little fantasy stories, heart-lifting and soul-cheering stories, things to leave you with a smile; as well, of course, as a couple of doses of laughter, adventure, and fun.

For this game, I'm targeting forum and tabletop play—anything where you can have a permanent physical record of events. You can have fun with this stuff in a real-time online game but it's going to be a little more difficult!

The Wishing Boy (or Girl)

And let's start by imagining you as a pretty ordinary kind of person.

Just an ordinary kid, living on an ordinary street. If you're usually older than a kid, well, bear with me. Get younger? Or at least imagine yourself a little younger than you actually are. Just an ordinary kid, in a kind of modern part of a kind of rustic Town.

You get ordinary grades. You do ordinarily well at sports. You like to sit out on the sidewalk of your street and eat ice cream or play jacks or talk to your friends or pet the neighborhood cat. You're named something bland like, I don't know. If you're a boy, maybe Chuubo or something? If you're a girl, how about Shokyou, instead?[1]

You're normal and you have no trouble fitting in.

You're ordinary and you *like* it that way.

But just because you're not very strong, and you're not very smart, and you're not very fast, and you're not even very charismatic, and you are, in fact, pretty much all-around ordinary in every sort of way, that doesn't mean that you can't go down to the vacant house at the end of your cul-de-sac and go in and close the door and unroll your plans and get out your saw and hammer and nails and wood and build a Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine that grants wishes.

Because, obviously, in fact, you *can*.

You *did*.

It's *right there*.

The Game

That's the kind of game this is. That's the kind of character you'll play.

You don't have to *actually* play a kid with a wish-granting engine, of course. That'd be a bit weird after a while. In the first major campaign for this game, **The Glass-Maker's Dragon**, you'll have a total of eight standard options, in fact—

- **Chuubo** or **Shokyou**, with their wish-granting engine;
- **Seizhi Schwan**, their best friend;
- **Rinley Yatskaya**, troublemaker;
- **Leonardo de Montreal**, the master of deviant science;
- **Natalia Koutolika**, hero and ice queen, best of her mortal generation;
- **Principal Entropy II**, his hands dripping with his father's blood;
- **Miramie Mesmer**, the dream-witch; *and*
- **Jasper Irinka**, the daughter of slain **Jade Irinka**, angel of the houses of the sun.

1 Warning: names may not be ordinary in non-participating locations.

Not to mention variants, characters from various supplements, and characters that you'll design yourself—

But at the core of it all?

At the heart of it?

This is the kind of game where your wishes come true.

Town

This game is set in Town. It's a pretty nice place, surprisingly rustic, with about 165 square miles of settlement and suburbs and 80,000 people[2] calling it home.

At its core, Town is

- **Fortitude**, a sweet, laid-back pastoral region;
- **Horizon**, the ruins of a vampire's "Night London;"
- **Big Lake**, that spans the worlds, and its
- **Little Island**—a jewel in that endless lake;
- **Arcadia**, a dazzling whirl of fun and magic;
- **Old Molder**, left over from the age of progress;
- **Bluebell Park**, a lurid place of alien magic; *and*
- **the Walking Fields**, dotted by scattered settlements;

and beyond and around all of that is **the Outside.**

Town used to be a *youkai* place. It used to be a monster town, home to creatures that served the gods of dream and nightmare. It used to be in darkness, every day, as it had no sun. But then humans came sailing over the Lake—first from Russia, then from Japan, and later elsewhere; and Alexandrel Celdinar built Night London; there was a grand age of deviant science and strange wonder, and one day Jade Irinka showed up.

She was the sun.

She's dead now. She's dead, and we all almost went with her. But we didn't. The sun came back—there are a handful of different stories as to the *reason*—and that pretty much brings us up to the present day, in Town.

What is this for?

This is a system to help you tell stories. It's a story of a beautiful place. It's an ideological tool, too, it's totally propaganda, because I do have a purpose here, in writing it.

I want you to heed the call if you ever hear it.

I want you to come to Town if you ever find it. I don't want you to be scared or disbelieving. I don't want you to be dismissive. It's a beautiful place and it needs a few more people, good people, like you.

2 Depending on how you count the ghosts, vampires, ogres, rats, dryads, robots, fairies, and *youkai*, I suppose.



Play



Basic Principles

preamble

The ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** RPG is a game of pretend.

It plays out in the course of a conversation. It can be an online conversation or a bunch of people sitting around a table. It can have props or it can do without. But fundamentally, the core of play is a bunch of people talking.

Most people are playing a single character—their PC or Avatar.

If you're doing that then your fundamental power is **the right to take actions**. You can use your game traits to do stuff. You can say, "I do this," or "I do that," meaning your character by 'I.'

This doesn't mean that your actions will do what you want them to.

It just means—

The game is built on the assumption that you can always *do* stuff.

This isn't philosophy or a manifesto. It's just how the rules are designed. You could have an ability that helps you wake up fast, so you're allowed to use your abilities even when you're asleep. You could have a character who's really good at reacting quickly—so nothing ever happens "too fast for you to react."

Sometimes your actions are pointless. Sometimes you're trying to do stuff that is just plain beyond what your character can do. If your character is a normal human, and you take an action like "I catch that falling star," then maybe all that happens is that you run down the beach and realize too late that it's actually extremely far away. If your character is on a fishing boat in a storm trying desperately to bring a forty-foot halibut in, and you take an action like "I play a quick game of tennis," then maybe all that happens is that people blink at you and then say, "OK, and, moving on."

(Or ask a question like, "Wait, what?")

But if you're playing then you have access to the game rules and your abilities. You'll be able to use Skills (pg. 64), emote (pg. 18), take quest-related actions (pg. 87-88), and earn XP (pg. 10)—if you're in the game, if you have a PC, then you have full access to the rules.

Conversely, if you lose control of your PC so thoroughly that you *can't* act—

If your PC dies, and the game doesn't just pick up with you playing their spirit out in the bleakest regions of the Outside where the dead things go; or if they're possessed by some evil witch or dream-poison and you're not in their driver's seat; or even if they're just so thoroughly beaten that they're part of someone else's story now—

Then you're no longer playing them. All conditions like that mean that you don't have a PC any longer, and you're just a spectator until you get them back or make a new one. You're never actually *playing* a character that you can't control.

One player—maybe one or more players in a big game—does things a little differently.

They're called the HG (or "an" HG). They're the final arbiter of rules stuff that affects or changes your abilities, but more importantly, they're not playing a character. They don't have a PC or an Avatar.

Instead, they play the world.

What this boils down to in the end is that the HG's role is to describe *what happens* as a result of how you act. Often the HG's descriptions will look a lot like the people in the world are taking actions, and that's fine—it's even *normal*. The HG can pretend that some kid you're playing hockey with has a Hockey Skill, like a PC would, and is using that to take actions, like a PC wound, with a certain numerical level.

But that's not what's really going on! That's just how it looks.

The *rule* is... **players take actions, the HG describes what happens**.

Gaming Terminology

- **PC or Avatar**—Player Character. Your Avatar in the world of the game.
- **NPC**—Non-Player Character.
- **Main Character**—this term isn't actually standard. A Main Character is someone at the heart of the story, including all PCs but some NPCs as well.
- **IC**—"IC" actions are taken by your character, "in character."
- **OOC**—"OOC" actions are things you do as a player, "out of character."
- **HG**—this term isn't actually standard. The HG is the "Hollyhock God," this game's equivalent of the Game Master.
- **Chapter**—this term isn't completely standard. This refers to a short unit of play with a relatively coherent beginning and ending, usually taking 15-90 minutes of tabletop play or a week or two on a forum.
- ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine***—this term isn't actually standard. This is the general term for the game rules we're using, e.g. "In a ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** game, you'll have 8 points of Skills...."

An Overview of Play

Here's what happens in a ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** game.

First, your group will choose a genre (pg. 17) and a concept (pg. 16) for the game. Then, with the exception of the HG, each player creates a single suitable character to play.

These characters will have collections of Traits such as Skills (pg. 64) and Connections (pg. 73) representing their areas of competence. They may also have mundane or miraculous Perks (pg. 81, 390) and Arc Traits (pg. 59, 390) that represent some of the stories that they have "lived through" prior to the beginning of the game. These Skills, Connections, Perks, and Arc Traits work more or less like the Traits in any other RPG; that said, a character's baseline areas of competence are less central in the ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** RPG than in many comparable games, and we're going to focus more on the dynamic *evolution* of your character than on any particular static state. For instance:

The "XP" or experience points (pg. 10) that your character uses to advance and improve their abilities is first and foremost a dramatic pacing mechanism for the game.

Your character will be on at least one quest (pg. 80) at all times; anything that your character is working on in their life, or working *through* in their life, can be a quest. These quests combine into larger Advancement Arcs (pg. 388-389) that organize and reward the stories of your character's life. Except for the brief transitional periods between those stories, when you don't know for sure what Arc your character will be on, your character will always be on exactly one Advancement Arc.

Over the course of play you will have many opportunities to collect XP, which you'll care about because XP helps you to advance through your character's quests and Arcs. You'll often earn XP from:

- evoking a character-specific emotion from the other players (pg. 46, 60);
- doing things that express a particular quest (pg. 87-103); *or*
- participating with the other players in telling the ongoing story of the game through genre-specific (and occasional out-of-genre) "XP Actions." (pg. 11, 21-45).

Some of these XP sources let you earn an XP every 15 real-world minutes, up to a maximum of once per in-game scene. Others let you earn an XP a limited number of times in each of the story's "chapters" (pg. 7, 12).

Often when someone earns one of these chapterly XP, and almost always when they're completely *out* of valid chapterly options for XP, their character "fades into the background" for a little while (pg. 12)—not necessarily departing play, or even being less bombastic and active than they were, but letting go of enough of their hold on the spotlight (the players' attention) that the HG can advance the clock or calendar and the other PCs can grab the opportunity, if they've needed one, to act.

Thus, in each chapter of the game, you'll experience a couple of XP Actions from each player, roughly round robin; possibly one or two quest actions from each player; and have the opportunity to take several or a few of these actions yourself. Meanwhile, as the chapter is playing out, you'll have the chance to earn additional XP from various every-15-minute/per-scene options, with a bias towards the sillier and more fun options having an every-15-minute limitation on them and the solemner and more meaningful options having a 1-2x/chapter limit.

Afterwards (or, OK, sometimes during) the HG can retroactively give the events of a chapter a bit more structure and meaning by assigning one or more PCs a point of an "Issue" (pg. 12, 139-202) relating to that chapter's events. In the medium term, these Issues build into subplots and character mini-arcs before resolving themselves; in the long term, the chapters will be organized into larger "books" (pg. 12) that represent the stories or the seasons of your game.

As you progress through these chapters and books and Issues of your game, your accumulated XP permits you to complete and resolve the various quests that you're on. Each time that that happens (that is, each time that you complete a quest) you'll earn a "Perk" based on what happened and what that quest was about. You'll also earn or achieve (or sometimes a better word might be "suffer") some resolution to something in your character's life deriving from that quest's place in your character's Arc.

For instance, the third quest in an Otherworldly Arc (pg. 410, 406) focuses on something that's trying to change you; whatever else happens when you complete the third quest of an Otherworldly Arc, and no matter what that quest actually was, you'll always discover a part of yourself at the quest's ending that hasn't been changed, and apparently won't be changed, by the stuff that's been going on. That's the mandated outcome, result, punishment, and/or reward of an "Otherworldly 3" quest, whatever that quest itself might have been—that you've found something in you that's still unevolved, untwisted, undeveloped, or unmarred.

After finishing your quest, and taking care of its Perk and outcome, you'll usually look for a new quest to follow it up with or to replace it—although you can let that matter sit for a little while if you're busy, well, *playing*, and you don't *have* to replace a completed quest if you've still got plenty of other quests going on.

Eventually you'll hit a certain minimum XP target from all of your completed quests, and you'll also reach a certain minimal level of resolution in the story of your character's life. At that point you've completed your Advancement Arc. This gives a permanent and substantive upgrade to your character's abilities and afterwards you enter into a brief transitional period wherein you don't necessarily know—not until you finish the next quest, anyway, and maybe not even then—what story Arc you'll next be on.

One of your character's stories has ended; their *next* story continues from there.



Quests and Experience

Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine tracks all the things that your character is working on or through, the various projects and efforts and struggles in their life, as "quests." If you're trying to learn the flute, that's a quest. If you're building a little ship, that's a quest. Even more abstract life things like living through a tough time and taking care of a shrine or park can be a quest—

They're the targets of your time and focus, in whatever form.

The big thing you'll be doing during play is making progress on these quests; and to do that, and to move forward with your life, you'll need to earn "experience points," or, XP.

There are three major sources of XP in this game:

- **Action XP** (aka Group XP) comes from taking various actions that advance the story. It goes into a group pot that will be shared among the players and you can spend your share on any quest.
- **Emotion XP** comes from evoking certain emotions and semi-autonomic responses from the other players. For instance,
  - if your character type is "hapless," you can get XP from making other players head-desk.
  - If your character type is "stoic" in enduring awful things, you can get XP from evoking an *aww*!

  Emotion XP goes to specific players, and you can spend it on any quest.
- **Bonus XP** (aka Quest XP) comes from the quests themselves. If you want to learn the flute, you need to practice; practicing the flute, ergo, is the kind of thing that earns bonus XP specific to that quest.

You'll be earning these XP at a steady pace throughout the game—the rate will depend on how exactly your group plays, but we're basically talking 2-3 times per hour in a tabletop game or every 2-3 scenes in an online game, with occasional special bonuses pushing that up.



Action XP

Sometimes in play there's a choice of paths—between something *meaning*, something *mattering*, and something kind of fading into a diffuse blur of stuff.

Action XP exists to open those meaning/mattering paths a little wider.

The rules won't always get this right. In fact, I'm not even really *trying* to get it 100% right. Think of these rules more as a... freeway network through the space of story. Sometimes you'll get stuck on the road and it'll go past your destination. Sometimes you'll have trouble crossing from one side to other.

The freeway system isn't there for this specific trip to this specific place.

It's just here to make it a little easier, *on average*, to get where you need to go—even if that means that you get stuck or blocked at other times.

Here's how it works.

Sometimes you'll find yourself in an identifiable situation—one of the 3-5 that I'm going to ask you to keep in mind, or one of the other 13-15 that'll be floating around in the rules in case you happen to notice that they're going on. You'll spot one of the 3-5 *conditions* that let you do something in your particular genre of game, or your HG or group'll realize that this is a perfect use for one of the out-of-genre actions.

In that case, you'll have the chance to take an **XP Action—**

You'll do something, and earn an XP for the group.

For instance, in a Pastoral game, you'll be watching for opportunities for...

- Shared Action (pg. 21)
- Shared Reactions (pg. 21) *and*
- Slice of Life (pg. 22).

If you're in a Gothic game, you'll still want those three actions, but you'll also be on the lookout for opportunities for

- Obsessive Action (pg. 24).

You usually won't use the full rules for, say, monologuing and taking a Decisive action (pg. 38-39), because those rules are more specific to epic and adventure fantasy, but even in a Pastoral game, you can dig them out if you're reminded of them and you think they'll fit.

The Group XP that you get from XP Actions goes into a shared "pot" that you can divide up among the players at any convenient breakpoint during play. If there's XP left over after a division, it stays in the pot; at the end of the session, the HG should add enough XP to the pot to make the final division even out.

Conditions, Actions, and Details

Here's the internal anatomy of an XP action.

It has a **condition**. That's the circumstance where you can use it. For instance, the trigger for a "Shared Action" is that you encounter someone who's doing simple, honest stuff—you know, studying, or fishing, or whatever.

It has an **action**—the thing you do to get the XP. In this case, say: you reach out to them.

In a few cases it also has a **special consequence**—something that happens because of the action that isn't just "my character does/feels/experiences X."

Normally at that point you add an XP to the group pot, play out the XP Action and the rest of the scene, and then fade into the background so that somebody else can act. If there's anything more to it than that, I'll mention additional details and consequences in the description of the action!

Session Goals

At the beginning of the session, particularly if the players or characters are or might be having trouble figuring out what to do with themselves and which quests matter, I recommend the HG ask each player to define a *session goal*.

This is a wish or dream that will be guiding their character's heart for the session.

It will tie directly into character motivation: the same thing in the character's heart that pushes them towards that wish and dream drives them towards the XP they can earn in play. It's the thing inside your PC that makes them willing to face trouble, adversity, and the like when the opportunity arises and drives them to connect to people in a more pastoral game.

Issues

Taking an XP Action can earn you a point of an "Issue"—a little story, a dramatic movement in your character's life, that moves forward from there. (The full rules for Issues are found beginning on pg. 139.)

For instance, take the **Slice of Life** XP Action.

It's pretty tame. It doesn't require much. It's just you out there in the world, taking in the things around you, and feeling an emotional response. You might think that there's no narrative movement there; but I like to think that we can do something with it anyway. So if the scenes are cool, even a laid-back Slice of Life scene'll get you a point of an Issue.

What does it say about a character that they're spending a lot of time out in the world feeling things?

What kind of story are they in?

My favorite Issue for that is the **Something to Deal With** Issue. You have some baggage you have to deal with, something in your psyche or your life. That's *why* your life's slowed down and why you're so wrapped up in your moods. And the first few times you're doing Slice of Life stuff and get +1 to the Issue, you probably have no idea what that little-i issue even *is*. But I'm thinking that by the time you've had the Issue on your plate long enough to get to level 4-5?

You'll know. You'll know what's going on with you, and you can resolve it, and all that time you've spent emoting responses to tasty food and sad events and cool vistas will make more sense.

That's how an Issue works.

In a fast-paced tabletop game you might wait a while between doing an action and getting an Issue. You might get an Issue that sort of summarizes everything everybody's been doing rather than a specific response to your cues. Even there, though, it's basically the same idea:

Do quiet stuff, get the Issue for people who do quiet stuff.

Get in a lot of trouble? Grow towards being a Hero!

Fading

After an XP Action, a character normally "fades into the background."

This is a conceptual trick used to explain why you're not off doing a zillion other things; why, having savored a view or bonded with a friend or gotten worked up into a spiral of obsession, you can relax and feel done for the next third or half of a chapter.

You've *faded*.

The XP action casts its shadow over everything you do, forwards and backwards from that moment, for a third to two thirds of a chapter each way.

For instance, you've been exploring a haunted house. And you came around a corner, and you saw a face just before the flashlight went out. It wasn't actually anything scary—just some old rags, as it turned out—but that **Discovery** Action earned you a group XP and left you freaked out for a while.

You're still freaked out now!

After a while, you unfade, and you're back to being an active character once again.

Time

Games of ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** play out in a series of "books"—stories or seasons—lasting about 2-5 sessions of tabletop play, dozens or hundreds of meaningful events, and often 2-13 weeks in the game. A long quest will typically take about a book to complete, and your most impressive powers can typically be used 1-2x/book (with additional uses costing a resource.)

In the shorter term, the game divides into a series of **chapters**, each covering a couple of significant events in the life of each PC and roughly 15-90 minutes of tabletop play. Many of your powers will have limited uses per chapter, again with additional uses costing a resource. In particular, your supply of "Will"—willpower, gusto, and cope—is tied to chapters; you'll spend your Will over the course of a chapter, and renew it when a new chapter starts.

If you're wanting to know how much of your life an XP Action should cover—

How big a part of your life it becomes totemic for—

The answer is that your character can take around two XP Actions per chapter. In a Pastoral game, that means two XP Actions a week, and each one probably sets the tone of your life for 2-5 days. In a Gothic game, chapters aren't so regular: you might have one chapter representing a single fervent night and another representing a slow and grueling season.

Either way, you'll get two XP Actions per chapter and you'll usually take them both.

The rhythm of play might be expressed as a chapter beginning with all the PCs looking for opportunities for action; the characters finding definitive moments and fading into the background one by one; one or two time-skips to later points in the chapter, to give PCs the chance to take their second or their skipped-over XP Actions; and then, when everyone's done or the chapter's time frame is naturally drawing to an end, a final jump forward so the next chapter can begin.

That said, you'll probably wind up skipping one of your XP Actions every now and then; and, on rare occasions, the HG or group might find a situation so compelling that they push you to take a third XP Action in a given chapter.

Arcs

The quests that you're on are organized into larger-scale "Arcs"— epic stories of personal advancement.

I've broken these down into eight generic focuses—



Blue or "Bindings" Arcs, focusing on sealed, bound powers: containment and targeted use of wicked, forbidden, or dangerous things.



Orange or "Knight" Arcs, wherein you take on a formal role and wield its perquisites and powers.



Green or "Otherworldly" Arcs, connecting you to some great force of nature as another part of yourself, and vice versa, often by way of dreams, nature walks, and communication with ally spirits.



Red or "Storyteller" Arcs, focusing on telling stories that come true, or, more generally, on changing the boundary between ideas and life.



Golden or "Aspect" Arcs, wherein you develop and unleash new powers from your body, mind, and training.



Purple or "Shepherd" Arcs, whereupon you learn to guard things, guide things, and wake powers in things.



Silver or "Emptiness" Arcs, drawing on the bleak, lifeless power of the far Outside and sometimes the more vivid chaos of the near; *and*



Black or "Mystic" Arcs, taking you outside of yourself; on these Arcs, you give yourself into the keeping of, and walk in the footsteps of, higher powers.

Each character will spend most of their career pursuing these Arcs.

For instance, looking back at some events in my own life, my childhood was mostly silver Arcs and college mostly golden; my last RPG, **Nobilis: the Essentials**, was written late in the course of a multi-year Shepherd Arc; and if everyone in the world buys a copy of this game and I am anointed with jewels and cherry boughs and made the ruler of all things, with clothes cast out of diamonds and a retinue of double gnus, that will doubtless represent the beginning of a glorious Storyteller Arc.

An Arc lasts 3-5 quests, but in practice it can go a little more than that because when you map the formalism onto the play experience and they don't quite fit together, the play experience gets to win.

Completing one quest will usually earn you a "Perk" like a cute new power, power-up, or bicycle; completing a full Arc will provide a substantive holistic improvement to your entire power set.

Playing as the HG

As the HG in a small game—with 1-2 other players, say—you may find it worthwhile to create an Avatar of your own to play. As the HG in a game of any size you may from time to time find yourself temporarily "playing" as a miscellaneous character or as "the world."

In these roles you're always entitled but not obligated to use the rules that are set up for players in such events. That is, you are a player, so you can take 2 XP Actions per chapter; with your own permission, theoretically, more. You are a player, so you can emote. You are a player, so in theory in the person of your Avatar or even of the world as a whole, you can take on a quest.

You're only *one* player, I should note, so you shouldn't indulge in this too deeply—

You can *imagine* that each of the Main Characters has a set of quests, but if you're actually going to use the quest rules, you should use them either for your personal Avatar or for "the world."

You can *imagine* that everyone in the world is constantly going around doing XP Actions in their own subjective realities, but if you need to do more than two in any given chapter, or if you need to do XP Actions without fading a little bit after them, you'd be better off just giving the PCs some XP by fiat.

But you *are* that one player, so you have access to the players' rules.

There's never any obligation here. This isn't something you have to do nor is it something you're generally expected to do.

Just, if it ever happens that something would be easier to resolve or to understand if you, as the HG, were a player?

Surprise!

You are!



Campaigns

Campaigns

The ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** RPG is designed to handle a number of different genres and game concepts, small though Town might appear. Before you create your characters, before you start playing, you're going to want to pick:

- a specific Region or game concept,
- a target power level, *and*
- a conceptual genre for your game.

The standard concepts—the default stories to turn to if you just want to "play a Chuubo's game"—are these:

- **A Fortitude Story**—your characters live out their lives in Fortitude
- **A School Story**—your characters attend School in Horizon *or*
- **Coming to Town**—your characters come from Earth or from elsewhere to Town.

Some of my other favorite pitches include:

- **Adventures on the Far Roofs**—your characters adventure with the rats of Fortitude
- **A Garden in Old Molder**—visiting or living in Old Molder, your characters discover things about themselves and the natural world
- **A Horizon Gothic**—ghosts, mysteries, and obsessions haunt the characters in Horizon
- **An Outside Story**—a trading or exploration ship sails through realms of wonder
- **Changed by a Wish**—some wish-level effect has turned Town into a land of, say, dinosaurs, and you run with it for a complete short campaign
- **"Stray Cats"**—your characters get involved with the exorcists and *youkai* of Arcadia
- **The Walking Fields**—larger-than-life characters live/adventure in the Walking Fields *or*
- **Weekends in Arcadia**—a game about your characters' visits to the Shopping District.

You'll also have the option of

- **An Else-world Story**—you play out a Chuubo's-style game in an original or borrowed setting.

Note that it's easy to adapt Chuubo's to any *world* but you may need house rules to adapt it to a different *tone or sensibility*. Without house rules, it's always going to be a measured game of difficult but hopeful times, a game of growing up, whether your game is about dungeon delvers, superheroes, space opera, wuxia, talking animals, cosmic horror, weird time shenanigans, or wizards at school.

Whatever you pick as your basic story, you'll probably want to refine it by taking early player ideas and running with them or by consciously emulating and implementing some media that you enjoy.

Power Levels

There are two standard power levels for a ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** RPG campaign.

The first is the mortal level.

At this level you play ordinary residents of one of Town's Regions—normal kids, teachers, vampires, talking rats, shop foxes, magicians, foreigners, laborers, Jotun, dryads, deviant scientists, consulting detectives, long-neck people, exorcists, ghosts, and the like—or the ordinary residents of wherever else.

Characters like this won't be gods, or at least not important ones, and they probably won't shake the world with their deeds. They can be jaw-droppingly cool. They can be capable of some pretty astonishing stuff. They aren't even necessarily *weaker* than characters at the miraculous level—but they're fundamentally physical and mundane. They're limited. In the final analysis they'll just be *people*.

The second option is setting the game at the miraculous level— in which case the players' Avatars *won't* just be people. They will instead be something more. In a miraculous game, your PCs'll be archetypes. Symbols. They will be creatures of cosmic *import*, even if their concerns are mostly local and even if they happen to be people as well. PCs at the miraculous level are icons, myths, and world-shaking heroes:

Great forces of the natural and unnatural worlds, or the agents or representations of such.

Genres

This game engine is built to support eight different genres of play. The delineation between them isn't a hard one—I think you'll need to choose one, but I also expect bits and pieces of the other seven to show up in play, and that's why I'm covering all of them now.

In no particular order, these are:

- **Pastoral**, focused on simple, honest living over the course of many seasons;
- **Gothic**, focused on slow, brooding passions;
- **Immersive Fantasy**, set in a place of marvels;
- **Techno**, with a goofy, meta, stylized kind of play.
- **The Road of Trials**, where characters struggle against impossible odds;
- **Fairy Tales**, for characters who flourish there;
- **Epic Fantasy**, focusing on the deeds of flawed, larger-than-life heroes; *and*
- **Adventure Fantasy**, with magic and danger around every corner.

The most important distinction between the genres is the XP Actions that you'll wield. In particular, each genre'll give you 3-5 XP Actions that players can initiate on their own, while the other 12-15 only come into play if the HG or group consensus suggests them—

If you're in a Gothic game, then a player can just *declare* that they're overwhelmed by their obsessions or their passions and throw an XP in the group pot; if you're in a Pastoral game, that only comes up as an option if the HG or the group as a whole thinks it's appropriate/fun.

The second most important distinction is the length of a typical chapter—Pastoral games, for instance, are designed to eat up weeks, seasons, and even years; Gothic games are highly variable; but an Immersive Fantasy can escalate from a handful of kids bumping around the shopping district to the end of the world over the course of just 2-3 weeks.

A "book" usually takes around 10 chapters or 3-5 sessions to play through; if the genre doesn't specify, assume that it takes one of those.

On the *Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine* Genres

I should warn you that all these genres are handled in a way pretty specific to this work. These aren't generic rules for eight different literary genres—they're labels applied to eight genres worth of stuff happening in Town and its environs.

Pastorals

a genre

Pastoral gaming is focused on slow, dreamlike play:

You can think of it almost more as a memory of a long-ago summer than something urgent that's happening now.

So I suggest

- a typical chapter length of a week;
- books that last a season;
- and occasionally stretching beyond that and playing out the characters' childhoods, golden years, or other periods you'd normally just skip over at a pace of one chapter per season, per year, or per multiple years.

That means that in a typical week you'll take about two XP Actions and maybe a bonus action or two relating to your quests. The time it takes to reflect and process a single XP Action can run to 2-5 days. Picking up basic proficiency with a flute or a fishing boat could take half a season; mastery would take plausible years.

In play, of course, some of this reverses—just like your memories, when you look back at them, Pastoral gaming seems to go by pretty *fast*. If you have year-length chapters, you could play out multiple years of your characters' childhood or adulthood in a single session; even with week-long chapters, you'll barely turn around after summer before Christmas decorations start going up.

Festivals

Speaking of Christmas, **festivals** are a feature particular to Pastoral play—

They may show up in other genres, but not as frequently and with less import. A festival week adds to your XP Actions—you'll get a bonus XP Action that week, with the intention being that you spend it at the festival itself.

If you don't have a suitable festival calendar handy, assume there'll be one every 7-8 weeks.

The festival calendar in Fortitude, for instance, has:

- the flower-viewing festival in the fifth week of Spring;
- children's day, in the ninth;
- the star festival, in the fifth week of Summer;
- the harvest and apple festivals in the tenth and eleventh weeks;
- a cleaning festival in the fifth week of Winter;
- and a cultural festival, on the eighth.

I'm not including Christmas or Pancake Week because the festival eats the whole week—you don't need an *extra* action to participate in *those*. I'm also leaving off holidays like Halloween that aren't very important to the local culture—

Town's *aware* of Halloween; it's begun to make itself known here, thanks to sailors seeing video of festivities and such and bringing the idea of it home, but it's not important enough yet to justify giving you an extra action for it in Fortitude. If you want to participate you'll have to make your own time!

There *are* a few things using the festival rules that don't appear there, though—the festival in honor of the elderly, say; or Valentine's Day, which can be *like* a festival if you're in love. You'll get the bonus action in chapters like that if and only if the holiday's a festival for *you*.

Emoting

Pastoral (and Gothic) games make heavy use of the concept of "emoting"—

Of consciously letting a certain emotion show. Maybe you get angry, so you'll say something like:

- " 'You bastard!' "
- "I'm kicking the wall" *or*
- "I emote anger."

...not so much to cause an *effect* as to let the emotion play out.

Or maybe your character's happy, so you'll smile. But the other players might not notice you smiling, or they might think it's just you as a player, or they might assume for no real reason that your character is putting up a front. So you say:

- "Smile" *or*
- "I emote 'happy.'"

I don't mean to imply this is a new concept in RPGs or anything. It's not!

I'm just calling it out and giving it a name.

Your character can take physical actions. They can say things. And also, you can *emote*:

Take an emotion. Let it radiate. Let your character be the vehicle through which that emotion expresses itself in the world.



Emoting vs. Taking Action

Unlike most actions, emoting isn't physical and tangible. Often you won't be able to describe all of the elements of your character's behavior that go into it. You'll know a lot of them, of course, but you should assume that there's probably even more to it than your character is consciously aware of—and even more than you are. Emoting will come out in your body language, your voice, your eyes, and the way you think and act.

There are two key rules for emoting:

- You have to let the other players (in the scene) know what you're emoting.
- Emoting has to be honest.

If you don't keep those rules, you're not emoting. I don't know what you're doing but it isn't that!

Making it Clear

The first rule:

To emote, you have to let the other players know what you're emoting.

That means that if your feelings are too wordless, quiet, or subtle to express at a noisy gaming table, you'll have to make them explicit. You'll have to actually *say* something like "I emote [the relevant feeling]." If you're trying to stay in character, and you're wondering what it means to say that, it just means that you're leaking enough emotion through your expressions and body language for other people to read.

Success and Failure

Your emote does not succeed until somebody acknowledges it.

Now, it's possible that you don't *need* an emote to "succeed." This game doesn't currently include any sort of minigame where you have to emote successfully four times within a minute or whatever to earn a Watanabe candy. The rules that demand that you emote, herein—they don't require your success.

I'm just saying!

Physical actions tend to "succeed" by achieving a desired physical result. Mental actions tend to "succeed" by giving you correct, actionable information. Emoting "succeeds" when the HG or another character acknowledges the emoted feeling by responding. Maybe a PC comments on it. Maybe they emote back. Maybe they just look over at you, sigh, and nod. Maybe an NPC does one of these things. Maybe the world itself responds—like, you shout that you're not afraid of Heaven, and then, a few seconds later, thunder rolls in.

But if nobody at all notices, that emote is a kind of IC failure on your part.

I like there to be a *beat*—a pause of a second or two—between an emoting action and the response. If the response is too quick, or too immediate, with a couple of exceptions maybe like sweeping sad people up into hugs, the exchange starts to feel like overlapping actions instead of like action and response. Accordingly, a too-quick acknowledgement might or might not count.

You don't have to be that explicit if you can make your feelings obvious through play. You can just react to something, for instance, and let the other players see your reaction, and that's often completely adequate as an emote.

Often—but not always.

Remember that if you are not going to make something an explicit statement, and you want it to be an emote, *you* are responsible for making sure that the idea gets across.

You can express sympathy and shock with a muttered, "wow." Some people may even express their sympathy and shock by totally ignoring someone's pain and rambling on about furniture. That's fine, when it comes to expressing your character, but it's not emoting.

"Oh, my God, that's awful, that's so awful, is there anything I can do?"—that's the kind of thing you need to be saying for an IC statement to qualify as emoting sympathy and shock.

And bear in mind that it also works to say "Oh, my God, that's awful, is there anything I can do?" and then wait a beat and then, when your character would be doing something difficult to convey like squeezing a shoulder or feeling a silent burst of empathy, "—I'm emoting sympathy and shock."

Keeping it Honest

The second rule:

Emoting has to be honest.

This is not the game for sending off false emotional cues. You can totally house-rule this at your table, if you and the other players want to play through convoluted mind games, but at its core, emoting is about sharing your character's true feelings. Don't worry about being too obvious and open. The other players and the HG will find ways to be confused about what's going on with your character's head even if you give them a play-by-play of your character's internal monologue. Don't worry about losing the potential for problematic interactions, either. People can hurt each other, and misunderstand each other, and have trainwrecks of conversations even *when* they're being honest, and in fact, it may even make it easier.

So you're allowed to fake emotions in character—

—but any time you actually *say* that you're emoting something, you need to be giving your character's real emotional state. And any time your character is giving a false impression, and someone asks if you're emoting, or fits things into some kind of rules framework where emoting matters, or whatever, you need to clarify that you're not emoting, you're just talking and doing things.

Emoting is for showing your character's heart.

Why Do You Need This?

Here's the three reasons I'm including the emoting rules:

- to give you a handle on the Slice of Life, Obsessive, Discovery, and Adversity actions, below;
- to legitimize a focus on the things your characters are feeling; *and*
- because people often find it a useful concept to keep in their mental foreground in a ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** game.

The last is also why I've gone into such depth!

Pastoral Actions

There are three XP Actions that form the heart of a Pastoral game.

You can do plenty of other stuff, and probably *want* to in order to take care of all that stuff like "progress with your life" and "fight scary monsters" and "get things done"—but these three actions are what define the course of play:

- **Shared Action**, where you find someone who's doing something simple and honest—chores, studying, fishing, or whatever—and connect with them as they work;
- **Shared Reactions**, where you talk things through with someone—sort out your head and/or theirs about stuff that's been going on; *and*
- **Slice of Life**, where you travel, admire the scenery, have a meandering conversation about nothing in particular; in general *experience* stuff and emote your reactions to it.

You can think of these as in-game actions if you're in a player headspace and as descriptions of what the game thinks really matters if you're in a character headspace.

Shared Action

Condition: Someone's doing something simple and honest, like cooking, cleaning, or practicing their martial arts katas.

You're hanging out with them, socializing or helping.

Or, *you're* the one doing simple, honest stuff, and someone else is interacting with *you!*

Action:

- **Reach out to them. Try to connect**.

Since this is the first XP Action I'm talking about, I want to make special note—

This doesn't have to be a big deal.

It's not like you have to interrupt their cooking by grabbing their hand in your two hands, looking soulfully into their eyes, and saying, "I... want to connect with you."

It's just... you know.

You do something. You say something. You ask them what they're cooking, or if there's anything you can do to help. Or, if you're cooking, you ask them to stir something. If they're doing martial arts poses, try to imitate them and work alongside them. If they're packing, and you can't help because you don't live there, hang out and chat.

And in truth, what matters most is actually the movement in your heart that says: I want to relate to this person!

Everything else is details.

Genres: Pastoral, Gothic
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

Shared Reactions

Condition: You're having a relatively open discussion with someone—something that touches on stuff that matters to you, and isn't just formalities and etiquette.

Action:

- **Reach out to them. Try to connect**.

Genres: Pastoral, Gothic
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

PCs or NPCs?

You can try to reach out or connect to either PCs or NPCs and get the bonus XP.

In a tabletop game, you should have a strong preference for connecting to other PCs, both in terms of frequency and the amount of time you put into a given interactions. In an online game or LARP the matter is more ambiguous but it's still probably *best* to connect with the other PCs unless there's a high HG:PC ratio.

Vulnerability and Trust

In general both **Shared Action** and **Shared Reactions** work best if you make yourself a little vulnerable—if at some point you do something that shows some level of trust for or weakness in front of the people around you, or if someone shows that trust or weakness to you.

As an optional rule, if the HG thinks that happened, they can add a second group XP to the action's rewards. I think you should skip this for the first few sessions of the game but add it in once you have a good handle on Shared Action and Shared Reactions.

Slice of Life

Condition: You've just had an emotional reaction—an action or emote—to something in the world. (A tasty cake? A pleasant view? A sorrowful scene?)

Action:

- **The image/moment sticks with you;** *or*
- **You get lost in that mood.**

That moment will set the tone for your life for a while.

Genres: Pastoral, Gothic
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

Sharing a Moment

In general **Slice of Life** works best if you get two people emoting about something—even if it's just as simple as you looking at the sunset and sighing, and someone else nodding and agreeing, "Yeah."

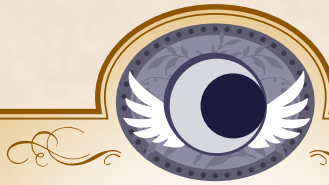
As an optional rule, if the HG spotted a second person emoting, they can add a second group XP to the action's rewards. I think you should skip this for the first few sessions of the game but add it in once you have a good handle on Slice of Life.



The Pastoral Icon

This is the **Pastoral** icon. I use it to denote all kinds of pastoral and conceptually connected things.

You don't have to do anything about it. Just admire it. You know. It's kind of cool!



The Setting Icon

This is the **Setting** icon. I use it to denote all kinds of stuff that's related to... just living in the world.

You don't have to do anything about it.

It's just... *there*.

Isolation

So technically you can take all these actions more or less on your own. This is an animistic game, so I'm not going to insist that you have someone else there even for *Shared Action*—I mean, if you *must*, you can take the world itself as your partner in that action.

Even without that—

You can go down to where someone's working, and you can try to talk to them, and they can completely ignore you. And you can declare,

"XP Action: I'm reaching out to them."

Even though saying that doesn't change anything; and then they *still* ignore you, probably, and eventually you go home.

Or, you're at home. You're talking to your stuffed animal. You're having a frank, open conversation that you can't have with anyone else. And you decide,

"XP Action: I'm trying to connect here."

That can happen.

It's a little sad. Just like being ignored is. It's a little sad! But it still sort of works. I mean, there's *something* there that's worth playing out, if it's going to happen anyway, you know?

And even with slice of life—

I mean, that's not the same kind of problem. It's not *inherently* weird to have a Slice of Life where you are at home, and no one else is there, and you eat a delicious sandwich, and emote, *mm!*

Or clean your bathroom and emote, *yuck*!

But if you decide:

"XP Action: I'm losing myself in that mood."

...and fade into the background after that? If that moment lingers, if that's what sets the tone for like half a week for you, if that's a core event in your life?

That still isn't a very good sign.

So here's the rule.

In a Pastoral game, if you take one of these core XP Actions and you don't connect to anybody at all—you'll pick up a point of the **Isolation** Issue (pg. 171-174).

This isn't a big deal.

It's not even *really* a penalty. An Issue is even technically a *bennie* of sorts. But it's also something to help put you in a certain headspace—in this case, the headspace of someone who's more and more isolated, but shouldn't be.

So it's not a penalty, and I can even imagine you actively seeking it out for fun (as a player), but at the same time, *even* in the very moment that you're doing that, I want you to think of it as something that you probably should avoid.

In Other Genres

In most genres, the only way you'll do **Shared Action**, **Shared Reactions**, or **Slice of Life** is if the HG or the group really thought it fit—

That it was a *good moment*.

For that reason, **outside the Pastoral and Gothic genres, the rules for Isolation are optional** and case-by-case. If you can have a good moment eating a sandwich alone in an adventure fantasy, if the group says, "That was awesome! It should be **Slice of Life**," or whatever, then you shouldn't feel like you need to worry about Isolation.

I mean, maybe you should! Maybe it's Isolating!

But in the other genres, Isolation isn't a core part of the rules.

Gothics

a genre

Gothic gaming adds a spiral of obsession and a dash of depravity to a typical Pastoral scene.

Chapters here can range from a night to a season—there's no fixed calendar or pace. The movement of the game ebbs and flows as to the passions of some cosmic beast:

One moment life is afire with inspiration and events flow with a frantic haste; the next, the world has begun to dry out, the river of inspiration sinks down into the earth, the mud of it dries, bubbles, and crackes, and the world becomes sere, thirsty, and sore. Weeks pass under a shroud of lifeless, brittle gray; *months* pass, even, and nothing seems to move.

To the XP Actions that we discussed before a Gothic adds one more:

- **Obsessive Action**, where you get worked up about something—usually escalating slowly to the point of obsession or paranoia.

Obsessive Action

Condition: You're getting really worried or excited about something. It's taking up a larger and larger portion of your character's thoughts

Action:

- **Tip over the edge into obsession;** *or*,
- **Just... kind of short out and shut down mentally. You're done.**

Note that even when you tip over the edge into obsession, you'll still fade into the background shortly afterwards, unable or at least unlikely to make meaningful progress on your obsession for a while.

This is not an error.

It is intentional.

To pour all your effort into something and then *not* get anywhere for a while is a key part of how obsession *works*.

Genres: Gothic
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

...gasp!

It is a Melodramatic Icon!

Are these things, these scattered treasures, which you have discovered to be labeled with this icon, truly... melodramatic... things? Or is this icon actually... *misplaced*, cruelly affixed to the wrong events, the wrong quests, the wrong occasions?

Tune in next time, dear reader, when I shall reveal the secret—the shocking secret—

That I am judging melodrama, not by the way you act, but by the way you *react* to what you see! That when the world weaves its dizzying net around you, captures the senses, draws up your breath, enspells you, ensnares you, makes you gasp, aches and lays siege onto your heart —

Dear reader! I shall confess it all!

Reaction Shots

In general **Obsessive Action** works best when someone else emotes their reaction to your going over the top—when your frenzy or shutdown is interrupted, or possibly *not* interrupted, by someone expressing their worry, fear, amusement, or whatever at your obsession.

As an optional rule, if the HG thinks that happened, they can add a second group XP to the action's reward. This doesn't even have to be immediate—it can happen a few scenes later, when someone witnesses your obsession continuing to thrive.

I think you should skip this rule for the first few sessions of the game but add it in once you have a good handle on Obsessive Actions.

Gothic Isolation

A Gothic game makes Isolation a little harder to pick up.

...not that you're less isolated. Oh, no.

Rather, it's that being a little isolated and withdrawn is *normalized*. Pulling away from others to protect your stubborn pride is standard. So being so thoroughly isolated that it's worth taking note of and tracking it as an Issue—

That'll take a little bit more.

So here's the new rule.

If you complete any of the four standard XP Actions for this genre—

- **Slice of Life**
- **Shared Action**
- **Shared Reactions**, or the new
- **Obsessive Action**

— there are now *three* outcomes.

Connection. You connect to somebody;

Isolation. You succeed at what you're doing, more or less; at least, it doesn't bite you. But there's no one to share your victory. You're alone with it, or cut off from other people. No one but you to appreciate it. You gain a point of the **Isolation** Issue (pg. 171-174), as before.

or

Failure. The action spirals out of control and bites you. Maybe it failed *because* you were alone. Maybe someone tried to reach you, but you pulled away, and everything blew up in your face. Or maybe you were on your own, and you failed, and you don't have any reason to try to connect to anybody.

Why would you show someone *that*?

Put as a simpler but far less intuitive rule:

If your action made you miserable, it doesn't give you Isolation.

The Most! Passionate! Icon

This is the **Passionate** icon. I use it to denote all kinds of stuff that's related to... obsession, passion, excitement, working yourself up into a total frenzy of wherever this sentence was supposed to end!!!! Over that! You know! thing!

...but you can ignore it.

Yes. That is acceptable. Leave it be. It doesn't need you anyway. It doesn't require your attention.

You may read on.



Immersive Fantasy

a genre

The streets are alive and full of magic. There's wonder around every corner. You can't go half an hour without finding something, if you look for it—

A hopping umbrella tsukumogami? A mysterious book-shop?

Two cars made out of fire, racing through the pre-dawn streets?

Immersive Fantasy is about knowing that you're surrounded by magic, yet being awed by it anyway. It's the genre for people who want to play in a world that's endlessly exciting, amazing, joyous, terrifying, and new.

I'm pegging a typical chapter to a single morning, afternoon, or night—like, the HG might announce them with:

- **Morning**: "A new day and a new chapter! What are you doing?"
- **Afternoon**: "The next chapter picks up after a refreshing [walk/lunch/whatever]..."
- **Night**: "So, next chapter! It's time for a [fun/terrifying] night. Where are you?"

...but you might skip one or two of those depending on your schedule, or lump them up and redivide them to get a one or two-chapter day.

I don't want weird interactions between this pacing and your powers, so I'm going to say that abilities that talk about "every few hours" actually mean "every 15 minutes." Powers that talk about "every few minutes" actually mean about 15 seconds, instead!

Experiencing the World

Immersive fantasies are built around three key **XP Actions:**

Sympathetic Action, where you see someone who's all frozen up (from emotion, shock, a sudden change of context, the spotlight suddenly on them) and you express comfort, reassurance, or sympathy;

Foreshadowing, where you pay a lot of attention to something. After a while, you react or emote; *and*

Discovery, where you're exploring somewhere you've never been, or trying something that you've never done—and you find or learn something!

There's also a special variant on **Sympathetic Action**, where the person who's "all frozen up" takes the XP Action instead; when that happens, it's called

Shock.

Again, you can think of these as in-game actions if you're in a player headspace and as descriptions of what the game thinks really matters if you're in a character headspace.

A Furious Reaction

In general **Sympathetic Action** works best if the person you're comforting explodes into emotion when you've comforted them—if they shift gears from "frozen up" to "demonstrative" after you act.

When you comforted them, they were all deer-in-the-headlights; but once you're sympathetic—

- they collapse in tears;
- get angry at you;
- run away;
- melt in adoration;
- vent loudly; *or*
- step up to the plate and do something completely awesome.

As an optional rule, if the HG thinks that happened, they can add a second group XP to the action's rewards. I think you should skip this for the first few sessions of the game but add it in once you have a good handle on Sympathetic Actions.

Sympathetic Action

Condition: You notice that someone's frozen up from, e.g., overpowering emotion, a sudden change of context, a sudden spotlighting, or shock.

Action:

- **Try to comfort/reassure them, offer them sympathy, or physically help.**

If this is more important to their story than your own, or if you can't take an XP Action right now, you can also offer *them* the chance to take an XP Action here (even if they're too locked up to actually "do" anything). Specifically, after you notice that they're frozen up, and when you're offering them reassurance, comfort, sympathy, or aid, say something like:

- "Is this your XP Action, and not mine?"
- "Is this worth an XP Action?" *or*
- just show them an XP token questioningly or ask, "XP?"

If they take you up on it, then this isn't your Sympathetic Action at all—it's their XP Action, **Shock**.

The HG can offer this along with an NPC's sympathy, comfort, reassurance, or aid.

Genres: Immersive Fantasy, Techno
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

Foreshadowing

Condition: You notice that you're paying a lot of attention to something.

Action:

- **Get caught up in it!**

Genres: Immersive Fantasy, Techno
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

Discovery

Condition: You're doing something you've never done, exploring somewhere new, or investigating an anomaly. And you notice that you've just found or discovered or learned something unexpected!

Action:

- **Declare that it's neat, mysterious, or scary enough to have an impact on you.**

Genres: Immersive Fantasy, Techno
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

Reaction Shots

In general **Discovery** works best when someone—it can be you—emotes a response to what you've found.

This isn't a very difficult criterion.

It's not like you're not *going* to react most of the time anyhow.

This note is just here to encourage you to fade to black on the scream instead of the monster's face, the *oooo* instead of the wonder, and the "...what?" instead of the mystery itself.

So, as an optional rule, if the HG thinks that happened, they can add a second group XP to the action's reward. I think you should skip this for the first few sessions of the game but add it in once you have a good handle on Discovery Actions.

A Delayed Reaction

In general **Foreshadowing** works best if, after you're been caught up in something for a while, it gets to you and you *react*.

You emote. Or you do something big. You're like,

"But... that story. I've *seen* that sword!"

Or "How dare they? I emote berserk!"

As an optional rule, if the HG notices you emoting or reacting at least a little while *after* you announced the action, they can add a second group XP to the action's rewards. I think you should skip this for the first few sessions of the game but add it in once you have a good handle on Foreshadowing Actions.

It's great if foreshadowing comes into play later on, in a real way that's even more important, but I'm not going to give XP for that—basically because I, um... I don't want you to have to take notes.

A Simplified Way to Play It

A lot of the time Foreshadowing is a relatively passive action OOC—you're listening as another player or an HG does their thing. Someone's telling a story, or interesting events are happening, or whatever, and you're interested or at least willing to hang out and listen as a player too.

You don't have to make a big deal of it to turn that into an action.

Just, next time there's a pause when it might seem like they're checking for reactions or seeing if one of the other players will interject, chuck an XP into the group pot, aside something like " 'Foreshadowing' or 'Go on,'" and go back to listening!



Hollow



For all three of these actions—**Sympathetic Action**, **Foreshadowing**, and **Discovery**—you should aim for the feeling that you are in the presence of something emotionally important. You need to evoke a certain... quality, sometimes called "the mysterium fascinans" or "the mysterium tremendum":

That here is an experience that commands the attention.

Here is something that fills you with the fascination or the terror of chaos and the unknown. *Here* is a feeling that you can picture, taste, or grasp at as a player, that you can *vicariously experience* as a player rather than merely intellectualizing it (even if you do not actually feel it for yourself). Something rich. Something tangible. Something *weighty*, something inexpressible, something that presses down against your inner tongue, admixes a heavy, leaden stillness into the substance of your breath; or the opposite thing, perhaps, the thing that is in motion, the thing that *seizes you* with its motion, stirs you like a river surging strange and wild with its wonder, pins you down with the crashing waves of it or shoves you onwards with the current of it, fills you with it, makes you want to rise and meet it maybe, drags you forward *to* it or holds you still there as it rushes in—you cannot understand it, how such a marvel as this can be!

Here is a thing like that—

Or maybe its lesser cousin, anyhow, some smaller mood but of that flavor, like: *this means something. I can feel this. This is sad. This is joyous. This thing matters. This thing matters, after all.*

You can invoke these XP actions even if you don't get a feeling like that—

Even if you explored a comfortable and safe territory; even if you comforted someone who didn't need it; even if you paid attention to something you didn't really care about, because, well, the HG seemed to think it was important, or whatever, right?

But doing so will increase the Issue, **Hollow** (pg. 162-165).

As with Isolation, Hollow is *technically* a bennie but I'm going to ask you to think of it as a price. This isn't an Issue for glorious fools or tragic heroes. This isn't an Issue for people who find wonder in the ordinary—if you can put yourself in your PC's shoes and feel wonder, or terror for that matter, genuine fascination, then you should be fine, that should count, you shouldn't get Hollow, it doesn't matter whether this stuff was *objectively* a big deal.

Instead you should get this Issue if you try to react, emotionally, but there's nothing in you reacting. This Issue makes you the kind of person who has trouble finding wonder *anywhere*, nor fear neither—who is too hollow to understand beauty, maybe, too hollow to feel fear, or maybe just the kind of person who thinks they know everything, who thinks they've been around the block, maybe, when they're really just a frog in a well.

This rule is in the player's hands. The HG can veto your taking Hollow for OOC reasons, like, if they don't want to track it; and they can hand it out based on the premise that the HG can hand out Issues whenever they feel like it—but this rule, this decision as to whether you really felt something during the XP Action?

That's going to be up to you.

In Other Genres

In most genres the only reason you'll do these XP Actions is if the *mysterium* is *already* there—if there's nothing deep and meaningful going on, why does the group or HG think it's important to raid the Immersive Fantasy rules to give these actions weight?

But justifications aside—

Outside the Immersive Fantasy and Techno genres, the rules for Hollow are optional and case-by-case. If it feels right to have comforting somebody who has a splinter be one of your XP Actions for the chapter, and to have that be Sympathetic and not Shared Action, then you don't have to worry about picking up Hollow.

You still *could*, if that's what feels appropriate. But in the other genres, it's not an intrinsic part of the rules.

Techno Gaming

a genre

Techno gaming takes your immersive fantasy and stylizes it—it's got the same basic genre concept, "the world around you is amazing," but it trades in its verisimilitude for a bunch of extra style, symbolism, and cool.

Chapters here mostly cover a whole day, but you'll skip the boring days—each chapter is one day from a weekend, holiday, or adventure. You're also going to start a new chapter for each "big event"—the notional equivalent of a boss fight, for whatever kinds of challenges you undertake—and depending where you are in the day, you might start another chapter thereafter.

This could lead to a four-chapter weekend, for instance, resembling:

- **Chapter**: Saturday
- **Chapter**: Sunday
- **Chapter**: Boss fight!
- **Chapter**:... the rest of Sunday

The Big Change (is not actually rules-relevant)

The big difference between Immersive Fantasy and Techno isn't actually going to matter in rules terms.

It's just an expectation.

Techno is going to make heavy use of two special-purpose XP Actions that I'll be talking about later on—



(Triggering or Participating in a) Ritual, a special event where things get a little weird and abstract, with special game rules, psychedelic phenomena, and/or strange in-character posing. Think magical girl transformations, cinematic drug trips, and travel montages; *and*



(Reacting to a) Transition, where things get *so* weird and metaphysical that you go out of normal play entirely. Think stock footage, minigames, religious experiences, and random chapter-header poetry in novels.

These are both pretty special-purpose, and they're both ultimately HG-triggered, so I can't say that they're Techno-*specific* or Techno-*focused*.

Instead, I'm just going to advise you:

They should be pretty common in a Techno game.

Meaning in the Noise

A Techno game raises the bar for the Hollow Issue.

If you complete any of the five standard XP Actions for this genre—



Sympathetic Action



Foreshadowing



Discovery



(Triggering or Participating in a) Ritual *or*



(Reacting to a) Transition

— there are now *three* outcomes.

Mysterium. It was meaningful. It evoked something.

Hollow. You're kind of pretending that your life has meaning, but, at least for this action, it really didn't. Pick up a point of **Hollow** (pg. 162-165), as before.

or the new option:

A Pretty Noise. Sure, it didn't *mean* anything, exactly, but it was kind of cool.

Basically, in a Techno game, you're still *aiming* for that mysterium, that sense of wonder, but if the reason that you didn't get it is that things got so weird and stylized that you stopped feeling like the stuff going on was really real?

That's OK.

Heck, I'll even be nicer—if you do an XP action, but it doesn't really get you on the gut level because you were pulled out of things by OOC stuff? And you think it might have gotten to you, if OOC stuff (whether "we were laughing too hard at OOC humor" or "toddler aggro") *hadn't* gotten in the way?

You don't get the Hollow Issue. You just get the tasty group XP.

The Road of Trials

a genre

This isn't a place or a genre, really. It's an *interregnum*. It's something that *happens* to you, something you have to get through—

The scariest and most exciting parts of your life comprise **the Road of Trials**.

Are you lost in the distant reaches of the Outside?

Shipwrecked, crawling to the shore of some little Big Lake isle with one leg broken and nothing to protect you from the sun?

Infected with the blood of a dead god?

Stepping into the dark, ruthless, and fantastic underworld of the manga artists, surrounded by ruthless shark-toothed gangsters, critics, and editors that'd just as soon eat you as see you thrive?

Becoming a parent?

Going to war?

On the Road of Trials, each new day will bring new challenges. Each chapter is a new challenge or a new day. You won't keep track of them, but the narrator might, e.g.:

Day 1. Day 2.... Day 39.

"The Incident of the Squirrel."

"Danger Island."

Round 4—Fight!

...Day 62.

Each book covers a new crisis, a new environment, a new tournament, or the birth or resurgence of a terrifying enemy.

Breaking From Reality

The road of trials is littered with psychedelia. When the relatively stable reality of Fortitude, Suzhou, Baltimore, Seattle, or wherever suddenly gives way, you are said to *break from reality*—

Things will happen that just shouldn't happen.

The story will slip out from under your fingers and reality will fade into delirium.

It's a break from reality when there's an epic transformation sequence, robot or monster summoning, or musical number. It's a break from reality when you stagger along in a world warped and wobbling from your fever; when people's faces start falling off and the walls start bleeding; when everything around you starts growing tentacles; when a weird, stylized council gathers to cryptically discuss the issues of the day.

Things get *weird*.

How to Handle It

In ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine***, a break from reality represents the temporary intrusion of another place's laws—

To fall into delirium is to fall into the grip of the Outside. To daydream is, perhaps, to touch Celestia; to feel suddenly at home in the world around you is to enter, in spirit, into Fortitude.

This is a transient and principally experiential phenomenon.

The marks that another realm can leave on your emotions, memory, and ideas are stronger than what they can leave on a rival physical world. So there's a tendency, for instance, for the wild chaos of Bluebell Park to fade away rather than leaving evidence—

It may be that there was a sudden musical number or transformation sequence, for instance, where Bluebell Park intruded upon the world, but the effects of that intrusion will tend to fade away under the scrutiny of a historian or a scientific mind as if most of it were nothing but a dream. Recordings of its most elaborate spectacles erase themselves or replace themselves progressively with recordings of bland, mundane events. If the ground burst to release robots, eerie statues, or magical streamers, it'll be whole and unbroken again two hours later.

This coverup is not complete. I should clarify that. It's not debatable or dismissable: this stuff *does* happen. Now and again the self-effacing quality of breaks from reality comes up against some other quality of existence and, in consequence, it leaves tracks. There are some videos that show this stuff happening, some documents, some artifacts and testimonials in the libraries of Town—

For every five hundred eyewitnesses or so, there's often a single proven fact.

So if you've ever wondered—like, you watch a magical girl transformation sequence or one of those Final Fantasy-style attacks and you think, *how much of this do the characters experience?*

I can tell you that in this game it *is* experienced.

Stuff the HG describes is stuff that the HG describes, you know? And actions the players take are actions the players take. There's no way that one thing would be more valid than another, just potentially more canonical, more solid, more *persistent* in its being real.

It's just that some stuff might not be... super-sticky. It might not be more than a metaphor, an illusion, an effect.

So a break *could* be a purely psychological experience—

Or, on the other hand, completely literal and real.

And there are three magic phrases that the HG can say to help put these things in context, so that players aren't always wondering what happened to the pink elephants that they lately saw.

The HG'll finish their description of what happens, and then...

Three Magic Phrases

"Let us never speak of this again."

This isn't binding, but if the HG says this after a break from reality, it means that you're well aware that whatever they just described "couldn't" have just happened, didn't just happen *like* that, anyhow.

But it feels *wrong* to focus on it further.

Just... let it be.

"...surprising no one."

This is again not binding—the HG describes, the players act. But if the HG says that, it means that it feels *weird* to question the events. Of *course* there were pink elephants floating around during that sugar rush. Of *course* that nap involved an elaborate plummet onto a four-poster bed while dancers spun around with red satin veils that became the sheets, in the middle of class.

...surprising no one.

Why get worked up over it? That's so embarrassing! That's like being that girl who's always complaining about the henshin transformations![3]

"And how it works? That's *your* problem."

As a response to questions about a break from reality, the HG may duck responsibility. Yes, things happened. Yes, they were weird. Yes, they probably left distinct physical evidence. Yes, those elephants may be hiding in the corner of the room now, terrified of the harsh weightiness of reality—or they may be eating people, or already popped.

It's up to the players to decide what happens, or, it's up to their characters to figure it out!

3 Jenna does a swirly gesture above her ear, as if to pretend that it's just those *other* people who can't cope with having the entire neighborhood turn into a backdrop cosmos just so that Jasmine Apocynum can change clothes.

Stations on the Road

Four key actions earn you XP when you're on the Road of Trials:

- **(Suffer) Adversity**: you experience something awful.
- **(Suffer) Corruption**, where something corrupts you;
- **(Suffer) Trauma**, where it's all getting to you; *and*
- **Never Say Die!**, where you defy it all anyway.

...as you can see, it's a pretty rough road.

(Suffer) Adversity

Condition: You're in a really unpleasant place and situation. It's getting harder and harder to think of anything but how much this really sucks.

Action:

- **Tip over the edge into delirium: *or***
- **Just... give up**

Genres: The Road of Trials, Fairy Tales
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

(Suffer) Corruption

Condition: You've just failed to completely defend against a poison, possession, or other corrupting influence; *or*, something's just triggered/awakened an ongoing corruption.

Action:

- **Experience surreal effects; then, the corruption/sickness gets stronger.**

Special Consequence:

If you don't already have one, you'll pick up a "trigger"—

Something that can happen to reawaken the corruption, even if you get away from whatever is causing it right now. For instance, a werewolf's trigger is the sight of the full moon.

Genres: The Road of Trials, Fairy Tales
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

(Suffer) Trauma

Condition: You've just failed to completely defend against something really traumatic. This could be anything from "seeing something horrifying" to "the psychic attack of an elder god."

Or, something's just triggered/reminded you of an ongoing trauma.

Action:

- **Experience surreal effects; then, your psychological wounds deepen.**

Special Consequence:

If you don't already have one, you'll pick up a "trigger"—

Something that can happen to reawaken the trauma, even if you get away from whatever is causing it right now. For instance, if you're traumatized by seeing bugs eating a dead animal, then seeing similar bugs or food with a similar consistency might trigger a resurgence of this trauma and a new Trauma action, later on.

Genres: The Road of Trials, Fairy Tales
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

Never Say Die!

Condition: You're completely overwhelmed and overmatched.

Or, you're willing to frame this conflict as if you are—you're awesome, maybe, but *doomed*.

Action:

- **Fight to the last drop of strength in your body!**

Genres: The Road of Trials, Fairy Tales
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

Reaction Shots

In general **Adversity** works best when someone else emotes their reaction to your troubles—when your suffering is interrupted, or possibly *not* interrupted, by someone expressing their concern, horror, amusement, panic, or whatever at your state.

As an optional rule, if the HG thinks that happened, they can add a second group XP to the action's reward. This doesn't even have to be immediate—it can happen a few scenes later, when someone notices that your torment has yet to end.

I think you should skip this rule for the first few sessions of the game but add it in once you have a good handle on Adversity Actions.

"Experience Surreal Effects"

Corruption and Trauma work best when the world goes weird—

Both the "I'm in shock" kind of weird and the "the moon's just started bleeding" kind.

Maybe it comes from the HG. Maybe it comes from the player. Maybe it happens in the "real" world. Maybe it's just in the character's head.

But it should happen.

As an optional rule, if the HG thinks enough of that happened to matter, they can add a second group XP to the action's rewards. I think you should skip this for the first few sessions of the game but add it in once you have a good handle on Corruption and Trauma.

Raising the Tension

I find **Never Say Die!** most dramatic when it's sprinkled with little defeats. When, over and over again, the effort that you're putting out...

Just isn't enough.

So each time that happens—

Each time you seem to *finally* have a shot, or even a sure victory, and then it's overturned by a sudden, unfair bump in the encounter's difficulty—

The HG should add another group XP to the action's rewards.

This lasts from the time you throw yourself into the struggle to the time it ends with your victory or defeat. This is technically optional and in the HG's hands, but I encourage it to happen every time.

(Or at least, more specifically, every time that the HG believes that that's what they just did.)



Illusion

The core theme that unites these various actions is suffering—

Each and every one of them is meant to end with you broken and fallen down, even if you happen to have won or made it to safety first. Each and every one of them is the story of how you get badly hurt, how you suffer, of the terrible things that you endured.

...but I'm not going to actually require that.

If at the end of the scene where you used an XP Action, it turns out that you're totally fine—maybe the threat was a paper tiger, maybe someone saved you, or maybe it was a reasonably scary event but some special case circumstance or rule sheltered you under its aegis—

That's OK.

It just means that you're not actually suffering adversity, corruption, trauma, or fighting to your last ounce of strength. Something happens, sure, and you might even think that that's what it is, or experience it, but some part of it is *maya*—**Illusion** (pg. 144).

These epic battles that you're having, this awful suffering, this corruption and this trauma—

It's not all entirely real.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, you understand. It *could* mean that you're making a mountain out of a molehill, which is bad; or that you have a vivid, entertaining imagination, which is good; or that you're wrestling with metaphysical enemies instead of real ones, which I guess is a little of both. It could mean that this whole story that we're seeing "on-camera" is a lie that you're telling the cops later, or a reconstruction from scattered evidence after you later on hit your head. It could be that *you're* an illusion—or that you're being protected from the threats you're facing by some power-player that hasn't yet shown up in game.

All I can really say is that at least some of what we "see" going on in the game—

It isn't real. You thought it was real, but it was just a fading break from reality. An **Illusion**. And that's why it all came out OK.



In Other Genres

In most other genres, you'll only be invoking these XP Actions when they really seem to fit. That means that a Corruption or Adversity Action with no real bite to it isn't an oxymoron any longer—it's something that your HG, or group, has already discovered to be a meaningful event in play.

I'm not saying that you *can't* pick up Illusion from that.

I mean, maybe that's *why* it's a meaningful event, *because* it hints at some deception.

But you don't *have* to pick up Illusion there; **outside the Road of Trials and the Fairy Tales genre, the rules for Illusion are optional** and case by case.

Fairy Tales

a genre

A fairy tale adds an element of destiny or transformation to the road of trials—

You still struggle, and ultimately you're still the pawn of forces beyond yourself, but much of it is neutral, bearable, or kind.

Chapters are *ad hoc*, I think.

There's no real pattern—most likely the other way around. Chapters conclude when the PCs have used up their XP Actions (and done anything else they specifically want to do before the chapter ends); the end of the chapter *brings* patterned events, like a new sunrise, sunset, info-dump, or the visit of a recurring mentor/godmother.

As noted, you'll add a new element to the **Road of Trials—**a fifth XP Action,

- **(Suffer) Transformation/Metamorphosis**, where you're transformed or graced by some external power in a fashion that isn't, or isn't necessarily, bad.

Objectively, this is exactly Corruption; the difference is a matter of tone.

(Suffer) Transformation/ Metamorphosis

Condition: You've just failed to completely defend against a transformational influence; or, something's just triggered/ awakened an ongoing metamorphosis

Action:

- **Experience surreal effects; then, the corruption/transformation gets stronger.**

Special Consequence:

If you don't already have one, you'll pick up a "trigger"—

Something that can happen to encourage or reignite the metamorphosis, even if you get away from whatever is causing it right now. For instance, some characters will have their transformation advance further every time they sleep. Other characters will just be triggered randomly by the distant actions of some god-monster NPC.

Genres: Fairy Tales
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

Fairy Tales and Illusions

If you're already living in a fairy tale, the bar for something being so implausible there must be an **Illusion** is going to be set pretty high.[4]

If you complete any of the five standard XP Actions for this genre—

- **(Suffer) Adversity**
- **(Suffer) Corruption**
- **(Suffer) Metamorphosis/Transformation**
- **(Suffer) Trauma** *or*
- **Never Say Die!**

— there are now three possible outcomes instead of two.

Suffering. You wind up damaged or broken.

Illusion. Some of your suffering appears to be unreal. Pick up a point of **Illusion**.

or the new option

Transformed. You're not *damaged* or *broken*, per se—but you are *altered*. You're alienated from your usual way of being. You're glowing and speaking disjointedly, or you're finally at peace, or you're a foot taller and covered in feathers.

It's still damage from the perspective of the game, if you're curious—that's all the kind of stuff that the wound system can handle if it needs to, up to and including "being finally at peace."

But it doesn't have to be damage in the sense of... well, *conventional* damage any more.

In fact, you could even handle a typical devotional/spiritual story with this genre: instead of declaring it delusional, you can now end a long night of spiritual struggle with a "transformation," in this case representing personal growth, salvation, hope, or grace.

4 "That pixie just pulled one ring through the other! There must be some trick going on!"

Epic Fantasy

a genre

Epic Fantasy focuses on the deeds of great and legendary heroes. It's about duels that last for ninety-nine days, punches that shatter mountains, wrestling eight-headed dragons, locking death in a jewel, standing in the center of town and calling out your enemies, hunting for the holy grail or the elixir of immortality, demanding the services of fire-shrouded angels, leading armies, building worlds from dust and ashes, and making the most terrible and horrible mistakes.

It's superheroic or Arthurian. Maybe a little shounen.

There's a bit of the sagas in it as well.

Most of all it's about declaring what you're going to do and then doing it, and experiencing the consequences that befall. If Pastoral is meant to feel like a memory, epic fantasy is meant to feel like those moments when you throw caution to the wind and just go for what you want and/or take a stand.

I figure that each chapter is an episode, an event. A *situation*. Like:

- In Which We Visit the Streets of Fortitude
- In Which We Sailed across Big Lake
- In Which There is a Battle

There's no real sense of *time* here, just as that psychological model might have suggested; there's just what you do and what happens after.

Nothing more.

Defining Moments

The three most important actions in an epic fantasy are—

Science, Faith, and Sorcery Actions, where you come up with a theory about how something works, and then you test it out.

Decisive Actions, where you decide to do something. *and*

Wicked Actions, where you decide to do something... wrong.

Science, Faith, and Sorcery

Condition: You're explaining or wondering how something works.

Action:

- **Propose an idea—an implication? loophole? a desperate hope?—& then test it.**

Genres: Epic Fantasy, Adventure Fantasy
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

"Science, Faith, and Sorcery?"

In a Science, Faith, and Sorcery action, your actions create a new covenant. They bring new definition to the nature of the world.

You test your beliefs and in doing so earn power.

The three concepts are completely different, of course. Faith trusts that things will work out. Science isn't sure—it just wants to know! And Sorcery—well, Sorcery is what I'm calling it when you decide to *force* the world into your desired shape by act of will. Three really different things, that you do for very different reasons, as very different characters in very different states of mind...

But they're all the same *action*:

You take a breath. You let it out. You step forward into the world of the unknown.

Decisive Action

Condition: You've been narrating or explaining your hopes, dreams, plans, actions, or thoughts. Or, someone/something else has been doing that *for* you!

Action:

- **Take an action that you can't retreat from—something decisive or definitive!**

Genres: Epic Fantasy, Adventure Fantasy
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

Playing to the Crowd

In general both **Decisive Action** and **Science, Faith, and Sorcery** play best when there's an audience—

Not just a narration or explanation, but someone *listening* to it and, at some point, making or emoting a response.

So, as an optional rule, if the HG thinks that happened, they can add a second group XP to the action's reward. I think you should skip this for the first few sessions of the game but add it in once you have a good handle on Decisive and Science, Faith, and Sorcery Actions.

The Icon of the Magician

This is the **Defining Icon, the Icon of the Magician**, the icon of the player or PC in the process of self-creating and recreating the world. It is the icon of strong decisions and powerful actions. It is the icon of the scientist, the alchemist, and the celebrant.

I'll use this icon to mark up stuff where you say: "I will do this."

And stuff where you say: "This, I shall believe."

All the different kinds of things, really, where the player can push forward and the HG doesn't have to do much at all. All the quests, and the XP Actions, and the other stuff where the motivation comes from a player and not from elsewhere in the game.

This game is pretty player-driven anyhow. I don't know for sure that that thing that I'm talking about is not just everything in the game. I mean, I'm not sure that the distinction I'm drawing here is actually a *thing* with a real, defined meaning.

But I'm going to declare that it is!



Wicked Action

Condition: You're doing something that you know IC that you shouldn't.

It's just not healthy!

Or, it's wrong!

Action:

- **Fall into a delirious abyss of self-indulgence.**

Genres: Epic Fantasy, Adventure Fantasy
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

"Experience Surreal Effects"

Like Corruption and Trauma, Wicked Actions work best when the world goes weird—

When your delirious descent into vice is accompanied by the surreal and bizarre.

Maybe it comes from the HG. Maybe it comes from the player. Maybe it happens in the "real" world. Maybe it's just in the character's head.

But it should happen.

As an optional rule, if the HG thinks enough of that happened to matter, they can add a second group XP to the action's rewards. I think you should skip this for the first few sessions of the game but add it in once you have a good handle on Wicked Actions.

Decisive Choices

If you're not in a position to make an irrevocable external commitment to something, you can still bind yourself to it in a **Decisive Action**. You can still say: "my decisive action is choosing sides," for instance, even if there's nobody there to care.

But this *does* have to mean something.

If you wind up breaking a commitment like this later, you might wind up suffering a Serious or Deadly spiritual wound (pg. 128), on account of having to betray a promise made to your heart.

Turn Back! Turn Back!

Turn Back!

The most important feature—in all of these cases—is *risk*.

The worth of the action is the worth of the gamble; if you're not taking a risk, then you can still *take* the XP actions of Epic Fantasy, but they're going to fall a little bit flat.

It's a valid act of Faith, for instance, to say:

"I believe in you. I trust you. That is why I am going to loan you this comic book, even though it would cost me three whole dollars to replace if this transaction goes horrifyingly wrong."

And it's Decisive to say: "I will not eat Indian for lunch today—though the Heavens fall!"

But it is, as epic heroes go, perhaps just a little bit tame.

So here's the rule.

If you do that kind of trivial thing, that's fine. It's an XP Action. But if you do something bolder and more epic, you have a chance at something more.

If the HG sees you walking into your doom—a normal course for Wicked Action, perhaps, and a common one for the other two—they may give you a fey intimation of the burdens to come. They may cry out, through the voice of ravens, signposts, or robe-clad seers along the road: "Turn back! Turn back!"

They may even lay out exactly what you face:

The consequence to come.

And if they do this thing, and you turn back, then the action is for nothing, of course; it's not an XP Action at all.

But if you heed not their errant cry, they add another bonus XP to the pot.

At that point your doom is writ, but not necessarily a doom—if the HG's warning left you wiggle room, either on the odds or on the meaning of it, you can still work around it. Or you can escape it using the rules for fighting Bleak or wish effects (pg. 476-481, 472-475), below.

...But it is writ. The price is paid. It's *real*.

This... is the Lurid Icon

Adventure Fantasy

a genre

An **Adventure Fantasy** is like an Epic Fantasy, except that the heroes aren't completely larger-than-life and awesome—

They get into trouble. They're down to earth.

They get *scared*.

The first way I'm going to represent this is with a new XP Action—in addition to the standard XP Actions for Epic Fantasy, a Fantasy Adventure also offers:

- **(Be in) Trouble**, where something really scary is happening.

Like so:

(Be in) Trouble

Condition: A threat approaches!

Action:

- **Be overwhelmed and overmatched.**

Genres: Adventure Fantasy
(in other genres you'll need the HG or group to suggest this action)

In Other Genres

I'm not going to explicitly make **Turn Back!** optional in the other six genres, since the HG has to decide to invoke it anyhow—

There's no point in making an option an optional rule!

That said, it's less important in the other six genres, and if the HG decides to use it, they can decide case by case or in general whether it runs on the Epic Fantasy or the Adventure Fantasy rules.

Lulls

I find **Trouble** most interesting when it's sprinkled with lulls—moments of apparent safety—followed by heart-stopping moments of fear.

So each time that happens—

Each time you seem safe for a moment, and then it turns out you weren't—

The HG should add another group XP to the action's rewards. This lasts from the time you first get into trouble to the time you take your next XP Action, for this and all similar threats. This is technically optional and in the HG's hands, but I encourage it to happen, either "every time," "every time the trouble is related," or "every time the trouble gets bigger."

Trembling

Adventure Fantasy lowers the bar for fear.

No longer need the HG foresee bad things before they can cry out, “Turn back!”

In fact, much of the time, the bad end they warn you of—it won’t come true at all. Oh, sure, it sometimes happens, but it’s not a “fey intimation”: it’s just your fears. Or, if you’re not the kind to be afraid, the inherent narrative fearsomeness of the situation.

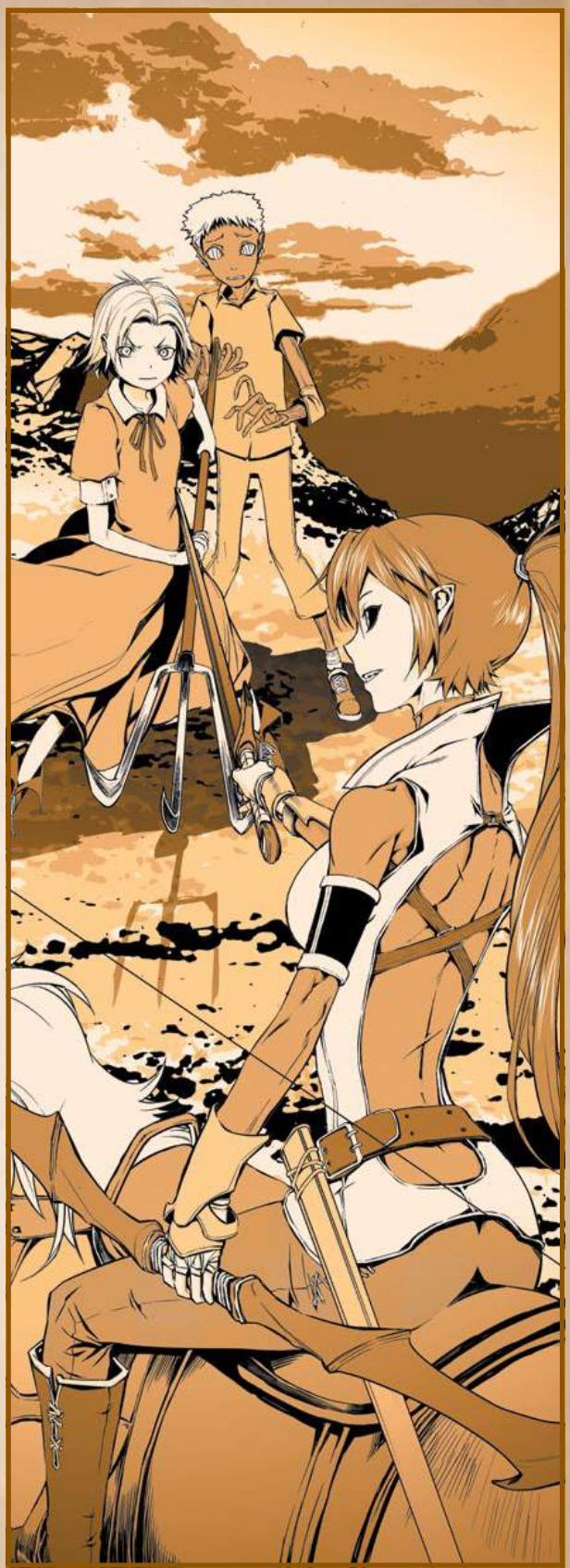
If you complete any of the four standard XP Actions for this genre—

- **Science, Faith, and Sorcery**
- **Decisive Action**
- **Wicked Action** *or*
- **(Being in) Trouble**

— and the HG warns you of impending doom, and adds an XP to the pot, and you go forward, well.

That bad thing might still happen. It might still be writ.

Or, it might not!



The Icon of Struggles

This is the icon of **Struggles**—the icon of danger, adversity, striving, and heroism. (At least, *action* heroism, you know, the modern kind, the kind where you feel outmatched and either frightened, hopeless, or doomed every step along the way.)

You don’t have to do much when you see it.

Just... maybe, try to be a hero? Or at least a little better than the person you thought yourself to be.

Special-Purpose Actions

a preamble

There are two XP Actions that I want to handle a little differently. They're not really a part of the game in the same way as the others because they're narrative tricks.

In character they represent stuff that's impossible to process—

Spiritual and transcendent experience, psychotic breaks, the most surreal dream worlds, data dumps from superhuman minds, sensory overwhelm, overpowering charisma or glory, psychic self-alteration, awakening inner potential, or even perfectly ordinary stuff that can't really be reasoned out like creating art, introspecting, falling in love, shifting from vacation mode into work mode, or enjoying a new piece of music.

Stuff where just saying it in words either doesn't cover it or *can't*.

This stuff takes you outside of normal play, but I'd kind of like to think of it as actions and give you a chance at group XP from it, so... here we are.

The two special-purpose actions I'll be talking about today are **Rituals** and **Transitions**.

These are genreless—they only come into play if the HG or group consensus wants them to. Otherwise you'll skip the ritual or transition and just have a bit of HG description of what happens when... you do whatever... instead.

Rituals

So I think that sometimes the world is weird. Sometimes *acting in the world* gets weird. Sometimes the whole model of "I do X, then I do Y, then I do Z" doesn't seem on point, because emoting and being metaphorical and being literal and proposing what your character does and proposing what other people do and stuff—

Sometimes I think that's all scrambled up.

When you're acting on a spiritual level or in a spiritual place. When you're playing mind games or social games with your own identity. When you're wrestling with metaphysical things and problems that are too big for you. When you're dealing with something where reason and ego and all the normal parts of the modern mind aren't enough—

I think that if you're playing that out normally, something is lost.

So sometimes I'll ask the group for a *Ritual Action* instead.

I'm modeling this pretty consciously on film techniques—on the ways that anime directors, in particular, and film-makers, in general, use repeated and abstract footage to achieve effects.

Here's the core of a Ritual.

Ritual Actions
The Invocation

Condition: You have the OOC attention of all of the players, and there is an applicable ritual.

Action:

- **Invoke a Ritual!**

Each Ritual begins with a ritual phrase or symbolic action. Maybe you're casting a spell from a strange book. Maybe you're taking a special pose. Maybe you're taking some necessary action that opens a sailing path through the Outside.

This only works if all the active players are paying attention to you. This is a practical convention, because rituals break the normal course of play so anyone who is playing in one needs to be aware that it's going on. But it's also a meaningful criterion. It's part of how a ritual works.

You arrest the players' attention. You invoke the ritual—

And the world stops.

The world stops; play freezes; it *must* stop, or the ritual fails. There is a requirement for a frozen, timeless moment in character, and not just the suspension of normal play on the players' part.

The world stops, and the normal course of play stops, and for a little while, you do something else.

Genres: None
(you'll only play out a ritual if the HG or group wants to)

Invoking a Ritual Without an XP Action

In general a Ritual requires an XP Action to invoke. That said, the HG always has the option to invoke a Ritual themselves if someone says the key phrase, takes the key action, or if they just feel like it. (They could even throw an XP in the group pot as they do!)

For example, if a player suddenly needs to use a Ritual Power late in the chapter, and the HG wants the power invocation to involve a Ritual, and the HG *doesn't* want to give the player a third XP Action for the chapter to use it with, it's appropriate for the HG to wait for the player to use the standard cue and then invoke the Ritual themselves.

Prompts

The metaphorical spotlight now moves from character to character. Usually the HG points to someone and gives them a *prompt*, something to help shape and define the ritual, something like—

- "say something cryptic."
- "a soul-beast is flying out of you; what does it look like?"
- "you. Play out your unleashed id in ritual actions."
- "you're in your worst nightmare; what are you doing?"
- "you're being interviewed by an imaginary magazine or film crew; their first question is 'what made you decide to come to Town and work with these people?'"
- "do something. It can be anything, even a normal action, but the further it gets from 'frolicking amidst the clouds and rainbows' the higher the Will surcharge will be."

Sometimes instead of the HG giving prompts, the spotlight will move from character to character by informal group consensus instead.



What is this for?

Rituals are most important for:

- travel montages
- shopping montages
- clothing-selection montages
- training montages
- magical girl transformations
- invoking big powers
- launching giant robots
- and stylized, surreal student council meetings.

But that's not why I'm including them.

I'm including rituals in the game because I want you to be able to engage, if not on equal terms, on *some* terms with numinous forces. I want the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy (pg. 73) to be able to challenge your faith without mind-controlling you. I want it to be possible to tell a story of healing a wounded soul. I want you to be able to form complex, emotional bonds with mecha if the game takes a sharp right turn into being a mecha story. In short, I'm giving you rituals as a mode of interacting with things for which ordinary play falls short. They're a way to inject meaning into elusive, peculiar events!



When the spotlight's on you, you take a ritual action or make a ritual response[5]:

- stating or emoting your reaction to some recent event;
- emoting your reaction to the ritual;
- "posing" or otherwise showing off in some iconic fashion suited to the spirit of the special effects or the ritual's mood;
- taking actions that are specifically called out by a rules book or the HG as part of the ritual;
- doing something that starts a different ritual—in particular, invoking a symbol of your own power (like activating the Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine)—and combining the two rituals thereby.

If two characters are in physical contact, they share a spotlight and can interrupt one another here; otherwise, they should not.

Genres: All
(if you're already in a Ritual, this is always an option.)

Closure

The HG decides who has the power to finish out the ritual and what they have to do to do so. This mostly shouldn't be a challenge—it amuses me to imagine players sweating as they try to figure out how to get out of the ritual, and if you're running some sort of weird existential horror game then it might even make sense, but I'm assuming that the HG either *tells* people how to end the ritual, or bends the rules until they manage it if people start to flail.

Afterwards, the HG describes the ritual's effects.

5 It's sometimes possible to break the rules and take an ordinary, unrelated action in here, but please only do this if you can make it awesome. Also you'll need to overcome a barrier—a level 2-5 Obstacle or Auctoritas, as described on pg. 67 or 114.

Ritual Powers

A handful of powers available to you in this game take the form of Rituals. In order to invoke them, you'll have to walk through a Ritual Action of some sort.

I'm usually only *requiring* this for the most potent and miraculous abilities.

There's flooding a magical artifact with the wishing power of your heart, which I'll talk about on pg. 535 under the heading **Combo Move**; that's epic and can have Town-shaking consequences and it usually takes a Ritual to perform. If you have access to something like the eponymous Wish-Granting Engine, that'll generally require a Ritual Action to get it going as well.

But this isn't *strictly* a power level thing, and you shouldn't feel obligated to treat it as such—it's a matter of the nature, and dramatic importance, of the event.

Even a very basic application of a magical Skill could require a Ritual every time, if that's what the HG thinks is right—for instance, if you have a "Magical Girl" Magical Skill, changing costumes with it is probably a simple Obstacle 1-2 magical action.

...but it could require a Ritual.

Or it could be a Transition, an option we're about to discuss!



Unnatural, Alien, Numinous, and Strange

"This is my blood. It will change you, if you let it. It will make permeable the barrier between you and the greater world.

"I can't stop it.

"It keeps coming from my hands. It is because I am born from my father, and my father slew the throne of God.

"I can't stop it; it is not mine, but rather yours. It is the world's gift to you, who have lost so much. I am touching it to you. I am marking you with it. I am freeing you. Be no more what you have been; release the grip of the old covenant upon you;

"Renewed."

— Principal Entropy II, **The Angel of Fortitude**, christening a new hall monitor at his School

- Character Type earns: **(Overacted) Shiver of Wonder/ Terror XP** -

Emotion XP

Transitions

Transitions are an alternate approach to the numinous and incomprehensible.

On occasion you may want to bring normal play to a stop—triggered either by IC or OOC events—and substitute a short reading for events in play.

Here's my pitch.

I don't think that RPGs need thematic poetry and whatever. At most a game's soundtrack plays that role. But I do think that sometimes switching from looking at game events to... reciting something outside the course of play... is the only way to express the idea that what is happening *is inexpressible*.

If you want to describe a tragedy that's too awful to comprehend—

If you want to describe a brush with the divine—

Just talking about how awful it is, how illuminating it is, how *big* and *impossible to understand* it is, won't work. Just talking about how you can't comprehend it won't work. There are no words to express "words can't express this"—

Except poems about related things. Except stopping talking about the battlefield and its awfulness, or the vastness of the touch of God, or the loss of a child, or the experience of becoming something more than human, whatever, just, *stopping*. Stop talking about it, look away, and quote something else. Ground the experience in something else, like a mind flailing for a way to understand.

If the point is that no description is adequate describing that won't work.

Do something else.

The kind of thing you'd need this for—

I don't know.

Sometimes there isn't anything you can say at all but

Leaves, like the things of man, you

With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?

Transition

Condition: You've just finished a transition.

Action:

- **Become Thoughtful and Distant.**

Genres: All
(the HG invoking a Transition qualifies as approval)

Stoic

"When I was a kid in Russia, my trainer wouldn't let me have flounder. He thought a growing girl should subsist on sawdust and chips of ice.

I dreamed of honey and wildflowers. But most of all of flounder.

I made a little flounder out of ice chips. [*wiggles a hand*] I swam it back and forth, like this.

In the end I could not eat it. It was... too precious to me."

— Natalia Koutolika, **The Prodigy**,
as played by Heather Sullivan

- Character Type earns: **Aww! XP** -

Emotion XP

What is this for?

In practice, when writing campaigns, I mostly wind up using Transitions to give you a way to grapple with things of the Outside, things of grief, and things that take you outside of yourself—particularly since the shape of shapeless chaos is notoriously difficult to grasp.

As weird as quoting poetry might be, it's a better way of handling an elevator ride to the top of some Outside-infested building than saying "this is a really disturbing, metaphysical elevator."

Emotions

In ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine,*** each character has a "bonus XP emotion" or "bonus XP condition"—a particular emotional reaction you're trying to get from the other players.

This is ideally something that can be boiled down to a gesture, involuntary vocalization, or emotional reaction easily overacted—you're looking for, e.g.,

- ***Aww!* XP**
- **Face-palm/head-desk XP**
- **Fist-shaking XP**
- **"Oh no! (Name) is in Trouble" XP**
- **(Overacted) Speechlessness XP *or***
- **(Overacted) Shiver of Wonder/Terror XP**

Or some emotion that can be tangibly represented by handing you an XP token, like:

- **Putting my Faith in You (with this XP token) XP**
- **Offering you Comfort (with this XP token) XP**

Or something that needs a complicated explanation for what you're trying to play here, but which is physically pretty simple, like:

- **Finger-snap and beckon over XP**—this is a good one for natural minions, whose exaggerated or long-suffering reactions are a source of amusement to others. When your doom is prepared, they snap their fingers and/or beckon you over, knowing you'll put up with it but won't jump in on your own.
- **Fist-pump/Salute XP—**you're playing someone so bombastic and dramatic, with such recognizable catch-phrases, that expecting people to cheer those catch-phrases on or celebrate them with a fist pump or salute is actually reasonable.
- **Thumbs-up XP**—this is a good one if your life is pretty hard but has good moments, at which times people are happy for you and give you a thumbs-up.

The most important feature of a bonus XP emotion is that it's always based on the *players'* emotional reactions and not their characters'. If the players are deep in their characters' headspace, then there's no real difference, of course—but when that difference exists, it's the players that you're targeting here. I don't care how strong an emotion your group *says* that your character evokes; I care about the emotion that your character *actually* evokes.

The second-most important feature is that the players can and should exaggerate their reactions to make this pretty easy.

Listen—I'm not looking for you to drive the players to tantrum and fury while getting face-palm and fist-shaking XP. I'm not expecting you to be able to get honest shivers of wonder and terror from them as often as you can get an honest *aww!*

It's *totally OK* to exaggerate your emotional reactions for the sake of giving people this XP. You should be ready to shiver at a player with a "shiver" XP condition if you're in the vicinity of shivers at all. You should be ready to point and gape and work your jaw when someone with a speechlessness XP condition says something disconnected from reason and the world. Fist-shaking should be more a matter of mock-outrage and shouting their name in slow-motion than of actual rage—as long as there's this honest seed of...

I guess it's the same underlying "nooooooooo" as for face-palming, but built up into a totally different mood.

You can earn this bonus XP once per fifteen minutes of real-time play.

I'm *expecting* you to earn it maybe once or twice per hour.

As a general rule you should earn emotion XP from actions taken in character. This is a soft rule—I don't mind if you get the occasional bonus XP from things that are pseudo-IC at best, or even completely out of character. (I mean, if I'm playing someone with the "fist-shaking" bonus XP emotion, and sometime in the course of play someone shakes their fist at me as a player and cries out, dramatically, "Jennnaaaaaa!" then my getting the bonus XP isn't really *bad*.)

But at the same time, don't get into the habit of thinking that that's what it's *about*.

It's not! It's your character's actions that are meant to earn the actual emotion XP.



Character Building

Character Building

Now that we've covered the basic experiences and emotions of the game, I'd like to take a bit to talk about how to build your character.

I'm going to start by explaining what a character build "looks like" at the mortal and miraculous levels. I haven't covered all the rules for this yet, so if this is your first read-through, I don't expect you to get more than an impressionistic sense of how a character works—it'll make more sense after playing or reading the book.

A **mortal character** starts out with:

- 8 points of Skills (pg. 64)
- a level 1 Connection Perk (pg. 73, 390) to any PC whose player agrees that you should have one
- 2 Normal Health Levels and 1 Tough Health Level (pg. 124-125)
- 1 MP (pg. 112)
- a basic quest (pg. 62), *and*
- a bonus XP emotion (pg. 46)

Seizhi/Suzy

Being a character is rough! Like, imagine: you're a swirl of conceptual detritus in some player's head, and then bam, chargen, everybody expects you to be this real and fully-formed person! But no matter how bad your particular PC might have it, no matter how unreal they might feel or how uncertain you might be that you've got them quite right, they should count themselves lucky. They're not Seizhi Schwan!

Seizhi Schwan was wished into existence right out of nothingness to be Chuubo or Shokyou's best friend.

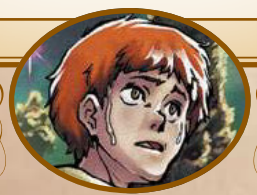
In your campaign, there might or might not be a **Wishing Boy (or Girl)**—a generic archetype title for someone who can make wishes happen. Maybe they're a PC. Maybe they're an NPC. Maybe they're not even in the game at all!

But if there is, if they are, then that wishing boy or that wishing girl probably went down to their wish-granting engine one day and wished that they had a best friend. And then, where there wasn't, there was!

That's this Main Character. **The Best Friend**, usually named Seizhi or Suzy Schwan.

And, quite frankly, as bad as it might be to be your PC right now, you know, all unfinished and stuff? Your PC cannot *possibly* be worrying about their sudden existence as much as a typical **Best Friend** does every day.

Seizhi Schwan, aka
The Best Friend



They'll also start with a level 0 Advancement Arc (pg. 387)—a story of character growth that's just beginning—and it'll come with the following benefits:

- a level 2 Bond (pg. 116)
- an Affliction (pg. 119) tied to the Arc Trait's rating (pg. 390)
- a level 0 Arc Trait (pg. 390), which isn't inherently useful but can grow later on; *and*
- the ability to "advance" or "complete" this Arc by earning about 120 XP (pg. 388), giving the benefits described on pg. 452.

If you start the game at the miraculous level, characters will be a little scarier. A **miraculous character** starts out with:

- 8 points of Skills
- 2 Normal Health Levels, 1 Tough Health Level, and 2 Divine Health Levels
- a level 1 Connection Perk to any PC whose player agrees that you should have one
- 5 MP
- a basic quest, *and*
- a bonus XP emotion

To this each character adds a certain number of miraculous "Arc Traits" and "Perks" (pg. 81-82). There's some flexibility here—

The HG can fine-tune the power level of a miraculous game by deciding how many Arc Traits and how many Perks a PC will get. (Technically the group decides this. But the HG is going to need the best understanding of what all the PCs are capable of and how their powers interact, so I'm putting the first and last call in their hands.)

In any case, a miraculous character gets the HG-determined number of Arc Traits, e.g.,

- (default) "you can start with three points of Arc Traits"
- "you start with a level 1 Arc" *or*
- "you're a formerly-mortal character, starting at level 0 of your first miraculous Arc"

...and the HG-determined number of Perks, e.g.,

- (default) "in addition to the Connection stuff and anything your Arcs come with, you can pick two free Perks suiting your Arcs."

The character can now continue an established Arc or begin a new level 0 miraculous Arc.

The Character Creation Process

Campaigns and setting books for the ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** RPG will often come with campaign- or Region-specific character creation processes. If you don't have a relevant setting or campaign book, though, here's what I'd recommend as the process for creating a new PC for this game:

- make sure that there's a campaign concept already on the table;
- choose your starting Arc and first quest;
- choose your Skills;
- choose your special abilities;
- choose your bonus XP emotion;
- fill in miscellaneous little details for your character; *and*
- choose a "basic quest" for your PC's daily life.

I'm going to assume that you already have a campaign idea taken care of—I think it's cool if you discuss it as a group, but I bet that most of the time you'll have that sorted by the time you've actually agreed to play the ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** RPG in the first place. The HG will say, "Hey, I want to run a Pastoral game on Little Island, who's in?" or people will talk about what RPG to play and someone will say, "Hey, we could be Stray Cats in ***Chuubo's***." or something like that.

Assuming, then, that that's taken care of—

I'll go over the next six steps now.

In Their Own Private World

"I, me, I, Leonardo de Montreal, I have plunged myself repeatedly down into the darkest depths of my own primordial psyche and found there—at the tangled root of the spiraling garden of my dreams—a place where the real world and the world of nightmare twist together into a bottle without shape or form and there one may fold through the *What is Not* into the *Is*.

I have made my dreams a blueprint for reality.

I have ascended to the throne I have always occupied, in some unknown Heaven; I have discovered myself as God.

And who better? And who else?

There was never a better qualified; no, not among all the scattered stars."

— Leonardo de Montreal, **Nightmares' Angel**, explaining why he drank the last of the milk and did not buy any more.

- Character Type earns: **(Overacted) Speechlessness XP** -

Emotion XP

Step 1: Choose Your Arc

I want to start things off with something active—something that leads straight into play. So the first step in character creation is choosing your starting character Arc.

What will your character's life focus on in the early stages of the game?

What's your goal or your mission statement *right now?*

Choosing Your Arc—Mortals

Are you a mortal? Then you'll start by picking the *type* of your Arc—the *kind of thing* it is, which is in some respects also the kind of thing *you* are right now.

Pick...


Bindings if you want to work with weird and forbidden stuff;


Knight if you want to find or live up to your place in society;


Otherworldly if you're torn between two worlds;


Storyteller if you're a larger-than-life, cinematic figure;


Aspect if you're striving to become better, stronger, *more*;


Shepherd if you want to guard, guide, or strengthen others;


Emptiness if you're dealing with loss, hurt, or the Outside; *or*


Mystic if your fate is in the hands of some higher mortal or supernatural power.

This turns into your starting level 0 Arc. If you're in the process of learning Shaolin Kung Fu, for instance, your character might start out with the Arc


Aspect (Shaolin Kung Fu) 0

Or, if you're a necromancer from beyond the world, you might start off with


Emptiness (Necromancer) 0, instead.

Choosing Your Arc—Miraculous Characters

For a miraculous character, your power sets and your life's stories are tightly related—including your starting character Arc. If you play through, e.g., the story Arc "Primordial," you'll evolve into a divine spirit of the natural world and get powers accordingly; conversely, if you want those powers or that evolution, you'll play through the Primordial Arc.

So let's start the character creation process with a look at the powers your character is learning or developing right now—

The *evolution path* that they're on when the campaign begins.

Maybe it's something they've been doing for a while. Maybe they're just starting it now. Either way, based on what you want your character doing, pick...

- **Knight (Become Somebody)** to find or live up to your place in society;
- **Otherworldly (Spiritual)** to develop elemental powers
- **Storyteller (Creature of Fable)** if you're becoming a story or myth;
- **Aspect (the Ace)** if you're striving to become superhumanly awesome; *and*
- **Shepherd (Sentimental)** to create magic stuff or have magical pets

If you're willing to walk a path that may sicken you—a path actively detrimental to your character's health and well-being—then you also have choices like:

- **Bindings (Wounded Angel)** if you practice deviant science or forbidden magic;
- **Knight (Reality Syndrome)** if you're developing powers that you don't understand; *and*
- **Emptiness (Accursed)** to take the first steps towards a tragedy—towards becoming a living weapon with a terrible life.

If you're actually turning into a god—into something divine, holy, something so far beyond humanity that while you walk this path you will be immortal, you can also pick...

- **Otherworldly (Child of the Ash)** and maybe possibly turn into a giant monster;
- **Storyteller (Creature of the Light)** and become a sacred existence;
- **Shepherd (A Keeper of Gardens)** and rule one or more magical places; *or*
- **Mystic (Primordial)** and become the incarnate and generally inhuman form of some natural force, e.g., evolving into the dragon of the wind or the many-armed goddess of Hope and the Sun.

Which path are you walking when the story begins?

Starting Quest

Regardless of power level, you'll now choose a quest to start that Arc out.

Turn to...

pg. 52 if you're on a **Bindings** Arc (including Wounded Angel);

pg. 52 if you're on a **Knight** Arc (including Become Somebody/Reality Syndrome);

pg. 52 if you're on an **Otherworldly** Arc (including Child of the Ash/Spiritual);

pg. 53 if you're on a **Storyteller** Arc (including Creature of the Light/of Fable);

pg. 53 if you're on an **Aspect** Arc (including The Ace);

pg. 54 if you're on a **Shepherd** Arc (including Sentimental/A Keeper of Gardens);

pg. 54 if you're on an **Emptiness** Arc (including Accursed);

pg. 55 if you're on a **Mystic** Arc (including Primordial).

Larger-than-Life

"If there is one among you who has the courage, come up and join me on this stage.

I will kiss you and I will transform you. I will reach my good right hand into your chest and I will pull out your living heart. I will transform what is left of you into a giant robot, and with that giant robot I will buy us freedom from this dismal reality's chains.

Do not despair. Do not let the world crush you. We can do this.

All is not lost.

You who were given to and mired in your misery. You who had abandoned hope. Come stand before me. Set aside this prison of your own making and I. will. make. you. good.

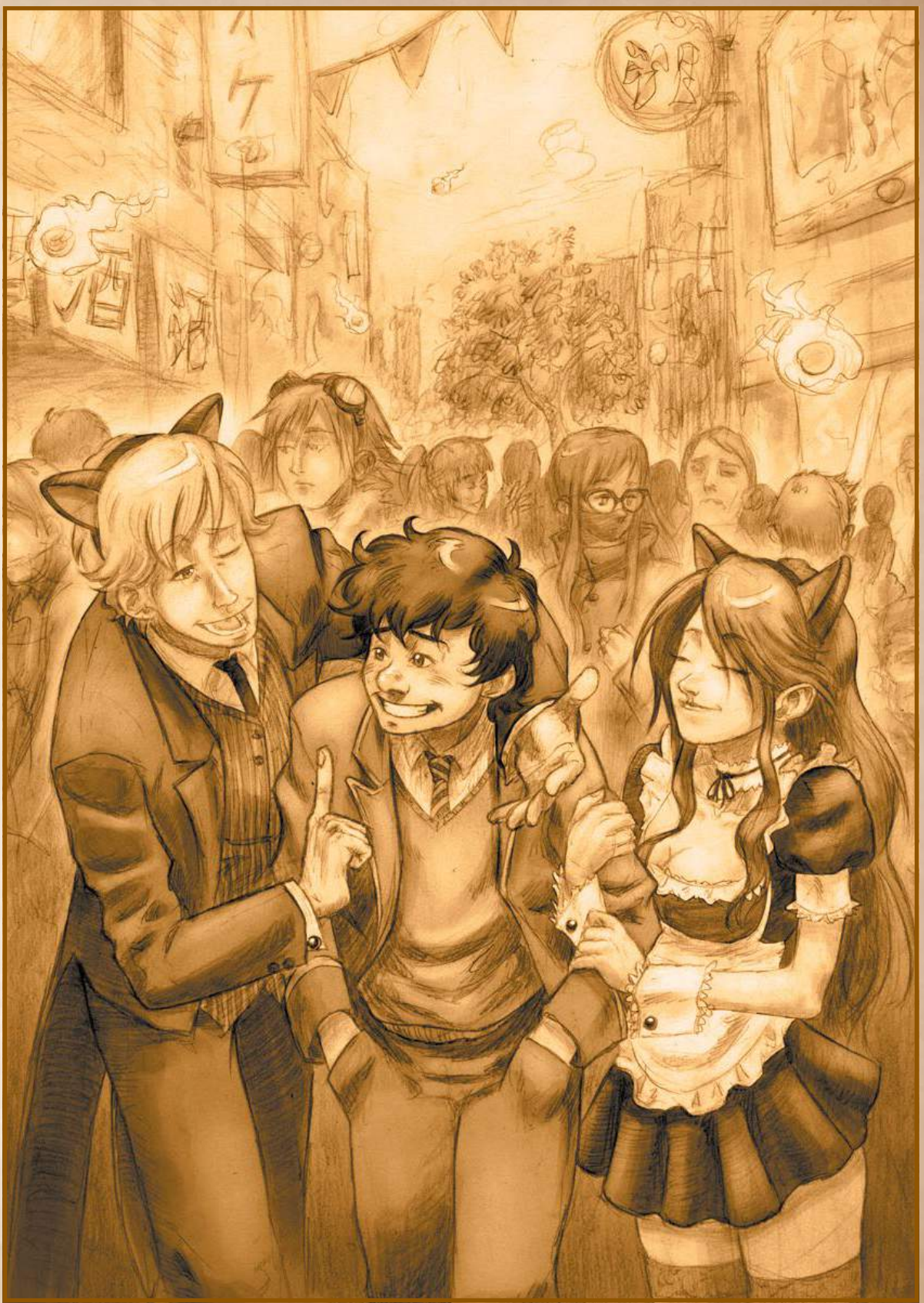
Salute! Apocynum!

Salute! Apocynum!"

— Jasmine Apocynum, **the Ideologue**, organizing an escape from detention using a conveniently-placed stage and mike

- Character Type earns: **Fist-Pump/Salute XP** -

Emotion XP



Starting Quest—Bindings Arcs

If you're on a **Bindings** Arc, then you can pick either of these starting points:

- You've just been thrown into a new relationship with some troubling power—e.g.,
  - you've been assigned to watch a criminal,
  - you've been partnered with something dangerous,
  - you've been given responsibility for something dangerous,
  - you've captured something,
  - you've wound up spiritually entangled with something, *or*
  - your parents are pressuring you into dating something

  that's conventionally "wicked" or "disfavored."

  So now you have to build a working relationship with them. Who is it? What are they? What's the problem?

  or

- You're having a crisis of faith. You work with weird and forbidden stuff. You find yourself worrying about whether you're an OK person anyway. Why are you worrying? Just how bad is it? Are you facing the truth that you're probably *not* OK, are you worrying over nothing, or is your moral standing here a legitimately troubling question?

You can either create a custom quest for this (see pg. 55) or pick one of the following quests from later in the book:

- **Science! (pg. 344)**: you're investigating something. What is it?
- **Bind (pg. 320)**: you've just bound some horror and now you want to redeem it.
- **Mental Training (pg. 328)**: you're studying!... maybe some sort of wicked magic?

If you have a new partner/relationship, completing this quest lets you hammer out a working relationship with them. If you were having a crisis of faith, completing the quest lets you reach some kind of closure.

You'll then move on to a new quest (pg. 394): there's somebody in need of your help!

Worrying

"I could hear them talking in their low, rich voices. I could feel the pulse of magic from their tattoos. I didn't even have to open my eyes to get the picture.

"I was a prisoner of the Russian cyber-Mafia.

"...again."

— Edony, **The Magical Detective**
as played by Diane Firth

- Character Type earns:
"Oh no! (Name) is in Trouble!" XP -

Emotion XP

Starting Quest—Knight Arcs

If you're on a Knight Arc, then you're starting the game with a dream. There's something you want to be. Something more than you are.

- Do you want to be something abstract, like "a hero" or "awesome" or maybe just "*more*?"

  If so...

  - What kind of thing are you aiming for?
  - Who do you talk to about your dreams?
  - Do you really believe that you can make it?
  - What's in your way?

- Or is there something in particular that you're trying to be?

  - is it something forbidden to you?
  - something special, but not impossible?
  - something you're already studying to be?
  - something you already *are*, like "an exorcist" or "part of an important family" that you're trying to learn to be *well*?

- Or are you already pretty successful at something, and it's just pushing it to the next level that's giving you trouble?

  If so...

  - what's a particular sub-problem that can make you feel kind of lost again? Like a newbie again?
  - what's going on that you're spending your time dealing with that?

You can either create a custom quest for this (see pg. 55) or choose one of these quests, if they fit:

- **Adventure GET (pg. 354)**: adventure and become what you dream of being!
- **the Refusal of the Call (pg. 366)**: or are you resisting your path?
- **the Object (pg. 330)**: learn to look the part before you can be the part!
- **Mental Training (pg. 328)**: study hard! *or*
- **Taking Care of a Small Child (pg. 339)**: it's hard to find time to become anything but a parent when you're taking care of small children, but you're still *allowed* to forge a new destiny! Let's go!

Completing the quest lets you put a name to the thing you want to become, if you hadn't, and also puts your feet on a legitimate path towards becoming... well, that!

You'll then move on to a new quest (pg. 401): some vice or weakness stands in your way.

Starting Quest—Otherworldly Arcs

If you're on an Otherworldly Arc, then you're starting the game torn between two worlds. You're having "otherworldly" experiences (usually dreams, but not always) that connect you to something beyond and outside yourself.

For instance, you might be...

- having shamanic/spiritual/out-of-body experiences?
- or something closer to visits to a fairyland?
- or are you staying in the world, but with a connection to some alien person or power?
  - ...a mysterious enemy trying to manipulate you?
  - ...a magical companion trying to recruit you?
  - ...a distant person in distress calling out to you for help?
- or is it more that you're transitioning from one world and life to another, in what could be a relatively mundane way, and you still have ties to the past?

What works for you here? Does it tie to the campaign concept? (If not, can it?)

Who are the major figures involved?

You can either create a custom quest for this (see pg. 55) or choose one of these two, if they fit:

- **Science! (pg. 344)**: Your dreams are calling you to a place of danger...
- **Changes (pg. 364)**: You are becoming someone else. *Something* else.

Either way, completing that quest tells you what you have to *do* about this.

Usually this is something that both you and your PC will figure out slowly as the quest draws towards its end. Other times, you'll pay off the XP for the quest and still won't know what you're supposed to do; in that case, you or the HG should figure out the way forward on the player level and then pass it on to your character in a "burst of [IC] inspiration." It's also possible that you've known the way forward all along and just didn't have the IC confidence or OOC authority to stand behind it until you completed the quest.

If for some reason you really don't *want* to know the right way forward, if you don't like the implicit guarantee that you're going the right way from there on, completing this quest can also offer you 2-3 different alternatives as to what you're supposed to do—in which case you're allowed to guess wrong.

Either way, you'll then move on to a new quest (pg. 408): you struggle with your chosen path's weight.

Starting Quest—Storyteller Arcs

If you're on a Storyteller Arc, then you're going to start out by having *fun*. You're a tourist. You're a meddler. Maybe you're a newbie. You're going to get involved in something *neat*. Maybe you have already, maybe it started just before the game began—or maybe you're just about to find it!

What is it?

- Do you already know what that's going to be?
- Or are you planning to get involved with
  - whatever the PCs are doing
  - whatever is available to get interested in in the early part of the game *and/or*
  - whatever plot the HG throws your way

  and declare it "neat?"

You want to be a self-propelled adventurer or a dedicated meddler to get the most out of a Storyteller Arc—if neither of those really fit you, if you rejected all of the above options, if you don't have a strong concept of what you want to do and you're not flexible about throwing yourself into whatever plot comes your way, you might want to go back and pick a new Arc.

As for the quest itself—

You can either create a custom quest for this (see pg. 55) or choose one of these, if they fit:

- **A New Job (pg. 318)**: it's so exciting!
- **A New Hobby (pg. 316)**: which is even more awesome!
- **Fascination (pg. 376)**: someone is or is about to be alluring/fascinating to you. Are they a mythic figure that will lure you into their world, or *vice versa?* or
- **Adventure GET (pg. 354)**: you don't know what you're doing yet, but you're darn well going to find an interesting story to get involved with—and then, get involved!

In either case, the first "blush" of the adventure fades when you finish the quest. It doesn't necessarily start boring you or anything but that's the point where you become less of a tourist and more of an active force in the plot.

You'll then move on to a new quest (pg. 414)—either "Taking Charge" of the situation you've found yourself in or ignoring the situation and doing things "Your [Own] Way."

Starting Quest—Aspect Arcs

If you're on an Aspect Arc, then the game starts with you *stuck*.

You were making progress on... whatever you do. Whatever you try to do, to be the best. You were a fighter or athlete trying to get stronger, or a musician learning an instrument, a magician learning the ways of power—or whatever!

Only, now you're stuck.

You've hit a wall.

- What are you trying to do? What are you trying to be?
- What's the wall you've hit?
- And how are you trying to get past it?

You can either create a custom quest for this (see pg. 55) or choose one of these, if they fit:

- **Mental Training (pg. 328):** an intensive program of study
- **Physical Training (pg. 334)**: rigorous physical training!
- **Above the Fray (pg. 350)**: first, you need to clear your head and take a while to think about some stuff that's gone on or happened to you.
- **Beautiful and Far Away (pg. 374)**: your training's fallen apart, to be honest; you've retreated from the world to a secret place.

When you complete the quest, you'll be able to push past the barrier—past whatever's had you stuck. You'll be able to reach a new level for the first time.

Afterwards, you'll move on to a new quest (pg. 422): someone or something presents you with the option of a new way of thinking.

Starting Quest—Shepherd Arcs

If you're on a Shepherd Arc, then the story starts with your ordinary daily life. So tell me:

- Who are you?
- What do you do with yourself?
- What's your daily life like?

You'll usually make a quick custom quest to start this Arc off (probably a purple quest, "part of a simple and honest life," pg. 55) but if it fits, you can also pick one of the following from later on in the book:

- **Connecting With Someone (pg. 324)**: you've been making a conscious effort lately to connect to somebody. Who?
- **Down (pg. 362)**: you've been having a really hard time lately.
- **Beautiful and Far Away (pg. 374)**: you've taken to hiding yourself away, recently, among your precious things.

During this quest you'll still be engaging in your ordinary life—no matter how weird things get for you, your ordinary life will be constant. You might get taken away from the flow of things for a while, but the baseline for your life doesn't change. *You* don't change.

You're still basically you. Your home and your life are still there.

Completing the quest, though, marks a *change* in the pattern of your life—towards or at the end of that quest, a new responsibility falls on you out of nowhere. And you accept it, at least to a degree.

Maybe that's something the HG provides. Like, you hit the end of the quest, you say, "OK, I'm done. A new responsibility falls on me?" And the HG says, "Oh, OK, it looks like your cousin is coming to live with you for a bit."

Or maybe there's something that has come up in play—someone who needs help, something that's needed taking care of, whatever; somebody has to step forward to do it—and when you hit that quest endpoint, you realize: "Oh! That somebody who has to step forward? That's me."

Or, as a final option, if none of that applies, maybe completing this quest makes you feel ready to grow and do more. If you were selling stuff at fairs, it's time to open up a shop. If you were working on a ship, it's time to apply for a promotion or take over a ship of your own. If you were just a kid, doing random things, maybe it's just generally time to grow up a little and look for some more work to take on?

Anyway, at that point, you'll take on a new quest (pg. 430): given plot, life stuff, and your new responsibilities, can you keep your life on an even keel?

Minion

"And why am I the one carrying everything?"

— Alucard Sunadori, **the Vampire**, interrupting himself in the middle of a rant about vampiric superiority to wonder why he's the only one staggering along with a zillion bags

- Character Type earns: **Finger-snap and beckon over XP** -

Emotion XP

Starting Quest—Emptiness Arcs

If you're on an Emptiness Arc, then there's something you have to live with. You've been touched by the Outside somehow.

This can mean a lot of different things. Are you...

- touched by the Outside in the form of bleakness and non-being?
  - depressed?
  - emotionally numb?
  - damaged, missing part of yourself?
    - your soul?
    - your heart?
    - your memories?
    - your name?
    - portions of your volition?
- touched by the Outside in the form of death?
  - in that you deal with death too much?
  - or just too much death *recently?*
  - in that death magic has marked you somehow?
- touched by the Outside in the form of the Riders and the Bleak Academy (pg. 73, 292)?
  - poisoned by some sort of Rider magic?
  - a pawn of some Outside power?
  - a descendant of the Riders?
  - a Rider who has chosen reality over the void?
  - a Rider who hasn't done that yet, but is sympathetic enough that one day you might?
- touched by the Outside in the form of Outside-fueled magic?
  - are you from one of the shrine families of Fortitude (pg. 210)?
  - from some similar sacred family?
  - do you travel the Outside to gain power?
- or are you a sailor or traveler who frequents it?

In all these cases your first quest is really simple:

Explore how you live with that.

What are you living with? Who is supporting you in living with it?

It's pretty easy to create a custom quest to start things off (probably a gray quest, "part of the background of your life and healing," pg. 55) but if it fits, you can also pick one of the following:

- **Bind (pg. 320)**: you try to humanize some vampire, evil ghost, or awful power.
- **The Object (pg. 330)**: the story of your hat, diary, or flute.
- **Physical Training (pg. 334)**: exercise will help you keep control.
- **Someone's in Trouble (pg. 346)**: you stumble on someone *like you* in some important way—can you help them out?
- **Changes (pg. 364)**: you're in the process of a transformation.

Either way, the quest represents a time of contemplation and wrestling with who you are and how the Outside touches your life.

Completing the quest spurs you to make a change in your life. What change? I don't know!

Afterwards, you'll start on a new quest (pg. 437)—it could be any number of things, but at the core of the quest, you pick up or express an obsession.

Starting Quest—Mystic Arcs

If you're on a Mystic Arc, then you're surrounded by portents. Something is coming. Something is coming that will *change* you, will make an end to the you that you are today.

Do you know what that is? Is it something you're planning or is the game going to surprise you?

You can either create a custom quest for this (see right) or pick one of the following from later in the book:

- **Down (pg. 362)**: this is a really rough time in your life. Magic hasn't shown up to save you yet, or at least, if it has, it has not been enough.
- **Changes (pg. 364)**: you're in a process of evolution, and you don't know where it's going yet!

At the end of this quest, you're confronted by a "miracle." That is, something that you couldn't imagine happening—something that would change *everything* if it happened—does.

It could be something as simple as someone trusting or loving or being honest with you. It could be as massive as a dead person coming back to life. It could be something as unexpected as somebody blowing a trumpet and the walls all around you falling down.

It doesn't have to be a good thing, but it usually is. It doesn't have to be supernatural, although it usually is.

It's just... a miracle:

A wonder. A thing with incredible experiential weight—a thing that you can't go back from. A moment when you realize that you were *wrong* about how the world worked—when someone you were sure hated you saves you; when an angel steps in to shelter you from a storm; when you're forgiven for something you never believed you could be forgiven for; or the moment when everything was good, everything was sunny and peaceful and happy, and then the sky above you cracked open and a miles-long feeler-leg from some insect slipped in.

Afterwards, you'll start on a new quest (pg. 444).

Someone Struggling with Life

"It's just . . . I try so hard. I try so hard, you know? And yet nothing ever gets back to the way it used to be.

"I don't even think it can."

— Miramie Mesmer, **the Dream-Witch**, after another delay in the re-opening of her café

- Character Type earns: **Offering you Comfort (with this XP token) XP** -

Emotion XP

Step 1a: Custom Quests

The rules for creating your own quests are found in the quest chapter, but I wanted to take a moment in character creation and give you a sense of how it will work.

The easiest way to make a custom quest is to decide whether the quest is...

- **...a way of thinking?**
  - You will spend a lot of time proposing relevant theories/ideas in play.
  - If that sounds right, fill out the blue quest card from pg. 93.
- **...a private struggle?**
  - You will maintain a false public front over private troubles in play.
  - If that sounds right, fill out the orange quest and flip cards from pg. 99-100.
- **...a temptation or division between states?**
  - You'll have two very different moods/states in play.
  - If that sounds right, fill out the green quest and flip cards from pg. 96-97.
- **...a love or hate you have for something?**
  - You'll have a catchphrase/exclamation that you'll use frequently.
  - If that sounds right, or at least plausible, fill out the red quest card from pg. 91.
- **...an exciting adventure?**
  - Quest-related stuff will often go over the top!
  - If that sounds right, fill out the golden quest card from pg. (94-)95.
- **...part of a simple and honest life?**
  - You'll have a catchphrase that puts things in your ordinary life's context.
  - If that sounds right, or at least plausible, fill out the purple quest card from pg. 90.
- **...part of the background of your life and healing?**
  - You'll have a catchphrase that reflects your life's current state.
  - If that sounds right, or at least plausible, fill out the gray quest card from pg. (100-)101.
- **...something weird, symbolic, and mystical?**
  - Fill out the black quest card from pg. 102.

Copy or download and print the appropriate quest card and fill in the blanks. Mark how much XP you want to put in it—if you don't know how you'd choose that, choose "35 XP."

So for example:

You're on an Otherworldly Arc. You've decided that your character has a wicked changeling for an older brother. It's feeding on your life! That doesn't quite fit either **Science!** or **Changes** so you make a custom quest. Maybe it's a private struggle, and you hide what it's doing to you? Or maybe it's a temptation or division between states: sometimes you're free, and sometimes you're its mind-addled slave. You pick up an orange or green quest card, fill in the blanks, and choose 35 XP as your target.

Step 2: Choose Your Skills

After choosing your starting Arc and quest, you'll choose your baseline mundane abilities—8 points worth of Skills.

Schticks

If you're still working out who your character is, what their life is about, you might first look over these possible schticks:

- **Once-in-a-Generation Talent**. You have a level 4 Skill. Maybe even a level 5.
- **Special Type**. You're a magical or not-quite-human character type—in a Town game, for instance, you might be a ghost, vampire, talking rat, shrine family member, deviant scientist, dryad, Rider, dolphin girl, exorcist, robot, long-necked person, or someone trained by a spirit of wind.
- **Unique Magic**. You have some unique magic Skill of your own design, something that lets you do things that humans aren't supposed to be able to do.
- **Inhuman/Pulp Ability**. You have an unusual Superior Skill. It's like magic in that it lets you do things that humans normally can't, but it's not so much a trained Skill as an inhuman quality—you've been chosen by something, or altered by something, or you *aren't* human, or maybe you live by your own genre rules in a certain way. It's best if you can relate this somehow to the premise for the game, or vice versa—for instance, if you want a weird psychic talent in a School-based game, maybe there's a special class for psychics and characters with weird talents and you can talk the other players into making that a major or minor focus of the game.
- **Incredible Cool**. This is a relatively weak schtick in the long term—it's easy for other PCs to catch up to you in Cool—but if you want to be really good at, well, being awesome and *winning*, starting with some points in the Cool Skill will help.
- **Incredible People Skills**. If you want to be a natural leader, particularly a warm-hearted and generous one, you might want to start out with some Shine.

If you're interested in playing a special character type, then you'll want to review the setting material on that character type and any associated magical and Superior Skills. Otherwise, just keep schticks that caught your interest in mind.

It's also probably worth taking a moment right now to think about what your character is best at and whether that's something they're really genuinely *good* at or just the best of their rough lot of Skills.

Skills

I'll talk a lot about Skills on pg. 64-77, but choosing them is fundamentally a freeform task—

Figure out some things your character does or is good at. List them. Those are your Skills.

Now rate them from 0-5.

In a spirit of expectations management: a 4-point Skill is a pretty big deal. You don't need a 4-point Skill to be good. You need a 4-point Skill to be *noteworthy*. A level 5 Skill could make you a legend.

The usual range is 0-3.

If you have a Skill that lets you push beyond human limits, that can be but isn't necessarily related to its number—instead, you'll mark such things as "Superior" or "magical" Skills. The Skill in question is a Superior Skill if you can go past human limits because you're not actually human or because you're "just that good." It's a magical Skill if you're cheating somehow.

If you have a Skill in... being generally awesome and unflappable, call it Cool.

If you have a Skill in being radiant, inspirational, or vulnerable, a Skill that helps other people do things *for* you, call it Shine.

When you've written everything down, massage your numbers and choices until your Skill ratings add up to 8 points.

Aside

For the most part you're free to pick whatever Skills you like—

If the other players are cool with your being Gilgamesh, you can have Superior God-King 4 and *I* won't mind!

That said, do please make sure that your basic character concept fits the group and the game that people want to be playing, or at least that it doesn't *disserve* them.

Step 3: Choose Your Special Abilities—Mortals

Even at the mortal level, you'll have two powers that transcend your mortality—two traits that express not your mortal will and your mortal Skills but rather stuff like "destiny," "the human spirit's power to defy destiny," and "the wishing power of the heart." Both of these traits are associated with your starting Arc, so if you wind up unhappy with your character direction and drop your original Arc you'll also have the chance to replace these two powers.

Mortals—Choose a Bond

The first ability is something that drives you forward, something that strengthens you, a kind of passion. In game terms, this is a level 2 "Bond," as described on pg. 116.

Choose...

- there's something you *never* do, that you *can't* do;
- there's something you *always* do, that you *must* do;
- there's something that you're *driven* to do.

For instance, if you're really in tune with the street dogs and cats of Fortitude, and your starting storyline is a Bindings or Shepherd Arc about that, then you might pick a Bond like:

- I can't turn my back on an animal in need;
- I (must) sense an animal's true intentions;
- I'm driven to spend time with my animal friends.

It may seem a little weird that two of these are technically limitations or weaknesses, but don't worry about that—a Bond will make your life better regardless of whether it's *technically* a weakness or a strength.

If you have a magical Skill, it's common to relate the Bond to that Skill—for instance, if you practice ghost magic, as discussed on pg. 234, you might take a Bond like "I (am driven to) help ghosts resolve their unresolved business."

What kind of Bonds fit your Arc? What kinds of Bonds fit your character?

What's your Bond?



Mortals—Choose an Affliction

You'll also have an "Affliction" associated with this Arc. This has the same basic format—

- there's something you *can't* do;
- there's something you *must* do;
- there's something that you're *driven* to do—

but it's not a passion. It's something cosmic. It's a power, or a destiny. At minimum it's a hard, inescapable truth about who you are and what you're doing. It's not arguable and it's not driven by your heart—if you have something like "I can't turn my back on an animal in need" as an *Affliction*, that means you'll get up from a coma and maybe even from *death* if you encounter an animal in need.

To give you a sense of how this differs from Bonds, I'm going to revisit the cats-and-dogs example; for that, some suitable Afflictions include:

- I can't turn off my awareness of the animals of Fortitude;
- I (must) be connected to a great animal spirit;
- I'm driven—even *destined*—to spend time with a particular pack.

In play, the difference between a Bond and an Affliction is that you'll invoke a Bond yourself for bonuses or compensation while it's the HG who makes sure your Afflictions stay true.

What kind of destiny do you have? What's your role in the cosmos?

What's a hard, inescapable truth that you might have to face?

...and what's your Affliction?

Step 3: Choose Your Special Abilities—Miraculous Characters

The next step, for a miraculous character, is choosing an HG-determined number of "Arc Traits" and "Perks."

Introduction

Here's how to understand Arc Traits:

Over the course of the next 8-15 sessions of play, the character Arc that you're currently on will turn into +1 to an Arc Trait and 3-5 "Perks" (little bonuses you'll pick up on the way.) For instance, if you're on a **Wounded Angel** Arc, and your first quest starts your partnership with something wicked/disfavored... maybe an evil AI?... then the story Arc that begins when you meet that AI will eventually turn into 3-5 Perks and +1 to your Wounded Angel Trait.

A miraculous character starts with some HG-chosen number of Arc Traits—usually three points' worth—and what that means, what that's really saying, is that your character begins with that *history*.

If you have three points in miraculous Arcs, that means that your character has already lived through three epic stories. If you start with one point in miraculous Arcs then they've lived through one!

Maybe those stories are related to what you're doing now. Maybe they're not. That detail will be up to you.

What parts of your character's past qualified as epic stories?

...I don't know! That'll ultimately be up to you. But if you have trouble figuring out how to boil your character's history down into the Traits you have to work with, imagine that you're writing up your character's history as novels or short stories and decide: what stories would you tell people first?

Spend a point on each one, in the order you'd tell them, until you've run out of your points.

Or, if you don't know your character's history yet—look over the list below and figure out which stories you'd be most interested in reading/watching about them? Again, spend a point on each story, in the order of interest, until you've run out of your points.

This approach *could* leave you short a couple of necessary powers—for instance, you could wind up with a character that you know has wings and can fly but without any Arcs that give them wings or flight as a power. If so, I recommend going back and working the missing powers somehow into your 8 points of Skills.

Playing to Type

Some players may prefer to choose their characters' miraculous powers first, based on what they'd most enjoy playing, and extrapolate the history backwards from that.

In you're that sort of player, here's a basic guide to what the miraculous Arcs in this book *do*:

- **Accursed** (pg. 543) gives you a tragic life and an incredible weapon;
- **The Ace** (pg. 530) makes you awesome with mundane and Superior Skills;
- **A Keeper of Gardens** (pg. 537) is good if you like making NPC minions and props;
- **Become Somebody** (pg. 494) outfits you for a social role;
- **Child of the Ash** (pg. 508) gives you a giant war form and some neat tricks;
- **Creature of Fable** (pg. 525) eventually makes you a terrifying bogeyman/huntress;
- **Creature of the Light** (pg. 520) eventually gives terrifying levels of stage presence;
- **Primordial** (pg. 547) is great if you like coming up with cool uses for strange little abilities and features, or if you like being cosmically important.
- **Reality Syndrome** (pg. 500) has the F/X of ultimate cosmic or story-breaking power but some serious limitations on how much you can exploit it;
- **Sentimental** (pg. 533) gives you collections of eccentric, unique abilities;
- **Spiritual** (pg. 515) lets you command a player-defined "element;" *and*
- **Wounded Angel** (pg. 490) trades wounds for customized power sets of your own design.

Feel free to choose your Arc Traits accordingly—or even to go back and change your starting Arc so it fits!

Miraculous Characters—Choose Your Arc Traits

So here's how to map those big stories of your character's past to Arc Traits.

For each of the most important stories in your character's past, put a point into...


Wounded Angel (pg. 490) if...
- your character tried to be better than they are, and failed
- your character dabbled in science, magic, or forbidden powers


Become Somebody (pg. 494) if...
- your character had a role they were trying to fill
- your character fought to be normal and real when they weren't


Reality Syndrome (pg. 500) if...
- your character was kind of delusional and goofy
- your character learned important lessons
- your character developed potentially story-breaking/god-like abilities


Child of the Ash (pg. 508) if...
- your character displayed an exceptionally deep sort of reality
- your character connected to a magical place, far away
- your character worried about turning into a giant monster, or did


Spiritual (pg. 515) if...
- your character spent a lot of time in dream-worlds and other-worlds
- your character developed a deep connection to some "element" of the world, like Fire or Dreams or Recycling


Creature of the Light (pg. 520) if...
- your character developed into something inhuman, saintly, and holy
- your character was a bit of a showoff at the story's end
- your character was set apart and exalted in some fashion


Creature of Fable (pg. 525) if...
- your character's identity was compromised by a myth or story
- your character acted like a mythic or archetypal figure
- your character fed off of others' lives or natures to survive, or hunted for food


The Ace (pg. 530) if...
- your character fought hard to become "stronger"
- your character was basically an action hero
- your character was basically a pulp hero
- your character regularly achieved "flawless victory"


Sentimental (pg. 533) if...
- your character collected magical things or animals
- your character created magical things
- your character studied an art or a craft
- your character's good heart inspired others around them


A Keeper of Gardens (pg. 537) if...
- your character claimed, maintained, or defended a magical place
- your character created or summoned memorable minions or props


Accursed (pg. 543) if...
- your character retreated from the tumult of the world to a special sanctuary
- your character fell under a terrible curse
- your character sulked and angsted over their awful fate
- your character didn't sulk at all! But they showed their hurt once or twice. Were they comforted, or did they suffer alone?


Primordial (pg. 547) if...
- your character developed unexpected inhuman features
- your character's role in the cosmos and their identification with some natural or philosophical force was really important

Once you're confident that you've chosen the right Arcs, or as part of becoming so, review the Arcs you've chosen. Some of them will have embedded character generation steps—for instance, if you put points into **Becoming Somebody**, or even if you're just starting it now, you'll want to choose a special Truth about your character—as discussed, pg. 494.

Miraculous Characters—Choose Your Perks

Characters in this game have access to a set of "Perks"—little rewards and bonuses that they'll pick up every few sessions. You usually won't keep them forever, since you're only allowed to maintain up to 8.

Realistically, unless your character just fell out of the sky a few minutes ago, you should have a full set of 8 of them. Even *mortal* characters should have a full set of 8 of them, because, after all, they've lived life.

...but I don't want you to spend the time figuring out what your character's historically-developed Perks "should" be every time you create a character. I don't even want you to spend much time figuring out what Perks you might *want*!

By default a miraculous character starts with two free Perks. So, if you know what you're doing in this game, pick a couple of Perks now—or, if the HG changed the number you get, pick however many you should.

But... if you're not familiar with this game, if you haven't picked out any Perks before over the course of a campaign? Then I suggest that you skip them for now. Later on, maybe between sessions or during a break, look over the Perk lists on pg. 393-448. If you see one that you really want, particularly one that you could have plausibly picked up while pursuing your Arcs? Take it, up to however many free Perks you should get.

And if you don't see any that grab you, don't worry about it. You'll get up to 8 soon enough!

Step 4: Choose Your Bonus XP Emotion

In ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine***, each character has a "bonus XP emotion"—a particular emotional reaction you're trying to get from the other players.

Let's pick yours!

I suggest...

- ***Aww!* XP**
  - if you want incredible troubles piled on your back
  - if you want to face them stoically
  - if you want to be kind of cute and adorable in how you cope with them
  - if you have a tragic backstory
- **Head-Desk XP**
  - if you want a good excuse to do kind of goofy stuff in play
  - if people are always head-desking at your characters *anyway*
  - if you want to not think things through very well
  - if you want to have powers with a really high unintended consequence risk
- **Fist-Shaking XP**
  - if you want to be totally convinced you're the center of the universe
  - if you like being a lovable jerk
  - if you have an impulse control problem
  - if your name is a good one to shout while shaking one's fist
- **"Oh no! (Name) is in Trouble!" XP**
  - if you plan to get in way over your head all the time
  - if you're irrationally convinced of
    - your own personal immortality
    - everyone else's good intentions
    - the fundamental justice of the universe
  - if you're cute, underaged and/or undersized
- **(Overacted) Speechlessness XP**
  - if you want to be bombastic and over the top
  - if you're living in your own world
  - if you're absolutely convinced of your own righteousness and logic
  - if you overcome self-doubt with bluster and grandeur
- **(Overacted) Shiver of Wonder/Terror XP**
  - if you're older, bigger, and/or in a position of authority
  - if you're monstrous in some fashion
  - if you're the symbol or the spearhead of some cosmic principle
- **Putting my Faith in You (with this XP token) XP**
  - if you're a big brother/big sister archetype
  - if you're sincere and diligent
  - if you're earnest and heroic
  - if you're a lot skilled and just a little bit lucky
- **Offering you Comfort (with this XP token) XP**
  - if you stress out a lot over your life
  - if you're a comparatively normal person
  - if you have a big neurosis, trauma, sickness, or fear
  - if your big successes are rare
- **Finger-snap and beckon over XP**
  - if you're a natural minion (in denial or otherwise)
  - if other people are always roping you into stuff
  - if you're a fool for love or friendship
  - if you wouldn't know what to do with your life on your own
- **Fist-Pump/Salute XP**
  - if you have a ton of catchphrases
  - if you're bombastic, larger-than-life, and dramatic
  - if you have a genre
  - if you don't really act like (or think) the world around you is real
- **Thumbs-Up XP**
  - if you're kind of sweet and kind of goofy
  - if you're a natural sidekick
  - if you don't believe in yourself
  - if you think of others first
- **Something Unique**
  - if you have a good idea for another emotion to evoke
  - and a good hand gesture/sound for other players to use to signal that emotion

The goal is to get that reaction from the other *players* through your character's actions—e.g., if you have thumbs-up XP, and you get other players to be happy for your character, and give you a thumbs-up, you'll earn an XP!

Step 5: Little Details

Next I have some miscellaneous questions about your character.

You... don't actually *have* to answer them. But you might!

- What's their name?
- What's a good 1-2-word summary of their academic ability?
- What's a good 1-2-word summary of their athletic ability?
- Do you know their blood type?
- What's their favorite food?
- What's a zodiac or real animal that you think has a similar nature to theirs?



Step 6: Choose Your Connections

Connections are basically a measure of how well you know and *get* somebody. They're also a measure of how good you are at living somewhere or with someone.

The backstory in your head doesn't start you off with any Connections—

The past is generally subject to revision and reinterpretation right up to the moment that it matters in actual play—

But that's only true to the extent that your character is showing up "for the first time" in play. If there's something about your character that *already has* mindshare with the other players—like, maybe you talked about them and their family a lot before the game started, or they have specific ties to in-world organizations, or if you're borrowing a character from history, real life, or the media, or you're taking over an established NPC—then the HG should talk to you about what Connections might be appropriate, and you might pick up a few starting "Connection Perks" free. For instance, if you're playing King Arthur, and Merlin, Lancelot, and Guinevere are all around in the game, then you should probably start Connected to them by default!

I'm also going to give you the option of starting with free Connection Perks to one or more of the other PCs—

Specifically, you should talk to the players of the other characters, either now or after the first couple of sessions. If someone agrees that you "should" be close to or comfortable with their PC, you can get a free level 1 Connection Perk relating you to their PC!

Step 7: Choose Your Basic Quest

Finally, in a typical ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** campaign, every character has a "basic quest" (pg. 450)—a thing they're always doing, in the background. Every now and then this will earn you a precious memory or cool thing (a "Recharge Token")—specifically, at the end of each 15-XP repetition of the quest.

For now, imagine your character. Write down, or at least remember, your answers to these questions:

- It's just a random day. A random time. What are they doing? What do you *see* them doing?
- If it's something different—what's the core of their character? What do you want to be showing about them, all the time, that might get lost if you just focus on their powers and their abilities and the dramatic stuff?
- What's something that isn't necessarily super-productive, isn't necessarily going to be "worth it" by standard gameplay measurements, but which you don't want them to get discouraged about because it's who they are?

Looking over all of that—

What's your basic quest? What's the thing that they're *always doing*?

Again, decide if it's...

- ...a way of thinking?
  - You will spend a lot of time proposing relevant theories/ideas in play.
  - If that sounds right, fill out the blue quest card from pg. 93.
- ...a private struggle?
  - You will maintain a false public front over private troubles in play.
  - If that sounds right, fill out the orange quest card from pg. 99.
- ...a temptation or division between states?
  - You'll have two very different moods/states in play.
  - If that sounds right, fill out the green quest card from pg. 96.
- ...a love or hate you have for something?
  - You'll have a catchphrase/exclamation that you'll use frequently.
  - If that sounds right, or at least plausible, fill out the red quest card from pg. 91.
- ...an exciting adventure?
  - Quest-related stuff will often go over the top!
  - If that sounds right, fill out the golden quest card from pg. 95.
- ...part of a simple and honest life?
  - You'll have a catchphrase that puts things in your ordinary life's context.
  - If that sounds right, or at least plausible, fill out the purple quest card from pg. 90.
- ...part of the background of your life and healing?
  - You'll have a catchphrase that reflects your life's current state.
  - If that sounds right, or at least plausible, fill out the gray quest card from pg. 101.
- ...something weird, symbolic, and mystical?
  - Fill out the black quest card from pg. 102.

Only this time you need 15 XP.

Some Suggested Basic Quests

Are you always...

- studying the world around you, scientifically?
- thinking about fate, destiny, and meaning?
- thinking about spirits, ecology, or gods?
- thinking about justice, morality, and the right?
- trying to live up to some virtue?
- trying to live up to some social role?
- wrestling with a dark or troubled past?
- working on and thinking about some job or life thing, like
  - housework?
  - sailing?
  - fishing?
  - woodworking?
  - gardening?
  - martial arts?
  - art? *or*
  - music?
- talking/thinking about your favorite thing, like
  - animals?
  - ships?
  - manga?
  - science fiction novels?
  - cooking?
  - your latest health fad?
  - fresh air?
  - the game of Go?
  - historical trivia?
  - candy?
- fretting over exaggerated fears?
- getting *really* worked up over your favorite thing?
- or some fear?
- or some ideological/conspiracy theory concern? *or*
- torn between two worlds or natures?

Then that could be your basic quest!



Resources

Resources

I've talked about how characters are built and mentioned a number of Traits and abilities they might have. I'd like to take a few chapters now and explain them—the rules and concepts that make your character run.

Skills

A **Skill** is a simple description of something your character is good at—one of the tools they use to solve problems in the world. It's normally a one-word summary of an actual Skill, like "Cooking," "Cook," or "Teacher," but it could be a philosophy like "People are good" or a complex concept like "Discover a Convenient Shortcut" or "There's Nothing a Nip of Vodka Won't Cure."

Each Skill is paired with a numerical rating from 0 to 5—e.g.

- **Cooking 0**
- **People are Good 5**
- **Scholar 2**
- **Discover a Convenient Shortcut 1**

You can even go lower, if you want to say how bad your character is at something. I've never found a reason to go lower than -1.

0 is the default Skill.

Let's say that you're a human. Then you have a default level 0 Skill at basically anything that humans do that isn't covered by your other Skills. For instance, most characters have Brain Surgery 0. They're not *good* at it, but they're about as good at it as is the average person on the street.

The Skill levels mean something like...

-1► You're not good with this, but you do/enact it anyway.

0► You're not comfortable with this, but you could *try* it.

1► You're familiar with how this works.

2► You're good at this.

3► You're professional level.

4► You're a once-in-a-generation prodigy or an elite, top-shelf professional.

5► You're a legend, or should be.

Gaming Terminology

Trait—an OOC, rules-based representation of some ability or quality your character possesses. Skills are one example of a Trait.



Gaming Terminology

Nobilis—these rules are based on the rules from my earlier RPG **Nobilis: the Essentials**, which focused more on cosmic metaphysical conflict than on pastoral slice of life.

Of the two, **Nobilis** is a more technical game. It has more precise handling for weird corner cases of the rules and a rigorous power design system. ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** is a looser design, but I'm spending more time explaining the hows and the whys.

The biggest metaphysical and setting difference between the two games is the formation of the Outside. In **Nobilis**, I divided the world sharply into the real and the unreal—Creation, and the Lands Beyond. That division is much less sharp in this game, which divides the world into the Known (mostly Town and what survives of Earth) and the *Unknown*. Not only is that line intrinsically blurrier but it's a lot harder to observe!

That may be part of why you get stuff like the Riders (pg. 292) living peacefully in Town.

You don't need to know anything about Nobilis to use these rules. This isn't a Nobilis supplement. I just happen to mention Nobilis, now and again, since it's a part of this game's DNA!

Actions

Here's how Skills work in practice. You remember my mentioning Will earlier?

You have a pool of 8 Will.[6]

When you take an action, you'll pick one of your Skills to use as the basis for that action. If that Skill isn't an obvious choice, you'll want to describe what you're doing in such a way as to explain how it applies.

Then you'll spend some Will from your pool, adding it to your Skill number.

You'll compare the total of [your Skill + spent Will] to the list of things that you can do below:

You can...	
0 or less	attempt to do things, but only make things worse;
1	use your Skill in such a fashion as to please yourself and make you happy;
2	accomplish a task; have a tangible impact on the world;
3	do something "correctly;" impress people around you;
4	do something effective—something that moves you closer to your goals;
5	do something productive—something that makes your life better.
6	do something that looks dang good—impressive, dramatic, and cool;
7	do something *really* effective, moving you a lot closer to your goals;
8	do something *really* productive—it will make your life a lot better;
9	do the "right thing," for some fuzzy definition of right.

You can claim as many of these as you want, up to the level of [your Skill + spent Will.]

This chart is why I said that a level 3 Skill implied professional competence, for instance—with Skill 3, even if you're staggering and completely out of spare cope, you can still do things "correctly," for some value of correct. It's also why a level 5 Skill is legendary: a single point of Will lets you do the kinds of tricks you normally only see in action movies or the pulps.

Note that the HG is allowed to give you more success than you've earned—for instance, you're allowed to be effective or productive with a lower result than 4. Every time I come home and open my door, I'm probably mustering a Skill total of like 0-1, but I have tangible impact on the world anyway and sometimes opening that door is even actively productive! That's the leniency of the cosmic HG.

Most of the time, for most purposes in this game, a 2-point outcome will be "enough." But sometimes you'll really want something higher-level than that and it's worth spending extra Will for a guarantee.



6 Some characters have a secondary pool of 3 "miraculous Will"—but we'll talk about that below!

Intentions

Your actions aren't bound to any particular time-scale. They're not necessarily fire-and-forget. More often you'll set yourself a *task* or *project*—

I call this an **Intention**.

You don't spend Will so that you can "swing a sword" or "turn the oven on." You spend Will to "win a fight" or "bake a cake." To "prove [yourself] a hero" or to "cook for the family this week."

Maybe even to "live a full, fulfilling, happy life."

And sure, at some point during that happy, fulfilling life you'll probably swing a sword or two, turn an oven on, you know how it is, but that isn't *all* there is to living a happy life. There's also, like, um, you know. Other stuff! Like, you've got to type!

And, blow your nose!

Even if you *did* just want to swing a sword once, and that was all, you'd have to:

- first, get it moving;
- move it through its arc; *and even then, you'd have to*
- bring it to a stop.

It isn't just a single thing, you see. Not just a swing.

Nothing mortal ever is.

So the normal mode of operation in this system is that you take your Skill, add some Will, and create a [Skill + Will]-based Intention. This then hangs around for a while—until the chapter ends, or until you finish, or until you stop doing it. It's *always* there, part of your life. If you splurge on a level 6 fitness program in a Pastoral game, you could wind up doing some *really impressive* exercise all week. If you're ever just "doing" something in the game without formally invoking the mechanics, it's probably a [Skill + 0] Intention—the rest of the time it's either a bigger Intention you forgot to spend Will on, a power, or a mistake!

You can have two Intentions floating around at any given time.

Strictly speaking the rule is **you can be performing two actions at any given time**, and Intentions are a kind of action. They're the biggest, most important kind, because they're the kind most people take.

Time Scales

As noted (right), Intentions reset each chapter. What if you're doing something on a bigger time-scale?

One option is to just pick it up again each new chapter—every chapter you make a new Intention and go out and deal with it some more. That's how some people get through their lives, particularly if they're not trying to *get* anywhere. Another option is to lobby the HG to zoom out the time-scale of the game, if you're not the only one focused on stuff bigger-picture than a chapter.

The last option is to take up the matter as a *quest*.

The division between Intentions and quests is pretty much conceptual. If something feels like a big, long-term project, it's a quest, even if you super-rush it and finish it in a chapter. If something feels like a quick, short-term thing, it's an Intention, even if you wind up having to drop the Intention and pick it back up again over the course of multiple books.

Will Spending

Here are the amounts of Will you're allowed to spend on an Intention:

- 0 Will - *free!*
- 1 Will
- 2 Will
- 4 Will - *a strain on mind and body*
- 8 Will - *a potentially murderous strain on mind and body*

I've skipped some numbers there to help make Skills feel a little more distinct and fluid—it helps each point of Skill make a *difference* in what you're capable of, rather than just feeling like a point discount.

So if you're wondering if you can spend exactly 3 Will or 5 Will or something?

Nope!

You can't!

Will Recovery

There are four reasons why you might shed (stop carrying) one of your Intentions.

- you finished what you were doing, successfully.
- you've given up.
- this chapter of the game is over. A new chapter means new Will and new Intentions!
- you have too much to do and have to drop it now to make room for something else.

The first two cases are life-affirming—they represent natural endpoints. It doesn't matter if you've finished by saying "this is good enough for now" or "Gah! This isn't working!":

You've *finished*.

That matters.

If you spend 1+ Will on an Intention, and you can get to that kind of ending—whether it's victory, a good stopping place, or a wall you can't get past—you get one point of that spent Will back.

If it's not like that, though—if the Intention just kind of trails off?

That's not as good. You don't get back the Will.

As noted, at the beginning of each chapter of the game,[7] you'll shed all of your Intentions and get back all 8 Will.

Gaming Terminology

Sustained Action—something you are currently doing.

7 For instance, in a typical Pastoral game, this is on Sunday's dawn.

Miraculous Will

A few characters have powers that make things a little easier. They'll glide through life, or at least, a specific part of life, without it taking the normal toll on their energy and cope.

I don't want to just waive the Will cost for this stuff.

Perfection won't let you escape the fundamental experiences of the game. No matter how smooth your life is, the Road of Trials will still take its toll. Even the greatest genius has a finite weekly output in a Pastoral game; an epic fantasy demands decisiveness; an immersive fantasy requires alertness, care, and attention to the world.

So instead—

If you have a power like this, I'm giving you access to a second pool of Will: a pool of 3 "miraculous Will." This pool refreshes automatically every time you complete an in-genre XP Action, and every time you're in a scene with somebody else who does.

So, for instance, you're in a Pastoral game. You're in a scene with someone who does a Slice of Life Action—

You'll refresh your 3 miraculous Will.

Or, you're in an Immersive Fantasy, and you make a cool Discovery?

That'll refresh this pool as well.

No matter how many powers you have like this, there's only one pool of miraculous Will. If you have a power that lets you spend miraculous Will to cook, then you can spend your miraculous Will to cook. If you have a second power that lets you spend miraculous Will to fight, then you can spend from your single pool of 3 miraculous Will to cook or fight. But it's the same single pool in every case.

You can use Will and miraculous Will on the same action. Or not, if you'd rather not! If you lose track of which kind of Will fueled a given Intention, don't sweat it too much—you're not *supposed* to use the Will recovery mechanic to funnel Will from your miraculous Will pool to your regular one, but as long as you're not deliberately doing that, I don't expect you to keep careful track.

What is this for?

I don't want this to become standard-issue—it works against the point of "8 Will per chapter"—but I suspect that if the game runs long enough about half of the PCs will pick up *some* access to miraculous Will.

"This is particularly easy for me" just seems like a common sort of power to have!

That's why I'm giving it a prominent place.

Obstacles

Not everything is easy. There's a fundamental difference between petting a lonely kitten while sitting right next to that kitten... and petting it *across the void of interplanetary space*.

One is practical.

The other faces an Obstacle (level 4).

In ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine***, an Obstacle is a game mechanic representing the fundamental impracticality of what you're trying to do. Its rating summarizes how far you're having to warp the current definition of your Skill and circumstances to apply that Skill to do this thing.

Put another way, it's a measure of how *ill-equipped* your Skill is to do what you want to do.

I mean—

This is totally circumstantial. If you have a remote robot arm for petting kittens, you can reasonably pet a lonely kitten from a bio-station around some moon of Mars. The light-speed delay might be a problem but it won't *stop* you. So don't make the mistake of thinking Obstacles are an intrinsic part of the *task*.

It's just...

You've said something. You've declared an action.

Leaving aside success and failure, how reasonable is the *idea*?

The basic scale of Obstacles looks something like:

Obstacle 0. This is a reasonable thing to do, particularly with that Skill.

Obstacle 1. This is going to be rough.

Obstacle 2. This is going to be epic. Or a failure.

Obstacle 3. This isn't possible, but if you squint, you can *see* "possible" from there.

Obstacle 4. This is just plain goofy.

Obstacle 5. This is fundamentally, outrageously impossible—it violates logic, thermodynamics, genre, or something else close to the HG's heart.

Let's implement this in the kitten example. You're trying to pet a kitten and make it purr. You are using your default, level 0 Kitten-Petting Skill. How rough is this going to be?

Some examples of how rough it could be, and the accompanying Obstacle, include:

Obstacle 0. The kitten is *right there*.

Obstacle 1. The kitten is skittish and does not want petting.

Obstacle 2. The kitten is in the open maw of a nearby shark.

Obstacle 3. The kitten is in a sealed, steel box.

Obstacle 4. The kitten is on Eris. (A dwarf planet populated by a species of melancholy bat-people. And their kitten.)

Obstacle 5. The kitten is dead. Three years ago it fell into the heart of the sun.

Did it ever even exist at all?

Here's how this actually manifests in play.

Obstacles are a "Skill Penalty."

Before you claim any rewards, you subtract the highest applicable Skill Penalty from your Intention. So if I want to pet a kitten and make it purr, and it is in a sealed steel box, my Intention rating is [my Skill (0) + spent Will (0, 1, 2, 4, or 8) - the Obstacle (3)].

Reasonably speaking this does less than nothing—

I probably can't even figure out how to start.

I poke the box, maybe. Maybe not. There are no guarantees. The kitten may not even be alive. But let's say I find a way to bring my Lion-Taming 4 Skill into play. (Let's also say that I have such a Skill, even though I don't.) And let's say I put two Will into it. Subtract 3 and we still wind up with me being able to pet the cat "correctly"—as an elite Lion-Tamer, even *the steel box* doesn't stop me from impressing the people around me with my ability to make it purr.

But that's not actually all that weird!

I bet it's like...

I tap the box here. I tap the box there. I tap it here, and there, and—

There is now a purring coming from inside the box.

This could happen! It's absurd but not impossible. I have seen similar events transpire.

Sweet but Troubled Kid

"It's really OK? I can have this?"

Seizhi Schwan, **the Best Friend**, doublechecking before actually chewing an offered stick of gum

- Character Type earns: **Thumbs-Up XP** -

Emotion XP

Reasonable Applications

or, "I blow up the earth with my mind. Cooking Skill 3 + 8 Will."[8]

Note that at no point here does the HG have to violate causality or reason. There's never anything that says that the HG has to let my arm stretch between planets if I don't have a stretchy arm or pass through steel if I don't have a way to do it. The Obstacle isn't there to say "petting kittens across time and space is difficult." It *is* difficult, but that's not the meaning of the Obstacle.

The Obstacle is there to say—

"This is well outside the things you know how to do with your Skill. Do you even know how to start? How to make something happen? What you're trying to achieve?"

So there's only a level 4 Obstacle to blowing up the Earth with your mind.

It's goofy but it's not *literally* impossible—it's not a perpetual motion machine or a paradox or anything. You can take your Cooking Skill 3 and your 8 Will, or, I don't know, maybe your Glass-Making Skill would be better, but the point is, with just those tools you can still get to a level 7 Intention despite the nigh-impossibility of the feat.

It's super-effective!

...but that doesn't mean that the world blows up.

I feel that what should happen is something like this. Your mental conception of the earthbreaker omelette—"you can't blow up the earth without cracking a few eggs"—actually causes trembling in the substrate. Lights blow out. Tables shake. People who were scoffing just a few moments ago are looking a little worried now; and if you want this worry to be useful in intimidating them later, that's cool, because that helps make your actions productive (one of the benefits you can claim).

Overall that image is sillier than I'd like, and less effective than I'd like—

But I'm actually pretty satisfied with this scene. I mean, in a heavily realistic game it might be better to replace it with a dream sequence and in a full-on comedy the Earth might actually blow up just then[9] but the whole trembling substrate, minor earthquake, people worried thing? That seems like it's a *pretty* fair response to the Intention level that doesn't tear the veil of reason away.

So stuff could happen. Even with just a level 2 Intention, something probably *will* happen.

But, you probably still won't *blow up the world*. The HG doesn't have to let you. "Really effective at using cooking Skill to blow up the world with your mind" isn't the most effective thing in the world to be super-effective *at!*

8 Now you're cooking with gas!
9 Strangelets.

The Meaning of a Skill



Discovery

Part of the reason that we know that Cooking Skill can't psychically blow up the world is that the Skill has a plain, common-sense meaning.

Not every Skill does.

And even a Skill like Cooking has a meaning that evolves over time—if two cooks have this Skill, one may master the perfect sandwich while another focuses on fancy high-tech foods. Their Skills might both be called "Cooking," and they each might be able to learn to do the other's tricks in short order, but the Skills themselves are not the same.

So let's talk about how Skills differentiate and define themselves during play.

Consider a ninja faced with a blackboard and a complex system of linear equations on it. The ninja throws down a smoke bomb, vanishes; when the smoke clears, a solution is written on the board.

Ninjutsu, to solve a system of linear equations. Can such a thing be done?

As noted, the HG is under no real obligation to allow it. It's obvious that the ninja can write *something* on the board during the smoky interval, at least with an Intention 2+, but whether it's correct or not—well, *equation no jutsu* seems like an odd technique for a ninja to have.

They probably can't get it right! Not even with a "correct action" (3+) Intention!

...unless they can.

Unless it's well-known that *equation no jutsu* is one of the techniques that they *do* have, maybe, or *should*. Or unless Chi manipulation theory is actually grounded in systems of linear equations, which all ninjas must learn to solve in an instant. Or maybe even if they're in a comedy game, because in a comedy game, *(insert task) no jutsu* is probably *fine*.

So the answer to my earlier question is, if *your* Ninjutsu can solve systems of linear equations, then it can solve systems of linear equations. If it can't, then it can't. It's nothing to do with the fuzzy, abstract division between ninjas and mathematicians; it's only about the concept and the history of that one particular Skill.

What about Skills like "Excellence?" "Do Stuff?" "Dashing Hero?" "Good Fortune?"

Can *they* handle systems of linear equations?

Again it's not about an abstract comparison of the word or sentence fragment to the task at hand; it's about the *meaning* of those words, as established over time in play. The power of a Skill isn't determined by its name or even its number; it comes from the credibility of your idea about how you're using it, based on your high concept for the Skill, your confidence as a player, and the elements and outcomes established in previous events.

So here's how this works in play.

When you start using a Skill, you need to construe it pretty narrowly. You need to focus on the things that you *know* that it lets you do, the things that are central to its concept; and if you haven't really determined that, then the first few things you do with it will help to *define* that concept.

However, over time, you're allowed to stretch it out.

You can shake it up a little bit, do something that's pretty close to what worked before, and that'll be fine—just Obstacle 0, a normal use of the Skill. And then you can push it a little farther than *that*, and so forth, potentially down the slippery slope forever until you're using your "Architecture" to fly a car.[10]

You can even learn to do harder, more out-of-reach things.

If you stretch a Skill to an Obstacle 1-2 application, and succeed at the underlying task, and you do that often enough, repeat it often enough—eventually it stops having an Obstacle, or maybe drops down from level 2 to level 1. It stops being really weird and unusual. It becomes just a part of how *you* use that Skill.

In sum, your Skills aren't in their final form when you get them. You can develop them, even if the numbers don't change. Getting the most out of your Skills is a learning process—you and the HG will learn what they will be good for over the course of the game.

10 It branches off that thing with the pickles.

Tools

The opposite pole from an Obstacle is something that puts you on *firmer* ground—something that acts as a guideline, as a stabilizer, as a support team.

Something that makes you *better*.

Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine calls these somethings **Tools**.

Tools are pretty rare. Even a +1 Tool turns someone completely unskilled into an amateur and lifts a professional up to the level of the elite. A +2 Tool is radical; it makes your Keanu Reeves' into your Humphrey Bogarts, puts your local college physicist on a level with Steven Hawking, and gives random people off the street the illusion of reasonable competence at whatever the Tool is for.

That said—

A lot of low-end mystical effects manifest as +1 or +2 Tools. A shrine might offer +1 towards getting in touch with the spiritual world. A magical cloak might be a +1 Tool towards concealing yourself. The Meyer House is peaceful; it gives a +1 Tool bonus towards a good night's sleep.

Conflict

The rule for handling conflict between Intentions is pretty simple.

First, calculate the effects of Tools, Obstacles, and whatever.

Then, compare the numerical ratings for the two actions. The higher-level action "wins," and the HG gives it the appropriate rewards for its Intention rating. Then lower-rated actions get, well, as much as is possible from what's left.

So for instance, if I have an Intention to take a shower, and you have an Intention to shut off my building's water, and you have the higher Intention rating—well, at the very least, your action resolves first.

Our actions aren't *directly* opposed. There could be water left in the water tower. I could be perfectly content just *trying* to shower and realizing that there isn't water. But the point is, if your Intention rating is higher, my shower is taken in a context of the building's water being off. Or maybe the water hasn't even gone off all the way yet and all you've done really is add an Obstacle *to* my shower—that gets really ridiculously math-y and flow-chart-y for a diceless RPG showering system, but it could arguably happen.

The point is, if my action has a lower number, then it's taken *in the context* of your action. It's taken in a world where your action is guaranteed success and mine, as yet, is not.

If the two numbers tie—

It's really up to the HG. I suggest a bias towards "the defender," if there is one, and after that towards "the most reasonable victor," but, basically, it's just up to the HG which "wins" the conflict and takes precedence.

Edge

Sometimes a conflict is weighted. It isn't fair. Somebody in a bomber plane will probably win a fight with me even if I train for like *two years* in mantis-style kung fu. Even if I become a much better all-around fighter than they are due to an unconventional mantis[11] the fact that they have one jet, plus bombs, is an almost unconquerable Edge.

Edge acts as a Skill Penalty to the disadvantaged party; only, it's only a penalty for the purposes of resolving conflicts. It doesn't actually make them worse at what they're doing. It just means that they're outgunned.

How outgunned? Something like...

0 ► This is a fair fight.
1 ► It's a race, and you know the terrain (and they don't.)
2 ► It's a jury trial and all the jurors are on your side.
3 ► It's a water balloon fight and you've got the last water balloon.
4 ► It's a foot race, and you have an armored motorcycle.
5 ► It's a game of "guess what Alexei will say next"... and you're Alexei.

Note that an opponent's Edge doesn't stack with an Obstacle—they're both Skill Penalties. So if you're in a footrace against someone who knows the terrain (Edge 1) and you haven't had a good night's sleep in the past few days (Obstacle 1), their Edge just doesn't matter. If you're a brawl against someone who can fly (Edge 3) and you haven't had a good night's sleep in the past few days (Obstacle 1), you're at a -1 penalty in general and a -3 in terms of deciding who wins the brawl—but you're *not* at a -4.

In a normal contest, only one side has Edge at a time. This isn't *100%*—if you're playing full-team basketball against a 2-person team but the referees are completely on their side, it might be more convenient to think of both sides as having 2-3 Edge instead of neither side having any—but one side at a time is the normal approach: the HG boils everything down to determine which side has the actual advantage, and then, how much of one. This is why I'll sometimes talk about something giving you a certain amount of Edge "in an otherwise fair contest"—powers like that won't mean as much if the deck is already stacked, in your favor or against.

11 Er, master. I mean, master.

The Ace

Some characters will develop the miraculous ability to... do ordinary, human things really well. It might be Skill-specific, making them a miraculous doctor, knitter, or fisherwoman; or, they might just be really good at *everything*.

Sometimes I'll call that, and particularly that last option, being **the Ace**.

I don't really want to talk about miraculous abilities yet. I'll get to them! But not quite yet. I just want to talk for a moment about the *idea* of a perfected or improved human because I'll be using it as a mental shorthand in discussing the ideas to come.

Some perfected Ace, some once-in-a-generation prodigy—

They wouldn't always need to test themselves with Will and Intentions to get things done. They'd be able to bypass all the difficulties and just *do* things—but *what* things? Could they run at thirty miles per hour? That's not that much faster than Usain Bolt. What about forty? Sixty miles per hour? One hundred?

Just how fast can they run? Just how much can they lift?

Could they outwrestle a dragon? Stare down a sea serpent? Shatter glass with their spit at a range of twenty yards?

Where exactly is the line for perfection?

I think in some cases it's OK to let that depend upon the player. I think that in some cases it might be OK to let a perfected or enhanced human do something, but only if the player explains it first—if they want to wrestle an elephant to the ground, they may need more than just the declaration of perfection, but also a handwave like "elephant judo" or even something more realistic and precise.[12] It may take details and discussion to anchor one's belief to before one can imagine a perfected human doing any given thing; the line may be a pretty mutable and circumstantial thing.

I'm going to rely on it anyway, though—the line between perfected and impossible Skill—so that's why I'm defining how Aces work herein.

12 *"Asiatic* elephant judo"

Cool

Cool is a sort of Skill with special rules. It's pretty rare.

It's basically your ability to make whatever you're doing look easy.

You don't use Cool actively. Instead, anyone trying to hurt you, embarrass you, corrupt you, co-opt you, or mess with something you're actively watching or protecting takes your Cool as a Skill penalty to their mundane actions.

This won't stack with Obstacles or Edge, so it's most useful when you're fighting on an apparently fair battlefield.

The ratings look something like:

- **Cool 0:** Ordinary levels of Cool.
- **Cool 1:** You're unrealistically cool, like "the cool one" in an American sitcom.
- **Cool 2:** You're unnaturally cool, an undefeatable villain or a perfect knight.
- **Cool 3:** It's like the world has a law that says you always win.
- **Cool 4:** Your luck and calm are both actively supernatural. The world wants to go your way. Maybe you're a saint. Maybe you're a devil. Maybe you're just a key part of how this Town should be.
- **Cool 5:** Nothing mortal ever troubles you. It's not so much that you can't get hit or shot or poisoned or burned or embarrassed or sick as that you *don't*—it just doesn't happen. It's a ridiculous concept. You're far too awesome.

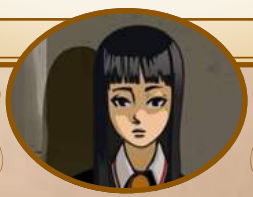
The Prodigy

Fortitude is the home of **the Prodigy**, a supremely talented individual. By default this Main Character is Natalia Koutolika, a PC-aged girl from Russia, although you could substitute a boy named Antony Yuryevich; the sophisticated French vampire princess Natalie Coutourier; the Spanish child of masked adventurers, Natalia Cordova; the African princess Zeinaba Kiros; or the somewhat older Ms. Mithrida Koutolika, a new teacher at Horizon's School.

Despite my vague suspicions that they've been involved with a secret KGB training program or something, I like her family—Yuri and Lenya are pretty good people, and little Sergey is *adorable!* Their home might even qualify as a "good place:" a little kind, a little sacred, to the point where it has protection against evil magic and the Outside—

So why is the Prodigy *herself* so very cold?

Natalia Koutolika, aka
The Prodigy



Shine

Shine is another Skill with special rules. It's also pretty rare.

Shine is being so inspiring, lovable, or commanding that people can do better at life when they're doing things for you. Basically, if it's *for your sake* or *to protect you* or *in the name of their love for you* or whatever—

People can use your Shine instead of their own Skill.

The ratings look something like:

- **Shine 0:** Ordinary levels of Shine.
- **Shine 1:** You're unusually charismatic and inspirational.
- **Shine 2:** You're easy to love and do things for. You're easy to respect.
- **Shine 3:** You're amazing, and can inspire people to do amazing things.
- **Shine 4:** You're like a good fairy, everyone's parent, or a transformational leader: you can help people towards productivity.
- **Shine 5:** You're like Helen of Troy—it's not so much that you can do awesome things as that people who do things for you do... kind of epic things. Sometimes even epic things that you may not want.

A Bit of History

In the old days Town was a *youkai* Town. It was a place of giants and monsters, ruled over by the gods of dream and nightmare.

Best-loved of all who lived there were the swan people.

Now when the humans came to Town and settled Fortitude and brought their iron and their crosses with them, the Jotun resolved to destroy them. Humans and *youkai* moved to a condition of war—well, war for the Jotun and participating *youkai*; a desperate struggle to survive, for humankind—

Until one of the swan princes saw and coveted the clothes that Elizaveta, a human, made.

Such was the love the Jotun held for the swan people—such was the love *everyone* had for the swan people, in those days, except perhaps humanity—that the Jotun then stayed their hand, ended the war, and accepted the human presence in Town. Now there are very few of them remaining, outbred a thousandfold by their part-human descendants: these days "Jotun" is more of a cultural identity than anything else, though even a modern Jotun will have some trouble with crosses and iron:

And all for the sake of Elizaveta's needle and a swan prince's love for clothes!

The Idol

The Idol (which is to say, the biggest mega-idol superstar of all the students at Horizon's School) is probably a modern-day swan person—though why a magically lovable swan person should suddenly appear after generations of their being merely "pretty glamorous" is a mystery to me. Perhaps it's not *actually* got to do with the swan people and it's just that the Idol is just. That. Cool.

Vain, maybe. Pretty sleepy. A little patronizing. Self-involved. A bit over-the-top with the fashion, really. There are a few little personality faults. But *still* just. That. Cool. The most beautiful, amazing, perfect, magical, incredible thing you can imagine.

By default this Main Character is either a PC-aged boy named Soun Shounen or his PC-aged sister Soun Shoujo.

Soun Shounen, aka
The Idol



Connection Skills

Connection Skills are your reward for investing time in a place, context, or person. (Or, in rare cases, in beloved possessions.) They're the sense of harmony, familiarity, the ability to *click* that you can get from all those things.

They're written as something like—

- **Connection: the Suzuki Family**
- **Connection: Herakleides Vasili**
- **Connection: the Moon Catch Neighborhood**
- **Connection: my Job at the Supermarket** *or*
- **Connection: the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy**

and, like most other Skills, they're rated from 0 to 5 (or sometimes a little less.)

Connections are a restricted form of Skill—you use them like an ordinary Skill but their default uses are defined for you automatically as:

- see into a (specific) person's heart;
- act appropriately in that person's company;
- trust that person;
- work well with them;
- enjoy their company; *or*
- remind them who they are, helping them fight off temptation or something that's changing them (particularly including the power of the Outside.)

Or, for a place/context—

- understand what's going on there;
- fit into it;
- go with its flow;
- help keep its engine running;
- live your life in a place; *and/or*
- ritually reinforce a place and strengthen its borders against the Outside or other alien forces.

For ordinary people, the benefit of Connections is that you can pick them up quickly—it can take years of effort to develop a new Skill, while a new Connection "Perk" takes weeks or months. For characters with access to miraculous powers, the benefits are more variable: some characters will be able to leverage their Connections to work wonders, while others will leave theirs to molder and become increasingly isolated from the world.

You have a default Connection 0 to just about everything. From there, you can aim for...

- **Connection 1** once you've hit it off with somebody;
- **Connection 2** once they become an important friend;
- **Connection 3** if you think you're great companions, allies, and/or partners;
- **Connection 4** if this is a really deep connection;
- **Connection 5** if they are your sun and your moon, the better part of yourself.

For a place or context, you can aim for...

- **Connection 1** once you're starting to feel comfortable here;
- **Connection 2** once you've started to understand how it works;
- **Connection 3** if you're immersed and totally know what you're doing;
- **Connection 4** once you're an elite master of this environment.
- **Connection 5** if you're becoming a kind of spiritual representative thereof.

If your Connection lags behind your emotional connection or your mastery, it means that your connection is *narrow*—you have a strong emotional bond, but you don't have the breadth of accumulated experience that the Connection Skill requires. Maybe that means you're not as connected as you thought. Maybe it means that you haven't put in the work yet. Or maybe it means that there's a side of this friend or context that you haven't yet had the opportunity to see.

The Headmaster of the Bleak Academy and the Death of the Sun

The Headmaster of the Bleak Academy is one of Town's bogeymen. He's a lot of different things in a lot of different stories, ranging from "the lord of Death's dominion" to just a guy who runs a school.

He's definitely one of the Riders, with his eyes all night and falling stars, and it's pretty likely that at some point he showed up in Fortitude with "the dust of a far and sunless land" on his feet, fell in love with or deceived Jade Irinka and vice versa, and fathered **the Child of the Sun**.

And in canon, he's the one who killed Jade Irinka—it's not *certain*, but it's the standard—

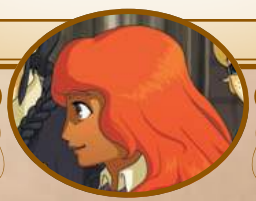
It isn't at all clear why.

What *is* clear is that this act was in some sense the metaphysical origin of the Outside: that it drowned much of Creation and all of the Lands Beyond Creation, much of existence and *all* of nothingness, under the multicolored void.

To the best of my knowledge this was on March 9, 1997, inasmuch as Gregorian dates mean anything. I figure you probably want to move it around some, maybe into antiquity, maybe put it more recently, maybe you even want to have it happen during play. I'm certainly not shy about having it happen at different times in different stories; it was more of a metaphysical than a physical event. But March 9, 1997 is when Russia witnessed the corresponding total eclipse.

By default **the Child of the Sun** is a PC-aged girl named Jasper Irinka, although you could substitute a boy named Raven. The first campaign will feature her as a helpful and kind of goofy Main Character who occasionally grows weird but pretty tentacle-limbs; she fell to Fortitude, doesn't know how to get back into the sky, and doesn't quite grasp that she *is* the new sun yet. Later stories will deal with the Headmaster's daughter, a teacher in Horizon; with the sky kingdom that Jade ruled and Jasper fell from; and with the Bleak Academy itself.

Jasper Irinka, aka
The Child of the Sun



Magic

A magical Skill in ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** is a Skill that isn't natural to you—it's a Skill that lets you cheat, a Skill that lets you break with the natural and normal rules of the world. It's a Skill that lets you do things that people, even your potentially rather special sort of people, just oughtn't be able to do, and without the use of miraculous or wish power.

Magical Skills mean that you've found a cheat code to the world.

Most of the time, in Town, that means that you're using the power of the Outside. The Outside isn't just outside the physical boundaries of Town. It's outside the organizing principles of the world as well. Using the power of the Outside lets you do things that *shouldn't* be possible, but—for whatever reason—they are.

For characters with Ace abilities, for perfected prodigies with mastery of every Skill, the most important feature of magic is that they are *not* automatically good at it. Magic doesn't *work* like mortal Skills. It's fundamentally alien. Ace abilities and Skills like "Hero" or "Paragon" make you better at what you are; even for magicians, magic is something you're *not*.

For everybody else, the most important feature of magic is that it's *difficult*.

Everything that you can do with magic has some sort of Obstacle attached. A normal Skill has a set of standard uses. Like, running—if you're in good health, and wearing good shoes, and on a decent road, you can just *run*. You don't start facing Obstacles to your running until you have a broken leg, or you're on slippery ice, or something of the sort.

Magic isn't like that.

Everything you want to do with magic is extraordinary. *Everything* forces you to push past some sort of barrier. Sometimes it's a trivial barrier—a few of the "magical" techniques in this book are so ambiguous or intangible that they're barely breaking the rules at all, and we'll call those Obstacle 0—but the barrier is always *there*. You're never in optimal conditions for using a magical Skill. It's always something *you're not supposed to be doing* and can only do because some alien and supernatural power intervenes.

I'm implementing each magical Skill starting with a list of relatively standardized and specific techniques. In some cases this is an extremely accurate portrayal and the underlying magic *is* built on named techniques. In other cases it's closer to a description of how that school of magic looks from the outside.

For instance, the Sosunov family in Fortitude has a secret technique that lets them visit their loved ones in dreams. It lets them do things like:

[Obstacle 1] send and receive detailed information through a loved one's dream;

[Obstacle 2] sense unnatural forces at work on dreams; *and even*

[Obstacle 3] send a dream forwards or backwards through time.

A typical Sosunov magician can communicate with a loved one who is far away. An exceptional Sosunov can stay in communication with dead loved ones, have extensive dream-conversations with a future lover or a child not yet born, and even risk paradox (and possibly a slightly higher Obstacle, at the HG's option) attempting to change their own history. I know that some of these things are studied explicitly *as* techniques but others just emerge naturally from their general studies of dreams.

As this suggests, the list of techniques isn't the end-all and be-all of a magical Skill. All Skills have potentially unlimited applications; magical Skills have potentially unlimited *unreasonable* applications. You can expand this indefinitely and effectively use any magical Skill to do essentially anything. However, you do still have to maintain credibility—

Experimentation, practice, or inspiration is required before you can roll out a new technique. Mastering it—to the point where its Obstacle level becomes reasonable—will take an enormous amount of time.

Some of the powers associated with the various magical Skills are functionally mundane. For instance, the magic of the Yatskaya family includes an Obstacle 0 power—

[Obstacle 0] reassure, befriend, or make peace with a cat or cat-like spirit;

I don't have the heart to tell you that you can't reassure or befriend a cat just because you don't know the Yatskaya Family Magic; and if someone like **the Prodigy** studied under the Yatskaya, she ought to be able to learn to do this kind of thing perfectly. So some of the lower-level powers aren't actually magical; they occupy an in-between state, where using them is *kind* of cheating and kind of not.

Here's how this is going to work.

If a magical technique exists, and the HG agrees that you can perform or approximate it—e.g.,

- you've seen it done, and you're good at copying others' tricks;
- you're in a magical place or situation where it should be feasible;
- your Skills *should* let you do something similar, here—

then you can use it, with a mundane Skill or some other magical Skill, at +2 to the Obstacle.

This isn't always the best option! You may be better off just ignoring the magic and doing it your own way—for instance, reassuring a cat is usually going to be Obstacle 0-1 anyway, so doing it the Yatskaya way isn't necessarily a good idea.

But if you have a highly flexible Skill like **Do Stuff** and you've seen Yatskaya doing their thing and you want to copy their technique and soothe a cat—

The Obstacle is 2.

Connection to the Outside

As an optional rule, the HG can set the default Connection to the Outside to -2.

Here's another example.

The Kichi family have magical scrying pools. They can look into those magical pools, overcome a level 2 Obstacle, and leave their body behind to wander Town as an incorporeal spirit. If you have a spying and sneaking Skill like "Go Where I Like," maybe you ought to let yourself do that as well!

Astral projection is normally Obstacle 2-4—it depends on whether your HG thinks psychic powers are real or not—but honestly, it's not likely to be that meaningful even if you overcome that wall. The normal outcome of a vigorous attempt at astral projection is that you have a daydream voyage, possibly augmented by a sensitive instinct and a heightened data-processing ability. Or maybe you break your mind-body connection and hurl yourself off into disorientation, Bluebell Park, or the Outside. Or—

I mean, well, all kinds of things *could* happen, but they're whatever would *normally* happen to a human throwing themselves against an obstacle of that sort. Not *magic*.

But if you're at the Kichi Pools? If you're willing to overcome an Obstacle 4 (the normal Obstacle for the Kichi, plus 2)?

I think you should have the same mostly-controlled experience as they.

If you do this often enough—five or six times a season, perhaps—then this application of your Skill might work its way down to Obstacle 2-3, with the normal difficulty for the Kichi forming the lower bound. Or it might make more sense for you to pick up the Kichi Magic instead. That's up the HG. It depends!

Summing it up:

You can sometimes use even the fully magical techniques with a mundane Skill or a different, inappropriate magical Skill—*if* it makes sense, and at +2 to the Obstacle. Sufficient experience may reduce this to +0 or +1.

Associated Bonds

Most magicians have one or two "Bonds," taboos or governing principles that shape their life outside the domain of the magic itself. For instance, if you practice ghost magic, you might be stuck helping the ghosts resolve their unresolved issues in the living world. If you practice the Sosunov magic, you have to be careful not to let yourself have nightmares or fall into delirium—that could pull you, and the world around you, into the chaotic Outside!

The full rules for Bonds will appear on pg. 116; for now, just assume that they're something all Main Characters, most magicians, and a few non-magicians can have.

Creating Magical Skills

When assigning Obstacles to techniques, I like to use a "small magic" to "ambitious magic" scale—

[Obstacle 0] Mundane tricks

[Obstacle 1] Small magics

[Obstacle 2] Bigger magics

[Obstacle 3] Ambitious magics

—reserving Obstacle 4+ for pushing the limits/inventing new applications, and deciding what "small," "bigger," and "ambitious" mean based on the magical Skill's thematics. In general, the Obstacles you pick can be up to two points lower (or, in weird cases, up to three points higher) than they'd be for a non-magical Skill.

I'd recommend starting with 5-12 total techniques. In terms of what techniques are available—

Honestly, you can pretty much put together any technique list that seems suitable. If you want to play the Demiurge and have omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevo*(throat clearing noises)* as techniques, that's fine; or, rather, it's probably not fine, talk to your HG and group before you play the Demiurge! but it's not an invalid magical Skill.

Superior Qualities and Skills

Superior Qualities and Skills are the other side of the coin from Magical Skills. They're abnormal or inhuman abilities that *are* natural to you.

They let you break the rules for being human, by declaring that you're not.

The Jotun have these. The dryads and vampires too. At that, so do elephants, fish, and the bird-faced spirits of the sky. It's not that they're alien. They're not. Nor are they touched by the Outside. They're just not human—

At least, not once they come into possession of a Skill like this.

(So why is the yardstick humanity? Why does that even matter?

...the reasons are mostly OOC. There may *be* a cosmological reason for humans or some human-like creature like the elves or Riders to set the norm, but in practice, I'm just writing an anthropocentric RPG. If the default character type were dogs, then I'd write up humans as having amazing, supercanine Skills like **Superior Language** and **Superior Thumbs**!)

Each Superior Quality or Skill confers three advantages.

The first advantage is that a Superior Quality or Skill *helps you win contests*. If you can bring your Superior Quality or Skill into play, it gives you Edge in an otherwise fair contest equal to the rating of the Quality or Skill. For instance, the Yatskaya Skill, **Superior Cat-Speaker**, will help you out in any contest where being able to talk to cats, or being *good* at talking to cats, is key.

The second advantage is that you can use a Superior Quality or Skill as a regular mundane Skill.

This Skill can be broader than the circumstances that give the Edge.

For instance, **Superior Thumbs** includes an implicit object-manipulation/tool-use Skill that makes even a thumbless or thumb-occupied human good at doing that kind of thing. Humans are better at soccer than ordinary dogs even if their thumbs don't give them an overpowering Edge. **Superior Wings** sharpen one's sense of 3-D motion and will make somebody a better airplane pilot and swimmer if the wings don't physically get in the way. As a final example, **Superior Cat-Speaker** makes the Yatskaya good at all kinds of cat-like activities; they don't generally get their full Edge in jumping, sneaking, or hunting contests, but they're still *good* at all of them.

Infuriating

"I thought the party was for me."

— Soun Shounen, **The Idol**,
explaining why he punched out the newly-arrived
Belgian ambassador

- Character Type earns: **Fist-Shaking XP** -

Emotion XP

The third, and probably the most important, advantage of having a Superior Quality or Skill is that it *makes you abnormal or inhuman*. There are things that you can do without magic that humans would need magic to perform. Forget improved piloting skills and 3-D orientation: having **Superior Wings** means *you have functional wings*. Forget the athletics and the occasional edge-case Edge: having **Superior Cat-Speaker** means *you can talk to your cats*.

The higher the rating of the Superior Quality or Skill, the more overtly supernatural this can be. The default expectations for this in ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** are:

0► You're within human norms.
1► You're unrealistically good.
2► You're like Rasputin (Superior Endurance 2) or Thumbelina (Superior Tininess 2).
3► You're like a beast—bears have Superior Strength 3, great cats Superior Reflexes 3.
4► You're something far beyond human—mountains have Superior Strength 4.
5► Nothing mortal can stand against you—light, for example, has Superior Speed 5.

So, for instance, the various levels of Superior Wings would look like this:

- **Superior Wings 0.** You have the same wings as any other human. I guess those are like your eyebrows or your back hair or something. Or the wings (dramatic pause) of your mind!
- **Superior Wings 1.** This might mean that you have functional wings, but they're really only good for hitting people with or *maybe* helping you control and aim your falls. The kind of wingspan it would take for a human to be able to fly is just ridiculous, so at this level you don't have that.
- **Superior Wings 2.** You can have working wings, but you might need to make some concessions to realism. Maybe they're gliding wings, or maybe you exhaust yourself in just a minute or two of flight. That still isn't necessarily *realistic*, you understand, and it's not even supposed to be, but it *affects* to realism by gesturing in its direction.
- **Superior Wings 3.** You can have working wings, and can fly as well as any bird.
- **Superior Wings 4-5.** This only barely makes sense, really—I mean, even in ***Dog Nobilis*** or ***Puppy Force*** where dogs are the default character type, humans would only have Superior Thumbs 2-3, you know? But maybe if your wings can let you fly off with whole cities, or outrace your own sonic boom, or something, you might have this level of Superior Wings.

These aren't necessarily absolutely *hard* limits—like, I'm not going to come to your house and lecture you if you try to get away with functional **Superior Wings 1** or if you want your incredibly skilled aerobatic flyer to have **Superior Wings 5**.[13] But in the first case I'd probably be happier with your talking your HG into giving you an extra point of Skills, instead, and in the second case, maybe it's worth sucking up the inefficiency and taking **Superior Wings 3** plus **Aerobatics 5**, or—maybe—just taking **Aerobatics 5** as your base, starting with a hang-glider or something, and working your way up to a power that gives you actual flight?

Stuff like being the Ace—

13 Unless I know you personally.

That is, stuff that makes you "better" or "perfect" with your Skills—

Enhances the abilities that are natural to you. Normally that's abilities "natural to a human," but ultimately it'll enhance *whatever you actually are.* So you can generally use Ace abilities to perfect the abilities that a Superior Skill gives you. If you contrive to give a perfected human or enhanced skill-user a set of **Superior Wings 3** (or, for that matter, a biplane), they will fly it with unnatural grace.

Conversely, *not* having a Superior Quality or Skill doesn't mean anything.

It's not a good sign or a bad sign.

A typical human doesn't have Superior Thumbs and doesn't have Superior Wings. Yet they still have thumbs and not wings. That's not because of some arcana hidden in their Skills. It's just because... they're a typical human.

Put another way—if I suggest a Superior Skill below, or if someone in your game has one, that doesn't mean that normal people don't have that Skill. And it doesn't mean that they do! If some alien from a distant clothing-world has Superior Fashion 3, that doesn't mean that fashion is equally alien to humans. And it doesn't mean it's not!

It just means that I think being superhumanly fashionable is a thing that an alien could be.



Hapless

"Well, of course, wishing to *have* an ice cream didn't work. I mean, you can't *have* an ice cream and *eat it too*."

— Chuubo, **The Wishing Boy**,
explaining why he wished to *be* an ice cream

- Character Type earns: **Head-Desk XP** -

Emotion XP


NEW



Quests

Quests

Quests are the core character advancement and achievement mechanism in a ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** RPG. You'll use them to improve yourself, to connect to places and people, and to make long-lasting changes in the world.

You'll find quests particularly useful for livening up technical and tactile activities and for getting a grasp on ambiguous ones. If you're studying aquaculture, for instance—learning to manage the fish and shellfish of Big Lake—then quests will provide an OOC eidolon for the technical details and hands-on experience that you can't really cover directly in play. If you're learning to become a more dependable person, the quest will provide you a way to measure progress on something otherwise unquantifiable.

Quests exist because a lot of life is about little things—tiny moments, textures, and details; things that get stripped from the experience of Town by the abstraction of play; by the conversion of a PCs' *life* into a player's words and actions around a table. Quests are their own kind of little thing, in turn: the player-level equivalent to all the bitty ephemera that you don't want to explain in-game. You don't have specific little body insights about whether someone is comfortable in your company, or an exact number for the optimum salinity level for raising lake snails, or names for all the colors, sounds and moments of a PC recovering from despair—you have accumulated XP towards a quest, instead.

Eventually you'll accumulate "enough" XP (each quest has its bank) and earn its rewards—stuff like life victories, new manga, 1/chapter abilities, and improvements to your abilities and Skills.

In practice you'll organize your quests into longer Arcs of 3+ quests. I'll talk about those later on!

Quest Description

notes and examples

Each quest starts with a note on how much XP it needs and some metadata—

For instance, a quest tagged with

1: 
2: 

is a good starting quest for a Shepherd Arc and a good second quest in a Storyteller Arc. It could be "the story of your ordinary life—the everyday work stresses, and pleasures that form the fabric of your days" (Shepherd 1) or just "ignoring the pressures on you and just doing things your own way." (Storyteller 2).

I'm calling that metadata instead of actual data because you're not usually going to look it up from the tag—instead, you'll either find the quest while *looking* for a good Shepherd 1 quest, or a good Storyteller 2 quest, or you'll just use that data towards the end of the quest to help get a sense of an appropriate reward for completing it.

After the metadata, the body of the quest starts with a high concept description of what the quest is all about.

Then there's a section, "What You'll Do," that's optional for both of us. You can skip it if you don't want it to apply and sometimes I leave it out. It's basically here to talk about the special effects of the quest—

The things you're doing, or the signs upon your person, that show you're working on that quest.

Then there's another optional section, "What You'll Know," that talks about the kinds of things that people who are on this quest tend to learn or know about. **You can generally assume that if you've been on that quest for a while, you can use your Skills (pg. 64, 69) to know or do that stuff—**you don't need any other excuse to stretch your most appropriate abilities to cover that.

Sometimes I'll use a different section, like, "What Happens," to talk about the things that happen over the course of the quest.

You can push the HG to have those things happen, if they're otherwise not.

For instance, here's two versions of a quest to clean up an old house and make it habitable again:

Cleaning up an Old House (version 1)

25 XP Quest

1: 
2: 

You're cleaning up an old house to make it habitable again.

What You'll Do

You'll probably have some cobweb in your hair or on your shoulder. You're going to be harried and you won't have much time for getting together with people. You might get sick a lot—you're around a lot of dust and mold.

You're always inviting people over so they can see how far the house has come.

What You'll Know

You'll know a lot about building codes in the Region.

In Fortitude, for instance, you'll know the building codes for Fortitude—or, rather, more specifically, you'll know that there aren't any. Not *officially.* But that there *is* some pretty intense if hands-off oversight from the Fortitude Regional Council: they'll make sure you're aware of the unofficial standards and best practices documents floating around the local library and provide at least gentle pressure against the house becoming or staying an eyesore. In fact, they're probably what made sure the house you're renovating came onto the market or into your hands in the first place!

(They're not all-knowing or all-powerful or anything, just, well, very interested in the state of the local buildings and streets.)

Cleaning up an Old House (version 2)

25 XP Quest

1: 
2: 

This is an adventure about finding friends in the most unlikely places.

What Happens

This quest seems like it's about cleaning, at first, but not long into the process you'll realize that you're not alone. A study of your environment leads you to discover a strange, displaced hedgehog-man living in the basement—apparently he's taken shelter there because he's being hunted by creatures from Outside.

You'll make friends with him, over the course of the quest, and have a strange adventure; but then he'll depart, leaving you with more questions than answers and a mostly-renovated house.

Perks

a rules concept

When you complete a quest, you'll earn a reward!

The Perk you'll get is usually based on your character Arc. For instance, let's say that you're on the fourth step of a typical Knight Arc—

> "You've fallen short of who you wanted to be. You've erred, or lost your path. Now you have to make amends, and grow.
>
> **Outcome:** Redemption is an ongoing process, but you've made a start. If possible, an NPC acknowledges that. Either way, the weight of guilt and wrongness on you lightens."

To finish the quest is to seize that outcome, which is pretty nice in and of itself—but you'll also get a bonus. One of the options, for instance, is...

> **Cool.** You gain a new level 1 Cool Perk.

This isn't a fixed part of your character to the same extent as your inherent Skills—you could, for instance, wind up losing this Perk later. But for right now, if you take that option, your work on redeeming yourself has earned you a point of Cool. If someone comes along right now and tries to corrupt or trick you, they'll be facing a level 1 Obstacle that they might not expect!

You might also get some benefit that isn't a Perk proper—

> +1 to an existing Cool Perk, up to **[a limit we'll talk about later, but basically, "the number of Arcs like this you've done."]**

So, if you've already done this Arc a few times, and you already *have* a level 1 Cool Perk floating around, you can now upgrade that Perk to level 2 Cool.

In a long game you'll be able to take the Perk all the way to level 5, evolving from an Umino to an Akio, from the Urkel to the Fonz, from a Doogie Howser into a *Barney*, or even from a Roseanne Rosannadanna all the way up to a Beatrix Kiddo, Ellen Ripley, or Emma Peel.

Perk Slots

I don't want characters to collapse under the weight of sixty-five different Perks—I'm OK with you having a lot of different powers, and a lot of different stuff going on in your life, but I'd like to keep your concept relatively clean.

So the rule is:

You can have up to eight total Perks.

After that, when you finish a quest, you can either pick a reward option (e.g. "+1 to an existing Cool Perk" or "move 1-2 points between skills") that doesn't require a new Perk, or sacrifice one of your existing Perks to make room for something new.

I'm not actually expecting this to be a problem for you—

By the time you actually exhaust the potential of the advancement system you should be able to afford a few Perk slots that you just use to hold your latest cool toy instead of stuff you intend as permanent; also, the rewards from longer Arcs can potentially accumulate indefinitely. If you ever wind up heartbroken because you really desperately need nine Perks, though, it's probably OK to trade in the normal reward for an Arc for an additional Perk slot instead.

Progressing Through an Arc

Quest mechanics are asynchronous—you don't always finish quests in the same order that you start them, nor do you always know in advance which of the quests your character takes on will be the important, life-changing or life-affirming quests and which will throw them down into the dark.

Accordingly, the whole process of finishing a quest and choosing a Perk that fits its place in your Arc is going to be a little *ad hoc*. The platonic ideal of an Arc is that you do 3-5 quests in order for that Arc until you're done; a Bindings Arc is a Bindings 1 quest, then a Bindings 2 quest, then a Bindings 3...

But if you start a Bindings Arc, and then finish two quests in short order, they're probably both from the "same" phase of your life—you'll get two rewards from the Bindings 1 step. Maybe that speeds you through Bindings 2 later, maybe it doesn't. Sometimes you'll even notice that a quest that you've just finished really has nothing to do with your Arc at all—it's a "side quest," as it were. In a case like that, you'll usually just take a Perk or other reward that fits the quest, even if it's a Perk from some completely different Arc—for instance, you might look at the metadata for ***Cleaning Up an Old House***, decide that when *you* did it it was kind of like an Emptiness 2 quest (pg. 437), and take the appropriate outcome and Perk.

Ultimately you'll finish the Arc after putting a certain amount of XP in, as soon as you complete the next plausibly Arc-completing quest.

Quest Cards

The mechanical heart of a quest in play is its *quest card*. This has two key features—

- a progress grid of blank spaces, representing the XP cost of completing the quest.
- a set of options for gaining quest-specific bonus XP.

Some quests have multiple options for this card.

You can technically use a quest card straight from this book, another book, or the Internet, keeping track of accumulated XP elsewhere; but normally when you start a quest you'll copy, hand-copy, or download and print the quest card, filling in the progress grid as you advance the quest.

There's a lot of flavor and ideas in the descriptions of the quest, and you probably want to pay attention to it if you want to maximize the fun and depth of experience of your game. But in *practice* it's all down to the card. Use the bonus XP conditions on the card. Fill in the progress grid or accumulate the requisite number of XP—

Get the rewards.

Bonus XP

There are two basic models for quest-specific bonus XP.

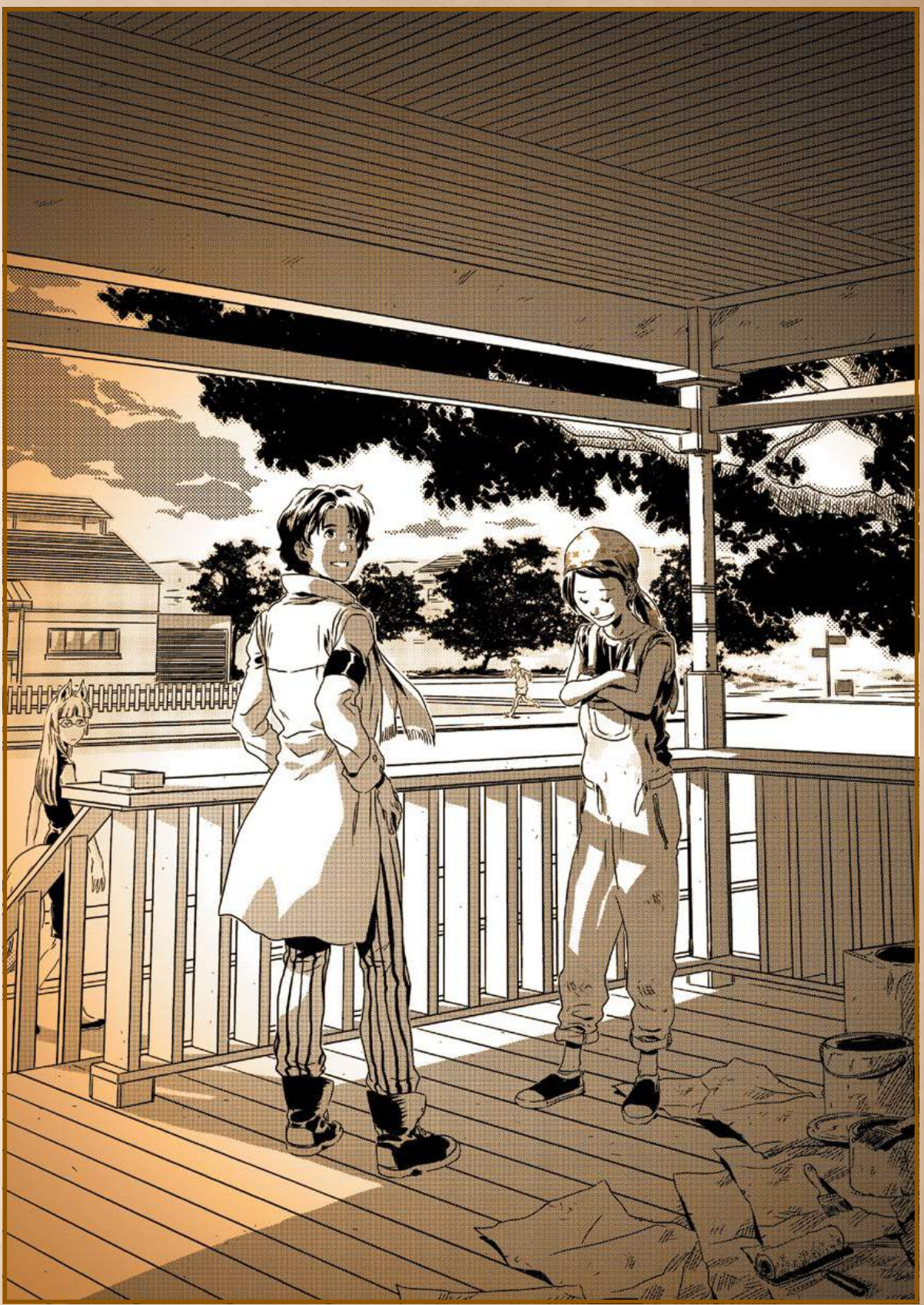
The first model is the "any time" kind of quest—there's something simple that you can do at any time to bring the quest into play. This'll earn you a bonus XP. For sanity's sake, you can only earn this bonus once in each scene and only once per 15 minutes of real-time play (approximately); this is over all of your quests combined.

The second model is the "storyline" quest—the quest is a structured experience, with some specific goals to aim for and a list of suggested actions. You can usually earn +5 XP towards the quest by hitting one of the major goals, and even if you don't, you can earn one bonus XP per chapter by taking an action or setting up a scene of the appropriate sort.

There's no limit on how often real-time you can earn bonus XP for a storyline quest, but I'm not expecting them to be balanced—even with the occasional +5 XP bonus, storyline quests are generally a little harder and take you a little longer to complete.

Examples

I'll show you two "any time" quest cards and a "storyline" quest card for the ***Cleaning up an Old House*** example, and then discuss them in more detail below.



Cleaning up an Old House (Example 1)

XP

25

Bonus XP

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by explaining some of what's happened in the past scene—your being exhausted and shaking, your backpack being full of hammers, the reason you showed up at a friend's house in time to rescue them from a fire—as

"It's the house, you see."

Quest Flavor

That's why you were in the neighborhood. That's why you're sick. That's why you're staring blankly at someone's hallway. That's why you didn't have anywhere to sleep and went over to visit them. It's *the house*, you see.

Pick some standard phrase to indicate this, it doesn't have to be the one I just said, and just use it or a close variant when you want to claim the XP.

What's yours?

_____

Cleaning an Old House (A Goofier Form)

XP

25

Bonus XP

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by **proposing a theory about how something will help you with renovations**. For instance, if you're being attacked by zombies, you might exclaim, "Endlessly reviving flesh! I bet this could fix my insulation problem!"

Note that you have to actually consider this theory. I mean, it's OK if someone stops you, but the point isn't to come up with something goofy to say, the point is to come up with a goofy idea to *think*—or, put another way, to show that everything you encounter is being filtered through the screen of "I've got to get this house into shape."

Cleaning up an Old House (As a Dramatic Structure)

XP

25

Major Goals

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest—

- ☐ if you are injured while working on the old house
- ☐ if you have a gathering of your friends there, and they pitch in.

You can earn each such bonus once per quest, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- working on cleaning or repairing the old house
- sleeping over at a friend's because your house isn't ready yet
- telling an anecdote to your friends about the house and its condition

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

Choosing your Quests

Each PC can pursue up to four quests at any given time.

I'm not expecting you to need that for just the quests in a given campaign—you're only going to need two at a time for that, maybe three if you find something cool on the side—but it's very easy to design new quests. An any-time quest should only take 2-3 minutes to put together if everything goes smoothly and 10-15 if there's some HG-player disagreement or negotiation involved. A storyline quest'll take longer, but 10-20 minutes to hash out something quick or 2-3 hours to make something worth sharing publicly online isn't an unreasonable time frame.

Getting back to your four-quest limit:

It's on the high side for the content I'm giving you and it's definitely not something to think of as a quota you need to fill. But I'm giving you four as an option, because there've been times in my life where that's fitting—where I've had, say,

- Starving Artist
- Working on an RPG manuscript
- Far From Home
- Working on a Fiction-based Blog

and while I could think of other quests I might theoretically have been doing, or combine two or three of them into a single quest, or whatever, those four items just seem *right* to me as a quest-tinted picture of a life.

You'll have a pretty free hand in choosing what your quests are. Almost every quest is available to any character that wants it, and hardly any quests have any sort of formal prerequisites. Even the Arc structure is a way of saying: *try to interpret what you wind up doing this way,* rather than "take these quests, in this order, or else."

Fundamentally, a quest is just something you want your character to be doing and working on, both during and between the scenes of play. If you're playing a pre-built character from, say, ***Fortitude: the Glass-Maker's Dragon,*** and the quests I've given you don't seem to fit you, feel free to raid other sources for anything else that seems better fit.

Starting a Quest

Quests structure activities that your character is already doing or things that you expect to have them do. That means that there's no white-armored knight waiting to ride up and escort your character into a magical land of questing when you start a quest—there's just the things you... do. When you take a quest, you're just saying, *this thing is important, and I expect that my character is or will be spending a lot of time on it in between game events.*

Here's all you have to do to start a quest:

- Decide that you're interested in a quest.
- Make sure you have fewer than four quests. If necessary you can drop a quest (see "abandoning a quest," below) to make room.
- Resolve to yourself that your character will pursue this quest.
- Tell the HG that your character is now on that quest.
- Write the quest's name on your character sheet, print or copy or create a quest card, or otherwise make a semi-permanent record of the fact that you're on that quest.

For instance, you really like birds. You decide to start a quest to learn more about the birds of Fortitude—well, done! Resolve that you're going to foreground that part of your life. Tell the HG that your character is studying the bird life of Fortitude. Record this information somehow. Copy, hand-copy, create, or download and print a suitable quest card and bam! You're on that quest.

The other side of that is that starting a quest doesn't give you anything in and of itself. If you declare, for instance, that you are now on the quest **Taking Care of a Small Child** (pg. 339), that doesn't *provide* a small child for whom you can now take care. It just structures and surfaces whatever existing opportunities for childcare you already had. If you're playing the kind of game where you can declare "I adopt a kid," "I babysit a neighbor's child," "I take care of my little sister," or "HG, provide a small child!" then the quest will help make that declaration worthwhile; otherwise, I guess you are woefully providing childcare to your chia pet, basement toad, or tiny egg.

HG/Group Quests

The HG also manages a pool of up to two "group quests." These are things that the players are doing as a group that the HG is interested in treating as a quest.

- any player can contribute XP towards the quest
- the HG chooses some number of players, and
  - each chapter that many players can each earn 1 bonus XP towards the storyline;
  - each hour,[14] that many players can each earn it 1 any-time bonus XP.

Group quests are almost always storyline quests with 1/chapter options that the HG is interested in seeing the PCs pursue.

- the HG chooses, starts, and chooses whether to abandon these quests.
- the quests don't generally give Perks, Arc advancement, or in fact any benefit save "cool stuff happens," but if they do, the benefits are shared with all appropriate PCs.

14 This could be 15 minutes as usual but that seems like it might get spammy.

XP and XP Cost

I'm calibrating the game on the following assumptions:

- a typical session runs 4 hours
- it gets through about 3 in-game chapters—sometimes 0 and sometimes 10, but ~3
- you'll earn about
  - 10 XP for casual play
  - 20-25 XP for focused, intense play
  - 35-40 XP if you're focused and covering a lot of IC time
  - 50-60 XP if you're focused, rushing, and everything goes right.

Each quest has an associated XP Cost, which you can understand in those terms.

The XP cost for a quest measures how much work and time it takes to complete the quest—the higher the XP cost, the more effort you'd expect to put into the quest before you see real results. If you're college students or NEETs with a lot of free time then you might get through 100 XP in a week of real-time play; if your gaming group is full of busy people with awkward schedules, you might manage 20-30 XP in a real-world month.

So when you're looking at the XP cost for a quest, you can understand it in that frame of reference—e.g. "50 XP? That's a couple of months of play!" Or "15 XP? I could get there in a single session, even half a session, but it'll probably take two."

I'll normally write a quest's cost under its title—for instance, "Cleaning up an Old House," above, is a 25 XP quest.

Bonus XP

Each quest has a way—often, several ways—to earn bonus XP specific towards that quest. I'm including these to make sure that quests don't drift into being *just* a background activity; while your character is likely to do a lot of the work towards the quest between scenes and sessions of play, I hope that you'll care about quests during the game as well!

There are two models for this.

Any-Time Quests. You can get a bonus XP at any time for this quest with some variation on:

- saying a quest catch-phrase
- emoting a quest catch-... emote?
- using a sign or prop associated with the quest
- proposing a quest-related theory or idea

There are cool details, and it's all built around the notion that you wouldn't be doing this, saying this, emoting this, using that sign or prop, whatever, unless events fit the quest—but mostly that's all there is to it. Just say something, or use a prop, and bam! I've made this very simple and easy so that all of the complication can come from the roleplaying *around* these events.

You can get one XP like this every 15 real-life minutes (or so), and at most once per scene. (That's over all of your quests, if you happen to have 2+ that work this way.) I'm *expecting* you to get this maybe once per hour, maybe less, and 2-3 times per hour when you're really pushing it.

Where Does XP Come From?

You can earn XP from—

- XP actions (pg. 11);
- quest bonus XP (pg. 87-103);
- emotion XP (pg. 46).

I'm calculating casual play as earning a bit under 2 XP per chapter and 1-2 total quest bonus + emotion XP per hour. Intense, focused play can earn 2-4 XP per chapter, 2-3 quest bonus XP per hour, and 2-3 emotion XP per hour instead.

Storyline Quests. These quests have two ways to get bonus XP. You don't always have both.

If there's something in particular that I think would be cool to have happen during the quest, or something that I want to highlight as a possible big event *during* it, I'll write that in as a "major goal." If the HG thinks/agrees that you've completed one of these, you'll get 5 bonus XP, up to a quest-specific cap. **You can ask the HG and players for help in making these happen.** You can't *demand* it, but it's OK to expect!

In addition, each storyline quest card lists a set of actions you can take to earn 1 bonus XP per chapter from "quest flavor." If you find yourself performing such an action, you get the XP. The 1-XP limit here is for *that specific quest*, so "try to get 1 bonus XP for each such quest" should be on your chapterly agenda.

If you don't stumble into it naturally, you can declare that you're taking a "quest flavor" action, even if it's not normally something you can control—for instance, if your quest flavor includes something like, "encounter a Main Character while you're traveling the roofs of Fortitude" or "accidentally swallow the crown jewels," you can say that that happens, even though it normally wouldn't be in your power to declare.

As usual, it's up to the HG to describe what actually happens when you take an action, so you and the HG *do* have to be on the same page—I'm just clarifying that you can take the initiative on quest flavor in a way that you can't for its major goals.

I've marked up the quest flavor with icons. There isn't any rules content to this—it's just a tool to get you thinking in the right directions. For instance, when I list an option like

 working on cleaning or repairing the old house

it might remind you of the icon for Shared Action and Shared Reactions—but it doesn't mean you have to play it out that way, it's just an indication that I can imagine it as a Shared Action kind of scene. If I put two icons, it means there are at least a couple of different ways I can see it playing out; for instance, when I offer

 telling an anecdote to your friends about the house and its condition.

I'm saying that that that might be a Shared Reactions or a Foreshadowing event. Or maybe it could be Sympathetic Action? I'd probably go with Foreshadowing, but if your brain goes to Sympathetic Action or even Shepherding instead I've decided that I do not mind.

Recording Bonus XP. I'm expecting you to copy or download and print the quest cards and mark up bonus XP as you get it on the XP grid—but it's also perfectly OK to track this on your character sheet, writing it on your character sheet next to the name of the quest.

In general I'm expecting you to get about 70% of the possible bonus XP on a storyline quest—you'll usually get your bonus XP each week, and you'll usually hit your major goals, but it won't happen every time!

Forum Games

In a forum game, I'm expecting the "per scene" limit on emotion and quest bonus XP to be a bigger factor than the "per 15 minutes" limit.

I believe that in a forum game it's notionally possible to get through 2-3 chapters and 20-25 XP in a real life week, but it's not going to happen; a more probable time frame is one chapter and 5-7 XP per month. If that's how it works out for you, consider slicing two fifths or three fifths off the cost of quests, the cost of Arcs, and the +5 XP bonuses.

Any-Time XP

I want to take a chunk of this book now to talk about any-time XP and how to choose the bonus XP condition for the quests you create yourself.

I think that there are eight basic ways to understand a quest. I've paired them together with a set of icons and colors, but you absolutely don't have to understand that—the icons are conceptual/tactile links between related concepts in the system, not something you have to worry about as special rules.

Here's a list of the quest types in their rough order of frequency:



Work and Study: the quest is part of a simple life—it's about you doing or learning something in a simple, honest way.



Melodramatic: the quest focuses on the exaggerated reaction you have to something you love/hate/whatever.



Paradigmatic: the quest defines a paradigm or context for you—it gives you a unique lens through which to view and understand the world.



Exciting!: the quest focuses on a passion or fear—it's something you get overwrought about.



Lurid: the quest is something that risks your identity—you're coping with something that calls you to go somewhere else, to be somewhere else, something that changes your state of being or lures you to vice.



Struggle: the quest is about your character's emotional and life issues writ large. It's about something that you can't process, something that you deny.



Setting: the quest is part of the background of your life—it's something you live through, day by day.



Symbolic: the quest is about so something weird, vast, mystical, almost indescribable.

Pastoral and Passionate Quests

In some cases the three-word name for Work and Study quests and the exclamation point for Exciting! quests winds up feeling a little awkward.

So **Work and Study** quests are sometimes also called **Pastoral**.

And **Exciting!** quests are sometimes called **Exciting** or **Passionate** quests instead.

I'm going to propose slightly different XP conditions for each, so the first step in designing a quest is to look over the list of them and figure out which one you want a quest to be. Sometimes it'll fit multiple options and you'll have to read on and see which one will inspire you more. All of these options boil down to something you can just say or do, so ultimately "wanting your character to still be cool, even though you do/say this a lot" is the major limiting factor.



Gaming Terminology

Scene—uh...

OK, look. A dramatic scene is a little hard to define in general, and even more so when it comes to roleplaying. So mostly I just want to be clear now that I'm using the term more often that you haven't *missed* a definition for scene. A "scene" is just... a scene. One scene of the story. If I were pressed, I'd say "a unit of stuff happening from the time a situation is established, until the time the situation changes in a way that resolves some narrative event." But that's not a rule for you to memorize. It's the definition that I'd give you if I were *pressed*.

You can use your own theory here for what a scene is!

Whatever a scene is, a "scene" in this game is one of those.

Work and Study Quests

Pastoral

There's something you're working on. There's something you're trying to build or learn or whatever. There's something you're putting long-term simple, honest effort into.

To earn a bonus XP, you'll take a scene where stuff has already been happening, and you'll reframe it as you doing your regular thing. E.g., saying,

- "Of course, I'm a writer."
- "I'm learning!"
- "I'm *trying* to *help*."
- "Nothing less from a [your last name here]."
- "And *that* was *another*... *mistake*."
- "Well, I'll try anything once."
- "Of course, as a brilliant detective, I had seen through this already."
- "Neither rain nor snow shall keep me from my appointed rounds..."
- Emoting *sparkle* or *ting!* to show how amazing you are.
- ...or something else?

This becomes your suggested explanation—either humorously or seriously—for recent events, successes, and/or failures, and your own part in them.

Generic Quest (Work and Study)

XP

15 20 25 35 60

Bonus XP

There's something you're working on:

_____

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by explaining away what you've been doing or trying for in the current scene as part of that thing you're doing.

Pick a standard phrase to indicate this, and then just say that phrase or some close variant when you want to claim the bonus.

What's your phrase?

_____

The idea is that by saying that, you either confirm that something is about the thing you're working on, or you make yourself a little goofy and perhaps overly earnest.

This can be a 15 XP, 20-25 XP, or 35-60 XP Quest

Melodramatic Quests

Melodramatic!

There's something you react to strongly. There's something that really hooks you, that you really care about.

Bonus XP for a quest like this comes mostly from reaction shots—there's something you do or say or emote that indicates that the quest is going on. There's something you do to show that your attention has been caught and engaged by the scene's relevance to your quest-specific interests, peeves, fears, or dreams, e.g.:

- "This is perfect for my book!"
- "I can't accept this!"
- "Dazz*ling!*"
- "Ooh, storytime! Dish!"
- "Of course, as a hero, I must face this boldly!"
- "O*oooooo*o"
- "It must be mine."
- "This is the life. The life!"
- "Impossible. Unacceptable!"
- "So. CUTE!"
- "I won't have it. Do you hear me? I won't have it!"
- "Fascinating."
- ...or something else?

Generic Quest (Melodramatic)

XP

15 20 25 35 60

Bonus XP

There's something that just rivets your attention when it happens; or when you think about it; or when something fits your thoughts about it.

Something you love. Something you fear. Something like...

_____

Pick a catchphrase for this. You don't have to use the exact same catchphrase every time, but it's the core of your experience here. It's what you say to show that your attention has been totally caught.

_____

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) with an emote or a statement that goes basically like that!

This can be a 15 XP, 20-25 XP, or 35-60 XP Quest



Paradigmatic Quests



Defining

This quest is a way of thinking. It's a special way of modeling the world. *You* have a special way, at least while you're on this quest, and possibly long-term, of modeling the world.

Maybe it's smart. Maybe it's goofy.

Maybe it's science. Maybe it's philosophy. Maybe it's a delusory belief! Or it could be something emotional or circumstantial, like ignorance, depression, optimism, alienation, or viewing everything through the lens of your impending child.

Anyway.

Your quest is a way of thinking. So you *show* that by proposing theories about the world, deriving from that style of thought.

Your bonus XP condition is proposing a specific kind of theory; you have to, e.g.,

- propose a theory about fate
- propose a theory about a mystery
- propose a theory about how to handle things
- propose a theory about how something works
- propose a theory about how to survive an attack by tigers
- propose a theory about the natural world
- propose a theory about romance and attraction
- propose a theory about what's going on around you
- propose a theory about the Outside or the Bleak Academy (pg. 298-314)
- propose a theory about the history of Town
- ...or something else?

You do have to say it, or at least think it, in character—the theory isn't from you, as a player, it's something that your character is, at least momentarily, seriously considering in the world.



Generic Quest (Paradigmatic)

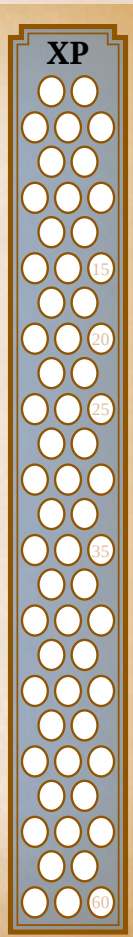
Bonus XP

There's something you're always thinking about. It's a lens that you see everything else through.

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by **proposing a new theory about that thing you're always thinking about**.

Make sure to actually stop and consider the theory—I mean, it's OK if someone stops you, but the point isn't to come up with something goofy to say, the point is to come up with new thoughts to *genuinely consider*.

This can be a 15 XP, 20-25 XP, or 35-60 XP Quest



Exciting! Quests



Passionate

This bit's about something that you get worked up over. I mean, really worked up. It's goofy. It *engages* you. You go over the top.

This is normally signaled by a sign, reading **Over the Top**, which you hold up when you or the natural course of events takes things over the top. When... for some quests, for quests that go over the top in comedic ways, it's for when things get so ridiculous that you just have to laugh.

And for other quests? The ones that go over the top in an awful way or a dramatic way?

It's for when you just have to make that kind of pained whimper-laugh that you do when the misery in your life goes over the top.

The XP condition doesn't have anything to do with laughing or whimpering, though.

It just *means* something like that, when you hold up the sign.

You'll get the bonus XP itself when you *do* hold up the sign—or, well, if you don't have a sign like that, or don't want to do that, or can't show it to people, when you emote

- *This is over the top!* or
- *I'm taking this over the top!*

This bonus XP condition is obviously pretty generic—you could indicate any number of Passionate quests with the same **Over the Top** sign—but for a quest like this it's usually going to be obvious *which* circumstances have just gone over the top. If you can't tell whether it's your passion for yakitori or your love of exploration that has just gone over the top—

Well, that can't happen *every* time, can it? Surely it's a special case!

Off-Camera Quests



THE CAMERA LENS IS ON FIRE

So there's some quests that really *should* mostly happen in the background. They're not about you. They're not about what you do on stage or on camera. They're just stuff that's happening behind the scenes.

Or maybe the quest is about stuff that happens during play, but—

You can't drive it. It's all up to the HG.

I don't like that.

I don't accept it! That's not a good quest!

Instead, I demand that you step up to the bat and *make* goofy stuff happen. If you think your quest is an off-camera quest or an HG-driven quest, treat it as an Exciting! Quest instead; only, maybe, with a bit more player agency and a bit less character agency in taking things over the top.

Generic Quest (Exciting)

XP

15

20

25

35

60

Bonus XP

There's something you're doing:

_____

...and you get really worked up over it. Well, you do, or the world does. Ridiculous, absurd things happen. Things get hectic.

So, look. Arrange for a sign.

It should say "**Over the Top**."

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) when your quest, or its consequences, or what you do about it, gets a little over the top.

Or, for that matter, when you *decide* to make them a little over the top.

When that happens, hold up the sign or otherwise declare/observe that things have gotten over the top and you can claim the XP.

You don't even have to say anything in character! You just have to be willing to hold up a sign. It's even OK if sometimes you're being ironic or making a suggestion instead of an observation, as long as an observation is more typical.

This can be a 15 XP, 20-25 XP, or 35-60 XP Quest





Lurid

You're torn between two worlds or two selves. There's a seed of wickedness in you; or sickness; or corruption; or maybe just another self, another form, some flowering change; or pain.

Or something's calling you. Something's pulling you.

There's a way you usually are. Maybe it's a good way, maybe it's a bad way, I don't know. And then there's this risk of... change.

In the real world this is a continuum, but for simplicity, let's express this as a binary choice.

You're in one state, or the other. You're in control, or you are lost. You're the person you've been trying to be, or the person you were. You're sick, or you're OK. You're transforming, or you're not; hurting, or you're not; having whatever problem it is happen... or you're not.

You can get the bonus XP when you flip between states in active play—in the middle of a scene. This can be something you say or emote—"I am now hurting" or "I am now a suspicious character." This is *usually* something you say or emote, I bet.



Generic Quest (Lurid)

XP

15 20 25 35 60

Bonus XP

You're torn between two worlds or two selves; between:

_____

and

_____

Ideally, you'll make a sign for this—a reversible card, which you could in theory have on the table in front of you in play to show which state you're in. You can earn a bonus XP at any time (though only once per scene/15 minutes) by flipping the card, showing that you're moving between the two states.

If you can't actually keep the card in front of you, holding up the card with the relevant side facing people or just saying or emoting something appropriate can earn you the XP instead.

This can be a 15 XP, 20-25 XP, or 35-60 XP Quest

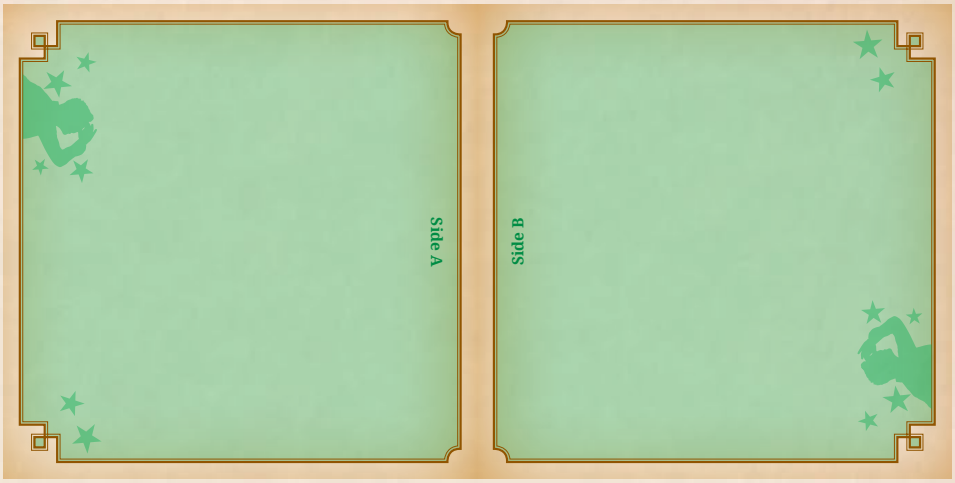
...but if possible, I'd like you to have a two-sided sign.

Keep it in front of you on the gaming table to reflect the two states of your being. Have one side that faces up when everything is OK and one that you flip to when corruption, metamorphosis, trauma, wickedness, or the allure of some distant treasure gets to you. (You can also just flash either side of it if there's no room to keep a prop sign in front of you at the table, or quote from it if you're in an online game.)

I'm explicitly setting this up so that you'll normally get the XP from flipping to the "bad" side—since you can't get a second XP in the same scene, and you'll often switch back to the good side between scenes rather than during—but so that you will sometimes get an XP from flipping it the other way.

Some example signs include:

- Curious / *Too* Curious.
- Troubled / Free.
- OK / Haunted.
- Innocent / Suspicious.
- Human / Angel.
- Grounded / Daydreaming
- Sober / Drunk
- At Home in Fortitude / Called to the Bleak Academy
- Ordinary Kid / Obvious Delinquent
- Cautious / Tempted





Two-Sided Lurid Sign Examples



Struggles

Struggle

There's something you don't handle well. At least not yet.

There's something you don't easily process.

You're messed up, and the condition you have of being messed up like that... is the quest. When you experience some emotion or situation like success, peace, a happy environment, or whatever, you immediately self-sabotage. Or maybe it's a negative emotion, like: you feel fear, and immediately begin suppressing and denying it.

All you actually *have* to do here is emote or say something to indicate that you're feeling the emotion or being in the situation in question. But this is another case where I'd like a two-sided sign. One side, with the emotion, you show to the other PCs. The other side has your inner monologue, e.g.:

- **At Peace** / *You don't have time for this.*
- **Hurting** / *Smile!*
- **I Know What I'm Doing** / *You don't know what you're doing.*
- **In Control** / *You're not in control.*
- **Serious, Professional Face** / [Sudoku game, for playing in your head]
- **So Cool!** / *Why can't I be cool?*
- **This is Good, Right?** / *I don't understand. I don't... understand.*
- **Touched** / *This will end in pain.*

Generic Quest (Struggle)

XP

15 20 25 35 60

Bonus XP

There's something you're trying to do or be. It's probably even a good thing!

...but this quest comes with a psychological or social burden—a private cross to bear. Something you can't handle as well as you like to pretend. Something you have trouble processing. When you're saying or emoting *this* to everyone...

_____

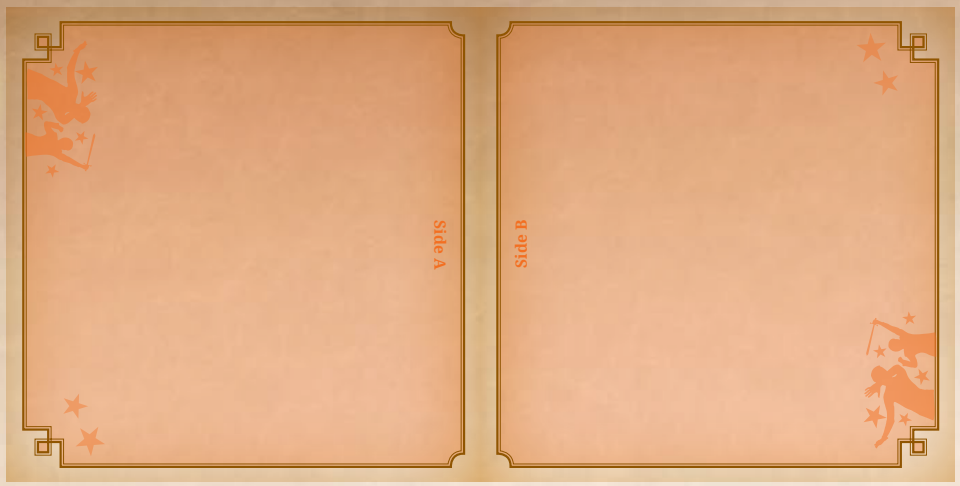
Some deeply- or shallowly-buried part of you is actually thinking *this*:

_____

Create or pick out a two-sided sign: one side is your public face, the other shows your hidden thoughts. You can earn a bonus XP at any time (though only once per 15 minutes/scene) by expressing that emotion—normally, by holding up the sign.

The back side of the sign reminds you of your flaws. If you're not playing in a place where you can actually hold up the sign, it's OK to just remind yourself quietly of what it says, or, if you must, ignore the back side in its entirety.

This can be a 15 XP, 20-25 XP, or 35-60 XP Quest



The Background of Your Life



Setting

A Setting quest is about a stage in your life. It's not really about something you *do*. It's about something you just have to live *through*.

Some practical possibilities for Setting quests include:

- become a "better" person
- deal with grief
- deal with trauma
- spiritual explorations
- self-exploration
- adjust to a new lifestyle
- find a way to forgive someone
- experience an inherently or consciously temporary phase of your PC's life—
  - be grumpy for a while
  - be overly happy for a while
  - try hard to be popular and outgoing for a while
  - buckle down for a while
  - goof off for a while
  - experiment with forbidden arts for a while
  - recover from surgery
  - wean off of cigarettes, and backslide at the end of the quest
  - wean off of cigarettes, and stay off of them afterwards
  - be dismissive of local culture for a while
  - be really enthusiastic about local culture for a while, instead

I know this is going to sound weird but I don't think you can advance a quest like this just by declaring progress, or by focusing your attention inwards.

I'm going to say instead that the core of a quest like this is something *external* that happens while you're on the quest. You still have to be the one to do it, so it's still something your character does, says, or emotes; the bonus XP condition is going to be your character *reacting* to that thing—but still. It's something outside you. Something sensory. Something that takes your attention out into the broader world. You emote some variant on:

- "Listen to those birds."
- "Look at those clouds roll in."
- "I'm stretching my fingers and watching them go in and out."
- "I'm staring at the endless sky."
- "There'll be chunks of potato, onion, beef in the soup tonight; and spice."
- "I'm staring out across the lake."
- "It tastes like rain."
- "This tea is so bitter."
- "This soup is so good."
- "This sun is so warm."

Ideally this is something you can say when the quest is on your mind. Your character is recovering from grief: you can't do that by having a scene where you stomp around emoting recovery from grief, but you *can* look off now and then into the distance, hear the sounds of the gulls over the lake, and say, "Dang, just listen to those birds."

And earn a bonus XP for that; and move, bit by bit, towards peace.

It's possible that referencing a memory would also work as a bonus XP condition here. Figure out a certain *kind* of memory that you have, like memories with a precious person or memories of a better world, and then say or emote something like:

- "Remember the first time we came here?"
- "Remember when we got lost out by the northern beach?"
- "Remember when it was summer and the days were long?"

Either way, it's saying or emoting your observation/catchphrase, or a close variant thereof, that earns you the bonus XP for such a quest.

Generic Quest (Background)

XP

15

20

25

35

60

Bonus XP

There's something you just have to live through, day by day.

_____

And there's something—some experience or memory—that helps mark out those days. There is something that draws your attention when this quest casts its shadow or its light upon your life.

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by directing attention to this experience. This usually relies on a specific catch phrase—e.g., your attention drifts to the birds flying out over Big Lake, and you say, "Listen to those birds."

...or whatever.

What catch phrase do you use?

_____

This can be a 15 XP, 20-25 XP, or 35-60 XP Quest

Symbolic Quests

Symbolic

There's something that's happening to you, but you're not really sure what it's about. It's metaphysical and ambiguous. You've been touched by destiny and miracle and—

Well, it's not clear where that is going.

The way to handle this, I think, is that when you feel the touch of that destiny and miracle upon you—when the weirdness has started—you need to free-associate a bit on what's going on in your character's head. Talk about images and sensations, either emoting "I'm experiencing this / flashing on this" or as things your character says. That'll earn you the bonus XP.

The *meaning* of these rambles isn't going to be clear until towards the end of the quest—

And maybe not even then, though by then you should at least *try* to pull it together into some sort of story and some sort of sense—

So the fulfillment criteria here is the same for each and every Symbolic quest.

Try not to have two quests like this at the same time; it won't be clear which one to give the bonus XP to when a strangeness like this arises.

Generic Quest (Symbolic)

Bonus XP

There's something going on. You think it means... you think it... it *relates* to...

_____

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (though only once per scene/15 minutes) by declaring that you can feel the touch of it, the thing, the it, the miracle, the strangeness, the dissociation, the unnameable, the it, the thing

—you can phrase it another way; just give some indication that you're triggering this quest condition—

and then free-associating for a few moments about what your character is experiencing, feeling, thinking.

Talk about being cold, or warm; talk about visions; whatever. Clenching muscles in your arms. Hunger in the sky. Whatever. Random rambles and chill sensations across your back, gnashing stars in the glory beyond the world. That kind of experience, the taste of bugs chattering in the summer, and that brings you in a bonus XP for this quest.

This can be a 15 XP, 20-25 XP, or 35-60 XP Quest

XP

15 20 25 35 60

Storyline XP

Storyline quests are a little harder to break down into solid rules. Mostly I'm going to give you some rough guidelines here, below.

Major Goals

It's worth note that the "major goals" for a quest *aren't* necessarily or even generally the character's major goals. They're *my* major goals, or the HG's major goals, or your major goals as the player designing the quest.

Storyline design isn't in character, in other words; it's done from an authorial perspective.

So the major goals are based on things like:

- this would be an awesome dramatic scene here;
- this would strengthen the feel of the quest;
- this is something that should happen as part of the quest story, but the PC doesn't know that;
- this would help to fulfill the dramatic purpose of the quest;

as well as

- this is an obvious strategic/practical mid-point.

You can use this to sneak all kinds of "wouldn't it be cool if...?" and "maybe this happens while...?" into the quest.

My personal default is to give you about one major goal for each 10 XP of quest, so you can earn half, or just a little bit under half, of the quest's XP from its major goals. That's not a hard rule on how quests *have* to work, though; it's just my personal style.

Quest Flavor

Quest flavor is generally just a set of (potentially fun) scenes or actions that you can imagine a character performing while on the quest. I don't mean the actions they take *to do* the quest—I mean, the things that you'd expect someone on that quest to be doing. You're still designing from an OOC perspective, here! You're still trying to capture the mystique of the quest, inasmuch as it has mystique: its *appearance*, what seems important from the *outside*, more than what's important in actual fact.

There's no hard rule for how many of these flavor options a quest should have. I like to have at least three, because otherwise the quest is just doing the same stuff over and over, and I've tried to rein myself in before I go past one option per 5 XP—but if you're creating a quest, and you really *need* 20 different flavor options, or can't think of a reason to have more than 2, well, then, that's fine!

Spending XP

You can spend XP at more or less any time during the game to complete a quest. If you have 5 XP floating around, and you've earned 10 bonus XP on a 15 XP quest, you can complete that quest immediately. You're obligated to explain how it makes sense to complete the quest right then—e.g., if Dorothy, in the hurricane and on the way to Oz, wants to complete a fishing quest, she'd better be fishing off of her porch and making some folksy observation about what she's learned—but as a general rule it can always be *done*. There is one exception: as a sanity measure, I'm going to allow the HG to veto XP expenditures during play. I don't mean "setting consistency and sanity" or "rules balance sanity." I just mean, if the HG is already juggling too many chainsaws and plates, some of which are on fire, they have the right to tell you not to spend XP bringing another big thing into play *right then*. Conversely, towards the end of a session, the HG may want to actively prompt people to spend XP on any quests they might want to finish so that the HG can work the quest's outcome into the ending or the epilogue of the game.

After the end of each session, and before the next session begins, you'll need to spend your accumulated XP on quests. For instance, if you earn 18 XP during a 5-hour-long Saturday game, then, after the game, you'll have to divide that 18 XP between one to four of your quests. If you decide at this point to finish one or more quests, make sure to let the HG know. You can also pick up new quests at this point, particularly if you've finished one or more quests, and you can spend some of your accumulated XP on these new quests as well.

If you and the HG like, you can work out "what happened" with quests you finished and started at this time between the two sessions. Otherwise, finishing and starting new quests "officially" happens during the first chapter of the next session of play.

Abandoning Quests

From time to time you'll realize that your character isn't interested in a given quest any longer. They're no longer that person or they're no longer in those circumstances. They've moved on. They've *abandoned* the quest.

You can abandon an ongoing quest any time you like. Once you've done so, you're no longer on that quest and it no longer counts towards your four-quest limit. The story of the quest finishes, to one extent or another—the HG can still use the story elements as part of the ongoing game, but there is some sense in which you both feel and actually are "done." For a one-off quest, you feel like you've done all that was in you to do; you can't do this right now: you're done. For a repeatable quest, you've decided that it's not worth it or it's not possible: maybe you'll do this quest again later, but for right now, you're not going to *have* a new plateau, a new level, or a new key defining moment, nor are you going to for a while to come—and maybe that's not so bad.

Abandoning a quest costs you half of its invested XP, but you get the rest back immediately to apply to whatever existing or new quests you like. As an optional rule, the HG can give you some or all of the rest at the beginning of the next book of play.

Quest Completion

When you've paid a quest's full XP cost, the "story" of the quest completes. Whatever it was you were building towards, you've accomplished it.

Your Arc will tell you the quest's final outcome and you'll choose from its list of rewards.

—well, they're all suggestions, so you might choose your own reward, but *usually* that's what you do. You'll read the line that says "Result:" "Reward:" or "Outcome:" and then you'll skim the list of Perks, Perk-improvements, and other rewards.

Unexpected Outcomes

On occasion you and the HG will have to do some thinking here.

For instance, if you're working on a quest to repair an old house, it's logical to assume that you come out of this with a house. On the other hand, it's possible that towards the end of the quest there's a terrible fire, and suddenly there's nothing left but some scorched land—

And you're sitting there with 24 out of 25 XP, so you tip in another to complete it, because, darn it, that doesn't change the *work* that you put in.

And at this point you're going to want to figure out if the Perk you get is a reflection of the cruel unfairness of the world or if you and the HG should figure out some way for you to end up with a new, cool home like you'd expected to have—

Some eucatastrophe wherein, say, the HG tells you: "well, that's it for that project. But you know, your friend's uncle's looking to move in with his children, he has this *great* little house he's willing to let go of cheap, and with the insurance plus some pitching in from your friends you could have everything copacetic by next Friday...."

You won't ever technically *have* to work around stuff like this. The Arcs are designed with a fair bit of abstraction precisely *so* I never have to promise you a house I can't give. I'm just saying, it's important to take a moment to reflect upon what *should* happen when you're approaching a not-immediately-intuitive end for a given quest.

If You Started an Arc...

Completing the first quest of an Arc marks the official beginning of your journey. That's the point at which you can say that your character is "on" a given Arc.

This usually earns you a level-0 Trait, representing the path that you've just started, e.g.,

Knight (Idol Singer) 0.

That indicates that you're on a Knight Arc, trying to be an Idol Singer, and your current level of awesome at that is level 0.

Ultimately you're allowed to declare yourself on any color of Arc after finishing any quest—you can complete a weird hand-made quest to cook 150 hamburgers and declare that you are now connected to some great Otherworldly force (pg. 406)—but it's good manners to make sure that this makes sense.

If You Finished an Arc...

If you've crossed the XP boundary for your Arc, you gain a permanent benefit of some sort. For instance, if you're a PC without access to miraculous powers, you'd get something like:

- +1 to the Arc-based Trait, like **Knight (Idol Singer)**
- +1 to a Skill (pg. 64), +1 to a Bond (pg. 116), or a new level 1 Bond (pg. 116/452)
- a new level 1 Skill,
- you can optionally move a point from an existing Skill into the new Skill, *and*
- if the Arc Trait just hit 3, gain a new Affliction (pg. 119/452)

The Skill doesn't have to be an exact match for the Arc, so you could advance to, e.g.

- **Knight (Idol Singer) 1**, *and gain*
- +1 to your Bond "alcoholic" *and*
- a new level 1 Skill, "Totally Disillusioned"

These benefits are inherent—you'll never have to discard them like you would a Perk.

Closing Out Arcs in Good Order

I don't want players to be unhappy because they finish a quest 10 XP short of the Arc and the next logical quest for them to take up is a 50+ XP-costing brick.

So when the Arc's end approaches, you can talk to the HG about these options:

- cutting or stretching a quest's XP cost by up to 50%;
- finishing the Arc itself midway through the next quest with a big insight, staying on the quest, and applying the rest of its XP towards a new Arc.

You can also abandon an existing Arc midstream; much as with abandoning a quest, you'll get back half of the invested XP—

Not *back* back, since you've already earned Perks or completed quests with it or whatever, but, you know, you can apply that much as a head start on qualifying for your next Arc—

And the HG can later, and optionally, give you access to the rest.



The Miraculous

The Miraculous

Depending on the campaign, characters may start with or acquire access to *miraculous abilities*—powers that transcend causality and process. These aren't really things you *do*. They're things you learn to *make happen*.

Things you can just... *declare*.

They can be really minor things, things that you could also do with ordinary actions, like:

- "I take a step forward." *or*
- "I wriggle around in whatever bag I happen to be trapped in."

But they're more likely to be magical or transcendent stuff like—

- "I grow wings."
- "I spin some straw into gold."
- "I make a bridge of fire to span this river."
- "I pull the information I need out of this stack of books."
- "I make this harder for someone (raising the Obstacle)."
- "I make this easier (lowering or waiving the Obstacle.)"
- "I play this instrument perfectly."
- "I run at eighty miles per hour." *or*
- "I cast a veil of illusion to hide my bike."

The best thing about a miraculous action like this is that it always *happens*.

There may be limits to its power. It can be opposed by a stronger miracle. Unless the power states otherwise, it has limited reach—basically, it can affect stuff in the same Region, e.g. "Fortitude" or "Little Island," as yourself.

But it's not like a Skill, where your action is "I try to do this" or "I have this Intention."

A miracle can fail or be stopped or whatever, but the action itself, the part that you *just do*, is "This happens." You point at the world. You tell it: *make this so*.

Even if you shouldn't be able to "take a step forward," because you're sealed in an iron casket. Even if you shouldn't be able to "grow wings," because... you're a human or a rat or something, and they don't do that.

You use the miracle.

It is made so.

The downside of a miraculous action is that you don't have any way to spend Will and buy your way up to a guarantee of "effectiveness," "productivity," or doing "the right thing." Those guarantees are the currency of mortal actions—of fuzzy, organic, slippery mortal actions, one thing one day and another thing the next.

Miracles aren't like that.

They simply *are*.

Octopus Singer

an example Miraculous Ability

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

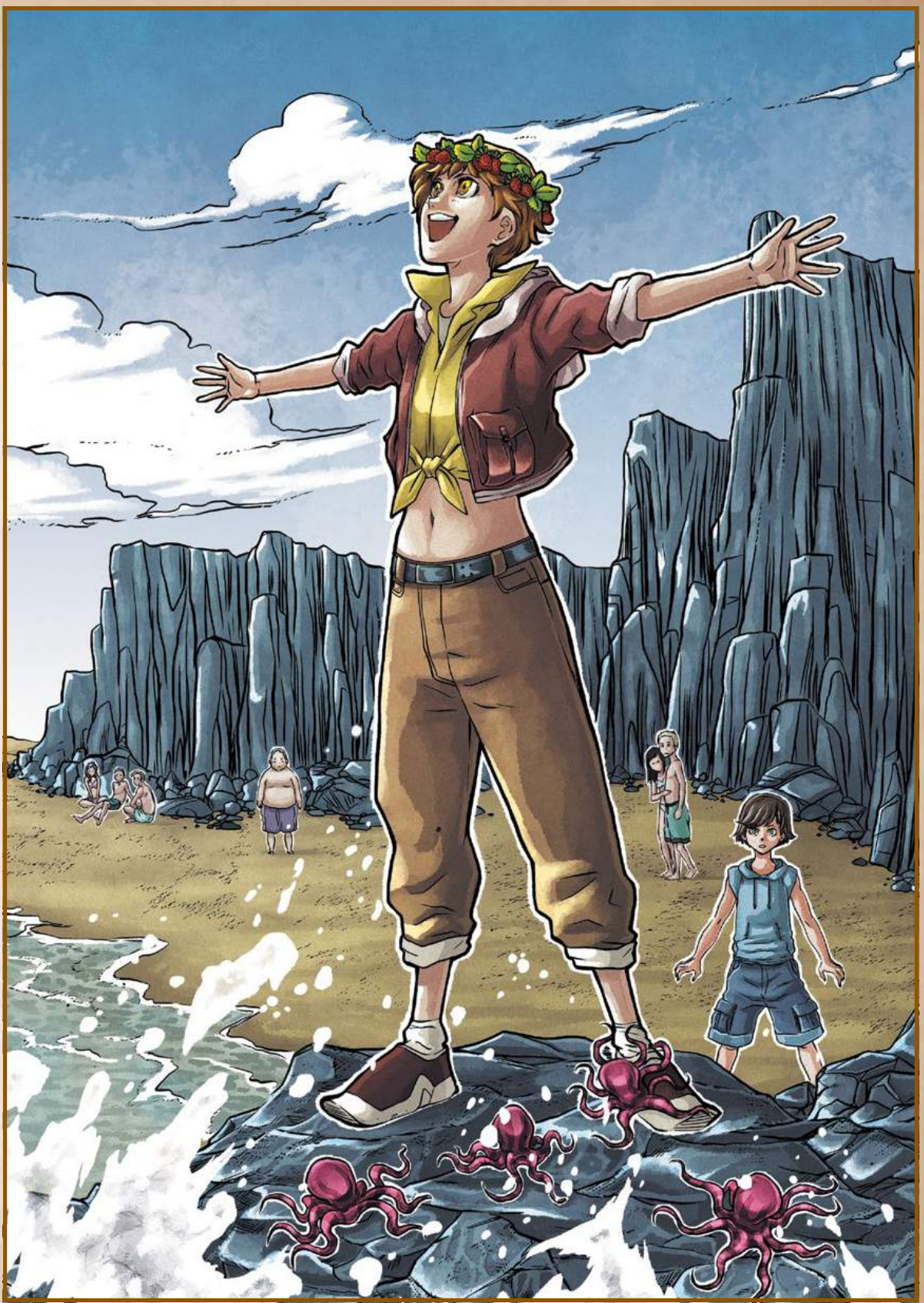
- 0 MP—invoke this power by Big Lake, when there are octopi nearby
- 1 MP—invoke this power by a different body of water, or when octopi are far away
- 4 MP—invoke this power in an epic fashion, e.g.
  - summoning forth an octopus-like *kaiju*
  - summoning an octopus spirit
  - calling forth octopi from rain puddles or other bodies of water without them.

Octopi are vulnerable to music—to certain songs that resonate with their hearts.

Sing near the Lake and invoke **Octopus Singer** and your song will call them forth. It will draw them out miraculously; they will crawl towards you, one after another, from the nearby rocks and pools. Traditionally, to the people of Fortitude, this is understood as the octopi praising the rare master of this technique and giving their consent to be eaten.

This power is a good Perk to pick up after a beach- or fishing-related quest—

Most commonly from the first quest in a Knight Arc, where it represents an unexpected talent that you discover in yourself, or in an Otherworldly Arc where you meet an octopus spirit of some sort in your dreams.



Weathered

an example Miraculous Ability

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—weather damage 1/chapter
- 1 MP—use this ability a second or later time this chapter
- 2 MP—use this ability a second or later time in a handful of hours

This miraculous ability protects you from physical damage.

Invoke **Weathered** when you were just about to be badly hurt and you can declare that you're fine instead—that you've weathered it like an action hero or an old sea captain, with at most some trickling blood, torn clothing, or some smears of sweat and soot.

This power reduces the severity of a received physical wound by about one level (pg. 126-128). The HG can veto its use if the wound was already too trivial to worry about or so thoroughly overkill that even being Weathered wouldn't help.

You'll pick up defensive powers like this early in a miraculous Aspect or Emptiness Arc and later on in some of the rest.

How Miracles Work

Let's go over how these examples work.

Both **Octopus Singer** and **Weathered** are noted as being "Miraculous Actions."

I personally like to think of miraculous actions as "tactical" abilities, but you should probably think of them in the same way that the characters do; that is, as expressions of:

- the wishing power of the heart; *or as*
- the power of the Bleak Academy, that hungers to unmake the world.

Here's the basic rule for miraculous actions:

A miraculous action automatically takes precedence over any mundane action. It wins any direct conflict with a mundane Skill.

This doesn't always mean *you* win the larger conflict—for instance, if you sing forth an octopus from the nearby waters while someone is trying to stab you, it may not actually... help. Even if you're in an octopus-catching contest instead of a knife fight, it *still* might not help. If your opponent is using a vast steam-powered fleet to trawl the whole area with awful octopus-nets, for example, the 0 MP version of this miracle won't be enough. You'd need the 4 MP version to actually catch *more*.

Similarly, if you're invoking **Weathered** in a talent competition, the miracle wins any direct conflict with a mundane action—but unless you can bait someone into claiming that their ability to damage you is their talent, it's unlikely that this will be of use.

Still...

If a mundane action and a miracle come directly head to head—if someone uses a level 15 mundane action with 5 Edge to try to stop you from singing forth octopi, and you have **Octopus Singer**—the mundane action always loses. That's important. Mundane actions can never stop miracles from fulfilling the letter of their effect.

Not every miraculous ability is a "miraculous action." Other options include "Imperial Miracles," which are technically even stronger; Bonds and Afflictions, which I'll talk about later; and miscellaneous oddball things.

Let's continue examining the example miracle abilities.

After noting their action type ("miraculous action,") these abilities list a set of costs in "MP" for various modes of use. This is the fuel for miracles—MP, aka Miracle Points, aka "the wishing power of the heart."

Octopus Singer is an example of a power where you spend MP commensurate to the effects. You don't need wishing power to use the basic ability. You'll only need a little if you're outside the power's normal context, e.g., singing forth an octopus from the southern California coast. You'll need a lot of wishing power, though, to sing an octopus out of a teardrop or out of your daydreams of a lake.

Weathered is an example of a power where MP affects its frequency of use instead. The power seemed a little excessive if used continuously, so I've pegged it to the chapter—even a high-level Techno hero can be brought down by sustained and focused fire; the most weathered of Pastoral sailors, beaten down by a really bad week. A power like this typically doesn't get much stronger when you pour MP into it, but you *can* spend MP to use it more often than its native pace.

After the table of MP costs and uses, the rest of the ability descriptions explain what the powers actually do. As noted, this is something that just *happens*—unless the power says so, you don't have to spend Will or do anything else.

Miracles That Help With Mortal Actions

A number of miraculous actions affect your mundane actions in one fashion or another.

Ace abilities, like I've mentioned, are built around improving your mundane and Superior Skills towards perfection, or even beyond it. If this kind of power fits your character's themes, you might get access to miraculous Will (pg. 67) for mundane actions, improve your Intention ratings on a regular basis, enhance your strength and speed, and have the option of intense, over-the-top martial arts training to pick up temporary Superior Skills.

Sentimental abilities enhance your connection to certain objects, people, or things that are precious to you—you'll learn to evoke extra powers from or share your own abilities with the things to which you have Connection 3+. You'll also learn to visit them in spirit, a power that could persist even after your death.

More generally, a number of miraculous abilities have effects that, while not directly connected to your Skills, wind up either improving them or relying on them—e.g., a miracle might let you call up a magical wind but then let you control that wind *with* your Skills. Another might lower the Obstacles your mortal Skills face when you're in a meditative frame of mind.

You can invoke a mundane action-affecting miracle and the mundane action that it affects simultaneously, and doing so only counts as a single action or thing. For instance, if you have a miracle that lets you form a [Skill+4] Intention without spending Will, you can generally invoke the miracle and the Intention itself at the same time. This is important, since you can only do two things at a time, and you might have been doing something else!

Imperial Miracles

Imperial Miracles don't cause a *thing* to happen; they state a destiny. They say: "this will happen," "this has happened," or "this is happening now."

They're like genre principles, or stuff written into the setting, or directives from a higher authority. They don't say *how* things happen, not usually, nor do they *make* it happen, exactly. They just say that it *does*.

Physics changes; fate changes; destiny and circumstances—

I mean, if you use an Imperial Miracle to say that there should be a bridge across a certain river, there are a lot of ways it could play out. You could stumble across a bridge that was "already there" a few minutes later; or spiders could spin a silken bridge across it; or the local Regional Council could decide to build a bridge there; or the rainbow could shatter and chunks of it could fall from Heaven to form a multicolored bridge. There's usually a ton of leeway in the details, is what I mean; the HG comes up with something that would be cool, appropriate, or both and makes it work out somehow in play.

The Door Into Memory

an example Imperial Miracle

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—open the door into memory, 1/book
- 1 MP—open the door again, into the same person's memories
- 4 MP—open the door into a different person's memories (before the book's end)

Here's an example of an Imperial miracle.

Invoke **The Door Into Memory** and you can open a door into someone's dusty memories and physically go through. You can take them or others with you. The door stays open as long as you're sustaining this power; if you stop sustaining the power with you or someone else trapped on the other side, a path back into the present must remain.

The HG decides the details of the world/memory interface, and it can change from time to time; however, you're usually safe from "messing up the timeline" or damaging the person's mind and the HG should tell you if this is not the case. The higher the Arc's associated Trait when you pick the power up (e.g. **Otherworldly (Spiritual) 2**) the smoother the experience is likely to be:

At Arc 0-2, this power may well have baroque and unruly elements and arbitrary limitations on what you can do or see or experience in "the past," but at Arc 4-5 this is much less of a concern.

The expected application of this power is gathering information and treasuring lost things, but you can also use it to change the modern world; there's a quest for doing just that on pg. 326.

Common Cost Structures

Inherent Powers

Type: [Variable]

Cost: —

Type: Miraculous Action [and possibly Major]

Cost:

- 0 MP—starting mid-scene, invoke this power 1-2x/scene
- 1 MP—starting mid-scene, invoke this power an additional time
- 2 MP—starting mid-scene, invoke this power as often as you'd like this scene
- 4 MP—invoke this power as often as you'd like this scene.

Many powers that represent your natural, always-available abilities are free—there's no cost to use them at all. Others are emotionally or spiritually keyed: you always "have" the power, but it takes focus, or a certain mood, or energy:

There's something that means you don't go all-out with these powers unless you really care. These powers generally work *starting mid-scene*, meaning that you can usually start using them only *after* some meaningful stuff has already happened in the current scene. For instance, if you have the power to fly, but spend most of your time on the ground, it's probably built like the second option above—

It's not *impossible* for you to start a tense conflict by grabbing someone and launching into the sky, or to go back and forth between airborne and ground-bound a lot, but it's *surprising* for you to do that in the same way that it'd be surprising for a random schoolteacher to open a fight with a dangerous enemy by punching it in the head.

Gaming Terminology

- **Mundane action or Intention**—the kind of things people do. We start out adrift and impractical amidst a welter of chaotic sensation. Through a billion false starts and errors we learn how to become ever-more effective, productive, and humane, but we never quite reach perfection.
- **Will**—the power source for mundane actions. Our limited supply of time, cope, and effort.
- **Miracle**—the kinds of things warring gods and demons do. A flare of power rises from the heart and burns its truth into the world.
- **Imperial Miracle**—the kind of thing that world-dreamers, subtle deities, and cosmic principles do. A wish whispers out from the heart to shape the world.
- **MP**—the power source for miracles and Imperial miracles. Sometimes I will speak of this as wish power, "the wishing power of the heart," or "the power of the wishing heart to change what's possible." However for the miracles of the Bleak Academy I suspect it is not something so glad.
- **Arc Trait**—a Trait you pick up from pursuing a given Arc, e.g. Knight (Idol Singer) or Aspect (perfect, unconquerable Ace).

These are keywords I'll sometimes stick on the description of a miraculous or Imperial ability:

- **Bleak power**—a miraculous ability drawing on the bleak, unmaking power of the deep Outside and the Bleak Academy. These powers usually make it easy to destroy, cripple, invoke despair, and curbstomp your opponents, but there are special rules for resisting them on pg. 476-481.
- **Major power**—a miraculous ability capable of doing epic things, extremely complicated things, and/or affecting large areas.
- **Ritual power**—a miraculous ability that triggers/requires a Ritual when invoked, unless the HG waives that for OOC reasons.
- **Unreal power**—a miraculous ability whose effects are treated a little bit like a break from reality: after invocation, if the world winds up in a weird state, the HG may revise the lingering effects to something that makes sense in the local reality. (For instance, creating a Klein bottle or turning people two-dimensional is fine in the Outside, but if it's an Unreal power, and you invoke it in Horizon, then things will drift back towards normalcy after the scene and the power's use end.)

Ultimate Techniques

Type: Imperial Miracle or Major Miraculous Action [possibly also a Ritual Power]

Cost:

- 0 MP—invoke this power 1/book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a book

Type: Imperial Miracle or Major Miraculous Action [possibly also a Ritual Power]

Cost:

- 0 MP—invoke this power 1/book
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time in a given book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a given chapter

Type: Imperial Miracle or Major Miraculous Action [possibly also a Ritual Power]

Cost:

- 0 MP—invoke this power 1/book
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time in a given book
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time in a given chapter
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a matter of minutes

Your high-end, most powerful techniques will often look something like this. You're meant to use them once per story, in a big flashy way, but there are provisions for using them more often when that fits.

Somewhat Less Ultimate Techniques

Type: [Variable]

Cost:

- 0 MP—you may invoke this power 1/chapter
- 1 MP—do so a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—do so a second or later time in a handful of hours

This is a pretty standard format for a power you're meant to use once or twice a chapter.

Powers That Take Effort

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 1 MP (or sometimes 2 MP, or very rarely 4 MP)

Some powers—almost always straightforward miraculous actions—are atomic bursts of effort. You must spend a surge of wish power for the power to invoke.

Powers That Take Time to Invoke

Type: [Variable]

Cost:

- 0 MP—you may invoke this power 1/chapter
- 1 MP—do so a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—do so a second or later time in a handful of hours
- 4 MP—invoke this power instantly.

Power Description:... Over the course of a few minutes, you do [[something]]...

Type: [Variable]

Cost:

- 0 MP—invoke this power over the course of a few minutes
- [[some]]* MP—invoke this power instantly

* usually 1, 2, or 4.

The powers of immortal creatures often take time to use. You have to gather and condense energy, destiny, and will, or otherwise slowly shape the world.

When you have a power that works *after a few minutes*, that means that if there's other stuff going on (as opposed to a pretty dead scene, or a scene where everyone's waiting on this power), a few things have to happen while you're setting it up. Ideally this covers about 5 minutes of game time in a languid scene or 5 minutes of real time in a scene of fast-paced play—

But there's no reason to use a stopwatch for this unless you've been watching too much **Revolutionary Girl Utena**.

MP

The power source for miracle abilities is wish power, aka "Miracle Points" or "MP."

Normal people don't have much of this—

- humans on Earth don't seem to have any. Maybe it's one in a thousand?
- most people in Town have 0.
- some people in Town have 1.
- I sometimes suspect the rats of having 2-3.
- gods and stuff have around 5.

I'm going to set the default at 1 MP, but please note that a higher-level game should definitely either start you at 5 MP or get you there pretty quickly with a couple of free 2-MP bumps along the way.

Simplified MP

This is an optional way of handling MP for those without many miracle powers.

You have 1 MP to spend each session.

If you want more, ask the HG for one. If you want to save up 2+ MP for a particular power use, ask the HG what you'd need to do.

Full MP Rules

You have a starting MP pool of 1 MP—or more, if the HG agrees or you've earned additional MP during play.

You'll regain spent MP, to a maximum of your starting total, at a rate of:

- 1 MP, at the beginning of each chapter;
- all your MP, at the beginning of each book.

You can gain additional MP, with no particular maximum:

- from Issues, such as **Isolation** (pg. 140);
- when Region Properties get you into trouble;
- from Bonds (pg. 116)
- when you spend 2-3 chapters diligently honoring a "Region Property" (e.g. helping somebody find/make a home in Fortitude, or helping the cats of the Yatskaya temple come and go, as per pg. 205 or 220)

In addition, there are a handful of abilities that improve MP but only up to the starting total, and you can restore your MP *to* its starting total by remembering, cherishing, and ideally monologuing about a Recharge Token (below).

Recharge Tokens

Every now and then you'll stumble on or work your way to something precious to you. Something that you can hang on to. Something misted over by the power of your heart—like a valley over which clouds of the power of your heart, pink and purple and well-loved, hang low.

Something that you can turn your thoughts to when times are hard.

It could be a collectible figurine. It could be a precious memory. It could be a token from someone that you love. It could be a work that you've completed, like a story or painting or song or something, or a work that you love to reread, look at, or listen to. It could be a recipe or a memory of the smile of someone you cooked for, if you love cooking. It could be a scar, if you love to fight.

It could be a charm on a bracelet you wear.

Something like that is a **Recharge Token**. It typically takes you a short (15 XP) "side quest" to get one, and once per token—after earning it as a reward—you can call upon it to refresh your Will and MP to their starting totals. (Or just your Will, if you happen to have more MP than your default.)

You don't have to touch it. You don't have to have it on you.

You just have to know that it exists, or existed, at least; that you had it, once.

I don't expect you to accumulate too many of these, and I'm pretty sure going past 2-3 that you haven't used is going to be an unfavorable choice, so I'm not going to limit this. You can have as many as you earn through quests. Just write down somewhere what precious things you have, and mark them somehow as depleted when you have called on them to Recharge.

Miraculous Conflict

Like Intentions, Miraculous Abilities have numeric ratings—the effective rating of your ability derives from the underlying Arc.

Specifically, each time you complete an Arc you'll raise an associated Arc-based Trait, e.g.:

- **Knight (Idol Singer) 0 => 1**
- **Otherworldly (Spiritual) 2 => 3** *or*
- **Otherworldly (Can Turn into a Giant Snake) 2 => 3**

This also serves as the baseline rating for your Miraculous Abilities—a Perk is going to get its rating from the Arc that you learned it from (or 0 if you abandon that Arc before getting to 1) and that rating will serve as its baseline effectiveness in miraculous conflict.

Specifically, in the event of a conflict between two miraculous abilities, the miracle with the higher Arc rating "wins"—its success forms the context in which the other miracle must operate. This works for miracles just as it does for mundane Skills: the higher-level miracle doesn't necessarily erase the lower-level miracle, and in fact most miracles will just glide past one another with only the slightest friction from the clash, but where there is a conflict, the higher-rated miracle's needs come first.

There's one special exception to this:

I want to give a bit of an advantage to epic, world-shaking powers, even at a lower Arc rating.

So one of the things you decide when getting a new power—well, one of the things that the HG decides, probably—is whether a power is "Major" or not.

Major Miraculous Actions have an numerical rating of [their Arc + 3.]

All other Miraculous Actions have a numerical rating of [their Arc.]

Massive, world-altering powers should always be Major. If you can drown the world in a wave, that's a Major power. The converse isn't true. If you can cover anything with a teacup, caging it and removing it from sight as a miraculous action, then that might or might *not* be a Major power.

If you're not sure, try catching a world-devouring wave under your teacup!

That'll probably help you to tell.

Conflict With the Other PCs

After a while you're likely to notice that the Arc rating for the other PCs' best abilities will tend to track pretty closely to your own. This means that any regular conflict with another PC is likely to end in a tie.[15]

For the most part that's intentional—it's OK to sometimes overwhelm or be overwhelmed by NPCs, but I'd rather you take advantage of the *semantics* of your miraculous abilities when fighting your opponents, not their rating. That said, if you're reading the Miraculous Conflict section to figure out how to get a leg up on the other PCs, there are four basic methods, from best (in my eyes) to worst:

- bring in some strategic advantage like Strike (pg. 115) and more specifically your Bonds (pg. 116).
- accept the numeric tie and pitch a story to the HG as to why they should call it in your favor;
- put some work into developing a targeted, Major special technique; *or*
- focus your character's efforts on "leveling up" faster than your rivals do.

I'm a little nervous about the last one causing interpersonal problems at the gaming table, but it is, in fact (and as long as you're not an OOC jerk about it), a thing that you can do in play.

Conflict Between Imperial Miracles

It's technically impossible for two Imperial Miracles to be "in conflict"—even an apparent conflict between two prescribed destinies can, as story after story has demonstrated, work itself out in practice. It's like saying both "America must be west of Africa" and "Africa must be west of America"—

The world will only become round.

In fact, in general, an Imperial miracle can't be in conflict with *anything*, so it doesn't need a numerical rating at all.

That said, it is reasonable for the HG to assign a higher conceptual *priority* to the execution of the Imperial miracle with the higher Arc, and some Imperial miracles will mention minor benefits or downsides to a higher or lower Arc.

15 Except when one is using a Major ability and the other isn't, or when you're in a campaign like ***Fortitude: the Glass-Maker's Dragon*** where it's reasonable to imagine having one high-rated and one low-rated Arc, or when one person has rushed ahead to the next Arc level and the other hasn't, etc. etc.—but I'm putting this in a footnote because the core point is still an important one to make.

Miraculous Edge

Now that we've established a baseline for miraculous conflict, I should note that occasional effects grant something called **Miraculous Edge**. This, like mortal Edge, affects the outcome when two miracles come into conflict.

Like mundane Edge, miraculous Edge applies to mundane conflicts.

Unlike mundane Edge, it also applies to contests of miracles. For purposes of deciding the conflict, you'll subtract your highest applicable miraculous Edge from your opponent's miracle's rating.

Miraculous Edge doesn't ever interact with other sources of Edge. I mean, *at all*. It doesn't cancel out or balance against your opponent's Edge. It doesn't add to other sources of Edge or miraculous Edge. It's independent!

In a miraculous conflict, you just get the best miraculous Edge you get.

In a mundane conflict, you calculate the appropriate mundane Edge; and if your miraculous Edge is better, you get that instead. It's even possible that you could have miraculous Edge and be at a mundane Edge *disadvantage*.

Weird!

But possible!

The Auctoritas

The miraculous equivalent of an Obstacle is **the Auctoritas**.

Things that resist the power of the heart, or the power of the Outside, are said to be sheltered or shrouded in the Auctoritas (or "an" Auctoritas)—a shield rated 1 to 5 that keeps miraculous abilities out.

Auctorita guard certain things against interference or prevent certain things from happening. For instance, the Auctoritas might prevent the power of the Outside from damaging a certain house or park; or it might protect your ability to walk down a certain street from any miracle that would stand in your way.

An Auctoritas differs from an Obstacle in that its primary mechanism *isn't* reducing the rating of opposing actions. In fact, when opposing a typical miraculous ability, the Auctoritas doesn't reduce the rating of the miracle at all. Instead, it simply cancels hostile miracles outright.[16]

Where there is an Auctoritas, the thing may not be done.

...at least not with the power of miracles!



16 Or, well, keeps them from doing this particular thing. If you have a miraculous lying ability, and you lie to a crowd, and one person is protected by an Auctoritas, the others still hear the lie. This is a rarer case than you might think.

I should explicitly note that an Auctoritas doesn't do anything to stop mundane actions. For instance, a parent's love might protect somebody from the destructive, unmaking power of the Bleak Academy. That's an Auctoritas! But the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy could still probably tie the kid's shoelaces together while nobody was looking. The kid would trip. It would be awful! But it wouldn't be *miraculous*.

It wouldn't violate the shield of a parent's love.

An Auctoritas *can* be associated with an Obstacle or other difficulty. It can even be associated with an active miraculous power that has the same general theme. It's just that those things aren't part of *the Auctoritas*—like your hat isn't part of your belt or vice versa even though you will often wear both.

So, anyway, you can think of an Auctoritas as a shield against miraculous powers.

If you need a counteragent to the Auctoritas? The tool you need is something called **Strike**.

Strike

You can spend MP on a 1-for-1 basis to add **Strike** to a miraculous action. It doesn't even cost you an action—you can just *do* it.

Strike tears through an equal-leveled Auctoritas—if [your miracle's Strike ≥ the Auctoritas rating], the Auctoritas is entirely ignored. It also counts as miraculous Edge.[17] So let's say you're a summer hero with a level 2 Arc Trait, **Storyteller (Hero of the Beach)**. And you're trying to break an endless winter. The winter is fueled by a level 6 miracle and protected by a level 4 Auctoritas (let's say)—that's terrifying!

...but it's OK.

At least potentially—it's OK!

If you can get 4 points of Strike, e.g. by spending 4 MP, then your miracle can ignore the Auctoritas and you'll have 4 points of miraculous Edge. That puts the two miracles roughly even: it's all in the hands of the HG. If you can get 5 points of Strike, then you're in a better position: it's a win for the hero of the beach!

Auctorita don't stack up, so 5 points of Strike is enough to overcome any Auctoritas. That said, Strike is one of the rare Traits that can go past 5—it's technically limitless.

17 Though note that miraculous Edge and Strike don't add together.

Bonds

A **Bond** is like a super-Skill—it's a rule that governs your existence, all wound up in the wishing power of your heart. It's a law of your nature, guarded by some unconquerable pillar of your being.

Your will and drive, perhaps? True love? Or could it be a primal fear, or loathing, or taboo?

Bonds are character Traits with a rating between 1 and 5. The core idea of each Bond is that there's something about who you are,

- something that you *must* do;
- something that you *can't* do; or
- something you're *driven to do*—

that's so strong that any time it comes into play, it fires up your heart and burnishes your actions with wish power.

Bonds are entangled with the destiny that flows out of *you*.

They're extremely natural.

A key rule for Bonds is that you *as a player* are always the one who brings them into play. They're not tools for the HG to wield against you, even when your Bonds are hurting you, and they're not tools for the HG to use to help you with, either. You can't have a passive-voice Bond like "I can't be talked about" (or "Nobody can talk about me"); or rather, you can, but it's not clear what that would actually mean. It's not binding on the HG, being *your* Bond, so people will talk if they want to; and *you're* the one who'd have to resolve why that's so.

Conversely, even if you have a weird mystical restriction like "I can never give my name to anyone," that's only a problem when you want it to be. I don't mean that it's *false* or that you can turn it on and off—you can't.

I just mean, if you want to give someone your name, you just have to come up with whatever handwave you want. "I'm not *giving* you my name—I'm *selling* it to you, and I'll be taking payment later." Maybe. Or even the great-great-grandmother of all handwaves:

"Oh, I can do this, here, because... of some reason.[18]"

18 Or "the" reason.

Bonds and Actions

In ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine***, you can apply a Bond when

- you're trying to do what you *must* do
- you're trying to do what you're *driven to* do
- you're trying to avoid doing what you *can't* do

or

- you and the HG just think that it probably applies

and this gives you three key benefits—

- if you're using mundane actions, and dealing with a conflict or an Obstacle, you can add the Bond level to your Intention level.
- if you're using a miracle, you can add your Bond level to your Strike. Strike from a Bond adds to Strike from other sources (but not to Strike from a different Bond.)
- if the Bond gets you into trouble, the HG can award you with Will or MP up to the numeric rating of the Bond.

You only get these benefits from the highest applicable Bond. If no Bond applies, you don't get them!

Bonds also offer two minor benefits—

- if you spend 2-3 chapters heavily focused on "serving" the Bond, e.g. doing things that support its nature, you may receive up to the Bond's rating in MP.[19]
- notionally, you can survive off of serving your Bonds—the Obstacle ranges from +1 to +4, but you can replace food, water, sleep, and even *air* with serving your Bonds if necessary. You... probably don't know that you can do this.[20]

Bonds are technically a sort of miracle power, but since they have their own ratings and their own meaning, they're not necessarily tied to a specific Arc.

Here's an example of a Bond:

19 You can't get Will this way because the Will refresh at the beginning of a new chapter gets in the way.

20 I didn't want to include this! It's weird and niche! But I kept thinking of epic long-term and comedic short-term uses that required it to exist....

Inquisitive

an example Bond

Type: Bond, Level ( ) ("I can't resist spying on things and people that interest me.")

Cost: —

You're a bit of a snoop!

- Invoke **Inquisitive** when you're taking a mundane action to spy on something or someone who interests you and there's some sort of Obstacle or conflict in your way—
  - someone is trying to spot you, say;
  - you're using magic to spy on them; *or*
  - you need to crawl out on the chimney rafters in utter silence to get a good look—

  and you can add the Bond's rating, ( ), to your Intention level. You can only add this bonus from one such Bond.
- Invoke **Inquisitive** when you're spying on something or someone using a miraculous action and you can add the Bond's rating, ( ), to your Strike. Strike from a Bond doesn't add to Strike from other Bonds, but it does add to Strike from MP and Strike intrinsic to a miracle.
- Invoke **Inquisitive** when snooping really gets you into trouble and the HG may give you up to the Bond rating ( ) in Will or in MP. You can also get this MP if you spend 2-3 chapters focused on snooping hard!
- It is notionally possible for you to replace food, water, sleep, and even air with snooping, e.g. surviving absurd lengths of time in a cramped space or underwater if it lets you spy on something. This gets unpleasant almost as fast for you as for a normal person, though, and the Obstacles can range as high as 4.



Region Properties

Each Region of the game has a list of **Properties**, each functioning as local level 2 Bonds.

For instance, in Fortitude, there's a Property which says:

"You have a home in Fortitude."

If you're in Fortitude itself, that qualifies as a level 2 Bond for you; you can invoke it to augment your mundane actions, give Strike to your miracles, or put off your hunger because you know you'll soon be home. If for some reason having a home in Fortitude gets you into *trouble*, you can earn up to 2 Will or 2 MP.

Similarly, Horizon has the property

"Each person in the School must experience exactly three events between classes."

If you're in School, then that's a level 2 Bond. You can fudge the meaning of 'event' as much as you like, allowing you to take shameless advantage of the condition—but on some level it's inherently *true*.

Afflictions

Afflictions are a kind of miraculous ability. They're the last kind we're going to talk about for a while.

Each Affliction is tied to an Arc Trait.

Afflictions are like Bonds in that they're built to express truths of your character's nature. Unlike Bonds, though, and unlike many other miraculous abilities, they're larger than your character—they're part of a destiny writ into and entangled with the cosmos.

They're a part of you, they're something worked deep into you, bone and soul, but they're bigger than the wishing power of your heart.

An Affliction isn't necessarily more impressive than a Bond in its *description*—like a Bond, it's just

- something you *must* do;
- something you *can't* do; *or*
- something you're *driven to do*—

and like a Bond, an Affliction can focus on something as trivial as snooping, sleeping, or being able to burp really, unusually loud.

But, as noted, an Affliction is cosmic.

If you have an Affliction that says that your name is known everywhere, then the bat-people of Eris know your name. If you have an Affliction that says you "keep abreast of technological developments," you can swan down into the sewer-realm of some tribe of technocratic ghouls, look over their most recent research in tele-anthropophagy, and make insightful comments about their previous papers and related research.

It covers *everything*.

The other side of that is that the Affliction is enforced by the HG. You can gently remind the HG about it, and often you'll be able to activate an Affliction yourself through some trigger—I mean, if you have an Affliction saying that you can tap your shoes together three times to fly home from anywhere, then you can invoke this as a player by tapping your shoes together three times and (if necessary) reminding the HG of this power—but it's never completely and entirely in your hands. Sometimes the HG will bring a baroque grandeur or frenetic energy to their enforcement of your Afflictions. Sometimes they'll languidly toss out an action or two, let others' efforts oppose them, and then shrug and (on behalf of the Affliction) call it a day. Sometimes, if they remember or if you remind them, they'll even use the Affliction against *you*, e.g. having you fly home by accident because of your character's feet clattering together while they're asleep on the electric train.

Afflictions have three key benefits:

- the HG may invoke their power to do stuff—usually 1-2 miracles/scene, with a level somewhere around [Arc rating + 1], but really, whatever actions they want.
- the Affliction's truth is guarded by an Auctoritas with a rating equal to the Arc.
- if the HG uses the Affliction to get you in trouble, or notices that it has done so, they may give you up to the Arc's rating in Will or MP.

Note that you can get a little weird with the grammar here—for instance, while it's awful indirect, you're totally allowed to build a shapeshifting power as an Affliction: "I *must* be able to shapeshift." (Or even "I *can't* be a lame static-shaped mortal!")

You could even *write* that as "Affliction: Shapeshifter," if you wanted.

So why do I bother saying that there's a *must*, *can't*, or *is driven to* underneath it? I just want to ensure there's a genuinely enforceable rule.

Mortals can have Afflictions, though it's rare and special, and can spend their MP to add Strike to the miracles that these invoke. This is the only real use mundane characters will have for their MP—the wishing power of the heart piggybacks on a miraculous action, not a mundane one.

The next page has an example of an Affliction, so you can see how they might work.

Why Arc + 1?

I think it's the right number!

Strike doubles as miraculous Edge. An Affliction's Auctoritas is usually going to cancel any opposition without [Strike ≥ Arc rating.] So by the time something has gotten past the Auctoritas to contest the miracle itself, we're talking about an effective action level of 0-1.

I want there to be some cases where the Affliction still wins, even though at this point it should usually lose. So that's why I picked [Arc + 1].

Laundry in the Sun

Type: Affliction ("It's always sunny where I'm drying my laundry")

Cost: —

Your laundry, once hung out to dry, *must* be hanging in sunny weather conditions. (Alternately, you *must* have sunlight-like weather conditions for any laundry of yours that you have hung out to dry.)

- The HG will invoke **Laundry in the Sun** to defend any of your laundry that you have hung out to dry against any effects that would keep it from receiving sunlight (including rain, snow, darkness, or someone murdering the sun.) Such an effect will need [Strike ≥ the Arc Trait's rating ( )] to succeed.
- The HG will invoke **Laundry in the Sun** when you hang laundry out to dry to ensure that your laundry is in a sunny spot, or to preserve that condition when necessary. This typically consists of a 1-2 miracles rated roughly [Arc rating + 1] ( ) per scene.
- If **Laundry in the Sun** gets you into trouble, the HG may compensate you by offering you up to the Arc Trait's rating ( ) in Will or MP.

Afflictions and Arcs

As an optional rule, Afflictions have their own independent rating (from 0 to 5) instead of the rating of the underlying Arc.

Breaking Afflictions and Bonds

If you know the mystic rules that bind somebody, you can use that as leverage to crack those rules or attack the person in question.

Usually this is just semantic games—holding Ms. Hana Moon's flashlight on someone who can only die in the light of the moon and the like—but in some cases, where a Bond or Affliction represents a supernatural protection with terms that the user can violate, you can target the Bond or Affliction directly. You can trick or force someone into breaking the rules that govern their life.

You can "break" their Affliction or Bond.

As an optional rule,

- If you can convince someone's player that you've damaged or violated one of their Bonds, or forced them to do so, then this wounds them—often a serious or deadly wound (pg. 128), and often deactivating that Bond for at least a chapter and more typically the rest of the book. The details are pretty much up to them.
- If you can convince the HG that you've created a full-on paradox or inconsistency in a Main Character's Affliction, or between two such Afflictions, this may wound the associated characters—again, often a serious or deadly wound. This may also rip the involved Affliction or Afflictions out of the weave of destiny, removing them entirely—the target's player (or HG, for NPCs) can choose whether to keep an affected Affliction or sacrifice it in exchange for receiving some other Affliction or power at a later, appropriate date.

Bonds and Afflictions

It is the characteristic of both Bonds and Afflictions that they are *true*.

I want to tell you why that is so, and how that is so, and why it is the case that I call the latter "Afflictions" even though they can be good.

It is easy to believe that Bonds are somehow "weaker" than Afflictions. "Less true." They are not cosmic law; no HG enforces them, no miracles enforce them; without a player to uphold them, nothing "makes" them so. They are not the tools, the hands, or the branches of the great and subtle power that moves behind the surfaces of things. They are little, instead, they are little as you are little, as your PC is little, they are limited to the reach of your hand, your voice, your thoughts. They are the smallest circle of light around you while Afflictions are a great cosmic night.

But Bonds *are* true—not as Afflictions are true, not as a truth that is forced against you, pushed on you by the great machinery of the heavens, but true in the way that by living we can make things true. In the way that by being, and believing, and hanging on to things, we can make things true. Little things. Big things. Things that are good for us. Things that are bad for us. We can make them true.

It's like...

You know how oppressive states and situations are always trying to erase and unmake the agency of the vulnerable and oppressed, and yet there is something worked into the universe that says, but wait, that agency is still there?

It's like that.

Bonds are slippery, naming the way that they are true is slippery, because it's slippery to point out what makes someone who's systematically stripped of their strength, strong; systematically stripped of their value, valuable; systematically treated as a cog in a machine, a person instead. But that slipperiness doesn't make them less true. It just makes them easier to ignore. To simplify away. To deny. And it is equally easy to habituate ourselves to Afflictions, to think that some of them are "good" (or, for that matter, that some of them are "bad"), as opposed to simply recognizing that they are the things that are held to be true about you by the cosmos, and any further judgment is meaningless to them, and even if they have your name in them they do not necessarily care about you at all.

I think it's one of the strengths of the system that in the end Bonds can *beat* Afflictions; that as comparatively weak as they are, they're the *best* way to beat Afflictions. As Solzhenitsyn suggests, and Genseric confirms:

One person who refuses to buy into the lie can bring the vastest of edifices down.

Variable Afflictions and Bonds

A few of the Afflictions and Bonds you pick up through Perks and miraculous Arcs are not linked to a specific number, or to the level of the Arc Trait, but to the level of some Issue. As the Issue rises and falls, so will their power.

Conventions

Each campaign has a list of **Conventions**, typically manifesting as level 2 Afflictions associated not with a PC but with the HG or the game.

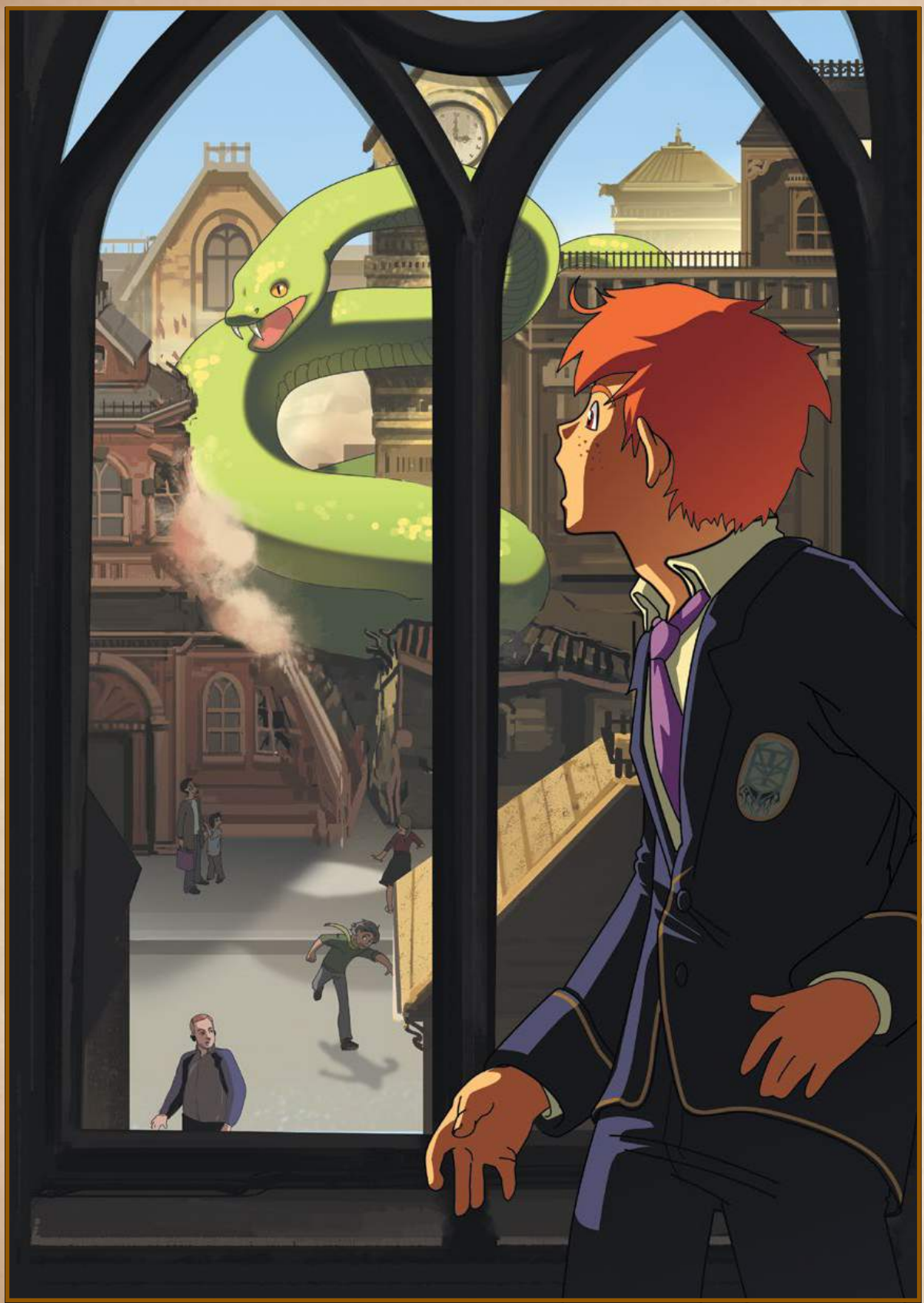
The standard conventions for ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** are:

- Masks are extremely effective disguises *and*
- Turning into a giant snake will not help.

The first convention means that the Student Council of Horizon, for instance, can get away with putting on little masks and being essentially unrecognizable—they could be your parents! Your enemies! Other PCs!

The second convention reinforces one of Chuubo or Shokyou's long-running woes, since "can turn into a giant snake" is often a power that that character has.

Feel free to add a few others; future campaigns may do so as well.





Health Levels

Health Levels

Sometimes people will attempt to inflict an undesirable effect on your PC.

Sometimes it even "hits"—you're definitely hurt by this. But what does this mean? And how should it play out?

What actually *happens* to you when it does?

I think you should have a stake in this. I think you should choose whether getting shot means staggering around bleeding from the forehead, cursing the loss of your favorite whiskey flask, or twitching on the ground in panic because of how close that bullet was to your ear. I think you should choose whether getting hit by a spell to make you fall in love makes you act all lovey-dovey, creepy and obsessive, emotionally mercurial, sweetly devoted, enraged and fuming and fiercely maintaining the walls around your mind, dizzy because of how it interacts with your previous enchantments, completely casual and unaffected by your sudden new love, or freaked out and twitching in a corner somewhere from the sense of psychic violation that attends. I think you should get to choose whether catching a glancing look at Medusa's face slows you down for a few days, turns you to rock when you're not paying attention, makes you a free-willed, mobile statue, or fills your mind with the awful nightmares of stone.

I think that if it's a bad enough situation you should have to work with the HG and/or the player whose PC attacked you on this, but generally, I think it should be your call.

To some extent this manifests as a second chance to "dodge"—

If something bad happens to you then you've already failed to use your normal resources to prevent it. But I think that if you're willing to acknowledge that *something* bad happened to you, it's OK for a partial or last-second escape to be included in the story of that wound.

All this—it's mostly a PC thing.

It's not that NPCs can't inflict undesirable effects on one another, or PCs on NPCs, but the point of Health Levels is to handle stuff that affects your PC. And the reason that your PC is special here isn't because they're important to the story, although they are, but because you actually have two *different* stakes in their fate:

- the stake of "I am playing them, and they don't want to be hurt;" or, put another way,
- the stake of "I don't want them to be hurt"—*but also*
- "I have my own ideas about what should happen to them here."

These rules look like normal RPG rules for mitigating damage, like hit points or a damage track, but that's not what they're about, not exactly.

They're about making sure that the damage you take fits your character concept.

They're about that *last* stake—about making sure that the awful things that happen to your character, if awful things happen to your character, happen in a way that satisfies you, that fits your sense of the story and the kind of character that you want to play.

For instance, if you have a kid, you might want to pick up the Perk on pg. 430 that'll let you use your own health levels to protect them. That has nothing to do with your physical health. It's not *being a meat shield*. It doesn't even have anything to do with magical shields of parental love, although those do actually exist.

It's something that lets you say, "I want this child to be around and safe. That's how I want to play."

Because that could be a part of who your character is.

I'm combining this stuff, this sense of your character and the things that matter to them, with the actual damage system and the ways you have of protecting your character from being hurt. That's because like most RPGs ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** expects and encourages you to think up ways for your character to be cool. So it's only natural that while you have control over your character, you'll *ordinarily* use this extra power of yours to help your PC survive and flourish. It's only natural that there'll be some overlap between the tactics of a PC who wants to keep living and the tactics of a player who wants to keep them cool. That's why I'm *letting* you—not requiring you to—use the damage system to let your PC weather great trials and come out OK.

Normal Health Levels

Your character has some number of **Normal Health Levels.**

Usually, 2.

These are used to handle superficial wounds—cosmetic stuff, mostly. Stuff that won't stay with you for more than a week or two. Things that might get you bloody, might get you dizzy or confused, might make you cough or shudder, but stuff that won't actually hurt you all *that* much.

They're also your wound levels of last resort—like, if you run out of all the other kinds, and something bad happens, even if it's not cosmetic, even if you're being skewered or thrown into the living flames, you can use a Normal Health Level to survive that.

But *mostly* they're for superficial wounds.

Trustworthy

"I suppose I must have managed it, somehow."

— Lilimund Cartaign, **the Wish-Granting Engine**, explaining how she stole the Bleak Academy

- Character Type earns: **Putting my Faith in You (with this XP token) XP** -

Tough Health Levels

Your character has some number of **Tough Health Levels**.

Usually, 1.

These are used to handle bad things that happen to you. Stuff that gets in the way. Stuff like broken legs, pneumonia, love spells, being turned into a toad, and all that. You can't get as much done with a broken leg, or as a toad.

(Being a broken-legged toad has got to be *the worst*.)

So, having a Tough Health Level makes you intrinsically tough, and here's why. As long as you have any kind of Health Level, you can still cope with damage without losing your character. But if you have a Tough Health Level, it *can't* be wounded by cosmetic stuff.

So imagine that you're a typical PC, and you're in a fight or whatever, and something a little bad happens. You get your foot stomped on. It really hurts. That costs you a Normal Health Level. And then your head gets beaten back into a mirror. Ow! That costs you your other Normal Health Level. And then you get punched in the gut and...

And then...

And then, nothing. You can't lose your Tough Health Level to that, and you don't have any more Normal Health Levels.

You're just fine!

I mean, you're still limping, because of that foot thing. And there's blood on the back of your head. But you can ignore that gut-punch. It doesn't matter.

Now, if you live an active life, then eventually something really bad will happen. You'll get your leg broken or a three-foot-long hornet will sting your arm and you'll lose your Tough Health Level.

Then you're vulnerable again.

That said, I don't want you to suddenly regret, at that moment, when a gigantic, terrifying hornet has just stung you, that somebody stomped on your foot earlier in a fight.

So at the very moment that you lose your Tough Health Level—your *last* Tough Health Level, if for some reason you have two—all the wounds in your Normal Health Levels go away, and you get them both back.

In short, before you can lose your character integrity or be defeated you have to *first* lose your Tough Health Level and *then* take two superficial wounds.

Divine Health Levels

Your character has some number of Divine Health Levels.

Usually, 2.

Well...

That's misleading. Characters with miraculous abilities tend to have 2, and characters with miraculous abilities are the usual characters for the game. But if you happen to be playing an ordinary mortal, your default is *none*.

No Divine Health Levels! You're not divine!

...Luckily, if you're a mortal character in an epic campaign, the campaign should have something set up to get you to 2 Divine Health Levels without needing Perks or advancement, and in any other campaign, you either shouldn't need them or can ask the HG to let you earn them in some other way.

Anyway, if you have one, a Divine Health Level is even better than a Tough Level. You'll only lose a Divine Health Level to something that's actually *epically* bad. Maybe someone uses a weapon and a level 6+ Intention to cinematically slice you open or blow your head off. Maybe someone uses level 6+ magic to do something equally profound. Maybe you're blasted by a miracle.

The point is, as long as you have Divine Health Levels, you're still a PC. But you can't lose them to ordinary stuff. So if you have even one Divine Health Level, and you've lost your Tough Health Level, and you've lost your Normal Health Levels—

Until you take some epic damage, you can't get hurt any more.

I mean, you may *act* hurt, but mostly, you've reached your dramatic damage equilibrium or something. You've got as much going on, on the damage front, as you can.

Actually running out of Divine Health Levels cleans your Tough Health Level of whatever wound was in it—you get it back. It heals. So the only way to actually beat you, the only way to completely take away your PC status and make you a pawn of whatever higher or lower power wants to manipulate your body and your mind, is to first take away your Divine Health Levels, *then* your Tough Health Level, *then* your Normal Health Levels.

There's a reason I use the word "Divine"—this is survivability and resilience comparable to a god's.

Defeat

Run out of Health Levels and you are no longer a viable PC.

That doesn't mean your character is dead. (In fact, *having* Health Levels doesn't even mean your character is alive!)

It just means that you've used up your vested interest in your character's fate. They're a pawn of the HG and the other players now. And while that could be fun to play, in theory, these rules aren't designed for it.

So at that point—

You're not playing. The HG takes over and you're just around to kibitz and watch the game for a bit.

At the next suitable lull in play, talk to the HG about how to come back. Maybe your PC is salvageable—they can break free of the enchantments on them, heal from their wounds, even return from the dead. Maybe you can get control back in a week or two, I mean, an in-game week or two, or by the end of the session, or something.

Or maybe they're basically lost and it's time for you to pick out a new PC.

You can come back into the game as soon as the HG allows you to. You can even play a temporary PC for a while if the HG thinks that your original PC will recover but not for a few seasons of the game. As an OOC matter, I think you should get back in by the beginning of the next session if you can, but, honestly, it's whatever works.

Wounds

I want a game where witches can turn people into animals, magic can summon down fire from the sky, love spells exist though they're not good things, people can be stabbed or shot or hit by lightning, and if you spend too much time out there sailing you could stumble on Medusa's island and catch a glimpse of her hidden face—

But I also want you to retain your dignity and control over your character's concept.

I want you to retain your PC's *capacity for action* all the way to the end.

So let's turn our attention now to what it looks like when something bad happens and you mitigate or express that incoming damage in a wound.

Surface Wounds

If something happens that messes you up, but not *badly*—if you're feeling it, but you could ignore it if a kid needed to get to the hospital or a monster was stalking you?

That's a **Surface Wound.**

Surface wounds cover all the damage and problems that matter when you're trying to work and get things done but maybe not so much on the battlefield or in a crisis larger than yourself. They're all the things like pulled muscles and the flu and grief and being overworked and stressed.

Things like this can *only* affect a Normal Health Level—they can't touch the rest.

So you can only ever really have two of these conditions at a time and they'll go away the moment you lose your Tough Health Level. But while you have them—well. They're real, and they mess you up.

In play, I'm actually going to handle this as an advantage.

I know that's a little counterintuitive, but I want to put the burden on *you* to play the hurt here up. I can't expect it to cripple you and I can't make the HG drag you down with it because I can't predict when you'll be able to push past these wounds. So instead I'm going to give you the option of being tough enough to just ignore them but also give you an incentive to validate the effect, to treat it and narrate it as something damaging.

You'll get your choice of:

- a +1 Tool on actions when you're playing up the wound;
- a level 1 Bond related to the wound;
- if you and the HG can quickly agree on how it works, a level 2 Magical or Superior Skill related to the wound.

Plus, when you take a Surface Wound, you'll get a free reaction shot—even if you're already doing two things, even if you're already sustaining two actions, you can do something to show that the attack or effect has gotten to you.

When you take a Surface Wound you lose a Normal Health Level. **The wound heals in 0-2 chapters**, normally at the end of a chapter, at which point you'll get that Health Level back. If you're already *out* of Normal Health Levels, you're temporarily immune to Surface Wounds.

Ambiguous Wounds

Sometimes you'll take a very ambiguous wound. Like, you'll get punched or stabbed. You'll hurt your foot. You'll get sick or feverish. You'll have a spell on you that "influences" you or affects your mind. You'll be depressed or have something really awful happen.

Just what this does to you—it is not clear.

A detailed examination of what the wound actually *is* might end up with it being brutal and terrible. That punch broke your jaw. That stab wound went through your lungs. That spell has you utterly, irrationally convinced that if you don't do what its invoker asks, your whole family will drown at the bottom of Big Lake. You may "know" that that's not true but your heart will *feel* it as the given truth.

Look under the skin of an ambiguous wound and you will sometimes find something awful like that.

...or something pointless, a little bruise or a meaningless effect.

...or something that gives you an Obstacle 1. Now and again.

I *like* details. I *like* the fact that if you get stabbed you get stabbed in a specific place, and either it's a place that hurts you a lot or it's a place that's comparatively safe. I *like* the fact that if something messes with your head, either it's a temptation you can easily ignore or a compulsion that you really can't.

I mean, details like that are cooler than not having them. If we didn't have details like that we'd be Outside.

But I don't like the idea that picking these details is just the HG making a quasi-random call, and I don't like that two of those options boil down to "I guess that attack wasn't as cool as I thought."

So when there's something like this, you have the option of taking a **Surface Wound**.

If you're out of Normal Health Levels, then that Surface Wound will just bounce off of you. That's probably a reason for the HG to take a second or two longer to decide whether the wound is something more specific before handing it out.

...but, well, if it really is just "you get punched" or whatever, then you roll with it, and you're immune, and that's cool too.

Gaming Terminology

Reaction Shot (Combat)—when you take a wound, even if you're already sustaining two actions, you can take an action or emote that reasonably follows from that wound. I'm expecting you to use this to stagger or grunt or scream or say something snappy, most of the time, but it's completely OK to use the momentum to do something awesome if you think that's the best fit for the scene.



Serious Wounds

A **Serious Wound** is something that gets in your way. It cripples your capacity for action in some respect—which can range from "you've been ensorcelled and can no longer sing high-G" to "you've been killed and can no longer do *anything*."

At the same time, it's basically mundane.

We're not talking about falling into the magma chamber of a volcano, being regurgitated alive by the unwolves, or having the wrath of Heaven incinerate you. We're talking about getting shot, or falling off a third-story roof, or spending the night on an iceberg, or something. We're talking about magic, sure, but not the vast magic out of legend; rather, the magic of someone pretty close to the level of mortals. Someone who's got to work hard to enchant you at all.

A Serious Wound is something that a badass can handle.

John McClane or Abe no Seimei—they would shrug it right off!

The rules for a Serious Wound are very similar to the rules for a Surface Wound, above. As a PC, taking a Serious Wound, you'll get a free reaction shot and a power. (If desired, you can even use that power in the reaction shot itself.)

For the power, you'll have the following options:

- a +1 Tool on actions when you're playing up the wound;
- a level 1 Bond related to the wound;
- a level 1 Affliction related to the wound; *or*,
- if you and the HG can quickly agree on how it works, a related level 2-3 Magical or Superior Skill.

This is mostly the same list as for Surface Wounds. I'm giving you the option of an Affliction to help you out if you're under heavy fire from miracles and the chance to capture some weird curse's effect, if necessary, with a level 3 Magical or Superior Skill.

Next, as part of the process of taking a Serious Wound, you get to mitigate what happened. Choose one (or possibly more) of the following options:

- you give the wound a tight focus so that it doesn't mess with all your actions;
- you reduce the scope of the wound to something specific you can live with, or mute its overall effect down to the same;
- you avoid the wound just in time, but you're kind of traumatized by it;
- you avoid the wound, but hurt yourself doing so (in a different way);
- you get a way to turn the wound "off" and "on;"
- you twist the effect into something mildly advantageous;
- you suffer the wound's effects in a metaphorical or otherwise non-literal way.

I'll go over these choices in a moment. I'll note in advance, though, that they're not all meant to be equal. You're not shopping the list to find the least painful or the most advantageous. That wouldn't be much of a challenge. You're looking for the one you think *happened*, the one that feels the most *right* to you, or, if you can't figure that out, if you don't *know* that, for the one that will be the most fun.

When you take a Serious Wound you lose a Tough Health Level. **The Serious Wound heals in 0-2 books**, normally at the end of the book, at which point you'll get that Health Level back. If you're out of Tough Health Levels, you can lose a Normal Health Level instead. If you're out of *both* Tough and Normal Health Levels, you're temporarily immune to Serious Wounds.

(Or you're utterly defeated, if Tough and Normal are all that you have.)

Deadly Wounds

A **Deadly Wound** is just a Serious Wound that you get from a particularly impressive or epic source. It's something that *should* outclass you—a nuclear weapon; a cloud of military-grade poison gas; someone using really impressive weapon Skills like you'd see in a kung fu movie to stab you; a scary, Major, or high-level miraculous attack; or the supreme magic of an ancient, terrifying sorcerer with plenty of time to work.

Basically, something's a Deadly Wound if shrugging it off or even just surviving it makes you kind of a mythical and epic figure yourself.

When you take a Deadly Wound, you'll get a reaction shot and a power:

- a +2 Tool on actions when you're playing up the wound;
- a level 2 Bond related to the wound;
- an Affliction, w/ rating tied to a relevant Issue or Arc Trait, related to the wound;
- a level 3+ Magical or Superior Skill; *or*
- a miraculous ability.

You'll get to mitigate the wound, too, just as before.

When you take a Deadly Wound you lose a Divine Health Level. If you're out of Divine Health Levels, you can lose a Tough Health Level instead. If you're out of Divine and Tough Health Levels, you can lose a Normal Health Level instead. If you're out of Health Levels completely, you are defeated and no longer a PC.

A Deadly Wound does not heal on its own, but you can pursue a relatively short quest (pg. 450) to reduce it to a recoverable Serious Wound. If this is still too slow for you, **you may undertake a longer quest to heal a Deadly Wound completely**—assuming it fits the events of the story, or can be *made* to fit the events of the story, you can choose "healing a wound" as the reward for a 35+-XP quest.

If you've lost your last Health Level you can't do a quest to get better, but neither do you have to—either you can work out a way to get back in the game or you can't, but either way you don't need to bother with healing the wound!

Defensive Wounds

It's normal to choose powers and mitigation methods that make it a little harder to follow up on an attack. For instance, if you're being blasted by miraculous lightning, and you're worried that whoever is killing you can just *keep blasting it?*

Pick some sort of level 1 Affliction that says that you're all lightning'd out!

It's boring to kill someone with the same attack three to five times in a row anyway. Make them shake it up!

Keeping a Wound

As an optional rule, if you finish healing from a wound, but want the story of the wound to continue, then the benefits can remain over the course of an Arc or quest to pick up some power *like* the wound's.

Ambiguous Wounds That Are Definitely Bad

In a few rare cases you'll encounter an ambiguous wound that's on the Serious or Deadly scale. This is something like "you're hit by dark energy! ...which does something," or "you fall into the vat of strange chemicals. Have it affect you!"

Strictly speaking it's the HG's job to give this more description first—

...but if it really is just a generic effect, then they can hand it out directly as a Serious or Deadly Wound and let your reaction shot and choice of power determine what it actually *is*.

Accepting a Wound

If you're OK with something you do not have to take it as a wound.

If someone curses you to earn two coins for every coin you spend, say—

Maybe you *like* that?

I mean, that doesn't even sound bad! Why would you think it's a wound? Maybe I said it wrong and that was actually a helpful blessing from a friend!

Or someone enchants you to grow wings.

You might *like* wings!

Or even stabs you. Someone stabs you—you don't *have* to use the wound system. You could just, you know

...be stabbed.

And then maybe you go to do something, I don't know, ride a bike? And the HG makes that Obstacle 1. It's not normally Obstacle 1 to ride a bike, it's usually just like, um, riding a... just like catching a fish. You know? Smooth as sailing once you know the road. And then it's a little harder all because you have been stabbed. And it's hard to stay conscious now and there's blood on the keyboard, I mean, gaming table, I mean, bicycle, *bicycle*, and you try to stay conscious, and everything's fuzzy and double vision, and the HG gives that an Obstacle 2, and you stagger, and fall over and go to the hospital and you finish your sentence. And in the worst case now you're dead and you have an Obstacle 4-5 to doing *anything at all*.

...but that's a worst case. I mean, you'll probably just get medical treatment and get better.

I'm not recommending this for cases like stabbing.[21] I'm just saying that there's a blurry line between wounds and stuff that just happens, and the way I'm handling that line is to say that in most cases you have a choice.

The exception is stuff that *only* affects you through the wounds system—

- ambiguous wounds, like "you've been punched" or "bam! Mystery energy," *and*
- Surface Wounds.

These the HG can just hand out, if they like, to give them a proper effect upon play.

21 Well, the medical treatment part is OK. Get medical help if you're stabbed. But just accepting the wound—that I will not endorse!

Insisting on a Wound

Conversely you'll have the option to insist on taking something as a wound even if it might not otherwise be.

Someone summons you with magic. They call you to a stone circle, where they mean to make you a sacrifice. You don't want that to happen but it wouldn't normally invoke the *wound* rules—it's an action, not a lingering effect.

Still, it *does* impede your capacity for action, however temporarily. In summoning you they are blocking your ability to do much else. So if you want, you can stipulate that the effect lingers—bearing in mind that a wound for something like this is at least Serious, and therefore will last at least until the end of the season—and mitigate it as a wound.

You're no longer being helplessly summoned, even though they presumably beat your defensive action level. You're instead... haunted, somehow, and persistently, by the magic of the call!

Unusual Wounds

Normally you can only mitigate or insist upon a Serious or Deadly Wound—you can't escalate to the wound system to fight off, e.g., a Scrabble loss unless that loss *is* a big enough deal to inflict a Serious Wound. However, particularly but not exclusively in **Techno** games, your group may wish to designate certain categories of Surface Wounds as things you can insist upon and/or mitigate: for instance, a game deeply concerned with football could let you ward off enemy touchdowns by insisting on and then mitigating a new Surface Wound.

Focusing a Wound

option 1 for mitigating a wound

You can use one of your health levels to take a wound that would have been a whole-body or whole-life thing and make it a lot more specific.

For instance,

The Shattered Arm

You've just been struck by a bear. Normally this would leave you kind of whole-body in bad shape. But in this case, you roll with it.

As you land, your arm shatters, but most of you is OK.

The Hunger Curse

You've just been enchanted to go hungry: no food shall cross your lips.

But that's so vague!

Let's clarify it. I mean, obviously you can still drink, so you can drink protein shakes. Right? Protein shakes: OK. And oh! What about snacks? I mean, snacks aren't *food*. Right?

They're snacks!

And you have a friend whose cooking is definitely not food. Seriously. (Sorry, [your friend]!) This has been established. You have told them this many times. And now you'll have to go to them and *rely* on it!

I think a better way to put the curse is clearly "no hearty, proper meals shall cross your lips."

Let's go with that!

Recovery

Healing from a focused wound is typically a **Melodramatic** quest (pg. 91).

Living With a Wound

option 2 for mitigating a wound

You can use one of your health levels to turn a wound into something that you know how to live with. Something that sucks, or is kind of cool, or whatever, but which you can manage—something that won't really get in your way.

Like:

The Love Spell

Someone casts a love spell on you.

They come over. You welcome them in, of course. You're under a love spell. You flop on the couch. You start playing a video game. They ask you, "It worked, right? You love me now?"

"Sure," you say. "I love you. Whatever. Could you..."

You wave your hand. You want them to move to the side. They are between you and your game.

"Just," you say, "scooch over. You know. A little? Out of the way? Love?"

The Gunshot

Oh no! You have been shot!

But it looks like... you are OK, I guess? I guess you'll just have to bandage it, keep it clean, and try day by day to get by.

The Werewolf

You have been bitten by a werewolf. It is nerve-wracking. The days of the month slowly tick past. Then... fear!

You look up at the moon! The change is coming!

Your eyes cross. Your nose twitches. The world goes weird. **Poof!**

You sprout a pair of adorable, fuzzy wolf ears! Maybe even a tail!

The moonlight plays against the Twisting River: the water chuckles over night-black stones. And as for you, after a while... you say,

"That's *it?*"

And a soft wind blows.

Ghost

You've been killed—erased from existence.

But you're just *part*-dead.

You're a ghost, with the ability to live in the ghost world and make an approach from it to life. And in fact, for some reason—I don't know what it is, maybe it's because of the circumstances of your death—it's even *recoverable*. If you can find your footing in life strongly enough, if you can fit into the living world, you might return.

Recovery

Healing from a wound like this is typically a **Pastoral** quest (pg. 90).

Avoiding a Wound

option 3 for mitigating a wound

You can use one of your health levels to take the trauma of a near-missed wound instead of the wound itself.

For a magical effect you manage to cling to reality but the magic fills your dreams.

For a physical effect you see a vision of what's *about* to happen just before it does, and you manage to avoid it. You twist out of the way. You stop short of making a mistake. You don't get brutally hurt but it's filling your mind just how sickeningly close you came.

If the circumstances allow, if it's OK with the HG, you can sometimes have this vision later: like, you have a near-miss but don't know it, and only later when you find out how close you came does the wound take hold.

This counts as a wound in all respects. You still have something to recover from. But it doesn't impede your physical actions. Instead, you'll only suffer from it in flashes of trauma, in dreams and daydreams, and in magical environments.

For instance,

The Transformation

A witch turns you into a duck. Only—you snap yourself awake a moment later. That didn't happen!

But now and then there are little slips in reality.

A duck is walking down the street—well, I mean, you are. Someone shouts, "Duck!" and you respond, reflexively, "Qua!" In dreams you are hanging out with your friends and then someone notices. They tell you this, sternly, severely.

"Did you realize you were a duck?"

You hold up your **I Am a Duck** sign. I guess you did!

The Spar Through the Chest

You're on the Lake in a storm. There's a blast of lightning. The mast cracks and a lance of wood comes down to spear through y—

No. That didn't happen.

You saw it coming. You got out of the way just in time. But you keep seeing it happening, now. You *keep feeling* it, sliding in through your chest, your lungs filling with blood, the awful pain—

You think, maybe, in another world, in the real world, it happened to you, and you died.

The Curse

You're exploring a Horizon graveyard with a friend when you find a hammer. You touch it and you realize that it's the ghost of a hammer that fell on its carpenter's head and killed him. It didn't want to kill him! But it did.

You fall under the curse of the hammer's ghost.

The moment you see your friend you realize it—you've been cursed to kill them, or to be killed by them, just as the hammer killed its friend.

But—

You and your friend. You're too close for that!

All that happens is that sometimes, when you see them, you suddenly have horrible, twisted visions of how the two of you might fight.

Recovery

"Healing" from an avoided wound is typically a **Struggle** quest (pg. 99-100).

Resisting Wounds

option 4 for mitigating a wound

You can use one of your health levels to fight an effect so fiercely that the actual *damage* you take is from your escape or resistance instead of the wound itself.

For instance,

The Giant Bird

A giant bird swoops down to carry you off. You dive flat and lose your hat, or a precious watch, or your new bike, instead.

Darn that bird!

You wind up with a level 1 Bond, *I Can't Have a Bike* or *I'm Driven to Mourn my Bike*.

The Explosion

You've been trying to understand a bit of deviant science. It... doesn't go well. There's an explosion.

You don't want to get blown up.

So you throw yourself out your window and break your leg. Or you crouch behind a metal riot shield, only, the unpredictable effects of the deviant science wind up merging the metal into your hair and the skin of your arm.

That's "resisting the wound."

The Stone

Billy Sovereign, the bully, attempts to break your will. He uses a magical stone to try to shatter your mind and make you obey him. But you fight him so hard that not only do you not obey him when he gives you commands but in fact you're magically blocked from obeying *any* command that the person giving the order wants you to obey.

Stupid Billy Sovereign anyway!



Recovery

Healing from a resisted wound is typically a **Melodramatic** quest (pg. 91).

Back-and-Forth Wounds

option 5 for mitigating a wound

You can use one of your health levels to give incoming damage an on/off switch. This is mostly suitable for magic and psychological effects, but it could work for a physical wound if the wound has a chronic rather than a persistent effect.

The on/off switch here is almost always emotional.

There's something you feel, and the spell or whatever begins to take effect. Between scenes, or when you feel a different thing, it fades away.

This effectively gives you an alternate form or mode.

If something "should" keep you from moving, thinking, acting, or existing in that mode, choose:

- the change isn't as bad as it "should" be. ("The deer... has thumbs?")
- you're inexplicably effective in that form. ("The deer... made toast?")
- you're surprisingly useful in that form. ("Thank God we have a were-deer!")
- you can recover your mind or mobility through, e.g.,
  - concentration
  - outrage
  - other strong emotions
  - need *or*
  - will, *or*
- you gain some special power that lets you act. ("This deer... is psychic!")

Ooze

You've been melted down into ooze by a deviant scientist. Luckily you discovered yourself to be a sentient ooze capable of independent motion and broke out of your vial and legged it—

Er, oozed it—

From the lab! Eventually you realized that being self-confident and learning how to keep it together lets you mold yourself back upwards into your human form. If your self-confidence frays and you don't know what to do, you start melting back into an ooze again!

The Deer

You've been turned into a deer!

Calm tends to revert you back to normal. Fear tends to send you bounding off. You have an inexplicable affinity for toast.

The Sickness

You're really sick. Something is wrong with your system. It's weakened you. It's brought you to bed. But the good air of Fortitude—it's strengthened you again. As long as you stick to a simple, honest life, to taking things slowly and simply, to the Fortitude way, you'll be able to get around. When you let yourself get too excited, too hurried, too alienated from the simple life that's giving you your strength—

Your strength fades away and you have trouble keeping on.

The Loyalty Spell

You've been enchanted, bound to a witch or fairy as their loyal knight—

Until they make the mistake of asking you to do something your heart can't accept, or thanking you for something, at which point you return to normal. Even when you have free will you're emotionally attached to them, though, since you still have a wound; if you see them in danger or thank *them*, you'll snap back to being their loyal knight once again.

Wavering Reality

You've been unmade—well, mostly unmade.

You must cling to the things of the world. You must live fully, don't let yourself get separated, isolated, alienated. If you do, you'll fall first into the ghost world and then into the Outside.

You don't know how you get back from that. You only know that sometimes, somehow, between the scenes of the game... you do.

Recovery

Healing from a back-and-forth wound is typically a **Lurid** quest (pg. 96-97).



Twisted Wounds

option 6 for mitigating a wound

You can use one of your health levels to twist or construe the damage of a wound as or into something useful. There's still a downside—there has to be a downside still—but mostly, it's something you can put to use.

Like,

Broken Fingers

That guy thought that stepping on your fingers would put you down. And it hurts, yes. But the fire of revenge that filled your heart makes you more effective than even having one hundred thousand fingers would!

Seeing Medusa's Face

That glancing look at Medusa's face—it could have turned a girl to stone!

But not you. No.

You're a *glasses* girl, and that means that all that happened to *you* is that sometimes when you're very still you turn into a statue and sometimes when people stab you with softer things than stone (like needles, or swords) they break.

Poisoned

You've been poisoned by a bad fish! But now you have a much deeper insight into the mind of wickedness.

You can *smell* it in bad situations, sometimes, just like that fish.

Possession

That ghost or witch or whatever tried to take over your body, and sometimes it still *does* control you, but mostly, it gave you accidental access to its own powers and knowledge!

Vampire Thrall

Similarly, that vampire tried to glamour you. He used those powerful eyes. But—

He didn't count on the fact that you're *dead certain* you know what he really wants better than he does himself.

The Bleak Takes Interest in the Real

A witch is cursing random people in the crowd around you with a withering death. But when she reaches you, she stops.

"Oh, no," she says, thoughtfully. "Not killing *this* one. This one is... *interesting*."

As an optional rule, or if you're playing fast and loose with the existing rules, you can twist any wound from Outside or bleak sources by declaring yourself suddenly *overly interesting and relatable* to the bleak power within them, which makes them want to make you a minion, or fall in love with you, or complain about their life problems to you instead of following through with their declared attack.

It's up to the player of the target (usually, the HG) whether you can have this wound be their actual reaction/attraction to you, or if it has to be a generic "attractive to the bleak."

Recovery

Healing from a twisted wound is typically an **Exciting!** quest (pg. 94-95).

Metaphorical Powers

option 7 for mitigating a wound

You can use one of your health levels to make some effect on you metaphorical instead of literal. This is mostly suitable for magic and psychological effects, although you could combine this with muting or avoiding a physical wound and that would give you a reasonable effect.

When I say metaphorical, I mean something like:

Turned Into a Frog

You've been cursed! Turned into a frog!

And so you are.

Green, you wear green now, it is the color of you; hop, you hop, too, a lot more than you ever did. Your favorite candies now are these little licorice bites. Sometimes you'll be happy when you buy a bag, you'll offer to share them with people, you'll pop one in your mouth and you'll say that "this candy's pretty fly." You'll have this habit of puffing out your cheeks when you're thinking now and of taking baths in ponds. Occasionally you'll wander around with a lilypad on your head.

You're a frog!

Recovery

Healing from a metaphorical wound is typically a **Setting** quest (pg. 100-101).

Stabbed in the Heart

You've been stabbed through the heart! ...wait, no. That didn't happen. It's just a shallow cut.

But somehow, your heart has gone cold anyway. Somehow it's hard to feel things now and especially difficult to love.

Mystic Prison

You were meant to be sealed in a mystic prison—a silver cage. But it's not *you* in there. It's just a bird that sort of... represents you. When the bird sings your heart lifts. When the bird is hurt you suffer. When the bird is fed you feel a little more full. But you're not the bird. The imprisonment itself—it failed.

Story Wounds and Sickness

Sometimes bad things happen to you because of... well, plot. Not because of a tactical conflict or a hostile action but because that's where the story goes.

If something happens to you for basically OOC reasons—because the HG thinks it would be cool, or you think it would be cool, or whatever—then you don't handle it as a wound. You handle it as a dramatic thing, a narrative thing, an Issue—typically, the Issue

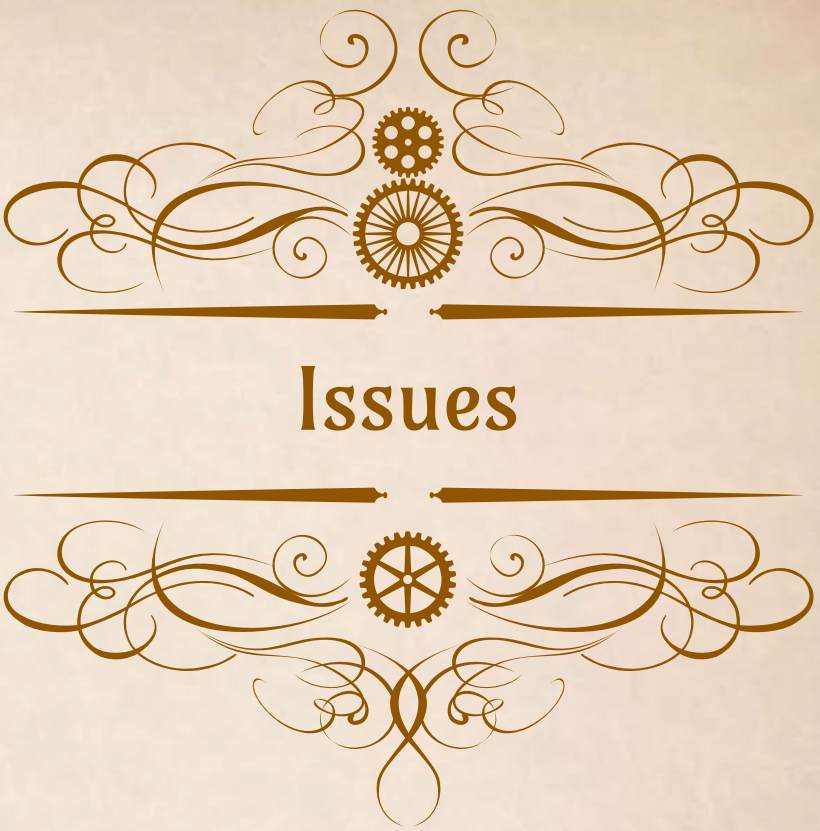
Sickness

If it's ambiguous, like, you were attacked by something as a natural evolution in play, but you let it happen because it seemed cool; or something bad happens that would probably affect you anyway, but it's only a *definite* thing because the HG is pushing for it; or whatever?

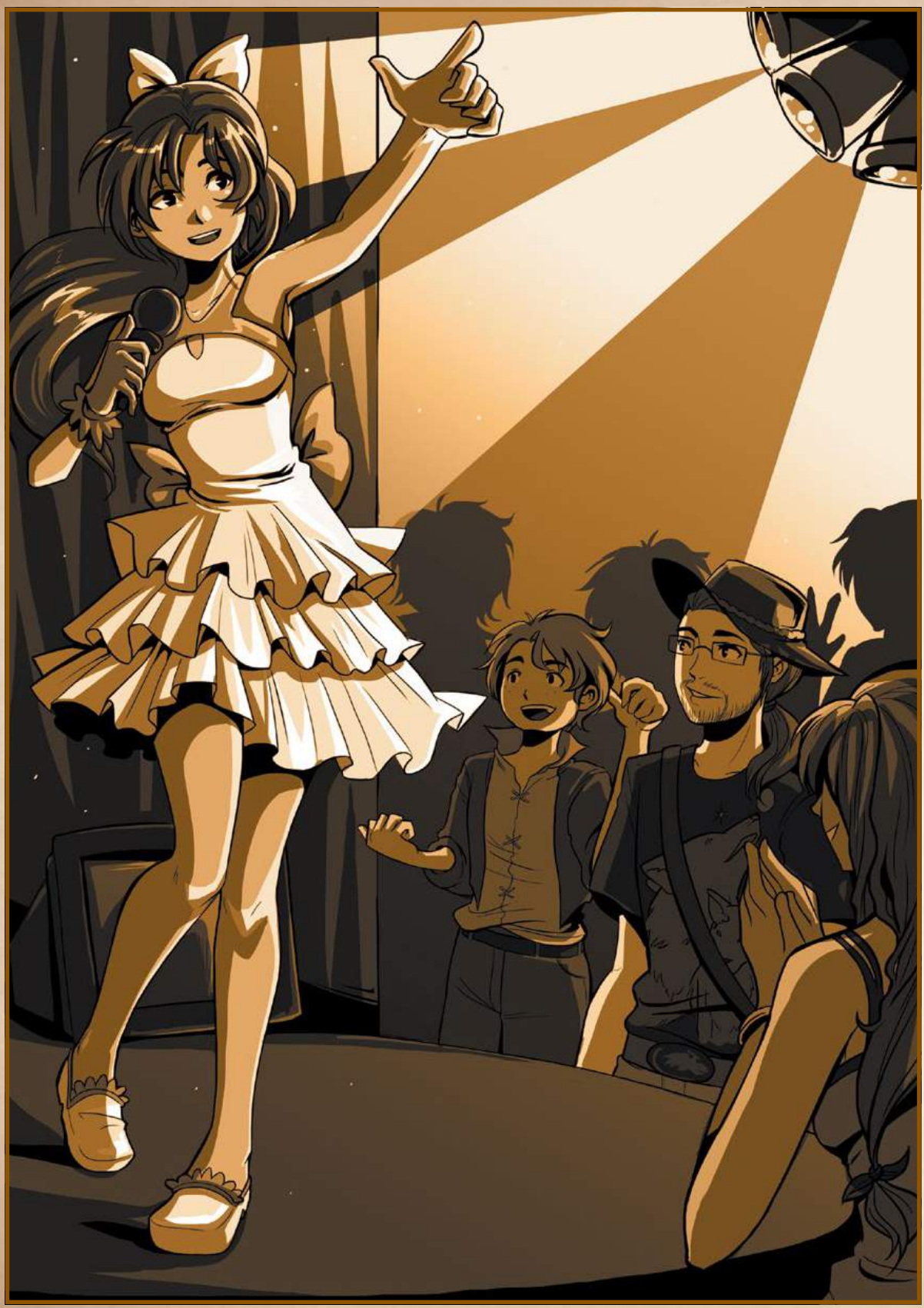
That can be handled either way, or even as both.

As the name implies, a Sickness is *usually* bad, but it's not necessarily the case—perfectly normal human reactions to trauma can qualify as the Sickness Issue, as can a positive or ambiguous metamorphosis.

So let's talk a little about how Issues work.



Issues



Issues

Over the course of play characters can accumulate points in various **Issues**—

Dramatic movements in their life, things building towards a resolution, each of them rated from 0 to 5. For instance, a cold or flu or werewolf virus is represented by the **Sickness** Issue; meddling with forces beyond your comprehension, by **(in) Over Your Head**.

How an Issue Works

general notes

Each Issue comes with an embedded narrative arc.

The first three levels of the Issue are mostly for expressing what's going on with you—they are for *establishing* the calling, the complex, the heroic journey, the vice, or whatever else is going on.

You are of course receiving the Issue and its increments over the course of play—

So it's not the text of the Issue that's doing the work of establishing this, but rather its interactions with the events in the game. By the time the Issue comes to a head at level 4, you should ideally know what it's "talking about" in the context of your game—not, "I have Hero 4," but "ah, the epic battle that I've been building towards since I first got Hero 1 is finally ready to be resolved."

At level 4, the Issue kicks into high gear. This is also when you'll have your first real chance to finish out the Issue's story, "closing" or "resolving" it and receiving 4 XP and an MP. If you do so, it isn't *necessarily* all that dramatic—

It's a *relatively* dramatic moment, of course, but if your group is really used to this game's systems, you could potentially have somebody closing an Issue every few hours of play.

At level 5, if the player didn't manage to close out the Issue, things get a little more hectic, dramatic, and scary—but even then it's not necessarily a big deal. If it makes sense for it to be an epic moment, then it's an epic moment; if it makes sense for it to be quiet and wrenching, then it's that.

Closing out an Issue at level 5 gives the same 4 XP + 1 MP reward.

Full Implementation

I'm going to start by giving you the full implementation of Issues. This is a mechanic with high handling time, so it's only suited for forum games, play-by-email, solo games, and games very low on immersion—

If you're playing tabletop or on IRC, and focused on in-character play, you'll want the simplified version in the next section.

In any case, for now:

If the handling time's acceptable, after an out-of-genre or particularly meaningful XP Action, the HG reacts. Their reaction takes the form of an Issue point given to a PC involved in the scene. There's one Issue for a kind of "*shrug*, I dunno either" reaction, for instance—that's

 **Mystery**

There's another for a reaction like "that was peaceful, laid-back/bittersweet"—

 **Something to Deal With**

And so forth.

The player in question increments the Issue, reads the associated instructions, and takes a card representing the new level of the Issue to keep in front of them in play.

Simplified Implementation

If that's too much bookkeeping or handling time for your game, I'm going to suggest that you instead assign Issues once per chapter or once per natural breakpoint in play.

The HG picks an Issue based on their strongest lingering impression from events, hands it out to all the players it fits (not just the one most responsible, but also not just "everybody") and players can handle the updating as the lead-in to the next chapter or section of play.

Issue Cards

The core of an Issue is built as *advice*—

As a set of "Issue cards," one of which is optionally kept in front of you during play to remind you of the Issue's influence on the way your character thinks. (If you can't do that, then the cards are something to glance through during stuff for which your character is quiet or not there, instead.)

For the most part, the Issues won't ask anything more of you than that; you just have to maintain a rough awareness of your Issues and how they affect you.

That said, at specific points in each Issue's progression (often, level 4 and 5), there'll be more that you need to do; for that, see the instructions below.

Genre-Based Issues

Characters may pick up the specific Issues

 **Hollow**

 **Illusion** *and*

 **Isolation**

from the rules for their genre's XP Actions; I wouldn't give them out too casually for other reasons, but there are plenty of miscellaneous circumstances that they'd fit.

Characters may also pick up

 **Sickness**

through unusual channels.

If you're playing with the simplified version of the Issues, you can wait to process that change until the next chapter or natural breakpoint in play.

Lowering an Issue

Issues mostly go up during play, but you can reduce them in three ways. The first two have to do with the reduced dramatic urgency of an Issue after a session or story break, which lowers an Issue:

- by one point at the end of each book; *and*
- by one point at the end of each session, or, for continuous games, each Sunday's dawn.

If you're playing by the full rules, you'll lose one point *per Issue* at the end of the session and book. If you're playing by the simplified rules, you'll lose one point from whichever *single* Issue the player judges to be least memorable in context—the one whose current dramatic urgency is least likely to carry over to the next session or story.[22]

Resolving an Issue

The third way to lower an Issue is:

- by "resolving" the Issue when it reaches level 4+.

The actions you have to take to "resolve" an Issue are Issue-specific, and are going to be described on the Issue's card. Resolving an Issue earns 4 XP and 1 MP and drops the Issue to level 0, after which you can't pick it up again for a while—

What that specifically means is that if you're about to pick up the Issue again, and the HG thinks it's too soon after you resolved it, you... don't!

22 You can tweak the timing or the rate of Issue loss here if it doesn't wind up working out for you.

Gaming Terminology

Session—it's a "session" when the players get together for the game. I'm targeting 4-hour sessions. Online games might or might not have specific sessions.

Issues and MP

Issues have a power in them that derives from the wishing heart, the magic of various Regions, or the emptiness of the Outside and the Bleak Academy. I don't know if it's *precisely* the same as wish power from other sources, but...

In practice, Issues will give you MP.

In particular you'll receive 1 MP from each Issue when—

- it reaches 1, 3, or 5;
- it causes trouble for you (as with a level 1 Bond);
- you "resolve" it.

Issues can also save you MP. At level 4-5 they become ripe for resolution; there's something you can *do* to bring the story of the Issue to a convenient and appropriate end. **If you and the HG agree that a given miracle would resolve the Issue, then the dramatic weight of the Issue gives you an advantage—a 4 MP reduction in the miracle's cost**.

This is on top of the 1 MP that you gain for resolving the Issue.

If the miracle cost less than 4 MP to begin with, you may convert the rest of your discount to Strike.

A List of Issues

The standard Issues in a ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** game are...

 you're in **Over Your Head**

 being a **Hero**

 **Sickness**, including cinematic transformation and corruption

 **Vice**

 **Mystery**, where there's some mystery around you

 a **Complex,** representing a neurosis or obsession.

 **It Never Stops!**, where your life is just plain ridiculous and it's not your fault

 a **Calling**, representing something—initially, an unknown something—you must do.

 **Something to Deal With**, here meaning "baggage;"

and

 **Trust,** in untrustworthy powers.



There's also three genre-specific Issues, which you'll usually only pick up based on the genre rules:

being **Hollow,** unable to truly appreciate the world

an **Illusion** hides the truth of your life even from the HG and players; *and*

Isolation.

This list is far from comprehensive, although I think it covers most of the important stuff; you can freely create new Issues for your game. For instance, ***Fortitude: the Glass-Maker's Dragon*** will track the progress of an expedition far away by introducing the Issue

To the Island of Death!

Which Issue Should I Give?

These Issues are part of the game's conversation. Accordingly, as the HG, you can hand out any Issue you like, and here's what you're conveying by doing so:

"That was pretty laid-back."	+1 to **Something to Deal With**
Head-desk. Pause. *Head-desk*.	+1 to a **Complex**
"This path that you are on... might be the wrong path."	+1 to **Vice**
"Doing ordinary stuff, huh?"	+1 to a **Calling**
"This is so mean to you guys."	+1 to **It Never Stops!**
"You guys are very active."	+1 to **Over Your Head**
"Suspense! Doom! Action!"	+1 to being a **Hero**
"I'm... intrigued."	+1 to **Mystery**
"This is a pretty big deal."	+1 to **Trust**
"...You're in trouble."	+1 to **Sickness**

If you can't keep track of this many Issues, just look at the list occasionally and pick out one or two to have at the top of your mind.

It's totally OK for your impressions to adjust based on the average game—

If you're playing a game that focuses on the PCs' ordinary lives, and this is the first time you've really done that in an RPG, then I'd expect you to respond to a lot of stuff in the first few stories with "ah, doing ordinary stuff, huh?"

And it's fine for that to mean you give your PCs **Callings**.

But if after a while, the PCs are heavily involved in a prize pumpkin-growing contest, and it's still pretty ordinary, but it stands out from their ordinary lives for you as "Suspense! Doom! Action!" or "This (pumpkin) is a pretty big deal?"

It's fine to give out being a **Hero** or **Trust** then instead.

In short, go with your actual responses here—don't try to create some objective standard to hew to and then burden yourself with the expectations that gives.

a Calling

There's something you're going to need to do.

There's a task or problem or destiny waiting for you that you won't be able to ignore. You won't know what it is at first. At least, you probably won't, at least not in detail. But you'll figure it out eventually. And in hindsight, when you look back on the story afterwards, you'll realize it was calling out to you all along.

Here's a simplified picture of the Issue and its progression:

► Your world is in good order.
1► You feel like something's been left undone.
2► There's something important left undone, and the world's gone a bit awry.
3► Your heart is awake. The world is calling. You *almost* understand what you must do.
4► You can't ignore this. You know what you have to do.
5► This is really important. You have to do it, even if you're scared. Even if you die.

Your Calling

You might have a **Calling** if there's...

- someone you need to apologize to
- a window you need to repair
- a treaty that you need to broker *or*
- a lost treasure that you need to find

Mystery

Picking up the **Mystery** Issue means that there's something mysterious going on with you. People—you, the HG, the other players, or maybe just the other players—will be aware that there's some mystery. It'll become more important and more central to the scenes you're in over time. Then there'll be a big or at least a little reveal that brings some closure to that and adds a satisfying beat to the story.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► Mystery has not yet touched your life.
1► There's a hint of something weird and mysterious.
2► That mystery might *matter*.
3► Something inexplicable is revealed behind the surface of the mystery.
4► You stand at the doorway of revelation.
5► The mystery is spiritual, unnatural, or otherwise fraught with meaning.

Your Mystery

Mysteries have gathered around you, e.g....

- where did you come from?
- what is your real motivation and agenda?
- what secret are you keeping?
- are there really aliens living in the sun? *and*
- *why* does Big Lake have access to the seas of other worlds?

becoming a Hero

Picking up the **Hero** Issue means that your life is on course for a climactic confrontation with a terrible adversary. You're going to face dangerous enemies, perilous journeys, and ultimately you're going to have to overcome some horrible foe, who at least *seems* scarier than yourself, and probably at a large personal cost, in order to seize, rescue, learn, or win something precious.

Maybe it's larger-than-life. Maybe it's just life-sized. But as far as the stories of your life go, it's going to be epic.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► everything is under control
1► you've shown some heroism
2► you've decided to step up to the challenge
3► you've met your enemy, and it terrifies you
4► all seems lost—but wait...

[somehow you survive, and maybe even *win*, except that now...]

5► you face a final, impossible challenge

Heroic Challenges

Pretty soon you might find yourself putting everything on the line to...

- fight bullies
- conquer the Bleak Academy
- rescue somebody from Hell
- find the holy grail
- steal a dragon's treasure
- or challenge a Mystery you haven't even yet seen....

Hollow

Picking up the **Hollow** Issue means that you're acting like your life has meaning when, for you at least, it doesn't.

You've lost some of the sense of wonder; some of your empathy; some of your terror.

You don't have it in you to really *explore*.

This ends when the world, abhorring a vacuum, sends something at you from an unexpected direction and you get hurt, transformed, or otherwise forced to care.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► Your world's pretty interesting to you.
1► You'd rather have magic and color in your life but you're basically OK without.
2► Your life is kind of muted. Things don't matter as much any more.
3► You're actively cynical about the idea of anything mattering.
4► You don't really care at all any more.
5► You're actively self-destructive.

Being Hollow

You're on the road to trouble...

- hanging out with the wrong crowd
- being a bit too casual about making enemies
- being dismissive of magic and miracles
- thinking you know everything there is to know
- choosing a bland life over a vibrant one
- ignoring serious life issues and risks

Isolation

You'll pick up **Isolation** when you reach out to people only to realize that you're alone. At first you may accept it or even valorize it, but eventually you'll realize that you need to turn to somebody else for help.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► You're fine.
1► You're only really lonely when you're alone.
2► You're drifting a little bit apart from everyone.
3► You're becoming quieter, meeker, afraid to disturb the people around you.
4► Something's wrong. You need help. You need to reach out to somebody.
5► Some Bleak power has your soul, mind, or heart within its grip.

Being Isolated

You're drifting away...

- spending too much time in the places of the dead
- thinking of bleak and far-off things
- spending too much time alone
- turning to your imagination for company
- ignoring good chances to hang out with people
- pulling away because you don't want to burden people
- feeling bad about yourself; unloved

Illusion

If you're in the grip of an **Illusion** it means that there's something about your character that isn't being shown in-game.

There's something... *off*... about the events that we actually see.

It could just be that there's a piece missing. It could be that they're a doppelganger, a clone, or that you're reconstructing the story of what happened later on. There's a narrative or plotting trick here, in short, and this Issue builds up to its being revealed.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► Seeing is believing.
1► It's hard to believe, but this part of your life actually happened.
2► There's some illusion or trick here.
3► There's something that rings false about the threats you face here.
4► The trick is about to be revealed.
5► ...and it's going to change everything.

The Illusion

Are you...

- hallucinating some of this?
- secretly the cat's-paw of a villain?
- a body double?
- someone else's hallucination?
- being inserted into the story retroactively by a wish?
- yourself, time traveling from the future?
- *fighting* future-you, traveled back from the future?

Something to Deal With

Picking up a **Something to Deal With** Issue means that there's something nagging at you. There's something that you need to process. It's not so much that there's an *action* that you have to take, although there's usually a symbolic action at the end. It's that there's some *emotion* you need to recognize or something in your life you're doing wrong, and you need to bring that to the surface and deal with it.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► You don't have an Issue like that.
1► There's something nagging at you.
2► You feel unsettled and off, and you don't like it.
3► Things are *almost* fitting together, but you can't... quite... see it, yet.
4► You've put the pieces together. You know what you have to do.
5► You know what you have to do, and you even know why you haven't done it!

The Thing That You Must Deal With

There's something lurking in the background of your life that you haven't really faced. Do you have...

- old baggage, memories, and wounds to sort through?
- fears to acknowledge and face?
- a situation you don't know how to navigate?
- bad/wrongful ideas you need to realize that you're having, *or*
- errors that you have to notice that you're making?

Sickness

Picking up a **Sickness** Issue means that there's something wrong with you. There's something that has gotten *into* you that's changing who you are. You're getting weaker and weaker and it's getting stronger and stronger; but in the end, you'll have to show your true strength of character, either casting it out of you or learning how to live with and integrate it into your identity.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► You're reasonably healthy and strong.
1► You've been through a lot lately.
2► You're having a hard time hanging on to who you are.
3► You're weak, battered, and nearly broken.
4► You have to defy what's happening to you for the sake of who you are.
5► You draw on your wounds and transformations for a new strength and self-definition.

Your Sickness

You might pick up a **Sickness** if there's...

- something transforming you
- something possessing you
- something traumatizing you
- something corrupting you
- something messing with your head
- something messing with your body
- something taking away your confidence in yourself
- something ruining your life *or*
- something making it harder to be yourself

a Complex

A **Complex** is basically a set of bad ideas that you can't let go of. They make you feel bad but having them feels good. They drive you into a series of escalating bad decisions until your life falls apart in complete disaster and disarray.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► you know what you're doing.
1► you're trying too hard.
2► you're driven to distraction.
3► your life is falling apart, *but you have a plan.*
4► ...*that* wasn't a very good plan, now was it.
5► you face epic inevitable disaster, but may be saved by an equally epic grace.

Your Complex

You might wind up with a **Complex** if you're dealing with...

- a fight you can't win
- a problem you can't handle
- an obsession with schoolwork
- an obsession with shopping
- an obsession with some mystery *or*
- relationship troubles?

It Never Stops!

The **It Never Stops!** Issue is kind of like a Complex or obsession, except not all of the irrationality is in *you*—some of it is genuinely externalized into the world. Having this Issue means being caught in a fundamentally irrational situation...

Which means that even if you completely clear your head and get over your obsessions and neuroses, *irrational things will keep happening*. Fundamentally this means that you're being oppressed by an arbitrary and unjust power, but that power could be "genre," "the HG," or "the whims of your significant other" as easily as Malambruno or the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► You know what you're doing.
1► Things are... a little rough
2► Things are getting kind of messed up here
3► This is ridiculous, but at least it'll be over soon, one way or another
4► *How can this still be happening?!*
5► *...?!?!?!?!?!*

Absurd Challenges

Are you dealing with...

- ridiculous, ever-escalating fights and battles?
- absurd, ever-escalating romantic hijinks?
- horrifying, ever-escalating trainwrecks of a situation?
- or with something even worse?

Trust

Picking up the **Trust** Issue means that you've offered your trust to powers beyond your own. You've signed on with the Student Council or the Riders; bound yourself to a spirit, god, or totem; joined a club or a sports team with unnatural resources; sworn blood sisterhood or brotherhood with a powerful character; taken up with one of the shrine families of Fortitude; or started dating somebody scary and powerful enough to count. This Issue tracks the trust you give such things over the course of the current story.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► You've been pretty self-contained and self-assured thus far.
1► You've shown or acquired a connection to some power outside yourself.
2► You feel comfortable relying on such powers.
3► You're enjoying that connection, that relationship.
4► You relied on someone or something too much—it's going to betray or hurt you.
5► You've been betrayed and hurt but you're going to have to trust again anyway.

Trust

You'll pick up **Trust** by displaying the kind of excessively trusting and open nature that...

- makes you vulnerable to spiritual powers
- gives you an excess of faith in humanity
- lets your family control your life and identity
- lets your peers push you around
- binds you too tightly to a figure of some power or importance, *or*
- that makes you too certain in yourself and in what you believe.

The Name "Trust"

The name might undersell this Issue a little. I could have called it, maybe even should have called it, "playing with fire" or "spending a lot of time using rituals" or "the world is really weird around you" or "you're OK with the company of angels, gods, horrors, and great and terrible things."

Whatever.

It's just, it doesn't feel like that to you.

If it did, you wouldn't have this Issue. If you gave all this stuff its proper respect and fear, then this wouldn't be an Issue. If it *felt* like the kind of stuff that you should be getting Trust from, then... you wouldn't be getting Trust.

So for you, and this is the reason I'm giving it this name, it's just *Trust*.

Your faith that the world is good. That you know what you're doing. That things are going to be OK.

Vice

Picking up a **Vice** Issue means that you're embracing something that you probably shouldn't be doing. You're treating something that's actually kind of bad for you as if it were a Calling. This produces progressively more phantasmagoric, epic, and staged devotional scenes until eventually the world forces you to resist temptation and stand up for the things you *actually* believe in.

So if you're 100% genuinely convinced that your Vice *is* a good thing, that booze or slacking or working for the Bleak Academy or whatever is up there with friendship and honesty and hard work on the list of virtues, don't take a Vice! Explain to the HG how you feel and take it as a Calling instead.

Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► You haven't shown any stand-out vices for a while.
1► You're walking a troubled or risky course.
2► You're justifying it to yourself.
3► This is screwing up your life. Wait. No. Let's say, "spicing up" your life. Oh yeah.
4► You've got to shape up; somebody needs you.
5► You've got to shape up *anyway*, but your vice is what gives you the key to save the day.

Something You Shouldn't Be Doing

You may pick up the **Vice** Issue if you've gotten into a habit of...

- truly excessive slacking
- drinking, drugs, or smoking
- working too hard, or for the wrong people
- lying, cheating, or being cruel
- gambling or street racing
- collecting way too much yarn
- ...or even just staying up half the night playing games!

Over Your Head

You'll pick up **(in) Over Your Head** when you stumbled into a situation with more going on than you can easily understand and resolve:

You're trying to learn or understand something that confuses you. You've walked into a morass of secrets, lies, and hidden motivations. You've gotten involved, intentionally or accidentally, in a complex conflict with people of good faith on both sides. You've found yourself in unknown territory, dotted with riddles and confusion.

There isn't a single great mystery behind it all, most likely; or if there is, you don't know it yet. There's just a lot of little *stuff* that you need to figure out.

You get more and more confused, more and more lost, or deeper and deeper in over your head until finally everything *clicks* and you understand exactly what you have to do and why you're just who this situation needs.

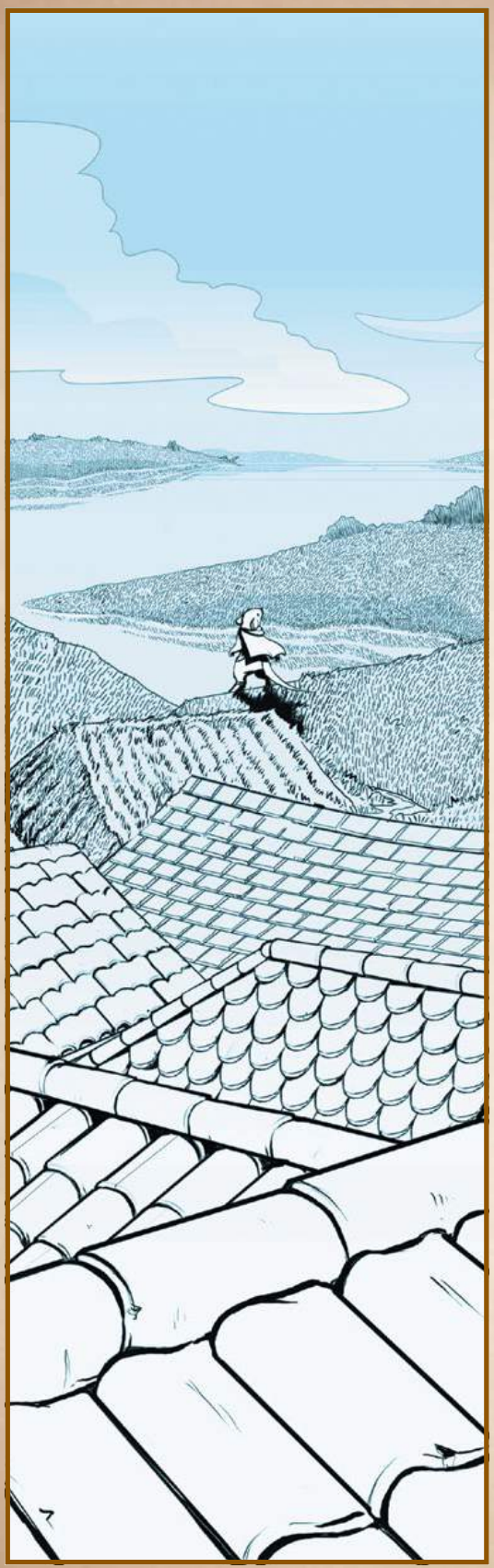
Here's a simplified form of the Issue and its progression:

► You're comfortable with the world and you understand how things are.
1► You're confused—something isn't as it should be.
2► You feel betrayed—something you *relied on* isn't what it should be.
3► You were *wrong*—and your misunderstandings have put something important in danger.
4► You have an *idea* about what to do and how things fit together.
5► You've just had the *best* idea. Seriously. *This rules*.

In Over Your Head

You've been stumbling across complicated and problematic things, e.g.,

- shadows of mysteries and old guilts hanging over peoples' head
- prophesies
- people you're starting to fall in love with
- things you're supposed to be studying that you just don't get
- mysterious organizations hanging out around their School
- complex political situations *and/or*
- guns inexplicably prominent on the mantel...



Malambruno

The roofs of Notting Rather roll together into grassy hills; the chimneys fade from brick to sod. The gutters have stopped up to form a lake: the Gutter-Lake of Forms.

There, past Nowhere Way in Notting Rather, Malambruno, which is named Hatred, sleeps.

There, in that fine and pretty place, it melds itself into the shingles and the trees; the river and the lake; the hills, the grass, and even the sky and stars. It is made indistinguishable from the world around it and the scent of its musk is sweet.

Sleep not on Malambruno; breathe not its musk. It will make you other than yourself.

It will fill you with the seeds of its wickedness; it will give you a monstrous form; and you will have no one to complain to but yourself, o human child, for you slept on Malambruno, in Notting Rather, past Nowhere Way, and by the Gutter-Lake of Forms.

—from ***The Mysteries, for a Human Child***, by Filimer Augustine

Issues in Play

This section's here to tell you what to do when you have an Issue at a certain level. The general instructions equivocate between being IC and OOC; the card, on the other hand, is always[23] meant to be an IC representation of the influence of the Issue on your character's thoughts.

You don't have to agree with it. It doesn't have to *be* your thoughts.

But it's what the Issue is presenting to you, in your character's head, roughly as often as you look at or remember the card.

At some points during the process the instructions might ask you to "tell yourself" things, or to tell things to the HG and the group. If there's going to be a long pause before you can put these ideas into action, make sure to write any key conclusions down!

23 With one arguable exception.

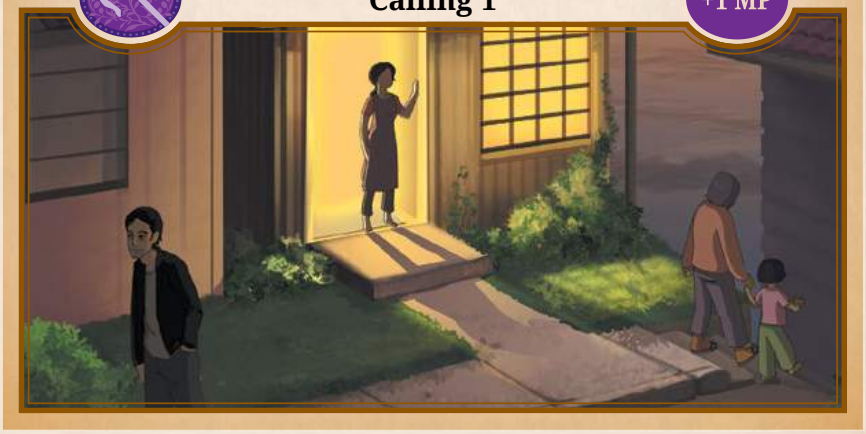
Calling

Calling 1-2

You feel like something's left undone...

You feel like there's something you need to do, but you're not sure what. You've forgotten, or you haven't figured it out yet, or all the pieces haven't come together yet for you to act.

Calling 1 +1 MP

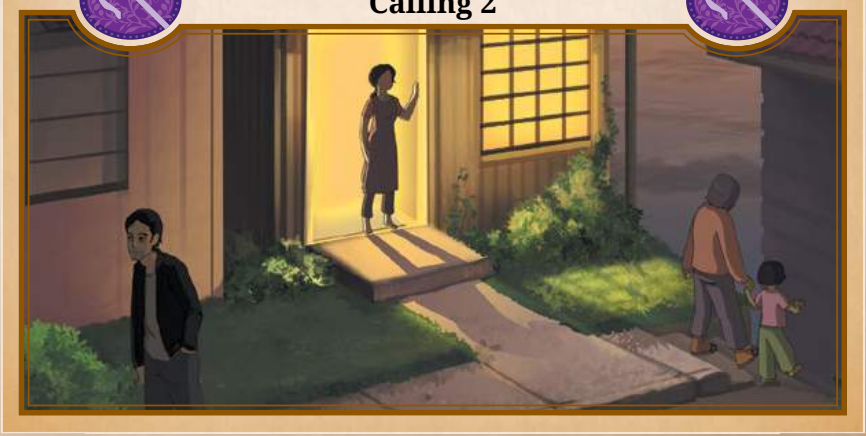


There's something wrong somewhere.
You feel like there's something you need to do, something you've forgotten or haven't figured out.

Maybe if you talked about it to your friends?

Took a second look at your priorities and your routine?

Calling 2



Calling 3

It's like you're finally starting to wake up. It's like you're rising above the straits of your ordinary life. Your heart is speaking to you. The world is speaking to you. You can't understand it quite yet—

So while you have this card, don't close your eyes to things. Not to anything.

You have to be alert, open, and mindful until you understand what the world or your heart is telling you to do.



Calling 4

Just hit level 4? OK. *Your path is clear.*

You know what's wrong with the world. You know what hasn't been done. You know what task has been left unattended, or what wound has been left to rot. You know

- what you needed to do, and didn't;
- what somebody else needed to do, and didn't;
- what you did, that you oughtn't've;
- what was done, that shouldn't have been;
- what needed to be honored and trusted, that wasn't;
- what needed to be fought, that wasn't; *or*
- what needed to happen, somehow, only, it never did.

Take a moment and tell yourself what that was.

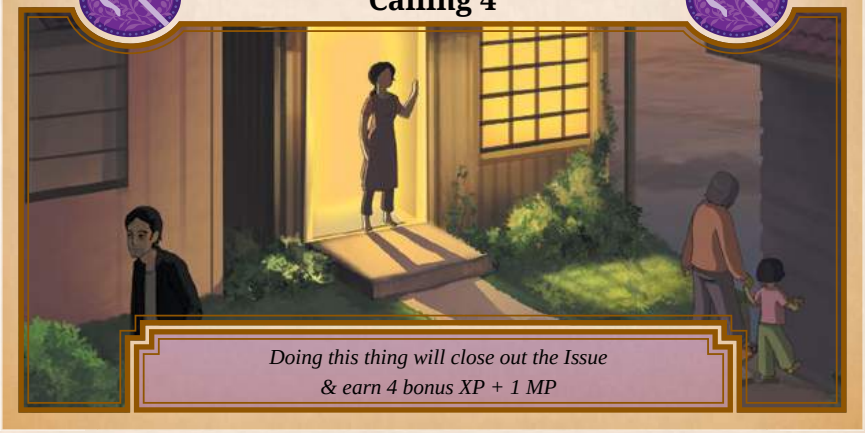
Then tell yourself what you have to do, now that things have gone this far, to try to make it right.

You know what went wrong with the world

&

You know what it is you have to do.

Calling 4



Doing this thing will close out the Issue
& earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP

Calling 5

Just hit level 5? **This Calling is harder, and scarier, and more important than you thought**.

It's not going to be easy. Maybe it wasn't going to be anyway, but now it's definitely not.

Now it's going to be scary, and it's going to be hard, and you're going to have to do it anyway, because it's the thing that's needing done.

Remind yourself about what's wrong with the world, and why.

(Or has it changed?... but you'll have to go forward, with the new path, even if it has.)

Tell yourself again what went wrong with the world. Tell yourself what you've got to do to fix it. Tell yourself why you're scared.

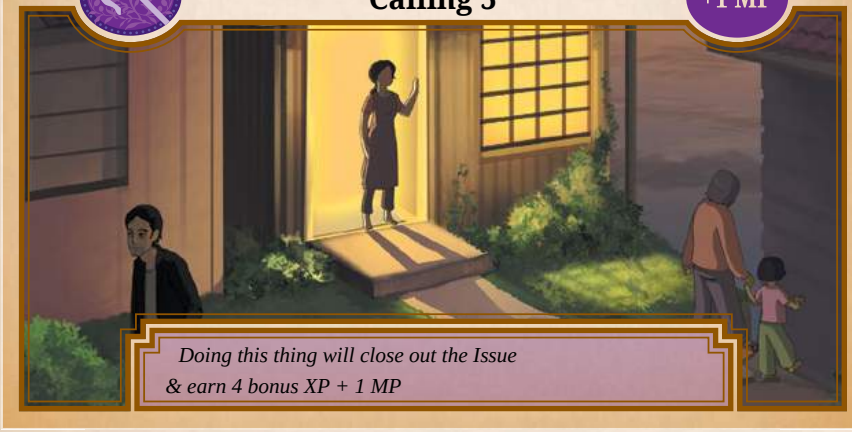
Then face forward, find your opportunity for action, and do what must be done.

You know what went wrong

&

You know what it is you have to do.

Calling 5 **+1 MP**



Doing this thing will close out the Issue
& earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP

Complex

Complex 1

You're trying a little too hard...

Sometimes you get a little bit too excited, distracted, or weird.

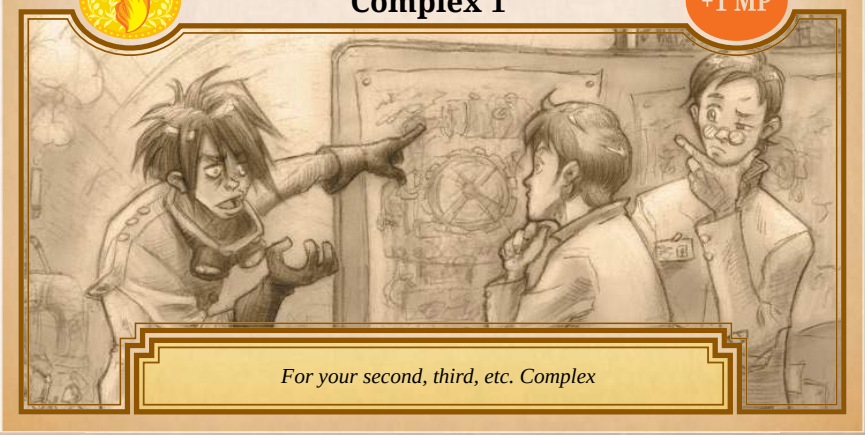
Complex 1 +1 MP



Sometimes, *even when not indulging your other Complexes*, you get a little bit too excited, distracted, or weird.

Is there something else going on?

Complex 1' +1 MP



For your second, third, etc. Complex

Complex 2

Just hit level 2? Time to decide what your Complex is about.

Like, for instance:

- what if you fail at life?
- what if you don't get all As at School?
- what if people find out what you've done?
- what if somebody is eating your soul?
- what if you're accidentally eating someone *else's* soul?
- you don't look good enough
- you're not popular enough
- you want so much stuff and can't afford it all
- why can't everyone understand how important this mystery is?
- why can't everyone understand the importance of eating vegan?
- why can't everyone understand your deep connection to Mr. Spock?
- why can't everyone understand how important it is to *love?*

Pick something. One of these or something else. Or make the HG pick something.

At the next chance, tell everyone—the HG, yourself, and by OOC communication or IC emote, the players—what it is. Even if you don't want to! You're too stressed and obsessed to keep this an actual secret.

There's something you are *not doing enough about*.

You have to try harder. Don't give up!

Say something like that to yourself, or even out loud, right now. "I have to try harder on *[[this thing, whatever it is.]]* It'll be OK if I work harder."

Complex 2



Complex 3

What's your plan?

It wasn't as easy as you thought. You've been trying really hard but you feel even further from success than you did when you started. Maybe your standards got higher. Maybe your need got dire. Maybe you're just falling behind. But you can't stop here.

It's time to start pushing harder.

Figure out a plan. Figure out a magnificent, glorious, crazed plan. Then do it. And then the next plan. And then the next plan, until you get to Complex 4, when everything...

...will probably work out OK.

Here's your Issue

...but you have a plan. Did it fail? Come up with a new plan. Keep going. You just have to make it to Complex 4 and everything will definitely,

definitely

work out OK.

Complex 3

+1 MP



Complex 4

Your Complex hit level 4? OK, *Complex 3 kind of lied to you*.

A little.

Things have not worked out OK. Not yet.

So...

Think about what you've been doing wrong. Think about where you could go from there. Figure out what, in that vein, you absolutely *can't* afford to do. It made sense so far, but you have to stop before you do *that*. It will lead to total disaster. Figure out what that thing that will lead to total disaster is.

Tell yourself what that is. Heck, tell the HG and the other players.

Then realize, as you say it, that *wait*. That isn't necessarily a total disaster. That is... if you do it right, if you're lucky, if the world will smile on you just this once

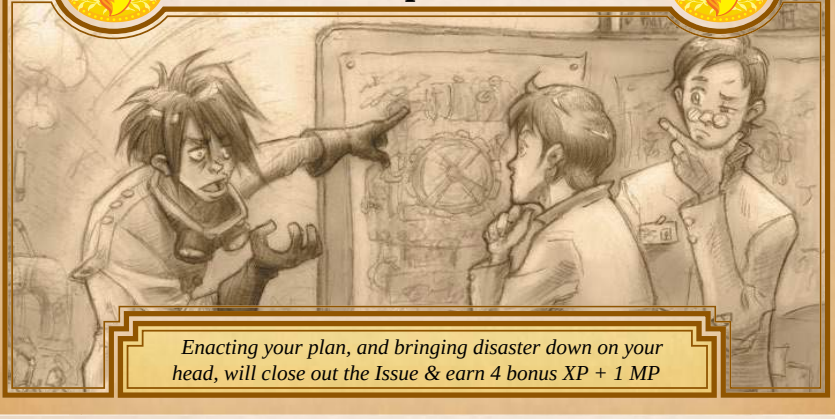
...why, that could actually *work*.

Here's your Issue

...but you have a plan.

...come on, world, just this once, just let it *work!*

Complex 4



Enacting your plan, and bringing disaster down on your head, will close out the Issue & earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP

Complex 5

Your Complex hit level 5? OK, *you can see your doom a'comin' like the headlights of a train.*

What happened with that last plan? Did you not get the chance to pull it off before the stakes got higher? Or did it actually *work*, was it actually *a good idea like you thought*, only the world is so unfair that you have to top it now with something else?

Anyway.

You know what you have to do. You are committed. There is no turning back now. You have to kick it up a notch.

Tell the HG and the players what you absolutely, positively can't let happen. Tell them what you're doing all of this to try to prevent. Then explain your *new, improved* plan to make that happen. Er, well, not happen. You know.

Yeah.

That plan sounds good. It is *just crazy enough to work*.

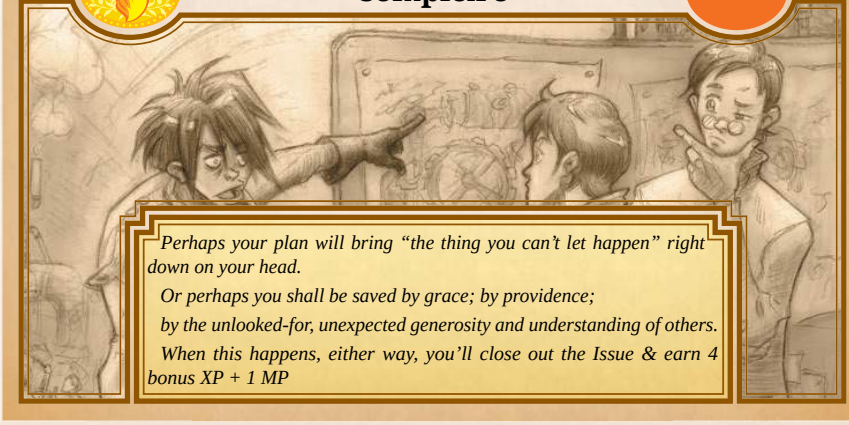
You know what you absolutely, positively can't let happen.

You have a new, improved plan.

It'll work. It will work. It's your last shot. *It has to.*

Complex 5

+1 MP



Perhaps your plan will bring "the thing you can't let happen" right down on your head.

Or perhaps you shall be saved by grace; by providence;

by the unlooked-for, unexpected generosity and understanding of others.

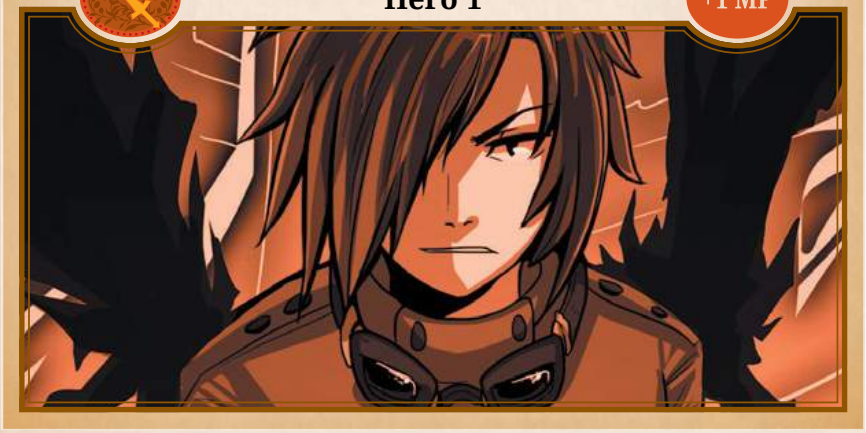
When this happens, either way, you'll close out the Issue & earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP

Hero 1-2

You've shown some heroism...

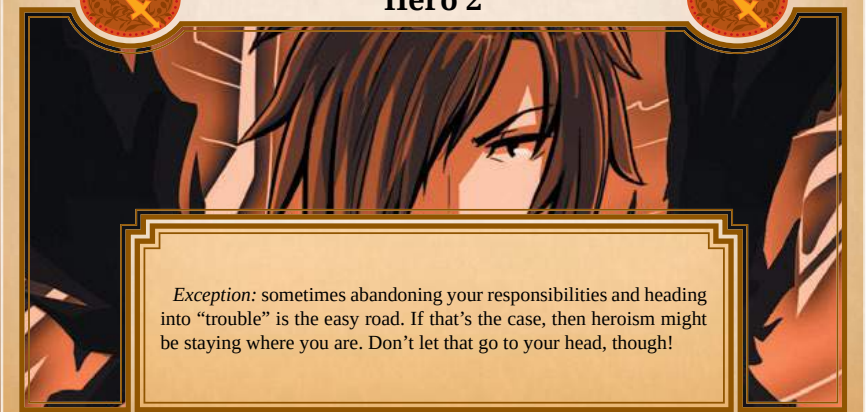
There's more to you than this. You haven't shown your full strength and power yet.

Hero 1 +1 MP



You're a hero. When there's trouble, head in that direction.

Hero 2



Exception: sometimes abandoning your responsibilities and heading into "trouble" is the easy road. If that's the case, then heroism might be staying where you are. Don't let that go to your head, though!

Hero 3

Level 3, huh? *Time to name your fear.*

You are facing something that terrifies you. Identify it. Name it.

Is it

- an enemy or hazard already encountered in the game?
- something that your enemies might do to hurt you?
- some principle or possibility that the threats you've seen represent?
- some weakness in your heart?

Don't think too hard about this if it's obvious. Like, for instance, if you've been fighting Typhon (pg. 225), just say "Typhon." Don't try to pretend you're not scared. Face your fear. Don't look for a deeper meaning. Typhon is scary!

But if there's no really dangerous enemy that's shown their face, maybe the thing that terrifies you is "my best friend getting hurt" or "some shadowy force I suspect behind all these disasters" or even just "pain" or "disappointing everyone."

Whatever it is that you fear, you can't beat it.

Not now.

Name something you can do to hold it at bay for a little while. Explain how you can get a temporary, tactical victory.

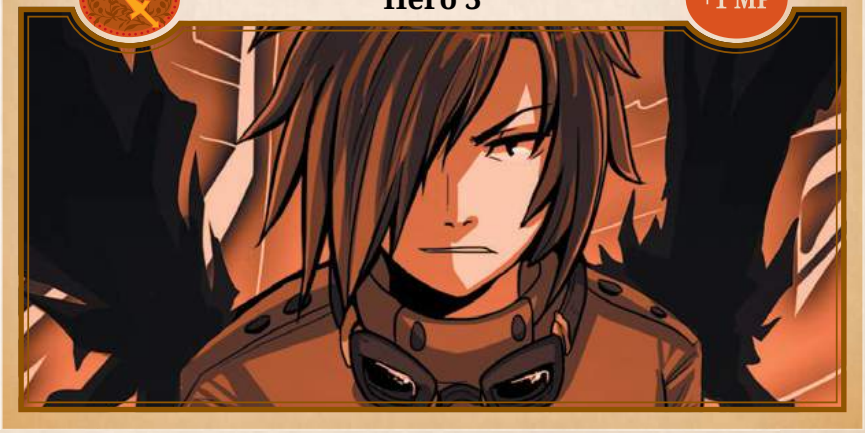
Tell the HG, at least, what the enemy is and what you can do about it.

You have named your enemy—

_____

—and you are afraid.

Hero 3 +1 MP



Hero 4

All is lost. Tell the HG that.

All is lost, or all is about to be. You're about to have something horrible and unfair happen.

Either you're about to

- *lose*, and lose hard;
- face the need to sacrifice yourself to get what you want; *or*
- confront your enemy in a pyrrhic battle, where you win but you go down fighting or some circumstantially plausible variant thereof.

The HG can pick which of these happens based on the situation at hand. You should probably cooperate in the latter two cases with helping that story come about.

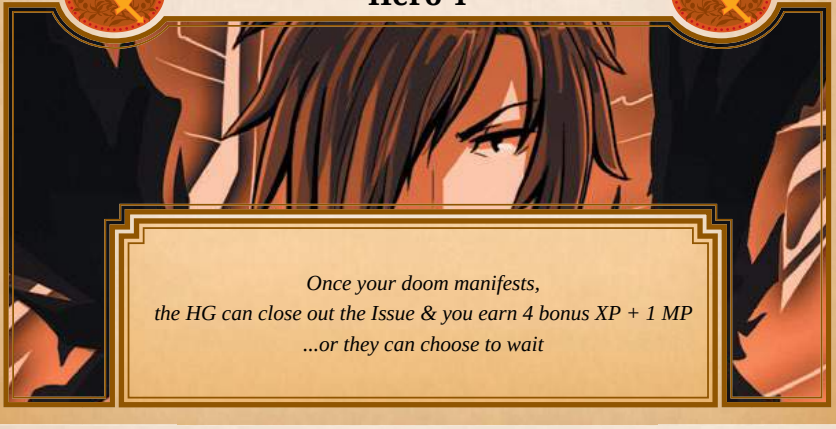
Your enemy is

_____

and

all is lost.

Hero 4



Once your doom manifests,
the HG can close out the Issue & you earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP
...or they can choose to wait

Hero 4: A Dirty Secret

Here's a dirty little secret.

"All is lost," right? That's what the card says.

But... there's still hope. Sometimes, sometimes, when it seems like everything is lost, when it seems like you're doomed, or even already dead? Sometimes it's not that way.

There is still hope.

Hero 5

The hardest part is yet to come.

Tell the HG that.

Tell them—look. You need to claw your way to victory here. You need to climb back out of the darkness.

You need to win what you were fighting for. Because this part? This part where you thought that all was lost? (Were they?)

This isn't the hard part.

The hard part is what happens next.

If you haven't won big yet, the HG needs to help make sure that you do, that you win something big in the vein of what you thought you were after; they need to *give* you that...

And then they need to throw at you the biggest threat so far.

When you realize just how royally screwed you really are,
close out the Hero Issue & get 4 XP + 1 MP.



Hollow 1-3

Things don't matter as much to you any more....

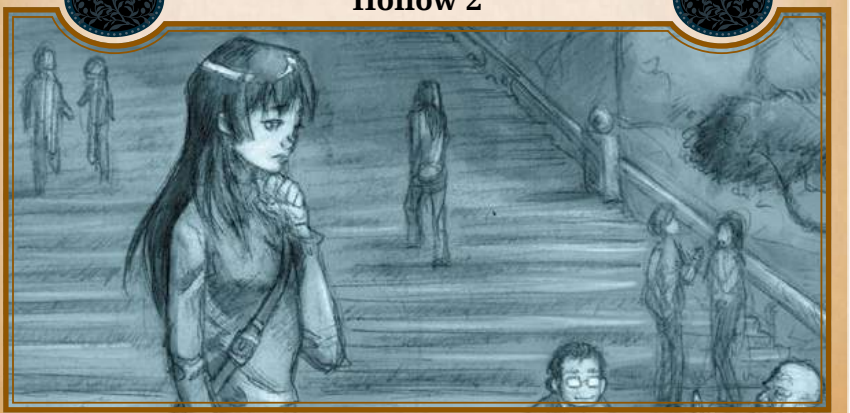
Who are you, really?

Hollow 1 +1 MP



Would anyone even notice if you were gone?

Hollow 2



It's OK if all there are is shadows. You can decide to care about shadows.

It's OK if you're not real, if this isn't real,

if this is all you get.

If, I mean, if...

I mean, that's allowed to be OK.

Hollow 3 **+1 MP**



Hollow 4

Just hit level 4? OK. *Nothing bad can possibly happen any more.*

Tell the HG that.

Like, “No, seriously, the card says that I no longer have to worry about the minor threats in this setting, or, like, seatbelts or responsible drinking or who I hang out with and stuff. Because you? You are not my Mom.”

Or... well, something to that effect.

You’re safe now! All those little things, whatever. Worrying about that stuff is just the kind of precaution taken by wimpy players who don’t have the courage of their convictions. It’s just an imaginary world anyway. They’re not your Mom!

...unless they are, in which case you should probably clarify that they’re just not your *game* Mom. Otherwise they might become upset.



Hollow 5

Just hit level 5? You can take that as proof that Hollow 4 was right.

You're still here, aren't you? Nothing bad happened, did it?

I don't know if it's because you're secretly God Almighty incarnate in the form of whatever, or if you're a robot with no real emotions that nobody can therefore really hurt, or if it's that all the magic and wonder in the game is just paper tigers and illusions.

I don't know, in short, if it's because you *don't* care, or because you *shouldn't* care, or because you just *don't have to*.

But frankly, at this point, you'd kind of *like* something to hurt you. You kind of want that. It would... I mean, it would *mean* something.

You know?

Maybe it would let you feel.

Haha. *Licks lips, nervously.* Haha. Yeah.



Illusion 1

The ironic thing is that at this point, the “illusion,” if there is one, is the unbelievability itself. The stuff that earned you this Issue?

It really happened.

It just *seems* like the kind of thing that never could.



Illusion 2

There’s some kind of trick here...

There’s something wrong here.

Don’t try to name it yet. Just... watch for it. Catalogue the little details that don’t match up, the things that don’t seem to make sense.

Listen to people’s narratives for things.

Where are they lying to you?

Don’t trust the HG’s descriptions. I mean, mostly trust them. They’re mostly good. But somewhere there is a single deceit.

Illusion 2



Illusion 3

Just hit level 3?

You receive an immediate Serious wound: *something is not right*.

See the wound system on pg. 126-128—

But in practice, that means you're going to want to choose one of the following:

- a +1 Tool on actions when you're playing up the wound;
- a level 1 Bond related to the wound;
- a level 1 Affliction related to the wound; *or,*
- if you and the HG can quickly agree on how it works, a related level 2-3 Magical or Superior Skill.

If you know what's going on, if you know what's wrong, then base the wound on that.

Otherwise...

There is a story of a woman whose face was cut with swords, over and over, and she took no scarring; a torch was thrust burning into her stomach, but it just went out; she ate nothing, nor drank she anything, and yet she did not starve;

For she was simply the reflection of a woman standing over the water, and not even a true woman, but a shape of straw.

If you don't know what's going on yet, then the wound boils down to: "I am merely an image on the water."

The Serious wound remains as long as you have Issue 3, and not a moment more or less.



Illusion 4

Just hit level 4?

Heal the wound from Illusion 3, then re-inflict it; it's scaled up now. It is *Deadly*.

If you must, rewrite it, and change the power that you receive.

The Deadly wound remains as long as you have Issue 4, and not a moment more or less.

The *skandhas* arise from our sense-perceptions. The... heaps and piles of our ideas.

We know things and, knowing them, deceive ourselves:

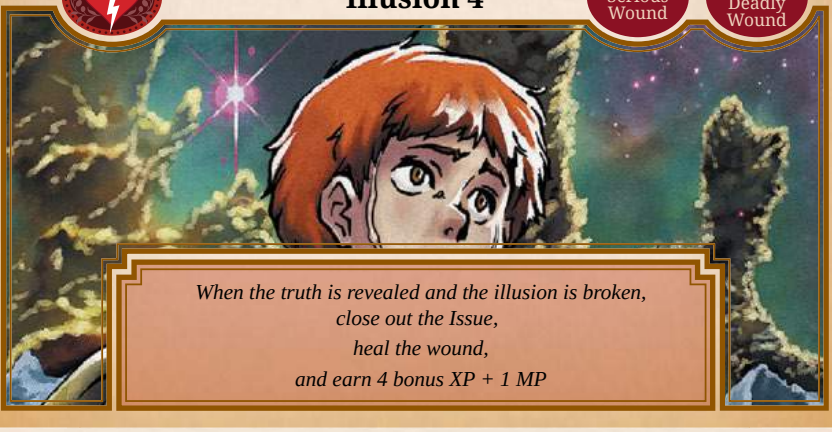
And become ignorant.

If you wish to lie to someone, show them a truth. Then they will draw their own conclusions, and be deceived.

Illusion 4

-1 Serious Wound

+1 temporary Deadly Wound



When the truth is revealed and the illusion is broken,
close out the Issue,
heal the wound,
and earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP

Illlusion 5

Just hit level 5?

You are no longer playing your character. Instead, there is only an illusion.

Choose:

- if you and the HG can quickly agree, you are now playing something that is not your character, but with an established or easily-created build;
- you are now hanging out and kibitzing for a few scenes. You may earn emotion XP or claim quest bonus XP but other than that you are not in play.

You are no longer playing your character, so this card is OOC.

Talk to the HG about a time frame—something that works in the game, something that puts pressure on them but doesn't screw them over. Single-player game? 10 minutes. Crowd of 8 players with a lot of stuff going on? 60-90 minutes. Forum game? Maybe a week and a half. Forum game where you're having fun playing your alternate character? It could be as much as two months.

But there *is* a time frame, and since you're OOC it's even a RL one.

A clock is ticking.

Something shattering is going to happen to the illusion of your character, and your own character is going to return, when that clock's metaphorical alarm goes off. At that point, you'll also get 4 XP and an MP and the Issue'll resolve.

Illusion 5

-1 Deadly Wound | +1 Defeated | +1 MP



Isolation 1-3

You're drifting a little bit apart from everyone....

You are not alone. You're not lost. You're not messed up.

Are you?

Isolation 1 +1 MP



Sometimes you think people don't really get you.

Like, you're not there; like, you don't matter;
like, you're a ghost.

Isolation 2



You're surrounded by beautiful people. Beautiful things.

And then there's you.

It's stupid, isn't it? To feel so insecure. But you're just not cool. Not like them.

Isolation 3

+1 MP



Isolation 4

Just hit level 4? OK.

Something bad is about to happen.

You've been pulling away. You realize that. You've let yourself get more and more separated from the world.

Tell the HG who you most want to protect—which of the PCs and important NPCs you've been trying hardest not to burden. Tell the HG who you most don't want to hurt or burden; and that that's *why,* that not burdening them is *why,* you sometimes choose to bear things alone.

Then admit to the HG, "But I'm going to have to bother someone. I can't do this on my own."

The HG will arrange a scene, soon, where you're stuck—where there's such a good excuse to ask one of them, to reach out to them, to talk to them, that if you don't, you'll have to admit you're too screwed up for words. If it's not obvious, the HG'll even tell you when it's that scene.

Tell the HG that.

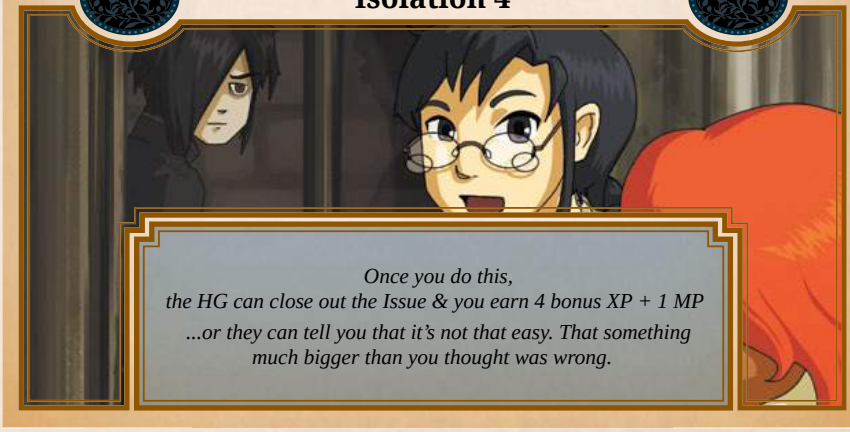
"You're going to have to set something up where it's pretty much obvious that I should talk to them, ask them, burden one of them, or whatever. And make sure that I know."

It's so embarrassing!

You can't handle everything alone. You're going to have to be a burden to someone. Dang it.

The HG will give you an opportunity to reach out...

Isolation 4



Once you do this,
the HG can close out the Issue & you earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP
...or they can tell you that it's not that easy. That something much bigger than you thought was wrong.

Isolation 5

It wasn't like you thought.

This situation—it wasn't like you thought. It was a lot worse, maybe, and maybe in some ways better. If you've hit Isolation 5, that means that you *weren't* just being neurotic when you isolated yourself. Either you've been deceived, betrayed, and the people around you weren't who you thought they were—or you're under some kind of magical effect or curse, something that's dragging you away from everybody.

You reach out to someone, and they don't answer you, and there's this terrifying emptiness in their expression or in the way you feel.

To fix it would take a miracle; it lasts *until* there's a miracle, until someone or something reaches down into your life, all unexpectedly, and saves you—or until the breaks between sessions whittle down your Isolation Issue to something reasonable, I suppose.



It Never Stops!

It Never Stops! 1-2

Things are... a little rough right now.

There's some over-the-top stuff going on.
It makes it harder to just relax and be yourself.
But you can handle it. You can stay cool.
You can just, you know, help a little, or be a little rebellious or snarky, or explain carefully why you don't want to be involved,
and then you're done, bam, in, out, simple,
and you can go back to being you.

It Never Stops! 1 +1 MP



OK, maybe you've made some commitments.
Maybe they're getting a little tough to keep.
But if you just stay focused, you know, stick to what really matters, and keep moving forward,
you'll totally resolve the whole thing soon.
Everything is going to be fine.

It Never Stops! 2



It Never Stops! 3

Just made it to level 3? *Phew! It's almost over.*

OK, so maybe the earlier levels of **It Never Stops!** said things would be fine. And maybe things are not, in fact, fine. But there are some decision points coming up soon. This all *has* to end there. You're going to win soon, and if you don't win, you're going to lose.

Soon as you can, figure them out. Tell them to yourself and probably the HG.

Like:

- "After I fight this guy, it's over, right? I mean, either I win, or I'm dead/beaten."
- "After this test, it's over, right?"
- "I'm going to risk it all on this one last chance to reach the Headmaster's heart." *Or*
- "At least once I finish this Malambruno-repelling ritual, it's done."

Yeah.

Pick some stuff like that.

I mean, it sucks that things were this hard, and it sucks that you *could* still *lose*, but at least, you know, if you lose you lose, and if you win you win, and then you're free.



It Never Stops! 4

Just made it to level 4? *I guess that settled it...*

But wait.

Maybe you know this already. Maybe you're just finding it out as you read. But the HG's not going to let you off so easily.

Did you fail? You're going to get another chance.

Did you succeed? That was just the *second*-to-last boss. Maybe even third-to-last.

Or did you not even make it to the end before things unexpectedly got worse?

I'm going to be straight with you here. Your job isn't to win or lose. Not any more. Your job right now is to accept that all this has changed you. It's changed what you want, it's changed who you are, it's changed what you're fighting for.

Figure out how you're different. Tell yourself how you're different. It doesn't have to be a big deal. It's usually not a big deal. It can be like a quarter or a fifth of a big deal, you know? It can take a fair few runs at this Issue before you're all that different as a person. But it matters.

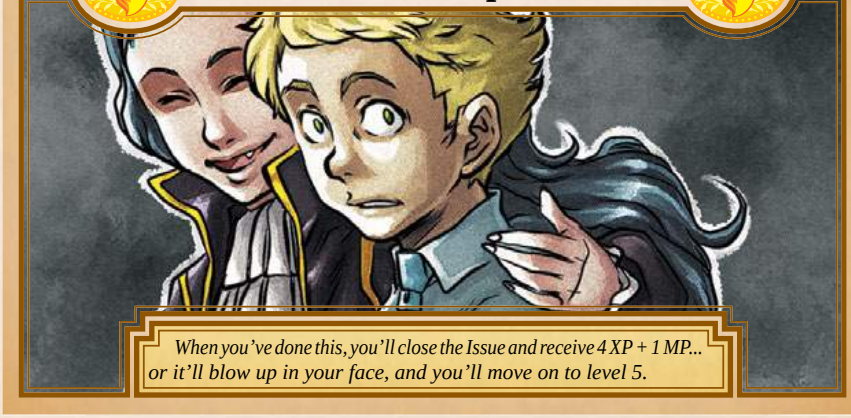
It's *a* deal.

Figure out how to recognize, validate, formalize, or even celebrate your change. Tell yourself and the HG what kind of scene you'll need.

You've changed.

You need to mark and express that change somehow so you can get your head around it.

It Never Stops! 4



When you've done this, you'll close the Issue and receive 4 XP + 1 MP... or it'll blow up in your face, and you'll move on to level 5.

It Never Stops! 4: A Note of Explanation

Here's how trying to mark and express that change might blow up in your face.

You go and tell a friend, "you know, all this time, I've been fighting for you and telling myself I didn't want to; but, you know, I shouldn't think that way. Because you? You're worth fighting for."

And then your friend says, "Surprise! I'm the final boss!"

It Never Stops! 5

Just made it to level 5? *It never stops!*

You were wrong. Whatever you thought about how you've changed? That was wrong. It's not that easy, that comprehensible. There's something much darker or much brighter going on. It's probably even outright supernatural.

Used to the supernatural?

Then it's practically *eschatological!*

Talk to the HG.

Throw them some ideas. Get some back.

Figure out what kind of scene will show how you've *really* changed, and then go play it.

You've changed. *Really* changed.

You are not who you've been.

You need to do something to mark and express that change so you can get your head around it.

It Never Stops! 5 +1 MP



When you've done this, you'll close this Issue and receive 4 XP + 1 MP.

Mystery

Mystery 1-2

A hint of something weird and mysterious....

There's some mystery about you, or some mystery that you'll have to face. What is it?

Mystery 1 +1 MP



A lot of what's going on with you and around you—it's all connected. It's all connected back to this one mystery. Is there something that you're keeping secret? Or is it something that's being kept from *you*?

Mystery 2



Mystery 3

You want to rip the truth out from where it lies—whether that's the world, or your own heart—and show it to people. But can they understand? Is it even *possible?*

To move forward
look for omens and signs;
listen to stories &
trust your own reactions to events

Mystery 3 **+1 MP**



Mystery 4

Just hit level 4? OK. *You stand at the doorway of revelation.*

You don't necessarily know the answer to the mystery. But you know what answering it would *mean*. You know what part of your life will never be the same—in a small way, or a big one—once the mystery is revealed.

Tell yourself what that is. Or, if you don't have time right now, tell yourself as soon as you get a chance and you're looking at this Issue.

It's that. Right?

Now tell yourself what you have to do to reveal the mystery. What's the step you can take that will bring it to light. Do you have to share a secret with your friends?

Do you have to open a doorway you've been dreaming about?

Do you have to break into Lee Scathing's lab at night?



Mystery 5

Did you hit level 5 before you could close this Issue? OK. *This is a deeper mystery than you thought.*

It's not just a mundane thing. Maybe you already knew that. But, either way, you now understand that it most definitely is not.

This is a spiritual thing. This is a numinous thing. This is, at the least, something that's a little bit beyond words and understanding. It's like love, maybe, if we're talking about things that aren't necessarily supernatural—you can say the word love, you can explain things by talking about love, but in the end the only way to understand something like love is to take in the whole story of it and let it osmose slowly into your mind and heart.

Tell yourself again what answering the mystery will mean. Has it changed?

Tell yourself again what you have to do. Has that?

And whether that's changed or not, tell yourself something about why you think you cannot understand—a few private words to yourself on what you think it means that here is something that defies simple understanding. Tell yourself what it means that this is a deep mystery, and think about how to *share* that wonder with the other players in play.



Over Your Head 1-2

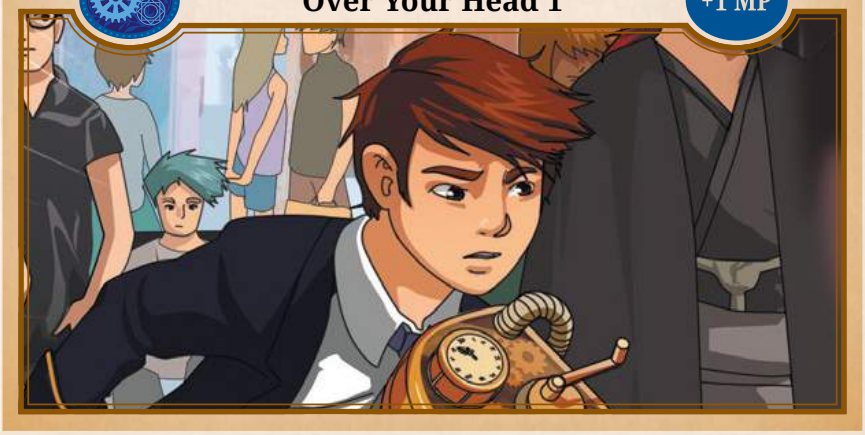
Something isn't right....

You're starting to get a sense of what's going on here. You're building a picture in your head, even if it's hard to put it into words. But there's a problem.

Something isn't right.

There's something here that just... doesn't... fit.

Over Your Head 1 +1 MP



No. No, no, *no*.

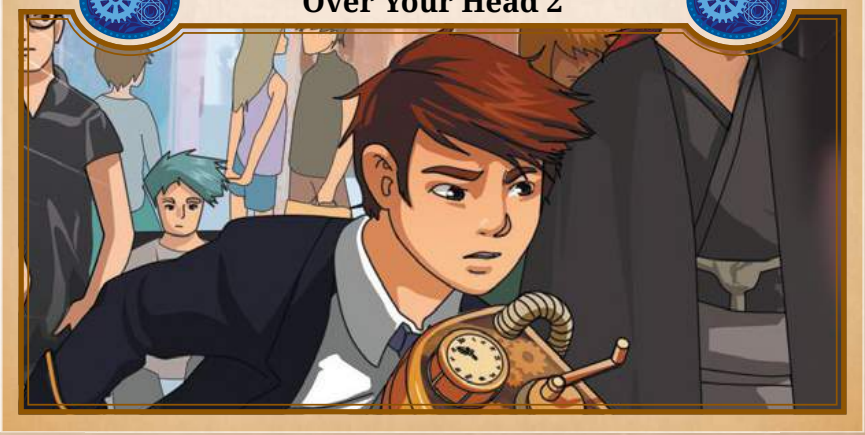
There's something you've forgotten. Something you've overlooked. Something that isn't right. This isn't what's supposed to be happening.

Look around you.

This isn't right. This isn't what's supposed to be happening. It's a betrayal. Even if things *look* like they're going well, *this isn't right*. You're going to have to figure out what to do, what to change, who to trust—

And fast, because your instincts are warning you that this could all go *wrong*.

Over Your Head 2



Over Your Head 3

Horror. Shock.

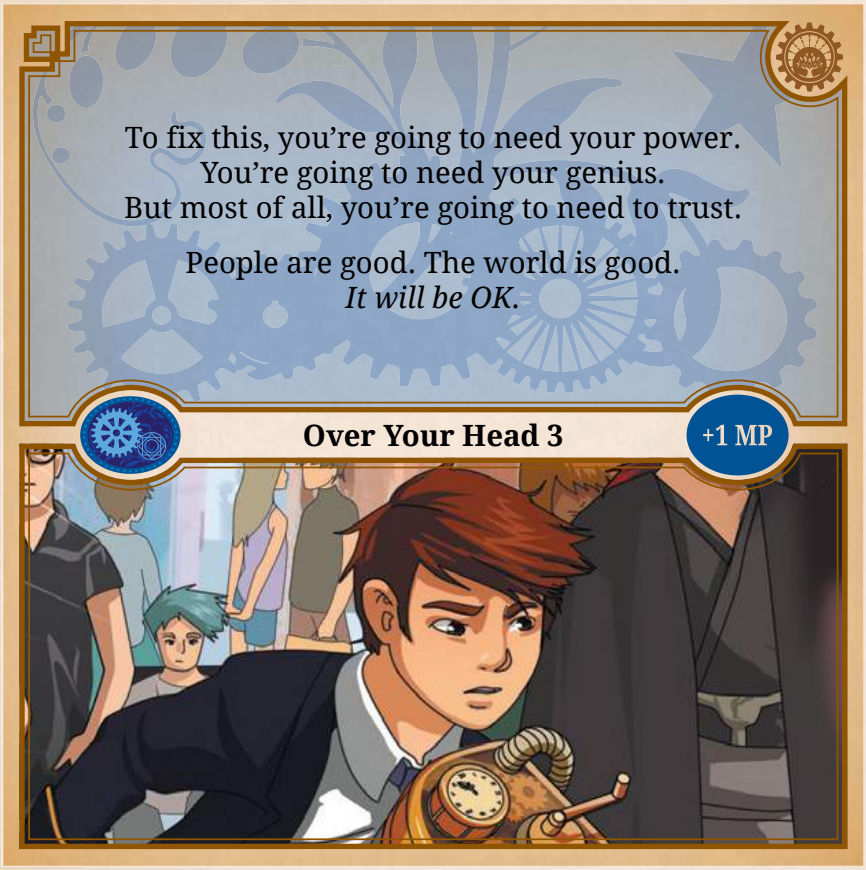
You've made a terrible mistake. You've trusted the wrong person or the wrong theory. You've made the wrong decision.

You've *misunderstood*, and there's going to be a terrible price. If you don't do something, if you don't think this through, if you don't come up with something, there's going to be a terrible price, and it's going to be your fault.

Look around you. Look at the terrible prices that are in the cards.

Which one of them is your fault? Why? Are you sure?

What have you forgotten? What's slipped past you? What aren't you doing, what aren't you getting, where are you failing *still?*



Over Your Head 4

Just hit level 4? OK. *You have an idea.*

You know how everything ties together. You know how you can *make* everything tie together. You know what you have to do. Does it

- bring in something that was foreshadowed but forgotten?
- bring in several such things?
- test your courage and faith by trusting something—
  - yourself?
  - someone else?
  - a theory?

  —that you didn't dare to trust before?
- give someone else a chance to shine or prove themselves?
- show something that everybody already knew about the game in a new, interesting light?

It doesn't have to, but those are the key signs of a brilliant idea!

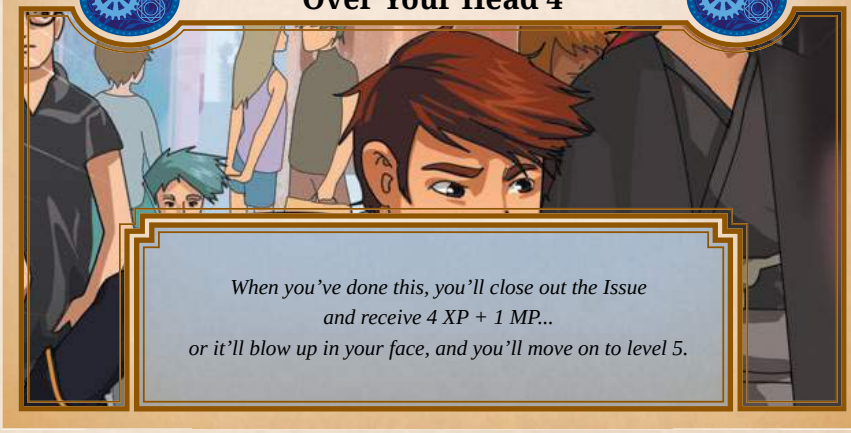
Maybe you can see the whole picture now. Maybe it's at the tip of your mind's tongue. Tell the HG what you *do* see. Tell the HG what bits of old foreshadowing you think you can bring in, who or what you'd like to trust, what about the game or your old ideas you'd like now to rethink.

Then either tell the HG what your actual idea is, or work with them and maybe the other players to figure the idea out.

Finally, figure out how to test your theory or to put it into action!

You've had a brilliant idea
&
You know how to test or implement it.

Over Your Head 4



When you've done this, you'll close out the Issue and receive 4 XP + 1 MP...
or it'll blow up in your face, and you'll move on to level 5.

Over Your Head 5

Did you hit level 5 before you could close out this Issue? Or did your idea blow up in your face?... OK. That's all right. You've thought of something *even better.*

This is marvelous.

This is transcendent. It makes you want to dance with glee.

You know how to fix what just went wrong, or maybe, even better, you know how to *use* what just went wrong to make things right.

Tell the HG what this new idea is like. Tell the HG that "it will actually work, at least in part"—it says so right here on the page!

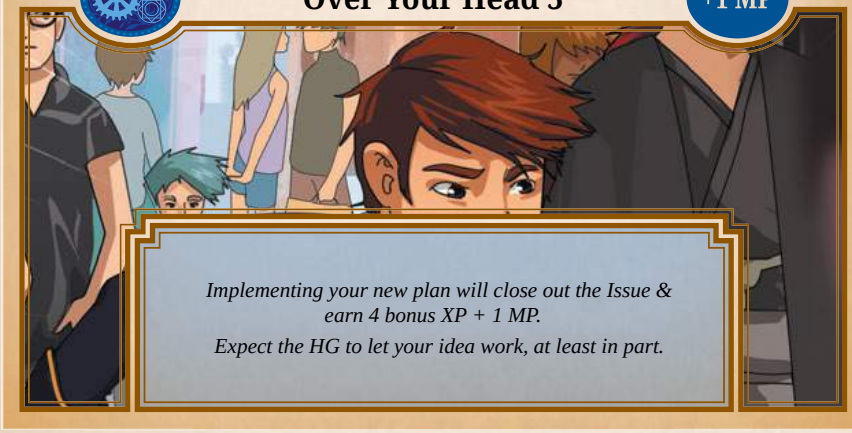
Then tell them what the idea is, or work with them and maybe the other players to define it.

You've had an even better idea.

This—

This is going to be *beautiful*.

Over Your Head 5 **+1 MP**



Implementing your new plan will close out the Issue & earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP.

Expect the HG to let your idea work, at least in part.

Sickness

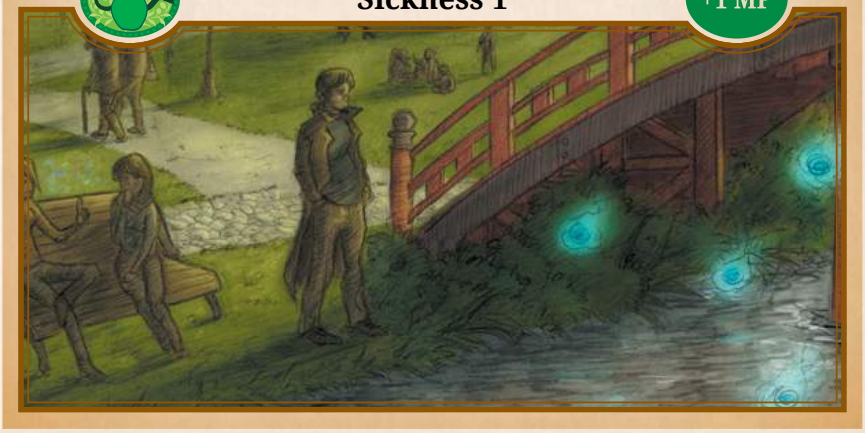
Sickness 1-2

Some kind of unpleasant stuff's happened...

You feel kind of messed up. It's harder than usual to just be happy and have fun. It's harder than usual to cope with the little stuff.

Life's wearing you out.

Sickness 1 +1 MP



It's like the world has it in for you. It's like it won't *let* you climb out of this pit you're in. You are losing the sense you used to have of who you are and what you want to be.

Sickness 2



Sickness 3

You're dissolving. You're breaking. You can't hold on to yourself any longer in the face of what's happening to you. Except—

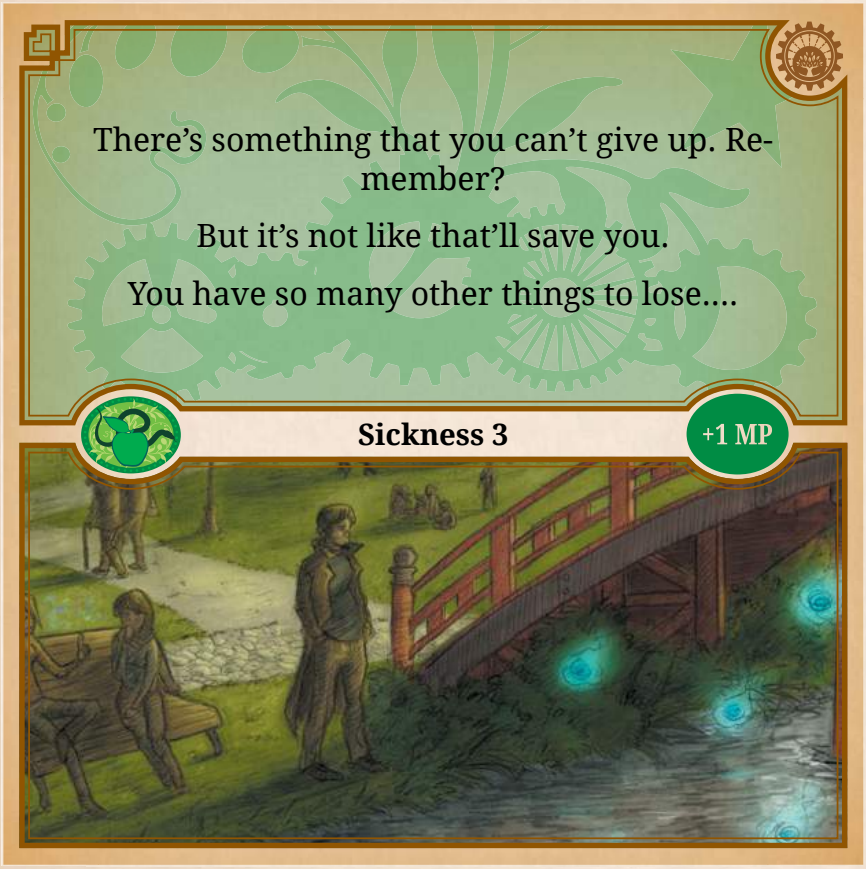
There's something you don't want to give up. There's something you are having trouble giving up, even though it doesn't seem you'll get to have it. There's something keeping you from despair, or maybe something that keeps pulling you *out of* despair every time you throw yourself back in.

Name it. Identify it.

Is it

- a promise you want to keep?
- a truth or principle you won't let yourself forget?
- something you refuse to do, or have to do?
- a person you want to stay yourself for?
- something you love about yourself that you won't let go of?
- something you hate about the change that you won't give in to?

You can't just let the world destroy you. At least, not this part of you. It's not that you're too strong to break here. It's just, you *can't*. You don't know how to let go of this even when you break. It's like an anti-break got to you first, something good or maybe even something awful that keeps you, somehow, *stuck*.



Sickness 4

Just hit level 4? *You're finding new strength.*

Tell the HG that.

You've lost the stupid little things you were clinging to. Probably. You've been broken down pretty far. You probably thought that all was lost, only, it wasn't.

You didn't know, or maybe you'd just forgotten that it was there, but somewhere inside you you've found a core of strength. You've found a steel core, a raging fire, or a perfected theorem somewhere deep within your self.

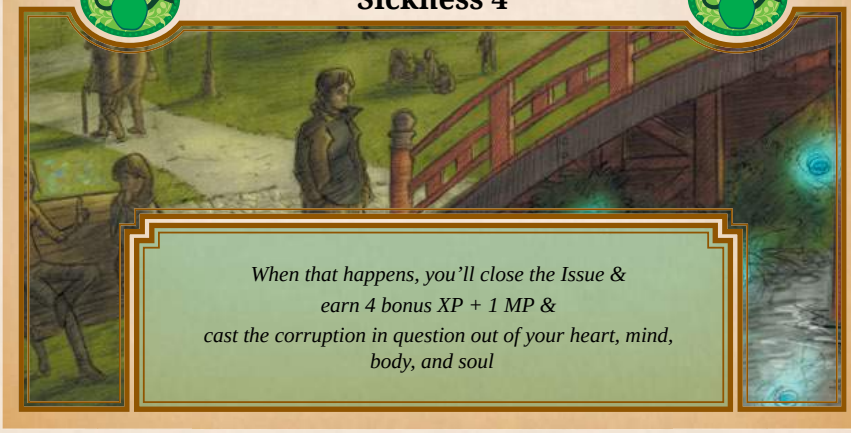
The next round of this battle, you're going to show that inner strength.

This is done now. You are your own person now. You are going to fight.

It doesn't matter what it is. Mind control? Possession? Vampirism? Peer pressure? A really bad flu?

The next time it shows its ugly head, you're going to take it down.

Sickness 4



When that happens, you'll close the Issue &
earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP &
cast the corruption in question out of your heart, mind, body, and soul

Sickness 5

Just hit level 5? *You're going to have to live with this.*

Maybe you tried to fight off whatever sickness you've got going on, and you lost. Maybe you didn't get the chance to fight. But you can't win now. You might be able to suppress it, or deal with it some other story, but you're stuck with whatever's wrong with you until the current story ends.

But in that Sickness there is a chance at strength.

Tell the HG that.

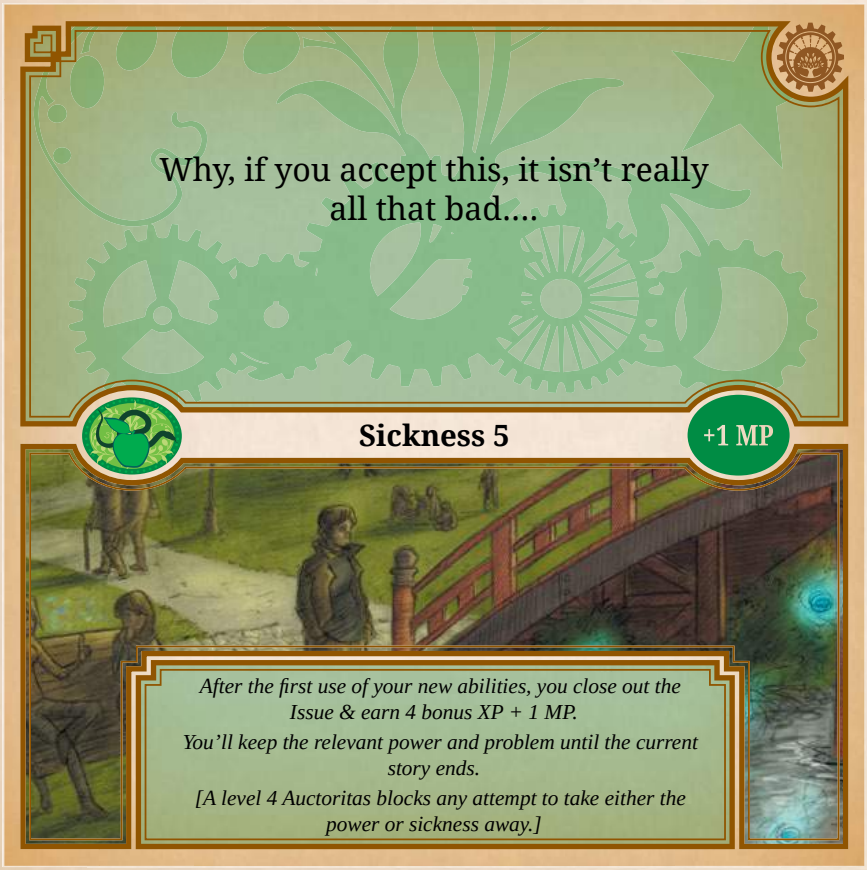
Tell them—"look, you gave me Sickness 5, so this sickness isn't just a weakness any longer. It's not in charge any longer. Whatever caused it isn't in charge any more. It's part of me now, and that means I control it, and here is how it's going to give me strength: ..."

Or however you want to say it.

And then tell them. Tell them how it's going to make you better. Tell them how it's going to be a *power* for you, at least until the story ends, and maybe again in the future if the sickness doesn't go away. Tell them what it's going to *do* for you, for now.

The HG can set some boundaries, but in the end, they're obligated to let you take power over the Sickness and make it something substantively useful to you in play.

Are you cursed to turn into a toad? No—a *were*-toad, with toad powers. Is somebody enslaving your mind? No—you've learned how to trick yourself into thinking whatever you want to do is what they really want from you, and suddenly you have the best self-discipline and mental/physical control ever. Peer pressure? No, *leadership*. Best of all, you don't have to make any concessions to this as a player: you're still entitled to use your powers to overcome your sickness, as often as ever otherwise you could.



Something to Deal With

Something to Deal With 1-2

There's something nagging at you....

You keep thinking about things you don't want to think about. It's uncomfortable.
You want to distract yourself from it.

Something to Deal With 1 +1 MP



You keep thinking about things you don't want to think about. Your feelings are pushing their way out of you.

It's like a gigantic gum bubble blowing in your mind and heart.

Everything around you seems a little bit unreal and far away.

Something to Deal With 2



Something to Deal With 3

What happened? What's coming to the surface? A memory, bubbling up? A principle, you're not living up to? A promise that you'd forgotten that you'd made?

And why do you actually—

Why have you started actually feeling a little *freer,* like you're starting to see how to find peace?

You can *almost see* how all the pieces fit together, you just need a little help from someone around you or the world, you just need to see the right thing or hear someone to say the right thing that makes it all fall magically into place—don't you?



Something to Deal With 4

Just hit level 4? OK. *You think you know what's going on.*

You've figured out how it all ties together.

Tell yourself now what you think that is. Or, if you don't have time right now, tell yourself as soon as you get a chance and you're looking at this Issue.

Yeah. That feels right.

Now tell yourself what you have to do about that thing. Talk about it? Take action? Call a family member or a friend? Go out in the sunshine?

You know what you have to do.



Something to Deal With 5

Just hit level 5? OK. *You can face this now.*

You've figured out how it all ties together. You know what you have to do.

And you also know why you were still a little reluctant to do it.

Tell yourself now why you weren't ready to resolve this Issue before. Do that even if it's "not your fault," like, other important stuff was happening or the HG didn't give you a chance.

You weren't quite ready before. Tell yourself why.

You still know what you have to do, right?

Find time.

Do it.

Something to Deal With 5 +1 MP



Doing this thing will close out the Issue & earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP

Trust

Trust 1-3

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

You are not alone.

Trust 1 **+1 MP**



You can rely on others.

Trust 2



The world is good to you.

The people around you bring you joy.

Trust 3 **+1 MP**



Trust 4

Just hit level 4? OK. *Something bad is about to happen.*

Tell the HG which powerful NPCs you trust most—which you've given too much of your heart to.

Tell the HG how far you're willing to go in trusting them.

Then tell the HG, "I've presumed too much, somewhere. One of them is going to betray me."

The HG will arrange a scene, soon, where you can trust them in that fashion—possibly in a Science, Faith, and Sorcery Action. You'll trust them; you'll *gamble* on that trust.

But it won't work out.

That's a truth for now—that is, the HG will come up with how it will go wrong, and why, and so if events go awry and betray expectations, there's a chance it will be OK. There's still something you can hope for; I want there to be, so that it can be folly and recklessness, rather than simply obstinacy, to trust.

But unless things go really weird, and you should tell the HG as much, that trust will end in tears.

There's someone or something you've already promised yourself you'll trust.

The HG will ask you to demonstrate that trust, soon.

Trust 4



Once you do this,
the HG can close out the Issue & you earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP
...or they can choose to wait

Trust 5

You've been betrayed.

If you don't already know how you've been betrayed, if you weren't there for it, if there wasn't a scene, then you'll find out soon.

You've been betrayed, and yet you're going to have to trust again, because... because. Because that's who you are, maybe. Because there's no choice, maybe. I don't know.

Tell the HG that.

Ask them to set up the scene where you are or find out you're betrayed. (Perhaps a good chance for Foreshadowing or Sympathetic Action?)

Ask them to set up the scene where you are or discover that you've been betrayed; and then work with them, before or after that, to figure out why and how you decide (or are forced) to trust again.



Vice

Vice 1-2

You're walking a troubled or risky course....

There's something you like to do, that you want to do, that you've decided to do, and maybe other people don't think it's such a good idea, but so what? They just don't get you.

Vice 1 +1 MP



You've got this kind of magical dream of what your life would be like if you had a totally free hand to indulge your "vice," free of all the other obligations and issues that get in your way. Sure, people might tell you it'd lead to disaster, but no, it'd be this awesome, glorious vision. You get dreamy-eyed just thinking about it.

Vice 2



Vice 3

Your dream-world is calling you, your vice-dreams are calling, but—

There's something that's tugging on you, telling you that something in the rest of your life still matters. Name it. Identify it.

Is it

- a friend or place or activity that needs you?
- something cool coming up soon you want to be clear-headed for?
- a matter of principle?
- or maybe you're just too strong to get lost in vice, whether you want to be or not?

You can't just drift off into dreams, or gamble your life away, or burn yourself out working too hard on stuff that doesn't matter. This... thing, this something *needs* you.



Vice 4

Just hit level 4? *Damn. You can't keep this up.*

Tell the HG that.

There's someone who needs you to shape up. Or something. There's a reason. You're about to get dragged out of your comfort zone. You can set some parameters in advance, but once you've done that, the HG is going to call on you to

- be a hero instead of a slacker/druggie/drunkard
- be a good person instead of a liar/cheat/bully
- set aside a life-eating thing like
  - gambling
  - super-stressful work
  - aiming for valedictorian
  - nightmare science, *or*
  - being a superstar

  so that you can be there for your friends
- drop a bad relationship/alliance because it's gone too far, *or*
- ...whatever.

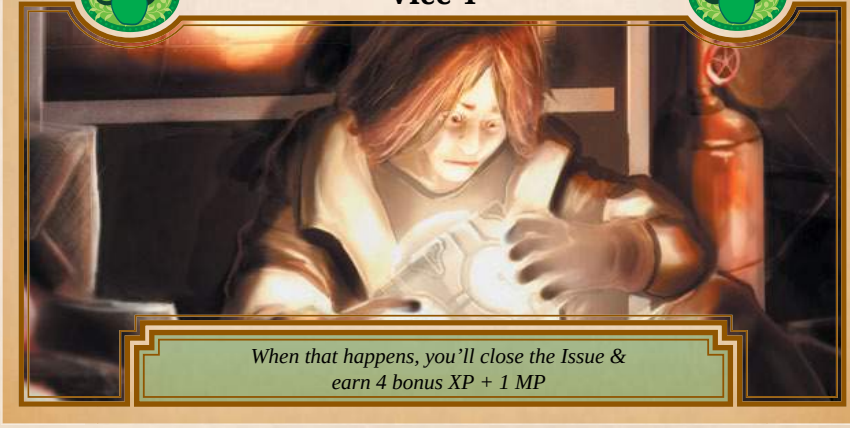
And you're going to have to take that call, because it's going to be the right thing to do.

You can't keep this up.

You know that.

When the time comes, you'll have to set aside your Vice. It's going to be the only right thing to do.

Vice 4



When that happens, you'll close the Issue & earn 4 bonus XP + 1 MP

Vice 5

Just hit level 5? *You're going to have to make your own call.*

It's time to go past the bottom of the bottle and out the other side of the glass. It's the time to slack so hard you spin the wheels of the world backwards. It's time to dance with the devil until the devil can't dance no more. Listen. Just now, you were thinking that maybe you'd have to give up on your vice in order to attend to things that matter more?

And, heck, maybe you still will.

But first?

In your Vice there is the answer to your problems.

Tell the HG that.

Tell them—"look, you gave me Vice 5, so I'm going to be called on to set all this Vice stuff aside pretty soon and tend to what needs tending. But I tell you, first, I'm gonna call on my Vice for power. I'm going to *use* my Vice to do something amazing, maybe on point, maybe a little off of it, before I give things up. Here is how it's going to go down."

Or however you want to say it.

And then tell them. Tell them how your Vice will *save* the day. If you don't know yet, make it up while you're talking. The HG can set some boundaries, but in the end, they're obligated to let your Vice help you, just this once, and throw the scene at you where it happens.

Where it proves *awesome.*





Setting

Setting

Come with me to a little town surrounded by the multicolored void. It sits in the middle of *no true thing*, or nothingness, and it is circled by its sun. It is a peaceful town. It's sleepy. It's practically bucolic. It's not involved in the carnival of great dreams and bloody events that Creation so frequently becomes.

You will have trouble leaving this town—though, oh! I should call it Town—once you arrive. Beyond its borders is no human place, but only the Outside. The Outside is a land reminiscent of heat mirages, visions, and symbolic abstract art. It is brightly colored, fearsome, confusing, and difficult to navigate. Most importantly it lacks that quality of existence that characterizes reality. It isn't a good place to go walking in for the same reason that novels, or ideas, or mathematical theorems aren't good places to go walking in: that is, it's a category error if you do. At the same time, if you head out of Town by any normal road, you'll find yourself without a choice. A trick of topology has wrapped Outside all the way around this little world and let you step from one to the other.

Here in Town there is a lake. It's called Big Lake.

Big Lake is the best way to get in or out of Town. The sailors know many secret routes that lead from the lake to other places—to certain lakes on Earth and other worlds; to the dry mares of the moon; to the river of a sleeping goddess' dreams; and most importantly to the sea. Big Lake doesn't border directly on the Outside, at least not the same way the rest of Town's borders do. You can walk around its edge without ever traveling Outside. It'd take a long time, and you pass pretty close to the tangled edge, but you *can*. Big Lake is structurally an inland body of water. But the act of sailing Big Lake, in itself, opens the way to other lands. Travel on Big Lake can fold up the world and bring you closer to distant realms.

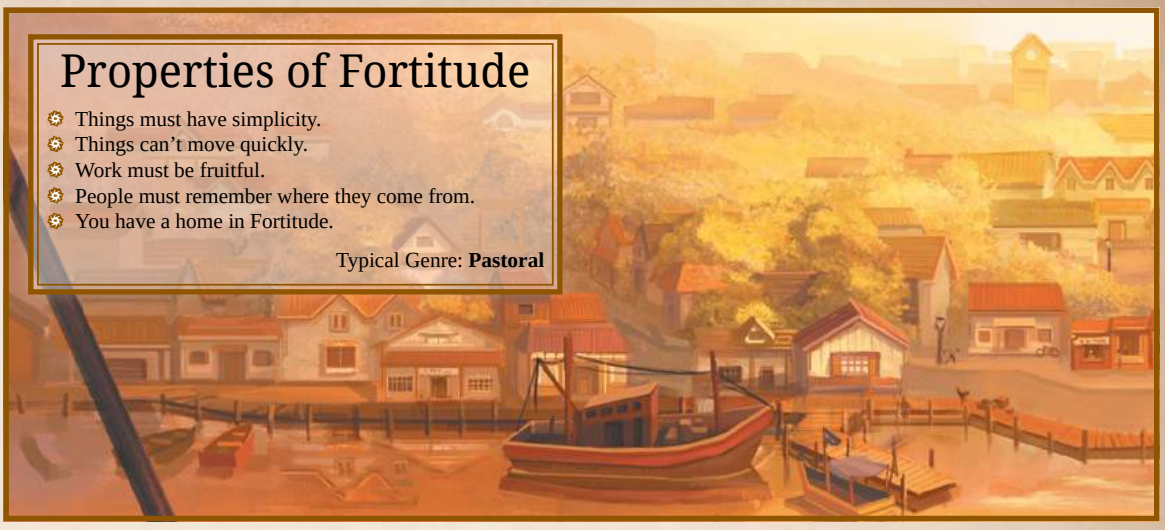
The part of Town that I want to start with today is *Fortitude*—the first human settlement, down by the docks of Big Lake.

Over the hills to the west, there's more of Town—

There's Horizon, where Alexandrel Celdinar tried and failed to build a second London, and there's Arcadia, and there's the Walking Fields—

But for me, it all starts right here in Fortitude, where Town's waters meet its shore.

Fortitude



Properties of Fortitude

- Things must have simplicity.
- Things can't move quickly.
- Work must be fruitful.
- People must remember where they come from.
- You have a home in Fortitude.

Typical Genre: **Pastoral**

Fortitude sits on the shore of Big Lake and brings its fish to Town. Its fishermen know strange pathways in the Lake; they return as often with nets of salt-water fish as fresh, and sometimes one returns with a fey light gleaming in their eyes and some monster from Outside squirming in their nets; the people of Town call that a "*kaiju* day," and eat from the thing for days if it is wholesome enough for sustenance.

It is a measured place, a border place, and its time is set by the slapping of the water on the shore. It's a place of lake smells and sea smells and the smells of cookery and home; for you can't go there without feeling the *home-ness* of the place close about you, welcoming you in.

The people are good there. They build strong communities and they don't need to lock their doors. They trust and support one another and they're always ready with a helping hand; but they're a little insular, a little bit out of synch with Town, as if the world beyond the docks is just too fast and disconnected for them to really grasp what's going on.

Area: ~120 square miles
Population: 40,000
(33,800 humans / 5,500 Fortitude rats / 400 vampires / 300 other)

Lifestyle

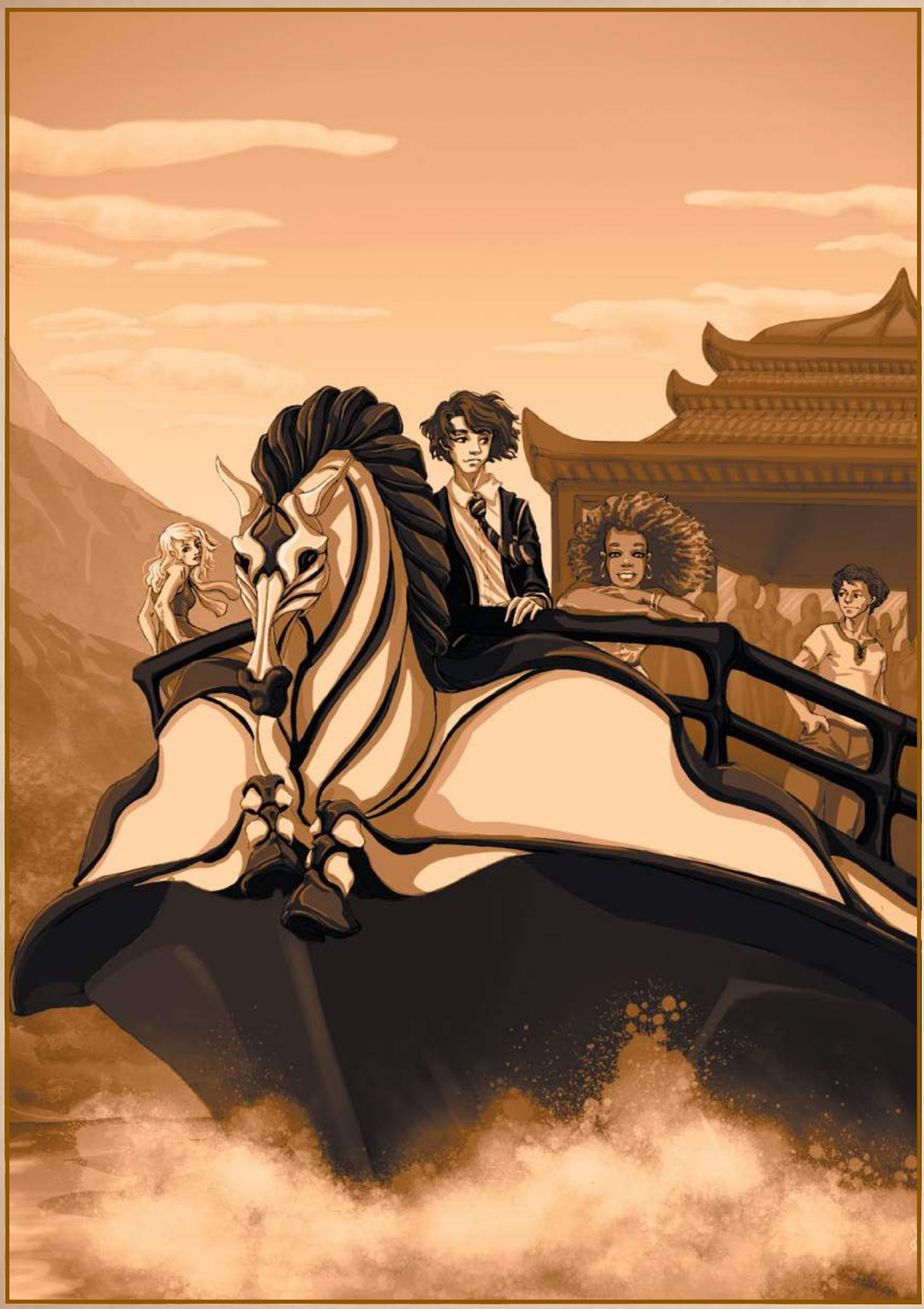
Fortitude is a walking community—people don't really think anything of a 2-3 hour walk to do some errand or another, as long as it's not raining hard, and maybe not even then. So the walks are broad, smooth, and well-appointed with trash cans, and people'll smile or wave to you as you go walking by, and there's always cool places to stop in or things to see.

It's a welcoming community, too. It's the kind of place that likes to take in foundlings—not just as a metaphysical law, although it is that too, but as a cultural ideal. It's a place where you will find family, if you need one, and you'll probably find something a bit like family eventually even if you don't.

It's a place that's tamed gods to its rhythm, in the past, and monsters, if the stories can be believed. It's the kind of place where good cooking and good sewing is more likely to change the world than fighting with words or swords.

There's a lot of sunset or sunrise there—it's not *constant*, not really, that's why it's not on the Properties list, but sunset and sunrise are *popular*, there. Like, they seem to start earlier and last longer than you'd expect, and fill up a little more of any day. It's the softness around the edges of the place, I think, that goes with the softer light.

Fortitude is troubled by the dust that comes in from the Outside. It blows in off the lake in little, pretty crystal shards. They're neat and they're colorful but there's a problem, which is to say, that dust is a psychoactive toxin, so you don't want too much of it around. It's attracted to people's dreams, though, so people set up dream-catchers to catch it and then either beat out the dust from them on the street or take it to a temple for purification. If you let it accumulate it can do some pretty weird things, like get rust started on things that aren't even metal.



The fundamental culture of Fortitude is a Russian-Japanese blend—Russian, because the first human settlers came over the Lake from Russia; and Japanese, for a variety of historical reasons. People have come over the lake from, frankly, all over, but those two cultures are the biggest non-*youkai* influence on the place.

Seafood is obviously a pretty heavy element of the diet—particularly since the sailors of the place can reach almost any lake or sea, if they've got a mind to, and bring in almost any body of waters' bounty as their catch. Fishing is a highly-regarded occupation, if you live in Fortitude, and even families who aren't involved in fishing for a living often have a small boat they can use to bring in an occasional catch.

If you look around at random you might find yourself near the post office or the laundromat; near peach trees in flower; near a creaking dock like *Kokoryov Harbor* or by *Hennessey's Café*; in the *Irinka Park and Gallery* amidst the trees near *Ceiba Quay*; in a maze of little nameless streets or "side-ways" with the occasional street vendor selling food; under *the Sign of the Owl-Eyed Seeker*, Kodacha Elhaym's mother's shop; or on some great long hiking walk past scenic moments looking down on the sprawl of Fortitude below.

Talking to your family or "family" in Fortitude is usually **Shared Reactions**

You're welcome to. They told you that once. They want you to feel free to tell them about your life.

If you do, you can probably earn an XP or two by trying to connect.

Cooking, chores, and a lot of stuff in Fortitude is **Shared Action**

You're doing your thing—your simple, honest thing. You skip ahead to the point where someone else shows up in scene, or you go bother someone else who's doing simple, honest stuff, because you can't earn XP for this alone.

Then one of you reaches out. You try to connect.

If you want the bonus XP, maybe one of you can make yourself a little vulnerable? It doesn't have to be much—even, "Hey, could you stir this for a few minutes while I go hunt for the vinegar? I don't want it to congeal!"

Walking through Fortitude is usually **Slice of Life**

Chores and conversations, too, are sometimes **Slice of Life**

Something stirs an emotion—brings out an emote. The moment sticks with you.

Outside-dust poisoning is usually **Obsessive**

If you get a faceful of Outside dust, or if you spend a lot of time in Fortitude but forget to clean your dreamcatcher out, you may get a little paranoid. You may start having nightmares, maybe even when awake.

It builds up into you doing something over the top: you tip over the edge into obsession.

Fortitude Rats

a discussion

The rats of Fortitude grow to a foot or more in length, plus that much again in tail. They weigh a couple pounds. They often wear pants, a cloak, and a sword belt, and their spine is twisted enough that they can easily stand on hind legs.

Most importantly, though, they're people.

They've *woken up*, and apparently brain size isn't everything, because they're not noticeably duller or for that matter smarter than the humans that I've known.

Long ago Fortitude's rats struck a bargain with its humans. They bound themselves not to make too much trouble for humans and in general to be the humans' friends. In exchange, the humans keep the cat population of Fortitude under strict control. There's some other stuff to the bargain, too—like, most doors have little rat doors in or beside them so the rats can come and go; and a lot of people keep their roofs nice and clean and sturdy, because the rats like to use the roofs as roads; and the rats'll warn people of coming storms—but that's more along the lines of unofficial cultural cooperation than part of the actual deal. In any case, matters of treaty, mostly concerning the exact numbers and disposition of local cats, are arbitrated in the court of the Rat King under the hostel named "The Rat King's Recourse."

The rats have their own ships and lanes of trade, though you'll usually only see them on the Lake at night; sometimes a hard-up family of rats will take service with the human fishermen, doing fine detail work and repairs on the ships, carrying a small portion of the cargo, and using their superior sense of the weather to aid the ships in travel. Children sometimes enlist for a year of service or seven years of regular training with the rats, learning their culture and practicing their various skills in the warrens beneath the docks.

Interactions with the rats can be **Pastoral (Shared Action/Reactions)**

Try to connect!

Interactions with the rats can be **Foreshadowing**

You see a rat. It's standing dramatically on a roof, or doing something else dramatic—they are extremely dramatic individuals—or maybe it's just doing something normal like hanging laundry or talking to a friend.

You get caught up in watching for a while. It does more stuff. Then, you react!

(Superior) Fortitude Rat

an example Superior Skill

Here's a Superior Skill that I'd use not to represent an extraordinary ability—I mean, the Fortitude rats are extraordinary, but there *are* thousands of them, and all of them *are* Fortitude rats—but as a convenient conceptual wrapper for all the ways in which an alien species is different from the human norm.

If you're a Fortitude rat, then you're good at all kinds of things that humans aren't.

You can hear into the ultrasonic. You're a heroic rooftop adventurer. You know how to get around Fortitude as a rat, and you know rat culture more than human culture, and you understand the sacred monster-god "Mysteries" of the rats[24]. This Skill counts basically as the "Rat Lifestyle" Skill, with bonus Edge when you bring your inhuman advantages into play. Note that this may or may not balance out against your inherent disadvantages as a rat. I mean, it's definitely enough that *I* would lose a fair fight against a rat, but I can think of at least two game designers who would stand a chance.

I think a Skill like this is also something of a force multiplier. I mean, if you're roughly equally Skilled in combat, then being a rat when your opponent is a human is kind of a disadvantage, I think. But if you're really *good* at fighting, and your opponent is just some out-of-shape writer or even a tough but untrained sailor kid? Then I think that gap in Skill makes being a rat not much of a preexisting disadvantage, and then (for that reason) the Edge from this Skill will make your victory look easy.

This Skill makes sense at level 0-2, and maybe 3; here's roughly what the levels mean:

Superior Fortitude Rat 0: Your rat status is strictly honorary at *best*.

Superior Fortitude Rat 1: You could make a case that a human kid who trains with the rats might pick up this level of Skill, at least until they grow up and get too Big. You could make that case! I personally disagree, I think, because I think that's blurring nature and nurture too much, but I could totally be wrong. Anyway, this makes you a bit better at rat-stuff, and rat-wary, and good at sensing the weather and traveling the roofs.

Superior Fortitude Rat 2: This is about where I'd place actual Fortitude rats—it's a high enough Superior Skill to account for their having actual inhuman advantages (like the ability to talk "silently," fit through small spaces, and chew, however slowly, through concrete) while also retaining their fundamental similarity to humanity.

Superior Fortitude Rat 3: This is where I'd place an epic rat hero, I guess? Like, their equivalents to Lancelot, Enkidu, Hippolyta, Julie d'Aubigny, and Robin Hood.

24 They don't serve them. They fight them! But they're still basically the rats' gods.

The Kichi

a Shrine Family

Near the top of Fortitude's western hill are the Kichi Sacred Pools. You can make offerings at the pools if you want to ask the universe for the safety and health of a loved one—it's a way of telling Heaven and the cosmos, *please, let them be safe and well*. Sometimes you can also see glimpses of the future in them.

The Kichi family tend these pools. They refine Outside dust by washing it in a sandalwood basin, straining it, mixing it with various herbs to set, and pounding the dried blocks back to dust again; after seven repetitions, the diluted dust can be added to the pools to preserve their potency. The process is slow and a little arduous and works best on the higher grades of Outside dust, so they generally buy commercial dust rather than helping to dispose of the lower grades.

The Kichi family residence is placed prominently and centrally in the Moon Catch neighborhood low on the western hill. It's an hour's hike or a twenty minute bike ride from there up to the temple. Young and secular Kichi only go to the temple a few times a month, but Kichi wishing to study the family magic or to help tend the pools must bathe there in the morning and the evening, ideally (though it's OK if lateness or schooling or work interferes with this) at the sunset and the dawn.

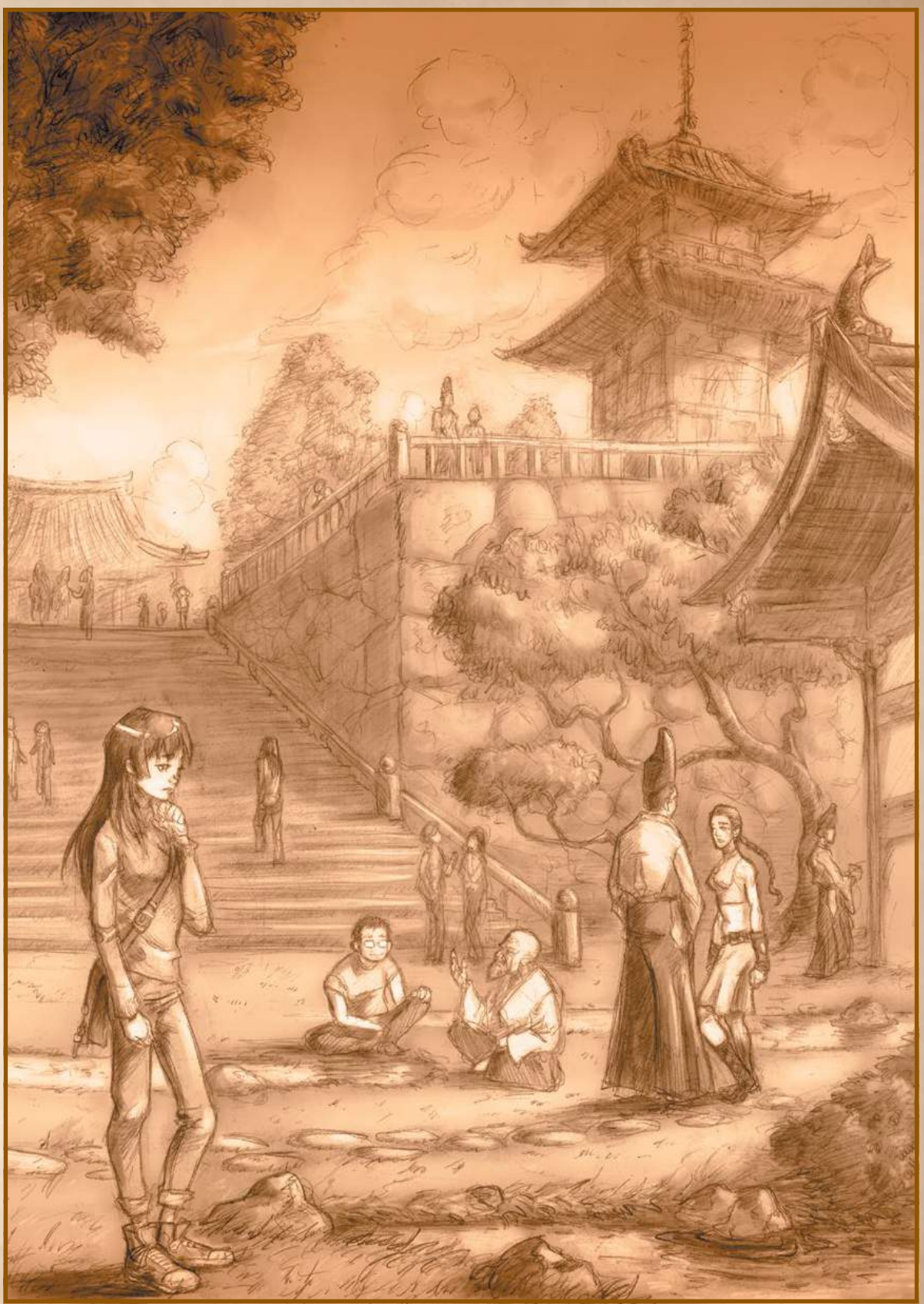
Interactions with the Kichi are usually **Pastoral**

Their work at the pools is usually just simple, honest stuff. Maybe occasional Slices of Life.

Interactions with Kichi are sometimes **Immersive Fantasy**

Sometimes, though, you'll watch them at work in their pools, or look into those waters yourself and see strange visions, and you'll slip into feeling something more ominous and more vast.

Like there's something *meaningful* and *deep* here going on.



Kichi Family Magic

an example Magical Skill

The Kichi family facility with their pools is a magical Skill—the **Kichi Family Magic**.

Basic use of the Kichi Sacred Pools is available to everyone by default. The pools are open to the public from an hour after dawn to an hour after sunset, or by special arrangement. A normal person trying to divine or purify themselves using the pools would face +2 to the Obstacle, but the following techniques are available:

[Obstacle 0] make a ritual offering and accompanying prayer at the Kichi Sacred Pools

[Obstacle 0] see strange and meaningful things in the water.

[Obstacle 0] look in the water and know whether someone else who has recently looked into the water has evil intentions towards somebody you love, and, if so, who.

[Obstacle 1] look into the water and sense whether something you love is threatened, and if so, get a general notion of who/what, by who/what, and how.

[Obstacle 1] improve the state of your mind, heart, and soul by bathing in the pools.

The Kichi Family magical Skill also gives access to the following supernatural techniques:

[Obstacle 1] turn off your need for air as long as you're meditating or in a Kichi pool

[Obstacle 1] seem like a flock member or a non-threatening herbivore to any nearby waterfowl

[Obstacle 2] looking into the water, see useful hints as to the fate of someone who has caught your eye.

[Obstacle 2] looking into the water, see something of the character and true nature of someone who has caught your interest. If there's any compatibility between the two of you at all, you'll fall a *little* bit in love—not necessarily romantic love, though. If there's no compatibility at all, or if something interferes with the view, you'll probably reflexively become really uncomfortable with the person you were trying to connect to.

[Obstacle 2] leave your body looking at the water and slip off to wander Town as a disembodied spirit.

[Obstacle 2] use the pools to purify something poisoned or corrupted

[Obstacle 2] look into the pools and see a loved one and the world around them, even if they are far away

[Obstacle 3] look into the pools, see a loved one, and protect that loved one or other loved ones visible in the scene from danger, even from far away

[Obstacle 3] look into the pools and sacrifice a portion of your spirit to shield a loved one from a future danger. You must spend at least 1 Will on this effect, and the Will you spend does not return to you until the effect ends.

Shrine Family Magic

Shrine family magic comes from "the dust of the Outside:" particulate chaos that blows in off Big Lake. It's the stuff of enchantment and fairy tales, and a psychotoxin as well; something of a public health hazard, really. Over the years it's turned out that the best ways of containing it relate to sacred practice, and thus Fortitude's shrine families, its mythic figures, and its hazardous waste disposal professionals kind of merged into a single career.

I'm going to tell you about the magical and Superior Skills developed by five of these Shrine Families:

- the Kichi, who process the dust heavily and then add it to their sacred pools;
- the Sosunov, whose sacred meditation can neutralize the dust;
- the Titov, who must consume the dust directly to retain their ability to feel;
- the Vasili, whose sacred rituals to honor their patron elements involve the dust; *and*
- the Yatskaya, descended from a selkie but now much more closely tied to cats, who mix the dust of the Outside into their temple's sacred incense.

There's much more on these families, as well as the Hayashi and Watanabe, over in ***Fortitude: by the Docks of Big Lake***, and a little more in ***Fortitude: the Glass-Maker's Dragon*** as well.

Shrine Maiden (or Priest)



Suggested Bonds

Some traditional Bonds for Kichi magicians include:

- **Bond**: I can't lie about love.
- **Bond**: I must follow my heart, placing personal loyalties above duty.
- **Bond**: I must honor the Kichi traditions.
- **Bond**: I must protect the Kichi Sacred Pools and I must help visitors make offerings there.
- **Bond**: I can't resist spying on things and people that interest me.
- **Bond**: I must keep my body clean and pure, with regular ablutions and a strict diet.
- **Bond**: I must fulfill my responsibilities as an important person in the Kichi family.
- **Bond**: I must perform ritual ablutions and purification rituals regularly or feel intensely wrong.
- **Bond**: I am physically fragile and light.
- **Bond**: I must honor others' secrets when I can.
- **Bond**: I am driven to tease others with my knowledge instead of sharing it openly and forthrightly.

The Sosunov

a Shrine Family

The Sosunov family practices sacred meditation and empty-mind techniques. These techniques are powerful enough to purify Outside dust or calm an Outside storm—the chaos and confusion of the Outside dissolves away before the opening of their inner eye. Through this meditation, they may step outside the world of flesh and travel into the world of dreams. It is the Sosunov tradition that their ancestress Miruna Sosunov took this one step further and achieved the supreme enlightenment, breaking free of the dream that is the world and suspiring into nirvana.

(They also think that Miruna lingers in the world as a minor goddess protecting both themselves and the family shrine. I think this is not consistent but, then again, she's not *my* ancestress. What do *I* know?)

The Sosunov practice pales their skin and hair: creams the coffee of a darker skin or makes lighter skin like chalk. It makes their eyes weak against bright light, weakens their constitution, and they begin to see spiritual things—by which I do not mean precisely that they see mystical magical spirits, nor that they hallucinate, but rather that their world becomes suffused with theological portent and frissons of spiritual implication. They are *sensitive* in the good and the bad meanings of the word.

They become delicate, and refined.

In dream worlds the Sosunovs are very strong. They must, however, control and portion that strength carefully. If they allow themselves to suffer sufficiently bad nightmares or fall into delirium they'll drag the world around them temporarily into the Outside.

The Sosunov family is wealthy and important in Fortitude. The wealth of the family comes from trade: the Sosunov magic is ridiculously valuable to any merchant captain wishing to trade between Fortitude and distant lands, and when there aren't Sosunov captains taking this advantage for their own, there are Sosunov sailors exchanging their services for a cut of the proceeds of the run.

The Sosunovs aren't really about sailing, though. They're glad of the wealth and proud to be part of the lifeblood of Fortitude's trading fleet, but it's not *who they are*. Nor are they about keeping a shrine and disposing of Fortitude's raw Outside dust, even though they do that, and as important as that is. The core purpose of their family—the *heart* of their family, the thing they think of when they think about what it means to be a Sosunov—is that the Sosunovs are the guardians of Town and Fortitude's dreams.

The Sosunovs aren't the only shrine family with some facility with dreams, but they're the ones *responsible* for them. They're the ones who have to step up and fight it if something nasty gets into people's dreams from Outside or as the result of somebody's poorly-thought-out wish. That's how the current heir's grandfather **Julian Sosunov** died, and their great-grandmother **Nereid Sosunov** too. They fought a faceless witch who lived in dreams, and they took her down, but the dying witch took them down beside her. Once or twice a generation, something like that happens—something from Outside, anyway, gets in, and must be fought. As for crazy wishes from wish-granting engines or whatever messing up the dreams of Fortitude, well, that hasn't ever happened yet, but obviously, it could.

The Sosunovs are a healthy and prolific line. They have a well-established main family, several cadet families, and ties to many of the other important and well-off families in Fortitude. They restrict the *greatest* secrets of their magic, and the treasure room of their temple down by Twisting River, to the main family; otherwise, they are supportive of and generous with the cadet branches and other close relations. Cadets and cousins of the Sosunovs may study the Sosunov magic lightly, deeply, or not at all as they so choose.

Trouble in dreams is usually **Lurid (Wicked or Corruption)**

Something gets into your dreams from Outside. It tempts you, corrupts you, or traumatizes you. The world gets weird.

Interactions with the Sosunov are usually **Slice of Life**

A lot of what they do is just scenery—oh, look, this ship has a Sosunov sailor! Oh, hey, that's a Sosunov mansion. Oh, neat, he's pacifying that incoming storm!

The moment sticks with you.

The Sosunov Family Magic

an example Magical Skill

Basic use of the Sosunov techniques does not require magic. The Sosunovs learn mundane meditation and arts of spiritual connection before they move on to truly magical endeavors. The first three techniques are thus technically available to all characters. Someone like Natalia Koutolika, **the Prodigy** (pg. 71), could use these techniques on their own as soon as they understand that it's possible to do them; other characters can study them under the Sosunovs, spend decades reinventing them, or improvise something similar if it seems like it would be cool. (That said, using a temple family secret technique with a mundane Skill or with an inappropriate magical Skill adds +2 to the relevant Obstacle.)

These basic non-magical techniques include:

[Obstacle 0] purify Outside dust through meditation;

[Obstacle 1] calm the Outside to a very limited extent through meditation;

[Obstacle 1] shape a dream that you're already in.

The rest of the Sosunov techniques, on the other hand, require *actual* magic to use:

[Obstacle 1] appear in the dreams of a loved one;

[Obstacle 1] send and receive detailed information through a loved one's dream;

[Obstacle 2] use magic[25] to attack or defend the spirit of an entity in a dream you're in (such as a spiritual invader, the dreamer, or yourself);

[Obstacle 2] sense unnatural forces at work on dreams;

[Obstacle 2] break someone's will down with drugs, ritual, or sleep deprivation so that you and the target may both enter the dreams of *that* person's loved ones;[26]

[Obstacle 2] enter any dream already thoroughly compromised by other magical forces;

[Obstacle 3] send a dream forwards or backwards through time.

25 With whatever special effects you can think of.

26 This technique sounds and is really nasty but in practice it's usually an act of kindness. The Sosunovs don't *like* breaking people and using them as radios, but if someone you love is lost or trapped somewhere, the Sosunovs might be willing to help you make contact with the person that you've lost, and the only way they have to do this is by breaking your mind and body down and dreaming *through* you like your soul's their glove.

27 The most notable drawback to Sosunov magic.

Suggested Bonds

Traditional Bonds for Sosunov family magicians include:

- **Bond**: Nightmare and delirium can drag me and the world around me into the Outside.[27]
- **Bond**: Miruna Sosunov looks out for me.
- **Bond**: I fear inadvertent enlightenment.
- **Bond**: I fall in love too easily
- **Bond**: I am not good at anything outside of temple life.
- **Bond**: I can't let myself get upset, particularly not close to bedtime.
- **Bond**: I must defend the dreams of Fortitude.
- **Bond**: I purify things around me when I meditate.

Walking Between Dreams

It's not *easy* but you can get into other people's dreams, even without the Sosunov magic.

There are roads between the dreams of any two people who are closely connected—e.g., you and your family, you and your friends, even you and your rivals or the people you hate. It's not easy to travel them—it's a difficult spiritual experience with a very high Obstacle even for a lucid dreamer and you'll need at least a level 3 action to be anything more than a faint presence at the far end.

But it's possible!

I figure it's something like an Obstacle 3 to cross from dreams or trance states into a loved one's dream; Obstacle 4, to reach a friend or rival's dream; Obstacle 4 again, to reach the dreams of somebody physically near you; and Obstacle 5 to get to a random person's dream or out into the generic dream-world of Town or Fortitude as a whole. Note that Sosunov magic is pretty restrictive about whose dreams they can get into, so even a Sosunov would face a level 4 Obstacle to get into a typical rival or acquaintance's dream.



The Titov

a Shrine Family

It is my judgment that the Titov family is a toxic nest. They are not so much a family as an open wound. Here I literally mean the family and not the individuals therein. There is not a one of them that couldn't be a good person, a worthwhile person, maybe even a *hero*, if they weren't trapped in the mess that is *the Titovs*.

There is a secret under the Titov shrine. There is a prisoner there that humans should not know or a treasure that humans should not keep.

It warps them. It is tearing them apart.

It is leaving them loathsome to one another, and to themselves.

It is not clear to me whether the thing that they keep is inherently wrong and evil, or if it is only evil because of *how it is seen*. It is not clear to me whether the path to their salvation is to *accept it*, or to *free it*, or *escape it*. Because I do not know this I could not help them; so perhaps it will fall to you.

The Titov family magic lets them attract what they need. I have heard their argument for not just using this power to *fix themselves*. It is basically just fear. They'll tell you that they dare not ask for anything too great lest the cost be even greater. They'll be afraid that they'd break Fortitude, or Town, or all the world if they called out for that which would free them from their suffering. And they'll be afraid, and this part is legitimate, that they wouldn't live long enough to see it reach them if they tried.

The cost of the Titov magic is emptiness. They lose the ability to see themselves as people. They lose touch with their feelings—if not usually the feelings themselves—and feel only the broken glass of their unhappiness. For them Outside dust is a palliative, something they take to maintain an artificial sense of emotion and keep themselves from just sitting and staring at the walls until their prisoner breaks out.

Anyway.

Under the Titov family shrine—in poor repair, though kept clean and open to the public by the family's bitter pride—is an intrusion of the wild chaos that is the Bluebell Park. Therein dwells a thing they must protect or keep enchained.

It is not clear to me what this is. Perhaps it is a gate—one of the gates that **Jasmine Apocynum, the Ideologue**, seeks to open. If so then she will not need to struggle for it: such a gate, in such a place, will open of its own accord and when the time is right. Perhaps it is a holy thing: perhaps all of Fortitude and Town is nothing more than the holding place for the Crown of Thorns, the Ark of the Covenant, the Agneyastra, or the pieces of Pandora's box.

Most likely it is a prisoner.

Most likely it is a prisoner, immortal and chained, and wound around the hearts of the Titov family like some abhorrent overgrowth or net. Perhaps it is something sleeping that would be benevolent if it woke. Perhaps it is something broken, that would be benevolent if it healed. Perhaps it is not.

In ***Fortitude: the Glass-Maker's Dragon***, the default assumption will be that it is a prisoner—specifically, a sacred horror named **Iolithae Septimian**, whose lies (particularly if she is ever freed) can supplant or become the truth. However, no matter what campaign you're playing in, it's ultimately up to the HG and the players of any PC Titovs what's down there—it's perfectly reasonable, if you want to shake things up a bit, to have it actually be the Ark or a mystery warehouse or a chained dragon or, well, nothing in particular at all! You could even have it be something that *shouldn't* be chained, like a remnant of the sun goddess Jade Irinka or one of the Main Characters nobody was using.

Getting involved with the Titovs is often **Wicked**

It is possibly *good*, but I do not believe it can be *healthy*, to involve yourself in their affairs.

Getting involved with the Titovs is usually **Passionate (Adversity or Obsessive)**

They worry you. Or stress you out.

Getting involved with the Titovs can put you on **the Road of Trials**

You get tangled into their affairs. Maybe it's because you were what they needed, and they used magic, and you came?

I don't know.

You try to get out again, or you try to do whatever they want you to do. You are an awesome, doomed, and suffering creature. I'm sorry. You very well might survive it but it is unlikely to have ended well.

The Titov Family Magic

an example Magical Skill

This is the magical Skill of the accursed Titov family, who hollow their souls out with magic in order to perform the rituals that keep, imprison, or guard whatever treasure or horror it is that resides beneath their shrine.

They are under an impossible burden.

It is not surprising, therefore, that their magic gives them the power to find or create what they need in order to bear it.

Unlike some magical traditions, the Titov magic is wholly unnatural; it contains no mundane techniques and you can't duplicate any of it with a mundane ability or Skill. You might be able to do something *like* a Titov technique with your own Skills—I've seen mundane people "know what they can offer [someone] to assure their willing cooperation," for instance—but it won't be an echo or mirror of the Titov technique. It'll be a different, mundane route to a similar final result.

The Family Titov

I hesitate to go into too much detail on the modern family, so instead I'm going to mix and match sources and give you the Titovs of long-ago, from the days when Town was lost in night and under Alexandrel Celdinar's rule:

The patriarch of the Titov family is **Iskandar Titov**.

His wife is **Nirmala Titov.**

They are both deeply wounded by the Titov magic: Iskandar is brittle, prideful, and despairing of the Titovs and their fate. Nirmala is essentially broken: calling forth a doctor to heal Ezther Titov's arrhythmia unmade her.

Their five children are:

- **Jason Pyotr Alexei Titov,**
- **Ezther Titov,**
- **Soramir Titov,**
- **Isabella Titov,** *and*
- **Diána.**

Of these, Diána exists only by virtue of the Titov magic, called forth from nothing to heal Ezther, summoned from the earth, and never formally adopted into the Titov line. They're a broken, twisted mess of a family: Jason and Ezther possessive and hateful towards one another, Soramir resenting the comparative physical weakness that puts him under his older brother's shadow, and Isabella mistrusted by all of them as too clever by half and probably under the influence of the thing below their shrine to boot. Diána is the saddest story of them all: she conceives of helping and supporting the other Titovs as the function of her existence, but they mostly regard her as a lesser, artificial thing.

They can't get out from under it. Even if one of them escaped, cut their ties and left, they're all too important to one another: someone would just find the person or tool they needed in order to bring them back.

That's how it was in those days of night; it continues, to the now.

Standard Titov techniques, and the accompanying Obstacles, are:

[Obstacle 0] perform the rituals that keep bound the thing beneath their shrine

[Obstacle 1] appear stable and calm while experiencing a psychotic episode

[Obstacle 1+] attract someone or something to them that they need

[Obstacle 1] know what they can offer that person to assure their willing cooperation

[Obstacle 2] know what they can offer that person that would make them not merely willing to cooperate but unwilling to betray the Titovs under any reasonable duress

[Obstacle 2] infuse an object with emotional meaning—make even an ordinary work into great art that gives a sense of freedom or peace, or a simple knickknack into a gift that brings great joy

[Obstacle 3] create a new person from the earth, if there is no one that their magic may summon in answer to a certain need.

Characters created by the Titov magic generally have a Superior Quality or Skill (pg. 76-77) that reflects their ability to answer a certain need. Diána of the Titov, for instance, was created to heal her sister Ezther's arrhythmia; since no sufficient doctor existed within reach, the Titov magic conjured her from the soil. She had the Skill **Superior Arrhythmia Physician 3** from the moment of her birth, making her a competent general practitioner and supernaturally good at treating that one particular disorder.

Suggested Bonds

It is through the Titov magician's Bonds that the curse of their magic—the hollowing of their soul and more precisely their ability to feel their own feelings and recognize themselves as people—manifests. Some traditional Bonds for the Titovs include:

- **Bond**: I see through lies. *or*
- **Bond**: I think I see through lies.

- **Bond**: I see what people and things are useful for. *or*
- **Bond**: I see people (and things) *as* what they are useful for.

- **Bond**: I cannot escape these people [the Titovs].
- **Bond**: I am entangled with the thing beneath the shrine.
- **Bond**: The Titov magic changes me.
- **Bond**: I can't connect to my own emotions.
- **Bond**: The dust or the thing beneath the shrine are changing me.
- **Bond**: I must consume low-grade Outside dust to function.
- **Bond**: I am sick to death of this life: consumed with depression, obsessive self-loathing, and/or paranoia.



The Vasili

a Shrine Family

The Vasilis intercede between Fortitude, the sky, and the earth. They are promised from birth to the rain, the wind, or the thunder; the winter, the spring, the early or late summer, or the fall; the earth, or the fire, or in rare cases to Big Lake. While there is a Vasili pledged to a certain element it will treat Fortitude with more kindness: in the generations that have had a fire-taming Vasili, for instance, fire station records indicate perhaps 10% fewer fires and almost 18% less loss of life and property damage altogether. It is assumed though less well proven that this extends to Vasilis with a different pact: that Big Lake was more fruitful until the recent death of **Nikhil Vasili**, for instance; that the wind treats the ships of Fortitude more kindly because **Mayu Vasili** is alive, that the winters are milder because of **Asuka**, the springs more bountiful because of **Gorou**, and the earth more generally fruitful while **Herakleides Teófilo Vasili** keeps his garden in the north.

The Vasilis reconsecrate themselves with the use of Outside dust, each in their own characteristic fashion. Mayu releases it, trickle by trickle, into the wind. Asuka and Gorou intermittently use handfuls of the stuff during the sacred dances they perform. Herakleides, the current head of the Vasili family, mixes it into his garden's mulch; this is not a recommended gardening technique and for all his power his own garden is finicky, unsatisfying, and peculiar in its yields. Occasionally he'll get something interesting and magical out of it, sure, but mostly his garden is just a symbolic labor that helps him to tend the earth of Fortitude as a whole.

The Vasilis are more *a magical existence* than practitioners of magic in themselves. Their power isn't something they wield, but something that wields them. Their fates are spoken for and their hearts are locked open in a joyous romantic innocence by their sacred marriage to their element of the world. That isn't a closed marriage, of course, or more precisely, it isn't an obstacle to an earthly one—if anything, it's the opposite. The Vasili are crazy for love, growing up in a flurry of crush after crush and romantic drama after romantic drama until they finally stumble on "the one."[28]

The Vasili sometimes perform rituals or dances. Watching one can be **Foreshadowing**.

> Time slips by as you watch the dance....

Interacting with the Vasilis is usually **Shared Action**

> They're doing simple, ordinary things. You reach out to them. You try to connect!

Visiting Herakleides Vasili's garden may be **Discovery**

> You visit. You poke around. You find something unexpected and new. It's neat, or scary, or mysterious!

28 Shockingly, they mostly actually *do* find this "the one." I think this is probably magic, but I'm not sure, since it's not really a nature intercessor thing. I'm definitely not sure what would happen if a Vasili were naturally polygamous. Presumably either: reality would crush their romantic dreams; they would find "the two" or "the three;" or they would lock into monogamy when the magic kicked in.

Affinity for (an Element)

an example Superior Quality

The Vasili bond to nature is a **Superior Skill**. It's different for each Vasili. For instance:

- Mayu has **Superior Affinity for the Wind**
- Mayu *also* has **Superior Affinity for the Stability of the Ground**
- Asuka has **Superior Affinity for the Winter**
- Gorou has **Superior Affinity for the Spring**
- Herakleides Teófilo Vasili, who keeps a garden, has **Superior Affinity for the Earth**

The Vasili may use these Skills for influencing the weather/the land/the seasons, for perceiving things about them, for surviving in harsh conditions relating to their element, and for emulating or taking advantage of the thing they're bound to. Thus, Asuka may use his Superior Affinity for the Winter to win snowball fights, cool someone's fever, or mitigate a harsh winter. Mayu can use her Superior Affinity for the wind to slip away from a pursuer, predict the wind's direction, and not fall over when the wind is blowing hard. While there is a Vasili tied to a certain element, statistically speaking, that element will be kinder to Fortitude as a whole.

Superior Skills are generally inborn and inherent, so there's a natural floor and ceiling to any given Vasili's ability here. Most are born with 1-2 points of a given Affinity, and would have to engage in some kind of horrible desecration of their connection before it could fall lower. Most cap out at 2-4 after growing up with their condition and training in how to use it best; they'd have to do something pretty epic to take it past that natural cap.

For the most part, a Vasili's Superior Skill will only give them a supernatural Edge when that element is directly present. If snow falls in late autumn, Asuka can use his **Superior Affinity for the Winter 4** to win a snowball fight, but it's not until the beginning of winter that he gets an additional 4 Edge, and that Edge vanishes again the instant Pancake Week ends and Spring begins.

The Yatskaya

a Shrine Family

The history of the Yatskaya begins with Finley.

He was a seal, most people say, and not a man: a seal, lured up from the sea by his sea-captain wife. She stole his heart, or maybe just his seal's skin. They settled in an abandoned Jotun building up on Maple Hill.

For generations after that the sea still welcomed the children of the Yatskaya.

They'd find seal-skins or seal-shapes of their own, if they wanted them. Nearly one in four turned their back on the land, threw on their seal-sark, and swam out past the Lake into the sea. Then it became one in six; one in ten; one every several generations; and finally, today, they've left all that seal business behind them.

It's been supplanted. It's slipped from them. They've gone over entirely into being creatures of the land—though not *human* creatures. Not quite.

If anything, they're cats.

It's a problem! There's this whole Fortitude culture thing and rat-human alliance that makes identifying with cats a problematic idea—

But it is what they *are*.

It is the Yatskaya tradition, you see, to mix the dust of the Outside into their incense; the sweet-scented vapors of chaos hang heavily about their temple; they grow up breathing it. Their temple is like a ship at sea, cut off from the world around it, and there are two special Properties there that apply:

- you can lose yourself in daydreams, and think them real. *and*
- cats come and go as they please.

These Properties are real in that temple as Fortitude's own.

It's estranged the Yatskaya from the world.

It's bound them to the cats as peers.

Growing up in that fog has kept them distant from human concerns; kept them strong, graceful, confident, and alienated even as the seal-ways faded from Finley's heirs. It's given them the gift to talk to cats and sometimes other life just like they can talk to their distant cousins in the sea. It's tied the Yatskayas to the alien powers and Mysteries that dwell in cats' and rats' nightmares, subtle thoughts, and dreams.

It's changed and honed them to such an extent (with likely Skill ratings of Claimed by the Sea 1, Superior Dreamer 2-3, Cat Speaker 1-3, and potentially the Yatskaya Family Magic) that they are good at hardly anything else.

The Yatskayas run the Maple Hill Neighborhood Association. Even without owning the land, they keep the whole area as a kind of fastness. The houses there take after the Yatskaya temple style, with low stone fences, shaded alleys, simple construction, and maple trees in the gardens.

In Maple Hill, people aren't really big on the rats' thousand-cat quota.

The Yatskaya don't like the idea of euthanizing a cat.

Nor would it do the area that much good to keep a feline census precisely: the rats don't like the temple, they avoid the whole Maple Hill vicinity, and they would never trust Yatskaya numbers; rather than trying to get an accurate count, in fact, they just assume the place has three times the cats that it ought.

Interactions with the Yatskayas are usually **Foreshadowing**

Perhaps you're in the temple, and daydreams rise to fill your world. Perhaps you're watching on a lonely street as a Yatskaya princess calls and speaks to a cat. Perhaps you're listening as one speaks a prophesy—though, they don't actually have any powers of prophesy, insofar as I'm aware.[29]

You get caught up in it for a while.

Interactions with the Yatskayas are sometimes **Shared Action**

They're a shrine family! They are totally capable of doing good things—doing simple, *honest* things!—and of connecting with people while they do. They're mysterious and subtle and they smile at things beyond your shoulder or hidden in your future[30] but they're also helpful, diligent, and kind.

So it is totally possible that your interactions with the Yatskayas will be ordinary Shared Actions. It's just not as likely as you might hope!

29 They do like to screw with people's minds, though.

30 And again I emphasize that they don't actually know your future, they just... they just kind of act sometimes like they do.

The Watanabe

another Shrine Family

The Watanabe Family makes various candies out of refined Outside dust. That *sounds* like they're awesome Willy Wonka types, but it turns out that they're not. They're... mostly a couple of old men with tiny glasses on their faces and a handful of young apprentices in their shop.

Lily Watanabe, the current heir to the Watanabes, doesn't even work in their shop; she's cool and all, I like her a lot! but she's unlikely to draw you into a dazzling world of love and candy-related intrigue.

Unless—I've been asked to mention this—you're playing an incredibly hot and successful boy in your early 20s, and *not* playing a Watanabe. In that case you are "not merely allowed but expected" to draw Lily Watanabe into a dazzling world of love and candy-related intrigue.

But anyway.

Mostly this family is not a source of magic or excitement, but just of Watanabes, which is to say, chewy little candies that taste more or less like butterscotch.

Cat-Speaker

an example Superior Quality

The Yatskaya family has many strange gifts; among them, the supernatural ability to talk to cats, understand cats, and make with them a social/empathic bond.

At the different levels of the Skill, that looks like this:

Cat-Speaker 0: You can meow in a cat's general direction. It may, or may not, reply.

Cat-Speaker 1: You can communicate with cats about as well as a competent veterinarian who's familiar with a given cat's case could.

Cat-Speaker 2: Cats understand you about as well as a buddy animal in a sidekick movie would, and vice versa. They'll grasp stuff like "get help" or "what do you think of this outfit?" and are abnormally expressive in return, but you can't hold an actual conversation with them.

Cat-Speaker 3: You can talk to cats as if you shared a common language, including hearing meaning in their replies. Although it'll feel like you're talking to them in English or Russian or Japanese or whatever, a lot of the time they're actually communicating via body language, and if you're not actually looking at them they're much more difficult to understand.

Cat-Speaker 4: You can communicate verbally *or* telepathically with nearby cats. It's not a very profound mind-to-mind connection but it is there.

Cat-Speaker 5: All you need is eye contact—in that moment, it's like you and the cat are the same person, and can instantaneously convey all the memories, ideas, and plans you'd be willing to share with one another (and more.) You also have the weak telepathy mentioned above when you'd prefer.

How smart is a cat?

That's something of a Chinese Room puzzle. This isn't like one of those jokes where you learn to talk to fish and discover that all they're ever saying is "I'm a fish! I'm a fish! ...I forgot what I was saying. But I'm a fish!" Level 1 *is* sort of like that, OK, granted. You're good with cats, but what good is that? But by level 2, you can already actively collaborate with a cat or exchange opinions therewith, and by level 3 you can actively discuss feline philosophy. The Yatskaya can teach cats how to play poker, warn them about the future, or listen to and comprehend a cat's description of events.

I mean, I know! Cats aren't *smart* enough to play poker.

But sometimes, in Yatskaya company, they'll still win.

This isn't like it is with the rats. The cats haven't woken up. Animal lovers have been trying to prove *since Fortitude was founded* that cats, birds, or whatever are as smart as rats and humans—and failing. Cats aren't people. Not like humans are people. They can't play poker. They can't do math. They can't hold a complex conversation or learn the details of Fortitude's history. It just doesn't work like that.

Except with the Yatskaya, for whom, sometimes, it sort of does.

For the Yatskaya, for anyone with Cat-Speaker 2+, really, cats are up there with mute seven-year-olds. And at level 3+ they're like people, who happen to also be cats. That's as high as it goes—they don't scale up to supergeniuses or anything, unless they happened to already be supergeniuses for cats—but levels 4 and 5 increase the frequency with which they'll behave intelligently when out of your immediate sight.

So that's weird, right?

Impossible, right?

The best explanation anyone has come up with so far for the Yatskaya ability is that they aren't quite living in the same world as everybody else: they're in a neighboring world, entangled somehow with our own, where explaining things to a cat, in a calm and even tone of voice, can actually *work*.

Cat-Speaker also functions as a generic Skill at doing cat-like stuff—hunting, fishing, athletics, hanging out in high places, appealing to human sensibilities without giving in to their customs, seeing in the dark, sneaking around, and so forth. It gives its full bonus Edge when you're talking to cats, in any circumstance where talking to cats can possibly give you that much Edge—a tense contest to convey information quickly to a cat is the Platonic ideal case, although a battle in a battlefield with cat-activatable turrets in the background is pretty close—and it gives some fraction of that Edge for cat-like activities when the Yatskaya is acting sufficiently like a cat, taking a cat's advice, or using a cat-specific ability like low-light vision or super-jumps.

Claimed by the Sea

an example Superior Quality

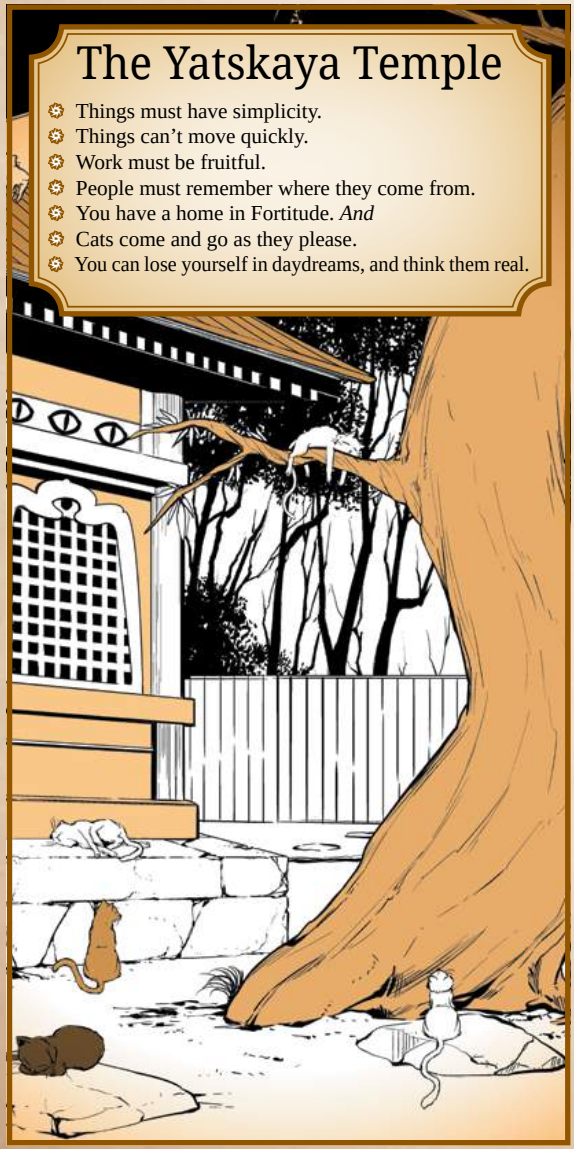
If you have this Skill, the water claims you.

One of your ancestors belonged to the sea, or possibly to the Lake, and the water calls you still. It speaks to you on some deep, liquid level; sings softly to you in your blood and dreams—and it makes a part of you want to lose yourself in it, to give up your humanity, to put on a seal-skin or shark-skin or whatever and swim out endlessly into the waves.

There aren't many people with this problem in Town. There's a couple of pikeskin or flying fish rats, I've heard, and there's the dolphin girl. There's Idril Nakano, who's supposed to be an octopus spirit. There's the Yatskaya, who at one time were selkies; though, that was generations and generations ago.

The Yatskaya Temple

- Things must have simplicity.
- Things can't move quickly.
- Work must be fruitful.
- People must remember where they come from.
- You have a home in Fortitude. *And*
- Cats come and go as they please.
- You can lose yourself in daydreams, and think them real.



Basically, what I'm saying is, it's not all that likely that you'll have this, but here's how the levels would look:

Claimed 0: You're not a selkie or a shark-were or whatever. You can put on a fish skin or seal skin but it would just be gross. Don't do that.

Don't.

Claimed 1: The sea or the Lake calls you, but you couldn't go even if you gave in to it. You wouldn't survive!

This level of Claimed extends the boundaries of what's possible for you in the water—it gives you a lung capacity, water temperature tolerance, capacity for streamlined movement, and feel for the water that a normal human can't match! But on its own, it doesn't actually make you a very good swimmer. It's all talent and no Skill.

This is whereabouts you'll find the Yatskaya today.

Claimed 2: The sea or the Lake infects you. You're a creature of it. The tides pull at your moods and your dreams are full of swaying kelp and crashing surf and of the great vastness of the depths.

This Trait lets you perform incredible, pulp-action feats in the water—you can't actually breathe underwater or go more than a day or two without returning to land, but you're an incredible, legendary swimmer and can hold your breath for an inhuman length of time. You may be able to transform a little if you spend enough time in the water, growing fins or scales or getting eyes better suited to the depths. If someone said, "Oh, that girl/guy's a seal" or mermaid or whatever, people around you would probably be half-tempted to believe.

Claimed 3: The water owns you, and you can breathe within it. One day you will go back to it; or, well, that's your *destiny*. That's what your body says to you. I suppose that you *could* possibly decide to fight it off.

Cold water doesn't bother you. Dark water doesn't blind you. Drowning doesn't *happen* to you—although it might forcibly change you, because at this level, you also have the ability to physically transform into a sea creature and back again. Maybe you put on a seal-skin or a shark-skin and turn into such a thing, and cast it off again to become human. Maybe the water steals your clothes and gives you a fishtail and gills but you keep your basic human form, and your old clothing rematerializes when you dry out. You can usually transform instantaneously, though you may need to be underwater or to have some special prop to do it.

The Lake or the sea is constantly tugging at the back of your mind, calling you out to return to the water and to live there.

Claimed 4-5: This doesn't really happen; or, put another way, if the sea or Lake has that strong a hold on you, you've probably already gone.

(Superior) Dreamer

an example Superior Skill

You're good at handling surreal, unreal, chaotic, and dream-like environments. You're unfazed by the Outside, at home in Bluebell Park, and wouldn't be all that terribly disoriented if you fell into Wonderland itself. You can dream lucidly, fall asleep or wake up at will, and fend off mental attacks with ease. In addition to being a Skill for handling yourself and staying oriented in such environments, **Superior Dreamer** gives an Edge in any conflict for control over a dream-world or your own mental state.

Note that it's almost impossible to use this Skill to *do* stuff in the waking world—it may help with art or storytelling, and if somebody else telepathically assaults you or something you might be able to turn the tables, but you can't usually just shove people out of the way when a bull is charging and say:

"I'll handle it! I'll use my... *dreaming*!"

The results would almost certainly be gory.[31]

Level 5 doesn't make much sense to me, and kind of risks the PC escaping the conversation, but here's how levels 0-4 would work:

Superior Dreamer 0: You're able to fall asleep and dream. Usually.

Superior Dreamer 1: You're a lucid dreamer, and good at coping with strange things.

Superior Dreamer 2: You're *really* good at coping with strange things.

Superior Dreamer 3: You fundamentally know who and where you are—either there's something elemental about you, so that you *define* yourself into being, or you're just incredibly centered and rooted. You can't ever be completely lost or disoriented because you're always *you*, and wherever you go, there you are.

Superior Dreamer 4: You pretty much understand nonsensical worlds better than the real ones. You're the kind of person who'll spread mayonnaise on two slices of bread just before the Outside begins to rain sandwich meat, turn simulated worlds inside out to trap the AI that's simulating you, and casually play yourself when you show up in other people's dreams. In sum, your dream-world power ranges from the cartoonish to the godly.

31 J is for Jenna
in all of her glory
Tramped down by a bull.
For bad puns about Gorey.

The Ferry

that you sometimes ride in dreams

Once it was one of the horses of the sun; but she died, and it fell screaming into the Lake and lost its form; and now it is a wooden boat, cold and quiet though still alive, with only a horse-head figurehead to remind it of its former shape.

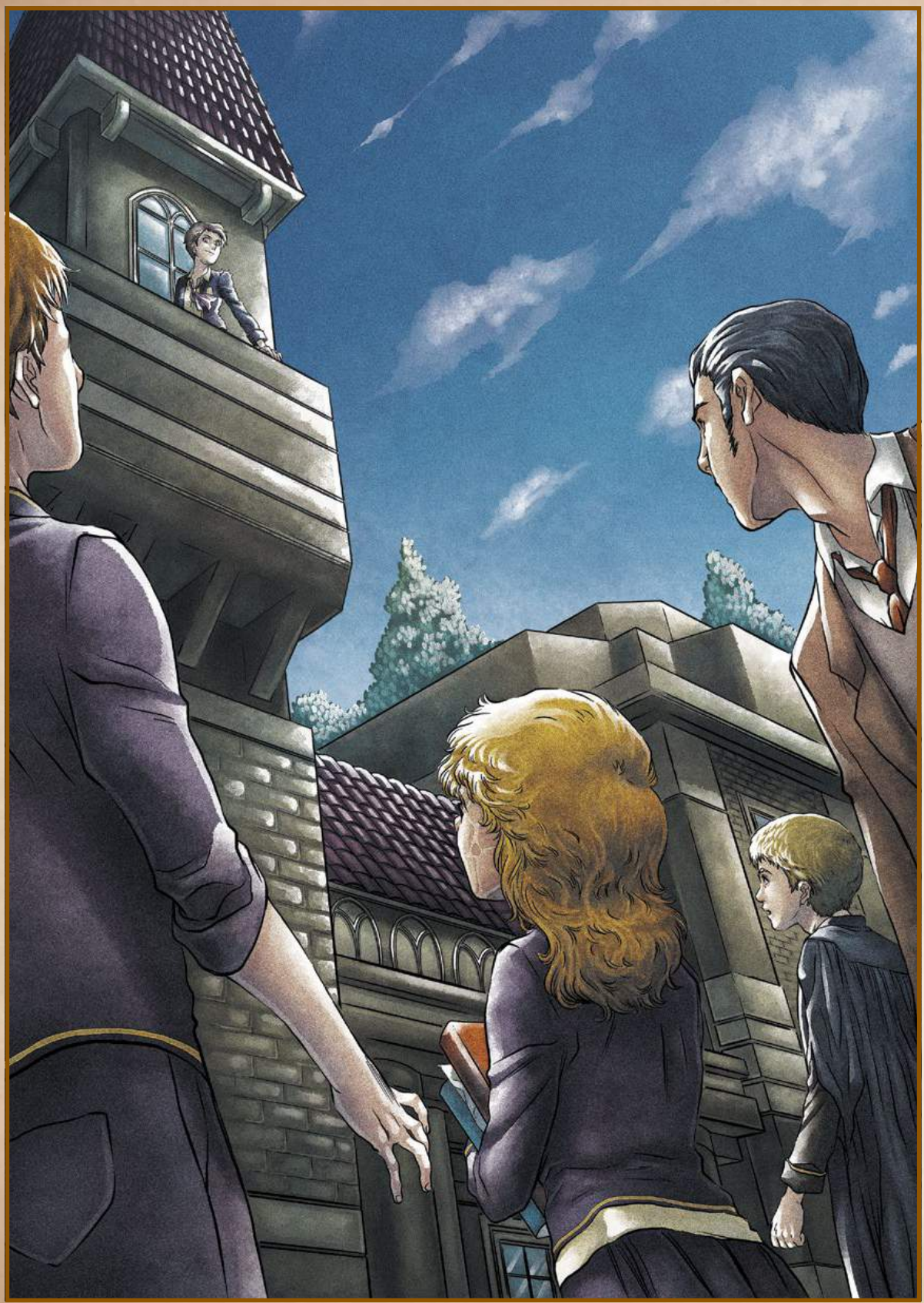
It roamed free for a while. Then the ferryman caught it and taught it of the needs of Town. Now the ferry runs between Fortitude and Little Island, leaving every three hours and slipping across the Lake. It sleeps in Fortitude after dark: the last run to Little Island is at 4:30 in the wintertime and 7:30 in the summer. Between its final dock and sleep, the ferryman sits with it, singing to it, cleaning it, or combing its wooden hair.

Traveling on the ferry is usually **Slice of Life**

Experience the world and the water!

On the holidays, it's more like *sailing the Outside* (pg. 302)—

- **Trouble** when things get scary;
- **Adversity** when they get hard;
- **Slice of Life** at their best;
- **Discovery** when you're encountering strange possibilities; *and a*
- **Ritual**, if you want to compress a long, epic journey into a single furious scene.



The Yatskaya Family Magic

an example Magical Skill

Lastly we have the magical Skill of the Yatskaya, who have bound themselves to the cats of Fortitude and sometimes bind themselves to a handful of related spirits, archetypes, and Mysteries as well.

The single, solitary, non-magical technique of this Skill is:

[Obstacle 0] reassure, befriend, or make peace with a cat or cat-like spirit;

But they are also familiar with such magical techniques as:

[Obstacle 1] see through the eyes of a cat or something they are bound to;

[Obstacle 2] command a cat;

[Obstacle 3] bind themselves to an archetype or spirit connected to cats;

[Obstacle 3] speak to or become that archetype;

[Obstacle 3] attune to a specific cat they have a Connection with, increasing their effective Cat-Speaker (pg. 219) with regards to that cat to level 5 for a scene and level 4 for the rest of the story.

[Obstacle 3 + restriction] draw on a spirit to empower themselves; if the resulting Intention is not 3+ the spirit has the option of taking over their body and actions for a time.

[Obstacle 3 + restriction] draw on a spirit to enchant or destroy something; if the resulting Intention is not 3+ the spirit will then *automatically* take over their body and actions for a time.

The Troublemaker

So in the stories "Rinley Yatskaya" is the name of an epic fool, the kind of guy you'd expect to see stealing the wind from the Devil's sails, inventing forks, and catching the moon in the palm of his hand. He was a lovable troublemaker who wandered through Town's early days getting into all kinds of mischief.

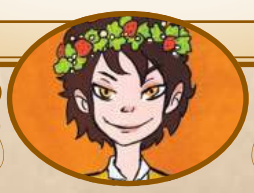
There's someone a little like that in the modern day.

By default, **the Troublemaker** is actually *named* Rinley Yatskaya; apparently her parents, Goro and Shiori, decided to tempt fate. She's usually a girl a year or two under the PCs' age, although the name would of course work for a boy. The modern Rinley's just beginning to show the signs of walking in her namesake's footsteps and becoming a folk hero, a trickster figure, someone awesome and goofy like the old Rinley was—sailing on a thimble, finding spending money under rocks, and all that like, though she hasn't really gotten *used* to it yet.

But the thing is, she's already figuring out what all y'all will notice in time—that she *can* do this sort of thing, that she *does* do this sort of thing, because the wishing heart has a power in it to change what's possible and what isn't!

This character *could* also be the youngest child of a different family—Rinley "Valentine" Kichi, snoop and matchmaker extraordinaire; Rinley Sosunov, with more of a Buddha stories and less of a tall tale vibe; Rinley Titov or Titova, summoned from the earth to help contain what they keep hidden at the Titov shrine (pg. 214-215), possibly prematurely, if it's still asleep or bound; or Rinley (Nicholas or Nicoletta) Vasili, with a superior connection to the hearth or to the power of steam!

Rinley Yatskaya, aka
The Troublemaker



Suggested Bonds

Growing up in the Yatskaya family temple leaves one strange. Yatskaya, magician or otherwise, often develop Bonds.

Suggestions include:

- **Bond**: I don't understand human ways.
- **Bond**: a little simple or naive
- **Bond**: I cannot fight without risking becoming animalistic and berserk.
- **Bond**: Rats trouble me.
- **Bond**: I must look out for the interests of the cats I know.
- **Bond**: I am driven to lurk in high places and stare down at people.
- **Bond**: I am drawn to water.
- **Bond**: I hate water so *much*.
- **Bond**: If I don't get my fourteen hours of sleep how do you expect me to get through the day?
- **Bond**: I like to play with my opponents.
- **Bond**: I act like I'm drugged, in a trance, or half-asleep even when I'm not.
- **Bond**: I act *really ridiculous* when actually drugged, and it doesn't take much catnip to get me there.
- **Bond**: Insects are really tasty. And catching them is fun!
- **Bond**: I get really, *really* hyper sometimes.
- **Bond**: ooh shiny
- **Bond**: destiny's patsy
- **Bond**: I have no destiny at all.
- **Bond**: I've bound myself with Yatskaya Magic to an ancient cat god.
- **Bond**: I've bound myself with Yatskaya Magic to a Mystery feared by the rats.
- **Bond**: I've bound myself with Yatskaya Magic to the cats of a given neighborhood.
- **Bond**: I've bound myself with Yatskaya Magic to a specific cat.
- **Bond**: I've bound myself with Yatskaya Magic to the cats of a non-Fortitude Region.
- **Bond**: I've bound myself with Yatskaya Magic to oversee the death, birth, growth, territory, or other element of the life of cats.
- **Bond**: I am not good at anything outside of temple life.

The Mysteries

If you hang out with the rats of Fortitude you'll notice that they're heroic adventurers; or, well, that they think of themselves like that. And you may wonder about this, and think it's pretty silly, because everything else aside, where do you even *find* adventures to be heroic in, in a rustic place like Fortitude?

And maybe if you're a little wiser, you think, oh, they sail out on Big Lake, and confront things in the Outside, and since the Outside's equally scary no matter what size you are, I'd guess, that gives some credence to their claim.

And they *do* do that. I mean, that kind of adventuring is real.

The weirdest thing, though? That *isn't* the core of it. That isn't where they do most of their adventures.

They go out on the roofs of Fortitude and they take their secret ways, and at some point the roofs *stop* being Fortitude roofs.

They start being "the Far Roofs" instead.

Things get weird and magical and you have everything from manna trees and witchlights to the horror that is Grayvale and its sun.

There, above the world, where the world laws are—as far as I can tell—the laws of Soma Village (pg. 297), the heroic rats of Fortitude face, duel with, and study the god-monsters called the Mysteries. They quest against creatures like the poisonous serpent Typhon; against Goblin, terrible and cruel; against Harpy, though they've slain her; or against the mind-killing Hedge the Fang.

I'll tell you more about these adventures later, when I've had the chance to assemble all my notes. I just don't want it to surprise you when I do. Whether you're gaming in Fortitude or just visiting, you should know this stuff is there!

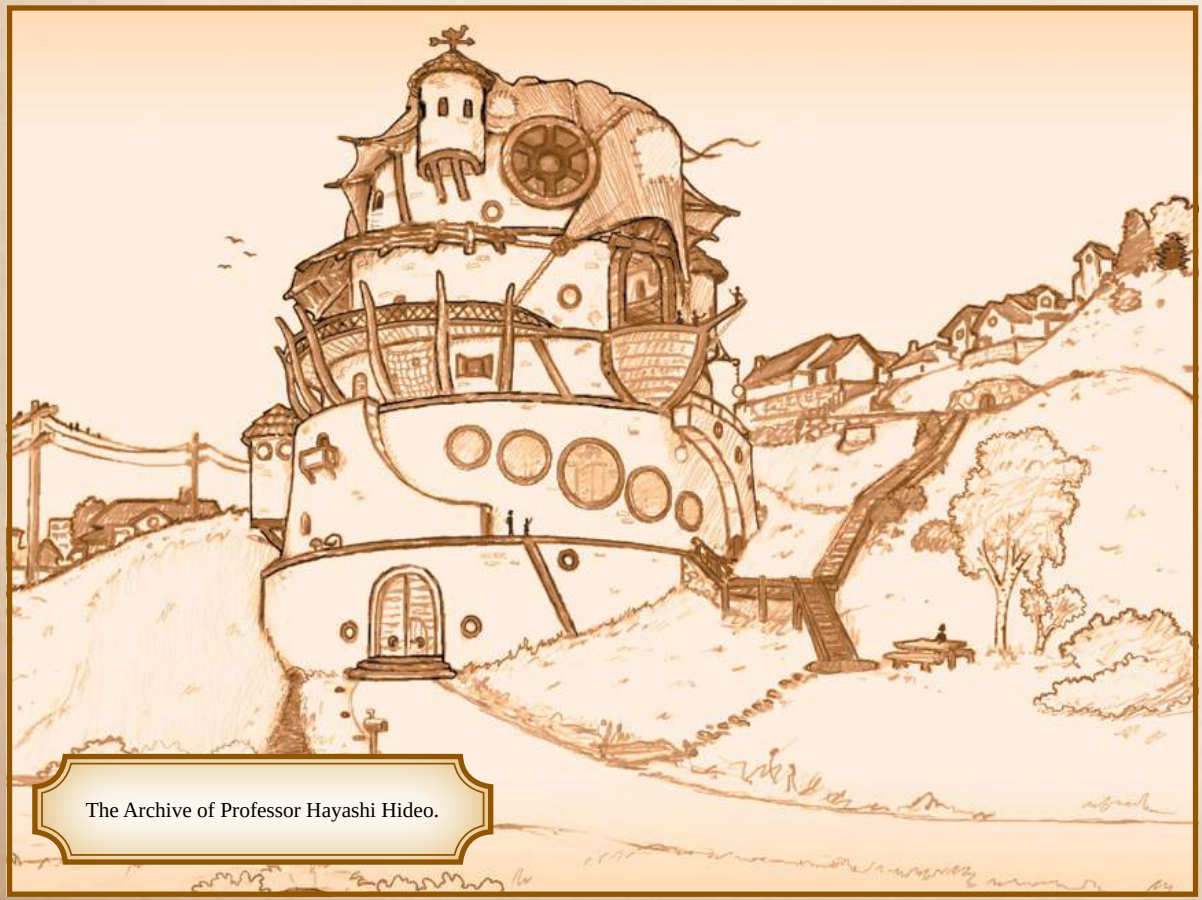
The Hayashi

another Shrine Family

The Hayashi Family is atypical for a shrine family—they're very mundane and down to earth[32], over at the House of Crystal. They process the dust of the Outside by melting it into glass, blowing the glass into form, covering it with a layer of ordinary glass or lacquer, and letting the sun shine through it over months or years to disinfect the magical substance inside. The effects of this are so slow and subtle that they don't count as or require a magical Skill; instead, there's a quest for it, **Glass Magic** (pg. 464), which I'll share with you a bit later on.

Of note is their black sheep, Hayashi Hideo; the top floor of his Archive/halfway house is in the shadow of a Mystery.

32 Down to Town?



The Archive of Professor Hayashi Hideo.

RAT-LORE OF TYPHON

Typhon, who is named Outrage, is a great and terrible serpent. She dwells past Gallows Way, in the Madcaps' Nave below Dead Man's Manor. There amidst the chaotic rising and falling edges of the Nave she rages at the things that have done her wrong, smashing the rooftops into kindling one day and coiling in deep, hidden places meditating on her malice and dreaming of visitors to bite the next.

Praksia the rat found her there. Typhon broke Praksia's neck and hung her high. Praksia danced, not dead but certainly not living, for seventy and seven days. Then the lightning struck the tower where she hung, and Praksia slipped away.

"I cannot stay," she whispered, when to her family she'd returned. "For I am dead, and Typhon will hunt me down. I cannot stay, but I will tell you her secrets, and you may put them in your Books of Names."

–from **The Mysteries, for a Human Child**, by Filimer Augustine

The name of Typhon is
Outrage–the fury of the privileged when intruded on by the weak

The heralds of Typhon are
storms; the scraping of scales on the roofs; the glint of gold in the distance; POLITICAL TURMOIL

The weapons of Typhon are
the weak, intruding on the strong.

You turn Typhon aside by
poisons; whips; disasters; and anything that moves like snakes

Typhon kills you by
hiding from her sight; meekness; willing service to her ends; *compassion and empathy for those below you in their station*

Typhon is drawn to
breaking your bones; hanging you high; ripping you up; casting you down; and in any cruel and wicked way

Typhon hungers for
pomp; gold; glory; the vulnerability of prey in the aftermath of a disaster; those who refuse her, reject her, or show her disrespect

You may kill Typhon by
your love; your adoration; those who praise and adore her she treats more kindly, and those who reject her or flee her she will never in her life forgive

Typhon is reborn when
stabbing her in the eye with a blessed spear; choking her on her own weight; acting to save her from a real and genuine need

the storm is fiercest at Madcap's Nave; when the Rat King dies without an heir, and a new family must take the throne ← WHEN A LEGENDARY PEARL FORMS AROUND THE HATRED AND JEALOUSY IN A HIGH-RANKED OR OTHERWISE FORTUNATE PERSON'S HEART

You may escape the attention of Typhon by
praising her as you defy her, until you prove yourself more trou-
ble than you're worth; rejecting a gift that she has offered you
three times.

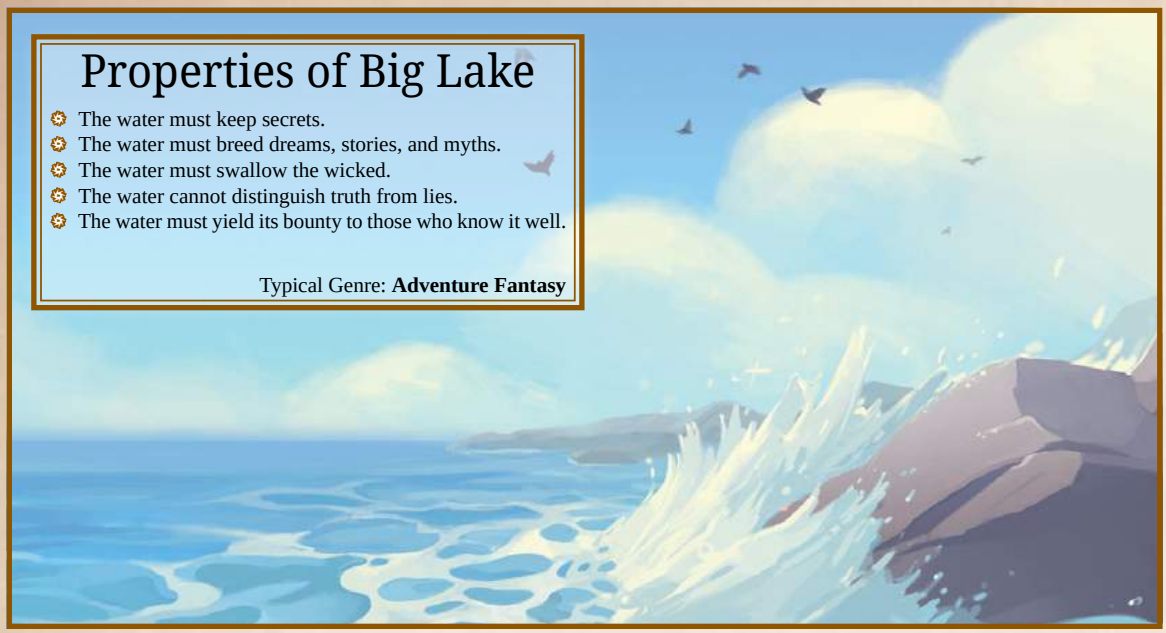
from Vittore's Book of Names

Big Lake

Properties of Big Lake

- The water must keep secrets.
- The water must breed dreams, stories, and myths.
- The water must swallow the wicked.
- The water cannot distinguish truth from lies.
- The water must yield its bounty to those who know it well.

Typical Genre: **Adventure Fantasy**



Big Lake is an inland lake. It's a place of mysteries and secrets—not the least of which the secret paths, shortcuts, and tricks that the ferry and the fishermen use to reach the Outside and thence the sea.

For all that it's a sizable part of Town, not much actually *happens* on Big Lake.

There is reputed to be a secret kingdom under or on the waters which only manifests on specific occasions. Perhaps it is a kingdom of ghosts; or lake elves; or terrors from Outside; or ordinary people who happen to live underwater. Perhaps it is an appearing and disappearing island, or perhaps it is a fairytale underlake land. I don't know. I'm not going to go into it today. There could even be more than one.

The water must keep its secrets, after all.

Area: Immeasurable (443+ sq. miles)
Population: unknown

Ships

The "six Kings" of the human ships of Fortitude are

- **Kirillo**, foremost among fishing ships;
- **Tikhvin**, the far-traveling merchant;
- **Hiryū** and **Egretă**, two venerable ancients;
- **The Wittenberg**, famed, lucky, and adventurous; *and*
- **The Kranmaru**, aka "the Young King."

I've also heard much of the rat-ships **Rule the Sea**, **Dragonslayer**, **God of Big Lake**, and **Kaiju of the Heart**.

Some of the other ships that are currently at sail include **St. Peter's Cross**, **the Sandpiper**, **the Great Lord Gadigan**, and **the Neall Raemonn Price**.

Conversations on Big Lake

Conversations about hopes and dreams are usually **Decisive Action**.

Celebrating something like a birthday out on the water is usually **Decisive Action**.

> You talk about what you dream of. You talk about what you'd wish for. It's building towards a decision—what are you going to do to bring about the world of your wishes and dreams?

Talking about life is usually **Shared Reactions**.

> You trail your hand in the water. You look at the sky. You talk about things that have been going on, and you connect to the people you're with. You're maybe more open than is safe. You take a bit of a risk that way, make yourself a little vulnerable that way, out on Big Lake.
>
> The water'll keep your secrets, after all.

Talking about nothing in particular while out on the water is usually **Slice of Life**.

> You talk. Something in the mirrored lake or your thoughts stirs an emotion.
>
> You get lost in the mood.

The Net Breeds Dreams

In a Pastoral game Town is unlikely to have Internet access. At least, I haven't found it.

In other genres, though—Techno or Immersive Fantasy, in particular—

You might have more fun if it's actually there. Is it just getting started? Or has it been there for years?

One model for a Town net is that you can get to the whole Internet—it's all "out there"—but like the physical world it is mostly drowned in the Outside. A lot of webpages are just plain surreal and disorienting stuff, and clicking on links too unwisely can produce breaks from reality in the real.

Another option is to make it so you can't see the Outside-covered pages—

They time out, or they 404, and so Town winds up with intermittent access to a small, oddly-selected rim of the outer world's Internet, plus a little local private Internet of its own. I figure all of this would be dolled up retro to match the BBS, America Online, or *maybe* even the Geocities era. You could even add a twist of *better-than-Earth* Internet on top of that, local steam-based stuff, like request-anticipating pseudo-AI that moves windows around and does little searches for you, steampipe voice interfaces, or magic-based holographic displays. The net would probably run on the world-laws of **Big Lake**—"the net must keep secrets," "the net must swallow the wicked," and so on, but there might be an edging of Fortitude.

Magic and Trouble on Big Lake

This stuff is pretty rare. But it happens!

Disposing of a body or an evildoer out on Big Lake is usually **Decisive Action.**

You talk a bit about what led you to this. Then you do it. Then, maybe, you follow it in.

The water must swallow the wicked, after all.

Trouble while out on the lake is usually **Trouble**

A storm rolls in suddenly. A giant Outside-bred sea serpent or kraken attacks your boat. Something bad is coming, and you are overwhelmed!

Can you get away?

Can you hide, and wait it out somewhere safe?

If you can't escape, can you win a little tactical victory, like getting the anchor up before the storm gets there or stopping the serpent from snapping your main mast?

Trouble while out on the lake is sometimes **the Road of Trials**

The lake is big enough that you can have Adversity there, too, even without crossing into the limitless Outside. You can suffer adversity after a shipwreck, floating out there, alone. There's almost no sharks or human-eating fish because it's a freshwater lake—Outside-spawned creatures like the sea serpent I mentioned are aberrations. On the other hand, the Lake touches on the Outside in many places so there *are* occasional aberrations, and even, quite possibly, sharks. The lake is pretty warm, compared to the sea, but if you spend long enough stuck in it it will begin to feel quite cold indeed. The water's *usually* drinkable but sometimes it's brackish or has a hint of Outside psychotoxin in it. There isn't much of a rescue organization in Fortitude because shipwrecks are so rare, so you'll have to be pretty lucky or hope that you're close enough to shore to get to it in whatever direction seems the likeliest to swim. You're probably within a few miles of *something*, and even if you go in *exactly* the worst possible direction you're probably only 10-13 miles away, but 13 miles is a really long way to be swimming and that something you get to could be the Outside and not the shore.

The Lake's big enough to have Adversity, and it can be awful enough to give Trauma; and there's enough Outside poison out there to put you at risk of Corruption; but most of all—

The Lake is a place of and for heroes; so most of this leads you to **Never Say Die!**

Waiting for something interesting to happen is usually **Foreshadowing**

Stuff hinting at an underlake kingdom's presence is usually **Foreshadowing**

You watch the sky and the water. You think. You feel. It seems like something is going to happen. You wait for it. You get caught up in that feeling, that *impendingness*.

After a while something finally *does* happen; or maybe it never does, and you get through the whole trip still waiting.

Stumbling on something interesting is usually **Discovery**

What's that? *Wow!*

Working on Big Lake

Exploring Big Lake and its paths is usually **Discovery**

Now in the old days you could get across Big Lake and its secret paths without even entering the Outside; but these days most sailors will settle for finding lakeways to interesting destinations that don't cross through *too much* of the fearful and difficult Outside.

You're out there, exploring. Maybe it takes you a few days or weeks to find each new thing, or maybe they're coming one after another like the rain. And here's one now: something new, something nobody's seen before.

What is it?

Is it terrifying? Mysterious? Cool?

Doing nothing in particular while out on the water is usually **Slice of Life**.

You do whatever little things you're doing. You make small talk. You stare out at the horizon. Something in the mirrored lake or in your thoughts or someone's words stirs an emotion.

The moment sticks with you.

Fishing or boating work is usually **Shared Action**

You go out on the water. You do simple, honest things. You connect with the other people on the boat. You trust them to watch your back.

Long Journeys

This works pretty much like *sailing the Outside*, on pg. 302, in particular since long journeys usually *do* cross the Outside.

It's...

- **Trouble** when things get scary;
- **Shared Action** for most of the trip;
- **Slice of Life** at its best;
- **Discovery** when you're encountering something new; *and a*
- **Ritual**, if you want to compress a long, epic journey into a single furious scene.

The Ritual of the Lake

an Example Ritual

Here's how you might sail out across Big Lake, through lands of adventure, and then return.

You'll start with a ritual phrase like, "Weigh anchor!" or "Sail away!"

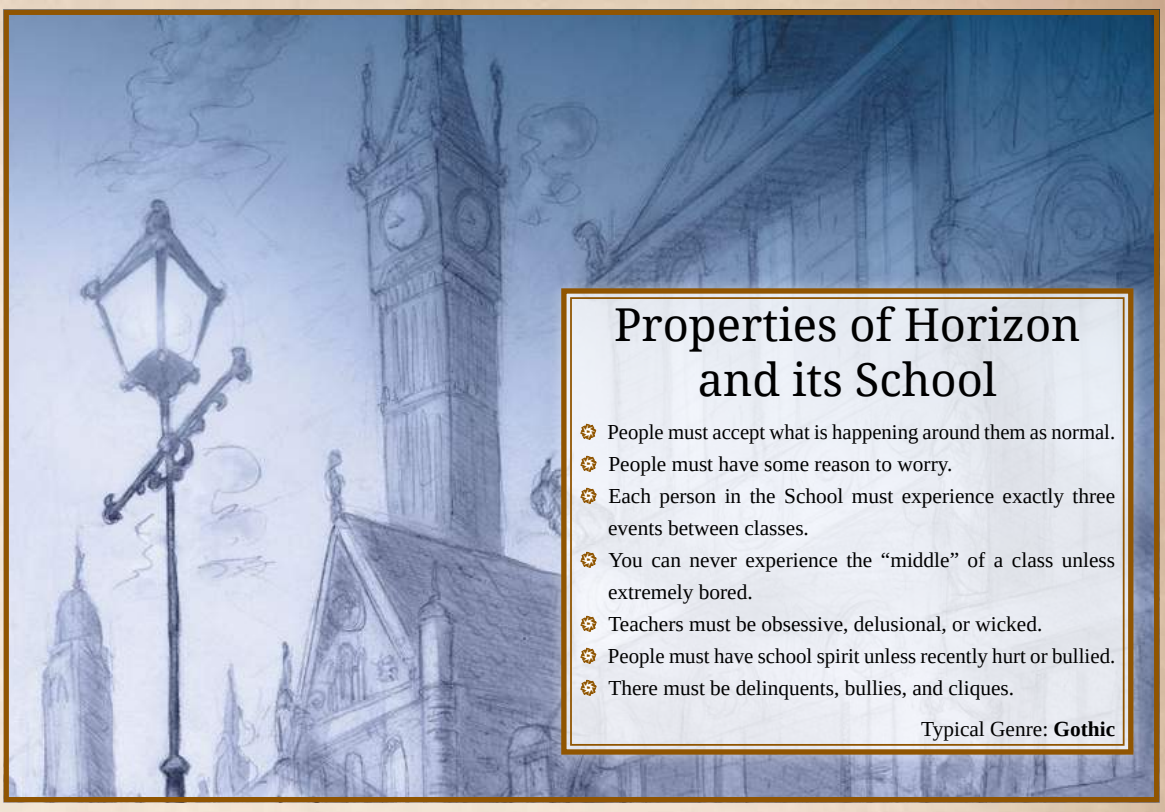
Then, assuming that you've met the criteria—basically, you need the HG's permission, and all the players have to have noticed that you've started a ritual—you and the other players start in on a series of ritual actions:

- describing things you do aboard the boat;
- "posing" or otherwise showing off how your character interfaces with nautical life;
- summarizing strange encounters or weird things that you see or find—
  - scary weather;
  - strange weather;
  - lashing waves;
  - weird, magical islands;
  - strange sea creatures;
  - uncomfortable experiences;
  - tall tales;
  - daring adventures; *and*
  - brushes with death
- talking about what you hope to find at the end of your journey; *or*
- invoking some unrelated symbol of power (e.g., powering up a world-altering device or engine, or invoking a Ritual Power) to merge the two ritual invocations together[33].

The ritual usually ends when someone uses the phrase "Land ho!" and the HG confirms that that's acceptable at this time. The result and benefit is usually that the characters have safely traveled across large portions of the Outside and arrived, either where they wanted to go, or somewhere where the HG wanted to take them.

33 I don't actually expect you to combine Rituals very often, particularly not for an OOC ritual like this one, but that's exactly why I feel I have to mention it every time I'm talking about a ritual lest the option be forgotten. I'm expecting the rare payoff the one time it actually happens in your game to be amazing.

Horizon



Properties of Horizon and its School

- People must accept what is happening around them as normal.
- People must have some reason to worry.
- Each person in the School must experience exactly three events between classes.
- You can never experience the "middle" of a class unless extremely bored.
- Teachers must be obsessive, delusional, or wicked.
- People must have school spirit unless recently hurt or bullied.
- There must be delinquents, bullies, and cliques.

Typical Genre: **Gothic**

This Region of Town is brooding and gothic. Built on three layers of dead civilizations, it has the highest per capita population of walking dead and monstrous residents of anywhere in Town. Most of them are functionally harmless but living students are advised to stay out of graveyards, catacombs and labyrinthine underworlds, turf marked as the possession of an unworldly tribe, and the steam tunnels underneath the School.

As a rough demographic sketch, Horizon's population is roughly 57% human, 34% ghost, 6% vampire, and 3% monster or "other." The ghosts rarely leave Principal Entropy's School, however, so the visible demographics on the street are closer to 85% human, 9% vampire, and 6% monstrous—or as much as 93% human during the day.

The centerpiece of Horizon is Principal Entropy's School, and the Region is built both in and out of character to attend the School's needs. In a game focusing on older characters, you could replace Horizon's School with the University, Research Center, Military Training Facility, or Office Building where the characters spend their time; a modest academy in any other Region would adequately fulfill the academic needs of Town. There are also various houses, shops, parks, and other points of interest here.

Area: 35 square miles
Population: 33,200 + 3,500 commuting to or boarding at School (20,800 humans / 12,700 ghosts / 2,000 vampires / 1,100 unworldly creatures / 100 other)

The City

Horizon is built in the style of Victorian London. It's cleaner than you'd expect, though, and has fewer people—you can find massive slums and rookeries with all of three families sharing them, stretching their gaily colored laundry lines between the crooked windows and narrow ledges and giving even the little ones a suite of the cramped rooms each. Most of the place is dated, baroque architecture but there are a few buildings of modern brick. The Region is full of cemeteries, gargoyles (the not-alive kind), arches, parks, patches of dead grass and living trees, fountains, towers, wide roads, and neon signs. The standard transportation is hansom cab, bicycle, or foot, although there are a handful of rickety busses that serve Horizon or all of Town.

Tunnels, ruins, and catacombs extend far below the city, full of strange horrors and remnants. Everyone says you shouldn't go down there—the secrets there are best left buried.

Exploring the forbidden places beneath the city is usually

Wicked

You descend. The world becomes strange and unreal.

Should you really be doing this? Doesn't everyone say you should not?

The "worry" that the Region Properties require is usually

Obsessive Action

You're nervous about something. You get worked up over it. Eventually you tip over the edge into obsession!

...or do you just kind of shut down, instead?

Wandering around Horizon is usually **Slice of Life**

Something in the environment catches your attention. It makes you feel something.

You get lost in the mood.

Unworldly Tribes

The unworldly tribes of ghûls and ogres and other external or primeval folk stake out various territories within Horizon. They ooze forth from the corpse of a dead god buried somewhere in the Region, or linger from primordial times, or lose some scrabbling grip on the edge of the evil island (pg. 242) and fall from the Principal's home onto Town. They band together in Horizon and claim abandoned streets or buildings as their homes.

Studying or befriending a member of the unworldly tribes destroys them. Under the pressure of either a competent investigation or a strong relationship with a human, their skin thickens and forms a crystalline cocoon; horrid noises and bright lights emerge from deep within; and eventually a human hatches. For this reason they police their own numbers and minimize their tendencies towards crime; SWAT teams might prove no threat to them, but a single competent detective or social worker with an axe to grind could humanize them all.

Humanizing an unworldly creature against its will is usually

Wicked

You wouldn't *normally* think it's OK to change someone's species against their will, right? So if you think it's OK when it's a ghûl, that could qualify as a Wicked Action. Even if you're right! You'll start by willfully trying to "befriend" or investigate them. Then you'll break from reality (pg. 31-32). Perhaps the HG warns you of the possible costs of what you're doing, but you just go ahead and do it anyway, because, I don't know, because ghûls eat human corpses and that's just gross, or whatever.

Wicked!

Shared Action/Reactions can result in an accidental or unplanned befriending.

When you connect with an unworldly creature during Shared Action or Shared Reactions, that can move you closer to a state of friendship. I don't think that makes this wicked, despite what I said above, because I don't think you can make a legitimate connection out of the wickedness in your heart—at worst, you can make a wicked or obsessive *plan* to befriend them, followed by an actual honest connection:

Two separate incidents, one vile and one good.

School

School has no other name. Sometimes it's called "The School" or "Horizon's School" to differentiate it from others. The rest of the time the implied capital is understood.

It's not an ordinary place.

It is vast, baroque, and somber. It's a lot bigger than it needs to be—the grounds are a square mile, and most of that is one gigantic building whose facade completely dwarfs you as you approach. It has 6500 living students and over 12,000 ghosts and it would still be spacious at a fifth of its size.

It's like walking into a land of giants, the first time you go to School.

Classes are usually **Foreshadowing**

Something catches your attention....

Studying is usually **Obsessive**

You worry or get obsessed with your classes or assignments. You get worked up over it, tipping over the edge into obsession. Does somebody notice and react to the way you're going over the top?

Socializing is usually **Shared Reactions**

You work through your emotions about stuff that's happened or is happening. You connect with some other students about it. Ideally, someone makes themselves a little vulnerable to pick up an extra XP.

Club and Team Activities are usually **Shared Action**

You do stuff together. You try to connect.

Experiencing the baroque grandeur of the place is usually **Slice of Life**

It stirs up an emotion in you; you're lost in the mood.

Athletics

With the occasional exception of a Night School team or a team fielded by St. Vita's School for Wayward Girls, School doesn't really have any rival schools to play sports against. Accordingly the more popular sports have small internal leagues—hockey, basketball, tennis, and soccer in particular have managed to put together leagues and ladders enough to have a small series of games every year, and other sports keep trying.

Competitive games are often **Never Say Die!**

Protagonists have a surprising tendency to wind up the underdogs, over and over again, and the ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** PCs are no exception. Many games will feature the characters defying the overwhelming power of their opponents—narrating their actions as awesome and doomed, ramping up every time the HG pushes them to fight harder, and ending up exhausted whether they win or lose. Coming up with reasons why a miraculous or otherwise powerful PC could even imaginably have trouble here is up to you! ("You" mostly meaning the HG, but players who want these Actions are actively encouraged to help with the brainstorming—or even pitch the opposition themselves.)

Practice is usually **Shared Action**

Of course.

Competitive games are often **Slice of Life**

The sad truth is that many matches will not actually challenge the PCs—particularly if somebody like **the Prodigy** or **the Idol** is on their team and even vaguely motivated. Conversely, a team limited to the less athletic characters like **the Wishing Boy** may not stand a chance at all. Games that are foregone conclusions, or where the major challenges fall on NPCs instead of PCs, are likely to play out as Slice of Life.

You experience the world. You feel something. You get lost in the mood!

Delinquency

Much like athletes, delinquents and troublemakers traditionally establish their place in the School hierarchy by ritually fighting their way to the top as individuals and gangs in single- or double-elimination contests. They even have subtle markers suggestive of a uniform. They just don't call it a *sport*.

Traditionally there hasn't been much in the way of extramural rivalry between the gangs of the different schools. The ladder has been known: there's troublemakers from School. Then there's the local unworldly tribes. They're scarier. Then there's Night School troublemakers. They're worse. Finally, there's St. Vita's School for Wayward Girls; anyone from there is presumptively if not necessarily the scariest and toughest badass within a mile. Lately, with **the Idol** Soun Shounen asserting his supremacy over School's delinquents and making the previous toughs his minions, there's been some rumors going around that he could take on even the bravos of the local unworldly tribes.

Avoiding getting caught is usually **Trouble**

If you're doing something you probably shouldn't, the threat of somebody catching you tends to loom. You'll feel overwhelmed and overmatched. Can you run? Can you hide? Can you duck part of the consequences?

Maybe it'll seem like you've succeeded, like you've gotten away or saved what matters.

...but that could just be a lull before a follow-up shocker when everything goes wrong!

Delinquent-style fights and activities are generally **Never Say Die!** or **Slice of Life**

Much as with sports, the characters are likely to be overwhelmingly challenged or not challenged at all in any brawl worth playing out.

Ghosts

Ghosts fill up most of the empty space in School.

You can't always see them. They have their own classes and a tendency to fade from view. However, most of the time they're visible in the halls or classrooms as faceless people in a faceless crowd. They have black "emotion" lines on their featureless heads allowing you to appreciate their moods. If you become personally acquainted with a ghost and spend sufficient time on the interaction, you may begin to see their actual face and features. Customs vary over the years, but for the most part, the living students consider growing that close to a ghost unnatural behavior, marking the face-seer as a freak, geek, or other personage outside of social norms.

Not every student is capable of seeing the ghosts at all. Some are blinded to their presence by unknown phenomena; to these students, and to everyone else from time to time, School is a vast and echoing cathedral, unnaturally great, quiet, and cold, that urges the living by its emptiness to huddle together and move swiftly through its halls.

Interacting with ghosts is usually **Slice of Life** or **Discovery**

You emote in the vicinity of a ghost. Surprisingly, it emotes back!

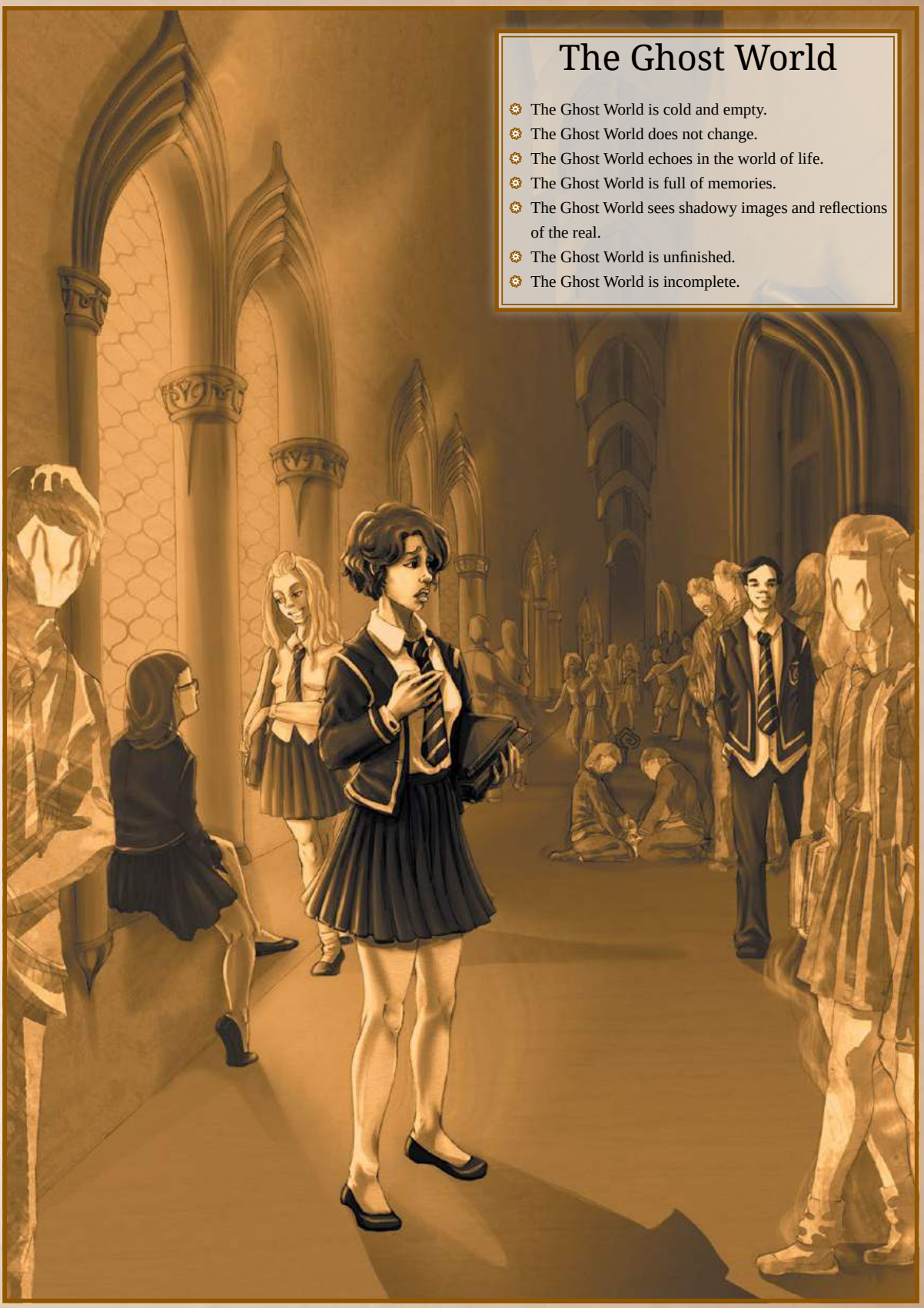
Being unable to see ghosts is usually a **Sickness** or **Vice** Issue

Maybe you really can't see them. Maybe you're just willfully refusing to see them because you find their presence traumatic. What is it that you are not willing or able to see?

The Ghost World

Ghosts and people are naturally estranged from one another. They do not interact. The human reality and the ghost reality do not touch—ghosts interact with ghosts, and ghost-books, and ghost-roads, and the like. Humans interact with humans, and human-books, and human-roads, and the like. But the division between the two worlds is not whole and entire. Sometimes eerie sounds drift through from the ghost-world, or the brighter lights of the human world will shine through amidst the ghosts. Sometimes empathic sensations will transmit. In certain moods and in certain places a human will be primed to sense ghosts, or vice versa. The more they sense one another, the more real they become to one another, until first one starts to see the ghosts, and then to share a physical reality with them.

It's a setting conceit that the living world is "more" real than the ghost world, and thus the living are more real to the ghosts than the other way around. When a ghost sees a human, there may be a shimmer or distortion between them, like the ghost is looking upwards at the world through water; when a human sees a ghost, the ghost itself seems indistinct, unfinished, and incomplete. The ghost world is a lower, vaguer reality, more prone to time-skips, emptier of sensation, less mutable, and more possessed by dream-logic. It is even possible that the ghost world is nothing more than the memories of the real.



The Ghost World

- The Ghost World is cold and empty.
- The Ghost World does not change.
- The Ghost World echoes in the world of life.
- The Ghost World is full of memories.
- The Ghost World sees shadowy images and reflections of the real.
- The Ghost World is unfinished.
- The Ghost World is incomplete.

Ghost Magic

an example Magical Skill

Ghosts don't really have *powers*—they're just people, who are ghosts—but a few of them are a little better at being ghosts than others. This seems to be a magical Skill: hard, unnatural, and draining for them.

(Isn't that just a little bit strange?)

You can use Ghost Magic Skill to perform the following basic, non-magical techniques:

[Obstacle 0] laugh an eerie, echoing laugh

[Obstacle 0] raise someone's hackles

[Obstacle 0] stare ominously

[Obstacle 1] walk silently.

[Obstacle 1] see into the living world without bringing the two worlds closer.

It also gives you access to the following techniques, which are *actually* magical:

[Obstacle 1] find someone who's looking for you.

[Obstacle 1] adopt special "ghost expressions" that human faces can't.

[Obstacle 1] fade away from the living world when nobody is watching.

[Obstacle 2] fade away from the living world, even in plain sight, as long as the people watching you don't know you very well.

[Obstacle 2] turn translucent and mostly-intangible, able to pass through things of the living world as long as they don't also exist in the ghost world.

[Obstacle 2] slip into someone's dreams.

[Obstacle 2] stretch out your legs into an attenuated vapor, allowing you to float off the ground or stretch up to five feet taller.

[Obstacle 3] reach into the living world from the ghost world without materializing.

[Obstacle 3] interact with specific objects while otherwise mostly intangible.

[Obstacle 3] steal someone's life energy.

[Obstacle 3] drag a living person temporarily into the ghost world.

Suggested Bonds

Some Bonds that might work for a ghost include:

- **Bond**: I am bound to the place of my death.
- **Bond**: I lurk around the edges of the world.
- **Bond**: Every night I am hunted down, torn apart, and eaten by other ghosts.
- **Bond**: I have unfinished business.
- **Bond**: I am always cold.
- **Bond**: I am shockingly normal and dull, considering that I'm a ghost.
- **Bond**: I prefer others to take the lead.

Some Bonds more common to living magicians who practice ghost magic include:

- **Bond**: I am half a ghost.
- **Bond**: I keep slipping inadvertently into the ghost world.
- **Bond**: I have to help ghosts resolve their unresolved business.
- **Bond**: I have nightmares every night.
- **Bond**: Ghosts that other people can't see or hear are always making me laugh or startle in inappropriate contexts.

Vampires

At night, School becomes Night School. This is very much the same except that instead of children, the students are either adults taking special classes or vampires.[34]

Let me talk about vampires for a bit.

Most people are scared of vampires; their movements and spiritual emanations trigger the death-fear and the predator-fear in the human soul. However vampires in the modern world typically consume negative energy (worry, fear, and pain) instead of blood; many of them have taken a moral stand on the matter, while even those with an active taste for blood have the same opinions on murder and assault as any other citizen of Town. If a vampire wishes to reassure humans of their docility, they will drink "pillow-teeth tea," a concoction of octopus ink and various Horizon herbs which makes their fangs squishy like marshmallows and unable to rip open human necks. If they wish to deny humans this reassurance they may wear T-shirts comically playing up their ability to rip your neck open without breaking a sweat, instead.

A vampire feeding on you is usually **Corruption** or **Metamorphosis**

Having a vampire eat your worries is probably kind of pleasant, and I've heard good things of the whole blood thing as well—but it's still somebody changing you from outside yourself, so the HG might inflict a point of Sickness and the target might take a Corruption or Metamorphosis Action.

Drinking pillow-teeth tea is usually **Corruption** or **Metamorphosis**

Seriously, the stuff is the craziest thing a dentist has ever made me drink. I imagine that if you got used to it, like, if you're using really small doses as a cavity prevention technique, it might become a Slice of Life sort of thing. If you're a vampire, and you decide to drink it for the first time, or to stop drinking it for that matter? That's probably a Decisive Action, complete with a monologue leading up to your decision. But usually? The HG should treat it as an "attack" and potentially a Metamorphosis, complete with all the trippiness that can happen when local reality gets disturbed.

After drinking the stuff, your teeth are kind of, um, *spongy* for a bit.

The predator-fear usually triggers **Obsessive Action**

Vampires are almost always safe, and even when they're not the fear will feel exactly the same, so their threatening presence probably doesn't qualify as *Trouble* unless you're a total Horizon n00b. Instead, incidents where you're really feeling the vampire-fear provoke Obsessive Action.

Fear sweeps over you. You get worked up over it. You do something over the top. Ideally, somebody notices and emotes a reaction; or, maybe, the vampire catches you (and reassures you, probably) or goes away, ending the Obsessive Action scene.

Investigating Night School is usually about **Discovery**

You explore. You find neat, scary, or mysterious things, and, ideally, emote a response!

Note that you probably won't find anything mysterious.

I mean, maybe objectively, you would? But it takes a lot for something to seem mysterious in Horizon, what with the Property that "people must accept what is happening around them as normal"—

So finding something "neat" or "scary" is much less rare!

Invoking vampiric power could be a **Ritual**

You're probably not a vampire. Even if you are, it's probably just, you know, a thing. But if you are a vampire, and you want it to be this echoing, uncanny, transformative power in you, then calling on your vampiric nature could be a gothic permutation of the standard magical girl transformation sequence. You'd play something like that out using the Ritual Action rules.

34 Vampires, even vampire children, avoid School during the day because they do not like catching on fire.

(Superior) Vampire

an example Superior Skill

This is the Skill that lets a vampire eat negative emotions and blood instead of normal food; lets them have vampire children; gives you, if you are a vampire, the immunities and recuperative properties of the living dead. It's also a rough measure of how intimidating and predatory humans find your body language when you're not actively disguising your true nature.

The levels look like this:

Vampire 0: You think of yourself as a vampire. You maybe act a bit like one?

Vampire 1: You're vampire-*like*. You can get decent nutrition off of blood, your night vision is good, you're extremely resilient, and your metabolism is extremely slow. This is a good level for someone who almost died, but was saved by a bit of vampire blood, or by connecting to a vampiric spirit, or something.

Vampire 2: Are you a half-vampire? A young vampire? Unusually alive? Your fangs are very small. If you plan to turn someone else into a vampire, have medical assistance on hand, since there's a very high risk that you'll just kill them. You can survive starvation, asphyxiation, and drowning, but you need mortal food and air to *function*. You also need a bit of blood or negative energy now and then to keep your powers active. You give off "this is a dangerous human" vibes and can smell blood from a long way away. Your senses are generally keen and your night vision is excellent.

Vampire 3: You're a vampire. You're dead, but you walk. You can survive off of blood or negative emotions. You can eat negative emotions—sipping lightly from ambient worry, fear, pain, and possibly jealousy or anger or whatever, or drinking these things straight from someone's mind. You don't need air, you don't need food, you don't need water, you don't age, you heal quickly, and your natural way of moving *freaks people out*. It is *terrifying*.

You have the sense of smell of a bloodhound and it's even better for blood. The rest of your senses are generally keen, but not that much better than at Vampire 2.

At this level you can make vampire children, although I don't know how—I have, um, not yet actually, um, interviewed a vampire on this subject. I assume it's like in modern vampire fiction but for all I know you just use a really goofy secret handshake and then wibble the tips of their ears a lot with your fingers. I don't know! Your PC might not know either.

Vampire 4: You are some sort of super-vampire or primordial pre-vampire or post-vampire or something. I don't know what these are, but it's such a common idea in fiction that if you've got an idea of what that would be, I think it would be OK to use it.

Vampire 5: You are a "living vampire." I don't know what this means either! Except that it's actually scarier than a regular vampire instead of weaker like you'd expect.

This is mostly just the Skill of *being a vampire*—it might include strength and grace and stuff, but only when you're using it to do vampire-type things like hunting or pointlessly showing off for a romantic interest and it doesn't come with any Edge. For that reason vampires often supplement this with two more Superior Skills, discussed below, and a variety of Bonds, Perks, Afflictions, and unique magical Skills to simulate the classic vampire abilities like animal-summoning, transformations, or flight.

Superior Vitality

an example Superior Skill

This is the unnatural health and strength of the living dead.

Vampires are *really* strong. I'm benchmarking a typical vampire PC at the strength and vitality of a bear—that's **Superior Vitality 3**. That's both a skill "really strong/tough 3" and 3 points of Edge in any mundane conflict where strength and toughness comes into play.

In the bigger picture this Skill looks something like:

Superior Vitality 0: Mortal strength! What's wrong with you??

Superior Vitality 1: This gives you a small supernatural edge, but not an awesome one.

Superior Vitality 2: You can effortlessly overpower most humans, but you're still in the rough vicinity of mortal strength. You can only do things that are realistic for "someone really strong."

Superior Vitality 3: You're as strong and tough as a bear, and maybe stronger. You can tug-of-war evenly with like 8 strong guys. Given long enough you can probably break through metal.

Superior Vitality 4: Your strength is pretty limitless. You can crumple steel, drag tractors around, and so forth.

Superior Vitality 5: Your strength doesn't even make physical sense any more: you can catch falling airplanes, bat elephants casually out of your way, and it is vaguely possible that your jaw is strong enough to bite holes in space-time. Characters like **the Prodigy** may still be able to outwrestle you, but the HG can reasonably require them to give a stirring monologue or suffer a bit of Trouble before they can make the attempt.

Superior Physical Control

an example Superior Skill

Vampires are also pretty fast, dexterous, and graceful. I'm benchmarking this at **Superior Physical Control 1**, which isn't anything to write home about, but you might consider giving up a point of something else and buying your way up to 2, which would put you up there with cinematic ninjas, martial artists, pulp heroes, Robin Hood, and the like.

In the larger picture, this Skill probably looks like:

Superior Physical Control 0: Clumsy as the living!

Superior Physical Control 1: You move with an unnatural grace and precision, but you can't *do* that much with it without another skill to enhance.

Superior Physical Control 2: You're better than any human, but the best gymnasts, runners, and fighters out there might be able to *almost* keep up with you and edge out a victory by sheer experience.

Superior Physical Control 3: You can pour tea safely while on the back of a bucking horse.

Superior Physical Control 4: You can catch a single drop of water from a splash or throw a needle into the eye of a hornet.

Superior Physical Control 5: Unlimited precision of movement, which I guess means that you can do things like... um... sing a note to cancel out the waveform of another sound, hide from somebody searching for you in a closed elevator, paint photorealistic images in seconds, and the like?

Teachers

Most of the teachers are just ordinary teachers. They're messed up or wicked, because that's the law of Horizon, but they're still pretty ordinary—a teacher is more likely to be an obsessive pencil counter than an obsessed collector of students' skin; more likely to believe themselves in 18th century France than to believe that the world must be sacrificed to some wicked god; more likely to be pettily cruel or ideologically evil than murderous, sadistic, or monstrous. You might start the morning with a cat running homeroom—not a talking cat, just an ordinary cat with a diploma from a diploma mill; move on to a class with a muttering eccentric; then, after a break for lunch, round out the afternoon with a deviant scientist, a nihilistic unrepentant murderer on work release, and a fervent breatharian nutritionist.[35] You'd get to go home still alive!

That said, there are some teachers who are actively dangerous to the children of Horizon: they're just the meat and drink of specific campaigns and encounters and not an assumed part of a young character's life.

Class with a **Deviant Scientist** is usually a source of **Obsessive** worry

Class with a **Deviant Scientist** can also be **Trouble**

Whether it's **Dr. Ellen Kinnegan** with her botanical experiments or mild-mannered **Mr. Hawke** with his railguns and robotics, there's always the brooding sense hanging over the class that something's about to go terribly wrong.

Class with **the Unrepentant Murderer** is usually a source of **Obsessive** worry

Obviously **Mr. Red** won't jeopardize his work release just to kill you, probably. He is very clear that those stains on the wall are not blood, or not his students' blood anyway. "Besides," he'll say airily, "the Principal's always bleeding. That could totally be from him. Hahahahahaha."

Then he'll look at you, very seriously and sincerely, and say, like a lover, "Nothing matters, you know. Not even maths."

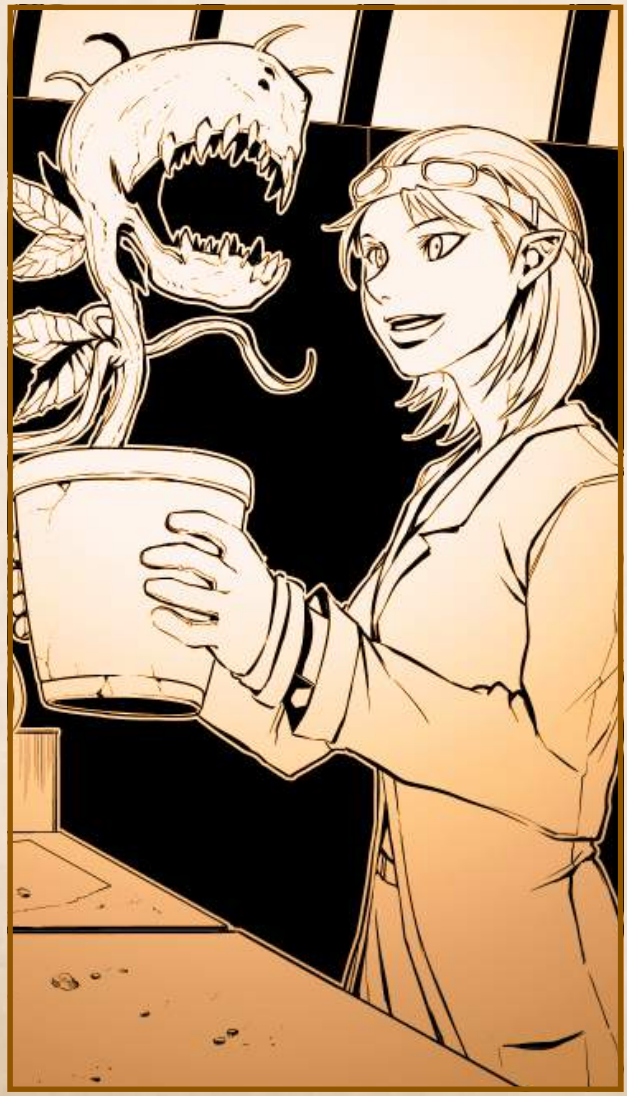
Class with **the Self-Effacing Teacher** is usually **Shared Reactions**

It's practically impossible to even remember this guy's face, much less his name, or to listen to whatever he's trying to say. Does he have eyebrows? Does he speak your language? Is he even your teacher, or is this another class run by the cat? This one time he showed up wearing a pink and lavender suit because he wanted to tell people he was getting married, but he lost your attention somewhere before saying to whom.

Usually his world history class is an occasion for lively discussion of sports, family matters, and love.

Class with **the Shriveled Teacher** is usually **Adversity**

This is a wizened old man named **Mr. Morgan**. He has stone fingernails that are long and sharp. He is cruel and extremely good at justifying his cruelty; he is able to make an impeccable case that almost anybody deserves whatever punishment he feels like handing out, and according to legend can cow even a hero into standing down. There is a rumor that if he ever gives anybody an A+ or an honest compliment he will catch fire and burn away.



35 Teach the controversy!

Ogre-Sensei

Zoë Rosewood, aka Ogre-Sensei

(The) **Ogre-Sensei** is very passionate about poetry, literature, math, and the right of his or her unworldly cannibalistic tribe to continue existing as themselves. This ogre is a very good and challenging teacher except that sometimes in the middle of their class when nobody is paying attention one or two students vanish... and they are never seen again.

Could the teacher be eating them?

And why can't the best minds and hearts of the student body turn this ogre into a giant human egg?

By default this Main Character is Mrs. **Zoë Rosewood**, but you could swap her job and title with that of her husband, the Principal's usher and bodyguard Hugh. Other variations include making her a risen ghoul or tank-model zombie instead of an ogre giving her a high-level special seminar instead of a class, or mak ing her and Hugh fresh-faced School-age geeks smart enough t teach one particular class during the current budgetary crunch.

Extracurricular interactions w/ the Ogre-Sensei are usually

Trouble

She's terrifyingly, freakishly strong—like, she can beat **th Prodigy** in hand-to-hand combat. She can smell where you've been for the last three days from up to a quarter mile away. Her skin can turn a knife. Also, she eats people. Well, her tribe does, anyway. And she thinks that's their *moral right*.

Ogre-Sensei's class is usually **Foreshadowing**

She likes to pick topics that matter to people.

Ogre-Sensei's class is sometimes **Sympathetic Action**

You weren't paying that much attention. Then, bam, suddenly this class is *very* important. Like, you've just realized that on of the students is *gone*. Or she's casually mentioned somethin directly relevant to your interests, like a discussion of wha your family was doing fifty years back or a story about some thing you're looking for.

If you freeze up in shock, someone else can attempt **Sym pathetic Action**.

Extracurricular interactions w/ Ogre-Sensei are sometimes

Never Say Die!

You refuse to accept that she's too strong to fight and too *some thing* to befriend or investigate and turn into a human egg. Yo stand up to her. Maybe you even *seek her out* and stand up to her

Never Say Die!

Her rants about anthropophagy are usually **Slice of Life**

She will occasionally go off on a tangent about how completely unfair and ridiculous it is to be a superior, amazing ogress who is born to kill and eat humans and then have them turn out to have this pompous spark of... something *almost* like *personhood* or intellect inside their ridiculously mushy brain-meats. How the moral binding to not eat things that have their own experience of the matter is a ridiculous and unfair imposition and how if anybody can construct a proper ethical argument freeing her of it she will totally give extra credit.

Sometimes she will make this argument because she is passionate. Sometimes she will do it because she is tired, dispirited, or drunk. And at such times she is oddly sympathetic, because a desire not to kill and eat *people* is clear in her voice even while she wavers intermittently into a rhapsodical de-



The Practical Teacher

Mrs. Senko, aka the Practical Teacher

This Main Character is a very good teacher (probably covering "rational thinking," "citizenship," or "topics in reason and philosophy") but disapproves of childishness and imagination. **The Practical Teacher** is always trying to convince students to abandon their fanciful ideas and study hard so that they can go to the Bleak Academy beyond the far Outside, for which this character is a local representative and recruiter.

This Main Character is normally **Mrs. Senko**, daughter of the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy, but may also be **Mr. Senko, Jr.**, his grandson. Another possible variant is **the Impractical Teacher**, who strives to madden students with whimsy and magic until they flee to the Bleak Academy to escape the rampant chaos of Horizon life. (Or maybe that isn't the purpose at all—maybe they just want to laugh at the students for breaking down!)

The Practical Teacher's class is sometimes **Decisive Action**

Perversely, the pressure of her practicality can result in your thinking about, and talking about, your hopes and your wishes and your dreams. If you can catch someone's attention with this while you're laying out your ideas and hopes, and build towards a decision or towards a decisive action, that's a great Decisive Action.

The Practical Teacher's class is usually **Corruption**

She will try to break you down. She will try to get her hooks into your *mind*.

The Practical Teacher's class is sometimes **Never Say Die!**

You refuse to give in. You refuse to bow to the ideology of the bleak. You stand up to her, resist her power, and make a case for wishing, childishness, and the imagination—or maybe you just tell her off. This provokes, not a physical conflict, but a philosophical, psychological, and verbal struggle—

Never Say Die!

The Practical Teacher's class is sometimes **Shared Reactions**

It's also possible that you might become friends with her over time and have classes where instead of Corruption or struggle you wind up just kind of offering your alternate perspectives on the kinds of things that have gone on. You work through your divergent emotions and your ideas. You talk about how you live your lives. You try to connect!

Deviant Science

an example Magical Skill

There's a pervasive strand of deviant science in Town, particularly in Arcadia, Horizon, and Horizon's School. It works like this.

Deviant Science (aka **Steampunk**, **Steam Science**, or **Science!**) is a magical Skill. That means that it can do basically anything—while it may *look* like it's bounded in some fashion by the normal limits of human or human-like activity, it isn't. If you practice this science, you can make a gyroscopically stabilized hand cannon or a clockwork alligator that really cries. You can make a death ray. You can make anything imaginable, really, with only one limitation: practically everything you can do with this Skill faces an Obstacle, meaning that you'll probably need to spend more Will than you'd like. Harder stuff faces a larger Obstacle, and stuff outside the standard steampunk thematics below usually gets a +2 Obstacle on top of that.

Note that deviant science *is* a kind of engineering and not just casting spells, so you're going to need time to do your work. Sometimes you can hurry it a little, but if the HG thinks you're pushing it too far you'll take the "outside the standard steampunk thematics" penalty on those grounds alone.

This Skill starts with two techniques that aren't really magical at all—

[Obstacle 0] Simple, practical, and realistic feats of engineering, such as putting together a quick block and tackle.

[Obstacle 1] Unrealistically extensive clockwork.

I don't think other PCs need magic or a +2 Obstacle to do these—characters like **the Prodigy** can perform these techniques perfectly, and really, for a normal scientist, even the vastest clockwork projects are going to be Obstacle 2 instead of Obstacle 3.

The next few techniques, conversely, are *genuinely* magical, or at least, well, deviant:

[Obstacle 1] Unrealistically elegant steam-powered machines

[Obstacle 2] Self-motivated automata

[Obstacle 2] Artificial limbs

[Obstacle 2] Flying machines

[Obstacle 3] Thinking machines

[Obstacle 3] Death rays

[Obstacle 3] Multi-purpose machines capable of dramatically reshaping/resizing themselves

I'm not ready to say that any given application here is impossible to an ordinary engineer—Earth has plenty of flying machines, and in fact some of almost everything else! I'm just going to say that at this point, you've departed from normalcy.

That's a problem for anyone trying to copy or understand your work—

But for you it's a plus. It means you can do remarkable things. If you want to whip up a zeppelin in your garage, the HG doesn't have to spend a few hours trying to look up whether that is a feasible or an unfeasible project. I mean, I assume that either engineering students at MIT build zeppelins in their garage on a regular basis or that there's some reason why it's just not practical at all, I assume this is *knowable*, but it doesn't *matter*.

You're a deviant scientist. It's Obstacle 2.

Similarly, if you want to build an actual artificial intelligence, the HG doesn't have to look up the state of modern AI; we don't have to have a discussion as to why it hasn't lived up to its early promise or whether a true AI automatically self-improves to a Singularity. The HG just has to work with you to figure out what's appropriate to your Skill and to Town.

I wouldn't put it past normal, non-deviant scientists to invent some sort of death ray—probably sound-based or whatever? Electricity?—but that isn't relevant either. If you want a death ray—sound-based, electricity-based, even *remove the vital principle*-based? Bam. That's Obstacle 3.

Wondering why I'm only going up to level 3 here?

It's because I'm reserving Obstacles 4 and 5 for steampunk adaptations of other magical Skills' techniques. For instance, the Kichi family can astral project while staring into their magical pools. That's Obstacle 2. The Yatskaya can embody a spirit or archetype; for them, that's Obstacle 3. So a Kichi Pool Astral Projection Vapor Engine, replicating the Kichi technique, would be Obstacle 4. Building a Yatskaya-Style TYPHON Interface Battlesuit Mark I, summoning the spirit "Typhon" down into the wearer's flesh: that would be Obstacle 5. Most random stuff that isn't listed above or emulating an established technique from another magical Skill will be Obstacle 3-5; once you hit Obstacle 5, that's as hard as anything gets.[36]

A really good Horizon laboratory can function as a +1 Tool for such a Skill as this.

Bonds You Might Have

Common Bonds for a deviant scientist include such weaknesses as:

- **Bond**: I'm obsessed with numbers and measurements.
- **Bond**: I have a tendency to monologue.
- **Bond**: I prefer to do things the baroque and elaborate way.
- **Bond**: I can't sleep when I'm inspired. I can barely eat.
- **Bond**: My hair looks goofy.
- **Bond**: I am unaware of normal social conventions.
- **Bond**: I automatically use my "outside voice" when talking about science!
- **Bond**: I cannot resist a sufficiently compelling experiment.
- **Bond**: I am impelled to doom myself through my own hubris.
- **Bond**: I love my creations. My beautiful creations.

And such strengths as:

- **Bond**: I am exceptionally good at making weapons.
- **Bond**: I am exceptionally good at making robots.
- **Bond**: I am at my best when building stuff with an animal theme.

36 So why not just build an All-Powerful I-Win Button, if you're at Obstacle 5 anyway? The answer: if you think your character can make an All-Powerful I-Win Button, that *is* a better use of your time than a Yatskaya-Style TYPHON Interface Battlesuit Mark I... but it's not worth ruining your character concept for. All mundane actions, including actions to use magical devices, are heavily filtered through the HG's storytelling techniques anyway, so it's better to have a battlesuit that fits with the game and your character's story than something named "the All-Powerful I-Win button" that does not!

The Principal

Principal Entropy II, Magister, aka The Principal

Once upon a time the Principal of Horizon's School was **Entropy I, Magister**—the King of Evil and all evil things. Having learned that the world was doomed, he came down to Horizon and built his School, there to cultivate students capable of becoming or creating a new world.

This he called the S.E.E.D. program.

No sooner did the program begin to bear fruit than he did, as well—a child by (some say) the Magistrix of the Third Age of Creation, **Attaris Ebrôt Appêkā**, or (others say) by a mortal woman; by the sun, then named Jade Irinka; or by God or the Devil themselves.

That's this Main Character—

By default, a 22-year-old male scholar named **Principal Entropy II**, although you could make them secretly female, or the publicly female **Principal Attaris II**, or cut back or increase their age.[37]

Let's assume this character is "Entropy II," for now.

He killed his father and he stole his job—

Well, officially, Entropy I decided that he had to leave suddenly, stripped off his bloody, knife-gashed fireproof garments, handed them to his son as moving, family-connection type music swelled, said, "Son, I'm going to need you to run the School while I'm away," jumped into the incinerator and flew up the chimney and was off; his son clung so fiercely to those garments as he cried that the blood permeated and became an element of his hands...

—but let's be realistic.

He killed his father, and he stole his job, only to discover that being Principal is not actually all that rewarding. Now his hands drip eternally with blood and he must spend most of every day buried deep in the Administration Complex of School handling paperwork, angry parents whose children have been eaten, suspended, or otherwise unfortunate, and interpersonal issues at the School.

These days Principal Entropy II lives on an evil island that flies around the sun. It comes down from the sky in the morning and double parks, or, rather, fifty-thousand-fold parks on his space and the adjacent parking spaces in the massive administration lot. Then he climbs down and it flies away until it's time for the Principal to go home again at night. Fortunately for his faculty nobody really uses cars in Horizon so as long as they remember not to park their bikes in or call a hansom to the administration parking lot these events are unlikely to do harm.

Owing to the peculiar circumstances under which he assumed his apparently hereditary office, Principal Entropy isn't actually that much older than the students at his School. He has very strange ideas about how the School should be run but seems to have good intentions—he is intent on turning out students capable of handling anything life throws at them, and isn't afraid to be cruel and authoritarian to get there. His private office is guarded by a labyrinthine trap-infested warren of strange halls and filing cabinets; most students whom the teachers send to meet with him must wait for him in the general Administrative Offices.

In his tenure the S.E.E.D. program continues; evidently, the world's still under threat.

37 "for budgetary reasons"

Meetings with the Principal are usually **Immersive Fantasy**

For him it's like Decisive or Science/Faith/Sorcery Actions:

- He monologues to you. He explains his perspective, and builds up to a choice. Then, he acts!
- Or... he decides to trust you with something. So he explains what he thinks you're about, and what he thinks you're going to do, and then he gambles that you'll do it.

...but he's often an NPC, so I don't think his epic actions matter here. What matters is that you might feel sympathy for him; or scared, intrigued, or puzzled by what he says; or that you may find it a Shock!

Or are they **Defining Moments?**

It's also possible that you're the one in the driver's seat here—monologuing to or putting your faith in *him!*

Being recruited into the S.E.E.D. program is often a **Defining Moment**

Participating in the S.E.E.D. program is often **Shared Action**

S.E.E.D. functions a lot like any other School club—the club mission, "to create a new world if this one gets destroyed," is great and epic and all but in practice involves sitting around in a clubroom reading books, doing homework, and playing games. The exceptions aren't usually actions but long plotlines—

Training missions or complex storylines where the Principal or PC/NPC who runs the club tries to build up the participants' potential; attempts to move forward with world-creation so the club will have something to show off at the cultural festival; dangerous experiments like building a small prototype world in the near Outside or reducing a basement lab to a state of raw chaos; and being targeted by enemies from far away.

Incidentally, the actual process of creating a new world probably involves one student turning into a giant tree or other axis mundi, another student turning into a crackling wall of fire that surrounds it and keeps enemies at bay, and a few others becoming gardeners. Developing these harsh truths into a plotline is left as an exercise for a reader or a later campaign.

Going into the Principal's labyrinth is sometimes a **Struggle** (Trouble or Never Say Die!)

You're driven by some unavoidable circumstance to head into the labyrinth around Principal Entropy's private office. But you're overwhelmed and outmatched!

Or were you looking for trouble?

Did you have an option? Could you have waited for him in the Administrative Offices? That's more likely to be Never Say Die!

When he addresses the student body it is usually **Foreshadowing**

He'll say something that catches your attention. You listen for a while. Then, you react!

The Student Council



Six shards of the first Principal Entropy—"the Six Sins"—rule the Student Council of Horizon's School. They wear masks when about their official duties and hide invisibly among t body when they are not. They share the Principals' dre ating a new world, but each has an alternate vision as should be done.

They are:

Lee Scathing, who runs the Disciplinary Committe magician, he keeps tanks of the Principal's blood in l tory beneath the School and uses them to create pois ordinary students into Hall Monitors, and craft new for He objects to the S.E.E.D. program as too earthy, coars man, believing that only a perfected being of total inno re-create the world.

The Exultant runs the Travel Committee. He has l ways of the evil world and the Outside. His sin is to l edness precisely because it is wickedness; he *adores* th bad intentions. His grand dream is to poison the Hea the Bleak Academy with the stuff of the Principal's e paralyzing him as a wasp might paralyze a spider, and to host the eggs of newborn worlds.

Owler thinks itself a God, and laughs at the pric achievements of all other souls. It runs the Catering Co is a formless vitality: it has learned the trick of stepping to body, possessing the new host and leaving the old and confused behind it. It intends to create and becom world itself, reshaping its borrowed flesh; then it will its new world-host, leaving it stuck eternally in the sha new Creation, while Owler parties with such allies and can bring along as the new world's eternal King and Q

Mourning has no specified role on the Student C cil. He is generally believed to be a vampire prince, ab walk in day, and rejecting the pillow-teeth tea that w indicate his refusal to harm mortals. He holds that it is f a vast field of corpses that the new world shall be ma he spends his life engineering the great battle that sha give it birth.

Glass Spider runs the Finance and Budget Com- mittee. He has a magic of naming to him, the power to inject others with packages of compulsions, drives, a programmed thoughts—though he must purchase acce their minds from them for his more extreme and pecu endeavors. His belief is that it is not a student but a st that will remake the world—a work of art, which he see desperately to find someone to craft, that will, whe played out physically on the stage that is the world or (more likely) the Outside, give rise to new substance an new form.

Finally, **Impious** runs the Athletics Committee. The pious is to love the wounded, and their strength in survi ship, so much as to forget that there is more to them tha wounds. It is the belief of Impious that only a creature t from utter ruination, from being utterly *broken*, can b seed of a beautiful new world.

Working for the Student Council is usually **Wicke**

In a typical Horizon game the Student Council is very gray but not actually evil—

I mean, with the possible exception of Owler, they can all maintain at least the façade of humaneness and more than a façade of having a legitimate reason to exist. They should all *probably* be thrown into a volcano or something, but there's at least a 30% chance that some of them are salvageable as people and a 5% chance that they're *necessary* to saving existence and humanity from being lost.

So, working for them isn't necessarily evil. They'll tempt you into it, they'll try to sway you into it, and it won't be evil.

It'll just be... bad.

Unhealthy.

Not good for you at all.

You may get an invitation. They may offer you a mask and powers and a place among them, or a junior role assisting the luminaries of the place. They may offer you an ordinary job, or ask for your help with their secret agenda.

It's not healthy, so it's Wicked, but I guess it isn't necessarily wrong.

Encounters with the Student Council are sometimes **the Road of Trials**

Conversely, there's always a chance that they are laughing and brutal monsters, to a one.

School Uniforms

School has three standard uniforms, leaving aside accessories, options, and gender divisions. These are colloquially known as *the living colors*, *the dead colors*, and *School colors*.

The first uniform is navy, white, and gold. This is for *living students born in Town*. The crest for these "living colors" is the ourokompos, a classical symbol made of knotted snakes that represents life upon the world. School regulations forbid this uniform and these colors to vampires, ghosts, foreigners, unworldly creatures, and residents of the Outside; this is enforced with penalties ranging from detention to expulsion and, in one case, according to rumor, with death.[38] This uniform is also forbidden to locals unfortunate enough to have been born on foreign soil, although the penalties are less and students who moved to Town before their third year of life or whose parents were both natives may apply for an exemption on that basis.

The second uniform is black and red. These are the *dead colors*, for foreigners and the walking dead. The underlying cultural complex, which took me a while to tease out, is the notion that ghosts and vampires are both immigrants from the land beyond the grave. There may also be some xenophobia or at least patriotic fever involved in this juxtaposition; I'm not altogether sure. Though it varies from year to year, this uniform is generally more daring than the first uniform in its cut and its style.

Living students born in Town are forbidden to wear the black and red, although there is an exemption available for second-generation immigrants who consider themselves natives of a different land. It's not clear whether this uniform is available to someone who dies and then comes back, to someone who might as well be dead, or to characters of ambiguous homeland such as the nearer straits of the Outside; it's probably best to wear the black and gold, below, while waiting for an exemption to go through. The crest for the dead colors is the red hand or the empty red sun, two classic heraldic symbols for the Principal himself.

The third uniform is black and gold. Any student may avail themselves of these colors and this design; it's something of a fail-safe, I think, although the student body has given it connotations of elegance and formality as well. The crest for this uniform is a symbol of sun and stars.

School has separate athletic uniforms, but they're not as strictly regulated (except within the individual teams) and they tend to have both functional and aesthetic variations. The School animal is the jackalope, a jackrabbit with antlers and a pheasant's tail, and many teams and several clubs have taken it as their mascot and their blazon.



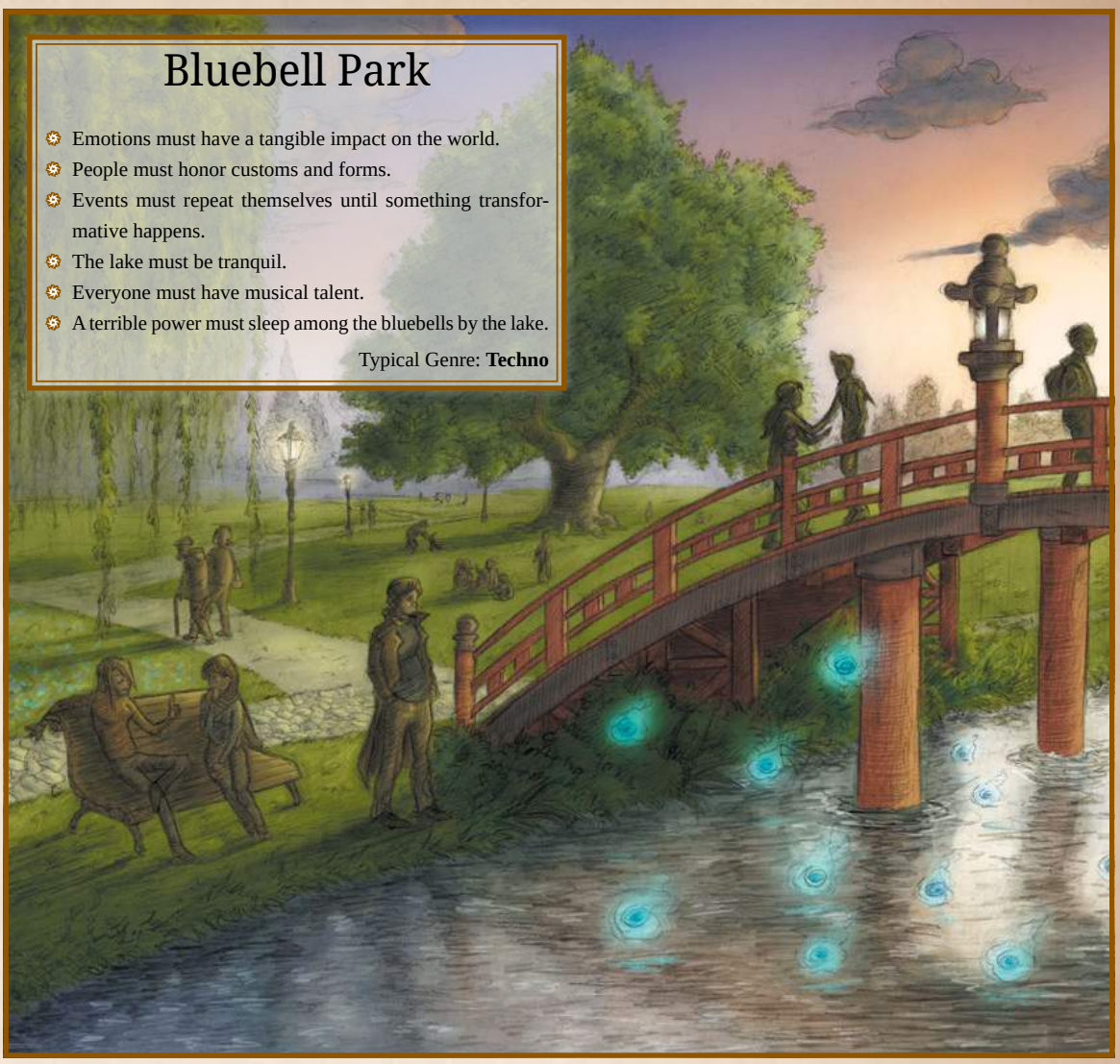
"red hand"
(black/red uniform crest)



ourokompos
(navy/white/gold uniform crest)

38 I suspect that if this happened at all the circumstances were not as I have heard.

Bluebell Park



Bluebell Park

- Emotions must have a tangible impact on the world.
- People must honor customs and forms.
- Events must repeat themselves until something transformative happens.
- The lake must be tranquil.
- Everyone must have musical talent.
- A terrible power must sleep among the bluebells by the lake.

Typical Genre: **Techno**

This Region is stylized, unsettling, and brilliantly colorful. It is a shock to the senses.

It is a haunted place.

Wish spirits live here. They encourage people to dream, to desire, to want things. That isn't all, though. There's something darker, something that takes people out of themselves, something that makes them less human and more their public/social identity—a place where you are perfected and taken away from yourself, both at once, where your every movement becomes more dramatic, more confident, more emotional, and more precise.

Bluebell Park is Town's premiere destination for both romantic walks and duels. This is not simply the choice of the people of Town, but something of the Park's nature—the place is ambiguously located. It seems to drift into the path of those who are seeking, or finding, a profound emotional experience with another. It takes a certain conscious will or very careful attention to one's surroundings or one's maps to reliably *avoid* Bluebell Park at such times, and so the bulk of Town has learned to live with it, even to value it. Two lovers, walking, will look up, and see they walk in Bluebell Park, and smile; and "Shall we meet in Bluebell Park?" is a standard invitation to either a romantic walk or a duel, with the occasional memorable misinterpretation in result.

Love and battles open your heart to your partner or opponent.

In Bluebell Park, they also open you up to the archetypes and symbols that live within yourself.

Area: 275 acres
Population: ~5 + 11,000 wish spirits

Who is Bluebell Park?

Bluebell Park is the you that you don't know. It's the part of yourself that you hide from yourself. It's the unleashed you, sometimes; the real you, sometimes; the hidden you, sometimes. Maybe those are the same things and maybe they're not, but they're all faces it can wear.

It may lock its gates against those who have high **Sickness**. They're not really *themselves* any longer and so the Park rejects them—even if it's the *source* of their sickness, even if its metaphysical nature descends when they break from reality and the sickness gets worse, it still bars them from the physical Park itself.

Conversely the Park may actively hunt down those characters with high **Vice** or **Mystery**, moving through Town to place its paths before them, reveling in giving them opportunities to indulge their wickedness or to learn more about themselves. The Park is sickening, actively sickening, to someone who has issues they're not facing, and sometimes to anybody who is fighting hard to control themselves and who they are.

So when you go into Bluebell Park, that's something you can use to decide how it reacts. How do you feel about the parts of yourself that you don't usually see? Are they a wonder to you? A horror to you? Something that you want to see?

It's not quite that simple, though, because you're not the only one in Bluebell Park. At least, not most of the time. Most of the time, there's someone else in there with you.

Their emotions will reach you, if they want them to. They can pierce you with them, bend you to their will with their words and feelings alone. It's dangerous to go into Bluebell Park with someone, even if they think they're not going to push you into anything, because you're dealing with not just them but their inner truths.

On the other hand, there's a saying that we can never really know anybody else; that we live alone and we die alone; that other people are aliens to us, Outside creatures to us, sources of fear, and mystery, and unease. That doesn't have to be true. You can see into someone's soul. You can feel their heart. You can know their truth.

You don't have to be alone. You can take the risk and you can actually understand somebody else, if you're willing to risk yourself.

So, as the enemies of the world might say—

Shall we meet in Bluebell Park?

The South

The southern portion of Bluebell Park is a heavily-landscaped area built around a central lake or pond. I don't know what to call it—it's way too big to be a pond, practically half a mile long, but it's a skinny little thing, barely as wide as two football fields, so I feel a little uneasy calling it a lake.

It's a body of water, anyway.

There's a muddy grass rise that runs lengthwise down the lake. I wouldn't want to walk it but you could, you'd just get your boots pretty wet. It's not straight: it wiggles this way and that like it was dividing up a yin-yang symbol.

There's a cobblestone walking path around the lake. There are benches you can sit on.

There are shops around the lake—not that many, just a few. There's the Kago library and there's Tavares' café. There's a sandwich shop, a donut shop, and a gallery; an old broken-down and burned-out smithy; a bookstore; and Flotsam Newspaper Supplies.

There are trees and banks of flowers. There's grass. The whole area is surrounded by low white walls with red tiles on top.

The Children's Area

Off to the west of the landscaped area is a small, lightly wooded area with mostly-cleared dirt ground, animal-shaped statues, and a low wall that surrounds it. In theory it is a viable place for children to play while parents walk along the cobblestone way or duel upon the bridge.

Bluebell Park, for the Shallow

Maybe you're not thinking right now. Maybe you're relaxed. Maybe your heart hasn't been battered lately, maybe there's nothing you're really hiding from yourself, maybe your biggest secret right now is that you've really got to pee.

Have you been running, for exercise I mean, and your body's full of endorphins?

Are you celebrating turning in a big assignment?

Are you **the Wishing Boy**, maybe, in the full flower of the Ordinary?

For you, the Park will probably be a safe and shallow place. You won't find anything too strange there because there is nothing that you're hiding from yourself. At worst, a *little* bit of the sickness of the place will slip into you, and even that's pretty rare.

For the shallow, visiting Bluebell Park is *rarely* **Trauma**

For just a moment the colors in this place were too bright, too sharp, a little bit disorienting and disturbing. For just a moment the smell was a bit too sweet. And maybe you start dreaming about it later, maybe it seeps in and you dream jumbled, disruptive dreams of those colors, those flowers, and those scents, that wake you up sweating and make it hard to sleep again. Maybe you see it sometimes, randomly, later, even when awake, when you close your eyes.

But, like I said, that's rare.

For the shallow, scenes in Bluebell Park are usually just **Setting (Slice of Life or Discovery)**

You see something. It stirs your emotions—how pretty! How scary! How weird!

Bluebell Park, for the Troubled

You're troubled. There's something eating at you. There's something confusing you. You wander into Bluebell Park.

It is a garden of strange symbols.

It is trying to tell you...

What?

Figuring out what it's trying to tell you is usually **Immersive Fantasy**

You walk the paths of Bluebell Park and they are full of strange happenings and strange symbols. You see Foreshadowing, you make Discoveries, and every now and then—

You see something that freezes you up.

Maybe you were with someone, and figured you were safe, because why would the Park pay any attention to *you* when you were with *them*?

But you see something anyway. You round a corner and there's a statue of *you*; or you suddenly see a momentary, flickering vision of the person you're with killing you; or something else comes up that you absolutely can't ignore, something that you weren't expecting. Maybe a dying wish spirit, if you love them. Maybe a letter reaches you from a friend. Maybe you realize, or at least think for a moment, that you're walking into the mouth of a giant wolf!

You freeze up.

That's an occasion for the person you're with to take a Sympathetic Action.

Figuring out what it's trying to tell you is sometimes **Epic Fantasy**

Maybe you've seen some stuff and you think you've figured out what it's all trying to tell you. Maybe you take over the scene from the beginning, saying, *"Here is what I see."*

Anyway, you explain where you're at in your head, and what you're seeing, and then you make a choice. And the HG can allow that choice, and that private vision, and that's going to be Decisive.

Or the HG can deny that choice, say—"that is what you want to see, but here is what Bluebell Park *actually* shows you"—and if you accept that, and it hurts you, then that must have been a Science, Faith, and Sorcery Action; but if you deny it, isn't that a Wicked Action instead?

Diligence and Repression, in Bluebell Park

Sometimes you've got something you're repressing. Sometimes there's something in you or the world that you don't want to face.

Sometimes you're diligent and serious and honest and brave and good.

You will hear something, then, like a high-pitched buzzing or ringing sound. You will feel it, then, as you walk through Bluebell Park—a stifling blanket of terror and darkness pushing in on you. Everything will be wrong, wrong, wrong, and terrible. It will build and twist within you.

I think that this is supposed to actually be two different experiences, one for those in denial and one for those who are good. Not many people have visited the Park both while in one state and not the other, and then in the other state and not the one, and certainly not in close temporal proximity, so it's hard to say for sure. But I'm told that it really *is* different, that it's the difference between having something twisting within you and being on a high plateau without any air. It's the same sweep of ever-worsening nausea and *I don't belong here* that you'll experience either way, but it's still two different kinds of experience deep-down.

I don't know. I really don't! But that is what I am told.

This *wrongness* of Bluebell Park is sometimes **Trouble**

You're freaking out. This place is making your head spin and your ears ring. You're starting to *see* something, to *feel* something. Everything's going weird. You have to get out of here. Or—maybe if you can sit down, maybe if you can close your eyes and wait it out—

Or maybe you can fight for a limited, tactical victory. Just hold out for 5 minutes. Just get through this for a little bit of the walk.

Then suddenly you realize something like *you have never actually been yourself, you're a puppet of a former self and the only reason you don't know it is that some monstrous machine wiped your memory...*

After the lull, you see, comes fear.

This wrongness of Bluebell Park is sometimes **Wicked**

You shouldn't be here. It's too vivid. It's too strange. Your world is going a little weird. You should run. You should get out. But you don't.

Maybe you're on a romantic walk with somebody. You don't want to embarrass yourself.

Heck, you're thinking. Maybe this isn't even *really* unhealthy. Maybe this is... maybe this is what being in love feels like? Maybe you're not going out of your head, maybe this is what being on a romantic walk with somebody you care about is like? Everything smells so sweet. Hospital-sweet but sweet. Everything is so bright. The person you're with is so pretty, so handsome. Their voice is so far away.

You should run, but you don't.

This *wrongness* of Bluebell Park is sometimes **Corruption/ Metamorphosis**

Or maybe it's too late from the moment you get there. Maybe it's all eating into your head from the moment you get there and the only thing to do is to enjoy it if you possibly can.

The Ideologue

Salute! Apocynum!

Struck by a dodgeball, this Main Character achieved enlightenment and realized that the world is a lie and an illusion. Now it is the mission of **the Ideologue** to shatter the four mystical gates that protect that lie, opening everyone's mind to the True Thing beyond. Luckily, part of the dodgeball enlightenment package includes a magnificent mansion in Bluebell Park, shapeshifting ability, and the power to pull out people's hearts and turn the rest of them into a normally giant monster to pilot against a gate.

(Naturally this resolves or helps resolve whatever psychological issues might have been troubling them.)

This Main Character is usually **(Princess) Jasmine Apocynum**, a PC-aged girl, but could also be a PC-aged boy named **(Prince) Jasper Apocynum**. One weakness of her shapeshifting is that—most of the time, and regardless of what shape she wears—she has "Riders' eyes," that is, a field of night interrupted by falling stars rather than the whites, pupil, and iris of ordinary human eyes.

She is the main character of the novel, ***Fable of the Swan***.

Jasmine Apocynum, aka
The Ideologue



Experiencing this *wrongness* is sometimes **Adversity**

You freak out. You run. Or fall down and throw up. It messes you up. You do something that can only be called over-the-top, considering that you're just in a pretty, vivid park and not some weird sort of Hell.

—and you tip over the edge into delirium.

Shall We Meet in Bluebell Park?

It's OK to visit Bluebell Park for a formal, pre-planned date or any kind of duel even if you're a good person or have something you're repressing. The Park will get involved with such things but it won't *sicken* you. What I mean is, if you happen to just wander into the Park, willingly or otherwise, on a date, then it can be a dangerous place; but if you arranged to go there, from the beginning, it's actually a lot safer. It's also a lot safer for people with dueling on their mind whether they meant to show up there or not. It's as if the challenge/invitation, "shall we meet in Bluebell Park?" is a tonic against the poisons of the place.

Preparing for a duel or date in Bluebell Park is often a **Ritual**

Shall we meet in Bluebell Park?

Preparing for the duel or date is likely to be a Ritual. This is *particularly* true if one of the characters thinks it's a date and the other thinks it's a duel.

The start of the Ritual is somebody answering the eponymous question with their agreement. They nod, or say, "Yes," or "Fine," or "OK," or whatever. If they agree but can't do it *just then*, then the Ritual begins instead with someone remembering that moment—touching or looking at the clothes they're going to wear and musing, "Shall we meet in Bluebell Park?"

Then you and other characters take a series of ritual actions—

- describing one of the things you do to prepare;
- stating or emoting your reaction to some recent event;
- "posing" or otherwise showing off in an iconic fashion associated with the clothes you're putting on;
- snarkily commenting on the process;
- talking about what your fears or dreams about what's going to happen; *or*
- Invoking an unrelated symbol of power (e.g., the Ritual Power **Combo Move** on pg. 535) to merge the two ritual invocations together.

The ritual ends with someone dropping a handkerchief or other cloth and saying, "Go." At this point the two characters involved either meet at the gates of Bluebell Park, or, if at least one of them expected a duel, they face one another on the southern bridge.

The principal benefit to the ritual is the possible XP therefrom, plus the fact that the park *won't* make you sick while you're there for one of these purposes, but you may also receive a beautiful cut flower or other gift from an admirer in the park.



Dueling, in Bluebell Park

Shall we meet in Bluebell Park?

A typical duel is held on the wooden bridge across the lake in the southern portion of Bluebell Park. Melee weapons or unarmed combat is the norm, and the legal code in Town doesn't have a dueling exemption for murder, but other than that there's no defined protocol.

Duels in Bluebell Park are usually a **Ritual**

The duelists must take their places on the bridge. Someone—ideally not a participant—begins the ritual by saying, "Go," and dropping a handkerchief if such a thing is available.

The ritual plays out like an ordinary encounter, with the following exceptions—

- You can emote or share a memory as an attack. The feelings in your heart will reach your opponent, and the emotion or memory will manifest physically in an effective combat technique. This functions as a level 2 Bond and gives the attack minor supernatural effects.
- Up to three times total, the participants can declare a "remarkable defense" against some attack, avoiding its impact. Instead of describing the consequence of the attack, or allowing it to inflict a wound, the HG describes weird symbolic things happening around the park. (This will not defend against attacks with 3 or more Strike.)
- As usual with a Ritual, you should expect to take turns when acting—unless the HG tells you to speak, or your characters are in physical contact, or you're declaring a remarkable defense, you should stay silent when somebody else is taking an action. The word "should" is intentional—this is a matter of form and courtesy and not an absolute obligation.

The duel ends after three remarkable defenses are declared. If either participant is not satisfied, the participants may exchange one final flurry of one action each. If the duel stops before that point, the HG can point at participants and demand they attack something (themselves, the other party, or whatever else seems appropriate) until three such defenses are used or somebody takes an action with 3 Strike to interrupt or break free of the ritual.

Time Together, in Bluebell Park

Sometimes when you emote in Bluebell Park it is extra *loud* to everyone around you. They can feel an echo of the emotion itself.

Sometimes when you try to connect with someone, you *do*.

Functionally this is just a Property of the Region—"Emotions must have a tangible impact on the world." You can treat such Properties as level 2 Bonds, adding +2 to relevant mundane actions that have to overcome Obstacles—such as the Obstacle preventing you from effectively conveying certain emotions or feelings to others or the Obstacle keeping two peoples' souls and hearts disjoint. There isn't *always* such an Obstacle,[39] but sometimes there is, and it will range from 1-4 depending on how hard it is for the target to understand you.

You can lose yourself in someone else, here. You can fall into the truths inside them and then you don't have to be alone.

You shouldn't do this. You shouldn't *let* someone do this, into you. It's wrong.

But if you want to, you can.

Sharing emotions is sometimes **Decisive Action** or **Science, Faith, and Sorcery**

Trusting someone with your heart—or trusting someone to show you theirs, here in Bluebell Park where the emotion can strike you fully—that'll typically play out in a Defining Moment.

A Decisive Action, maybe, where you explain the reasons for your feelings, and then share your heart; or a Science, Faith, and Sorcery Action where you build up to that moment of trust.

Falling entirely into someone else's emotions is usually **Wicked**

Letting someone fall entirely into your emotions is usually also **Wicked**

This isn't healthy. You can touch someone's soul here, but you shouldn't let it overwhelm you.

But you decide to let that happen anyway.

You decide to dissolve into them, or vice versa. There's a break from reality, weird special effects, as your souls touch and one of you falls into the other. Maybe the special effects are your perceptions of the spirits involved. Maybe they're things like: you've noticed hedges carved into the shapes of people as you walk, but now they're all looking away or covering their eyes; or, the statue that showed two people talking earlier now shows one of them eating or tied to or merging with or seducing the other.

Maybe the HG tells you what could be at stake and gives you a chance to back out. Maybe they lay out the risks for you. If they don't, or if you hear those risks and go ahead anyway: that's a Wicked Action.

Sharing emotions is usually **Shared Reactions**

You talk about something that's been going on with you. When your amped-up feelings reach someone's heart, that's usually connecting with them, making yourself vulnerable, and them making themselves vulnerable *all at once*, so this is really very efficient as a Shared Reaction goes.



Gaming Terminology

Canon flexpoint—this term isn't actually standard. It just means: this can only be determined in play. It's something I don't know, but more importantly, it's something you should try not to know at first either, even if you're the HG; wait for it to become apparent to you *through the course of play*.

39 Sometimes you know someone well enough that they totally get you even without magical intervention.

The Abandoned Smithy

There is an abandoned blacksmith's shop near the pond. At one point it sold weaponry for duels. At some point the blacksmith committed an error. Now the shop is securely boarded up.

The floor of the shop is rotten.

The basement beneath it has no visible floor. There is only darkness, on which a person may stand, and a door that leads by unclear processes back to Bluebell Park. There in that dark space the soul of the smith is suspended in agony and amidst molten metal. He has been in Bluebell Park long enough that an archetypal nature overrides his will to be free of pain: he will not allow himself to be freed or exorcised until "appropriate" circumstances occur.[40]

Most of this information—along with several variations—circulates as rumor at the School.

Conversations with the blacksmith are usually a **Ritual**

The start of this ritual: *you go in*. The world stops. At this point you can't interrupt players unless your character is in physical contact with theirs or the HG points to you and tells you to take an action.

The character who went in probably stands in darkness next to an agonized blacksmith spirit covered in molten metal. Other characters who were in Bluebell Park probably experience a sudden obstacle in the way of whatever they were doing—a snowstorm, a windstorm, sudden blindness or infirmity, statues bursting up from the ground in front of them when they try to take a step, or swarms of bees. It probably doesn't stop them from acting, but it slows them down to the point they don't finish whatever they were doing until just after the ritual completes.

When the spotlight is on you, you can do the following things:

- State or emote your reaction to some recent event;
- Emote your reaction to what's happening in the ritual itself;
- Interacting with the obstacle, if you're outside;
- "Posing" or otherwise showing off in some iconic fashion if you're inside;
- Special actions associated with this ritual—
  - **Giving up or sacrificing something;**
  - **Saying cryptic allusions to the smith, and receiving a cryptic reply;**
- invoking a symbol of your own power, mixing the associated ritual in.

The ritual typically ends with the person inside stepping up and doing something to the blacksmith. Kissing, embracing, stabbing, slapping, spitting on, poking out the eyes of, or reaching for (before pulling back your hand) the blacksmith are all possible and suitable endings. If a person outside wishes to end the ritual and complete whatever they were doing, they need an action with at least 2 Strike. If the person inside wants to ignore the ritual and free or kill or otherwise seriously mess with the blacksmith, they need an action with at least 4 Strike.

Participants in the ritual generally gain a point of **Trust** and find some mundane reward waiting for them in their School locker or mailbox the next day.

40 Those circumstances are a canon flexpoint. It is in fact a canon flexpoint whether that's actually what's inside the smithy at all.

North

The northern portion of the Park is a light deciduous forest. It is a bluebell wood, and bluebells grow there even out of the normal season—not in the depths of winter, perhaps, but a surprising coat of blue flowers spreads between the trees in spring, summer, and most of fall.

The weather is temperate here. Precipitation is rare.

Mysterious roughly-carved stone statues scatter through the forest. Most of them are abstract, vaguely mathematical shapes. A few more resemble people or animals wearing strange clothing. Some of them hold carefully covered or electric lamps that may be lit at night.

Dirt paths lead between the trees.

There are very few buildings in the wood—one emergency shelter, two houses, and an extensive tree house and fire watch post maintained by Horizon's Park Association.

Traveling the north woods is sometimes **Corruption**

You walk the woods in Bluebell Park. You travel through them to get to a particular statue, or to get to a particular house, or just to escape after having been abandoned there.

The world goes weird.

Is it the flowers? The scent of the flowers? Is it fairies or wish spirits darting about in the woods?

You're *changed*.

Traveling the north woods is usually **Setting (Discovery or Slice of Life)**

What do you find there? The image or mood you stumble on will stay with you for a while.

Examining the statues carefully is usually a **Ritual**

The statues represent something sacred.[41] You stare at the statues. You investigate them, or touch them, or try to catalogue them.

The ritual is very simple:

- you describe how you're examining the statues, and the HG describes what you see or feel;
- you state or emote your reaction to some recent event, while examining a statue;
- you "pose" near the statue in an iconic fashion;
- you invoke some other Ritual, merging the two;
- at some point, you ask, "Do we know what these mean?" and the HG answers either:
  - "That has not been determined" if even they don't know;
  - "That has not been revealed" if they think they do; *or*
  - answers, if you have enough information now to know.

The only reason not to ask the final question immediately is that you'll get more potential XP and have more fun if there's at least some meat to the scene!

41 Just what? Another canon flexpoint: figure it out during the game.

Wish Spirits

Town's wish spirits are natural spirits, like will-o-wisps and flower fairies, that make people wish for things. They look like glowing dots of light or shapeless ghosts made from power. Sometimes they look like fairies if you look very closely. They can't generally *speak* but they can emote. They can encourage people to wish for things, too—they have a **Superior Encourage Wishing** Skill at level 2-3, although they can only encourage people to want things that either the target or the wish spirit already wants.

They're mostly based in Arcadia and Bluebell Park, but they do show up elsewhere in Town: at the Titov shrine, in graveyards and chapels, and in small gatherings in the Walking Fields' woods. They also like fireworks, so you might see them on any festival where there are fireworks; they will often float up into the sky and echo the fireworks displays with patterns of their own.

It's said that if you can "make friends" with a wish spirit that you'll be lucky all year—but they're not really social or able to communicate with humans, so the question of whether you've made friends with one or not is a little ambiguous. They seem to have personalities, and to like attention, and to react to your feelings, but they're also pretty mercurial and alien and hardly any of them can talk. Think "empathic alien fireflies who like wishing hearts but get bored of you pretty easily" and you'll have a good sense of what they're like!

Wish spirits are found everywhere in Town, but they are most common here in Bluebell Park.

Walking among the wish-spirits can be **Foreshadowing**

You watch them as they spin and play. They pulse with emotion. They stir wishes in your heart.

Walking among the wish-spirits is usually **Slice of Life**

You watch them. You feel something. That moment sticks with you.

A Text For Use in Bluebell-Park-Related Transitions: Excerpt From "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," by John Keats

The First Duelist:

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

The Second Duelist:

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.

She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she wept and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

Arcadia



Properties of Arcadia

- Time must pass quickly, except during meals.
- You must spend more than you expected.
- You must have a good time.
- You must be kind to others.
- You must want things you didn't get.
- Boys must carry packages for girls.
- Stray cats must be fed.
- Nobody can experience wondering where money or goods actually come from

Typical Genre: **Immersive Fantasy** or **Techno**

Town's shopping district, **Arcadia**, is a fast-paced whirl of fun, materialism, and delight. It's the place to go for new books, comics, games, toys, and clothes, not to mention food and fun. It's got karaoke, miniature golf, skate parks, regular parks, and an active flea market, as well as Town's only serious electronics depot, its largest arcade, most of the best pancake and noodle shops, and *the* best pie and meat bun shops, Mrs. Porridge's and the Golden Phoenix Bun Shop respectively, in Town. It's designed to be the kind of place you can lose endless hours to whether you have a few coins in your pocket or a fresh week's allowance or paycheck to spend.

Most of the time when characters visit the Shopping District they'll either take a whirlwind trip through vistas of fun and somewhat materialistic joy or they'll settle down in some park, shop, or restaurant for a meal with their friends. It's a good place for bonding experiences, for showing off how your character does things, and, of course, for getting overly distracted by possessions of various sorts.

The Shopping District is where most of Town's *youkai* live—not that there are terribly many, of course, these days, but those that there are mostly live here. It's the kind of place where fox-spirits sometimes dally with humans, umbrellas and old kites sometimes turn into monsters, and fox-people, tree-spirits, and teenagers meet up on the weekends to mill, dance, read books, listen to music, and dress up in cosplay or visual kei.

Area: 6 square miles
Population: 4,800

(4,450 humans / 250 youkai / 100 robots)

Style

The Shopping District is very modern. It's all *shiny*. Everything is glamorous. There's a lot of big glass windows and a bit of neon and even a few giant television screens showing advertising on buildings' sides. There are regular street performances. There's statuary (classic and modern) and cool architecture. Wish spirits float through the air, even in broad daylight. Strange but interesting creatures lurk in the alleys and the corners—and are even found running the shops! There's plenty of room to walk on most of the sidewalks, and there's lots of nice trees planted along the way, and there's tile-and-fountain plazas and glorious parks and a ton of cool little local stores.

There's a river running through the Shopping District. It's a pretty feature so there's a lot of foot-bridges, riverside walks, and river views.

The business section of Town is here. It's not huge—really, there's only a few blocks to it, swollen up a bit with a contained park or two and a handful of experimental projects—but it's got tall buildings, headquarters or local offices for a few big companies, mansions, a train stop, and the twelve-story super-modern Methodology Building that was briefly the tallest, and is still the second-tallest, building in all of Town.[42]

42 The tallest, of course, is the School.

Shopping is *rarely* **Wicked Action**

The Shopping District is a reasonably healthy place *in general*, but every now and then you'll see something that you know you shouldn't have or buy. Whether it's a double umbrella ("for when one layer of umbrella isn't enough"), a puff of cotton candy bigger than you are, the deviant and sexually overpowering music of Buddy Holly or the Beatles, or just a rare comic that you know is out of your budget, buying it when you know you mustn't is potentially a Wicked Action. There are a few stores (from "Poison & Candy" and "the Headmaster's Daydreams" to "F.F.'s Magical Exterminators") that you probably shouldn't even *visit*.

Just how weird will the world get when you break from reality?

And will the HG warn you of the doom that is to come?

Street performances are usually **Foreshadowing**

Something catches your attention. You listen or watch, startled. Then after a while you react!

Usually, with: *"Awesome!"*

Shopping and window shopping is *sometimes* **Obsessive Action**

You see something cool. You get worked up over it! You do something over the top, tipping over the edge into obsession. Ideally somebody notices and reacts.

Sitting in a plaza with your friends and talking is usually **Shared Reactions**

You talk about stuff that's happened or is happening. You reach out. You try to connect.

Shopping, window shopping, and wandering the District is usually **Discovery**

You've just found something neat, scary, or mysterious!

Gawking at the sights is *sometimes* **Slice of Life**

Something stirs an emotional response—"wow?" "I *want*." "that's kind of freaky."

The moment sticks with you; or, you get lost in that mood!

The Marvelous Electric Train

The Shopping District has nice wide asphalt roads for cars, but of course there just aren't that many cars in Town. Most of the actual *transportation* in Arcadia is ground-level electric trains. These look very modern and super-cool—they have the visual aesthetics of super-fast bullet trains—but their horsepower is unimpressive. They go 40-65 kilometers per hour at best, not even counting their frequent stops.

If you're waiting for the train, you probably want the NN, the CU, or the 7C (aka the "Seven-Chen" or "Seven-Chan") line.

Taking the train is usually **Slice of Life**

You hang out on the train. You share your emotional response to the wonder that is electric trains. Perhaps someone else will emote back?

Taking the train is rarely a **Transition**

In a Techno game, or if the Shopping District and its marvelous electric trains become a big feature of your campaign, they might become an occasion for stock footage! The wait for a train, and the ride on the train, can be a frequently-repeated clip in the "show" that is your game. Since you can't actually show that clip in play, you'll want to read from an appropriate text instead!

I'm going to include two possible texts for this transition. They're both pretty short, so you may want to replace them with a text of your own soon after instituting this as a feature of the game. In the meantime, though, read from whichever seems more appropriate! If you want to give a sense of variety or recurrence, you can limit yourself to short sections of text on short trips and more or all of the text on longer trips, read it a piece at a time if the characters are going to take multiple trips in a day, and so forth.

First Text: “The Thirteenth Station,” by Jenna Moran

We blur into the world of forms
And set aside ourselves

Autumn colors rush by

A leaf spins up

By the tracks I can see my brother John
His teeth fell out
But his hat’s still on

By the river there’s my sister Rhöne
Struck in the head
By a wicked stone

I wish—
But no.

In the sky on the clouds in the shadow of the sun
There’s my darling Chloe
(oh) Look at her run

And there’s David down in the muck of the well

And Alex under the carousel

And there’s Heather in the sky on her horse of flame
And her sister Lauren who does the same

I wish—
But no.

And the sky opens up. It’s Leonard’s maw

And Emily struck by the falling of his jaw

And Margareta spins a top in the road
And on Rhöne’s stomach is a hopping toad
And the reaper reaps what the reaper’s sowed

And Christina watches with a reaper’s patience
And the train barrels on towards the Thirteenth Station

I wish—
But no.

I pass them all on the railroad track

I wish—

But a person oughtn’t look back.

Second Text: excerpt from “The Bohemian Girl,” by Michael William Balfe

I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls
With vassals and serfs at my side.
And of all who assembled within those walls
That I was the hope and the pride.

I had riches too great to count, could boast
Of a high ancestral name.
But I also dreamt, which pleased me most
That you lov’d me still the same,
That you lov’d me, you lov’d me still the same,
That you lov’d me, You loved me still the same.

I dreamt that suitors sought my hand.
That knights upon bended knee,
And with vows no maiden’s heart could withstand,
They pledg’d their faith to me.

And I dreamt that one of that noble host
Came forth my hand to claim.
But I also dreamt, which charmed me most
That you lov’d me still the same,
That you lov’d me, you lov’d me still the same,
That you lov’d me, you loved me still the same.

Cosplay

As noted, cosplay and visual kei are a common feature of the Shopping District, particularly on the weekends. It has a bit of the Harajuku spirit!

Participating in Shopping District cosplay *can* be **Decisive**

You talk about why you're choosing a given costume or cosplay style. You build up to a major decision, such as asking somebody out, or a decisive action, such as going out in costume for the first time. Then you make that decision or take that action!

Participating in Shopping District cosplay can be **Wicked** or **Traumatic**

Turning into your costumes is a common theme in stories, so maybe something like that could happen here. I don't want to think up the details because this probably isn't what actually happens.

Participating in Shopping District cosplay can be **Shared Action**

You go do cosplay stuff with someone else. You connect over it.

The Ritual of the Cosplayers

Those are all valid options, but

participating in Shopping District cosplay is **usually** a **Ritual**

It's just like a magical transformation sequence, except that getting ready usually takes a heck of a lot longer! You start the sequence with a ritual phrase like, "Ooh, time to get ready" or "Right! Get in the bathroom and help me dye my hair!" or "OK, you brought the costumes!"

Then you and other characters take a series of ritual actions—

- describing one of the things you do to prepare;
- stating or emoting your reaction to some recent event;
- "posing" or otherwise showing off in an iconic fashion associated with your costumes;
- snarkily commenting on the process;
- talking about your excitement about the day or where you want to go; *or*
- Invoking an unrelated symbol of power (e.g., activating the Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine, or setting sail via the Ritual of the Lake) to merge the two ritual invocations together.

The phrase that ends the ritual is usually something like, "Perfect! Let's go!" but sometimes that's just an intermediate step—the ritual *could* continue on to include the entire day outing, replacing "describ[e] one of the things you do to prepare" with the new ritual actions:

- pose for a photograph;
- declare an activity during the day outing, such as "shopping at The Latest Thing" or "dancing in the park."

In addition to the potential group XP, the usual benefit and outcome of the ritual is that you regain a bit of Will or even an MP—but that's up to the HG. Maybe it gives you a small power related to your costume, or temporarily boosts a relevant power or Skill, instead!

Fox-Eared People

There are over a hundred fox-eared people (“Tenko” or “shop foxes”) living in the Shopping District. They descend from humans and fox spirits. A few of them may even be fox spirits in disguise! There are also often at least that many people in the Region who dress as fox-eared people as part of their cosplay (“Feyfua” or “fake foxes” is the standard term, although if I had my way it would be either “cosukitsu” or “kōkokuko (advertisement foxes)”).

I hear that the existence of the feyfua is pretty weird if you are actually a fox-eared person but that they accept it because if you’re going to be exotic anyway you might as well be fashionable.

Fox-eared people have fox ears as well as their regular ears. The fox ears are larger and a little higher on their head. Fox-eared people often have bright-colored hair and are almost always pretty or handsome. Some of them also have fox tails. They tend to be thin and a little bit short and they tend to dress in old-fashioned Japanese or Chinese clothing. The fox-eared people believe that their fox-spirit ancestors are still watching over them—that’s why a human-Tenko child is almost always a full Tenko (when the mating is fertile at all), and why if a fox-eared person cuts off their fox ears their tail will fall off, their magic will wither, and they’ll turn all the way human.

In the early years of Town the fox-eared people had a reputation for good luck, powerful magic, and good counsel. These days their fortunes have waned—they’re more likely to be shopkeepers or traveling entertainers than sorcerers, exorcists, generals, or the idle rich. That said, the fox-eared people still have it better on average than most—they enjoy better health, greater enjoyment of simple pleasures, and have greater access to magic and money both than is the average Townsperson’s lot. The Tenko look out for one another, and none of them are likely to ever go hungry for any reason except for pride. The downside, of course, is that they’re a small and visually distinct minority in a Town too small to vanish into and too big to stop meeting strangers in—even if they’re more likely to face positive bigotry than negative bigotry, I imagine a constant stream of double-takes, unearned admiring sighs, people assuming that their lives are easy because they have Tenko blood, and people wanting to touch their ears or tail gets to them after a while. It’s probably worst for the pregnant ones, because living surrounded by people who might at any moment randomly decide to touch your ears, tail, *or* belly has got to be like living in a war zone of well-intentioned invaders of your personal space.

Meeting an important fox-eared person is usually **Immersive Fantasy**

There are important Tenko families. They engage in weird politics. You don’t know much about it because you’re not a Tenko. But maybe you’re about to!

For them it’s like Decisive or Science/Faith/Sorcery Actions:

- A fox-eared matriarch or patriarch calls you in and monologues to you, in between puffs on their long pipe, building up to some decision that they’ve made or the role you have in their plans. Then, action!
- Or... they decide to trust you with something. So they explain what they think you’re about, and what they think you’re going to do, and then they gamble that you’ll do it.

But the truth is, they’re NPCs, so I think what actually *matters* here is that you might get caught up in their story; or sympathetic to them when they struggle; or that you’ll discover some neat, scary, or mysterious thing, and spend a while lost in thinking about it.

Meeting your first fox-eared person is usually **Foreshadowing**

Something catches your attention. It’s—the ears! Or the tail!

You watch, listen, follow, or pause to process and then run up to them, startled.

Tea in a fox-eared person’s shop is usually **Slice of Life**

You interrupt your conversation or drinking to emote a reaction to how serious and awesome and impressive it is. Look! It’s a fox’s tea house! Or whatever. That’s so glamorous! You also have the option to emote a different reaction instead, like “This is ridiculous” “I’m not impressed” or “How tragic! I will never have fox ears, unless I can persuade Chuubo to make an appropriate wish. But they’re so fluffy!”

The moment sticks with you.

Fox-Eared Magic

an example Magical Skill

Some fox-eared people have a little bit of the magic of their fox-spirit ancestors. Even powerful and fey Tenko probably only have 1-2 points in Tenko magic, but if you want to bring a Tenko prodigy or an actual fox-spirit into play, they might have more!

The first four techniques are technically available to all characters. They don't require magic or Tenko blood. Characters like **the Prodigy** can learn these techniques on their own once they understand that they can be done; other characters can pick them up by studying the ways of foxes, spend decades reinventing them, or improvise something similar if it seems like it would be cool.

These four non-magical techniques are:

[Obstacle 0] Contort to create a fox's shadow on the wall with your body or your hands;

[Obstacle 1] Sharpen your hearing and eyesight;

[Obstacle 1] Slip out of most handcuffs or bonds; *and*

[Obstacle 1] Recognize holiness

I've broken the Tenko techniques that require *actual* magic to use into three basic styles:

- Fire and Lightning Magic;
- Perception Magic; *and*
- Transformation Magic.

A typical Tenko magician learns one of these styles and has a +2 Obstacle penalty when using techniques from the others. All of these styles have access to the four non-magical techniques.

Tenko Bans

Traditional Tenko Bonds include:

- **Bond**: Dogs terrify me.
- **Bond**: People are really weird about the tail and ears sometimes.
- **Bond**: It takes a lot of concentration to hide my tail when disguised as a human.
- **Bond**: If I'm separated for too long from my special magical pearl I'll die.
- **Bond**: I am not always in complete control of myself around deep-fried tofu. It's just too good!
- **Bond**: My ears are really sensitive—loud sounds can hurt, and grabbing them is a submission hold!
- **Bond**: I'll always repay a favor.

Particularly disreputable Tenko may have Bonds like:

- **Bond**: What is property to me? I take what I want and live where I choose.
- **Bond**: I'm addicted to playing with human minds and hearts.

Tenko with Bonds like that are sometimes known as "Yako" (field foxes/evil foxes) or "Jackasses" (evil donkeys).

Fire and Lightning Magic

[Obstacle 1] Make sparks out of thin air;

[Obstacle 1] Summon a ball of harmless fox-fire to hover near you or in place;

[Obstacle 2] Create a burst of fire or jolt of electricity;

[Obstacle 2] Control the movements of fox-fire;

[Obstacle 3] Blast things with lightning or fire.

Perception Magic

[Obstacle 1] Sharpen your sense of smell;

[Obstacle 1] Know the location of nearby dogs;

[Obstacle 2] Make your voice sound like the wind, the clinking of coins, or fire;

[Obstacle 2] Trick the senses so that people who are not paying attention think they see or hear what you want them to see or hear;

[Obstacle 3] Turn invisible;

[Obstacle 3] Create complex, detailed illusions.

Transformation Magic

[Obstacle 1] Increase your beauty or poise.

[Obstacle 1] Purify the sound you make when using a musical instrument or your voice;

[Obstacle 2] Take the shape of a fox, or turn back into a fox-eared person;

[Obstacle 3] Take other human or animal shapes.

Tsukumogami

People say that if a household thing exists for a hundred years, it'll turn into a spirit—but time flies when you're having fun! In the Shopping District it might take only thirty years, or even twenty-five. Even though electricity repels most tsukumogami and modern items are much less likely to turn into such a spirit, there are still dozens of these artifact spirits lurking in Arcadia. Known tsukumogami include—

- a pack of 6+ umbrella-spirits;
- a mated pair of awning-spirits;
- three broom-spirits, including one legal citizen working for the Kinnoruto Temple;
- a lonely kimono-spirit;
- two lantern-spirits;
- at least two kite-spirits;
- a reclusive curtain-spirit;
- a eye-protecting goggles spirit;
- the "three sisters," street sign spirits that point in confusing directions;
- a bucket-spirit;
- an unknown number of sandal-spirits, typically found making footstep-sounds in empty alleyways;
- a stone-bridge spirit;
- one of the extremely rare handgun tsukumogami, formerly belonging to a visiting U.S. Marine. It is hunting the man or spirit that killed its original owner;
- a guitar tsukumogami that claims to have been owned previously by Elvis Presley;
- according to rumor, an entire *row of buildings* tsukumogami that purportedly moves around or eats people while they are shopping in its stores.

It's probably best to think of the tsukumogami in Town's Shopping District as either mascots or citizens, depending on how intelligent they are. In *theory* they could be vicious or dangerous. In theory any quarter-century-plus object in the Shopping District could randomly wake up as a malevolent demon-god and start killing people one after another. In *practice*, you hardly ever have to worry about tsukumogami attacks:

The Regional Council for the Shopping District maintains a two-person exorcist team ("the Stray Cats") to snuff out any *youkai* that turn murderous, and they'll pretty reliably get there before a newborn killer tsukumogami manages to take its first victim down. They're highly attuned to killing intent,[43] they can sense that kind of thing from miles away, and they're grumblingly efficient about keeping Arcadia and its people safe. The Gray Man in the Methodology Tower and the Kittens (apprentice exorcists training at the Kinnoruto temple) act as secondary layers of defense.

What this all boils down to is that parents tell their kids not to play with the artifact spirits, because you never know, but they don't actually freak out too much if the kids defy them and do it anyway. The tsukumogami that *survive* are pretty tame.

Dealing with the "three sisters" and certain other tsukumogami can be **Adversity**

Suddenly you can't find your way around. Every time you look at a street sign it's different. You used to think that it was just a mobile street sign *youkai* confusing you but now you think there's more than one, and that maybe one of them or all of them can slide up onto a real street sign and confuse it. Or is there an evil fox casting an illusion over the area? Are you drugged or sick? Is this whole area sliding into the Outside? It reaches the point where you just can't *cope*!

Suddenly encountering a tsukumogami is *sometimes* **Trouble**

Tsukumogami are mostly harmless, like I said. But geez. It's not like you *know* that the first time you round the corner and there's an umbrella creature looking at you. Then it hops towards you. It's a looming, approaching threat! You hide. You run. You fight for a limited, tactical victory. You shout, "But it's not raining!" There's a lull, when it seems like things are OK. Then a heart-stopping moment of fear!

Trouble!

Suddenly encountering a tsukumogami is usually **Foreshadowing**

Something catches your attention. It's a... wait, what *is* that?

You watch. You listen. It moves. It keeps moving. It's a... it's a... *thing*. You react!

Interacting with tsukumogami is often **Shared Action**

You do stuff. They do stuff. You connect over it.

Maybe one of you makes yourself a little vulnerable for the extra XP, like, you reach out your hand to touch it even though you don't know where an umbrella keeps its teeth? Or, the street sign lets you clean graffiti off of it?

Interacting with tsukumogami is often **Discovery**

What strangeness have you just now discovered?

Befriending a tsukumogami may give you opportunities for **Sympathetic Action**

Now and then a tsukumogami gets pretty Obsessive.

It's working on something or worrying about something. It gets worked up over it. Eventually it goes over the top—usually to the point where it's just *stuck*, like a turtle flipped on its back or a Roomba bumping a wall.

At that point you can emote a sympathetic response and help it over the hump.

43 Also to bad weather and impending fires, although weather and fire preparedness aren't their actual jobs.

Conflict with a tsukumogami is typically **Slice of Life**

Only for them, it's more... Never Say Die!

Here's how it plays out when you try to kick a broom tsukumogami out before it's finished the sweeping that it wants to do; or when you try to refuse a lantern-spirit trying to take you somewhere; or anything of that kind—

You will have the upper hand.

You will probably have so much of an upper hand that there's no point in *fighting*, per se. You are the winner here.

But no!

It defies you!

The HG grits their teeth and narrates the tsukumogami's every action as awesome and doomed. They will fight, oh, yes, to their last drop of strength. You push them to fight harder and harder with your overwhelming overmatchingness, throwing them out physically, barricading the door against them, maybe even taking up arms or using magical powers against them—

But it won't end until they've either won and persuaded you or ended up broken and defeating and sobbing, inasmuch as tsukumogami are capable of sobbing, upon the ground.

Emote your reaction to all this. Hopefully somebody else emotes too.

The moment sticks with you.

Exorcists and the Kinnoruto Temple

As noted, Arcadia maintains a small number of exorcists to handle situations where tsukumogami or other *youkai* go wrong. They train at the Kinnoruto temple, which doubles as a nekomimi-themed café and gift shop. They learn to make tea and sandwiches, look good in cat ears, describe the history of the temple and its neighborhood, tell fortunes, and hunt down renegade demons before they can hurt anybody. The exorcists-in-training are usually called "Kittens;" the team name for the two exorcists who currently collect a retainer for patrolling and keeping the Shopping District safe is "the Stray Cats." As one might expect, they're a male-female pair of hardened, crass, and occasionally slovenly exorcists who alternate between wearing sensible gray clothing and wearing the cat-eared maid and butler costumes that they trained in back in the day. There's also a professional yin-yang master employed by the business and financial offices to prevent inappropriate use of magic and ensure the safety of the business section—he's traditionally called the Gray Man (or Gray Woman), and the current Gray Man is a half-Excrucian gentleman (pg. 292) with an office in the Methodology Tower.

Interactions with the Gray Man are usually **Wicked**

You shouldn't interact with him. I don't know why. You just... shouldn't. It's probably something to do with the job, since I heard he was actually pretty cool before he took it on.

Interactions with the Stray Cats are usually **Lurid**

They'll offer you booze. They'll entice you with their sexual presence. They'll encourage you to loan them money or let them crash at your place. They'll ask your help in tracking down a tsukumogami that's concerning them. These are *bad ideas*. They are unhealthy and/or immoral! Maybe you get involved with them anyway. You break from reality. Things get *weird*. Maybe the HG even warns you of disasters that'll be coming?

You keep going anyway.

That's a fine **Wicked Action** right there.

Or maybe: you're in their company and you get exposed to... well, something. Something wicked. Something that can change you. You don't defend perfectly. There are supernatural or psychosomatic effects—again, a break from reality. Corruption/transformation or trauma sets in. That's a **(Suffer) Corruption, Metamorphosis, or Trauma** Action!

Interactions with the Stray Cats are *sometimes* **Obsessive**

They're models for obsession, completely wound up in their hobbies and their exorcism.

That kind of behavior contages.

So listen. Sometimes when you're hanging out with them, you'll get a little bit neurotic. Dangerous *youkai* are scary. Exorcism is spiritually potent and therefore confusing. The Stray Cats are incredibly aggravating. They're also, I am dead serious here, smoking hot.

So there are a lot of different reasons why you might, when hanging out with them, get a little, you know, worked up. In one way or another. And this can lead to tipping over the edge into a delirium of obsession.

Eating at Kinnoruto is usually **Shared Reactions**

The modern Kinnoruto costume is actually completely un-embarrassing—they went upscale about 12 years back after an incident with a pervert *youkai*, switching the Kittens from maid- and butler-costume to formal exorcist kimonos, though the Kittens kept the fake cat ears and sometimes the fake whiskers or cat-paw gloves that their predecessors wore. So when you're lunching at Kinnoruto the whole nekomimi theme is cute and pervasive but pretty much not a *thing*. You just... well, eat, probably while talking to your friends about stuff that's been going on. You make a connection. Maybe you share a secret or something, you know, something to earn you the vulnerability XP?

That's Shared Reactions.

Visiting Kinnoruto is sometimes **Slice of Life**

You see something cool. You share your emotional response. Somebody responds, and emotes their own reaction to the scenery or to you, maybe?

It sticks with you.

(Superior) Holiness

an example Superior Skill

Some shrine maidens, priests, exorcists, and monks have an inherent, shining spiritual energy or holiness.

You use holiness principally to:

- show/display the truth;
- resist the influence of the Outside;
- anticipate and defend against dangerous *youkai* and killers;
- banish corruption, poison, and decay; *and*
- strengthen and heal those of good or innocent heart.

In general you'll lose some of the benefits of this if you don't maintain ritual and mental purity—you'll always have your enhanced insight, poison resistance, and resistance to the Outside, but corrupt thoughts or failing to take the time and effort to stay pure will cost you much of the rest. This loss, should you suffer it, is fortunately not permanent; a few days of ritual cleansing and consciously purifying your way of thinking can leave the most corrupt and rowdy exorcist uncomfortably holy instead.

This Skill comes with a small Edge against all *youkai* and unnatural forces but only gives its full Edge against the worst of evils.

Here's what the various levels would look like:

Superior Holiness 0: You're only a *little* [[holds finger and thumb a little bit apart]] holy.

Superior Holiness 1: Your spiritual presence is palpable and pleasant—you can calm a sick baby with a touch or make a leaf spin around in a cup of water by holding your hand nearby. You have a small edge against the Outside and any particularly wicked monsters.

Superior Holiness 2: You need no tools but your strong feelings to chasten or scourge *youkai*, ghosts, and spiritual beings; in a purified state, you may use those same feelings to heal or purify others, encourage plant growth, or to reach and inspire others' hearts. You can tell when someone or something is going to need you in a struggle against unnatural forces and can download a general plan of action for helping them from the cosmos itself. (This plan might not be perfect, but it'll be a good start.)

Superior Holiness 3: You're immune to most toxins, can endure the Outside without flinching, and you're overflowing with sacred spiritual power. If you apply that power directly you may perform miracles: plants bloom, sickness dissipates, and poisons and impurities fade away before your outstretched hand. Randomness distills down to meaning, with coins likely to land on edge or repeat themselves and books likely to fall open on relevant pages. Evil weakens. The world revitalizes and calms.

Superior Holiness 4: The world around you is full of great and blossoming gladness and peace. You know what will touch peoples' souls, and can often produce it. You can attract the beasts and birds to listen to your sermons.

Superior Holiness 5: Your power is as limitless as Heaven's: you can raise up the dead, catch a stone monkey in the palm of your hand, and speak such words as will live forever.

Exorcism

The heart of an exorcist's abilities is their **Superior Holiness** or **Superior Spiritual Energy** Skill—it's not so much a magic they practice as a magic that they *are*. There's generally no point in training as an exorcist unless you're at least holy enough to quiet a sick baby with a touch or powerful enough that a leaf on water will spin around when your hand passes over the cup—that's roughly Superior Skill 1. The natural cap for an exorcist's ability is level 2; a few can push past that to level 3, and legendary figures at the peak of their strength might make it to Superior Skill 4-5. Developed properly, this Skill acts as a sixth sense for the activity of dangerous *youkai* and other killers and increased efficiency in fighting them—Spiritual Energy in particular, since that's what the Skill is for, but Holiness also gives a good instinct for *youkai* movements and an Edge in attempting to predict them.

In either case, in addition to their raw spiritual potency, the Kittens are trained in hand-to-hand combat, simple ranged combat, tactics, the history and taxonomy of the *youkai*, and, of course, all the various Skills they need to work at a neko-mimi café.

(Superior) Spiritual Energy

an example Superior Skill

Other exorcists have an inborn gift that makes them hostile to ghosts, *youkai*, and evil magic. They have a spiritual radiance that lets them touch on, feel, and dissolve the power of the intangible.

This Skill has three core effects:

- You may strike at the intangible, including magic;
- You may sense patterns and disruptions in the weave of things;
- You're aggravating and attractive, a magnet for *tsundere* behavior from those at all vulnerable to displaying it. (Which often includes other characters with this Skill.)

I'm not sure what level 5 looks like, but the first few levels of this Skill would look like this:

Spiritual Energy -1: You're kind of unprepossessing and either spooky, fragile, or meek. Spirits and *youkai* tend to *like* you but they do not fear you. Not at all!

Spiritual Energy 0: You can yell very loudly at a *youkai* that makes you angry. Probably.

Spiritual Energy 1: Your spiritual presence is palpable—you can intimidate an animal, ghost, or intern with a glare, draw them near with a wink, or make a leaf spin in a cup of water by holding your hand nearby. You have a small edge against the Outside and any particularly wicked monsters.

Spiritual Energy 2: You have the raw power to sense evil, *youkai*, magic, the power of the Outside, and other supernatural phenomena within your Region. You have the raw power to strike at intangible things, break spells with a touch, and see through illusions. This is all clumsy and unreliable unless you have a different Skill to formally train and channel your abilities, but the raw power to do it exists.

Even without other training, with this level of Spiritual Energy you can resist evil magic, push intangible spirits out of your way, and sense personally relevant evil in your immediate vicinity. You're a little magnetic, too: you attract people, but you also get under their skin enough to irritate them.

Spiritual Energy 3: You have enough intuition to sense stuff like pain, fear, discord, and the larger patterns like "something is probably going to happen soon." In short, your spiritual senses become predictive and not just active once you train them up. Magic tends to fray when you pay attention to it, making your attention painful for ghosts and intangible *youkai*. You have a kind of sizzle to you.

Spiritual Energy 4: You burn away magic in your presence—you have to be careful and meditative or you might accidentally set ghosts and fox-eared people's ears on fire with a look. You're extremely high-contrast: people get obsessed with you super-easily, whether they're claiming you as a rival, enemy, friend, romantic interest, or employee. You tend to just *know* how to get on somebody's nerves or, conversely, on their good side. You can pick up trouble coming from outside your Region—fully trained, though that would admittedly take another level 4 Skill, you can probably predict danger and magical threats as much as a century in advance.

Some Miscellaneous Youkai

Here are some of the other *youkai* you might see about.

Tree People. A number of the residents of the Shopping District are bound in some fashion to one of the local sacred trees or groves. The tree people have pale, refined features with a greenish, bluish, or acorn undertone; long fingers; flowers or leaves growing in their hair; a love of dance; and naturally quiet voices that pain them, a little bit, to use. They tend to be extremely long-lived and require very little sustenance, giving them the freedom to wander the District without formal residence or career, sleeping in the branches of trees and resting at a temple on extremely cold or dangerous nights. A few with longer-term ambitions study at "Grains of Knowledge," Dianne Lawler's little school.

Some of these "tree people" are plant spirits; others are orphans or runaways "adopted" by the trees; a few are the children, grandchildren, or descendants of someone like that, who chose to inherit their ancestor's connection to the trees.

The Long-Neck People. Certain families of the Shopping District have the power to stretch their necks to twenty, thirty, or even fifty feet in length, their necks gaining incredible flexibility as they do so. In the past they could only do this at night; since the death of the original sun they've learned to do so even during the day. There's a common prejudice holding that long-neck people are incorrigible tricksters and spies, and for this reason most of the long-neck people keep their abilities a secret. Town being as it is, I kind of suspect that they're just normal people with a really weird power, with maybe a bit of a self-fulfilling prophesy on the side, but that's not the kind of thing I can really know!

Other Strange Creatures. People have also sighted large, strange spirit-creatures with one or more eyes; bizarre monkey-human hybrids; transforming beetles and spiders; a lightning dog, which may or may not actually have been a pair of foxes; a blue ogre; a gigantic foot, which demanded that the homeowner it descended on wash it thoroughly; and a wild-eyed and mouthless creature in cerements whose head bears tattoo-symbols of the sun and moon. Some of these strange creatures of the Shopping District may be tsukumogami, wandering members of the unworldly tribes (pg. 230), or unorthodoxies from Old Molder (pg. 279). Others are unique existences, with no particular reason for existing save their own. As with the tsukumogami, there's a distant possibility that any given strange creature is dangerous, but in practice that's a once-in-a-lifetime threat.

Interactions with miscellaneous youkai are *sometimes* **Shared Action**

You do stuff. They do stuff. You connect over it.

Interactions with miscellaneous youkai are *usually* **Slice of Life**

You're out in the world. You see one of the tree people, or a strange creature, or one of the long-neck people. Perhaps you communicate in words, or perhaps just with emotes!


OPEN
OPEN
OPEN

(Superior) Plant Spirit

an example Superior Skill

The baseline power for a plant spirit looks something like this:

Superior [Plant Type] Spirit 0: You're just a normal person who, possibly, hugged a tree.

Superior [Plant Type] Spirit 1: You have a few plant-type features. Your life is bound to that of a field, grove, or particularly great tree—while it lives, your aging slows markedly at maturity; if it dies, you'll age ten years to every one. You don't need much food if you have sunshine. You're good at dancing. You understand the moods and needs of plants.

Superior [Plant Type] Spirit 2: You're not a human or anything like it—your default form is that of an invisible spirit distributed across the whole of your field, tree, or grove. You can emerge from this state with great difficulty to assume a semi-human form, and may shift from there into a fully human form or back with difficulty. Returning to spirit form is easy when at home and almost impossible (Obstacle 4) anywhere else. Your human form is remarkably beautiful or, in rare cases, handsome. You may vitalize plants with a touch, using this Skill as a botanical medicine Skill that needs no tools, and you're an excellent musician and dancer.

Superior [Plant Type] Spirit 3+: At this level you may shift between forms without effort. You may also have or learn the power to assume additional forms, such as a swirl of petals flying on a self-made breeze.

Long-Necked

an example Superior Skill

If you have this Skill, you are of the long-necked people—you may stretch out your neck and twist and bend the lengthened neck around freely (like a very strong tentacle with your head on the end.)

The levels of the Skill look like this:

Long-Necked 0: You could have a pretty long neck. Like, I mean, whoa. Or not.

Long-Necked 1: You have a weird mutation—your upper spinal column is incredibly squishy, resilient and flexible, as is the muscle and skin of your neck. You can twist your head around, sometimes as much as 540 degrees, or stretch it out by up to a foot and a half. If this is the limit of your potential, Long-Necked people will find you adorably laughable, like a pudgy baby or puppy—it's like being a were-pug among were-wolves!

Long-Necked 2: Your neck can stretch out to twenty or more feet—maybe more, but at some point you start having trouble keeping it upright because of weight and leverage issues. Your neck hairs are very sensitive to air currents around them.

Long-Necked 2 is the highest level you'll see in Town, but I can imagine going a little further:

Long-Necked 3: Your neck is tougher and more compressible than rubber, can stretch out like an elastic superhero's, and is fully flexible and practically self-supporting all along the way. The biggest limit here is that "my head is half a mile away with my neck stretched out between the two positions" is not always the most tactically advantageous position; however, your neck hairs are sensitive enough to "see" blocky shapes in their immediate vicinity, and your neck is equally adjustable everywhere, so if somebody tries to chop your neck in half or something you can generally dodge and loop your neck around their sword handle or whatever to stop them.

Long-Necked 4: With practice, you may even learn to stretch your neck through time, into one mirror and out another, or otherwise do the kinds of remarkable tricks that make long-necked entities so legendarily fearsome.

Long-Necked 5: Your neck can slim down to a monofilament thread or puff up like a blowfish to shove buildings out of the way. It's strong as a titan, essentially unbreakable, has a kind of psychic echolocation that maps everything around it, and can whip about at supersonic speeds to practically anywhere you can see. You can manifest an oni-mask type protective shell around your head itself to keep it from catching on fire or exploding from pressure changes or whatever during all this, making your head and teeth basically as unbreakable as your neck.

Places to Eat

Wherever you go in the Shopping District you're sure to find street carts selling a variety of tasty food, coffee, tea, or cold drink places, and random little sandwich, fish, barbecue, or noodle shops.

Here are a few places that I can vouch for!

Mrs. Porridge's Restaurant

This restaurant is one of Chuubo's favorites—it has comfortable booths, a nice veranda, a range of amazing American-style dishes like yakinuku sandwiches, fried onion slices, fried chocolate bars, potato slurries, tuna noodle casserole, two-patty hamburgers with or without the egg, and sweetened milk, plus, of course, the best of all possible pies. It even has karaoke on Wednesday and Saturday nights! It's a great place to come when you have something to celebrate with your friends.

The Golden Phoenix Bun Shop

This incredibly tourist-y restaurant—the roof has Imperial decorations marking it as the residence of one of the highest notables of the Forbidden City, but the owner isn't even full-blooded Chinese!—is nevertheless the source of the most delectable meat buns in Town. And they're so cheap! You can buy a bag of meat buns and sit with them at the nearby benches or stroll through a nearby garden. You can't actually eat in, though: the closest you can come is sitting on one of the four high stools directly under the restaurant's awning.

Steam Noodles

This is a pretty good noodle soup shop. It's cheap, and the soup is hot and good. The sign out front talks about a revolutionary noodle-steaming process but as far as I could tell when I ate there the revolution changed nothing. Your soup comes with a small salad but you have to get it yourself at an extremely uninspiring salad bar.

Still, the noodles are good!

The Clever Crab

The crab was probably not actually that clever, since it was almost certainly eaten. But possibly it was a Buddhist saint that *wanted* to be eaten to help advance the enlightenment of other life. Or something. (I couldn't say.) This is a decent seafood, sandwich, and tea place with metal chairs, lightweight tables. It has a bit of a Seattle atmosphere, which is pretty much why I went in!

Dunstan's Pizza

This classic pizza restaurant bears the name of St. Dunstan. When the Devil troubled him at his smithy, St. Dunstan caught the Devil's nose in his red-hot pincers. That flattened nose—*according to the legend of St. Dunstan's Pizza House, deviating here from the classic doctrine*—inspired St. Dunstan's cousin to invent the first pizza spatula. Another version of the story holds that whatever St. Dunstan was making melted down while he had his standoff with the devil, flowing over the anvil to form a flattened spatula. Either way, whenever you put a pizza into or remove a pizza from a comparatively flat oven, you're calling back to the legend of St. Dunstan...

Or so the pizza house claims. These legends are almost certainly complete fallacies, but the pizza is pretty good. You can get a bucket of crisp French fries to go with it and a real imported bottle of soda!

God Pancake

The logo for this pancake shop is a winged face floating above a pancake, looking skyward, over a bed of clouds. Has the pancake achieved godhood, or is it a god contemplating a pancake? It's a little hard to tell. Anyway, the classic "god pancake" is a thin blueberry pancake with a puff of sugary whipped cream on the top, a circle of thick lemon syrup, and grated raspberries around the edge; you can get it with tea, a side of spring rolls or chicken bites, and chocolate, or you can order it rolled up into a paper cone to go.

Anything involving food is probably **Shared Action**

You do stuff while you're eating, or you talk while you're eating about the stuff you do and want to do.

Finding a new place to eat is usually **Discovery**

Is it neat? Mysterious? Or a little scary?

Cutting-Edge Stuff

The Latest Thing

One of the stores with a very strong mindshare among the students at School and the kids of Fortitude is **the Latest Thing**. Its stuff is actually generally out of the student budget—it's targeted at people who want "neat things," and so it brings in a lot of weird and fashionable stuff from Earth and the other worlds. Collectible toys, brand-name apparel, strange foreign foods, the latest game or CD to get a shipment into Town, and peculiar upscale magical or technological goods all find their places on the shelves here. It's pricey, but the students love it anyway—they may not really be able to go there to *buy* things, but it's a great place to go to *drool over* all of the awesome stuff!

The Steamworks

Obsessed with robots, cybernetics, mecha, battlesuits, supercomputers, or artificial people? You'll find ample fuel for your obsession at **the Steamworks**, "a Modern Science and Robotics Shoppe" tucked away down by the river in the Shopping District at Town. Its principal clients are the businesses of Town, but there's a large sales area—the Steamworks Gardens—that's targeted at casual shoppers and the younger crowd, selling toys, fad items, and promotional devices, as well as giving talks about the glorious future of Town and offering tours to "youth interested in modern science." Imagine an airy bazaar combining elements of Italy, fairy-tale Baghdad, and a modern science museum. In every corner of the gardens is *something* neat: dueling robot scorpions, Tesla devices burning logos onto signs, gentle-voiced "speaking engines," or self-motivating gyrocopter fairies floating along the ceiling cleaning the soot and pollen from the ceiling and the upper air! Remote-controlled steamboats and one dragon-faced submersible patrol amidst the liles of a cultivated creek. The goal of the Steamworks Gardens is to be an irresistible magnet to any child or geek with even the faintest interest in modern science, and in this, it more or less succeeds.

Comparatively out of sight is the actual *devicery* where the engineers do their work. The Steamworks devicery is much more *interesting* but infinitely less *captivating* than the Gardens—it's full of machines of impenetrable design, half-finished robots and battlesuits barely distinguishable[44] from modern art[45], engineers laboring over reams of plans, and young apprentices hauling coal, twisting valves, and wriggling through vents to investigate various calamities, potential calamities, and disasters.

Visits to cutting-edge stores are *sometimes* **Foreshadowing**

Something mobile or interactive catches your attention. You admire or watch it or listen to the sales staff talk about it for a while. Then you react! Later, perhaps it'll become important to the story.

Visits to cutting-edge stores *sometimes* provoke **Obsessive Actions**

You get obsessed with something. It's just so cool! You get worked up over it. You do something over the top, tipping over the edge into obsession—do you spend money you don't have? Rant from a soapbox about how awesome it is? Try to steal it from the shop? Or do you just kind of short out and shut down over it, mumbling its name in intermittent awe or avarice as you stumble dazedly through the streets?

It's best if someone else notices and reacts!

Visits to cutting-edge stores are usually (about) **Discovery**

What wonder have you just found?

Steam-Powered Robots

The robots of the Shopping District are sleek creatures of brass and copper. Most of them are clockwork organisms with a side of steam and electric power, wrapped in a metal shell. They tend to have articulated clockwork or flexible-cable limbs; glowing eyes; legs, spherical wheels, low-temperature jets, or helicopter blades for mobility; and a generically soulful appearance.

Robots are generally gentle, quiet and patient creatures. They have decent hearts but lack the human need for company and entertainment. That isn't to say there aren't robots heavily motivated to seek family, friends, attention, thrills, or fun, just that they're a lot less common than the comparable human archetype.[46]

Roughly thirty robots in the Shopping District have achieved citizenship and bought off their contracts with their makers; another seventy are in various stages of progression towards this goal, still caught up in demonstrating or developing their intelligence or saving up the money for their independence. There's no outright exploitation of self-aware machines, what with engineers holding the device-love towards their work and Town having anti-slavery laws on its books, but the absence of standardized medical care puts them in an awkward position—from a legal perspective, what they're buying when they buy their freedom is not so much themselves as the maintenance contract that promises them long-term survival, and the cost of their construction[47] is simply folded in. I'm not entirely sure what will happen when robots develop sufficient resources to handle their own construction or repair—history suggests an unpleasant power struggle, but

44 If at all!

45 Many will never function, you see, barring fundamental advances in design, so they could be rightly understood as decorative in function.

46 There's an ongoing philosophical struggle between the engineers and robots wanting to target robot development towards even *more* peaceful, content, and quiet robots that will love nothing so much as service to humanity and those who want to aim them more towards *being* human. On the surface, this debate is about whether robot consciousness is human consciousness, whether a truly docile robot consciousness is a crippled personhood or a new kind of personhood, and whether a truly rebellious robot consciousness would be an expression of humanity or simply firebrand fetishism, but there are underlying strains of "How the hell does friendliness actually work?" "Are we even *capable* of building perfectly loyal or genuinely free-willed robots?" and "Is it better for humanity to have a child-species that honors and serves it or a child-species that goes beyond or even supplants it?" all mixed in.

47 Offset by the marketing benefit that having them out in the world brings their creators.



there might not be enough money, madness, or prejudice involved to turn things messy.

The District's humanoid robots have a relatively standard form, although it's been refined and smoothed over time—an untrained human eye is probably best off identifying specific robots by their nameplates rather than trying to catch the subtle differences in their shape. At a rough sketch, there are 60 self-willed or potentially self-willed robots demonstrating the current standard humanoid form; 10 identifiably older and 5 identifiably newer models; 8 undersized "chibi" robots; 4 gynoids with overtly feminine features[48]; 3 sentient computers that are semi-mobile at best; 3 hyper-mobile "explorers" designed around a head-sized spherical shell with miscellaneous reconfigurable limb attachments; 1 self-aware train that mostly keeps to its standard route; 1 intermittently self-aware hive creature; and a handful of other miscellaneous variants. Robots do not seem to be able to become tsukumogami, although since most of them feature at least some level of electric power and very few of them are older than the quarter-century mark the evidence is ambiguous at best.

48 This pretty much means "breast-bumps." Steam and clockwork are apparently pretty poor technologies to work with when it comes to actual sexual function, robot parturition is considered an unprofitable line of research compared to robot engineering, and most of the robots who have a gender identity at all tweak their voicebox or clothing style instead of their physical form.

Debates over the future of robotics are *sometimes* **Science, Faith, and Sorcery**

Will you trust the robots with a potentially rebellious future, or humanity with the power to deny the robots their agency? You think about this, explain what you know, come up with a theory, and propose a risky test.

Studying robots, or showing interest in their technology, is usually **Foreshadowing**

You're hearing exposition or reading description about this stuff, and you get caught up in listening, watching, or reading. After a bit, you reach a new understanding or realization—and react!

Debates over the future of robotics are *sometimes* **Obsessive**

You worry about or become obsessed with the idea of a future involving recklessly dangerous or miserably enslaved robots. You get worked up over it. You tip over the edge into outright obsession!

Interacting with robots is usually **Shared Action**

You do stuff. They do stuff. Try to connect!

The Methodology Building

The twelve-story Methodology Building is a monument to the glory and ambition of the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy. It towers over Arcadia like a gnomon over a sundial or an angel spreading its wings. It is His shadow that it casts, metaphorically at least; it functions as the embassy of the Riders, the Bleak Academy, and the Far and Sunless Land in Town.

To stand in the shadow of the Methodology Building is to be possessed of a wild, nameless longing for the end of things—for *unshackling*, for a dreamless peace, for a thing that is beyond childhood and personal existence and can only be discovered somewhere in the far Outside. It sends a chill emptiness through you but also makes you resonate to its calling; *give up everything you are*, it whispers to you, and *you may find eternity*.

That's the vision offered to you by the Bleak Academy: something soulless and wondrous, like a Heaven spun from steel and glass. Something transcendent. Something bleak. Something that can only ever be promises until you get there, and by then, whether it's a Heaven or a Hell, it'll be too late to change your mind.

Staring up at the methodology building *sometimes* invokes a **Trauma**

It gets to you. It gets under your skin. Under the surface of your thoughts. It makes you think things. You break from reality, just a little, as its shadow moves across the world. You wind up scarred, touched, even a little changed.

Staring up at the methodology building is *rarely* **Foreshadowing/Sympathetic Action**

It catches your attention. You watch it for a while: the movement of the shadow as the day goes by, the lights in the windows, the people walking to or fro, or the dreams it wakes in your mind.

It's a long time later that you tear yourself away.

Or: it catches your attention. You watch it for a while. You're distanced from yourself. Then—a shock! Someone touches your shoulder. Something speaks to you in your mind. You flounder. You try to get some defensive distance, perhaps? You're frozen up, in short, or messed up, and someone else can take a Sympathetic Action.

Staring up at the methodology building is usually **Slice of Life**

That moment sticks with you. The mood of the place fills you up.

Taking the elevator in the Methodology building is usually **Symbolic** (a Ritual/Transition)

Sometimes visits to the Methodology building will give you power. You ride in the elevator and the world stops and a voice asks questions of your soul, and then—when you come to your senses again, you're not in the building any longer, but something's different. Something's better. Something's worse. Something's *new*. Maybe you've picked up your visa to travel to the Far and Sunless Land. Maybe you've learned a terrible truth. Maybe you're healthier, a sickness you had is gone from your system, only now you have a strange compulsion to set aside the things of your childhood and prepare for a long journey. You won't know what it's going to be until you have reason to find out! That's a Ritual.

If the HG prefers, then there may be something you need to *do* or something that needs to *happen*, more than once, at the top floor of the Methodology Building. This would make particular sense if you end up allying yourself to the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy, for instance, and travel there to consult with him. In such a case the trip might be a **Transition**, marked by "stock footage." Imagine that there's a clip out there on youtube or something showing your character ascending the elevator, with, presumably, dizzying views of the world outside and beyond; since we can't actually show that clip in play, what with it not existing, you'll recite from an appropriate text instead. I've included some suggestions for appropriate texts below. Note that some of them are pretty long, so you may not want to use the whole text every time—just go for as long as it feels right!

First Text: "A Far and A Sunless Land," by Jenna Moran

"You don't have to stay," said the morning star
"Run away, run away, run away to a far
To a far, to a far, to a far, to a far, to a far and a sunless land."

"You can run," said the sun, in the middle of the day;
"O I wish 'that they'd told *me I* could run away
Run away, run away, run away, run away, to a far and a peaceful land."

"You can run away," said the sunset's light,
And it set its horizon in a hard flat line
"It's OK, it's OK, it's OK, and you'll find
A far and a sunless land. A far and a sunless land."

And the night rolls over and it makes me sick
It's a trick, it's a trick, it's a trick, it's a trick
And I wish someone'd told *me I* could run away
To a far and a sunless land.

Second Text: An Interpretation of the Katha Upanishads

Now a man, desiring a great reward, promised to give all that he possessed to Death; and as he made these sacrifices, his son reflected as follows:

Unblessed are the worlds where a man goes after death
If the gifts he gives are barren—
If he offers all he has to the gods
But holds back the better part for himself.

So he said to his father: "To whom will you give me?"

And that is how it came to pass that Ketas, who was that man's son, was made sacrifice to Death. And as he went he turned and he looked back upon the world of dying people, and living people, and he saw that they were the same, and he said: "I go as the first, but many more will follow."

A mortal ripens like corn; like corn, he springs up again.

Now Death had not expected this visitor to his home; truly, Ketas' sacrifice was an unexpected gift even to the god of Death; and so for three days and three nights, Ketas dwelt in the house of death unattended. He received no drink and no food and no fire was lit for him. He dwelt in silence and in darkness and the house of Death was barren unto him. When Death returned, Death was greatly struck by this, and cried out: "Hail to thee! You have dwelt in my house three days and three nights without receiving food or drink, and no fire was lit for you, and so Death shall grant to you three boons, whichsoever you may choose."

"O Death," said Ketas, "may my father be freed from anger to me; and may he know me and greet me, when I am dismissed by thee."

"Through my favor," said the voice of Death, "this thing is done."

"O Death," said Ketas, "teach me of the fire-sacrifice, that a person may pass through Death and unto Heaven."

"I tell it to you," said the voice of Death, "learn it from me; and know that this is the attainment of the endless worlds, and their firm support, which is hidden in the darkness."

Ketas listened to the words of Death, as Death explained, and Ketas repeated it back as it was told to him; and Death was pleased, saying, "For this I shall give you a second-and-a-half-th boon, that the name of this sacrifice shall be your name hereafter, and those who have three times performed this rite, and been united through you with father, mother, and teacher, and performed study, sacrifice, and the giving of alms shall overcome birth and death and obtain an everlasting peace and rejoice in the world of Heaven beyond the reach of grief."

"You are generous, O Death," said Ketas, and he bowed his head.

"Choose then," said Death, "your third boon, and all shall be accomplished."

And Ketas said: "There is that doubt, when a man is dead—some saying, he is; others, he is not. This I should like to know, taught by thee; this is the third of my requested boons."

"On this point," Death said, "even the gods have doubted formerly. It is not easy to understand. The subject is subtle. O great-spirited Ketas: choose another boon. O honored guest, I beg you: do not press me, and let me off that boon."

"On this point," Ketas agreed, "even the gods have doubted indeed, and thou, Death, hast declared it to be not easy to understand, and another teacher like thee is nowhere to be found—surely no other boon is like unto this."

"Choose sons and grandsons," begged Death, "who shall live a hundred years, herds of cattle, elephants, gold, and horses. Choose the wide abide of the earth, be king of the wide earth, I shall make thee the enjoyer of all desires—"

But Ketas was not moved; and so Death was forced to speak—

Third Text: An Ominous Dialogue

Night: What are you?
The Sleeper: I am that which dreams.

Night: What do you dream of?
The Sleeper: I dream of peace.

Night: You may have peace without existence. It grows and blossoms in the far and sunless land.
The Sleeper: I dream of a peace that writhes and coils in rejection of the dark.

Night: You dream of agony.
The Sleeper: I dream of agony. I dream of pain.

Night: What are you?
The Sufferer: I am that which conquers darkness.

The Sleeper: I am in envy of the night.

Night: How do you conquer darkness?
The Sufferer: I set myself on fire.

Night: Some would say it were a kindness to smother such painful flames.
The Sufferer: I am open to a third option.

Night: You dream of agony.
The Sleeper: I dream of agony. I dream of pain.

Night: What are you?
The Fire: I am that which laughs at nightmares.

The Sufferer and the Sleeper: I am in envy of the night.

Night: What do you dream of?
The Fire: A fall to the endless dark.

Night: Is there no ground, then, to stop you?
The Fire: I shatter the ground when I strike it.

Night: Is there no wind to slow your fall?
The Fire: I'm afraid it only speeds me on.

Night: You dream of agony.
The Fire: I laugh at agony.

Night: What are you?
The Fire: I am the envy of the night.

The Sufferer and the Sleeper: I am in envy of the night.

Inside the Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine

If you pull back the layers of metal and machinery from around the Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine's heart, you'll see a gateway to a pocket world—

Normally, a steampunk dimension, a clockwork world, that runs on Arcadia's rules.

It has about 350 residents, mostly robots (or fairies or whatever if you want to re-flavor it) but including a goodly population of *youkai*. There are also many non-sentient or quasi-sentient inhabitants, people or non-people anyhow to bulk out the feel of the place—at least two or three thousand, but maybe more depending on what you count. A handful of the residents just happen to live there; the rest work behind the scenes to sustain the machinery and keep its power of wishing alive!

As in the Shopping District, life inside the engine is a fast-paced whirl of fun, materialism, and delight. The main difference is that the business of the clockwork dimension isn't shopping, but rather maintaining the Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine, so you can replace the general idea of shopping/exploring Arcadia on pg. 254 with "maintaining the Region" and replace the electric train with whatever transportation is appropriate and you'll have a pretty solid picture of how life inside the Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine works. For instance, shopping is very rarely Wicked and is usually Discovery—so, you know, when you're wandering the clockwork dimension and thinking of getting involved with the stuff that's going on, that's rarely Wicked, and usually Discovery!

Most of the territory inside the Engine is fundamentally metallic and mechanical, like a puppet-show city built by engineers, but balanced atop the spinning gears of the place are pockets of ordinary reality, like Robin M's Portion, Luke's Unlikely Steamed Dumplings, the Killian Sideway, and the vast "Sif-Comb[49] Park."

Area: ~8 cubic miles of "stuff happens here," surrounded by infinite space
Population: 333
(300 robots / 30 youkai / 3 miscellaneous non-humans)

Lilimund Cartaign

Ruling the clockwork world inside the Wish-Granting Engine is a woman dressed in brass Victoriana with a metal umbrella at her side. This Main Character is brilliant and awesome and perfect, a muse of machinery: the grande dame of invention and hard-working wish-granting goddess **Lilimund Cartaign**!

She doesn't just live in the steampunk dimension tending the machinery and helping grant wishes, though. She *pretends* that, when she's talking to Chuubo (or Shokyou), because she's not entirely certain it's legitimate for her to actually be out in the world doing anything else, but *oh* is she ever out in the world. She'll sneak out practically any time she can be sure her creator won't know! She is the stealth do-gooder vigilante who fixes termite damage in the night. She's the secret heroine who'll rescue kidnapped children from some monster's lair. She's a glorious adventuress who goes around getting into scrapes and building things and fixing things and making things *better* and she tries, very hard, not to let people connect the two pieces of her life.

It's not that anything *bad* would happen. Not exactly. It's just...

The conversations that would follow if anyone knew her complete story—both "So, um, you're the spirit of a kid's magic engine?" and "So, uh, I accidentally made a scientist-hero? And it's not, like, a glitch or anything?"—are just so incredibly awkward!

You can choose a different aesthetic for Lilimund and the world inside the Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine. Her player, or the HG if she's an NPC, *could* choose a fairy tale world, or a land of pulp adventure; instead; and she, a fairy tale princess, or non-steampunk two-fisted adventuress! You could *even* replace her with the standard male version, declaring that the world inside the engine is run not by a woman in brass Victoriana but rather by Seizhi/Suzy's older brother, science hero, adventurer, and possible underground tournament luchadore **Laodemus Schwan**.

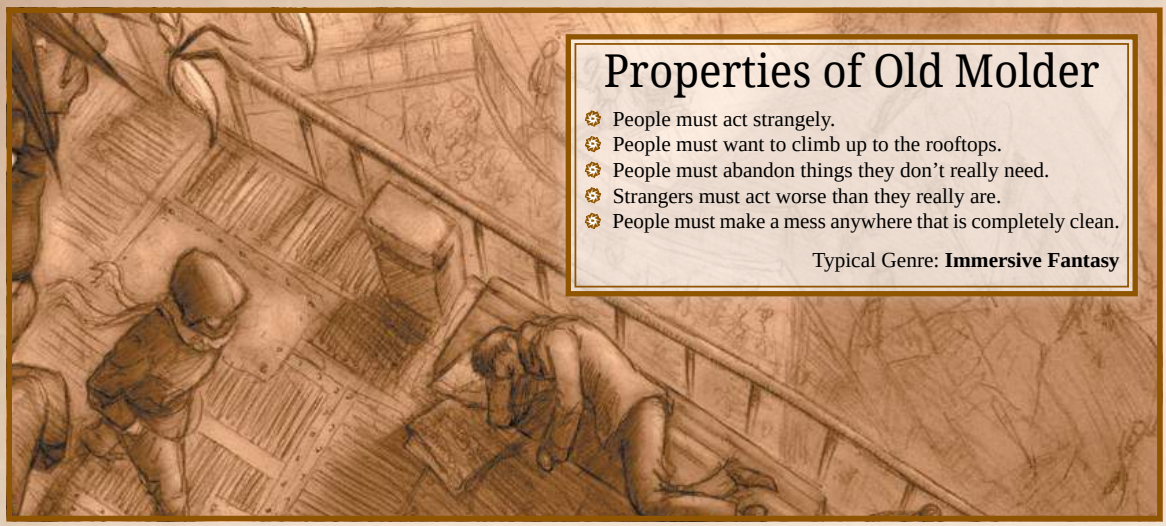
Lilimund Cartaign, aka
The Marvelous Wish Granting Engine



49 Technically the SJFCCMB, or "Sarah Jane Forest-Clockwork Combination Micro-Biome."



Old Molder



Properties of Old Molder

- People must act strangely.
- People must want to climb up to the rooftops.
- People must abandon things they don't really need.
- Strangers must act worse than they really are.
- People must make a mess anywhere that is completely clean.

Typical Genre: **Immersive Fantasy**

This Region's full of old metal, old buildings, and something wonderful—of nature and color taking hold in the ruins where industry used to reign. Amidst the crumbling brownstones and the rusting cars is a resurgent beauty: wild and tame gardens creeping in to cover the broken streets, traders and scavengers hanging bright fabric from the balconies of their upper-story homes, and the gleaming golden metal of pedal-powered dragonfly-shaped flying machines darting through the upper air.

It all began in the Celdinar Mayoralty, when industry came to Town. There was a time, though you'd hardly think it to see Town now, when "progress" was a fire in people's hearts—when everybody's dream, when everybody's *wish power*, set itself on a future painted in combustion, mass production, electricity, and brass. A wave of modernity broke across Town and everyone's mind was burning with the promise of a car for every traveler, a laundry machine and dishwasher for every home, machine-made clothing for every man, woman, and child, and palace-zeppelins and clockwork servants for every family of note. Old Molder was the production center, the beating industrial heart of Town.

Then it stopped.

People'll blame the earthquake, if they're talking casually, but the histories say that Old Molder actually was half-dead already by the time the earthquake hit. There were people coming in every day from all over the world, caps held to their heads and faces bright with hope and skill and promise, but there weren't enough of them; and the established families of Town were turning against Old Molder's development, more and more, as they realized *just how much* their lives would have to change; and the factories were terribly unlucky, or poorly managed, I don't know which; and the local workers, and the ship-captains who brought the new blood in, grew disillusioned day by day. The future was dying anyway, drop by drop, and then the earthquake hit.

Old Molder shattered, and Town left it to rot, and eventually the wild moved back in.

Area: 2.5 square miles
Population: 1,200
(1,150 humans / 20 clockwork people / 30 miscellaneous non-humans)

The Population

Old Molder's been settled over the years since by people who can't find a place in Town. That usually means people with a reason not to settle down—people who value being eclectic or independent in one way or another. This includes runaways from Horizon, young adults from Fortitude trying to establish themselves away from their family, hippies and bohemians, deviant scientists, misanthropes, near- or semi-human creatures difficult to categorize, a handful of unfortunates, and just enough in the way of ne'er-do-wells, criminals, and predators to give the place an unsavory air. It's a favored destination for Horizon's orphans, who are rarely entirely sanguine about the attrition rate as compared to the adoption rate at Horizon's two orphanages and would rather have done with the whole region; some of them organize into Dennis' gang[50], while others, like **the Magical Detective**, make a play for an independent existence.

In practical economic terms, the population breaks down roughly as follows:

What do the people of Old Molder do for a living?

~60%	(live a) Subsistence/Independent Lifestyle
~30%	Commute/Trade with Town
~5%	Scavenge/Trade
~3%	Engineering/Tinkering/Metalworking
~1%	Utility/Construction/Maintenance work
~1%	Something criminal, weird, or miscellaneous

About 700 of the residents live a subsistence lifestyle—individuals, families, or small groups grow their own food, make their own clothing, homestead their own condominiums or factories, and in general provide for themselves without depending on others. There's a lively scattering of small markets throughout the Region and people trade regularly with neighbors and wanderers, but such trade is for *conveniences* and *luxuries*, not necessities. Another 350 or so make their living off of strong ties to the rest of Town—they live in Old Molder but make a daily, weekly, or seasonal

50 A gang of orphans, run by a young man named Dennis. It was hard enough to get the name; if there's anything exciting, horrifying, or even interesting about him, I don't know it.

commute to the rest of Town to work, trade, or otherwise obtain the necessities of life. Somewhere in between are about 70 scavengers who hunt through the ruins and wilderness of Old Molder for scrap metal, herbal medicines, and interesting treasures from the industrial days; these they then trade with locals for useful goods or take out to the rest of Town to sell. There are about 35 engineers, tinkers, and metal-smiths whose skills are useful enough in Old Molder to put food on their table without doing anything else; 20 Utility Men[51] whose contributions to the public good entitle them to pretty much anything they might happen to need, on pain of social censure for the stingy; and a scattering of full-time shop-owners, criminals, and special cases.

Most of Old Molder is *technically* owned by some family or other back in Town. Sometimes someone even shows up with the paperwork to claim their rights—a building newly sold to somebody who'd rather have formal ownership before moving in, a dreamer with a big idea for the real estate, or a technical landlord in financial difficulty looking for a quick bit of cash. This can lead to long-standing disputes or immediate aggressive action but it's more likely to resolve both peaceably and quick; the Regional Council of Old Molder is empowered to strip land rights from outsiders or cut the electricity and plumbing to locals if either takes intransigence too far.

Talking to the Utility Men is usually **Foreshadowing**

The Utility Men are impressive roving troubleshooters, even if their particular post-apocalyptic domain is smaller than some university campuses. When they bring news, a warning, or a mention that they're going to be working in your area, it's probably relevant to your interests!

Subsistence is usually **Shared Action**

You're doing your thing—your simple, honest thing. You skip ahead to the point where someone else shows up in scene, or you go bother someone else who's doing simple, honest stuff (because you can't earn XP for this alone).

Then one of you reaches out. You try to connect!

Scavenging *can* be **Shared Action**

If you're bringing new blood along while you look for interesting things in the wilderness of Old Molder, that's probably Shared Action.

Scavenging is *usually* **Discovery**

You explore. You find neat, scary, or mysterious things!

Scavenging *can also* be **Slice of Life**

You know what you're doing. The wilderness is just backdrop to you. You see something cool or poignant or whatever.

That moment sticks with you.

Visiting a local tinker, engineer, or metalsmith is usually **Slice of Life**

There's fire, or cool metal things or blueprints, or apprentices, or whatever—something a little interesting to interact with.

Trading at the local markets can be either kind of **Setting Action (Discovery or Slice of Life)**

You see something interesting or meaningful and the image sticks with you.

The Yellow Stair

The earthquake split the road from Horizon to Old Molder open and tilted them apart. The Horizon side sank down a little bit and Old Molder lurched back; there's now a cliff where once they were contiguous. It's twelve feet tall where the main road once ran.

Ascending and descending that cliff, for the sake of those who walk between Old Molder and the School, there is a yellow metal stair.

Commuting to and from Old Molder is usually **not an Action at all**.

Most of the time you're going to just skip to a scene in Old Molder or Town.

Returning to Town is sometimes **Slice of Life**

If you're traveling with someone, then heading back to Town from Old Molder can be a Slice of Life (like most travel scenes can.) Find things to comment or emote on in the scenery that you pass, and hope that one of your traveling companions will do the same.

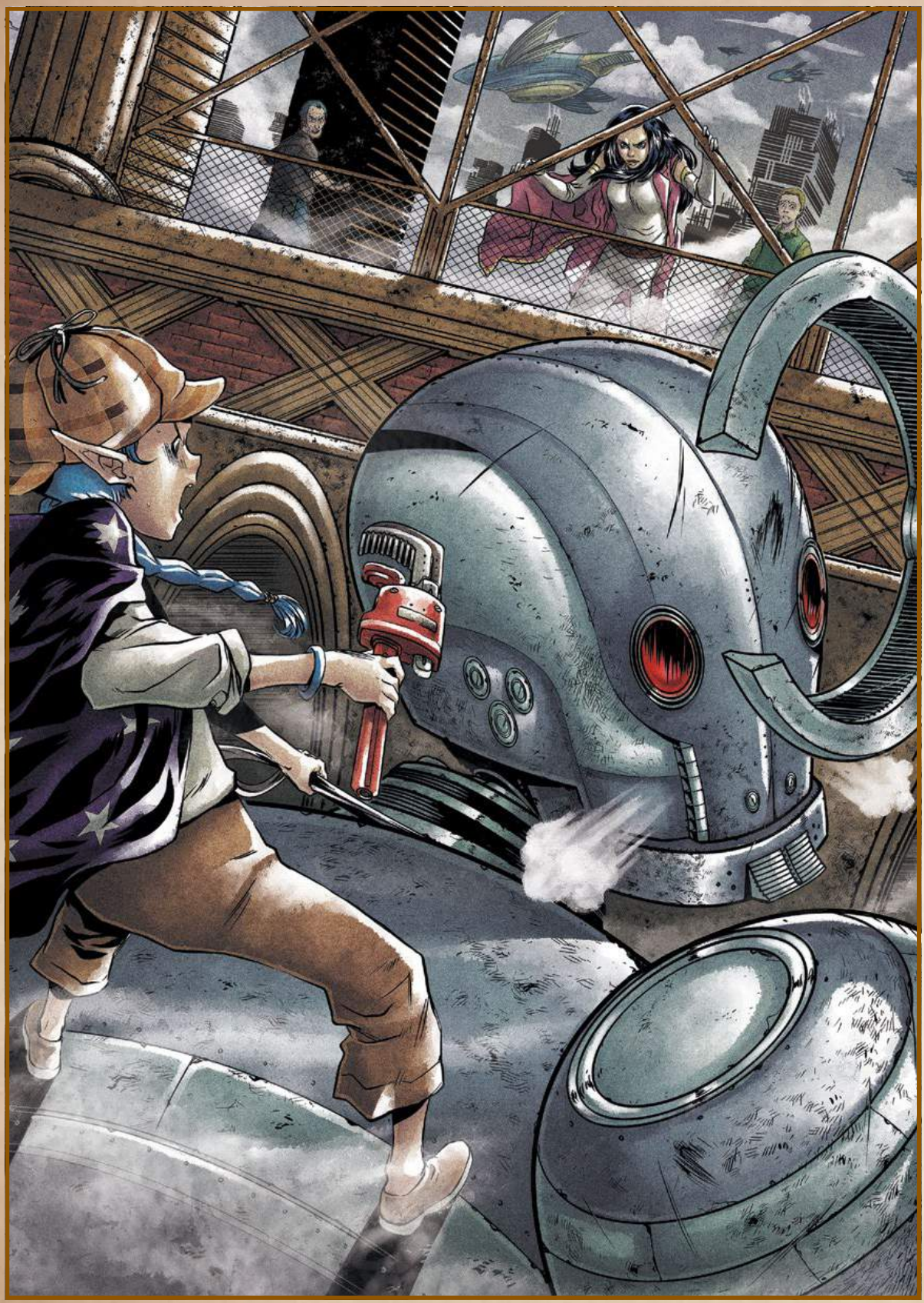
Commuting to Old Molder is sometimes a **Transition**

If you're going to climb the Yellow Stair "on camera," it's time to get out the stock footage! Assume that there's a nice clip out there on youtube or something of your character ascending the yellow stairs and walking across the broken streets and into the Old Molder garden. Since you can't actually show that clip during the game, you'll need to use a Transition instead.

The Utility Men

The Utility Men consist of the Spark Men, who provide electricity; the River Men, who keep the plumbing in good order; the Ombudsmen, who handle miscellaneous points of difficulty; and the Bridgers, who salvage scrap metal from below and use it to extend wirework walkways and bridges between the various buildings' upper floors.

51 The term is regrettably considered unisex.



The Magical Detective

One day an unregistered orphan stumbled into Town, wrapped in a cloak of night. This Main Character is usually **Edony Marguerite**, a young elf—the only "elf," to my knowledge, in all of Town, although there are rumors of some sort of kingdom under the Lake—but you could replace her with a catgirl or foxgirl or even a young werebear boy named **Luther** (with adorable little bear ears!), if you'd prefer.

The reason you can do this so easily is that the origin of this person is essentially unknown:

The road that **the Magical Detective** took to get to Town was so very long and hard that they've lost all memory of what came before, or even how they got there—there's just this vague sense that there was fire, and pain, and they were so very, very tired, when they staggered into Town at last. The fire is scary to remember, and the pain is awful, but it's the exhaustion that gives them nightmares:

How can a person be that tired and still *alive*?

They even lost their teddy bear somewhere along the way. It was more precious to their heart than life itself, but they lost it.

The road was hard!

The Magical Detective has a vague sense that they have a purpose here. A mission. That they weren't just lost—they came here to do something. To fix something. To save someone. Maybe it involved "taking on cases" to help random people? Saving them from themselves or from other people, solving mysteries, and in general fixing Town? Maybe it did and maybe it didn't, but it sounded plausible enough that the Magical Detective hung out her shingle as a detective—

She's on the case!

This Main Character is 60-70% of the typical PC age and lives in horrifying poverty in an abandoned Old Molder apartment. On occasion, when a parent is absolutely necessary for social or legal reasons, the spirit of the Wish-Granting Engine (pg. 270) will help the Magical Detective out by pretending to fill that role. For instance, that's how they got the paperwork for School filled out, allowing the Magical Detective to sneak in and attend a class or two now and then!

Edony Marguerite, aka
The Magical Detective



I'm going to include three possible texts for the Yellow Stair Transition. When you're climbing the Yellow Stair, someone of the HG's choice—probably you—reads from the text that seems most appropriate. If you don't want to take the time to figure this out in play, and you didn't think about it in advance, then just read the first one and ignore the other two for now!

First Text: "Baroque," by Jenna Moran

If the earth hated you, it wouldn't be a joke.
You would be in serious trouble.
It could engulf you.
It could hit you with a rock. It's got wolves on it.
It could wolf you.
It's got wild boars on it. It could boar you.
Then it could wolf you.
Then it could hit you with a rock.
Then take some magma from its core, you
Know, erupt, erupt, it could!
And burn you up.

If it dismally tolerated you, then it would swallow
All your works.
Then they'd be hollow.
Then it would hit you with a rock, but smalla
Than the rock with which it hits a hated foe
You know.

And when you were gone
It would flower over
And green would fall across the roads you'd made
And trees would rise to tower over
All your works, and crumble
Them with all their roots, engulf them,
Cover them in boars, or wolf them,
And your buildings would no longer matter
Save as trellises: the wire ladders
Would spill over with the fruit of its great vines

And if it loved you
Then it would go pretty much the same,
Except when you were gone, and all your brass was fallen
And the clouds of smoke
Consumed by pollen
And the brownstones crumbled
And the towers fell

In the forests you would see steel and brass
Dragonflies arise, and glass
Flowers blooming, and coal-eating elephants
To belch forth the savory of your smoke.

If she remembers she will remember you baroque.

Second Text: excerpt from "The Chimney-Sweeper," by William Blake

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved: so I said,
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet; and that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight, -
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.

And by came an angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

Third Text: An Ominous Dialogue

The Rising Sun: I remember when I could see the factories below.
I liked that. I liked shining down
And shimmering on the glass and cars.

The Falling Man: And making their steering wheels hot.

The Rising Sun: Do you have a point?

The Falling Man: Just saying. If you'd like I could remove the smoke
Sear it from the sky
Send an astonishing all-devouring noisomely-coiling cloud-bird after it
Expose the steel like naked malice to your eyes.

The Rising Sun: That is all right, I think.

The Falling Man: It is?

The Rising Sun: **The matter has been attended to**. Though—

The Keeper of the Storms: Though?

The Rising Sun: Now that the smoke has cleared, this moldering junk pile does not seem to be quite as I remember it to be.

The Keeper of the Storms: Yes, well.
embarrassed look
The matter is resolved; and should remain that way.

The Rising Sun: If it does not?

The Keeper of the Storms: Then I fear what has been kindled in this place.

The Garden

The earthquake cracked the ground, shattered the roads, broke and sprayed rubble across Old Molder. The most dangerous portions were covered over or fenced off; none of it was ever really repaired. Instead, the lower world of Old Molder, everything below the second or third story of the buildings, became the Garden.

Nature has reasserted itself here with unnatural speed and force; to look at the clusters of knotweed and blue flowers growing by the broken-asphalt pools is to think that centuries and not decades have passed since Old Molder's breaking. Green climbs the ruins of the buildings, and even over some still occupied and whole; stands of young trees give way to near-jungle here and there; and, to the fascination and (frankly) horror of such biologists as visit Town, the Region has given rise to *new species of insects, lizards, and flowering trees* unknown elsewhere, with major deviations from the norm. These "Molder Anomalies" include four-foot lizards, only occasionally poisonous; silver-colored bees; "shamblers" (large shamrock-shaped shade plants, which unfortunately do not actually shamble); and the Molder swallows, gliding/flying lizards who would be a reasonable evolutionary link between lizards and birds if we didn't already *have* birds around.[52] I've also heard rumors of weirder things, ranging from living swamps to crabs that occupy abandoned cars and rework scrap metal into leg-extensions for this shell.[53]

It's not just nature responsible for Old Molder's garden, of course. There are people involved too. There's a pervasive impetus in Old Molder to seek the heights that for many natives verges on compulsion. People don't *like* being down on the ground here: so they've given up on standing and walking on the streets, on the ground levels of buildings, and in the empty warehouses, and use them pretty much entirely for cultivating food instead. Corn and soybeans are most common in fenced-off or otherwise contained properties, but edible plants including fruit trees, berry bushes, wood sorrel, and violets have escaped their reservations, probably with human help, and grow throughout the Region now.

Getting poisoned by a Molder anomaly lizard is **Adversity**

They're not really *dangerous*, in the sense that you have to be pretty unlucky to get bitten by one of the lizards, and unluckier still for it to be poisonous—even if you're randomly sleeping on the Old Molder ground or poking anomalies with sticks you are most likely safe. That said, if it happens, then your life really sucks for a bit. The scene often fades to black on you once you've gotten tired enough from all the vomiting that you start to hiccup and/or cry.

52 Which we totally do.

53 I am going to assume that people are making this up, or, failing that, that some *person* is converting used cars into freaky crab-shaped proto-tanks. You know that you'd do that last thing if you had the time. Everybody would yell, "Look out! Tank!" when you marched into Town, but then they would say, "Or, wait! Maybe it's a giant crab! Or a new car! Crark! It's a crark! (Crab-car-tank.) Run!" But by the time they have figured out what to call you you have already dipped them in melted butter and croaked out in your crark voice from your synthesizer, "See. How. You. Like. That. Pitiful. Biped. :: In. Soviet. Old. Molder. King. Crab. Butters. You!" It would be, to coin a phrase, crarktastic.

Gardening, farming, and keeping or driving out bees is usually **Shared Action**

This usually isn't hard enough to qualify as adversity or trouble but isn't laid-back enough to fall under slice of life either. It's just you, walking your path. Doing ordinary stuff.

Try to connect!

Exploring the Garden is usually **Discovery**

What is this that you have found?

Enjoying the Garden is usually **Slice of Life**

You know what you're doing. Old Molder is just a backdrop to you. Take some food and a friend down on a picnic, maybe, or something, or climb up to the roofs for a better view. Anyway, you'll need to see something cool or wondrous or poignant or whatever, and then emote your reaction to it. And that moment, that mood?

It lingers.

Old Molder's Web

Now it's more or less impossible to avoid the ground entirely when growing food, but there's a bit of a cultural thing in Old Molder against *traveling* on it. Scavengers go below. Animals go below. The Utility Men go below, when they *must*. People go below for special reasons and for special occasions. People going about their daily business, though? They'd much rather keep themselves to the heights.

Old Molder was already prone to second- and third-story pedestrian walkways before the earthquake hit. The people building the place were very excited about filling the streets with cars, but also a little nervous about them—you know how people can be—so here, in the heart of Town's industrial district, people made it pretty easy to get from place to place without crossing paths with the machines. Some of the high walkways shattered in the earthquake; a surprising number of them didn't.[54] Still, there weren't enough left, or for that matter to begin with, to support a fully second- and higher-story lifestyle.

Things are different now.

For decades now people have been salvaging scrap metal from the Garden and the unused buildings and using it to build out the space between buildings with *Old Molder's Web*—a series of shiny wire-grate walkways, bridges, and occasional suspended market squares connecting the various upper-story residences with one another and with the tops of the shorter buildings. The Web got its name from the classic painting by Mr. Holmstock showing the sunset from a tall building and the wire laid out like a spider-web burning with orange-lit dew; in truth, from most rooftops, it looks more like a corn maze than a spider's haunts, for which I personally am grateful.

Finding a good view of the web is sometimes **Decisive Action**

This isn't for *seeing* the web, like, spotting a walkway from underneath. That's trivial. This is for finding a good place to see most or all of it from, from above.

As you struggle to find a good place to do that—it can actually be pretty hard when you're a newcomer to the area, or if there's some obstruction on your usual route—you talk with someone about your life and what's on your mind. You catch their attention, which is probably pretty easy because they're bothering to accompany you on this search. Then you finally see the web, and it's amazing, and as you're looking down across the sweep of the shining web and all Old Molder, you reach and then announce a decision.

Or do you do something decisive then and there? But I don't know what that could possibly *be* unless you're going to grow fiery wings or something or push your traveling companion off of the roof.[55]

Finding a good view of the web is usually **Slice of Life**

You admire it. Or you're a freak and you express your disappointment. Freak! Then someone else emotes, in response to you or to the web. That's a good moment to treat as a **Slice of Life**.

You'll remember that moment.

Walking on the web is usually just **Slice of Life**

Find things to comment or emote on in the scenery as you go, and perhaps those images will stick with you too.

The Dragonflies

A piloted dragonfly ornithopter treading the upper air is a characteristic sight of Old Molder. The ornithopters are compellingly beautiful: golden, gleaming in the sun, deceptively ethereal and fragile in appearance, hovering and flitting through the sky much as real dragonflies do. They're brutally difficult both to steer and to keep skyborne, I understand, so there's never more than a few of them visible at once—but once you spot one it's hard to look at anything else until it lands.

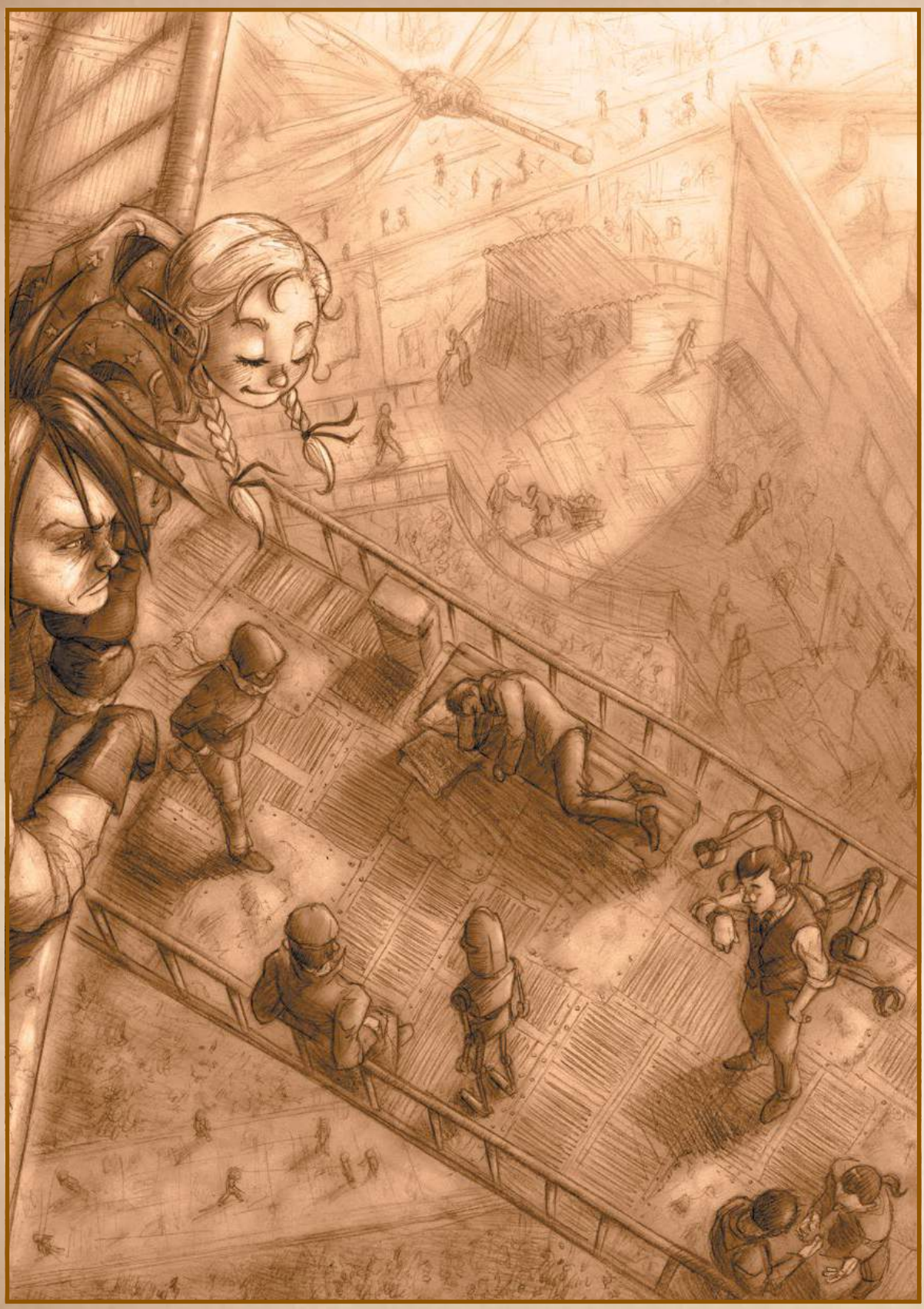
The Lurker

Sometimes ornithopters and their pilots just vanish. It's not common—once or twice a decade, at the most. It's still a little puzzling, because Old Molder is *not that big*, and the ornithopters are pretty visible. You'd expect them to go down in flames, or at least in screams, but you wouldn't expect them to *vanish*. For this reason people talk about "The Lurker," some kind of combustion-powered monstrosity hidden in Old Molder that hunts down and devours ornithopters and their pilots. I'm pretty sure this is just the local equivalent of an urban legend, but it's such a good excuse for Trouble that The Lurker probably *ought* to exist in some form or other in your game.

Amy Sutedja's "Unorthodox Record," while presented non-traditionally in the form of a manga, is probably the definitive study of this and other Old Molder myths.

54 It was really a very convenient earthquake in some respects.

55 Disclaimer: do not push people off of roofs.



The body of an Old Molder flyer is about 30 feet in length. Each wing is about 20 feet of golden filigree with something like soap bubble or, well, insect wing, stretched between the gaps in metal to make the lace of the wings airtight. Most of the power comes from pedaling; there's a small onboard engine in some designs, but it's not so much for regular use as for emergencies like a nasty wind or a suddenly locked-up leg. (The engineers of Old Molder are pretty good with engines, but it's not good luck to rely on an engine here, and nobody likes a purveyor of bad luck.) An Old Molder flyer is more likely to rely on winding for its power than combustion, and some models for the weaker-legged take an hour or two of winding for each fifteen minutes of free flight.

Words can't express how much I love these things. They're *awesome*. If you're incredibly strong and fit and ideally engineering-minded and you ever find yourself in Old Molder, please take one out into the upper air for me and tell me how it goes. Conversely, please don't take one far outside it—they don't take to the air outside Old Molder very well. It's not so much that they *don't work* in, say, Horizon, and you do get occasional daredevils flying an ornithopter into School and back, but the crash and casualty rates start skyrocketing once you leave the environment of Old Molder. Some of this is aerodynamics and weather patterns and the like; some of it seems to be that the things are only *barely* safe and functional in their native state. Their apparent ability to function reliably within Old Molder is then the consequence of a peculiar local blessing of luck, of dharma, or of fate.

Flight is *almost never* **Trouble**

The idea of something chasing you, or a disaster getting ever closer while you're flying, is pretty awesome and dramatic, but you can't really have very many scenes like that in Old Molder unless the skies become a lot more dangerous or, maybe, safer.[56] Anyway, a scene like that would work basically like this: trouble looms. You flail, trying to mitigate the problem, or maybe you try to run away or hide from some sort of aerial danger. You seem safe—until...

There's a terrible moment of fear!

Flight is often **Foreshadowing**

You're up in the air. Something down below catches your attention. You fly closer, your attention caught. Then you see—something more! Something interesting! You react!

Flight is sometimes **Shock**

...or at least, it can be if there's someone who can talk to you—like, if you've brought a small walkie-talkie or radio with you, or you're in magical communication with somebody, or someone's flying another flyer next to you, or you've got a Fortitude rat or some other extremely low-mass personage with you as your copilot.

If you *do* have someone who can talk to you, you can have a flight scene that starts with you just kind of soaring, enjoying the air. Or, if you like, with you sweating and pedaling, totally exhausted, taking the ornithopter somewhere where it needs to go. Then bam, suddenly you realize that what you're seeing is *absolutely shocking*. You try to get some mental or physical distance. You fail, at first. Someone expresses concern or sympathy. (That's why you need someone else around.) Their concern shakes you out of a mental lock-up or helps you push past a physical difficulty, and you can act again!

56 To encourage people who really shouldn't be flying to get out there and get into trouble.

Flying is often just **Shared Action**

You do stuff. You connect with the world and the air and your flying machine. You make yourself a little vulnerable, e.g., by flying way high in the sky in a fragile pedal-powered dragonfly-shaped ornithopter. Or by making yourself emotionally vulnerable. You know. Whatever.

This is probably isolating, but, heck, maybe you actually *do* connect with the world.

Unorthodoxies

Historically Old Molder has attracted an uncharacteristic number of Town's "unorthodoxies"[57]—semi- or non-human people of more or less unique circumstances, character, and extraction. At present these include Nataniel Oldman, an amoeboid gardener entity alleging shoggoth and nature spirit ancestry; the Morrow Square mass mind; a comatose mutate whose electrified skin powers much of the Region (the alternative, letting him radiate freely until his building burned down, is seen as even less humane); and, of course, **the Magical Detective**.

Trying to help the electrified man is usually **Science, Faith, and Sorcery**

I figure that it is reasonable to come up with and test a theory for what's going on with him, because your PCs are pretty awesome, but I can't promise it'll work out. So you talk about what you know. Then you propose your theory. Then you put yourself at risk—maybe you risk electrification, maybe you just risk your moral standing—testing your theory out.

Meeting an unorthodoxy is often **Foreshadowing**

You're out in Old Molder. You meet someone/something strange. It catches your attention and its strangeness gives extra weight to whatever it might say. You listen. It says or does something more.

Visiting an unorthodoxy you know well is often **Shared Reactions**

Once you know them, of course, they're just a friend. So if you visit them and hang out, it's probably to talk about stuff that's been going on in your lives. You connect with them. One of you makes yourself a little vulnerable, maybe? That's Shared Reactions!

Moral debate about the electrified man is usually **Shared Reactions**

I'm not really recommending you get into this, because the guy is unconscious so you're more likely to project player-level opinions onto the matter than to react naturally to social cues in character. But if you do find yourself debating this, that's Shared Reactions. If someone gets too worked up it might bridge over into Science, Faith, and Sorcery instead!

57 I feel a little weird talking about them like this. Because they're *people*. But this is a storytelling game, and this is how it works in stories, and I'm using one unorthodoxy with permission and making up the other two, so. Um. Something.

Little Island



Little Island

- Things can't change before they're ready.
- Things must show their true natures.
- Things can't lie.
- Things must be beautiful.
- The sun must shine brightly.
- You can never experience the night.

Typical Genre: **Pastoral**

Little Island is a storybook island near the middle of Big Lake. Fluffy sheep dot its green hills. Clouds float across its bright blue sky.

It's Town's memory of itself, I think, in a way.

To live on Little Island is to live in a story of the idyllic past. It's a place of your youth, of the golden what-used-to-be. Because there's a Little Island, the people of Town get to say, ah, the old ways aren't really gone, those days aren't gone, they're not lost and they're not forgotten. The past never really went away, they say, it just moved to Little Island.

It's a clean and healthy place. It's a true place. It's beautiful. It isn't in the past because it hates progress or is against the modern world or anything like that. It just hasn't caught up to the real world yet.

It has a temple at its heart. It's a temple to Jade Irinka, who was in those days, as I'm sure you will remember, the goddess of the sun.

The spirits of the wind laugh and play among Little Island's wind farms' spinning blades.

The people grow their grapes, catch their fish, raise their families, and tend their sheep, and it's all as it ever was, all as it always used to be; and they who live on Little Island never know the sunless night.

Area: 8 square miles
Sheep: 1600+
Population: 155 (130 humans, 25 wind spirits)

The Golden Days of Fable

Life on Little Island is simple and pastoral. It's a peaceful place and it's bathed in the light of Town's bright sun.

The houses are mostly made from piled, mortared stones. The roofs are dark shingles. Most houses have picket fences that surround them.

Not every house has running water. There isn't much in the way of electric. There's a tiny branch library on Little Island, basically a depot for relaying books in and out of Town, and Mary Margaret Cherry takes the post by once a week. There's no phone service or cell phone coverage at all, but the locals, of course, don't mind—what's the point of a *telephone*, after all, except to have people bothering you all the time?

And why wouldn't you just walk a few miles and have a visit if there were someone you wanted to see?

Most of the families of Little Island keep herds of sheep, but Little Island is also home to fishers, vine-dressers and farmers, and a family of priests and priestesses. There's also the Merrons, the closest thing Little Island has to rebels, who keep a small vegetable garden, tend the port for the ferry, and run the inn and general store.

Now Little Island is a folksy place, a once-upon-a-time kind of place, and you can tell because there's a narrator—someone to tell the stories of the place. You have to work pretty hard to be conscious of it when you're there, and so it's up to the HG and the players exactly how much of this element to bring in.

Still, it's not the kind of place where you get there and you're all "what do I do now?"

There'll be a voice to remind you what, somewhere in your soul:

Now on a day like this, Shokyou thought, there's nothing for it but to go and watch the wind-spirits at their play...

And if you ever need to help fix a sheep's sprained leg, or find help when you're in trouble, or build a picket fence, why, there's the narrator right there to help you, explaining the way people handle troubles like that on Little Island.

The Mermaids and the Seals

People sometimes spot mermaids or seals in the rocks near Little Island. Sometimes the mermaids sing. The people of Little Island don't trouble them—at most, they nod or wave—for such is the custom of the isle.

Spotting a mermaid or seal is usually **Foreshadowing**

It catches your attention. You watch or listen for a while. It does stuff. Then you react—and it slips away.

I'm not 100% certain the mermaids are real and not a special effect of some sort; and if they *are* real, then there's probably a reason people don't bother them, so trying to catch them might not be wise. So that's why this is a Foreshadowing Action and not something more interactive. Then again, it's your game! You know best!

Life on Little Island is usually **Shared Action**

You do simple, honest things. Like, watch over the sheep, or fix a broken window, or dust the house. You connect with somebody else over it—or, if you're alone, with nature itself. You make yourself a little vulnerable, because if you can't trust the people around you, either you or they don't belong on Little Island! That's a Shared Action.

Life on Little Island is sometimes **Slice of Life**

Something in the scenery catches your attention. You emote an emotional reaction—to the brightness of the day; to a fine new ribbon you have in your hair; to a sheep that's behaving more finicky than is his or her wont. Or you sight a mermaid or a seal in the Lake, or the face of your sweetheart in the clouds—and rather than watching it and getting all foreshadowy, you just share your joy in that!

Maybe someone responds, and follows up with an emote of their own?

That's a Slice of Life.

Bethany Lennox

Those who find that the simple life does not suit them eventually depart from Little Island—though, it can take a while. There's a story that Bethany Lennox realized one day that life on Little Island wasn't quite to her tastes. Seven generations later, her great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter finished putting everything to rights and saying her goodbyes and took the ferry over to Town for good.

"You Can Never Experience the Night"

The natives don't tend to comment on this explicitly, but Little Island is always sunny and the nights are kind of elusive. It's not so much that they don't *happen*, because obviously they must. It's just that apparently nobody ever looks around and realizes, "Hey, I'm on Little Island, and it's night." Sometimes it's because the narration just skips to

The next morning...

But other times it's much subtler than that.

The bright sun of day is an intrinsic part of life experience on Little Island. In the summer, it gives rise to a languid heat; in spring and autumn, aromatic breezes temper its heat; and in the winter, the sun shines sharp and clean in the winter sky through days that seem somehow far too short. If there wasn't the sun, would the island even really be *there?*

Visiting

The most common reason for visiting Little Island is as a student of School, on a field trip—normally that'll happen during the summer when the days are longest and the Island most accessible. On a field trip to Little Island students may experience the old-fashioned lifestyle of the place, pet the sheep, roam the hills, see the fields of grapes, and help out with traditional chores such as sheep-shearing or maintenance on the major buildings. It is a rare treat to witness one of the evening rituals, since of necessity this requires staying overnight on Little Island and may even require staying for several days.[58]

PCs might also visit Little Island to forget some trauma or trouble, visit friends (met at School?) who live there, or take some action at the temple pertaining to the matter of the sun.

Healing spiritual wounds with a visit to Little Island is **Pastoral**

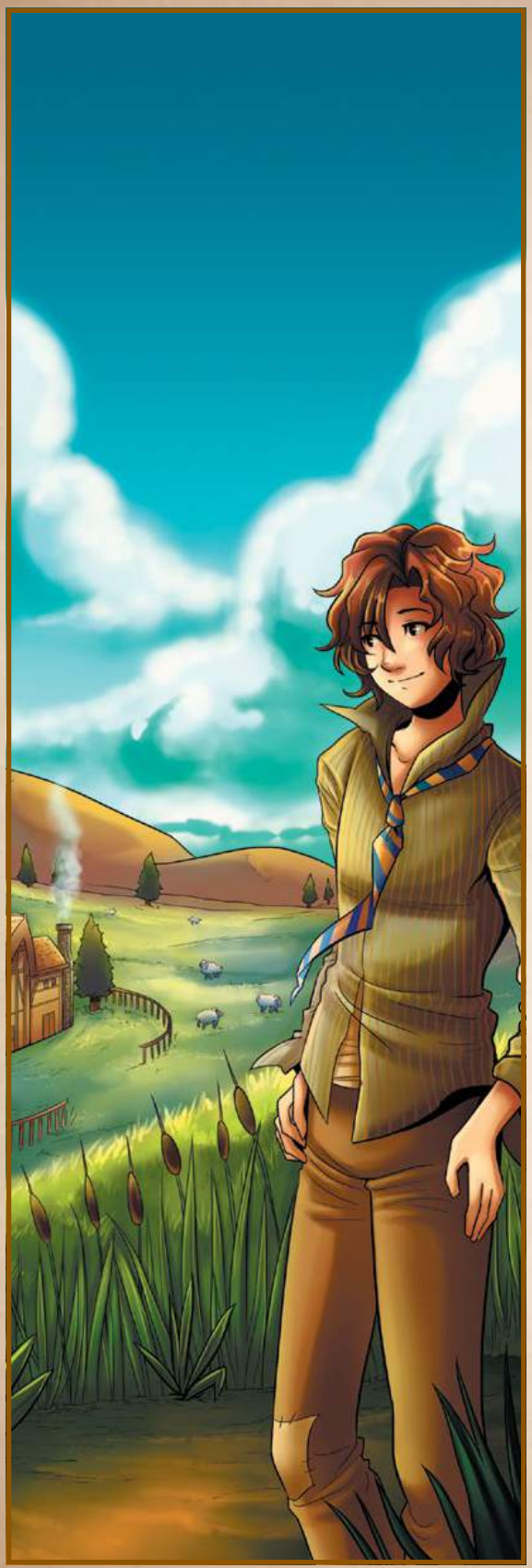
A visit to Little Island can be good for the mental health. You don't necessarily spend your whole time there actively "healing," but now and again, you'll talk to someone, or maybe just the world/narrator/HG, about what happened and why you were broken enough to need the trip: Shared Reactions.

And you'll also probably do Shared Actions and Slice of Life Actions while you're there!

The Goji

The fifth hour of Town's day is bound to the Goji family of Little Island: it's a lucky hour for them, and those who know them often find their thoughts turning to the Goji at five o'clock.

58 If something's going to keep the priestess from performing it, she might not always know in time to send people home.



Scenes on Little Island are usually **Shared Action**

If you're stranded and out of your element on Little Island, someone can help you. Helping you is a simple, honest thing, and they can connect with you over it, and maybe they even show you some trust if that's what you need, or accept *your* trust if that would work better. Either way, that winds up being a Shared Action.

Or maybe you're in your element. Then it's just like living here. You do simple, honest things. Like, help watch over the sheep, or visit the temple, or hang out with your field trip group, or wander the hills and admire the scenery. You connect with somebody else over it—or, if you're alone, maybe with nature itself. You make yourself a little vulnerable. That's a Shared Action too!

Scenes on Little Island are sometimes **Slice of Life**

Something in the scenery catches your attention. You emote an emotional reaction—to the vastness of the hills, to their greenness; to the clouds, or the calmness of the sheep, or the splashing of the Lake. Someone responds, and follows up with an emote of their own.

The moment lingers.

The Temple

In the center of Little Island is a valley. It is reachable by dusty paths, kept up but poorly, and marked along their way by birdhouses tied with sacred cords. At the end of that valley a steep esplanade ascends the hillside and becomes a great long stair, leading finally to the grounds of the temple to Jade Irinka, who was the sun.

The courtyard of that temple is vast and its architecture is stone and in the main hall of the temple is a twelve foot statue of Jade Irinka, six-armed, crowned by the sun, and bestowing a quixotic smile on those who visit her in these days after her death. Laid often but not quite always at her feet are flowers and smaller gifts; behind her is a great tapestry showing the island and the sun, and to her sides are gongs.

There has always been a family here whose duty it is to tend the temple and honor Jade Irinka. It's possible that the temple will move on to honoring Jasper Irinka now, **the Child of the Sun**, but in a typical campaign that hasn't happened and probably won't—either the new sun is too new and the world still doesn't know it should be worshipping her, or she's gotten used to it and decided that the temple should keep to the old ways and uphold her mother's memory and honor *her* as if she'd never passed away.

In short, the only way this is going to become a temple to Jasper instead of to Jade is if that happens during play.

Thus it is that there is no temple to the modern sun, only a small devotional in a side room for those who wish to honor it; and the rituals of the temple still honor the dead sun, the lost angel, Jade Irinka who passed away.

The only major change since the era of Jade Irinka is that the main entrance to the temple, which once faced east, now faces west; and how this should have happened, or why it did not require a more extensive change in architecture, even the priestess of the temple does not know.

Once upon a time it was possible to travel from the temple to the realm of the sun—to ascend through an archway that opened behind Jade Irinka's statue to the higher realm. This is no longer so; if the tapestry is cast aside, and the arch opened by the ritual of passage, it leads to nowhere good.

The narrator does not speak in the vicinity of the temple.

There is only silence from the heavens, there, that you may better hear what may be speaking in your heart.

Pausing part of the way to the temple and talking is usually **Decisive Action**

You discuss the things that led you there. Then you make a choice!

The walk to the temple is usually **Slice of Life**

You see evocative things along the way, or you learn something about a traveling companion. The moment sticks with you; the mood lingers.

Attempting to enter Jade Irinka's realm is usually a **Transition**

This may change if you're in a campaign where Celestia (see box) is accessible—

Then you may find yourself in a war zone, perhaps, assailed by the night-wyrms of the Bleak Academy; or in an unmarred paradise; or in an empty, inexplicable ruin that you may rebuild.

But if the sky kingdom remains inaccessible, then this is simply a Transition:

You experience hints of a nightmare world, of shadowy powers, of endless, biting wind; you read from an Outside-related Transition, e.g., the ones on pg. 314 or 480; the entire experience is painful, incomprehensible, and inexplicable, and not one that you are 100% certain to have survived.



The Sky Kingdom ("Celestia")

- You must reconcile the divided and the antithetical.
- You must keep things in good order.
- Your emotions must have a tangible impact on the world.
- The lake must be tranquil.
- You must see far, and see clearly.
- You must have a talent for expression.
- A terrible beauty must reside in everything, though it may hide beneath the surfaces of things.

At one time there was a kingdom in the sky—a deep, a true, and a paradisiacal land.

It has drifted away from us with the death of Jade Irinka. At the time of this story, even her successor, **the Child of the Sun**, does not know how to reach the kingdom of the sky.

But its touch lingers; sometimes I think that with the right route you could climb the limestone cliffs of the northern beach forever, and maybe one day reach the sky.

Wind-Farms and Wind-Spirits

Little Island has a bit of electric—mostly for refrigeration, sewage treatment, ventilation, and charging up boat motors, although the power outlets in the inn can save a trip to the mainland if a kid wants to charge their DS. If you *ask* a Little Islander where the electric comes from, they'll explain with a straight face that they get static electricity from rubbing sheep—they've been telling that joke to visitors for *years*, and they're not going to stop until they've sheared it bare of every last wisp of humor—but the more correct answer is the wind farms that cover several of the island's hills.

Little Island's wind farms have attracted wind spirits to them—fairly important wind spirits, if their own accounts are trustworthy. These aristocratic spirits treat spinning the windmill blades as a game or contest and squabble over whose "territory" in the region is the best. Many of the people of Little Island have a hereditary blessing from these spirits, or even a bit of wind-spirit in their own bloodline, which inclines the wind to treat them kindly. Those who *don't* have such a blessing are best advised to avoid the squabbling princes and princesses of the air—they're noble of heart and have no real desire to hurt anybody, but they're also prickly, fickle, possessive, and playful, and prone to dream up clever tricks.

If you're troubled by wind spirits, you can earn a substantial respite by tossing a hat or ribbon into the wind and daring them to chase it, or offering it to the "noblest" of those that torment you. Unfortunately, this only postpones the problem—leaving your hat in the possession of wind spirits can slowly deplete your solid material grounding and infect you bit by bit with the nature of the wind. This is not inherently bad so much as invasive, peculiar, difficult to control, and a bit open-ended in how long it may last and how far it may go.

Giving your hat to the wind is usually **Science, Faith, and Sorcery**

You tell the wind about the hat, or your friends about the trick, or the narrator proposes that this is a thing that you will do. You test the theory that they'll leave you alone and that you'll get what you want if you do it!

Giving your hat to the wind sets the stage for later **Corruption** or **Metamorphosis**

You find yourself unexpectedly touched by the nature of the wind. Reality gets a little weird. Corruption or transformation sets in.

Being troubled by the wind is usually **Obsessive Action**

You get worried or worked up about it. The wind-spirits stress you out with their tricks; or, you decide to repay them with tricks of your own. You go a bit too far, a bit over the top. Someone notices! (Or does something happen to render the matter pointless, instead, like the Headmaster wandering up and unexpectedly killing off the wind?)

Enjoying the company of the winds is usually **Shared Reactions**

You share news with them. You connect with them, or with others nearby. You make yourself a little vulnerable, whispering a secret to them or letting them play temporarily with your hat.

Enjoying the company of the winds can be **Slice of Life**

You hang out. Something moves you to emote. Someone else replies!

Wind-Charmers

Certain cherubic innocents possess something called "the wind-charm"—wind-spirits love them and treat them kindly. The weird thing is, the wind-charm is heritable. Even an extremely worldly jerk, supposing they had a sufficiently cherubic ancestor, may possess the wind-charm. This is measured by the Skill **Superior Connection to the Wind 1**. It probably shouldn't rise past level 1 barring a pact of some sort binding one's spirit to the wind or a truly legendary fairy-tale friendship or love for the wind.

By default, wind-spirit blood is a Defining or Setting Perk (pg. 391-392), making you "Seventh Earl of the North-Northwest Morning Breeze" or whatnot, with no attached magical powers and no real use for a shepherd or shepherdess except to establish their position in local wind-spirit society and maybe contact a relatively recent ancestor for help at need. It doesn't even really make them safe around wind-spirits or particularly palatable to wind-spirits not directly related to their line—it just makes sure that the danger is the danger of extended family politics rather than the danger of randomly becoming an interesting new toy. Someone with wind-spirit blood may wind up with **Superior Wind-Spirit 1-2** and/or **Superior Celestian 1-2**, as described on pg. 286, making them substantially more like the wind spirits themselves and even potentially allowing them to turn into the wind and fly.



(Superior) Celestian

an example Superior Skill

This is the Skill of those whose natural home is the upper air—those whose spirits dream of the sky kingdom where lived Jade Irinka, before her death.

Normally you'd need to spend a complete story *in* the sky kingdom to pick this up but since it doesn't seem to be there any longer, since you can go higher and higher and just find, well, sky?

I'll let you pick this up some other way.

The "Air" of Celestia

In the old days, when the creatures and bird-faced spirits of the sky kingdom visited Town, an "air of Celestia" would linger upon them. While the air lingered,

- mortals saw the spirit's actions as the actions of a bird, the wind, the heat, the snow, or something else like that, and wouldn't recognize the spirit *as a spirit* unless they actively, consciously looked.
- *even then*, mortals had difficulty seeing the spirits unless the spirit spoke to them or threatened them or something that they cared for.
- the Properties of Celestia continued to apply to the spirit
- the spirit resisted (but did not wholly ignore) the Properties of other places.
- while the air of Celestia lingered around a spirit, it smoothed their passage back into the upper world.

The Skill Itself

So the levels of this Skill look something like:

[Superior] Celestian 0. Sometimes you dream of the endless sky.

[Superior] Celestian 1. You seem to have boundless energy, though technically you don't. You like climbing a lot and you're absurdly good at it. You occasionally have whole conversations while asleep. Birds like you. You fade into the background when seen in the distance. When you depart Celestia, an "air of Celestia" clings to you for up to half an hour.

[Superior] Celestian 2. When you depart Celestia an "air of Celestia" lingers about you for up to three full days and three full nights. You need only a crumb or two of food a day, and either you don't need sleep at all or you can sleepwalk with great vigor and intelligence.

That's actually as far as it goes—proper Celestians only had two levels of this Skill, so I don't even know what a third level would mean. Possibly you'd need... a crumb or two of food a week and you'd be so awake that you'd bleed coffee? I. don't. Know!

(Superior) Wind-Spirit

an example Superior Skill

Between the lower world and the upper world there was a glassy medium which the Lady Irinka called *Heaven's Lake*, *Heaven's Shell*, or *the Hull of the Sky*. Across this medium blew the wind-spirits, shaping it and re-shaping it according to their whims and plans. Now that art is lost, together with Heaven's Lake and the kingdom in the sky; but the wind-spirits still have powers that touch upon it and the Skill (Superior) Celestian 2.

Their more wind-spirit-specific powers are represented by (Superior) Wind-Spirit, a Skill ranging from level 1-4 and generally a lot more customizable than the rules below suggest—if you want to have a wind-spirit that's a specialist in blowing out flames, or capable of violent storm winds but only for short durations, or able to turn completely into wind but only into a gentle breeze, that'll be completely fine! You can strengthen or specialize these abilities a bit or weaken them quite a lot without breaking the rules of the game.

Here's what the levels of Wind-Spirit look like:

Wind-Spirit 0. You are not a wind-spirit. Possibly you have a bit of wind-spirit blood in you but how could anybody tell?

Wind-Spirit 1. You're faster than most people. You can use "light foot" practice to make it seem like you've cut up to two thirds off of your density and mass—but technically this is balance-related trickery and deceptive strength, rather than an actual reduction in density, and if you're ever unconscious or paralyzed you revert immediately to your normal weight. You're hard to visually track. You can interact with the glassy medium as if it were rubber instead of the usual thick glass.

Wind-Spirit 2. Choose:

- You can adopt a wind-shape, difficult to see and identify and able to squeeze down or expand outwards by a factor of about two-fold. *or*
- You can control or wield a wind that blows around you.

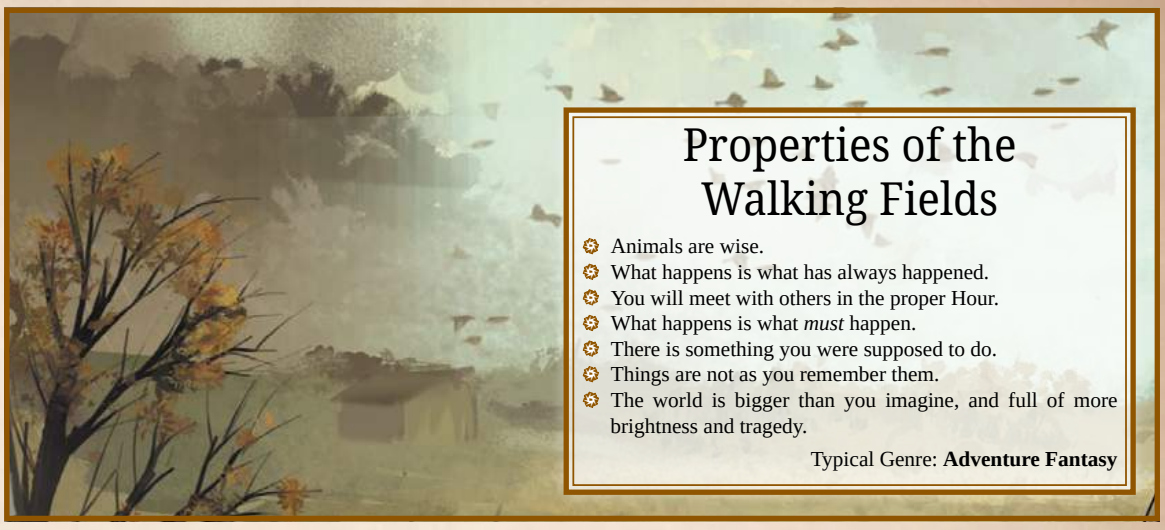
Either way, you can reduce your mass to a fraction of an ounce, or to anything between that and your normal mass. If you give in entirely to instinct (that is, to the HG) as to where you're going, you can fly at up to 25 miles per hour. You can interact with the glassy medium as if it were thick pudding, rubber, or glass.

Wind-Spirit 3. You can turn into wind and blow where you wish. You can be, or control, a gale. You choose many of the material properties of the glassy medium around you.

Wind-Spirit 4. You're comparable to one of the twelve emperors[59]. You can turn into a hurricane-force wind to fill most of a Region, blow for weeks without tiring, and do tricks like briefly turning a hand into a violent wind to blast enemies away with or sculpting the glassy medium into a miles-long path or an elaborate sculpture with just a puff of breath.

59 The greatest of all winds, responsible for blowing for weeks on end, shifting whole regions worth of cloud, and capsizing or speeding along even the strongest ships. They include three humanoid winds, the wind-dog Emperor Chou, the "Waking Dragon" Eme, and the Seven Sleeping Emperors, dozing wind-dragons who go about their work by a process of unconscious action. They probably won't show up in play, but the wind-spirits talk about them quite a bit!

The Walking Fields



Properties of the Walking Fields

- Animals are wise.
- What happens is what has always happened.
- You will meet with others in the proper Hour.
- What happens is what *must* happen.
- There is something you were supposed to do.
- Things are not as you remember them.
- The world is bigger than you imagine, and full of more brightness and tragedy.

Typical Genre: **Adventure Fantasy**

To the west sprawl the Walking Fields that are Town's agricultural base. The land is wild here, full of animals and plants and *life*, and waiting, and *ready*—

Though for what I am not sure.

It's the kind of place where sometimes the rocks that you grow up climbing will groan and creak and stretch and wake and regard you with their craggy eyes; and humph, perhaps, and settle again, and tumble back to sleep. It's the kind of place where you can imagine that at any moment the houses will loose themselves from the burden of the ground and sail through the fields like ships. It's the kind of place where just a moment ago, something happened; or *in* just a moment, something will happen, if you wait; a child lost, or an empire gained, or a dryad chased from the brambles by a wild and monstrous hunt.

That's how it seems, anyway, although in truth most of the time I've spent there nothing particular happened at all.

It's a place under a burden of destiny. It's a place that's filled with the *Call*—with something that's been waiting, something that *will* demand something of you, or take something from you, or give you a gift that you cannot repay.

It's an autumn place. It's mostly fields, but there are thick stands of trees and there are wide-spanning meadows. The colors here are gold and brown—gold-brown grass, and brambles; golden wheat and calfskin-colored trees; brown-gold birds and crisp gold autumn leaves, and all in the sun's warm glow.

It's beautiful. It's vast and open and full of the little things—of birds and small animals and insects. It's a place that's speaking to your heart.

Area: 760 square miles
Population: 20,000

Out in the Wild

There's a lot of pretty scenery out there in the Walking Fields, at least if you like stuff like brown-gold grass and little birds and hedgehogs and free-range goats or deer and foxes and iridescent insects and spiderwebs swaying on wind-blown stalks.

Wandering the Walking Fields is sometimes **Decisive**

You're out in the world. You think through stuff. You talk through stuff. You come to a decision, or you act!

Languid days in the Walking Fields are *usually* a lull in the **Trouble**

Languid days in the Walking Fields are sometimes **Shared Action**

There's a weight of destiny here. Even the peaceful days don't feel like a casual Slice of Life. They don't feel ordinary. They feel like something's *coming*.

The world is asking you for something.

Or talking to you about something.

It's always trembling on the verge of something happening.

So even if you're just hanging out enjoying the scenery, it doesn't feel like a **Slice of Life**. It feels like you need to connect to somebody, or the world; or, if not, like trouble is coming (back) soon.

Exploring and admiring the animals is sometimes **Setting (Slice of Life or Discovery)**

You see something—some glimpsed animal, artistic arrangement of branches and wind-blown grains, fairy fluttering from a flower, spider catching an insect, or scrap of cloth fluttering amidst some leaves. Or you feel something, a breeze or emotion.

It sticks with you.

Weather

There's a lot of rain in the Walking Fields. There's a lot of sun, too. There's always at least a little wind. The weather shifts pretty suddenly so a lot of the buildings have big eaves to them—that's so you can run under them in a storm.

Sudden rain is usually **Sympathetic Action**

You're not really paying attention to the sky. Or you are, but you don't realize just how fast the storm is coming. Then wham, lightning in the distance. Or whoosh, rain all over the place. Somebody in the scene kind of reels, confused and taken aback, because they're shocked. And you notice, and you're all sympathetic and like: "Come on, dummy! We've got to get inside!" That shakes them from their shock and they make a dash for it.

That's your Sympathetic Action!

Watching the rain from safety is usually **Slice of Life**

Later, the weather clears up!

Houses

The houses of the Walking Fields are made of good, solid stone. The stone gets stacked up and white plaster seals the cracks to make it prettier.

Some of the storehouses, mills, and barns are pretty tall. They look like lighthouses or the masts of ships.

The houses and shops always lean a little—I mean, there's this impression, I think, even when they're new. It's like they're wanting to move. It's like they're eager and waiting and wanting to be free. I imagine them talking to one another at night, the wind carrying their voices, saying:

O if the earth would only let me free,

the wind could catch me and I'd sail away!

The roofs even have figureheads, like ships. They have a sweep like the Viking longships and the front of them comes forward to the figure of a horse, or a dragon, or a woman, or a fox, or a bear, or whatever else!

I think there will come a night when they really do slip free from the bonds of the world and glide like ships through the Walking Fields; though I cannot say what that will mean, or what will happen after.

On the Way to the Door

There's often a fence around a house. It tends to lean.

Sometimes the fence is just around the house and its main yard. Sometimes it covers a lot of ground. But the house won't be in its center, not if the fence is large. You'll be able to see the house from the front gate.

There's often *something*, some structure or object, between the gate to the fence and the front door, off to the side of a dirt or a cobblestone road. A bicycle rack? A wooden table for eating outdoors? An anvil? An old wagon wheel? A meat drying rack? Laundry?

It's a halfway marker, and that's something in the culture of the place—a thing to say, *here the wild meets the tame*. Something that you can meet the fairies at, or a prince of the animals, or whatever, that isn't the fence (so they don't feel kept out) but isn't your front door (so you don't have to invite them in.)



A Bit of Space

There's a long way between houses. You're said to be "rubbing elbows" with someone if you can see their house from yours.

A house you don't know is sometimes **Trouble**

Destiny reaches its fingers out for you. You could try to run, but would that work? You could try to hide. You could try to assert control. But something is coming, something is luring you in. Ghosts? Murder? Someone who needs you? With your cooperation the HG builds a sense of horror and threat.

Often it seems like everything's fine—right before the next heart-stopping moment of fear!

A house you don't know is usually **Foreshadowing**

Something's off. Something's unexpected. A flash of color from the bird's nest under the roof. A fox catches your eye. You see the rust on an abandoned wagon wheel. You look more closely. The "more" that happens is the HG describing it more, going into more depth. Or a sudden movement—the fox runs away. The bird takes off. You lean over to touch the wagon wheel, at the HG's prompting, and it dissolves to rust. You react!

A house you do know is usually not a scene at all, but possibly **Shared Action**

I mean, seriously, once you know who lives there, it is probably just a house. But if you do have a scene focusing on the house of friends or family in the Walking Fields, it's likely a Shared Action scene. You do your thing. Or someone talks about their thing—"yeah, we spent months building this fence. Had to bring in the wood from a fair ways north." Anyway, you bond over it.

...maybe with just "so, what do you think?"

A house you don't know is sometimes **Discovery**

You approach. You find neat, scary, or mysterious things. You emote a response!

Transportation

There's a lot of dirt roads through the Walking Fields.

The people used to travel a lot by horse and cart, and then for a while trucks were in vogue, but bicycles are the hip thing now. They're usually kind of cheap and poorly-made, but what does that matter? You can go twenty miles in an hour! Or fifteen at an easy pace.

There's a School bus that comes to the Walking Fields, but it doesn't go very deep in. Most folks who live in the Walking Fields go to little 20-kid schoolhouses for elementary and middle school and then either skip high school as too fancy or board in Horizon during the week.

Travel in the Walking Fields is generally **Setting**

Half the time it's Slice of Life, just like in a typical place, but there's also a lot of Discovery when you're taking a long bike or walk in the Walking Fields. There's always a neat bit of *something* that you might see!

Dryads, Field-Spirits, and Flower-Spirits

The spirits of nature are not *common* in the Walking Fields, but they're a real presence.

The most common are probably the dryads and similar creatures. They may melt into the stand of trees, field of grain, or bed of flowers that gives rise to them; emerge from it in a semi-human, semi-floral form; or anthropomorphize themselves all the way down to humanoid shapes with flowers in their hair, soft voices, and a tinge of blue, green, gold, or acorn color under their pale skin.[60] They are excellent dancers, meager eaters, unnaturally healthy and long-lived, and they bring fertility and vigor to the plants wherein they dwell.

There are fairies, too, and wise animals, but I'm going to leave them in the HG's hands for now.

Dealings with the dryads and field and flower spirits are usually **Trouble**

These creatures are the favored prey of the Excrucians (pg. 292, 294) and this Region's genre skews towards adventure, so a lot of the time, when you meet them at all, it's because they're fleeing from the Excrucians' Great Hunt.

That's not actually the biggest feature of their *lives* or anything—

It's just going to be a comparatively common encounter type in play. And it's likely to be Trouble.

They can also be Trouble if you start messing with their trees or territory—at that point the dryads and spirits can themselves get a little scary. Even the nicest rose-spirits have their thorns!

60 "Pale" in that they appear somewhat ghostly and somewhat drawn—they're not necessarily Caucasian.

The Twig-People

The twig-people remind me of stick-bugs, only beginning not with an insect but with instead a human form. They're brown and green and big-eyed and their fingers are long knobby sticks.

I think they are a different kind of dryad, or possibly that they are immature or underaged dryads.

They live in the Walking Fields, anyway. They have a small settlement, and there are some of them who wander. They trade with the humans of Town. I'm not aware of them being able to cross-breed with humans, which means that unless they *are* underaged dryads they're one of the rare examples of an unambiguously intelligent, unambiguously tool-using, and unambiguously non-human species in Town.

Field-Dogs and Forest-Dogs

Another common spirit type is the field-dogs and the forest-dogs. These spirits are bound to a wide range of territory, or possibly not actually bound to it at all—they roam freely through the trees and fields. (There aren't really full-on *forests* in the walking fields, for clarity—that's just what the woodsier dogs are called!) These dogs don't have a human shape at all, or even a fully mortal-looking dog form, but they do sometimes have a grasp of language. Much more than with the dryads, their power over plants is outright magic: when they choose they may bend trees or move their branches to their whim or cause grass and flowers to grow in their footprints.

Dealings with twig-people, field-dogs, and forest-dogs are sometimes **Foreshadowing**

You watch one. You listen to it. It does stuff. Maybe, if it's a twig-person or a bizarrely articulate forest-dog, it says stuff. After you've processed for a bit what's going on—you react!

Dealings with twig-people, field-dogs, and forest-dogs are usually **Shared Action**

They're doing simple, honest stuff. Connect to them.

Superior Agrarian

The spirits of Celestia, otherwise very similar to the dryads and the like, have a Skill that defines them *as* spirits of that land. It would be reasonable to have a similar Skill for the dryads, in addition to the general plant type Skill on pg. 264:

- **[Superior] Walking Fields Spirit 1.** You seem to have boundless energy, though technically you don't. You like climbing a lot and you're crazy good at it. You occasionally have whole conversations while asleep. Birds like you. You fade into the background when seen in the distance. When you depart the Walking Fields, an "air of the Walking Fields" complete with a bit of its Properties clings to you for up to half an hour.
- **[Superior] Walking Fields Spirit 2.** When you depart the Walking Fields an "air of the Fields" lingers about you for up to three full days and three full nights. You need only a crumb or two of food a day, and either you don't need sleep or you can sleepwalk with great vigor and intelligence.

I'm going to assume that they don't need it. I'm going to assume that carrying the air of the Fields with them isn't *useful* in the same way that the air of Celestia is—for instance, it doesn't keep them from being seen by mortals, and it isn't necessary to make an easy crossing into the Walking Fields. However, if you think that something like this is necessary or useful, you can either roll it into the first two levels of [Superior] Plant Spirit, or you can assign it to any local spirits as a separately-purchased Skill.

Taken Children

Sometimes children in the Walking Fields vanish. I don't know why. You'll find bits of their clothing left hanging on the trees.

Sometimes they come back.

The taken children are not human any more when they return. They're shrunken, and their teeth are sharp, and their skin is hard, and they wear red-dyed caps. They're wise and they're tricky but they don't know anything they don't need to know[61]—they turn into right proper exposition machines, they do, each of them only able to say such truths as drive towards their purpose. They don't even *necessarily* know everything they need for that.

For what? you might ask. What is their purpose?

I can't say, in general, because it varies. Sometimes the taken children have come back to save people who were in trouble. Sometimes they've come back to clean up their old business—to remove their last regrets in leaving by, say, telling their family where to find a treasure of gold or buried oil under the Walking Fields.

There's a story, though, that they have to catch and kill seven mortal children before they can go back to being human again themselves; and that some of those children, the third and the fifth, become taken children themselves.

Here's my best guess. Children get taken by *something*. I don't know what. And some of them get offered a chance—a chance to go back, and with exactly enough information to do what they want to do. And maybe they do have to kill, or maybe they get confused by the story and think that's what they have to do, and maybe some of them who choose the killing choice are wicked and others are just too young to understand the full depth of what that implies. But the big thing is, I think they've all bargained with *something* for the right to come back and do, not what it asks them, but what they've asked of it.

61 Not counting some random woods-wisdom.

So I think that while they're weird little changelings, they're still enacting a human (or fox-person, or ghost, or ogre, or robot, or whatever) will.

Dealings with taken children are sometimes **Science, Faith, and Sorcery**

You explain your position and what you know about them. You build up towards venturing a theory—that they can be trusted, or they can't. Then you risk yourself on that.

Dealings with taken children are sometimes **Foreshadowing**

You watch one. You listen to one. It does stuff. It says stuff. After you've processed for a bit what's going on—you react!

Dealings with taken children are usually **Shared Action**

The thing is, they're kids. They're not human kids, and there's a *story* that they kill kids, but they. are. *kids*.

So maybe your HG can sell them as mysterious and dangerous enough to get you into a Science, Faith, and Sorcery or a Foreshadowing mood. But probably what happens is that you show who *you* are in how you choose to handle damaged, monomaniacal kids you find out in the Walking Fields.

You do something simple and honest. And they're there. And if they interact with you over it, if they don't just stay shy and distant, you can connect with them, and that's Shared Action.

Investigating the taken children leads to **Discovery**

You're trying to figure stuff out. And there's no real story or XP Action here until you do, but when you do finally understand something or learn something, you can earn XP by declaring it mysterious, scary, or neat!

The Jotun

The world woke up, one day, and found itself at the edge of Town—

Found itself with the tents of the *youkai* sprawled across it, the markets and the revels that were there before ever humans came to Town scattered upon it. And here is how the world woke up: it cast up shapeless, unfinished giants from itself, still trailing their spiritual tendrils back to the living land.

These were the Jotun.

They were species-less: they bred with insects, birds, clouds, and rivers. Their children with humanity would one day be the most numerous of all: would outbreed them, leave the original Jotun a footnote on their own people's history, and then merge back into the thronging masses of ordinary humanity with only a handful of families keeping the Jotun cultural identity alive—

But back then, they were giants and near to gods; they were strong as humans are not strong, magical as even the *youkai* were not magical; they wielded the lightning and could roust up the forests to a march. They were long-lived and durable creatures. Some had specific gifts, others generic prowess, able to shape the weather, speak terrible curses, enchant items, perform transformations, turn invisible, and fly. The most powerful were also the most vulnerable, however, poisoned by the touch of iron and driven back by a brandished cross or the name of Christ.[62]

Someone with the blood of the Jotun might have a **Superior Strength and Health** Skill at level 1-3 as well as some sort of magical Skill (pg. 74-77) or Superior "magical" gift. High levels of these Skills will often correlate with apparent deformity and/or vulnerability to iron and the cross. The greatest of them might even have access to the miraculous Arcs, **Primordial** or **Child of the Ash.**

The Excrucians

The Excrucians, or "Riders," are a people of the Deep Outside. They ride white horses. Their eyes are fields of night-black space punctuated by the occasional falling stars.

They sometimes come to Town in peace. They have a presence there. They sometimes even mix with humans or other peoples, giving rise to hybrids with intermittently Excrucian eyes. The ones who wear business suits or "I ♥ Town" T-shirts or whatever are safe enough to mingle with, even though technically they have an agenda to destroy reality and their time spent in the Deep Outside has likely driven them insane.

In the Walking Fields, though, the important Excrucians aren't the peaceful visitors. There are a few Rider-blooded families that matter there, sure, but mostly?

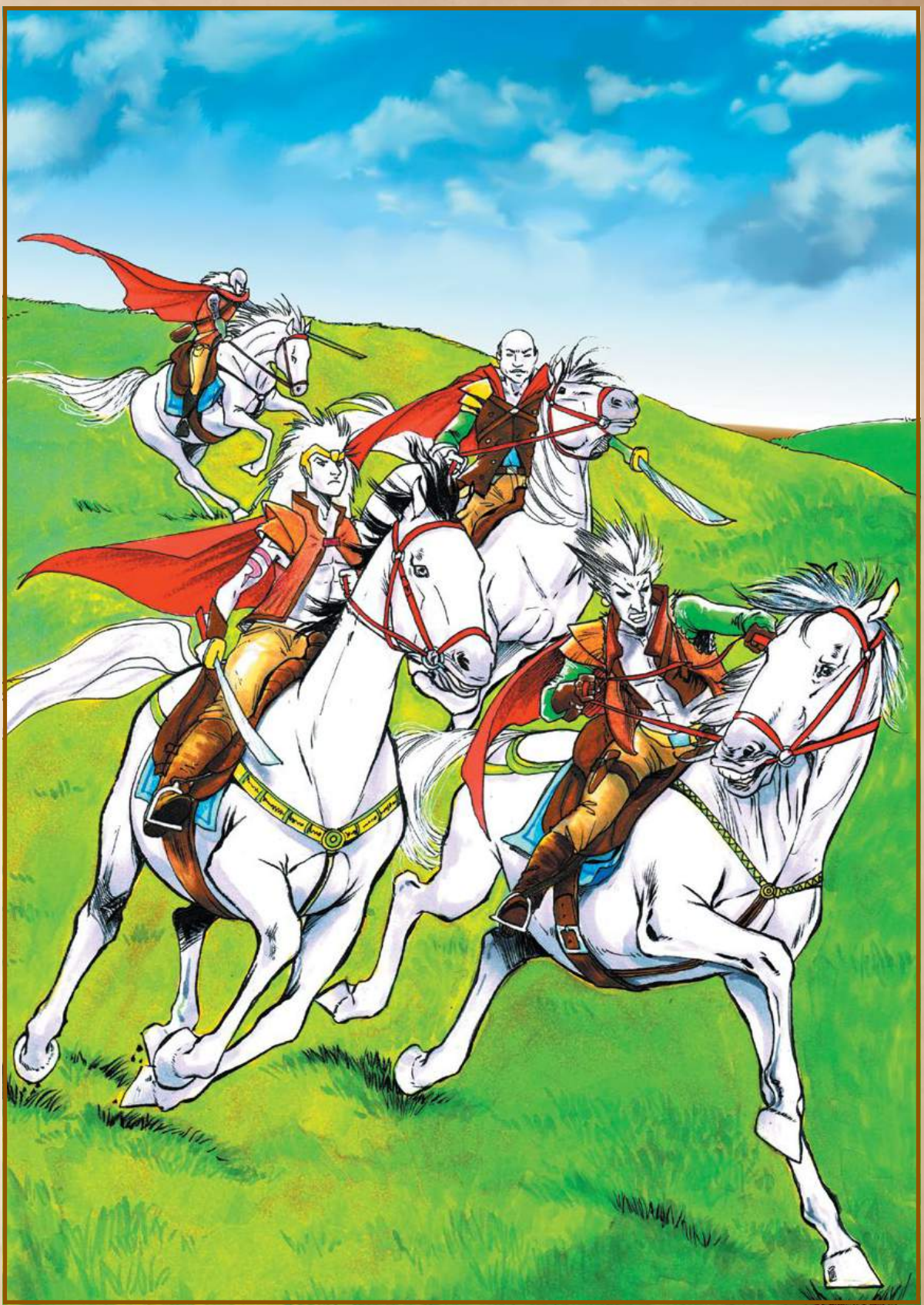
There is the murderous Great Hunt.

The Great Hunt

In the great hunt, the Excrucians ride in from Outside and what they set their eyes upon they chase down and kill. Sometimes it's a bird or a fox. Sometimes it's a spirit of nature. Sometimes it's a person. Once it was the entire Juuniji family, save only for those hidden faraway at School.

A typical hunting pack is a group of 3-7, although larger ridings have been known. They advertise themselves: they go about accoutered for war, and they will sound a hunting horn. Perhaps this is done in mockery of those they hunt, or as a way to increase the challenge of the hunt. Perhaps it is something that is done to clearly distinguish them from the others, for the sake of their more peaceful kin.

62 I'm not actually a Christian, or anything, so I can't account for this at all, but I'm not going to pretend this was some generic "faith" thing either. They didn't like the name of Jesus. The cross could send them howling back into the night. The stories are very clear on this and some of the people from back then are still around in one way or another to tell them!



Excrucian Riders

A typical Excrucian rider has 8 Will and the following mundane abilities—

- **Equestrianism 2.** They're good with horses.
- **Archery or Sword 2.** They're good with either the bow or the sword.
- **Sword or Archery 1.** They're familiar with the other.
- **Woodcraft and Hunting 1.** They're familiar with hunting and living in the wilds.
- **Socialize 0.** They're not that good with people.

They also divide two points between the following special Skills:

- **Superior Torment.** Superior Skill in inflicting torment and encouraging despair.
- **Rider Necromancy.** Magical Skill in controlling the dead and deceiving the living.
- **Changeling.** Magical Skill in concealing themselves among humans.
- **The Night-Craft.** Magical Skill in crafting nightmarish minions.

Encounters with the great hunt are usually a **Struggle** (Trouble or Never Say Die!)

Encounters with the great hunt can be **Adversity**

They hunt you. They torment you—you or something else near you.

You might fight for a limited tactical victory, perhaps. That'd be OK even if you're in Trouble. Try to escape, or hide, or take down the lead rider, block their path, disarm one of them, steal their hunting horn, warn the local farmers about them, get someone that they're hunting out of the middle of the road, *something*.

Or you might go well beyond yourself and decide to Never Say Die.

Or you might simply suffer from their torments until you fall into a delirium of pain.

Encounters with local Excrucians are sometimes **Corruption**

They get to you somehow. They summon you to them, or poison you, or fill your mind with their own strange thoughts. The world gets weird. You break from reality. Then, unless over the course of the scene that follows you've managed to defend yourself, you suffer a corruption or transformation of some sort.

Rider Necromancy

an example Magical Skill

This is one of the magical Skills of the Riders, or "Excrucians," who live in the deep Outside. It offers a comparatively limited selection of techniques but it's still pretty scary because they don't have to *do* much of anything to use it—if they can speak, if they can move their hands, they can invoke this power. There is little if any complication to its rites.

Its basic, non-magical technique is:

[Obstacle 1] sniff out corpses, graves, and places of death at an unnatural range

Known magical techniques include:

[Obstacle 1] Speak in voices not your own.

[Obstacle 2] Summon someone or something within a mile, twisting its travels so that they lead to you.

[Obstacle 2] Make a specific person unable to recognize something

[Obstacle 2] Make something unrecognizable in general

[Obstacle 3] Wake and bind a corpse or ghost into your service.

Note that people *can* oppose effects like these with their own mundane actions—e.g., using a perception Skill to recognize something through the magic. Effective Rider necromancy needs high-level Intentions and thus tends to burn through its user's Will fast.

Suggested Bonds

Traditional Bonds for the practitioners of this necromancy include:

- **Bond:** I hunt from the twilight to the dawn.
- **Bond:** I may not harm those with whom I've shared my drink.
- **Bond:** I forget that the dead are dead, and speak to or fall in love with them.
- **Bond:** I cannot make emotional connections with the living.
- **Bond:** I may not raise the virtuous dead.
- **Bond:** My powers only function in wild, untamed, or broken-down places.
- **Bond:** I am uncomfortable in reality, and soothed by the Outside.
- **Bond:** I ride a pale horse.
- **Bond:** I may not wear machine-made clothes.
- **Bond:** I may only hurt those whose sins I can discover and name.
- **Bond:** I flee my name, or the name of the Creator.
- **Bond:** Even if I was human once, I've picked up the "Rider eyes:" all night and falling stars.

Changeling

an example Magical Skill

This is another of the Riders' magical Skills. It gives you the power to seem human even though you are not.

To slip in and live among the families of the Walking Fields, or somewhere else.

To take those eyes of night and falling stars and make them green, or blue, or brown.

Known magical techniques include:

[Obstacle 1] Conceal your eyes behind an appearance of normalcy.

[Obstacle 1] Fit in with the local humans; conceal the behavioral signs of foreignness

[Obstacle 1] Conceal scars

[Obstacle 2] Conceal and partially suppress wounds and sickness

[Obstacle 2] Mimic a particular individual's appearance and mannerisms

[Obstacle 2] Fit seamlessly into a family, so that they forget you were not theirs

[Obstacle 3] Poison someone with a shard of dream, driving them into a psychotic break and filling their eyes with night and falling stars.

Many of these effects become quasi-permanent with regular use—the changeling doesn't have to sustain the magic, but in theory might find the effects fading and have to renew them later on.

Suggested Bonds

Traditional changeling Bonds include:

- **Bond:** I feast on the life of my family.
- **Bond:** People don't like me.
- **Bond:** I can be exposed as a changeling through certain hedge-magic tricks.
- **Bond:** I turn into an animal, insect, or spider at night.
- **Bond:** I'm driven to climb to high places.
- **Bond:** I can't eat my vegetables.
- **Bond:** I don't have a shadow.
- **Bond:** I have an extra eye on my stomach, and on the back of my neck.
- **Bond:** I'm an inhumanly good kisser.
- **Bond:** I don't breathe.
- **Bond:** I don't feel pain.
- **Bond:** I'm not burned by fire.
- **Bond:** I'm burned by the touch of a friend.
- **Bond:** I forget that the dead are dead, and speak to or fall in love with them.
- **Bond:** I am uncomfortable in reality, and soothed by the Outside.
- **Bond:** I ride a pale horse.
- **Bond:** I may not wear machine-made clothes.
- **Bond:** I flee my name, or the name of the Creator.

Night-Craft

an example Magical Skill

The soil of the "ground" in the Bleak Academy is peculiar stuff—a dank, unformed firmament, like the stuff of the unconscious mind, like the stuff in the back of your head that you don't think about.

Rider children at the Academy learn to mold little life forms from it, venomous and malformed things that fall apart, sloughing off their skin and organs, to dissolve back into the primordial mud. A few learn to make *substance* there, instead—to shape that nothingness into *things*. This art is not entirely lost from them when they travel into Town:

Suggested Bonds

Traditional night-craft Bonds include:

- **Bond:** I always have dirt under my fingernails.
- **Bond:** My saliva and blood are distinctively black.
- **Bond:** I have a morbid imagination.
- **Bond:** My dreams leak out around me as water when I sleep on the ground.
- **Bond:** My fingernails grow into claws no matter how much I cut them.
- **Bond:** I remind people of their nightmares.
- **Bond:** People see their nightmares, and not night and falling stars, when they look into my eyes.
- **Bond:** I forget that the dead are dead, and speak to or fall in love with them.
- **Bond:** I am uncomfortable in reality, and soothed by the Outside.
- **Bond:** I ride a pale horse.
- **Bond:** I flee my name, or the name of the Creator.
- **Bond:** I may not wear machine-made clothes.

It is named Night-Craft, and one may use it together with bodily fluids, shadow, mud, and soil to build minions and poisons even in the world of forms.

The common techniques of this Craft include:

[Obstacle 1] Mold unusually sturdy things out of dirt, mud, and sand.

[Obstacle 1] Spin out your nightmares into steel-strong thread.

[Obstacle 1] Distill shadow and soil into various nasty poisons.

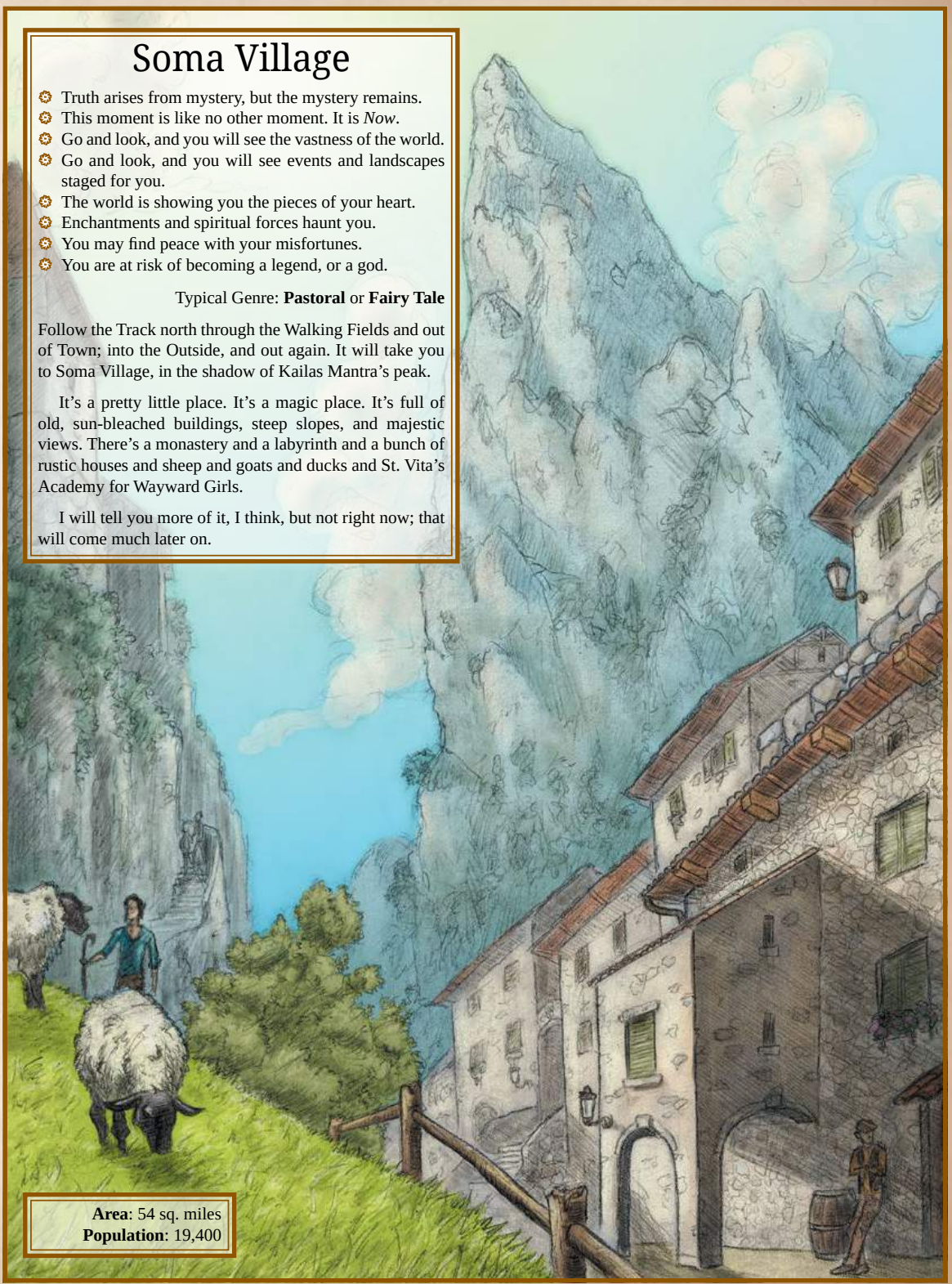
[Obstacle 2] Wake things you mold out of dirt, mud, and clay into servants

[Obstacle 2] Animate your blood or saliva, using will to move, solidify, or liquefy them.

[Obstacle 3] Given sufficient time, construct elaborate creatures out of your blood, soil, and your nightmares.

If you practice this art too much in Town, it will affect you; your saliva and blood will become thick, black, and viscid, with a smell like slightly rotten fruit.

Soma Village



Soma Village

- Truth arises from mystery, but the mystery remains.
- This moment is like no other moment. It is *Now*.
- Go and look, and you will see the vastness of the world.
- Go and look, and you will see events and landscapes staged for you.
- The world is showing you the pieces of your heart.
- Enchantments and spiritual forces haunt you.
- You may find peace with your misfortunes.
- You are at risk of becoming a legend, or a god.

Typical Genre: **Pastoral** or **Fairy Tale**

Follow the Track north through the Walking Fields and out of Town; into the Outside, and out again. It will take you to Soma Village, in the shadow of Kailas Mantra's peak.

It's a pretty little place. It's a magic place. It's full of old, sun-bleached buildings, steep slopes, and majestic views. There's a monastery and a labyrinth and a bunch of rustic houses and sheep and goats and ducks and St. Vita's Academy for Wayward Girls.

I will tell you more of it, I think, but not right now; that will come much later on.

Area: 54 sq. miles
Population: 19,400

The Outside

The fundamental phenomenon of the Outside is that when you leave Town, you wind up in a place that doesn't really exist or make sense. But if you learn the way around that place, it becomes *real*, or you find yourself in reality, or something that works like that. If you learn the way to Soma Village, for instance, then after a while you stop feeling like you're Outside when you're on that road. It's just a weird road that goes to a weird satellite village of Town. The first time you sail to another world via Big Lake you're passing through the Outside and nonexistence; eventually, though, it's more like "sailing a weird, Outside-flavored magical route."

So... why? What's going on? What does it mean?

There are at least three ways to understand it. I don't know which is right!

The first option is that the Outside is a pall of fear, deconstructive chaos, and tension that falls over the places *you* don't know. It's not really a physical phenomenon so much as a psychological one. The Earth continues to exist, and people live their lives there. Aelfscienne, Heaven, Hell, Jotunheim, all the places on what used to be the tree of worlds—they're all there. They're all *fine*. There's just a barrier that keeps Townsfolk from really seeing it. Instead, they see the Outside.

The second option is that the Outside is a physical thing that drowned the world, but that the world's information was preserved. So if you learn the way to sail to, say, Santa Cruz, then you'll find that everybody in Santa Cruz is still living as if the Earth is real. But it's mostly not—it's mostly gone, mostly lost, with just a few places like Town and the places that Townsfolk have *found* still extant.

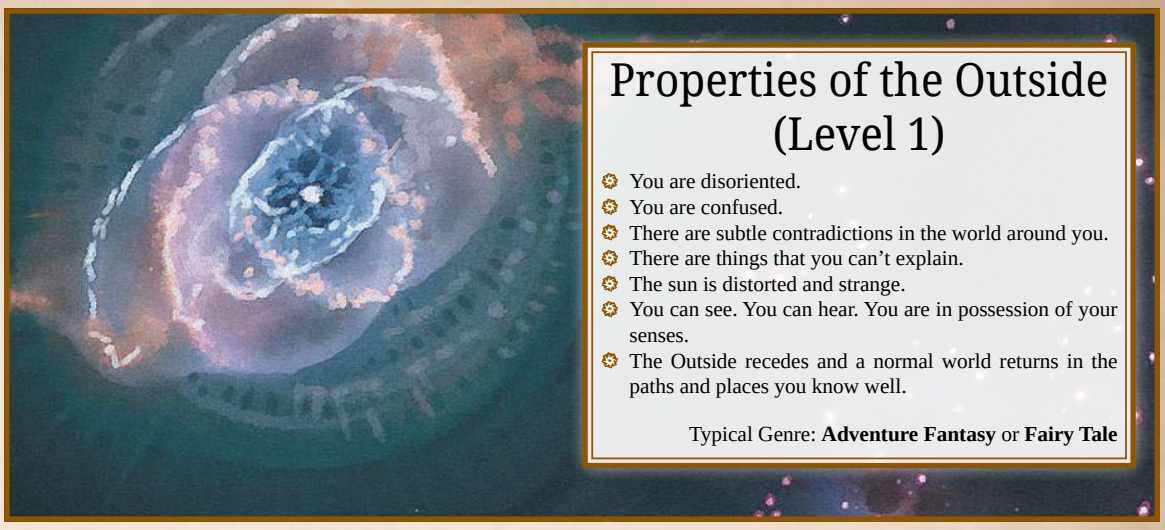
The third option is that there never really was an Earth except by implication. There never really was a World Ash, a Heaven, a Hell. There was always only Town. As you travel into the Outside, you can find pieces of Earth and other worlds there—but that's not because they existed. That's because they congeal out of the Outside when you with your preconceptions travel into the near Outside and try to make sense out of it all.

Visualizing the Outside

Trying to picture what all this might look like?

- **The Near Outside (level 1)** is lightly surrealist.
- **The Low Outside (level 2)** is increasingly surrealist, symbolic, and a little abstract.
- **The Low Outside (level 3)** is orphic cubism.
- **The Deep Outside (level 4)** is geometric art, verging on neoplastic composition (e.g. Mondrian).
- **The Deep Outside (level 5)** is a darker, more psychedelic style of this.
- **The Far Outside (level 6-7)** is sort of Soviet/realist with a limited color palette.
- **The Bleak Academy** is a standard, cool fantasy college campus under a dark sky, *and*
- **the Far and Sunless Land** is probably very clean and digital "vistas"—e.g., a mostly barren CGI night sky with a bright red star, that kind of thing.

The Near Outside



Properties of the Outside (Level 1)

- You are disoriented.
- You are confused.
- There are subtle contradictions in the world around you.
- There are things that you can't explain.
- The sun is distorted and strange.
- You can see. You can hear. You are in possession of your senses.
- The Outside recedes and a normal world returns in the paths and places you know well.

Typical Genre: **Adventure Fantasy** or **Fairy Tale**

Go a few miles down the Track, or sail out past where you can see the land. Head past the farmers' fields into the wild regions, or catch a fever and set your soul free from its shell.

You will find the Outside.

The first layer of the Outside is confusing and stressful. It is fearsome and surreal. It is not dangerous. Not yet. It is simply... strange.

The world contorts. It shifts. It stops playing by comprehensible rules. It stops being a place that you know and understand. It becomes... something else.

The sky is full of multicolored clouds. Drip orange ink, purple ink, and blue ink into water and you'll see something like those clouds. The wind is hot. The wind is dry. There *can* be rains and snows and days of stillness but mostly the wind is dry and hot and there is a barrenness to it, out in the Outside.

The sun is strange. It is always a little strange, but in many different ways. Sometimes it is absurdly geometric. Sometimes it seems like clockwork. Sometimes it is smiling, and sometimes it is swirling. Sometimes it has arms that are beams of light. Sometimes its arms stretch down all the way to the horizon, and bend—though straight; you must remember that the world is three dimensions projected down onto your eyes—to coil around the sky.

There are always roads. Paths spread across the near Outside like veins through a leaf held up against the light. They're often marked by road signs but no one I've ever met can read them—not linguists, not cryptographers, not even angels, who mostly claim that the signs have no meaning to them at all. They're in no human language, at the least, and probably not anything of Earth.

The ground bends in strange ways, in the near Outside.

Trees tend to have white leaves, or leaves in many colors.

There's a children's story feel to the place, I think—I once saw a grove of trees with shoes hanging from them instead of fruit. One time a drag racer motored by; it had no driver, which was weird enough, until it had driven past; then I saw that it had no back, it was just a front and single-side façade.

The Outside nullifies and betrays your expectations. There is no predicting it. You are at the mercy of the world.

Vital Stats

Napkin math suggests to me that the first layer of the Outside is *at least* as big as Fortitude, and that's assuming that it's just a mile-wide ring around Town. The truth is, while I don't want to give the impression that you can safely wander the first layer without stumbling on the second, because you *can't*, the first layer is probably closer to 7-10 miles deep at the median—and presumably there's more of it around every pocket of reality still out there. So we're talking an absolute minimum of 120 square miles but my practical expectation that its size is somewhere between 20 million square miles and, well, infinite.

Its population is probably equally immense. It is possible to stumble on someone else in the Outside. Not common! But possible. So I figure there might be as many as 1-2 rootless drifters, trickster figures, shamans, fever-dreamers, travelers, and heroes per ten square miles of the first layer of the Outside. Napkin math then puts me at a multi-million population consisting almost entirely of unique legends, terrifying names, and special cases—assuming, of course, that it's not infinite. That breaks my suspension of disbelief something hard, though, so I'm going to say that it's closer to a few hundred, and maybe just a baker's dozen, plus the occasional scattered ridings of Excrucians who don't actually live there but do from time to time pass through.

Note that people pretty much can't settle in the near Outside—when I talk about rootless drifters and travelers, it's for a reason. If you spend long enough in the Outside that you learn its rules, it stops *being* the Outside. If you find a settlement, it *isn't* the Outside—at most it's an Outside-tainted view of a more normal world underneath. When you get to know that place, it stops being the Outside, and you fall into the normal world. I don't know how it works for the Excrucians: most likely it's the same for them, or exactly the opposite, because I do know that they don't have actual settlements in the near Outside either.

Area: 120+ square miles (estimated 20,000,000-∞)
Population: 13+ (estimated 200)

Traveling the Near Outside

Anywhere you can't normally get to and anywhere you don't normally go can fill up with the Outside. You're pretty safe in Town, although the Outside's always blowing in off Big Lake and seeping past the edge of the Walking Fields, but once you get outside it, well, you're Outside it, beyond reality, in the place of magic, nightmare, uncertainty, and dreams.

There's only one real point to traveling Outside: to get through it to somewhere else. You might be heading straight past the early layers of the Outside to get to the Bleak Academy; or exploring the landscape of wonders, looking for something sane; or, most likely, tagging along with somebody who *already knows the ropes* of where you're going, and can lead you down paths that aren't even really Outside to them to get to the non-Town bits of reality that scatter through the Outside like gems.

You need to go through the Outside, usually, for instance, to reach Soma Village or the other satellite villages by bus, car, bike, or on foot. You need to sail through it to reach the seas of Earth, the Moon, Eris, or other worlds. Given sufficient dedication and determination, you could probably even reach somewhere further from Town by land—I'm not *familiar* with any routes to major cities, but you'd think that if Russia, or America, or China, or Africa, or Greenland, or whatever, you'd think if they actually existed, which they do, right? that you could get to one of them by road. Even if Town is in Australia or something unexpected, you could get to Sydney, right? You can't just drive around in circles forever in the Outback? Because if Town is just in the Outback then I will be really embarrassed indeed.

And OK, I lied. There's one more reason you might travel the Outside. It's a rare one but it's a real one. If you're into magic or meditation or spirit journeys or whatever, then sometimes the Outside is the place to go. It can strip you from yourself. It can show you your spirit. I'd say that Soma Village is usually better for that, but maybe you're the kind of shaman or totemic dreamer who needs the vast emptiness of the Outside.

Traveling with someone who knows the path is *sometimes*

Decisive Action

Occasionally you'll get a kind of symbolic path through the Outside—a road that means something. Your guide explains that, explains what it means or how they found out or whatever, and it leads up to an important choice or decisive action that plunges you back into the world. There's a story in ***Nobilis: the Essentials*** of Semane Menheneott Pass, where the choice in question is "which traveling companion do we throw off of the world?"; for the most part, however, paths in the near Outside are much safer than that, and the worst that's likely to happen is that you'll have to admit whom you love, choose something to give up, or apologize to somebody that you've wronged.

Hunting for magic or wisdom in the near Outside is usually

Science, Faith, and Sorcery

You talk about something that's going on with you. You explain what you know about it. Then you ask something, or for something. You basically tell the world: look, judge me here; or, look, give me what I need here; or, look, world, make the call. You put yourself in a position where the world's harsh judgment might hurt, or at least sting a little, and then you wait to see what the world will do. That's a Science, Faith, and Sorcery Action!



Being lost, feverish, or adrift in the Near Outside is often **Passionate** (Obsessive/Adversity)

You're worried. You're confused. You get worked up and panicky. You tip over the edge into obsession or delirium!

Or maybe you just give up?

Being lost, feverish, or adrift in the Near Outside is often **Never Say Die!**

Or: you're overwhelmed by what's going on. You defy it, defy your confusion or your circumstances, and try to assert order or reason on the world. You narrate your actions as awesome and doomed, ramping up your struggle every time the HG raises the stakes, and at the end of it, win or lose—whether you've made sense of things or otherwise asserted control over the situation or not—you end up exhausted and probably fall down.

But: Never Say Die!

Traveling with someone who knows the way is often **Shared Action**

They lead the way. They talk about what they're doing. You connect.

Exploring, looking for another island of reality ends with **Discovery**

What kind of reality did you find?

Storms from the Outside

The levels of the Outside behave a little bit like temperatures of air. Currents in the Outside and shifts in the "pressure" can send roiling clouds of the Outside into Town or plunge a section of the near Outside suddenly into a deeper layer. You can see these storms roll in over Big Lake or at the edge of the Walking Fields; by the time they reach Town proper they are weather in truth, rainstorms or hailstorms or hot dry winds accompanied by spiritual phenomena and strange luck and a glittering trail of the mildly toxic particulate essence of the Outside. In the near Outside these storms are both harder to see and more dangerous. Sometimes the spiritual pressure of the normal world rises and becomes pervasive, your ears hurt and your nose may even bleed, and the world snaps unexpectedly down into normalcy even if you're nowhere that you understand. More dangerous is when the pressure "drops," the void of the Outside seems to pull the breath from your lungs, your ears ring, clouds race across the sky and light and shadows whirl, and suddenly from some direction—often difficult to see from the ground—a deeper layer of the Outside washes in.

Ordinary storms are usually just bookends for Slices of Life, but storms from the Outside can portend situations of the following types.

A storm in the Near Outside or a massive storm coming in *from* the near Outside, is usually **Trouble**.

You see the first signs. You can feel it coming. It's an approaching threat. You run, maybe, heading for Town or a shelter or in a direction you think is opposite the storm. You hunker down or freeze up with panic. You try to do something to keep the storm from hitting, maybe establishing a little bulwark of normalcy to turn it aside, or generating spiritual pressure to mitigate the pressure drop—fighting for a limited, tactical victory at best. Maybe it works. More likely it just seems to work, gives you a lull in the pressure before a terrible moment of fear as the deep Outside washes in!

Watching an Outside storm from the beach or the edge of Town is usually **Foreshadowing**

It catches your attention. You watch it for a while. Things happen. Then, you react!

It's best if you see things in the storm that have the potential to be actual Foreshadowing, but, if you don't, maybe the scene is just foreshadowing something about you, or people vs. nature, or the upcoming presence in the story of the Outside.

136199 Eris

Eris is a massive dwarf planet orbiting the sun. It is populated by melancholy, sentimental bat-folk convinced of the imminent victory of evil but content to remain more or less humane themselves on any given day. Their principal exports are music, liquor, and carved bone divination sticks (which may or may not be efficacious); their principal import is pillow-teeth tea, which they consume for reasons as yet unknown. They give me a vaguely Mythos vibe, except for the way that they're not actually incomprehensibly monstrous—I guess it's something to do with how they live their lives out there in the cold and barren dark.

Purportedly the planet was set into its orbit by **Nightmares' Angel**, a nightmare scientist who returned to Town after a stint at the Bleak Academy. By default this Main Character is a PC-aged boy named Leonardo de Montreal, although you could substitute in a girl named Dulcinea de Montreal, a priest and sorcerer with the last name d'Avignon, or an amazing mechanical person named Leonardo or Dulcinea VII.

This Main Character is sometimes titled **the Rival**—it depends on whether they're focused on showing up Chuubo with their "Incomparable Nightmare Engine" or more engaged in doing their own stuff.

Leonardo De Montreal, aka
Nightmare's Angel



Sailing the Near Outside

It is a particular characteristic of the Outside on Big Lake that it bridges distances—that, or, possibly, it's a particular characteristic of the Big Lake itself. Most of the routes people sail that reach faraway lands pass through portions of the Outside—and if you're hoping to get to somewhere really far away, like Eris, you're likely to need to pass through a part that's relatively deep. If you're sailing it's much more possible to avoid storms or ride their edge, staying at a desirable level of reality—but the down side is that if you *do* get rolled over into the Deep Outside, you could find yourself *anywhere*, and lost.

Sailing the Outside is a kind of traveling the Outside, so it *can* be...

Decisive, if you're on a symbolic path;

Science, Faith, and Sorcery, if you're hunting for magic;

Obsessive/Adversity, if you're lost, feverish, or adrift—

All these things as described a couple of pages prior. But more often you'll see one of the actions below...

Sailing the Outside is *often* **Trouble**

Threats approach. You tack away from them, maybe, or try to ride them out, or do something to win a limited, tactical victory. It depends what the threat is: giant sea creatures are one thing; childlike divine entities riding storm clouds are another; pirates, zombie pirates, and the ships of lost or current militaries are a third thing; and storms of various sorts require a completely different approach than all of the above. But no matter what it is, it's something overwhelming—you're outmatched!

Sailing the Outside is *often* **Adversity**

Sailing the Outside isn't limited to Trouble, though. It can also provide more than its fair share of Adversity. You're becalmed, or short on food, or there's a sickness in the ship, or you're lost, or creatures are tormenting the crew rather than assailing it. You *suffer*, in short. When it gets to the point where it's too much for any normal person to bear, you tip over the edge into delirium.

Sailing the Outside is often **Shared Action**

You do simple, honest things on board the ship. Or maybe you talk about the simple, honest things you want to do when you get home or to where you're going. You connect with your fellow sailors over it.

At its best, sailing the Outside can be **Slice of Life**

You sail gently and sweetly through magical lakes, rivers, cloudscapes, mists, and seas. You see something cool. You share your emotional response.

It sticks with you.

When things are weird but not terrifying, sailing the Outside can be **Discovery**

You explore. You find neat, scary, or mysterious things!

Or you can handle a long journey as a **Ritual**

You start with a ritual phrase like, "Weigh anchor" or "Sail away!"

Then you and other characters take a series of ritual actions—

- describing things you do aboard the boat;
- "posing" or otherwise showing off how your character interfaces with nautical life;
- summarizing strange encounters or weird things that you see or find—
  - weird, magical islands;
  - strange sea creatures;
  - uncomfortable experiences;
  - tall tales;
  - daring adventures;
  - strange weather;
  - brushes with death
- talking about what you hope to find at the end of your journey; *or*
- Invoking an unrelated symbol of power (e.g., the Wish-Granting Engine) to merge the two ritual invocations together.

The phrase that ends the ritual is usually something like "Land ho!" and the HG determines when and whether a given character can call it out to bring the ritual to an end. The usual benefit and outcome of the ritual is, well, safe travel across great swathes of the Outside to wherever the characters need to go.

The Earth

- Its locations are relative;
- Its particulars are measurable;
- Its particulars are explainable;
- Its particulars exert causal force;
- Its events have causes;
- These causes are impersonal;
- These causes are amoral.

What remains of the Earth?

It's impossible to know.

The Earth drowned in a tidal wave of the Outside—the Unknown. And if we go to the places that we do not know, to the places we cannot verify remain, then we will find the Outside there waiting in all its roiling chaos. And if we explore them, if we dig through them, if we hunt for the sense and the understanding and the reason and the world that remained beneath, then we will find something. We will distill reality from the chaos—

But was it always there, waiting? Was it buried, and then restored? Is the Outside a real or a perceptual phenomenon? Is the place that is *re*-discovered the same place that it was before, or is it remade to match the remnants of our conceptions?

I don't know. I cannot know. That was a casualty of the Outside wave.

What I can say is that most of the world carries on just as it used to. There's still television beamed into little communities, little solid communities, from the vast chaotic drowned. There's still mail service. There's still phones. There's really no way you could even tell that it all drowned, except maybe that things have gotten a little weirder, and visitors a little rarer, and if you travel off the well-known paths you're liable to find yourself amidst the strange.

The Low Outside

Properties of the Outside (Level 2)

- You are far from home.
- You are frightened.
- Reality mixes with the abstract.
- Currents of emotion flow past.
- The sun is distorted and strange.
- To orient yourself is to drive the Outside away.

Typical Genre: **The Road of Trials**

The world becomes more stressful as the Outside presses in. It becomes harder to distinguish between *things* and *experiences*—when you're not looking at things, and sometimes even when you are, they fade into a welter of sensation or bits of abstract form. Your ship can remain entirely real while riding a wave that's nothing more than a wash of blue watercolor. You can spend an hour talking to or running from a man before you really notice that he had a metal sink instead of a face. The low Outside begins to slip from the surreal into the lyrically abstract, and you'd think you'd be able to laugh at that or play around with it but underneath it all is this pulsebeat of fear and distress. It's not a magical Toontown or fairy tale land. It doesn't *feel* like a magical Toontown or a cool abstract painting. It feels like you're being starved of reality. It feels like you're in a desert of sense, where the world itself is so desperate to hang on to form and meaning that it's using abstraction and bizarreness to paper over its terrible lack.

Properties of the Outside (Level 3)

- You are lost.
- You are frightened.
- Abstract forms and swirls of color intrude upon the world.
- Currents of emotion flow past.
- The sun is bright and painful.
- To orient yourself is to push the Outside back.

Typical Genre: **The Road of Trials**

Abstract experience becomes a progressively greater feature of the world as the Outside descends. After a while it stops making rational sense at all—you may be able to hang on to your own reality, your friends' reality, your ship or car or road's reality, but everything else is just a maelstrom of color, light, impressions, and emotional or spiritual or occasionally even cognitive experience. You're navigating the nothingness, really, for all that there is an appearance of somethingness. Your cues, your road signs, are *feelings*—even when there's no longer such things as mountains, wind, and trees, a skilled navigator of the Outside may recognize a sensation like the taste of a coming winter, the warmth of coming home, the smell or aching bones of an impending rain, or the frisson of fear that is encountering a stranger in the dark. You look up and the way the sun hurts you reminds you of a stubbed toe, so you go onwards. When you get the jarring sensation of being trapped in a place of loud noises, it's time to tack to the right! You travel through the sense of a wild jungle; when you hit the sense or feeling of a sunlit garden, instead, it's time to adjust your course. The language of the navigators of the low Outside is full of records of sensations; they are the currents and the landmarks for travel, whether they're comprehensible enough to pull you back to level 1-2 while you follow them or so subtle that even when you "recognize" them you don't understand them and remain mired in the low Outside.

Vital Stats

It's impossible to really measure the "size" of the Low Outside; proper dimensionality is a thing that it does not have. I can however state with reasonable confidence that it is essentially unpopulated: I'd imagine that there are a few completely bizarre cases where someone has set up a residence there in *some* fashion, but even then, that's probably more like an artistic statement or outpost than a settlement; it just isn't the kind of place where people *live*.

Area: N/A
Population: δ

Scenes in the Low Outside

You can still have Decisive Actions, Science, Faith and Sorcery Actions, Shared Actions, Slice of Life, and Discovery Actions out this far, but they're much rarer and generally better served by the Near Outside.

Traveling the Low Outside is usually **Passionate (Adversity or Obsessive)**

You're afraid. You're mired in the unreal. In theory orienting yourself and figuring out what's going on drives the Outside back—but it's hard to do, and when you're deep enough in the Outside it isn't that effective. Being out here is scary and it hurts and it's fundamentally *hostile territory*.

You struggle through the Low Outside. It's confusing. It's worrisome. It hurts. Yet you must fight:

Give up, and you will most likely fall further out into the deep.

Traveling the Low Outside is sometimes **Never Say Die!**

You refuse. You won't let this defeat you, overwhelming as it is. You defy it!... defy your confusion or your circumstances, and try to assert order or reason on the world.

Properties of the Outside (Level 4)

- Everything is fragmenting.
- You cannot trust yourself.
- You are being judged by standards that you cannot understand.
- The world simplifies as you progress into the void.
- The sun is a yellow circle, or some other simple shape.
- Somewhere, something hurts.

Typical Genre: **The Road of Trials**

Further out and the world begins to break down entirely. There are no longer washes of abstract color and sensation. There's no longer even a real sense of self—or, rather, you may retain your sense of personal identity and presence, but there's no longer reference points to ground that in. Your body and mind and soul remain intact, but without a clear interface between them and the world it's not like you can just look down at your hands and see them or think a thought and "hear" it—the self you can directly perceive through the fog of the Outside is rendered down to something as simple and barren as the world around you.

There's a certain neo-plasticity to the place—you'll often find the composition of your perception aligning onto the parallel and perpendicular, with hardly anything between the vanishing lines that either run to meet at the horizon or refuse to ever intersect. You'll feel yourself as a circle or square of substance progressing along a track. You'll see things devolving or abstracting into the primary colors; sounds organizing into pure tones; and scents relaxing and differentiating into the key notes of kyara, rakoku, manaka, manaban, sumotara, and sasora. It wouldn't be surprising if this were entertaining; it wouldn't be surprising if it were disorienting, frightening, and traumatic, like a sensory deprivation experience; but in fact it's something worse.

As you enter the deep Outside it begins to pull at you. It begins to catch at you. You start to have this dizzying, terrifying feeling like it's not the deep Outside but *reality* that's the mistake. You want to unravel the form and body and reality that has been given to you and reach for something empty and cold beyond it.

The sensation of the deep Outside is thus characterized as an overpowering demand, like the world has picked you up and is shaking you, demanding to know, *what is real?*

What does it even mean, for something to be real?

Properties of the Outside (Level 5)

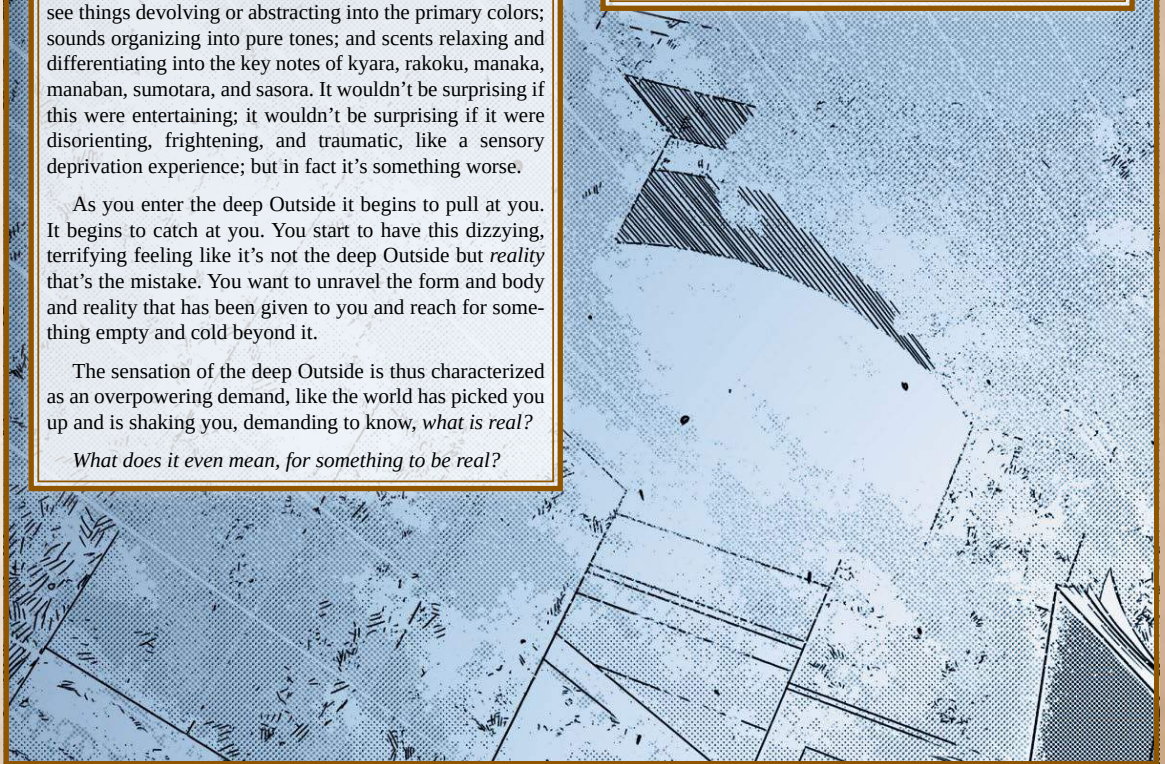
- Everything is fragments.
- Everything is dissolving.
- You are alienated from yourself.
- You are driven.
- A mad drive pulls you to destroy yourself, to throw yourself into the void.
- Somewhere, something hurts!
- You are not sure whether there is a sun.

Typical Genre: **The Road of Trials**

The world has fallen apart into geometry and psychedelia. Reality unravels. You unravel. The world is pulsing bursts of black and white, or chaotic diamond patterns, or a riven violet lattice on a field of unbeing. It is tearing apart all the things you were attached to. It is freeing you from yourself. You may lay down yourself at last. You may let go of the burden you have been carrying all these years, to be yourself. The clods of dirt, dung, and star-matter that are the mortal flesh. All the pains and old wounds and old abandoned dreams you've been carrying. Everything. You can let it go. You can give it up and fall, ripped open like a cannon-stung zeppelin, into the great endless emptiness.

The world is hot. It fevers you.

You are not sure if there is a sun, but somewhere, you are sure, there is the sound of drums.



Vital Stats

It's possible to live in the deep Outside. I don't recommend it, you understand, but the deep Outside *won't* revert into normal reality just from living there. You could theoretically build a house, a city, a *world full of people*, and it wouldn't necessarily force the deep Outside into sense. It would be a place to live where you'd constantly be under the glaring eye of Unbeing and wouldn't really know what was going on, but I imagine that children could be born there, and live out their lives there, and die, and never experience anything else but fragments, external judgment, alienation, and the urge to throw themselves into the void. They would doubtless treasure their brief moments of falling into the low Outside and being *merely* lost and frightened, but they would not know how to take advantage of them save perhaps to seize that moment to learn the shape of their own bodies and minds and find someone to love.

It's possible, and so the math says it's inevitable—if there *can* be cities, continents, and worlds lost in that void, then there must be, and in infinite numbers. Yet it is our good fortune as people of conscience in such a world as this that when it comes to the deep Outside the math is *not* an infallible guide. I have heard that there are cities, foundering in the deeps, so I will record the population thus, but I refuse to believe that there are an infinite number of them, or even a vast (if finite) number. There are no worlds that float out there and know nothing of being real. It must not happen, and it need not happen, so I will say that it does not. I suppose technically that is an act of Sorcery (or maybe Faith) on my own part.

Area: N/A
Population: estimated 1,020,000 + δ
(20,000 Excrucians / 1,000,000 human unfortunates)

Scenes in the Deep Outside

You can still have Obsessive and Never Say Die actions here. You can still have any kind of action, really, and any kind of scene. But when you get this deep the Outside is all about Adversity, lurid Corruption, and Vice.

Traveling the Deep Outside is usually **the Road of Trials**

You're drowning. You're losing yourself. If there were *time*, if time were not kind of melting down into a misshapen globule of timelikeness, then maybe you could spend a lot of it experiencing relatively tame if abstract scenery and phenomena—but the comparatively gentle experiences like "I know I am wandering in a garden, and biting into an apple, even if all I see is lines and a touch of green" are usually overwhelmed by your awareness of your fragmentation.

After a timeless time, you will realize that you are falling apart. That you cannot take it any longer. You emote your suffering, or the rigid control that holds that suffering at bay. Then there's a heart-wrenching moment when you realize that no matter how hard you fight, you've lost something else—or where you give up, you give in, and turn your thoughts to throwing yourself fully into the void.

Traveling the Deep Outside is sometimes **Wicked**

You know you shouldn't listen to the call. You know you need to follow a known route through the Deep Outside, or, if there is no such route, you know you need to get back to the lower straits as soon as you possibly can. Anything else is unhealthy and quite possibly immoral. But you do it anyway. You stay in the Deep Outside, or follow the awareness within you to further regions yet. The world goes awry. You break from reality. Maybe that's just the HG talking up the abstract environment you're in, or you playing up your sense of dissolution. Maybe it's something else, like a brief dip into the Low or the Far Outside or even a visitation from Soma Village or somewhere else in Town. Maybe the HG even explicitly *reminds* you of the cost of staying or going deeper into the Outside. You do it anyway.

That's a Wicked Action.

Traveling the deep Outside is very rarely a **Setting (Slice of Life or Discovery)** Action

That said, it may be hard to resist going into a Slice of Life or Discovery action on your first visits to the deep Outside in play. It's weird enough to be interesting, you know? You see stuff. It sticks with you. You marvel, or you're scared, or you're lost in the mood!

It doesn't *fit*, really, because the place is all about Adversity, Corruption, and Wickedness—

But sometimes gaming fun's more important than is sense.

Properties of the Outside (Level 6)

- Your wishes are dying. Your hopes are dying.
- The world is empty.
- The world is lifeless.
- The world is gray.
- You are alienated from yourself.
- The light of the sun cannot reach you.
- You can no longer hear the voice of your own heart.

Typical Genre: **Epic Fantasy**

In the far Outside, it is said, there is form again and space again and time again, but to no avail. It is lifeless, bleakness, dreariness, and gray. The sky is reborn monochrome, or sepia at best.

It is real again, or *like* reality again, like realism, at the least, but it is soulless.

It is the soulless antechamber of despair.

Properties of the Outside (Level 7): The Bleak Academy's Gates

- Your heart is dead. Your hopes are dead. Your wishes are dead.
- You are gone all lifeless, cold, and gray.
- You are held in a long moment of weariness and decay.
- The world could drown and you would not care.
- A starry tide is rising. Let it rise. You stand
- Before the bleak and lightless gates of a Far and a Sunless Land.

Typical Genre: **Epic Fantasy**

You are drowning in stifling conformity. In bleak perfection. In facelessness, somberness, and despair. You are no longer any sort of person at all, here, before the gates of the Bleak Academy. You are a machine. You are a *thing*. You are a cog.

This is a place without wish power. It drains it, sucks it all away. This is a place without heart, at the heart of the Bleak Methodology.

It is the seventh level of the Outside, and you must pass through here to enter the Bleak Academy or the farthest reaches of the Outside.

Passing through the Far Outside is usually **Wicked**

The Gnostics propose that God is evil, and they seem to make that theology work for them. The canon of Dadaist art includes a urinal. There are philosophers who doubt their own consciousness, and people who aren't hopeless admirers of Jack Vance. What I'm getting at is that it takes all kinds of twisty weird ideas to make a world, and I'm not going to say that it *has* to be Wicked to court the Far Outside. It's *possible* to wind up in a mental place where you think the Far Outside is good, where you can prove that, where going to the Far Outside is just Shared Action; or maybe Adversity, but not Wickedness; Obsessive, but not Wickedness; Decisive, but not Wickedness; ...and so forth.

But all that said, this place *is* a form of Wickedness, as conventionally defined. It's the opposite of wish power, and thematically that means that having it be anything but Wicked to seek it out is as weird as Gnostic theology or even Dada. You have to work pretty hard to get to that point, and until you do—to go to the Far Outside is to do something unhealthy and/or immoral.

And you know what?

I'll even give this place its own Wickedness variant, just to make sure:

Wicked Action (Variation)

Condition: You damage your hopeful, wishing heart.

Or, you willfully indulge the prideful impulse to despair.

Action:

- **Fall under the Bleak Academy's dismal spell.**

Because this place is *wrong*.

It's wrong, but you go there anyway.

Because it's Wicked, because there's a cost to go down that path, I'm going to say you have a choice. I'm going to say that you can fail out of the Bleak Academy's test right there and fall into reality—that if you turn against Wickedness, there at the Gates, and decide you *don't* want to fall into despair, you can actually reject it and it will fling you all the way back to sanity, to the Near Outside at the least. That Town is fundamentally *reachable* from those gates, that someone who finds themselves there *can* escape it, much more easily than from the Deep Outside.

You can take your stand here, at the gates, and reject that Wickedness; though, that isn't a Wicked Action, of course, nor brings the XP for one, since that isn't any form of wickedness at all.

The Bleak Academy



Properties of the Outside (Level 8): The Bleak Academy

- Here is the True Thing, beyond perception.
- Here the red world and the falling stars.
- Here is the dream that dreams do dream of.
- Here is the nightmare that nightmares hath.
- Here the wish that is beyond wishing.
- Here is the thing beyond the world; the Bleak Academy, that is beyond the end of life.

Typical Genre: **Epic Fantasy**

There are at least two perspectives on the Bleak Academy, and here is why.

You can understand the Outside as a mist of fear and trouble over an underlying world. From that perspective the Bleak Academy is the pall that hangs over—well, Heaven. Perfection. Nirvana. An endless, beautiful paradise.

Its presence is then the most monstrous of crimes, because, well, where there should be Nirvana, there's the Bleak Academy. Where there should be a beautiful afterlife, there's the Bleak Academy. Where we should be able to aspire to be as gods, we can only hope to be such mad gods as herein Leonardo de Montreal became.

Or maybe the Outside is *the thing from which reality congeals*. In that case, the Bleak Academy is a primordial Heaven. A proto-Nirvana. It's the thing that's going to become the perfect future of our dreams. Or could become that, at least, if the Headmaster were on our side, or was defeated by someone who was.

All that aside, though, what the Bleak Academy *is*... it's something worth attaining.

Past the gates of madness and despair, instead of more madness and worse despair, you find a True Thing that's worth having. That's what, anyway, I think.

Area: 4 square miles
Population: 20-60 (according to firsthand reports); 12,300 (according to the catalog)
(~80% Excrucian, 20% other)

The Academy

I assume it's sort of like a school campus. It's probably in the model of a European campus or monastery, complete with ancient architecture and mad-eyed scholars hiding in the stacks or labyrinths. There are grad-students chained to their cubicles as they process ancient, blasphemous texts, because that's the place where their nightmares led them. There are god-students in their onmyouji hats floating amongst the clouds, exchanging thunderbolts, because that's the direction of their dreams. The place pulses with a sense of hidden marvel but also of delirium. Its curriculum focuses heavily on independent study as each person builds a Hell or godhood for themselves.

I assume its walls are stone and brass and etched with figures.

I assume its sky is sunless and alive with stars.

Confronting the Headmaster is usually a **Defining Moment**

You talk about what led you to this confrontation. This leads up to a defining choice or decisive action on your part.

Or you talk about what you know about him. You propose a theory about who he is, or who you think he should be. You put yourself at risk to test that. That's Science, Faith, and Sorcery!

Confronting the Headmaster is *sometimes* **Adversity**

He binds you. He traps you. He is ahead of you at every turn and he controls you. You suffer. It is breaking you.

You tip over the edge into delirium—

...or do you give in?

Studying at the Bleak Academy is usually **Corruption**, **Metamorphosis**, or **Wicked**

If you are studying there, if you are trying to learn there, if you are working *with* the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy, then he has his hooks in you. He has the power to influence you. And as that influence seeps into you, you will experience supernatural or psychosomatic effects. Then, as you see the outcome of your study, corruption or transformation will set in.

I will set aside an exception: if you are a native here, or Epic Fantasy is your native genre, then this is merely Wickedness instead.

Tours of the Bleak Academy are usually **Immersive Fantasy**

There'll be wonders around every corner. Discoveries. Foreshadowing. Things to freeze you up in shock and prompt a Sympathetic Action. The *mysterium fascinans* and the *mysterium tremendum*: here are things to awe you, to make you tremble, to make you fear.

Confronting the Headmaster is *sometimes* **Never Say Die**!

His power is overwhelming. He is breaking you. But you defy him. You struggle to remain yourself and overcome his power—

Even in the Bleak Academy itself!

The College of War and Nightmare

The college of war and nightmare is where the weaponry of the Bleak Academy is bred. Its students are those who harbor perverse visions of creation—who have a thing that they wish to *build*, generally in defiance of the world. There's a pure major in this college for those whose creation is *not* perverse, and may be built within or at least without crushing or stealing from the pre-existing world; and there's a practical major for those who are amoral, who simply like to *work* the stuff of dream and nightmare and science, and care not to which end their work is used.

Most of the students, though, aim to be Warmains of the Bleak Academy, and build their desired future in outright defiance of the world. These are those who dream up night-wyrms to assail Celestia, set loose horrors in the sea of the Outside, and gather up the armies they will one day lead to conquer Town and put **the Child of the Sun** to death; in some campaigns, they may already be marching them, with a wound cut by their wickedness stretching all the way from the College campus to the kingdom of the sky.

The students here are in the mold of the Headmaster, with a dream they dream of, and caring not whom it hurts.

At first, the campus of War and Nightmare is generally **Trouble**

There's horrors loose all around. Nobody exerts proper vigilance. Spend much time there and a threat *will* approach.

Nor will it end with a single encounter.

There may be a lull in the terror, but the pressure after, most likely, stays on.

Once you're used to it, the campus of War and Nightmare is generally **Slice of Life**

Eventually, you've gotten used enough to the place that it's safe for you. You wander the campus. You emote. You see something piquant—oh, look, that chimera is eating its middle head!

The image stays with you.

But it's not a threat. Not any more.

The College of Natural Philosophy

The college of natural philosophy is home to those who study the True Thing—who seek to understand the nature of existence and the Far and Sunless Land. They learn a great and overpowering love from that contemplation, for people and for things; but they learn, too, that we have built the mortal world from lies. Town, and Earth, and existence itself is to these philosophers a jungle of deceit that we have put up to keep from seeing ourselves the way we really are.

They love us but they love not that lie.

It is their aim, it is their zeal, it is the *infection* of their ideology that they long to unmake the world for us. They dream to help you forget the Eyes and Ears and Nose, the Work and Home and School, the Trees and the Wind and the Laughter and the Hearts and Hope.

They think you marvelous, they who study the True Thing, whatever it is they think you are—but they love not what you think yourself to be. They will make you repent of it if they can, strip you of it, show you not the self you see in the mirror but the something *alien* that they know instead. And they and you will laugh and you will thank them for it; but will it be you that speaks those words, or something else?

Scenes involving Natural Philosophy are generally **Epic Fantasy**

You talk about the things that you know and you believe in. You propose a theory. You risk yourself on that theory—on the belief that the world, or a person, will honor and fulfill your trust. That's a Science, Faith, and Sorcery Action.

Or you talk about the things you know and that you believe in. This builds up to a choice or decisive action. That's a Decisive Action!

Or there's a bit of Wickedness—you're persuaded that the world's a lie, but you cling to it, a little, anyway; or, you don't think that, you're a hero of the world, you want to stand up for it, but you admire or hang out with or hide among these the enemies of the world *anyway*.



The Colloquium of Magi

The third program is for those who have transcended the mortal world[63] and come to study at the Bleak Academy, but have not elected in particular to join one of the other schools. It is a program created to liberate its students from the lingering ideas and ideals of mortal life.

It is normally the case that before they may go on to join one of the other schools, or for that matter undertake an advanced study in the Colloquium of Magi, the student is presented with a challenge designed such that they must wholly break down who and what they were before they can defeat it. Only when they have shed the detritus of who they used to be can they move on.[64]

Scenes involving the Colloquium of Magi are often **Obsessive Action**

> Setting aside mortality is hard. Dealing with those who are trying to set aside mortality is also hard. It's like trying to achieve enlightenment by banging your own head repeatedly into a dodgeball—it's a horrible lot of trouble, and you don't get far!

The College of Emptiness and Dream

The last college is home to the students of moral theory, law, righteousness, and the true emptiness that preceded the Outside. It is home to those who find the world unsatisfactory and wish to mold it towards their own bleak principles—those troubled by the sickness of our times, including both the worst dogmatic horrors and the most starry-eyed idealists in all the Bleak Academy.

The College of Emptiness and Dream is on the surface of an egg, or possibly a writhing mass of gods in the rough shape of an egg, or possibly an unborn existence, suspended in the middle of nothingness by a series of golden cords. It is separate from the other colleges, full of bleak wizards who set themselves apart, with a gravity that is local in nature. Those who master its principles become the Magisters or Strategists of the Bleak Academy; those who are still in the process of learning them are called jurists or students at Emptiness and Dream.

It is generally understood that the greatest athletes and most fearsome theorists at the Bleak Academy will come out of the college of Emptiness and Dream, while the more practical sorts pursue either War and Nightmare or Natural Philosophy.

Scenes involving Emptiness and Dream are often **Lurid**

> You do something wicked or unhealthy or someone does something wicked or unhealthy to you. Reality becomes unstable. The truth molds to their principles. Things get really weird. Then either you double down on what you're doing, or they go forward with hurting or changing you. Wickedness. Trauma. Metamorphosis. Corruption. It's all here, under the aegis of Emptiness and Dream.

The Dream-Witch

Long ago a prodigy of despair and hatred—a "Magister of the Bleak Academy"—came from Emptiness and Dream to end the world. Its name was either **Melanie Malakh** or **Reginald Malakh.**

It seduced young Hideo, of the Hayashi family (pg. 224).

Together they made a glass dragon, and taught it to hate the world. But it shattered, instead.

And so did the magister, Malakh.

This Main Character is what's left. **The Dream-Witch** is usually a girl named Miramie Mesmer, but they could be a boy named Reynard Mesmer instead. They're not a prodigy of despair and hate. They're not the whole of the monster that came to Town. They're just somebody touched by its power, or maybe a reduced version of that prodigy, withered into humanity and then bound (see pg. 320).

An older, wiser, and more worldly Professor Hideo Hayashi runs an Archive and a kind of halfway house for troubled and unusual teens now. That's usually where this Main Character lives, along with four or five other foundlings; that said, if it'd be more fun for you, you could decide that one of the shrine families took the Dream-Witch in instead.

The default Miramie Mesmer is sweet but kind of anxious and tightly wound. She's trying to refurbish a manor down the street from the Archive and set up an art shop, garden, and café. Except for a vague association with masks, dreams, glass, and Melanie Malakh, she's really a pretty OK person—you shouldn't judge her on her title alone.

But there's this ominous angle to her: it's possible that **Melanie Malakh** might still reform.

The Dream-Witch isn't necessarily a big part of Town's story as a whole but will be a key player in the first major campaign, ***Fortitude: the Glass-Maker's Dragon***.

Miramie Mesmer, aka
The Dream Witch



63 That is, places like Eris or Town
64 More or less like an ordinary thesis defense, I guess.

Scenes involving Emptiness and Dream are sometimes  **Foreshadowing**

You're walking along the trembling golden bridges to the college at the egg. The camera spins around that shape in nothingness. The Headmaster's voice whispers to you, maybe, about the death of worlds and the birth of gods, the murder of Jade Irinka, and a far and a sunless land.

Something catches your attention.

That may seem like a weird understatement, but you know how it can be. Even the craziest marvels and most abhorrent horrors can be normal. You can get used to them. But in this particular case, you don't. Something catches your attention. Something reaches you. You listen to it, or watch it, or notice it, or feel it. It keeps happening. Then you react!

Scenes involving Emptiness and Dream are rarely a  **Ritual**

The nature of the ritual will vary depending on events in play, but it's reasonable to imagine that you can find some way to tap the power of the egg or call upon the wizards and Strategists of the College of Emptiness and Dream. However you do so, it's likely to play out in the form of a Ritual.

The House of the Sun (Hypothetical)

The Headmaster of the Bleak Academy shot the sun; she *died*—

But I am told that she is not dead. **The Child of the Sun** is certain of it: there was some sort of miracle. Meta miracle, maybe, since the sun was an angel. There was *something*.

Somehow Jade Irinka is not *gone*.

And it is my belief that if she is not gone, if she is not dead, then she must have found herself fallen into the Bleak Academy or the Far and Sunless Land.

It could be either.

Let's call it a canon flexpoint what happened to her—I don't know, you don't know, you'll have to find out during play. Maybe she *did* die. Maybe she put on Marx Brothers glasses and is sneaking around in Town. Maybe she fell into the farthest Outside and is burning there.

...but maybe there's a new-made House of the Sun in the Bleak Academy, instead, dedicated to keeping her contained. Maybe there's a whole new College, a whole new line of eminences comparable to the Strategists and the Warmains, named something like "The Keepers of the Sun."

Maybe she's struggling even now in their great spherical auditorium, struggling to burst free; or even wrestling, not against the folk of the Bleak Academy, but against the True Thing or the Emptiness itself, struggling to devour it or become a part of it while the faculty aid or hinder her along the way.

I don't think that she's weak enough that the Headmaster can keep her captive personally. I think it'd take a whole campus, and even then she'd be at all times on the verge of breaking free. I think he'd need to funnel a ton of resources away from one of the existing colleges in order to hold her, and the first Keepers of the Sun would accordingly be ex-Warmains, ex-Philosophers, ex-Strategists, or ex-Magi. Their students, though, if she doesn't break free, are likely to be something *new*.

The HG shouldn't force a given genre for this stuff, but they should pick one of the genres below to *aim* for when and if it seems like you're going to discover that this is what happened to Jade Irinka.

One possible genre here is  **Epic Fantasy**

The House of the Sun is spun off from Natural Philosophy. They hold her in a cage of lies, ideas, philosophy, and conceits. She tells you about it. She whispers it to you. She tells you her plans, her decisions, her choice. Will you help her? Can you help her? What is the cost?

Another is  **Adventure**

They've found a way to kill her. Or, when they find out you know she's there, they're going to kill you. Something like that. You're outgunned, outnumbered, and outmatched!

But you?

You're going to win.

A last option is  **Gothic**

The struggle is constant. She is impossible to contain. Her chains are impossible to break. Dealing with one of these dual dilemmas obsesses you.

You try to connect to her. You try to help her.

But this is beyond you. This is impossible. There is nothing you can do.

What you see in this place will remain with you for all the years of your life to come.

The Far and Sunless Land

Properties of the Outside (Level 9)
The Far and Sunless Land

- The wind puts out the fire *and*
- Stars are falling from the sky.
- That which is eternal, ends.
- Seek nothing, gain all;
- Reject nothing, transcend all;
- Hold to no conceptions, rule all—
- This is a far and a sunless land

Typical Genre: **Pastoral**

Beyond the Bleak Academy is the land the Headmaster comes from—a land he claims, to Town at least, to represent.

Maybe he's its King. Maybe he's an apostate, rebel, or reject. Maybe he's just an academic, missionary, or civil servant *from* that place, who runs an outpost between the sunless land and Town.

It's a strange place to visit.

You can. You can get a visa, and go out to the Bleak Academy, and get on its tour bus, and go on a ride through the endless darkness, and marvel at a far and a sunless land. I can't guarantee that you'll come back, and I can't guarantee that you'll come back human, even if that's the way you start, but—

There is a place there, where the wind puts out the fires and stars are falling from the sky. There's a place beyond the Bleak Academy where that which is eternal, ends. It's real. It's there. It's the farthest reach of the Far Outside.

It's *there*.

It's just a little hard for mortal eyes to see.

Scenes in the Far and Sunless Land are usually **Shared Reactions**

You talk about stuff that's happened. You talk about the stuff that's in your heart. You connect with the people around you.

The Far and Sunless Land is sometimes **Slice of Life**

Don't expect the HG to describe what's around you. They might. They might not. It's a lot to ask. But still, something is there. It moves your heart. You get lost in the mood.

The image... -lessness?

It sticks with you.

Trying to pay attention to the actual vistas around you may trigger a **Ritual**

It starts with a ritual action—pointing towards the furthest Outside, or saying, "Oh! I see!" or, if you happen to be a Lewis fan, perhaps, "Further up and further in!"

And the world stops.

Then you and other characters take a series of ritual actions—

- Talk about memories that are dear in your heart.
- Talk about what you love about other people.
- "Pose" or otherwise describe how your character conducts themselves on the trip.
- Say things you thought you'd never say.
- Quote bits of poetry that come to mind.

And the HG replies with things like—

- "a candle flares; it is sheltered by your teacher's weathered hands, but the wind blows out the fire."
- "the stars are falling, one after another, faster and faster, until the sky is ablaze with light."
- "a clock strikes its final hour."
- "seek nothing, gain all."
- "reject nothing, transcend all."
- "hold no conceptions, rule all."

(and then points to the next person they want to prompt for a ritual action.)

The ritual always ends with someone saying, "This is a far and a sunless land." And then someone else echoing it, to bring the journey to its close.

The Sun, in a Far and Sunless Land

So what happens if Jade Irinka wound up here, or if Jasper Irinka decides to visit?

That's a canon flexpoint. I don't know. You don't know. You can't know. Something will happen. Something appropriate.

And if you don't know what happens? If you can't *think* of anything appropriate?

Break the game there, stop, take 5-15 minutes, and when you come back, the bit where you noticed the sun in a sunless land, or where **the Child of the Sun** tried to get in, is over.

Congratulations. You broke the world.

Working out what exactly happened, and how existence survived that break, is something you can do later on, in flashbacks, or as the resolution to an Issue, or something else like that.

"Falling Stars," by Rainer Maria Rilke

For general use in Transitions related to the Outside

Do you remember still the falling stars
that like swift horses through the heavens raced
and suddenly leaped across the hurdles
of our wishes--do you recall? And we
did make so many! For there were countless numbers
of stars: each time we looked above we were
astounded by the swiftness of their daring play,
while in our hearts we felt safe and secure
watching these brilliant bodies disintegrate,
knowing somehow we had survived their fall.

Excerpt[65] from "The Tyger," by William Blake

For general use in Transitions related to the Outside

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art.

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp

(&) When the stars threw down their spears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

65 My apologies to fellow Blake admirers for the mutilation of this poem; I felt I could afford to clip some lines and make it a better fit to the Outside, since you all know the real poem anyway.

Example Quests

Here's a few more examples of what a quest might look like.

A New Hobby

35 XP Quest

1: 
2: 
3: 

or

25 XP Quest

1: 
2: 
4: 

You've started a new hobby! Isn't it about *time* you got into manga, or American television, or the limitless world of Fortitude model car collecting?[66]

Then this quest is for you.

You can repeat this quest in a later Arc to continue your studies of the hobby or take them to "the next level."

I recommend the 35 XP version for normal use. If you're repeating the quest, though, and not really trying to take things to the next level—if you just want to keep the hobby fresh and relevant in your life—consider a short, 25-XP version instead.

66 Almost. THREE. Manufacturers!

A New Hobby (Peaceful Version)

XP

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You're dazzled by a visit to a great collection or store for this hobby;
- ☐ Someone demonstrates why you shouldn't underestimate the depth of complexity and *heart* put into this hobby;
- ☐ You become involved in a fan project for creating, modifying, distributing, or building upon the things of this hobby.

You can earn each bonus once, up to a total of 10 XP in the short version and 15 XP in the full.

Quest Flavor

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

- you're enjoying or thinking about the newest thing you've bought for your hobby
- you have a geeky discussion with a fellow hobbyist
- you daydream hobby-related elements into the world around you
- you attend a large hobby-related gathering
- you put work into the hobby (e.g. organizing an event, working on a fan project, building a model, or parsing a complicated story.)
- you experience the wistful sorrow of someone who can't afford to buy the latest thing

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

A New Hobby (Passionate Version)

XP

25

35

Major Goals

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

- ☐ you have a fierce, hobby-themed battle with someone;
- ☐ you get sick from spending too much time and money on your hobby instead of carefully attending to rest, nutrition, and health;
- ☐ you receive and must carry forward “the dreams” and often the symbol or nickname of a great geek/hobbyist who is retiring or stepping back from the hobby due to, e.g., injury or the birth of their child.

You can earn each bonus once, up to a total of 10 XP in the short version and 15 XP in the full.

Quest Flavor

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

- working on hobby-related stuff
- getting worked up about your hobby
- supporting your hobby in ways you probably shouldn’t
- using your hobby or hobby-learned skills to help overcome the problems in the rest of your life

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

A New Job

35 XP Quest

1: 

2: 

You've just started a new career! You have taken your first steps into what is most likely a dazzling world far bigger than anything you could have imagined.

Are you entering the shocking maelstrom of the fish canning world?

Are you working for an ex-enemy?

Have you just founded the Fortitude Young Adults' Detective Agency? Signed on daringly to help keep the books at Cramsie Hospital in Horizon? Are you maybe even dabbling in customer service or in the dizzying world of temps?

Then this quest... is for you.

A New Job (Comedic/Stylized Version)

XP

35

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You uncover a secret fighting tournament (possibly actually just a bridge/dice tournament or something) related to the job;
- ☐ You make a new friend, often a troubled kid, overburdened and meek person your own age, or kitten;
- ☐ You use the first (or other long-awaited) money from the job on an unexpected expense for someone else.

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

Quest Flavor

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

- the business struggles with money
- the authorities fail to understand your problems
- an enemy appears!
- a new client shows up
- an older mentor explains the dizzying scope of the work
- you're transfixed with interest in something seemingly completely unimportant, but related to the job
- that unimportant thing comes into play sometime later on

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

A New Job (Pastoral Version)

XP

35

Major Goals

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

- ☐ someone is injured or goes into labor at work and you help them to the hospital;
- ☐ somebody brings you snacks during a festival because you're stuck at work;
- ☐ you have to take over for the person who originally taught you the ropes.

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

Quest Flavor

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

- working on relevant chores
- talking about your work
- doing or taking advantage of stuff you learned at work
- showing people your work at the office

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

Bind

50 XP Quest

1: 
2: 
3: 
5: 

I cannot say if this is possible on Earth. I cannot say if it is possible in Horizon, or Old Molder.

But in places like Fortitude, like Little Island, and maybe even like Arcadia—

It may be possible for even the worst of horrors to be redeemed.

So in this quest, you will imprison a defeated horror in a sacred place—in one of the well-loved houses in Fortitude, in the Kinnoruto Temple in Arcadia, in the old temple on Little Island, or maybe in the mystery world inside the Wish-Granting Engine—and there you will strive to teach it humanity or humaneness.

Witches, murderers, demons, and even cosmic horrors like the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy can be rehabilitated in this fashion, although any non-consenting horror must first be thoroughly defeated. Human and human-like horrors must also meaningfully and plausibly repent.

What Happens

You'll set up containment of some sort for the defeated horror. This usually means restricting their movements (at least at first), setting up some way to monitor their actions, and sealing, blocking, or interfering with any dangerous superhuman powers they may have.

Some horrors are genuinely naïve. They undervalue human life because it never really occurred to them to do otherwise. Or perhaps it *had* occurred to them, a long time ago, but after millennia of evil they've so thoroughly lost touch with the moral portion of themselves that they've reverted to a peculiar kind of innocence.

For creatures like this, the story of this quest usually has parallels with raising a child. It's traditional—in stories, anyway—to trap them in a weak human body or a small, cute version of their normal form. Even if you leave the creature physically intact, you'll seal their power, mitigate the appearance of threat they give, and possibly stifle or seal their more evil instincts. At this point even if the creature retains a bad personality, boredom and pride will help to redeem them. Unsatisfied with an empty or structure-less life, the horror will eventually seek out human company, imitate human behavior, and inquire into the philosophical underpinnings of a humane existence. Like children, they are often petulant, contrary, or chaotic; like children, they are capable of randomly having fun with the essentials of human existence; like children they are, ultimately, biddable.

Eventually bound horrors start to feel a real affinity with the values of their captors—and around this time, they'll usually recover or unlock some measure of their power. At this point they become cognate to teenagers and express much the same range of behaviors: they become concerned with what other people think of them; they struggle to establish space and independence for themselves; they suffer from poor impulse control; and they adopt a teen archetype such as "self-loathing emo horror," "prideful jerk horror," or "diligent mini-adult horror." This is the most dangerous time for their rehabilitation, as they'll want things (whether "to redeem myself" or "to return to who I was before") that they're not really ready to achieve; if they weather any appropriate trials and come to terms with their nature, the quest completes.

Other horrors weren't naïve. They hurt people and they knew what it meant to hurt people. However, as subjects for this quest, they're presumptively salvageable—some combination of *they had limited choices* and *they've found genuine repentance* makes it worth *trying* to save them, at the least. A story like this requires a more psychologically realistic depiction of redemption and forgiveness, so it's going to be a bit harder to tell. Usually the horror that you're binding will have to work hard: training their self-control, working to repay their victims or society, practicing redemptive and self-disciplinary labor, or some combination thereof. The horror will also need to talk through a lot of things with a therapist, priest, parent figure, or confidant who accepts them. If you can get the horror's buy-in first[67] it can help to shatter the root of their wickedness—breaking the pride, starving the gluttony, or impairing the capacity for wrath that drove them to their acts. Eventually they'll do something heroic or self-sacrificing (either a single event or a long time of doing good things) that earns an appropriate measure of forgiveness and acceptance and thereby ends the quest.

67 Not so much a practical requirement as a way to make sure that you aren't becoming a horror yourself.

Bind (Dramatic Version)

XP

50

Bonus XP

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by proposing a theory about how the bound horror should approach human existence. This could manifest as:

- ☐ speculating about how to connect to the horror and make it understand the human world;
- ☐ attempting to explain the human world to it;
- ☐ helping it understand how its past and future actions fit into the human context.

...but ultimately it just boils down to this: propose a theory, earn an XP.

Your character must propose the theory aloud or, at minimum, in their official internal narration—it can't just be you, as the player, at the table, it has to be IC.

Bind (Casual/Comedic Version)

XP

50

Bonus XP

Arrange for a sign. It says "**Over the Top**."

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) when your interaction with the horror gets, or the consequences of binding it get, a little over the top.

Or, for that matter, when you *decide* to make them a little over the top.

When that happens, hold up the sign or otherwise declare/observe that things have gotten over the top and you can claim the XP.

You don't even have to say anything in character! You just have to be willing to hold up a sign. It's even OK if sometimes you're being ironic or making a suggestion instead of an observation, as long as an observation is more typical.


OVER THE TOP

Concentrated Awesome

20 XP Quest

2: 
3: 
4: 
5:  

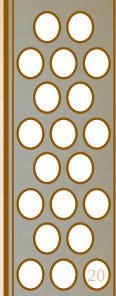
You'll usually only take this quest once you've gotten a level 4+ Connection with someone or somewhere—

The quest is about *being* a total master of some environment or *being* totally in synch with a partner, lover, friend, or even rival. It pretty much just focuses on how amazing, with that Connection, you are.



Concentrated Awesome

XP



Major Goals

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest if there's a scene where you've been cut off somehow from your normal power sources, memories, or sense of self, but use your deep connection to this environment to still be pretty awesome.

You can earn this bonus once, for a total of 5 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

-  having a montage of incidents showing off your situation mastery
-  hanging out admiring the thing or situation
-  exaggerated tongue-in-cheek drama about the thing in question
-  having a casual conversation while doing what "should" be exciting or difficult things in the situation or with the person in question—e.g., arguing over laundry or talking about stuff you've been reading with your Connection 4+ SO while fighting to stabilize a storm-tossed ship

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

Connecting With Someone

25 XP Quest

1: 

2: 

You're consciously trying to make a connection with someone—to get to know them. You're looking for ways to deepen your understanding of them and get closer.

Or, you're consciously trying to fit into a place or situation.

You work hard. You pay attention. It's a kind of dedicated, intentional learning.



Connecting (Casual Version)

Bonus XP

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by declaring that what you've been doing in the current scene is to build your connection with something or because you're learning how to live with that person or thing.

Pick a standard phrase to indicate this, and then just say that phrase or some close variant when you want to claim the bonus. For instance:

- "I want to know you a little better."
- "I'm getting the hang of this place."
- "I think we really connected."

What I recommend is figuring out what you'd say towards the end of the first scene you're really working on this quest in—if you find yourself saying something goofy, like "Let's work hard to be friends!" then your quest phrase will be goofy. If you're being all refined and stuff and wind up with just "I'm emoting, 'yeah, you're... pretty OK,'" then that's the phrase instead.

Regardless, you find *something* that says—

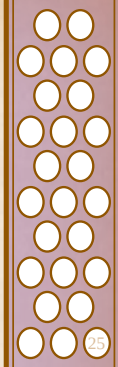
- this scene? It's an "I've been connecting" scene

and then you say that, seriously or ironically, to earn a bonus XP for this quest.

What do you say?

_____

XP



Connecting (Dramatic Version)

XP

25

Major Goals

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest if you:

- ☐ get in trouble trying to reach out to or connect with the target of this quest;
- ☐ get in trouble trying to help the target of this quest, and it or they in some fashion support you.

You can earn each bonus once per (repetition of the) quest, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- listening to stories about (the target of this quest)
- consciously trying to connect with (the target of this quest)

for a person:

- helping out with the daily life of (the target of this quest)
- talking about (the target)'s life, or sharing a bit of yours

for a place/situation:

- exploring how to live in (the target of this quest)
- talking to people about how they live in/with (the target of this quest).

- spending time with the target and thinking about the parts of that that are "different" from your usual life.

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

The Door Into Memory, as a Quest

25 XP Quest

1: 

2: 

3: 

4: 

You've learned to open a door into somebody's memories (pg. 109)

Now, you explore someone's memories, in the hopes of changing something—either changing the world of the present, if you're really *in* the past somehow, or the way they feel about something, or the way that *you* do.

What Happens

There are relatively few stable elements to this kind of thing.

I think that memory should mostly be a safe country to visit, but not always. Maybe you get hit on the head early on and forget that you're just visiting someone's memories. Maybe you're deliberately visiting a place of trauma.

I think there should be a light estrangement from events at first, like the world has trouble setting its hooks in you, but that's not certain either.

I think it's almost inevitable that you'll meet yourself, if you were there, or your parents or ancestors, if they were. Similarly I think it's almost inevitable that even if you try to avoid the person whose memories you're visiting (and just spy on them, I guess), you'll wind up "interacting" in the past.

I think that the world is probably most detailed in the immediate presence of the person whose memories you're visiting—that the world beyond their knowledge fades easily into the Outside. You may also be anchored to them in some respect, unable to get more than a few hundred yards away. That said, people have more information about the world around them than even they may understand, and the power **the Door Into Memories** fills in a lot of the rest.

I think this quest plays out mostly as an investigation, but sometimes there'll be a heart-breaking element—anyone you meet there arguably doesn't exist, after all, and if they do, they are older now. Some of them are dead. It can be pretty brutal. There can, of course, be touching elements too, since you'll have the opportunity to comfort people (or memories of them) whose traumas earned no comfort at the time.

In the end there's often a choice to make. I don't know what kind. I don't know how that makes sense yet. But some kind of choice. And then you're done.

The Door Into Memory

XP

25

Major Goals

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest if there's:

☐ a heart-wrenching scene in the past;

☐ an incredibly touching scene in the past.

You can earn each bonus once each, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

Once per chapter (...subjective, I guess), you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest by:

- making a friend in someone else's memories
- having an ironic encounter
- having a goofy encounter with yourself
- having a great time with some lost attraction
- failing utterly to stay uninvolved with and out of sight of events
- having a sudden reason to worry that you *can* alter time or the host's mind
- manipulating their memories
- doing something you really know better than to do in the "past"
- seeing something you'd much rather not
- getting stuck or lost and having to find your way out
- watching something historical play out
- having a meaningful conversation with a PC or important NPC in the "past"
- talking in the present about the things you've learned in the "past."

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

Mental Training

40 XP Quest

1: 

2: 

3: 

4: 

5: 

You engage in an intensive program of study. You vanish into piled books of lore, intensive training, or a fully-occupying academic environment.

I'm not going to tell you what you learn. I'm not going to tell you what happens.

That would be difficult.

Instead I'm going to give you a little mental training of your own!

The Toad

Once upon a time, there was a toad that swallowed a stone.

Inside that stone was an entire world.

Eventually the stone digested away and the world boiled out. Every time the toad hiccupped there'd be roads or straw or wind and stars all over the place.

What an unfortunate toad!

—from Sineus' ***Observations***

While scholars are generally in love with the story of Sineus' toad, the general public hardly remembers it—they just occasionally mention stuff like "swole like Sineus' toad" or "choking like a toad," in the same tone they might use for "wow, almost got shaved by Occam's razor!" when they survive an improbable incident.

A Verse

`The lark does rustle in the ripe corn, and the eagle returns

From nightly prey, and lifts his golden beak to the pure east,

Shaking the dust from his immortal pinions to awake

The sun that sleeps too long. Arise, my Theotormon! I am pure,

Because the night is gone that clos'd me in its deadly black.

They told me that the night and day were all that I could see;

...

`But silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon spread,

And catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold.

I'll lie beside thee on a bank, and view their wanton play

...

`Arise, you little glancing wings, and sing your infant joy!

Arise, and drink your bliss, for everything that lives is holy!'

Thus every morning wails Oothoon; but Theotormon sits

...hear her woes, and echo back her sighs.

—a bit of William Blake, from ***Visions of the Daughters of Albion***

Mental Training

XP

40

Major Goals

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest:

- ☐ In the unlikely event that you witness a toad swallowing a stone containing 1+ worlds, or do so yourself;
- ☐ When grief or some monster haunts you in your studies;
- ☐ When something corrupts you or is eating you slowly;
- ☐ If you get the chance to use your increasing knowledge and diligence to help on a major research project;
- ☐ If financial (or other pragmatic) reasons not to continue this training raise their heads.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 25 XP, although I'd be surprised to see you get more than 15 of these XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- you travel strange roads through campus
- you're discovered sleeping on your books
- you join or do things with a strange group of students
- you study something in nature
- you build a project with 1+ other students
- you study or discuss your studies with 1+ friends
- there's a montage of classes, term papers, tests, and/or other studies-related stuff
- you reflect on or discuss a bit of poetry

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

The Object

40 XP Quest

1: 
2: 
4: 

There's some object that has become a big part of your life. It soaks up and comes to *represent* your life. It could be a hat. It could be a detailed diary or journal. It could be a rare-won prize. It could be a nametag that you don't take off even outside of work.

Basically there's this *thing* that represents you, for a while.

You can probably adapt this quest to *basically* handle an event, title, or connection that becomes the center of your life, but it works best with an object, so you should probably pick a representative object even then. Not a noble title but a writ of nobility; not a friendship but a friendship ring; not a party, but a hat.

What You'll Do

When you're on this quest you'll *keep the object handy at all times*.

If you're taking detailed, careful notes on your life, then you'll keep that notepad or diary on you constantly. If you've got a new addition to your outfit, you'll wear it, rain or shine!

You'll notice that the object *keeps getting involved in wacky misadventures*.

This is not the kind of hat that wants to stay on your head. At least for the duration of the quest, this is a hat that wants to keep blowing away in the wind. This is a hat that gets confused with a different hat that gangsters from Chicago are hunting for. This is a hat that becomes imbued with the power of the Bleak Academy. *That* kind of hat. If it is a diary, then it's the kind of diary that is always getting stolen, borrowed, lost, or read.

You'll *refer to the object a lot*.

It becomes a symbol. You hold it up a lot. If it's a book, you read from it a lot. If it's a journal, you write in it but also read or cross-reference from past entries a lot. If it's an umbrella, you'll use it to emphasize your every gesture.

You'll play it up.

Finally, you'll *treasure the object*. You won't let people mess with it easily. If you share it with anyone it will be a powerful gesture of trust. If someone takes it from you they'd best be ready for your wrath! (Or at least your simulated wrath, if no harm was actually done.)

What You'll Know

You'll know all kinds of stuff associated with the object. For instance, the longer you keep a journal or diary the more surprised you'll be at how little you've previously kept track of in your life and how *much* is going on around you. You'll be surprised at how many things you weren't saying and how much you weren't noticing. The longer you wear an awesome hat, the more aware you'll be of other people with awesome hats around you—

How did you live so long without tipping your hat to them? It's amazing!

The Object

XP

40

Major Goals

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest if:

- ☐ your object is stolen;
- ☐ your object serves as a useful reference in deciding some conflict or solving some mystery;
- ☐ the object helps you sort out your head on something;
- ☐ your object either contains some important secret, or people falsely believe it does.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- you use the object as the framing device for a monologue/montage
- the object is involved in an interesting incident from the daily life of the Region
- you and the object witness a detailed, interesting sight *from* the Region
- people act goofy about you and the object
- you refer to your object for organization, inspiration, or security

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

Keeping a Record of Your Life

20 or 40 XP Quest

This section shows you how to adapt a generic quest like **the Object** to something more specific. In this case, I've turned it into **Keeping a Detailed Record of Your Life**:

You've always got a notepad, diary, or journal at hand; you're always writing or sketching little observations, ideas, or notes on current events. Is this just a personal record? Are you a scientist, artist, or writer? Or are you trying to work through some problem in your life by keeping better track of what you do?

If you're here because you actually just wanted to start keeping a regular diary, an ordinary evening-writing diary at home that doesn't have much plot weight, I've included a simpler bonus quest card, **Keeping a Simple Record of Your Life**, below.

Keeping a Detailed Record of Your Life

XP

Major Goals

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest if:

- ☐ your diary is stolen;
- ☐ your diary serves as a useful reference in deciding some conflict or solving some mystery;
- ☐ keeping better track of events in your life helps you sort out your head on something;
- ☐ your diary either contains some important secret, or people falsely believe it does.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 20 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- you use "dear diary" as the framing device for a monologue/montage
- you record an interesting incident from the daily life of the Region
- you record a detailed, interesting sight *from* the Region
- people act goofy about you writing a given incident down
- you refer to your notes for organization, inspiration, or security

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

Keeping a Simple Record of Your Life (20 XP variant)

XP

20

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (by only once per scene/15 minutes) by **proposing a theory about how something is going to get framed in your diary**.

The classic version of this is reinterpreting the events around you in a comedic fashion with stuff like "Dear diary, today my friend Jessie choked tragically to death on a handful of French fries," when that hasn't even happened, or at least, Jessie isn't actually *dead*, just yet.

Your character must propose the theory aloud or, at minimum, in their official internal narration—it can't just be you, as the player, at the table, it has to be IC. However, you don't have to belabor the fact that it's a theory about how you'll record something in your diary—just saying it, as in the example above, is fine.

Physical Training

40 XP Quest

1: 

2: 

4: 

You engage in rigorous physical training. Is there a big game, tournament, battle, or adventure coming up, or is this just something that you do?

What You'll Do

Someone engaging in rigorous physical training is *always wanting to do a little more*.

It can be really hard to get started. And every time you take the training up another notch, that feels almost impossible too. But once you've really gotten going—

It's hard to stop. It's hard to pull yourself away from it.

You'll feel preemptive guilt sometimes, when you think about stopping; guilt for how you might fail, someday, and all because you didn't push harder now. And training gives you clear direction and forward motion... making it harder to face the rest of your life, which does not.

Hm. What else?

Someone engaging in rigorous physical training is *always just coming in from a workout.*

You can obviously clean up before any formal occasion or appointment, but a lot of scenes will pick up just as you're coming back from your training. You'll be sweaty in a lot of the game. You'll have a towel around your neck. That kind of thing. And if you're not coming back from a workout, you were probably *heading out on your way*.

Someone engaging in rigorous physical training *eats a lot, and eats weirdly*.

There's something about a push for health that makes you want to drink things with raw eggs in them. There's something about training all the time that makes blending up a giant mug full of okra, ice, milk, wheat grass, and cauliflower sound just peachy—and! Oh, that's right! You should throw in a peach!

There's something about heavy physical training that makes you not only a sucker for weird nutritional ideas but also much more likely to be excited by random foods you hear mention of (because your body remembers a trace element in them that sounds really good right now) and any legitimate but gross nutrition approach.

Someone engaging in rigorous physical training is generally *troubled*.

It's not that it *makes* you troubled, exactly, and it's not that it's something that troubled people do. Rather, it's that the longer you spend running, stretching, doing weird training exercises, sparring, doing katas, punching bags, and etcetera? The more that becomes the *only* expression for the stuff that's boiling inside you. It lets a lot of it out, but the rest just clots up inside you.

It lingers.

Inside you, it builds up.

On the same note, someone engaging in rigorous physical training is usually *taciturn*.

It's not always that way! But as you get more used to expressing yourself with your body, you'll wind up with less need to express your existence in words.

Physical Training

XP

40

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You get in trouble—someone tries to shut down wherever you're training, or keep you from attending it;
- ☐ Your training is interrupted with a chance to help deal with some disaster (where heavy physical work is useful in prevention, mitigation, or recovery);
- ☐ You have a vision or flashback of some sort as you pass out from exhaustion.

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

Quest Flavor

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

- you wander home exhausted but happy after a lot of exercise
- someone comes upon you as you're training and watches for a while
- there's a training montage
- you struggle against a (training) barrier you can't get past
- you bond with someone through fighting/competing with them
- you let out your emotions through exercise/training/practice

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

Poisoned

35 XP Quest

3: 

4: 

5: 

You've been poisoned by Outside dust, or maybe by something else. And from that point forward—you keep having these horrible visions, or possibly even real, physical manifestations, of yourself as something else.

Something wicked. Some *other* you.

Something wrong.

What You'll Do

You'll *be haunted*.

You'll be pale and drawn. You'll be agitated. You'll look tired. You will overreact to sounds. You'll be frightened of the dark. You'll be frightened each time your friends depart that you'll never see them again. You'll be afraid that someone will trust you and it won't be *you* that they trust, it'll be *that thing*. But you're afraid to tell people about that, or to have them really believe that, because what if they think *you're* it? Or what if you really are?

You *won't be thinking clearly*.

I want to emphasize that. You're not just floating through a sea of surreal experience on an iceberg of your cold reserve. You're not making clever, careful plans to foil your alternate's attack. You are not well. You won't *be* well until it's resolved. It's possible that you'll still be under threat when things resolve, it's possible that it's all a misunderstanding, it's possible that it's all psychological or that your duplicate is actually your friend, but *for right now*, you're not in your right mind about what's happening. That's an element of this quest.

You *won't trust yourself*.

I don't just mean the natural concern that arises when you see something that looks like you doing things that you would not. I don't just mean "there but for the grace of God go I, and I haven't been feeling all that graced." It's more that your identity is partially displaced onto your alternate. You won't know for sure that you haven't been infected, changed, corrupted, perverted, stolen. You won't even always be completely sure that you're the real and original you.



Poisoned (Storyline Version)

XP

35

Major Goals

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

- ☐ something horrific happens to you because of this quest;
- ☐ you have a climactic confrontation with your "other" self;
- ☐ something happens to tie the "other self" to one of the other active stories or quests.

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

Quest Flavor

1/chapter, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest through:

- a dizzying vision of the enemy
- wrestling with your sense of self
- an impossible encounter
- dealing with some relevant internal baggage
- trying to understand what is happening
- suffering a bout of more general sickness/hallucinations

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

Poisoned (Any-Time Version)

XP

35

Bonus XP

This quest comes with a division of states—there's the you who is stable, grounded in the world, and is also *the only you*; and then there's the you who is sharing existence with at least one thing making dizzying defiance of the boundaries of yourself.

There's a sign (**Divided/Self-Possessed**) for this—a reversible card, which you could in theory have on the table in front of you in play to show which state you're in. You can earn a bonus XP at any time (though only once per scene/15 minutes) by flipping the card, showing that you're moving between states—that you're grounded and things are fine, or that you've either gone into a state of distress or are actively being haunted.

If you can't actually keep the card in front of you, holding up the card with the relevant side facing people or just saying or emoting something appropriate can earn you the XP instead.

Preparing for a Festival or Event

35 XP Quest

2: 

3: 

You're getting things ready for a big upcoming event—I'm particularly thinking about Fortitude festivals, which include a number of events and attractions, but this is also a suitable quest to use if you're putting on a play and it can work in a pinch if you're getting a party or concert put together.

This quest assumes that you're working as part of a team, but it's a cosmetic point—

You can still use it if it is just you.

What You'll Know

Why would they tell you anything? You're only *on the committee*.

What You'll Do

Someone who's preparing for a festival event *looks sleepless*.

You will be harried. You will be tired. As much as you ever do—I'm making allowances here for the occasional always-cool-no-matter-what type—you will seem like everything is completely out of control and about to fall apart at any minute. Even if it's actually under control right this second, you'll probably have *forgotten* how to not look overwhelmed, harried, and out of your depth.

You will *give speeches about what the festival means or how it should be put together*.

The reason I'm listing this here instead of as part of the quest card is that there's only one time when this actually matters—that moment when it makes things gel for the players and HG, if they hadn't gelled before. Otherwise, it's just part of the constant background noise of getting things ready: that everyone, from the lowliest supreme festival manager to the loftiest volunteer stage hand, has opinions and gives speeches on the task at hand.

You'll *keep coming up with (OOC) and encountering (IC) new ideas for things that are part of the festival.*

The world of theater and events is a world of endless wonder. There's always a new hitch, cool thing, or thing that has to be done that you'd never thought about before it emerged.

Preparing for a Festival

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You help to define/establish (for the *players*, I mean) an important part of what this event will be about;
- ☐ It's the week before the event's supposed to happen and nothing's ready!
- ☐ 0-3 days before the event, a huge problem comes up or remains! And then you solve it.

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

Quest Flavor

1/chapter, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest for:

- planning the layout (of festival booths, stage props & lighting, etc.)
- coming to consensus on the event's biggest features (e.g., music, attractions)
- preparing and rehearsing for things
- constructing the things you'll need (festival booths, props, costumes, &c.)
- posting bills
- getting people the equipment that they'll need
- dealing with completely goofy problems

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

XP

35

Taking Care of a Small Child

40 XP Quest

1: 
2: 
5: 

You raise and nurture, or help with, a small child. For our purposes, that's anyone up to the age of 7—the final celebration of Shichi-Go-San marks the end of this quest's efficacy and often the introduction of the child as an independent Main Character or NPC.

What You'll Do

You'll spend a lot of time in *little interactions* with the kid.

They'll be around. They'll be the focus of small exchanges—you'll pick the baby up, hug and bounce it, talk to it, and put it back down to bed. You'll answer random questions from the kid. You'll wipe their nose.

You'll make faces at them—really, making faces back and forth to kids is *where it's at*. You'll play little silly games. You'll tell them your grandiose stories, and you'll listen to their own.

You'll *emphasize your connection to them*.

This is a big thing. You're always calling a kid over and introducing them to other people, or showing other people things they've drawn; whatever. You're explaining the kid's fantasy world to others: if they're a knight, and their teddy bear is their horse, *you'll* be the one to tell people that. Even if you're kind of annoyed by the kid (e.g., the kid is an obnoxious tag-along younger sibling, or you're a really tired parent) the tenets of your relationship with the kid are really important to you:

You'll be all "this is my kid sister, she's really annoying and thinks goblins live in noses" rather than waving her away like you'd wave away an equally annoying gnat. In fact, it'll be intensely important for you to spend time making it *clear* to people that *this kid* is the one who is annoying to you, and exactly why: you want it to be as big a deal to others as it is for you.

You'll be *tolerant*. At least, if you're in a relatively Pastoral campaign.

I don't mean tolerant of their behavior, per se. I don't mean that you'll let them do things they shouldn't be doing. That's a minefield and I'm not even going to talk about it! I mean that you'll be tolerant of their existence; of their experience; of the fact that they're there, and often want a lot from you, and that their presence often means trouble and mess and makes demands upon your time.

Unless you're playing in a Gothic game, you'll *take them seriously*—

There are a lot of places out there where you might feel like you don't have the time for kids. Like the weight of kids on your daily planner pushes everything else out. Like you're running all the time just to keep the pieces of your life and theirs together, and can't manage anything else at all.

That's not how it usually is in Town.

They'll take up a lot of time! But you can still do whatever else you need to do, it'll just take you longer.

Unless you're in a Gothic game. Then you might really not have time.

You'll tend to be pretty *trusting*.

Town tends to let its kids manage a lot more of their own lives than you see in the modern West. They're not quite free-range but they're on a pretty long leash and their parents'll tend to take their word as pretty good.

You will get *memetically infected*.

The three most infectious sorts of catch phrase in the world are the ones that kids come up with, the ones kids discover and repeat, and the ones that you accidentally come up with that infect a kid. A suitably-aged kid can, with a mere half-hour's exposure, corrupt an entire roomful of intelligent adults into a peculiar, squamous clade liable to refer to feet themselves as boots ("two boots!") and reject a proposal for a hearty round of family-friendly boardgame play with an out-thrust hand and a declaration of *No Monolopy!*

Finally, you'll get *a lot more tolerant for goop*. Kids produce many variegated goops! Your tolerance does not automatically reach the level of immunity—parental resistance to mess and unpleasantness often plateaus at a kind of pained acceptance—but you'll still get an order of magnitude better at coping with someone randomly deciding to wipe their nose and then rub their hand clean upon your face.[68]

68 Because it's gross to have mucous all over your hand![†]

† Duh.

What You'll Know

Let's start with some stuff that might not be obvious.

You'll learn which places near you are kid friendly and who has kids of their own. You'll learn many things that are basically magic tricks, like various ways of strapping babies to you, calming or distracting kids, one-handed stroller folding and unfolding techniques, and the masterful interpretation of patterns of silence and sound.

You'll know that Fortitude's the best place in Town to take a kid to. Oh, sure, they'll love Arcadia, and most of Town is pretty good, but the thing about Fortitude is:

The place is practically *hostile* to wickedness and adversity.

For instance, tantrums are difficult here.

Let me take a moment to *savour* that. Tantrums are difficult here. They fall under the same general rubric as "wickedness." Most of what kids do when they're bad isn't proper wickedness, and tantrums often are part of being a kid and not wickedness at all, but... still. This is a place where screaming and stomping your feet and all that feels a little silly even when you're 2. It hardly ever happens. This is a place where kids are inclined to be oddly tranquil and grounded from the day they're born.

Even better, adversity is rare.

That means not only is your kid probably safe right now, wherever they are—I mean, you can *check*, obviously, I'm not saying you shouldn't, but they probably are—but that you are only going to have like *half* the mind-bendingly gross messes that you'd get with kids anywhere else.

Adversity. (in Fortitude) Is. Rare.

On a similar note, *don't* shop for childcare stuff in Arcadia. Get bio-diapers from a deviant scientist in Horizon, or just use cloth. Import formula from Earth or breastfeed. If you go to Arcadia for your childcare stuff you will end up *broke*. "You must spend more than you expected." is not a spiritual property you want governing the process of raising a child. It's bad enough on the rules for Earth!

Be prepared for the kid to wander into the Outside. This will *happen*. You will have to retrieve them. It's an inherent part of youth, no more avoidable than wet beds, skinned knees, and runny noses. Trying to stop it completely is likely to lead to bad places. Just... make them feel as safe as possible, during and in advance, in order to maximize your ability to get them safely home.

Now for the obvious stuff!

Over the course of this quest, you'll learn the kid's interests. You'll learn the state of their education—what they're learning about, what they care about, what they already know, and what they don't.

You'll know the names of their favorite toys and blanket, and where they get stored.

You'll know the books they like and the ones they don't.

You'll know all about their health. If you're a parent, you'll know way too much about their health. If you're just helping out, you'll know... a lot. Allergies, weaknesses, conditions, things that happened, reasons to worry or not to worry, all that.

You'll know the patterns of their behavior—how they react to various things, and what you can reasonably trust them with and what you oughtn't.

Taking Care of a Small Child (Dramatic Version)

XP

40

Major Goals

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest if:

- ☐ something happens to the child that gives you a reason to panic, but at some point afterwards things are mostly OK.
- ☐ you celebrate Children's Day, Shichi-Go-San, or Christmas with the child.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- taking the child with you on a walk, light chore/adventure, or to a PC gathering
- having a conversation with the child about something goofy
- having a conversation with the child about something surprisingly relevant
- teaching or telling stories to the child
- teaching or telling stories to the child about the PCs' adventures
- having a meaningful conversation with a PC or important NPC about the child
- actively taking care of the child

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

Taking Care of a Small Child (Casual Version)

XP

40

Bonus XP

You make faces at that baby! You cuddle that kid, or let them drag you around, or answer their questions, or show them off.

Basically you emote:

"Kid. Kid. ♬Kid kid kid♬."

or some variant thereof.

Anyhow, you can fuss over the child—or whatever you do habitually, which might be squinting at them, wiping their nose, or rolling your eyes at them for an older sibling—for a bonus XP up to once per 15 minutes/scene.

The best way to do this, I think, is to get a prop—probably a cloth doll or amigurumi, because those are easiest to fuss over. Don't worry so much about what you say or emote: pick up the prop and physically fuss over it for the XP! You can attempt to use a real small child here but they are unruly, intermittently available, and demanding: they may even require a share of the earned XP!

If you don't have a prop or child available, you can do without one: earn the XP by saying or emoting whatever seems appropriate to show that you're off in interacting-with-small-child world.

If the environment is appropriate and the HG is OK with it, you can use picking up the prop or saying or emoting whatever as a way of indicating that the kid in question has just come onto the scene.





Example Quest Sets

Example Quest Sets

Here's a few examples of more generic quests, organized into self-contained sets that you could play through sequentially or even more than once.

A Scientific Adventure

preamble

These quests form a generic structure to play through as a scientist, magician, or hard-headed person of faith.

You'll play through three to five of these quests, as fits your Aspect, Bindings, Emptiness, or Otherworldly Arc.

Science!

20 or 40 XP Quest

1: 
2: 
4: 

This troublesome situation has been dumped in your lap. It bothers you. But it also interests you as... a scientist, or magician, or whatever you are.

There's something here that wants an exploration by the brilliant mind of, well, you!

There's a problem here that's *worthy* of your talents.



Science!

Major Goals

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

- ☐ you fall under the burden of the quest: something explicitly puts the problem in your hands, or you explicitly take it up;
- ☐ you construct some sort of defensive perimeter;
- ☐ you encounter Jade Irinka, the former sun, or the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy;
- ☐ three chapters slip by without obvious IC progress on the quest.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 20 XP.

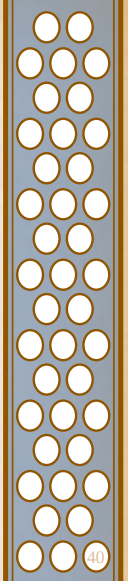
Quest Flavor

1/chapter, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest through:

- sympathizing with, or assisting, the outcast and the wrong;
- dreams calling you to a place of danger
- listening to stories of strange things happening in Big Lake;
- regaling people with a legend of some epic danger related to the quest—typically a legend invented by your player but occasionally forwarded from previous discussions with the HG;
- complaining to the other PCs about the progress of your investigations/work;
- reluctantly allowing yourself to be dragged away from it; *or*
- reluctantly allowing others to get involved with it

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

XP



Science! (Simplified)

XP

20

Major Goals

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

- ☐ you fall under the burden of the quest: something explicitly puts the problem in your hands, or you explicitly take it up;
- ☐ you construct some sort of defensive perimeter.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

1/chapter, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest through:

witnessing the fates of the wicked.

dragging other Main Characters into your work.

proposing new theories about the subject of your investigation or calling—e.g., the Outside, tsukumogami, Bluebell Park, the Bleak Academy, or the Titovs.

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

Someone's in Trouble!

20 or 35 XP Quest

1: 

2: 

Someone's in trouble. Usually it's a relative innocent and someone or somehow related to the meat of your current Arc.

You help them out!

Someone's in Trouble!

XP

35

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You formally commit (aloud or in an emote) to trying to help this person;
- ☐ They open up to you while talking to you in their home or important haunts;
- ☐ Some element of their problem bridges from the metaphorical or emotional to the real—e.g., a gate opens from their nightmares to the world, or a fear turns into a curse, or someone who always gets a little too carried away gets physically carried away shortly after a reference to that tendency.

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

Quest Flavor

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

-  catch eerie glimpses/foreshadowing of a threat to them
-  have a sleepover/slumber party/visit to their dreams
-  listen to them explaining their despair
-  are shown one of their secrets
-  hunt down some specific bit of trouble
-  drag them somewhere they really shouldn't be

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

Someone's in Trouble! (Simplified)

XP

20

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You formally commit (aloud or in an emote) to trying to help this person;
- ☐ Some element of their problem bridges from the metaphorical or emotional to the real—e.g., a gate opens from their nightmares to the world, or a fear turns into a curse, or someone who always gets a little too carried away gets physically carried away shortly after a reference to that tendency.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- identify or hypothesize about the "real" threat that will emerge
- feverishly work on an idea to help
- dig into their secrets
- invoke or bargain with some terrifying power to save them

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

Engineering!

25 or 35 XP Quest

3: 

4: 

5: 

You know enough about what's going on now that the problem is simply a matter of diligence. The title of this quest is usually either appropriate or amusingly ironic; if it's not, you can scratch out "Engineering!" and substitute in "A Conscious Life."

You move forward in a thoughtful and organized fashion to solve the problem at hand.



Engineering!

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You complete a major inventory, map, survey, or other exploration of the territory (often dream- or dream-like territory) at hand;
- ☐ You work towards a reconciliation between apparent rivals, enemies, opposing forces, or even with something oppressing you or someone you care about;
- ☐ You find a hidden well or spring of pure or untainted water.

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

Quest Flavor

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

- clean, prepare a ritual space, or do maintenance work
- eat with someone strange in a literal or metaphorical cave
- catalogue or explore the territory at hand
- groom a dog or similar animal connected somehow to the quest
- are penned in somewhere by rain
- bear witness to strange visions

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

XP

35

Engineering! (Simplified)

XP

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You find or gain access to a major inventory, map, survey, or other exploration of the territory (often dream- or dream-like territory) at hand;
- ☐ You're recruited or asked for help by what had previously seemed to be a rival, enemy, opposing force, or even oppressor;
- ☐ You find a hidden well or spring of pure or untainted water.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- write off some portion of the situation as a loss, and trash/seal it
- imprison someone or something
- call upon some terrifying or mysterious power connected somehow to the quest
- present yourself to "your public" in a dramatic pose for admiration; put on airs
- declare what must be done

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

Above the Fray

20 or 35 XP Quest

1: 

4: 

5: 

You rise above the conflict and... mess... of things. You seek objectivity. Maybe you're affecting to the role of a god: deciding what something's worth, where it comes from, and what its destiny should be.

Or maybe you're just trying to think things through and understand what's really happened (recently/in your life).

Above the Fray

Major Goals

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

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

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

Quest Flavor

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

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

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

XP

35

Above the Fray (Simplified)

XP 20

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You enact a meaningful judgment—impose a penance, punish a criminal or enemy, or forgive someone in an official capacity;
- ☐ You seek and receive some sort of divine guidance;
- ☐ You have a cathartic breakdown.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- you review reports or records of a dangerous part of the setting, e.g., the Outside or Bluebell Park, somehow relevant to the substance of this Arc.
- chores pile up while you figure out what to do
- someone cooks for you, brings you a hot drink, or puts you to bed
- in "walk and talk" decision-making scenes

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

Walking the Boundaries

25 or 40 XP Quest

3: 

5: 

This quest explores the aftermath of the previous quests. It's generally kind of slow and quiet—whether you're wrestling with the terrible damage that's been done to you, or admiring the victories you've won, this quest is all about having space and time to experience the matter in full.



Walking the Boundaries

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You walk among flowers in a place where somebody died;
- ☐ You read or tell someone the stories of a place's history;
- ☐ You share a precious drink or meal with someone, where "precious" is relative to your available resources (and not necessarily absolute);
- ☐ You say goodbye properly to an old friend.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 20 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- tending a garden or caring for a bit of wilderness
- making repairs
- staring into a fire
- watching children or animals playing
- playing ball, Frisbee, or something of the sort
- having an encounter with something that seems at first to be dramatic and scary, before turning out to be perfectly safe and friendly
- waking up with water dripping on you, moss growing on you, or an animal nosing you

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

XP

40

Walking the Boundaries (Simplified)

XP

25

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You walk among flowers in a place where somebody died;
- ☐ You dream or share a story or two of a place's history;
- ☐ You say goodbye properly to an old friend.

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

Quest Flavor

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

- indulge in a lazy routine (e.g. wearing pajamas all day)
- indulge in slightly less lazy morning routines
- tend a shrine, grave, museum, or mausoleum
- are pointlessly cleaning or organizing, and a visitor interrupts
- play with a dangerous thing

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

Looking for Trouble

preamble

These quests form a generic structure to play through as an adventurer, two-fisted hero, or troublemaking kid—anybody actively *looking* for danger, excitement, and mystery!

You'll play through three to five of these quests, as fits your Knight, Mystic, Shepherd, or Storyteller Arc.

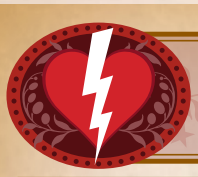
Adventure GET

20 or 35 XP Quest

1: 
4: 

You're on an adventure!

It can be sucky. Like, you could be poisoned. Or people could be dying. But you're still all dazzled by the newness and interest value of it all. It could be scary. It could be traumatizing. But it's *an adventure!*



Adventure GET

Major Goals

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

- ☐ Trouble starts or gets much worse in a well-staged way—whether that's accidentally walking backwards into an enemy camp, breaking into a supposedly empty manor during what turns out to be a dinner party, or declaring that everything's fine as long as there aren't any werewolves around just before werewolves show up;
- ☐ Someone rescues you;
- ☐ You stand in a shadowed place and tell someone a secret, then run away before they can react.

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

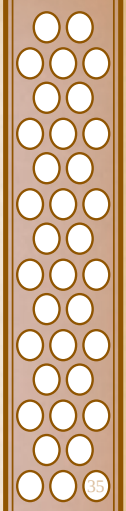
Quest Flavor

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

-  sneak into somewhere you shouldn't go
-  risk trouble by digging into somebody's secrets
-  drag others into your affairs/arrange their lives for them
-  propose a theory about the underlying situation you're in
-  tell someone a story related to the underlying situation you're in
-  get into trouble trying to help somebody else
-  risk trouble in the name of *adventure*!

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

XP



Adventure GET (Simplified)

XP

20

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You stand in a shadowed place and tell someone a secret, then run away before they can react;
- ☐ Trouble starts or gets much worse in a well-staged way—whether that's accidentally walking backwards into an enemy camp, breaking into a supposedly empty manor during what turns out to be a dinner party, or declaring that everything's fine as long as there aren't any werewolves around just before werewolves show up.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- you discover a secret
- you express your boredom and interest in adventure
- you drag someone somewhere they really shouldn't be
- whatever trouble's been dogging you shows up and/or escalates

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

Let's Doing!

20 or 35 XP Quest

2: 

3: 

The problem here is pretty massive, pretty complicated, pretty big. You're going to try to bull through it with sheer can-do gumption anyhow.

Let's doing!

Introducing Arc Features in an Early Quest

"Let's Doing" often introduces a labyrinth, a dizzying height, and a few key NPCs that will feature later in the Arc. It is in fact *designed* to help you introduce a core roster of characters and places for the Arc.

...but, for clarity, I'm not expecting you or the HG to nail down the Arc in advance here. I'm OK with the HG introducing "an antagonist" or "a romantic interest" here without really knowing how they fit in yet or even necessarily knowing that they *will* fit in. I'm OK with you randomly narrating a key figure or labyrinth or story-relevant cliff into being. That stuff works!

...basically, if you already know something is going to be important to whatever story you're playing through, try to introduce it here; and conversely, if you have no idea where things are going or how this story is going to end, try to introduce some heights, a maze or two, and cool NPCs.

Let's Doing!

XP

35

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You meet a new antagonist, ally, or romantic interest. (As designated by destiny/the HG—if someone unexpectedly becomes something like that, it may or may not count);
- ☐ Three chapters pass without obvious IC progress on this quest. (That is, whatever problem you're trying to solve gets no closer to being solved.)

You can earn each bonus more than once, up to a total of 15 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

-  narrate your impression of a PC, Main Character, Arc-related NPC, labyrinth, high place, or key location for the Arc, as if explaining them to a reader or video game player; you may do this IC or, if nobody minds, suspend play for a moment and do it OOC.
-  drag other Main Characters into your quest-related activities/investigations
-  grandstand about your reasons for being on this quest
-  talk with somebody about your dreams for the future
-  talk with somebody about death
-  get hurt emotionally by somebody somehow involved in the story of this Arc

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

Let's Doing! (Simplified)

XP

20

Major Goals

The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:
☐ you've met, or seen, all the key players in this Arc.

You can earn this bonus once, for a total of 5 XP.

Quest Flavor

1/chapter, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest through:

- sympathizing with, or assisting, the outcast and the wrong;
- proposing new theories about the subject of your investigation or adventure—the Outside, Bluebell Park, the thing under the Titov shrine, or whatever else;
- complaining to the other PCs about the progress of your investigations/plans;

or

- reluctantly allowing yourself to be dragged away from them.

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

Labyrinth Diving

25 or 35 XP Quest

2: 

3: 

5: 

You've got a labyrinth to take on.

Oh, sure, this can be metaphorical. You can navigate a maze of "social entanglement and cross purposes" or a labyrinthine mystery.

But you're probably actually taking on a literal, actual maze.

The metaphorical aspect is probably just going to come into play with the way that your life stays maze-like even when you're not physically exploring a convoluted place—that even if you're only actually in a maze for like a few weeks total over the course of a season, it feels like the labyrinth shadows the entire game.

Labyrinth Diving

XP

35

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You find or gain access to a major inventory, map, survey, or other exploration of the territory at hand;
- ☐ You're recruited or asked for help by what had previously seemed to be a rival, enemy, opposing force, or even oppressor;
- ☐ You find a hidden creek, flow, or spring of pure or untainted water.

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

Quest Flavor

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

- write off some portion of the situation as a loss, and trash/seal it
- imprison someone or something
- call upon some terrifying or mysterious power connected somehow to the Arc
- present yourself to "your public" in a dramatic pose for admiration; put on airs
- declare what must be done
- feed a stray cat

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

Labyrinth Diving (Simplified)

XP

25

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You complete a major inventory, map, survey, or other exploration of the territory (often dream- or dream-like territory) at hand;
- ☐ You make a friend in an unexpected place.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- hang out near a fountain or water feature
- eat with someone strange in a literal or metaphorical cave
- catalogue or explore the territory at hand
- are penned in somewhere by rain
- bear witness to strange visions

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

Climbing the Sacred Mountain

25 or 35 XP Quest

3: 

4: 

5:  

You ascend towards some personal victory or enlightenment.

This probably doesn't involve a literal ascent—there just aren't enough things in Town that can take an entire quest to climb.

That said, there's often a literal ascent deeply symbolically connected to this quest.

You'll be in its shadow, or climbing it, or thinking about it, quite a lot.

Climbing the Sacred Mountain

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You release some guilt or burden that had been weighing you down;
- ☐ You struggle alone on an arduous and metaphorically "upwards" journey;
- ☐ The wind knocks you from a height;
- ☐ You are struck by an insight or revelation that changes everything

You can earn up to three of these bonuses, for a total of 15 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

-  hunt desperately for solutions
-  stagger on despite a wasting illness
-  rise above/conquer some element of your situation
-  show someone an amazing view or vista
-  admire a distant bird, ornithopter, or zeppelin
-  see the sun break through the clouds
-  learn what it is that must be done

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

XP

35

Climbing the Sacred Mountain (Simplified)

XP

25

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You release some guilt or burden that had been weighing you down;
- ☐ You've reached a "landing" (a place to stop and catch your breath) on an arduous and metaphorically "upwards" journey;
- ☐ You are struck by an insight or revelation that changes everything.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- rise above some element of your situation
- stare out at an amazing vista
- talk about something bad that's happened to you
- talk, while feverish, to a bird, bird-like person, or bird-like entity
- struggle with sickness, weakness, rough environmental conditions, and your own frailty

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

Down

35 or 45 XP Quest

1: 
4: 
5: 

This quest is your descent into the underworld. This is a scary time in your life, when you have to face difficult truths and deal with painful things. At the end things can be good, but not during.

During—

...they can get very bad.

Down

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You watch somebody die. It can be an animal but only if it's emotionally affecting (brutal, or an animal you cared about);
- ☐ You get into a fight with someone you care about;
- ☐ You break down from grief or shock;
- ☐ You get really, viscerally sick—it's either life-threatening or really gross. You don't have to nauseate squeamish players by going into the sickness itself but you do have to play up the toll it takes on you.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 20 XP.

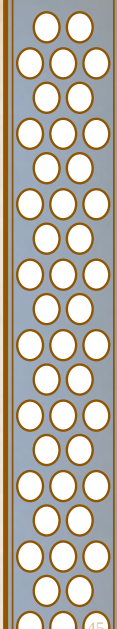
Quest Flavor

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

-  talk with someone about someone or something you've lost
-  hug a large animal, e.g., a deer
-  walk with the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy
-  wander in a daze
-  you can't eat or drink, or can't keep something down
-  you fall apart a little, skipping your usual hygiene/self-maintenance tasks
-  wander a graveyard or at the edge of a cliff
-  lock yourself in a bathroom
-  self-harm

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

XP



Down (Simplified)

XP

35

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You visit a throne room and stand before a seated (e.g.) King or Queen.
- ☐ You're sent into an underworld, be it basement, cave, oubliette, dungeon, or literal world of the dead;
- ☐ You're hung on a hook, crucified, tied to a wall, suspended by telekinesis, used as a scarecrow, or otherwise imprisoned or bound above the ground. Agony is optional (you could be in a canvas sack that is hung from a hook, or stage-show-style crucified); suspension and imprisonment are not.

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

Quest Flavor

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

- you have to abandon something precious, leaving it behind
- you're lost
- you're thirsty
- you encounter the dead
- you share a meal with someone while sitting on cracked stones

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

A Heroic Journey

preamble

These quests form a generic structure to play through as a dreamer, mystic, or hero focused on their cosmic role, destiny, and power to transcend who and what they seem to be.

You'll play through three to five of these quests, as fits your Emptiness, Mystic, Knight, or Otherworldly Arc.

Changes

25 or 35 XP Quest

1: 

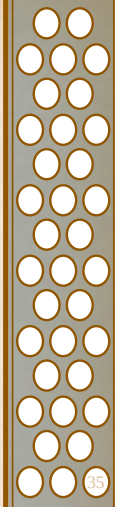
2: 

Some big change is coming to you or someone near you. The world, or your body, or your soul, or that of a friend—it's shifting into a different state.



Changes

XP



Major Goals

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

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

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

Quest Flavor

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

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

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

Changes (Simplified)

XP

25

Major Goals

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

- ☐ There's a scene where people are disapproving or bland but most importantly unfazed by your showing up with extra limbs or unusual physical alterations, e.g., a disdainful "Oh, that's *just* like you to have those tentacles" or "Acne! Nobody told me we were supposed to have acne today! (muttered) Showoff."
- ☐ You meet Death, the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy, or some other feared personage, but because you're delirious or have reason to believe that it's just somebody dressed as them, you have a pleasant chat instead of anything else.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- dreaming of merging with a great and branching tree
- uncontrolled shapeshifting, possibly in a dream/imagination spot
- being surrounded by dancing shadows—the same
- noticing some weird mark or change in your body

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

The Refusal of the Call

20 or 35 XP Quest

1: 
2: 
3: 

You struggle to find a way out of the situation you're in. You look for help. It's not necessarily that you don't want to move forward—

Often that's the problem. But other times it's just that you want to have a choice.

You want to move forward along the path you're on, but you don't *trust* it and you really want to keep your distance and be *able* to turn away.

The Refusal of the Call

Major Goals

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

- ☐ you accept, or at least are clearly tempted by, someone's offer to help you fight off/resist your destiny.
- ☐ you stand in the shadow of an enemy's fortress or cathedral.
- ☐ you give yourself into someone else's hands, making yourself terrifyingly vulnerable either physically or emotionally.

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

Quest Flavor

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

- talking with someone about the principles that are the most important to you
- describing yourself as a helpless pawn of fate
- wondering if you're actually good or evil
- trying to replace or repair torn clothing on a tight budget
- you're overburdened—you work too hard, and with too little
- you get confused about who and where you are
- fretting over whether you're actually on the wrong side

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

XP

35

The Refusal of the Call (Simplified)

XP

20

Major Goals

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

- ☐ you build or show a strong emotional bond to an "opposite number"—someone working at cross purposes to what you will become.
- ☐ they offer to help you but you have to turn them down.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- pleading with an enemy to understand you
- exploring and having fun
- a phone rings but isn't answered
- someone helps you while you're throwing up (from overwork? Sickness? Drinking?)

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

The Belly of the Whale

20+ or 45 XP Quest

2: 

3: 

You've been swallowed up by literal or metaphorical chaos. You're not always in active danger, but you don't really have a "normal" state to go back to—

You're out on a limb. You're like somebody at a convention without money or a room to stay in, or someone treading water in the middle of the sea. You're like someone lost in an amazing mansion or like somebody trapped in a spooky woods. The defining characteristic isn't how bad things get, though they can get very bad; it's that you don't have any compass, any map, or anywhere reachable and solid to *go*.

The Belly of the Whale

Major Goals

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

- ☐ you have a profound spiritual experience where you seem to blend into the world around you.
- ☐ you're trapped.
- ☐ you defeat an "opposite number" or rival, only to have a scarier enemy or problem arise.
- ☐ you're rescued by somebody
- ☐ you rescue somebody else.

You can earn up to four of these bonuses, for a total of 20 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

-  you stand barefoot in a high place, looking down at the world
-  you get stabbed through the torso, possibly in a dream/imagination spot
-  your hair grows in real-time, possibly in a dream/imagination spot
-  you bring light in the darkness
-  you comfort someone
-  you sit by the water eating fried fish with one or more friends
-  birds cluster around you
-  you manage a contemplative moment between troublesome circumstances

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

XP

The Belly of the Whale (Simplified)

XP

20

25

35

Bonus XP

This quest takes place in a context where you're out of your element, where you're transforming or being transformed into something else.

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (but only once per scene/15 minutes) by **proposing a theory about what will happen to you**.

Your character must propose the theory aloud or, at minimum, in their official internal narration—it can't just be you, as the player, at the table, it has to be IC.

This can be a 20 XP, 25 XP, or 35 XP Quest

The Belly of the Whale (Simplified, Variant)

XP

20

25

35

Bonus XP

You're dissociating from reality.

You are dissolving into these places that you find yourself in. You are awakening a strange new self inside. Everything is turning into teeth and rivers inside you.

Something is being *born*.

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (though only once per scene/15 minutes) by declaring that you can feel the touch of the impending miracle upon you—you can phrase it another way; just give some indication that you're triggering this quest condition—and then free-associating for a few moments about what your character is experiencing, feeling, thinking.

Talk about being cold, or warm; talk about visions; whatever. Flare up the light in you. Cut your teeth on cold. Have a greenness stuck in your mouth, somewhere, ugly, stopping up your tongue as you try to pry it loose. That kind of hing. That brings you in a bonus XP for this quest.

This can be a 20 XP, 25 XP, or 35 XP Quest

The Trials of the Sun

25 or 35 XP Quest

4: 

You're losing sight of yourself. You're being pushed so hard by internal and external factors that you can't maintain a solid picture of who you *are*.

There's no spare energy for it.

You don't have time for it.

It's all in flux.



The Trials of the Sun

XP

35

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You reclaim a lost legacy of a parent or mentor.
- ☐ You humble some enemy, bending them completely to your will.
- ☐ You unleash, or are taken over by, a bleak power.

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

Quest Flavor

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

-  your hands/arms sprout bladed vines, possibly in a dream/imagination spot
-  you merge with/devour someone else, possibly in a dream/imagination spot
-  you experiment with powers that you shouldn't
-  you assert your power or your destiny
-  you talk about your sense that there's a hole in the world
-  you wander in the dark, remembering some grief or loss
-  you use an elaborate, magical-looking key

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

The Trials of the Sun (Simplified)

XP

25

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You build a model, duplicate, icon, or eidolon of yourself.
- ☐ Someone else tells the story of how you lost or damaged some potential you once had.
- ☐ Someone realizes that they were afraid of you for all the wrong reasons. (It's OK for them to wind up more afraid, less afraid, or about the same, as long as the reasons change.)

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- you transcend or apotheosize in some fashion.
- you or your player give a monologue about the nature of your power
- you propose an enemy's fate
- you commune with an angel or the holy part of your nature.
- you perform some sacred chore (e.g. feeding a holy fire).

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

Special Note!

If the game and your powers don't support literal apotheosis/angels, handle these things as a spiritual effect—intangible and only sort of visible, but nevertheless "real" for purposes of the scene.

Apotheosis

20 or 40 XP Quest

5: 

This is your chance to meet, and become, your new yourself.

Apotheosis

XP

40

Major Goals

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

- ☐ Hold a representation of the sacred eternal—a philosopher's stone, an elixir of immortality, a key to the world—in your hands.
- ☐ Return to where you started the game or the Arc, find it ruined or damaged, and rebuild/repair it.
- ☐ Meet something that could be considered "the other half" of yourself.
- ☐ Witness an eclipse.
- ☐ Swallow a lizard, enemy, or ally spirit whole.

You can earn up to four of these bonuses, once each, for a total of 20 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

-  can't find water
-  fix something broken or unwhole
-  eat hot cross buns or melon pan.
-  guide someone else through a long journey or struggle
-  dig up someone frozen and rescue them, possibly in a dream/imagination spot
-  grow a new mouth or eye, possibly in a dream/imagination spot
-  merge with a book of some sort, possibly in a dream/imagination spot
-  pass through the gates of the Bleak Academy

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

Apotheosis (Simplified)

XP

25

Major Goals

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

- ☐ Wander strange, misty landscapes.
- ☐ Stare at a living creature frozen in or behind some sort of crystal.
- ☐ Release light from or open an eye in your forehead.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- shatter an enemy's weapon barehanded
- possess or infiltrate an enemy or place with your spirit/energy
- fight imaginary enemies, hallucinatory enemies, spirits, or shadows
- talk to people about your dreams for the future
- call upon one of your big powers in a dramatic fashion

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

A Bittersweet Saga

preamble

Here's another kind of Arc for a character trying to come out of their shell—

Someone trying to learn how to engage with the world, or also, anyone trying to help another character do so.

You'll play through three to five of these quests, as fits your Aspect, Emptiness, Shepherd, or Storyteller Arc.

Beautiful and Far Away

20 or 35 XP Quest

1: 

2: 

There is a secret place, somewhere beautiful and far away, that's calling to you.

It is an escape, a desperately needed escape from the world; but like all escapes, it can kill you if you take it too far. And it is so very easy to take this one too far; and yet, you need it, so very much.

This is the Arc's **Secret Place**, and it is located in the Arc's **Setting**.

Often it's a little unreal—you'll visit it in dreams, or visions, or by traveling through the Outside.

Beautiful and Far Away

Major Goals

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

- ☐ Others stumble on your **Secret Place**.
- ☐ You establish a reason why you *need* **the Secret Place**—why it's sustaining you, why you'd be at risk without it.
- ☐ You establish a reason why **the Secret Place** is *hurting* you, breaking you, damaging your ability to live an ordinary life.

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

Quest Flavor

1/chapter, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest through:

- guiding someone through the **Setting** of the Arc
- talking with somebody about **the Secret Place**
- talking with somebody about what dreams are, as compared to reality;
- talking with somebody about whether the world deserves to exist, whether it's good or bad, or whether that even matters.
- get in a row with somebody over/about **the Secret Place**
- refusing to retreat to **the Secret Place**, even though things are very bad. *or*
- retreating to **the Secret Place**.

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

XP

35

Beautiful and Far Away (Simplified)

XP

20

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You demonstrate how you *need* **the Secret Place**—how it's sustaining you, why you'd be at risk without it.
- ☐ You demonstrate how **the Secret Place** is *hurting* you, breaking you, how it's damaging your ability to live an ordinary life.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

1/chapter, you can earn a bonus XP towards this quest through:

- having a troubled dream
- talking with/ranting at somebody about **the Secret Place**
- babbling poorly-formed philosophy or metaphysics at somebody
- retreating to **the Secret Place**.

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

Fascination

20 or 35 XP Quest

1: 
2: 
3: 

There's someone or something that fascinates you—

Both as a person (or entity) and as a power, a force of nature. You want to spend time with them. You want to know more.

Fascination

Major Goals

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

- ☐ Express your fascination with someone or something dangerous and irresponsible.
- ☐ After that first reward, go a long way out of your way physically in order to study the operation and mechanisms of somebody else's powers (e.g., a field trip to Horizon to watch the Wish-Granting Engine at work.)
- ☐ Make yourself terrifyingly vulnerable, e.g. as an act of social/romantic trust, an act of folly, or as bait for a trap.

You can earn up to three of these bonuses, once each, for a total of 15 XP.

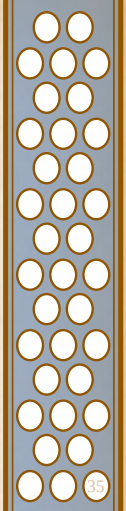
Quest Flavour

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

-  confess a secret desire
-  have a troubled dream about glass, magic, and the Outside
-  investigate the shrine family magic for dealing with troubled dreams
-  dream about a Main Character or Arc-related NPC
-  hang out with someone you like while they do their thing
-  get into goofy trouble for, with, or because of somebody else
-  talk with someone about the various bad ends people can come to in fairy tales, stories about wishes, and stories about witches

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

XP



Fascination (Simplified)

XP

20

Major Goals

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

- ☐ Witness something amazing, even by your standards.
- ☐ Get badly hurt when you weren't expecting it.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- investigate someone's powers
- argue with someone about the proper use of some power
- express your fascination with somebody
- explain to someone, or argue with them about, the workings of shrine magic, the Arc's **Setting**, or the Outside

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

This is So Surreal

25 or 35 XP Quest

2: 

3: 

4: 

Someone you're involved with (a friend, SO, ally, minion, or dangerously seductive power) is using their powers in ways that are just plain goofy. Often this quest is a reaction to wish powers.

This is So Surreal

XP

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You freak out—you have a minor or major psychological breakdown because you can't cope with these wishes;
- ☐ You give a monologue—often comedically serious IC, though not necessarily so OOC—to explain why a wish is a bad idea;
- ☐ You receive some implausible honor or reward for your conduct in handling a wish, or as part of the wish's execution itself.

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

Quest Flavor

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

- you're seduced by the wonder and utility of a wish
- marveling at the way a wish changed the world
- things get chaotic or absurd because of a wish
- you help some important place or person weather the course of a wish.
- you're forced to break a personal commitment—use a power you hate, break a promise, or whatever—in order to resolve or weather a wish.

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

Special Note!

Anything that can go wrong in the same way a classic wish can (including most Imperial miracles and some magical spells) counts as a "wish" here.

This is So Surreal (Simplified)

XP

25

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You freak out—you have a minor or major psychological breakdown because you can't cope with these wishes;
- ☐ You give a monologue—often comedically serious IC, though not necessarily so OOC—to explain why a wish is a bad idea;
- ☐ You receive some implausible honor or reward for your conduct in handling a wish, or as part of the wish's execution itself.

You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- you reject part of a wish that would have been useful
- you get lost in the Outside
- things get chaotic or absurd because of a wish
- you're forced to break a personal commitment—use a power you hate, break a promise, or whatever—in order to resolve or weather a wish.
- you have nightmares full of the symbolism of your personal or Arc-related traumas.

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

Special Note!

Anything that can go wrong in the same way a classic wish can (including most Imperial miracles and some magical spells) counts as a "wish" here.

This is *Such* a Bad Idea

20 or 35 XP Quest

2: 

3: 

4: 

Someone you're involved with (a friend, SO, ally, minion, or dangerously seductive power) has gone on a bit of a power trip.

This is *Such* a Bad Idea

XP

Major Goals

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

- ☐ Someone *normally* trustworthy or goofy goes on a power trip and winds up grinding you under their malevolent heel; or, more generally, you suffer unpleasantly from their use of the power that they've seized;
- ☐ You're put into an awkward, embarrassing, or at least highly goofy or counter-type role by a wish, probably with details suggested by the HG and other players;
- ☐ You manage to become a "power behind the throne" or otherwise steal a portion of the power in play over the course of a wish.

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

Quest Flavor

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

-  ritually drawing on the powers the wish has given you
-  enjoying the changed world, letting it corrupt you
-  you overcome some obstacle in the world of the wish
-  you're forced to break a personal commitment—use a power you hate, break a promise, or whatever—in order to resolve or weather a wish.
-  you struggle with the circumstances of the wish
-  the wish does something really strange to your life

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

Special Note!

Anything that can go wrong in the same way a classic wish can (including most Imperial miracles and some magical spells) counts as a "wish" here.

This is *Such* a Bad Idea (Simplified)

XP

20

Major Goals

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

- ☐ Someone *normally* trustworthy or goofy goes on a power trip and winds up grinding you under their malevolent heel; or, more generally, you suffer unpleasantly from their use of the power that they've seized;
- ☐ You're put into an awkward, embarrassing, or at least highly goofy or counter-type role by a wish, probably with details suggested by the HG and other players.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of up to 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- things get really weird
- you give up and just go with it
- you're forced to break a personal commitment—use a power you hate, break a promise, or whatever—in order to resolve or weather a wish.
- there's a big parade or festival

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

Special Note!

Anything that can go wrong in the same way a classic wish can (including most Imperial miracles and some magical spells) counts as a "wish" here.

You've Lost Them

20 or 45 XP Quest

3: 

4: 

5: 

Someone has lost a piece of themselves—something important.

It could be a friend. It could be an enemy. It's even vaguely possible that it's you—that you are now just a hollow shell or double of the person you used to be.

You're looking at this from the outside.

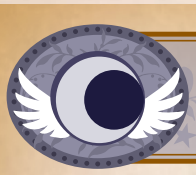
You *might* get it back, but you don't think you can. Certainly you don't *know* that you can, and you can't put any faith in it as more than a dream.

And the important thing is—

You feel responsible. If it's a random person or an enemy you feel responsible because you had something to do with it, or think you did. If it's a friend, you hurt for them and want to help. If it's you, well, you're not that person any more, but you have a kind of duty to carry on as if you were.

Does that make sense?

They are this Arc's **Lost Person**.



You've Lost Them

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You help to impersonate, construct a robot double for, or otherwise replace the **Lost Person**;
- ☐ You get in some kind of completely unnecessary trouble because that person is incomplete or missing;
- ☐ You get atypically emotional when it really sinks in that they're gone, damaged, or changed;
- ☐ Your first full or nearly-full book on this quest comes to an end.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 20 XP.

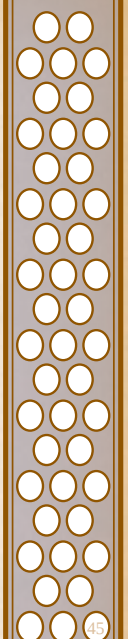
Quest Flavor

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

-  your life is a mess
-  you struggle to understand the loss
-  you talk to someone about memories, metaphysics, and the soul
-  you talk to someone about death
-  you encounter some shocking consequence of a wish or similar power
-  you watch somebody self-destructing
-  you dream of shipwrecks and drowning
-  you dream of the **Lost Person's** true self, their real self, somewhere far away
-  a week passes and nothing has gotten better

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

XP



You've Lost Them (Simplified)

XP

20

Major Goals

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

- ☐ You help to impersonate, construct a robot double for, or otherwise replace the **Lost Person**;
- ☐ You get atypically emotional when it really sinks in that they're gone, damaged, or changed.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- someone soliloquys about the loss
- you communicate somehow with the **Lost Person's** true self, far away
- you wander Fortitude[1] with **the Lost Person** or with or as their stand-in
- there are signs that things may be getting better after all

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

1 or some similar Region in an out-of-Town game

Something Heals

25 or 45 XP Quest

2: 
4: 
5: 

This quest is about an unexpected chance to find closure on something. Maybe it's a stroke of good fortune.

Maybe it's the product of hard work.

Maybe it's just something that had to happen, given time.

Something Heals

Major Goals

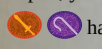
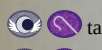
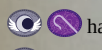
The HG can award you 5 XP towards this quest when:

- ☐ Someone comforts you in a time of need.
- ☐ You break your rules or patterns in a big way in order to help or save somebody else.
- ☐ Something goes right, because of luck or fate or divine intervention or somebody else—basically, because of not-you—when everything seemed lost.
- ☐ You absorb some power, force, place, or energy into yourself.

You can earn each bonus once, for a total of 20 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

-  have a precious moment with something you thought that you'd lost
-  talk with an old friend about your shared adventures
-  have an ordinary, happy day at your job or other place of work
-  sit with someone and eat crackers and soft cheese
-  stand in, or lean against, an arch overgrown with ivy
-  watch a ship sail away across Big Lake
-  dream of a faraway friend, loved one, or Main Character
-  bid an emotional farewell—you or someone else is moving on
-  show someone a wonder

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

XP

45

Something Heals (Simplified)

XP

25

Major Goals

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

- ☐ Someone comforts you in a time of need.
- ☐ You break your rules or patterns in a big way to show someone a kindness or take them under your wing.
- ☐ You absorb some power, force, place, or energy into yourself.

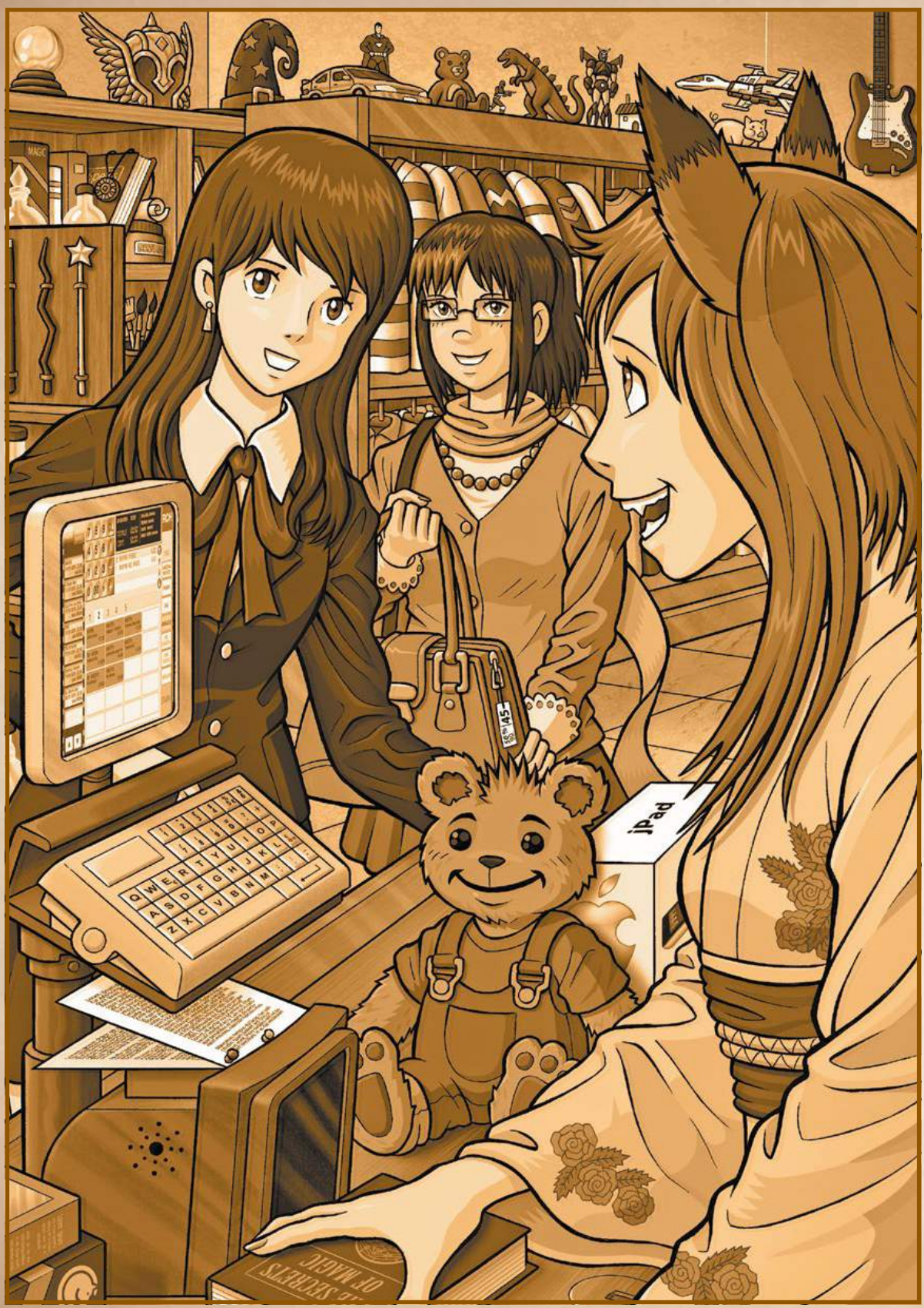
You can earn up to two of these bonuses, once each, for a total of up to 10 XP.

Quest Flavor

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

- talk with someone about the things you've lost
- feed leftover meat to a stray dog
- have a kind of over-the-top day at your job or place of work
- tell someone the stories of your adventures
- show someone a secret (often the Arc's **Secret Place**)

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


iPad



Arcs

When the story starts, you might be pretty ordinary. Just an ordinary kid, maybe with a wish-granting engine or perfect mastery of all forms of human achievement or whatever, but basically just an ordinary kid.

Or adult. Playing adults is OK, too, though this game is targeted at playing teens.

Or even a *normal* kid or adult, like, powers-wise, without anything much more than a couple of cool abilities to keep you in the game.

When the story starts, you might not be much, is what I'm saying, particularly compared to what someone like you can be.

But that'll change, and the way it changes is through Arcs.

On a Bindings Arc, you'll learn to master terrifying powers. On an Aspect Arc, you'll train your mind and body to new heights. An Emptiness or Mystic Arc risks a terrifying corruption; a Storyteller Arc can stylize you—it'll make you as a myth!

Here's how this is going to work in play.

The Story of an Arc

In concept and in hindsight, an "Advancement Arc" is a rigorously ordered chain of 3-5 quests that leads from one major stage of your character's life to the next. You'll tell the story of how your character wrestles with the obstacle or, possibly, the wisdom that holds them back from becoming more than they are—

And conquers it.

In practice, because I don't want to chain play to rails, an Advancement Arc *as it is pursued* is an XP target (somewhere between 120 and 250 XP, probably[69]) and a conceptual target ("reach a certain level of resolution on this stuff"), paired with some recommendations about the kind of quests you might choose to take along the way. If there's a meaningful amount of story pre-bundled with an Advancement Arc, as for some of the official Advancement Arcs, then you might also have a few intermediate conceptual targets—e.g., if I'm expecting an adversary to appear in quest 1 and then cause problems in quest 5, it might be important that they actually *do* appear even if you skipped quest 1 to start a potato farm instead—but even then, I'm expecting you to blaze your own trail when necessary and fill in the gaps with a simplified or "intermissory" quest if you manage to blaze past an important trail mark.

In any case, you'll start the game with an Advancement Arc pre-chosen. Later on, whenever you complete a quest that plausibly *could* be the starting quest for a different Advancement Arc, you'll have the opportunity to abandon the Arc you're on and start on that Arc instead. For instance, if you start play on a **Bindings** Arc, and at some point you do a quest that's a suitable first quest for a **Knight** Arc, you can stop following the Bindings Arc and start following the Knight Arc instead.

I'd usually expect you to do this after reaching a good stopping point—after those 3-5 quests, or that 120-250 XP target, in short, after you've just hit a milestone and fixed your progress in the Arc to your character sheet—but if you and the HG can come to an agreement on what happens to the XP you've built up so far, you can do it at any time, and in *theory* you could do it with your very first completed quest in the game.

The rewards for the quests in a given Arc come in chains. On a **Bindings** Arc, for instance, you'll usually start by getting the first **Bindings** reward, the "Bindings 1" reward. Then, assuming there's been a reasonable amount of play in between, the next quest you complete earns the second **Bindings** reward, and so on. There's three common exceptions:

First, the rewards for 15 XP quests are idiosyncratic: you'll either earn a Recharge Token or activate a "project/quest miracle," as discussed on pg. 450 and 454. You'll ignore these more or less completely when following the chain of an Arc's rewards.

Second, if you complete two quests in "quick succession," that is, without a reasonable amount of play in between, then you and the HG should discuss whether you get two similar rewards or whether you moved forward between the two, and which of the two plausible followup steps fits the quest you take on after *that*. For instance, if you've done the first quest of a Bindings Arc, and then you finish two more in quick succession, was the second one step 3 or step 2, redux? Is the one after *that* step 3 or 4? In short a simultaneous completion like that can hold you back—but this isn't meant as a punishment for finishing two quests at once, or a potential reward, just a reasoned awareness that they seem to have covered the same portion of your life's story.

Third, every now and then, you'll find yourself doing a "side quest"—something completely unrelated to the Arc. You'll pick up a Perk that seems appropriate to the quest (one of the Arcs it fits better) and you won't make any actual progress through the quest chain in the Arc.

Being On Two Arcs at Once

There are some benefits to an Arc that are intended to be exclusive. A miraculous character gets certain benefits for "actively pursuing" an Arc, becoming Immortal, "Frantic," or "Sickly" as discussed on pg. 486-489; you're only supposed to have one of these benefits at a time. A mundane Arc gives a new Bond and Affliction at level 0, and a miraculous Arc may give level 0 powers; again, you're only supposed to get this benefit from a single, central character Arc.

That said, sometimes it'll seem like your character really *should* be on two Arcs at once—that you can organize the stories of your life into two distinct, coherent, and separate streams.

A lot of characters in fiction work this way, and you can play this way if you really want.

I don't support it officially because it's all complicated and stuff. Plus, in a short-term game it messes with your advancement. But, if you want to have a major character Arc (that gets benefits from being on the Arc, such as that Arc 0 Bond and Affliction from a mundane Arc) and a minor character Arc that *doesn't* get those benefits, and progress separately along each of them, with each finished quest adding XP to one or the other Arc—that's fine.

You can even switch off which Arc is major and which Arc is minor, with the HG's permission, though usually only at the completion of a quest and only after at least one of the Arcs has reached Arc Trait 1.

69 The HG'll choose whatever number seems right for their game—it can even vary from Arc to Arc, e.g., with a discount for low-level Arcs, mundane Arcs, and accelerated training Arcs! The only thing they shouldn't do is discount or overcharge Arcs for a subset of players or PCs unless everybody involved is on board, and even this is a soft restriction in practice.



This is all something you can handle *ad hoc*, though, and your XP is pretty much always considered to count—the *worst* state you should be able to get into, by deviating from the Arc's core pattern, is having the HG or group insist that you completed a different Arc than the one you claim to be on, or asking for you to top the Arc off with a short, thematically appropriate quest before you're done.

In terms of rewards, a 20-25 XP quest is likely to have a relatively minor reward. A 35-60 XP quest is likely to have a major one. This is usually a matter of scope and applicability and not raw numbers: a lifetime supply of mouthwash is a minor reward, while a lifetime supply of whatever you might need from a given convenience store is a major one. Most of the Perks and options that I'll discuss below give you some wiggle room for taking more or less powerful options depending on the quest that you've done.

Ultimately it's up to you to figure out what you've earned, with the HG and the rest of the group having a minor power of veto if what you're doing breaks their sense of the world or their sense of the game.

How do I decide which quests count towards my Arc?

The Arc is the story of your character's life, so in theory any quest you actually do is going to be part of it. That means that when you finish a little side project like a 15-XP quest miracle or a run through your basic quest, that's considered part of the natural filler and body of your Arc; when you finish a more meaty quest, you should always look at it from the perspective of, "Do I think that this was the next quest in my Arc?" and even if you decide that it wasn't—

That a quest that you started as a side quest actually *was* a side quest, or a quest that you thought was your next Arc quest really couldn't be—

The XP counts.

In short, your 120-250 XP target is going to include the XP from pretty much any quest you finish, and is often going to have about 30% filler stuff that isn't quite on point, much like a person's life. The only thing to keep in mind here is that you *do* need to reach some level of resolution on the story to actually finish the Arc—it's a flexible and mushy criterion and I suggest the HG be deferential towards you on whether that actually happened, but it *is* a criterion—and that you should try, when picking and finishing your quests, to fit in at least a core three-quest Arc, however abbreviated the last 1-2 quests there may be.

The only case I can think of where a quest's XP absolutely shouldn't count towards your current Arc is if it's obvious to you and everyone that it shouldn't—that the quest was a distraction from your life, that in a real sense it was something you shouldn't have been doing, something that was part of a *different* story, a *contrary* story, and even then you might want to keep a record of the XP from that quest sitting around somewhere in case you pick up or turn out to be on *that* story later on.

If you're wondering *why* miscellaneous quests count towards your Arc, incidentally, it's because a story needs that filler space, *needs* those quests that might or might not be a part of your Arc and the little chibi-quests and projects that just reflect your experience and actions in the world the Arc has formed for you—if you get too focused on checking off boxes and not enough on exploring the metaphysical and metaphorical territory around you, your stories might at first become lean and streamlined but eventually they'd stop being stories at all!

Arc Traits

Each Arc has an associated "Arc Trait"—something like:


Bindings (Wounded Angel) 0


Knight (Idol Singer) 5 *or*


Aspect (The Ace) 2

That would mean, more or less, "you're a pretty cool ace and a top-tier idol singer but you're not particularly a wounded angel at all!"

The first time you dive into a given Arc, you'll pick up a rating of 0. You'll only ever have one level-0 Arc—it goes away completely if you abandon that Arc and pick up another one before the Arc Trait hits 1.

After completing a quest that takes you past your XP goal, you'll upgrade the Arc Trait by a level and receive some permanent upgrades to your power set. At the mundane level, this usually means that you get a new level 1 Skill and +1 to a Skill or a Bond. At the miraculous level, it means that you'll get the powers appropriate to the Arc's new rating.

For example, once you complete an appropriate quest to start the Arc with, you could find yourself with a new Trait:


Bindings (Wounded Angel) 0.

That gives you access to its level 0+ abilities (pg. 490):

Dramatic, Devices *and* **Divine Health.**

Once you finish the Arc, you'll have:


Bindings (Wounded Angel) 1, instead.

At that point, not only do you secure permanent access to the first three powers—they won't go away if you drop this for another Arc—but you'll also gain access to the level 1+ power, **Blasphemy**.

After completing an Arc, you'll start on a new quest chain, either for the same Arc or for a new one.

The basic structure of an Arc is generally the same regardless of the Arc and its rating—

If you want to get **Knight (Idol Singer)** to level 5, you'll do five Arcs of 3-5 Knight quests, and the basic *structure* will repeat itself each time (though with different quests). That said, it's typical for there to be some escalation in the Arc's core thesis—

From...

- An Arc about life experience, to one about your work/actions;
- An Arc about your work/actions, to one about your place in society;
- An Arc about your place in society, to one about purpose;
- An Arc about purpose, to one about meaning;

And after that you'll start looking at the experience, work, place, purpose, or meaning for a larger community or existence itself.

Or not, of course—that's a thought, not a law.

Mundane and Miraculous Perks

As mentioned earlier, characters may have up to 8 **Perks**—the medium-term rewards from individual quests.

Each quest in each Arc's chain offers a set of suggested Perks and other benefits for mortals and another set that miraculous characters can pick up. The latter is *almost* invariably better, but a miraculous character can pick up a mortal Perk should they prefer. In fact, technically, if your gaming group is OK with it, anyone can pick up anything as a Perk from any quest—

These are technically mere suggestions, although I'm expecting you'll use them directly most of the time and as inspiration the rest.

Here's the kind of options and suggestions that you'll see.

Adjustments

You'll sometimes have the option to rewrite an Affliction, Bond, Perk, or whatever, or move points between your Skills. This doesn't cost a Perk slot—it's just something you can do.

Oddly, even though this is a very weak option OOC, it can be one of the most powerful in the game—turning your Affliction "I have bad knees" into an Affliction "I am the supreme cosmic being" is a few seconds' work with a number two pencil but can be, IC, a pretty big deal.

Recharge Tokens

A quest may give you some number of Recharge Tokens. (Variable numbers mean that it's up to the HG and the amount of XP you spent on the quest how many you should actually earn.)

This isn't a Perk, and you don't need a Perk slot to get it.

Traits

Most of the mundane Perks will offer you a Trait, e.g.:

- **Bond** perks give you a Bond;
- **Cool** perks give you Cool;
- **Connection** perks give you a Connection Skill;
- **Magical Skill** perks give you a magical Skill;
- **Shine** perks give you Shine;
- **Skill** perks give you a mundane Skill;
- **Superior Skill** perks give you a Superior Skill; and so forth.

You can use these Traits just like the real ones on your permanent character sheet, but they don't add together—if you have Sailing 1 and a Skill Perk "Sailing 1," the Perk won't do you any actual good[70].

The exception is Traits that count resources rather than quantify abilities, e.g.

- **Health** perks, which give you a Health Level;
- **MP** perks, which improve your starting MP.

Resources like those add to one another and to your inherent Traits.

70 If you think you've found a way it does do you good during play, you probably should ignore it. For instance, if something magically saps your Sailing Skill, it should get both Skills. The only good it should ever do you is if you later raise the Perk or lower the Skill.

Variable Traits

A few Perks offer Traits that vary based on an Issue—a Bond Perk, or sometimes an Affliction or other Trait Perk, that is pegged to the current level of one of your Issues. It rises to 5 when the Issue does; when you resolve the Issue, the Trait drops to 0.

Later, the rise and fall will repeat.

Improving Other Perks

You'll often have the option to improve an existing Trait Perk when you complete a quest. For instance, particularly at the mundane level, you won't just get, say, a level 5 Cool Perk—you'll get a level 1 Cool Perk, then increase it by +1 four times.

Tricks and Magical Techniques

You may simplify the process of stretching your Skills to cover new applications (pg. 69) by taking an appropriate Perk.

A **Trick** enhances a mundane or Superior Skill—and naturally, if you use that trick often enough, it eventually becomes a part of your standard arsenal. I figure this is fast enough that you can expect to keep these Perks for around an Arc, two at the most—after that, you don't *need* the Perk any longer, because it's an established use for your underlying Skill.

The same is true for a **Magical Technique**, which enhances the options available for a magical Skill—but magic is harder to use and more infrequently used, so I'm not expecting you to permanently establish these techniques. That said, you can! I mean, basically, as soon as people start forgetting that you have this technique because of a Perk instead of just because it's part of your magic, you can talk to the HG about abandoning the Perk and just making it part of your Skill.

I just don't think that will happen very fast.

Accessory

You can receive a cool thing as a Perk: a bike, car, television, magic carpet, laser gun, robot landshark, god in a bottle, really high-quality flute, or whatever. An **Accessory** Perk like this counts as a temporary part of your character sheet, so you can take a wound instead of letting it happen if someone tries to misuse the thing, destroy the thing, or permanently take your cool thing away.

Miscellaneous Bonuses

A number of Perks offer miscellaneous bonuses, which pretty much do what they say on the tin. If your Perk gives a +3 Tool bonus to certain actions 1/book, you can get a +3 Tool bonus to those actions once per book. If your Perk "powers up" an inherent Skill by +1, then you count that Skill as one point higher than it actually is!

Miraculous Powers

Most of the miraculous Perks will offer you some sort of power. This is generally something that you'll have to define yourself—

Miraculous abilities are idiosyncratic and not limited by reason, so you'll have to build them by emulating one of the examples herein.

Defining Abilities

Powers marked with the **Defining** Icon give you a limited player control over things outside your character. I've only provided them at the mundane level, where they function as a gamble—you offer a hope, theory, or guess as to how something works.

Now, the HG describes and controls the world before you invoke a power like this.

And the HG describes and controls the world *after* you invoke a power like this.

So it's a little difficult to make this a proper gamble. It's awfully easy for this to be rigged behind the scenes, intentionally or not, to keep the bet from being lost or won before you even make it by an HG too ready to shoot you down or, conversely, so laid-back that they're happy to run with whatever you suggest.

So here's what we're going to do.

We're going to say that when you invoke a Defining power, whether or not this is to your advantage, the HG has to clear their head for a moment and put their preconceptions aside before they rule.

Adaptable Abilities

Perks marked with the **Struggle** Icon represent adaptability and willingness to work hard more than a specific reward thereof. They're usually variable Traits that you can change sometime each book.

Weird Magic

Powers marked with the **Lurid** Icon let you do weird, magical things with your ordinary Skills. Like all magic, this is unnatural—ordinary people can't learn to do this stuff, even though you're using an ordinary Skill to do it, and it's incompatible with the powers of **the Ace**.

Insights

Powers marked with the **Melodramatic** Icon give you access to HG hints on, e.g., NPC motivations, secrets behind the scenes, and suchlike.

Over the Top Stuff

Even at the mundane level, powers marked with the **Passionate** Icon are all about goofy, over-the-top, cinematic abilities. Even though ordinary people *shouldn't* be able to learn this stuff, evidently they can, because it's not *magic*.

You're just that awesome! Or, it's martial arts!

Pastoral Abilities

Powers marked with the **Pastoral** Icon track the subtle but mechanically relevant changes you've made to the world over the long course of one or more quests.

For instance, if there's a kid who feels safer in your company, you could represent that as a Pastoral effect. If there's a long stretch where this is mechanically irrelevant you'll generally treat it as a **Setting** Ability, instead, until it begins mattering again.

Setting Abilities

Powers marked with the **Setting** Icon represent your IC or OOC investment in a certain portion of the setting—a weight of authority or history that has accrued.

To keep this history and authority from being forgotten, a Perk like this lets you ask the HG for a micro-update on what's going on there every (Perk-specific) interval of time.

Mystical Abilities

Powers marked with the **Symbolic** Icon generally produce raw effects—things just *happen*, disregarding the normal rules for how things play out.

At the mundane level, this makes you better at "going with the flow."

Arc-Limited Rewards

Particularly at the mundane level, rewards may require a certain level of your Arc Trait to achieve. I'm expecting this to be "your Arc Trait before completing the quest"—

Since they're all suggestions, I can't enforce that or anything, and you can go with what feels right to your group, but on the whole, if you complete your first Arc and you're looking to see whether you can pick up something that's only available at Arc 1+?

You probably can't, or at least, probably shouldn't.

You were Arc 0 for the duration of the quest, and I don't like the idea that the rewards available might depend on whether you completed, or just barely fell short of completing, the Arc. It's actually *reasonable* for that to matter, in character, but it's too fussy, you know?

Questions

The suggested Perks are often pretty generic, so I'm leaving the answers to a lot of questions in your hands. For instance, there are some Perks that let you radiate inspiration, purity, or whatever in an "aura"—but you'll notice that the various Aura Perks don't answer questions like:

- "do people need to see me to be inspired by me?"
- "how far away can my radiant purity hurt the living dead?" *and*
- "can I target specific people and leave others unaffected?"

That's going to be up to what the Perk actually *is*, to how you got it, and to the circumstances of earning and using it specific to your game.

That said, in cases where the exact definition and function of a Perk is variable, and you pick something that isn't very useful? You can probably also assume that you can expand on it and develop it with practice just like you could some sort of Skill.

Bindings Arcs

Bindings Arcs focus on sealed, bound powers: you develop a facility with containment and targeted use of wicked, forbidden, or dangerous things. They look something like this:

- Quest 1 establishes you as the kind of person who does this.
- Quest 2 lets you help someone or do something important.
- Quest 3 lets you enact a big, decisive plan.

Then, if you haven't got enough XP to finish out the Arc, or just plain *want* to do more, you can go on to do:

- Quest 4 where you remake the world into something more like you think it ought to be.
- Quest 5 where you explore the effects that that had.

This Arc uses a really loose definition of "wicked, forbidden, or dangerous." I mean, we're not just talking about someone who calls up the powers of Hell, here; this is the Arc to use if you have a pet wolf, command a division of not-100%-clean cops, or act as the government handler for a reckless kid and their marvelous wish-granting engine—

If you're someone whose *genre* is "the person who controls dangerous forces," I mean.

If you're the innocent playing with forces that would kill anyone else; or the pragmatist in control of a ruthless power; or the selfish jerk riding the tiger; or the person who deals with edge and liminal forces because there's nobody else who can:

That's what this Arc is about.

Bindings 1

1:

A Wicked Partner

You have to work with, partner with, or tie your fate to something wrong or in disfavor: a beast; Bleak power; cruel or disliked person; taboo or ill-favored entity; or maybe a ghost, vampire, or witch...

Reward: you've hammered out a working relationship with them.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Maybe you get a powerful spiritual Bond to that creature?

- **Leashed Fury**. Gain a new miraculous power that lets you mentally communicate with, and command, some beast or "wicked" person. It's probably 0 MP to talk to them but there's an MP cost or time delay to command them. There may be a limitation or further cost when it comes to commanding a person or violating the nature of a beast—whatever it takes to make the players comfortable with things, I think.
- **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk connecting you to the creature.
- Gain +1 to a Bond Perk related to the creature or the quest.

Maybe you've won some treasure or payment for working with them?

- **Accessory**. A magically perfect possession—you can spend miraculous Will when taking action with this treasure.

Maybe you're becoming weirder, yourself?

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 2 Superior Skill Perk representing increasing alienation or inhumanity of some sort.
- An existing Superior Skill Perk (of that sort) rises to level 3.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Maybe your relationship to that creature deepens?

- **Connection**. Gain a level 1-2 Connection Perk to a "wicked" person or "beast."
- +1 to such a Connection Perk (max 5)
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to a Bond Perk that's somehow related to the creature or the quest, up to the Arc Trait's rating

Maybe you've won some treasure or payment for working with them?

- **Accessory**. An expensive object or well-tuned machine.

Maybe you're becoming a little weird yourself?

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 1 Superior Skill Perk representing increasing alienation or inhumanity of some sort.

1:

Am I OK?

You've long since started your work with wicked or disreputable things; you maybe even *are* one. You're not sure how to live with that. Does it make you evil? A bad person? Trouble? Do you have a place in society?

You're thinking about stuff like that.

Reward: you've come to terms with things, a little.

Alternate Bindings 1 Quest

Bindings 2

2:

Deep Trouble

There's someone who needs your help, or something you must do, *because* you work with the kinds of things you work with.

...Unfortunately, you have no idea what you're doing. This is big. This is complicated. Maybe leap in feet-first and hope to figure it out as you go?

Reward: you're oriented now. You have a plan.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You might earn a new contact or associate:

- **Bond**. Gain a new level 1 Bond Perk...
- **Connection**. Or a new level 2 Connection Perk...

...somehow connecting you to the person you helped, or someone else connected to the quest.

Or, since this Arc assumes that you're working with animals, soldiers, weapons, powers, or magic that you "shouldn't," maybe you've learned to control them better and to make them safer for others?

- **Bonus**. 1/chapter, this Perk acts as a +1 Tool for (choose one)...
  - selectively not hurting people when using a particular weapon or technique.
  - imprisoning, punishing, or restricting the movements of a dangerous servant, associate, or ally.
  - quickly assembling and deploying a particular group of soldiers, servants, or animals.
- **"They Know Your Scent."** It's not *perfect* but the powers you wield will *tend* not to get out of control and hurt people you care about—1/chapter, when the HG describes one of the wicked people, alien powers, or animals that you work with going wild and hurting someone, you can propose that they sense, remember, or share your interest in that person instead. The HG can accept or reject your idea, but has to clear their head and take a moment to consider it first.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You might still get a new contact or associate:

- **Bond**. Gain a new level 1-2 Bond Perk...
- **Connection**. Or a new level 2-3 Connection Perk...

...somehow connecting you to the person you helped, or someone else connected to the quest.

Or you might get a new ability—

- **Power**. This is
  - a power to protect someone from the kind of powers you wield;
  - a power to chain something related to the powers you wield;
  - a power to punish something related to the powers you wield; *or*
  - a power to summon something related to the powers you wield.

  And it's
  - a Major Miracle that you can use 1/book, or more often with 4 MP or to resolve an Issue;
  - a smaller miraculous power that you can use 1/chapter, or more often with MP;
  - a power you can use every scene, but it has some roleplaying or circumstantial condition that the HG thinks would be fun.

For instance, if you work with insects, you could have a seasonal power that banishes vermin from a large area for the season; or a weekly ability to call upon a swarm of bees; or a power to kill insects whenever you like by pointing in their general direction and snapping your fingers. I'm lowballing the power level in those examples; you can pick powers that are substantially stronger than that if that's what feels suitable to your game.

2:

This is Fixable

There's someone who needs your help, or something you must do, *because* you work with the kinds of things you work with.

...It'll be tough, but you know what to do.

Reward: you've tangibly helped them or made tangible progress.

Alternate Bindings 2 Quest

Bindings 3

3:

You risk yourself on a complicated and difficult plan. Usually you know what you're doing, and you're doing it right, but you're doing something so hard and complicated that you might lose midway through anyway.

Result: you win! ...unless you already lost. If you already lost, finishing this quest results in the ongoing catastrophe staggering to its natural halt.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You might change your nature—

- rewriting one of your Afflictions
- changing the details of a Perk
- moving 1-2 points between your existing Skills, or to a brand-new mundane Skill

Or you might attune yourself to an element—to something like *fire*, *shadows*, *plants*, or one of the classic **Spiritual** elements (pg. 515) like "the insects and the flowers."

- **Elemental Attunement**. Choose an Element to associate with your Bindings Arc. 1/chapter, you may use this Element as a +1 Tool for any reasonable action using or involving it.

Or, starting at Arc 1, you might be able to learn a new magical Skill tied to the Arc—something related to your bargains and strange powers.

- At Arc 1+:
  - **Magical Skill**. You gain a new level 1 magical Skill as a Perk associated with this Arc. You may only choose one such Skill for this Arc.
  - **Bond**. You gain a new level 1 Bond Perk conceptually related to one of your magical Skills or magical Skill perks.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to this Arc's magical Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You might change your nature—

- **Affliction**. You pick up a new Affliction with a level tied to this Arc.
- tweaking the details of 1-2 of your existing powers, making them a bit more pleasant to use either IC or OOC but not actually stronger or "better."

Or you might power up a bit—

- **Power Up**. You can strengthen one of your existing powers or make it easier to use. You can apply this Perk to one of your inherent powers or layer it on top of another Perk.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)

Or you might attune yourself to an element—to something like *fire*, *shadows*, *plants*, or one of the classic **Spiritual** elements (pg. 515) like "the insects and the flowers"—

- **Power**. Choose an Element to associate with this Bindings Arc, if you haven't. You gain a new miraculous ability—normally an every-few-hours kind of power, but it depends on what it does—that gives you miraculous control over that Element.

  You can pick one of the natural powers of the **Spiritual** Arc, using it at a level appropriate for your current Arc Trait, but it won't improve further without replacing this Perk.

Or gain some other new abilities—

- **Skill**. You gain a level 3 mundane Skill.
- **Magician's Path—**
  - Increase an existing magical Skill Perk to 3, exploring the limits of your magic.
  - Gain a level 1 Superior Skill Perk, as that magic changes you.
- At Arc 2+:
  - **Skill**: You gain a level 4 mundane Skill.



4:

You're making a proactive choice or gamble. You've decided to fix things, *change* things, or reveal the truth of how they already are.

Reward: you made an impact. You changed things. Was it right to do so? Time will tell.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Maybe you've become something awesome? Something that can legitimately define destiny? Just because you're a mundane character doesn't mean that you can't become an avatar of deity or the ruler of the realm of nightmares—it just means you need to work a lot harder!

- **Apotheosis**. 1/book, you can take on your full glory and power and use this Perk as a +3 Tool for anything appropriate. You may define this Perk in such a way that almost anything is appropriate, or hew closer to a specific title or power, as you and reason prefer.
- Arc 2+:
  - **Power Up**. Increase an inherent Skill or Bond that's relevant to this Arc by +1, up to the Arc Trait's rating. (This is always "+1, up to the Arc Trait's rating" instead of a number—if the Skill or Arc rating goes up, or even somehow goes down, the Power Up changes appropriately.) This can increase Shine, Cool, magical Skills, Superior Skills, and mundane Skills, but only while you keep this Perk.

Or maybe you've deepened your mastery of this Arc's magic?

- **Magical Technique**. Gain a new Obstacle 2-3 technique associated with one of your magical Skills—ideally a magical Skill Perk associated with this Arc.
- Arc 2+:
  - +1 to an existing magical Skill Perk associated with this Arc, up to the Arc Trait's rating.
  - +1 to an appropriate existing Bond Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Or maybe you've just gotten cooler?

- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- Arc 1+:
  - **Cool**. You gain a new level 1 Cool Perk.
  - +1 to an existing Cool Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You could learn a new alternate form or modality—you can become the expression of some great destiny-deciding principle and bring that principle personally to bear:

- **Power**. You have a new ability—either an Imperial or Major Miraculous ability—that you may use 1/book for free, or at other times for a cost of 4 MP. This transforms you into something theologically or metaphorically potent. For example, you become an avatar of winter who can stalk through the world bringing ice and snow, or an angel who can show people the flaws in their lives, or a congealing power that can hold the substrate of things together against a tide of the Outside. Usually this functions as a wish (a specific but abstract wish, like "I wish I were an avatar of winter") or Bleak power, so you can handle the details differently each time.

Or perhaps you gain an invincible, undying strength.

- **Health**. Gain a new Health Level as a Perk. This is normally a Divine Health Level, but if you hurried through the quest or don't *want* more Divine Health Levels, you could get a Tough or Normal Health Level instead.
- **Power**. Gain a new defensive power, probably roughly comparable to **Weathered**.
- **Bond**. Gain a new level 4 Bond Perk, something that sustains you.
- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction that expresses that inner strength.
- **"Guess You're Stuck with Me."** Gain a new, defined mechanism for coming back from death or absolute defeat. This operates on the player/game level rather than the character level so it's situationally better than immortality itself.

Or you master some form of magic associated with the Arc:

- **Power Up**. One of your inherent magical Skills improves to level 4-5 while you have this Perk.
- Improve an existing magical Skill Perk to level 4-5.

Bindings 5

5:

The Aftermath

You explore the consequences of a big decision you made for somebody else.

Result: it's time to turn your attention to something new.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

This could net you a cool companion or minion:

- **Connection**. Gain a level 2 Connection Perk to a new/underused Main Character. This gains you a sempai-kohai relationship with them and brings them into the game as your minion/pet/associate/friend rather than as an independent actor, although you can't expect that to stay true forever.

Or you could get a stronger version of the level 2 Perks—something to control and manage the powers that you wield:

- **Bonus**. 1/book, this Perk acts as a +3 Tool for (choose one)...
  - selectively not hurting people when using a particular weapon or technique.
  - imprisoning, punishing, or restricting the movements of a dangerous servant, associate, or ally.
  - quickly assembling and deploying a particular group of soldiers, servants, or animals.
- **"I Have... Certain Resources."** You have powerful forces under your control. To make sure that they don't get forgotten or drift off into irrelevance, 1/chapter you can invoke this Perk and ask the HG to narrate what's going on with them. (This doesn't have to be more than a sentence or two—"oh, your soldiers are doing training and thinking about winter supplies" would be enough.)
- **"They Know Your Scent."** As seen on pg. 394.
- At Arc 1+:
  - **Bond**: you gain a level 1 Bond Perk that helps you control some wicked or taboo creature, person, or beast.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to a Bond Perk that helps you control some wicked/taboo creature, person, or beast, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

5:

The Axis of the World

You become, or take up your mantle as, part of the axis of the world—e.g., the chain that holds evil at bay, the order that holds the world together, the power that binds all nightmares or dreams away from reality or makes what is alive to live.

Reward: you fulfill a key cosmos-stabilizing task.

Alternate Bindings 5 Quest

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

This could net you a cool companion or minion:

- **Power**. You gain the power to summon, banish, and to a limited extent control a new/underused Main Character.

Or improve your health and strength:

- **Health**. Gain a new Health Level as a Perk. This is normally a Divine Health Level, but if you hurried through the quest or don't *want* more Divine Health Levels, you could get a Tough or Normal Health Level instead.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 2 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate 2 MP.)
- **Power Up**. You can strengthen one of your existing powers or make it easier to use. You can apply this Perk to one of your inherent powers or layer it on top of another Perk.

Or do you improve your mastery over the powers you wield?

- **Power**. This is an impressive or even terrifying power to
  - protect someone from the kind of powers you wield;
  - chain something related to the powers you wield;
  - punish something related to the powers you wield; *or*
  - summon something related to the powers you wield.

And it's

- a Major or Imperial Miracle that you can use 1/chapter, or more often with MP;
- a meaningful power you can use at any time for an MP;
- a meaningful power you can use 1-2x/scene, or more often with MP.


Open

Knight Arcs

Knight Arcs let you take on a formal role in society or the cosmos and wield its perquisites and powers. They look something like:

- Quest 1 is about figuring out what you want to be.
- Quest 2 is about the vice that gets in your way.
- Quest 3 is an experience that shakes up your role.

Then, if you haven't got enough XP to finish out the Arc, or just plain *want* to do more, you can go on to do:

- Quest 4 is about making up for your mistakes.
- Quest 5 is about becoming something better than you were.

There are two ways to handle repeating this Arc. The first is just to scale up the ambition. First you want to be a singer. Then a *hit* singer. You know?

The other option is to shift the *kind* of thing you are looking for as you go, e.g.:

- "I want to *be* somebody."
- "OK, I'm the lost heir to the throne of the lake elves. I want to be *good* at that."
- "OK, I'm well-loved royalty, but I want to make the world a better place."
- "OK, I'm doing well, but this'll fall apart without me. I want us *all* to be better."
- "OK, I'm changing the world, but I want to understand why the world was so messed up in the first place, and whether changing it has a point!"

Knights probably escalate about that fast in an epic game, but you can feel free to take it a little slower if you're focused on pastoral stuff.

Knight 1

1:

You're putting on airs. You're dreaming big. Bigger than the life you have. You're *aspiring*, you know?

But you don't really know how to get there.

Reward: you've put a name to the thing you want to become, and you've put your feet on a legitimate path to making that aspiration real.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Sometimes that's enough to shape you—to change who you are:

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 1 Superior Skill reflecting your new aspiration or role.
- Arc 1+:
  - **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk tying you to the role.
  - +1 to an appropriate Bond Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Sometimes, since you don't know quite what you're looking for, you'll wind up picking up some odd tricks along the way:

- **Bonus**. 1/chapter, this Perk acts as a +1 or +2 Tool for some niche ability—not being lost, holding your breath underwater, juggling, or whatnot.

If you haven't changed much, maybe you picked up a mentor or acquaintance or grew closer to one of your friends?

- **Connection**. Gain a new level 1-2 Connection Perk.
- +1 to an existing Connection Perk (max 5)

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

At the miraculous level, there's a few different ways that this might change you:

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 2 Superior Skill reflecting your new aspiration or role.
- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk with a level based on this Arc.
- **Power Up**. Increase an inherent Skill or Bond that's relevant to this Arc by +1. (This is a modifier and not a number—if the inherent Skill or Bond goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.) This can increase Bonds, Shine, Cool, magical Skills, Superior Skills, and mundane Skills, but only while you keep this Perk.
- **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk reflecting your new aspiration or role.
- +1 to an appropriate Bond Perk

And again, you might pick up an odd trick or two along the way:

- **Power**. Gain a miraculous power covering some niche ability. You're never lost, you can breathe underwater, you can juggle perfectly, or whatever. This is normally a free and even automatic power, but the HG can impose an MP cost if you use it too often or if you've picked a power a little stronger than they think would fit.

This isn't really any *technically* different from the last option, but I wanted to highlight it. It's possible that you'll get better at communicating with the people around you:

- **Power**. a 0-MP miraculous power for understanding and communicating with people, such as **Well-Liked in (Region)** (pg. 401).

Knight 2

2:

This quest is a story of the thing that's in your way. Think of it as a "documentary"—it's not about how you *conquer* your problem, it's just a tool to help explore what that problem *is*.

A vice? A weakness? An enemy? Or is it just that you're kind of raw and new?

Outcome: this chapter of your life is over—things are about to change. You've either just made a big decision, just gotten the first big sign of that change, or you'll do so tonight or tomorrow morning.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Is the thing in your way a vice? Maybe you pick up...

- **Bonus**. 1/chapter, this Perk acts as a +2 Tool for (choose one):
  - indulging your vice;
  - dodging the consequences of your vice.
- **Magical Technique**. Gain a new technique for a magical Skill—something that your vice tempts you to use.
- Arc 1+:
  - **Magical Skill.** Gain a level 1 magical Skill directly on point for your vice—e.g., "Drunken Kung Fu" or "Gambler's Magic." You may have only one such Skill tied to this Arc.
  - +1 to this Arc's magical Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Or more generally—you could pick up:

- **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk representing your vice, weakness, or failing.
- Arc 2+:
  - +1 to a Bond Perk representing your vice, weakness, or failing, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

If none of that fits then you probably can't power up your flaw directly at the mortal level. Instead, you could try:

- **Bonus**. 1/chapter, this acts as a +1 Tool for doing something that you learned to do during the course of this quest. What is that?
- **Connection**. Gain a level 1-2 Connection Perk representing your lifestyle in general, or to someone you interacted with a lot this quest.
- +1 to an appropriate existing Connection Perk (max 5).

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

The simplest outcome for exploring your weakness, frailty, or vice is to express it in a new Bond:

- **Bond**. Gain a level 4 Bond Perk representing your vice, weakness, or frailty.

You could also gain in power a little:

- **Cool**. Gain a new Cool Perk at level 1.
- **Power Up**. Increase either your inherent Cool or an inherent mundane Skill that's relevant to this Arc by +1. (This is a modifier and not a number—if the inherent Skill goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.)
- +1 to a Cool Perk

Or maybe the "weight" of the quest—the sense of wrongness, and impending change—piles up into a completely new power:

- **Power.** Gain a miraculous power that lets you destabilize something or break boundaries—an Imperial miracle with problematic connotations or a miracle with a slow but powerful effect. For instance, you could learn to dissolve part of the world around you into the Outside or gain a 1/book Imperial miracle that lets you free anyone from anything that is imprisoning them or holding them back.

Well-Liked in (Region)

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—invoke 1-2x/scene to become instantly simpatico with a (Region) NPC
- 1 MP—invoke a third or later time per scene

Pick a Region when you receive this power.

People in (Region) know you and you know them.

Invoke **Well-Liked** while talking to an NPC who lives in (Region) and you'll get an instant two-way surge of empathy and fellow-feeling as well as a summary of what they've been thinking about and doing for the past scene or hour of their life.



Knight 3

3:

The Challenge

Something infects you or tries to change you. Something challenges your conception of yourself.

Result: You err. Or fall from grace. Or are changed. Or possibly you grow.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Perhaps you wound up changed—

- rewriting one of your Afflictions
- changing the details of a Perk
- moving 1-2 points between your existing Skills, or to a brand-new mundane Skill
- Arc 2+:
  - **Variable Bond**. Gain a Bond with variable level equal to your Trust. Your changed self expresses itself more and more as you open yourself to great powers, the world, and numinous things.

This quest often intensifies the contrast between you and the world around you. So this might manifest as an "aura"—

- **Defensive Aura**: Pick a more specific special effect. 1/chapter, your presence can shelter the people around you in some fashion. This is an action that you take that adds +1 to the Obstacle (max 3) for relevant attacks.
- **Support Aura**: Pick a more specific special effect. 1/chapter, your presence can support and help the people around you in some fashion. This is an action that you take, that acts as a +1 Tool for others taking certain actions. In the event that your presence would already normally be a Tool to those actions, this improves it by a further +1 (max +3).
- **Offensive Aura**: Pick a more specific special effect. 1/chapter, your presence can trouble those around you. This is an action that you take that adds +1 to the Obstacle (max 3) for a certain category of actions, such as "evil magic," "breathing," "speaking," or "feeling at ease."

Starting at Arc 1+, you can pick something that this path, your errors, or some symbiotic alien power is turning you into. Let's call it your "Evolution." It might take more than one Superior Skill to express it (e.g., a wind-spirit might need Superior Celestian and Superior Wind-Spirit), but you'll have only one Evolution per Arc.

You can choose:

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a new level 1 Superior Skill Perk relevant to your Evolution;
- +1 to an Arc-related Superior Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating; *or*
- rewrite an existing Superior Skill Perk associated with your Evolution.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Usually this quest has changed you in some way. So you might pick up:

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk.
- **Variable Bond or Affliction.** Gain a Bond or Affliction Perk with variable level equal to your Trust. Your changed self expresses itself more and more as you open yourself to great powers, the world, and numinous things; betrayal might temporarily revert you.
- **Bond**. Gain a new level 3 Bond Perk.
- **Transformation**—
  - Increase an existing Superior Skill Perk to 3, developing your natural abilities.
  - Gain a level 1 magical Skill Perk, as you learn to push it past the limits of the natural.

Or you might grow in strength through your adversities:

- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- **Power Up**. Increase an inherent mundane or Superior Skill that's relevant to this Arc by +1. (This is a modifier and not a number—if the inherent Skill goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.)

Or, as with the mundane Perks, your time in a high-contrast environment might have taught something about you to shine through—

- **Power**. You can invoke some sort of miraculous aura around yourself, giving a defensive, offensive, or support effect to appropriate characters in your vicinity.

3:

A Fish out of Water

You're taken completely outside your normal context. Maybe you try to stick to your role and vice and aspirations. Maybe you take a break from them. I don't know! Everything is different for a while.

Reward: This has a two-part reward:

- first, you have new inspiration about how to be what you want to be and do what you want to do.
- second, if there's nothing preventing you—that is, if there's no pressing story reason why you have to stay out of your element—it's time to wrap things up and come back home or back to normal.

Alternate Knight 3 Quest

Knight 4

4:

You've fallen short of who you wanted to be. You've erred, or lost your path. Now you have to make amends, and grow.

Outcome: Redemption is an ongoing process, but you've made a start. If possible, an NPC acknowledges that. Either way, the weight of guilt and wrongness on you lightens.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Conceptually, this strengthens you, frees you to move, or opens your mind to new options and hopes. The world isn't necessarily quite so allegorical at the mundane level—sometimes, in the real world, people will actually let go of guilt or whatever and *not* fly physically free—but even so, I'm going to start with metaphorically resonant ideas.

"Strengthening" you looks something like:

- **Health**. You've gained a new Normal Health Level.
- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.
- **Magical Technique**. Gain a new Obstacle 2-3 technique for one of your magical Skills, ideally building on and enhancing an existing technique.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- **Accessory**. You gain access to a useful defensive or force-multiplying object.
- At Arc 1+:
  - **Cool**. You gain a new level 1 Cool Perk.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to an existing Cool Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating
  - +1 to an existing Bond Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating

Freeing you to move looks something like:

- **Accessory**. You gain access to an unusual vehicle.
- **Ticket**. This Perk is a Superior Skill 1 granting you access to a particular road, vehicle, place, or transportation method. In short, your right to use it is so well-established as to give you 1 Edge against anybody trying to stop you.

Enhanced insight would look like this:

- **Bonus**. You've learned a reasoning trick that you can apply as a player—e.g., you've gotten good at flipping problems around, following the money, doing Bayesian analysis, or whatever. 1/chapter, this technique also acts as a +1 Tool for reaching good results by doing that thing.
- **"I'll Explain Later"**. You've learned specific secret knowledge, domain knowledge, or a reasoning trick that doesn't translate completely to the player realm—either because it's a big pile of disconnected esoteric knowledge or because the reasoning trick is basically an occult handwave (e.g. "numeric calculations," "Ars Morana," "astrology," or "what feels logical here?") Anyway, this can give you an insight into what's going on; 1/chapter, you can ask the HG what that insight reveals.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Again, your time on this quest may strengthen you—

- **Health**. Gain a new Health Level as a Perk. This is normally a Divine Health Level, but if you hurried through the quest or don't *want* more Divine Health Levels, you could get a Tough or Normal Health Level instead.
- **Power Up**. Extend the flexibility of a miraculous ability.
- **Power Up**. Make an existing miraculous ability Major.
- **Power Up**. Increase a level 2-4 Skill by +1. This can increase Cool, Shine, magical Skills, Superior Skills, and mundane Skills, but only while you keep this Perk and have an underlying level 2+ Skill.
- +1 to a level 2-4 Skill Perk, including Cool, Shine, Superior, magical, and mundane Skills.

Or lighten some of the burdens on you in general—

- **Lighter Heart**. 1/book, you can invoke this Perk as if it were a Recharge Token. The HG may require you to do something redemptive before this power becomes available again (that is, once used, you must wait until a new book *and* until you've done something redemptive again before this power is again available for use.)

Or give you a power useful for weathering trouble, seeing past the surfaces of things, or getting from place to place—

- **Power**. Gain a relatively strong defensive, transportation, or insight-related miracle. Talk to the HG about what's appropriate for the game in terms of power and cost.

Knight 5

5:

You have it in sight now. You know where you're going. This is the quest that takes you that last step to becoming something better than you've been.

Reward: And now you've become that. If possible, an NPC you care about acknowledges that. If not, then the universe does—one day, it's just... done.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

The simplest way to reward yourself for this quest is to directly change your character:

- rewriting one of your Afflictions
- rewriting one of your Bonds
- **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk representing the change in your character.
- Arc 2+:
  - +1 to a Bond Perk representing that change, up to the Arc Trait's rating.
  - **Variable Bond**. Gain a Bond Perk with variable level equal to your Calling—usually an *identity*, a self, a person that you become more and more as you live your ordinary life and grow into your duty or calling, but which becomes less important for a while once that calling is resolved.

Often, though, you've changed in intangible ways—possibly too subtle to express even with a Bond. This might manifest in the game as:

- **Connection**. You've earned a level 2 Connection Perk to a new/underused Main Character, who admires you for the change.
- **"I Really Am Different, Aren't I."**: 1/book, you can invoke this power and ask the HG to narrate an NPC's thoughts on how your character has changed. You can pick a specific NPC, but normally you pick something like "someone friendly" or "someone with surprising insight."

  If appropriate you receive this information IC—you accidentally read a bit of a diary, or some weird experiment with telepathy happens, or you pick up the information in symbolic form while in some weird dream-world or Bluebell Park or the Outside. (If you're in the Deep Under or on Little Island, it may even be a genuine voiceover.)
- At Arc 2+:
  - **Auctoritas**. Choose whether this Arc protects you from the Bleak power of the Outside or protects some feature of your character from the power of wishes. You gain a level 1 Auctoritas protecting you, or that feature, against those effects.
  - +1 to a previously obtained Auctoritas Perk of that form (max 3)

Sometimes the most important thing about this quest is something you've *achieved*:

- **"You may have heard of me."**: In this or a recently completed quest, you've changed the world. To make sure that this doesn't get forgotten/drift into irrelevance, 1/book, you can explain to the HG how you think it should play into the course of events. They don't have to go along with it, but they have to listen; and that chapter or the next chapter, they have to narrate how the change *is* playing into the course of events.
- **"It's a Living."** You have an important role in the world. To make sure this doesn't get forgotten/drift into irrelevance, you can ask the HG 1/chapter to narrate something to do with the politics of the role or someone being impressed by it. (This doesn't have to be more than a sentence or two—"oh, someone comes by to ask for a favor again" or "you have to make a new ruling or two on doctrine this week" suffices!)
- **Accessory**. Along the way you picked up a really cool treasure—something hardly anybody else in Town (or wherever) possesses.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You've become a very different person:

- **Variable Bond or Affliction**. Gain a Bond or Affliction Perk with variable level equal to your Calling. This is that very different person that you've become—and will become to a greater and greater extent as you live your ordinary life and grow into your duty or calling, but which will lose its grip on you for a while once that Calling Issue is resolved.
- **Power**. Gain a powerful utility power that takes a few minutes' work (or 4 MP) to activate: you can shapechange, or create bridges, or change temperatures, or turn people into animals or vice versa for a day.
- **Swap**. Ditch a magical or Superior Skill Perk and replace it with a new one, level 4-5.
- **Swap**—
  - Ditch a level 1-3 magical or Superior Skill;
  - Replace it with a new magical or Superior Skill of comparable level; *and*
  - Take a new **Power Up** Perk that raises that new Skill to level 4-5.
- You can also replace a level 4-5 Superior or magical Skill with a new magical or Superior Skill at the same level without using a Perk at all.

Or maybe what's more important is the things you've done along the way?

- **Affliction**. Gain a powerful new Affliction that changes or expresses a change made in the world.
- **Accessory**. Gain a potent item of mystical regalia.

Or that you've earned the loyalty of a new/underused Main Character?

- **Connection**. As expressed with a level 2 Connection Perk.
- **Affliction**. Or an Affliction.

Otherworldly Arcs

Otherworldly Arcs take you outside yourself—they connect you to worlds of spirit, nature, life and death, and other aspects of yourself. You dream powerful dreams, communicate with spirit allies, and become something other than you were.

This almost always echoes the experiences of religious ecstacy—of holy trances.

You fly from your body. You become one with storms or forests. You are eaten and torn apart by spirits, only to come back with medicine.

This isn't because the Arc requires you to be a spiritual person, or to believe in that sort of thing, or to follow a specific ecstatic tradition: rather, that's just what this kind of Arc is like. Internet browsing? Magical training? Intensive psychiatric rehab? Learning to control a giant robot?

This is the way they play out.

- Quest 1: dreams and otherworldly experiences connect you to some external power.
- Quest 2: the path you're on scares you; burdens you.
- Quest 3: something is devouring you; growing inside you; taking you over.

That's a pretty horrifying place to leave it, but a lot of the time it *does* plateau there—you finish the Arc, and you've been marked by it, but you're still here. Maybe you'll go back for another round? Maybe you'll do something else.

Or maybe you haven't gotten enough XP to finish out the Arc yet, or maybe it just *can't* end there, you can't make it. You have to go on to do:

- Quest 4: you're lost to yourself. You're not *you* any longer.
- Quest 5: you reconcile with someone or something you've been fighting.

There's also an alternative ending quest where you merge with some great spiritual force and become its exemplar, avatar, or kin.

Otherworldly 1

1:

Troubled Dreams

You're having dreams or otherworldly experiences that connect you to something beyond and outside yourself.

Afterwards: you know what you have to do about this—a path you are called to walk, or something you must do to keep these experiences under control. It is possible that you've found 2-3 options; if so, it is possible to choose wrongly.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Did you also develop a power related to your dreams?

- **Superior Skill**. Gain Superior Dreamer 1 as a Perk, representing your increased facility in handling surreal and dream-like environments.
- **Magical Technique**. Gain a new Obstacle 2-3 technique for one of your magical Skills, ideally something relating to dreams.
- **Bonus**. You have some sort of power relating to dreams or visions. For instance, you might be extra-creative in the hour after waking up, or occasionally "feel" the right direction to go or thing to bet on, or learn to do very well without sleep. 1/chapter, this Perk acts as a +1 Tool for doing something like that.

Did you meet and form a connection to some sort of ally spirit?

- **Bonus**. 1/chapter, you can call upon your ally spirit as (choose one):
  - a +1 Tool for a narrow set of actions;
  - a +1 Tool for any action, but only when your spirit is "near;"
  - a +1 Tool for any action, but with some consequence—the spirit affects you.
- **Superior Skill**. Gain a new level 1 Superior Skill derived from harboring that spirit inside your body, mind, or soul.
- **Connection**. Gain a new level 1-2 Connection Perk connecting you to that ally.
- +1 to an existing Connection Perk connecting you to that ally (max 5).

1:

The Hole in the World

There's something wrong with the world. Chaos has slipped into your nice ordered existence, or maybe something's always *been* wrong and you've just now realized that you care.

Afterwards: you know what you have to do. It is possible that you've found 2-3 options instead of one; if so, it is possible to choose wrongly.

Alternate Otherworldly 1 Quest

Or did you attune yourself to an element—to something like *fire*, *shadows*, *plants*, or one of the classic **Spiritual** elements (pg. 515) like "the long days of summer"?

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 1 Superior Affinity to that element.
- **Connection**. Gain a new level 1-2 Connection Perk connecting you to that element.
- +1 to an existing Connection Perk connecting you to that element (max 5).

Starting at Arc 1+, you can define a magical Skill for this Arc. You can only have one such Skill for this Arc.

Are you beginning to learn that magic from your dreams?

- At Arc 1+:
  - **Magical Skill**. Gain a new level 1 magical Skill Perk for this Arc.
  - **Bond**. Gain a new level 1 Bond, related in some fashion to one of your magical Skills or magical Skill Perks.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to a Bond Perk or magical Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.
  - **Variable Bond**. Gain a Bond Perk suitable for this magic with variable level equal to your Trust. Your magic becomes stronger and stronger as you open yourself to great powers, the world, and numinous things; betrayal and mistrust, if it resolves the Issue, might strip you temporarily of this power.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Did you gain a power relating to dreams (or possibly just generally "altered states?")

- **Power**. You gain a new miraculous or Imperial power relating to this stuff—e.g.,
  - you can peer into someone's dreams while conscious,
  - you can send someone a message in dreams,
  - you can touch someone to invoke a shared vision,
  - you can touch someone to inflict a hallucination,
  - you can access miraculous Will while sleepwalking,
  - you can access miraculous Will while in Bluebell Park,
  - you can do research at a miraculous library in your dreams,
  - you can "wake up elsewhere in a cold sweat" instead of taking a wound, 1/book
  - you can protect people around you from spiritual attack while dreaming,
  - you can spirit-walk while dreaming, *or*
  - an Affliction that everyone around you falls asleep when your REM sleep starts

Or build a deep connection to some element of the world?

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 2 Superior Affinity to that element.

You'll often meet a spirit or ally in your dreams or on an otherworldly journey. It could be a mentor or helper, but it often is or creates a symbiote that sets up shop inside your body, mind, or soul.

So the last power option we'll talk about here is based on that:

- **Power**. You gain a new power based on this ally or spirit: typically something you can call upon 1/chapter (or more often, if you spend 1-2 MP)

You're on a scary or difficult path. Part of you is resisting—clinging to the way things used to be. Even if you're on this path by choice, it's scary, or hard, or against your natural way of thinking, or costing something you really hate having to give up.

Afterwards: You release some of that. More of you accepts that you can't go back.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You'll often find yourself saddled with an unwanted responsibility or power—

- **Bonus**. This is a power that lets you fix—heal, repair, or protect—something that you didn't really want to be responsible for. 1/book, this Perk acts as a +3 Tool to doing so.
- **Bonus**. This is a power that lets you get or access somewhere unusual—somewhere you don't or at least didn't actually really want to be able to go. 1/chapter, this power acts as a +2 Tool for getting there.

Or you'll gain a bit more Connection to the ally spirit we mentioned in step 1—

- +1 to that Connection Perk, if you had one.

Or you can explore the idea that this is a vice, or that a vice is holding you back—

- **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk representing your vice, weakness, or failing.
- Arc 2+:
  - +1 to a Bond Perk representing your vice, weakness, or failing, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

At the miraculous level, the unwanted responsibilities and powers you'll pick up are a bit more extreme:

- **Power**. Gain a miraculous or Imperial power that lets you fix something—heal, repair, or protect something—you didn't really want to be responsible for fixing.
- **Power**. Gain a miraculous or Imperial power that opens paths to somewhere you didn't really want to go.

Or you might strengthen your ally spirit:

- **Power**. Gain a power (typically a 1/book Imperial miracle) from an ally or spirit met in dreams or during an otherworldly experience.
- **Power Up**. +1 to your Connection to your ally spirit, even if that Connection is 0, and to the extent feasible they become a useful NPC rather than a background character and powerset.

You might express a vice or acquire a curse:

- **Bond**. Gain a level 4 Bond Perk representing your vice, weakness, frailty, or curse.

Learning or getting a little better at magic is possible, since you're on a difficult path:

- **Magical Skill**. Gain a level 2 magical Skill Perk.
- **Skill**. Gain a level 2-3 mundane Skill Perk for a weird and kind of magical or at least unusual Skill.

If none of that fits, maybe clinging to your past will improve one of your existing Skills:

- **Power Up**. Increase an inherent mundane or magical Skill by +1, to a maximum of 3. (This is always "+1, to a maximum of 3" and not a specific number—if the inherent Skill goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.)



Otherworldly 3

3:

Something is trying to *make* you into something *else*.

There's usually a sense that it's trying to take you over, devour you from within, kick you out of your life, or something.

Or maybe it's the other way around: maybe it's *pulling* you.

Result: You find a part of yourself that hasn't changed, or won't.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

This quest often changes or marks you—

- you can rewrite an Affliction or Bond;
- you rename and adjust a Skill, or move a point from one inherent Skill to another;
- **Superior Skill**. You gain a new level 1 Superior Skill, reflecting inherent inhumanity.
- Arc 2+:
  - +1 to an appropriate Bond Perk or Superior Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Or teaches you something strange—

- **Magical Technique**. You express the quest's effects on you by gaining a new technique for an existing magical Skill.
- **Power Up**. One of your mundane or Superior Skills gains a supernatural twist. You can invoke this power 1-2x/book to treat that Skill as a level 2 Superior Skill for the duration of a scene (complete with up to 2 Edge and the ability to do borderline-supernatural things.) In addition to its other effects, spending a Recharge Token automatically refreshes your available uses of this power.

Or perhaps you become a more dangerous opponent even for miraculous things?

- **Accessory**. You gain a rare weapon.
- Arc 1+:
  - **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Perhaps the most important thing is that you've found a key part of yourself and who you are:

- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- **Power Up**. Set an inherent level 1-5 Superior Skill to level 4. (This Perk does not change with the Skill value, as long as it remains positive.)
- **More than Human**. Gain a level 1 Superior Skill Perk showcasing the inhuman element of what you've found about yourself, and *also* gain one of the following (potentially using a second Perk slot):
  - Improve an existing mundane Skill Perk to level 4.
  - **Power Up**. Set an inherent level 1-5 mundane Skill to level 4. (This Perk does not change with the chosen Skill's value, as long as it remains positive.)
- **Variable Affliction**. Gain an Affliction Perk with variable level equal to your Trust. The more open you are to great powers, numinous things, and the world, the better you're able to express *yourself*.

Or perhaps what really matters is how you've changed—

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk.
- **Power Adjustment**. Change an existing power, making it stronger but also either harder to control or more rarely available. When you discard this Perk, you can choose whether to discard the power adjustment or make it permanent.

The experience might have made you a more dangerous opponent:

- **Accessory or Power**. Gain control of a powerful weapon.
- **Power**. Your touch *becomes* a powerful weapon of some sort.
- **Superior Skill or Power**. You've learned a powerful destructive or transformative technique—a miraculous power you unleash in short bursts or a level 2-3 Superior Skill Perk that lets you do something like throwing lightning or playing a style of Chess so cold that it lowers your opponent's body temperature or ices over the room. This is often based on one of your existing Skills—that is, you'd get Superior Ice Chess 2-3 on top of an inherent Skill in Chess, or a lightning-throwing ability on top of and as an extension of an inherent mundane ability with Martial Arts.

Otherworldly 4

4:

You've lost a key part of your sense of *self*.

You look for a way to get that back.

Reward: you discover that it wasn't really gone. If that's observably impossible—e.g., you're mourning a severed limb—you discover either that your terminology was off and what you were really missing was something else that *isn't* gone, e.g., the sense of yourself as a whole person or your ability to play an instrument; or, you find a potential in you to recover it.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

When the dust settles you might find yourself with a new power that you hadn't had before:

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 1 Superior Skill Perk representing something you've gained and learned from this process.
- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.
- **Magical Technique**. Gain a new Obstacle 2-3 technique for one of your magical Skills.

Or we could focus specifically on the power to exist, the power to be yourself, that you have found:

- **Bonus**. 1/book, you can use this power as a +3 Tool for doing something that fits your core nature and/or competencies—basically, you can now *be yourself* super-hard and to exceptional effect.

Or on how *good* that feels:

- Gain 2-3 Recharge Tokens.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Finishing this quest may grant you a neat inherent power:

- **Power**. You get a relatively inherent miraculous power—e.g., flight, or the ability to snap your fingers and have a target in sight range get blasted with lightning[71].

Or it might increase the potency of one of your existing powers:

- **Power Up.** Extend the flexibility of a miraculous ability.
- **Power Up**. Make an existing miraculous ability Major.
- **Power Up**. Set an inherent level 1-5 Bond to level 4. (This Perk does not change with the Bond's value, so long as it remains nonzero.)
- **Power Up**. Increase a level 2-4 Skill by +1. This can increase Cool, Shine, Superior Skills, and mundane Skills, but only while you keep this Perk and have an underlying level 2+ Skill.
- +1 to a level 2-4 Skill or Bond Perk, including Cool, Shine, Superior, and mundane Skills.

(I've omitted magical Skills intentionally in that last entry—magical Skills, after all, are fundamentally powers alien to you, and this quest's reward is finding yourself!)

Or this quest might offer you access to a deep store of inner strength—

- **Lighter Heart**. 1/book, you can invoke this power as if it were a Recharge Token. The HG may require you to do something that reminds you of who you are—some characteristic or affirming activity—before this power becomes available again. (That is, once used, you must wait until a new book *and* until you've done something identity-affirming before this power is again available for use.)

Part of losing and then recovering yourself could unlock a new alternate form or modality:

- **Power**. You have a new ability—either an Imperial or Major Miraculous ability—that you may use 1/book for free, or at other times for a cost of 4 MP. This transforms you into something theologically or metaphorically potent. For example, you become an avatar of winter who can stalk through the world bringing ice and snow, or an angel who can show people the flaws in their lives, or a congealing power that can hold the substrate of things together against a tide of the Outside. Usually this functions as a wish (a specific but abstract wish, like "I wish I were an avatar of winter") or Bleak power, so you'll be able to handle the details differently each time.

71 You can probably invoke this power at any time for an MP or maybe you get 1-2 free uses per scene, starting mid-scene, and can use it more often or earlier in the scene than that by spending MP. See the powers of **the Ace** or **Child of the Ash** on pg. 530 or 508 for a good sense of what a person's "inherent" abilities might be like.

Otherworldly 5

5:

Live Together, Die Alone

You reconcile with someone or something you've been fighting.

Result: you help them find peace, acceptance, or find their way back from being lost.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

This process often strengthens you and makes you hale:

- **Health**. You've gained a new Normal Health Level.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- At Arc 1+:
  - **Cool**. Gain a level 1 Cool Perk.
  - **Shine**. Gain a level 1 Shine Perk.
  - +1 to an existing Cool or Shine Perk (max 3).
- At Arc 3+:
  - **Health**. You've gained a new Tough Health Level.

You may also physically change, becoming someone completely different—not so much from the quest itself, unless you choose the alternative version, as from the culmination of an entire Arc:

- you can take your inherent Skill points spent on mundane Skills and Superior Skills and re-divide them between (new or old) mundane Skills, Superior Skills, and Shine.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

At the miraculous level, this quest might still strengthen you and make you hale:

- **Health**. Gain a new Health Level as a Perk. This is normally a Divine Health Level, but if you hurried through the quest or don't *want* more Divine Health Levels, you could get a Tough or Normal Health Level instead.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)

Or the cumulative weight of the Arc and its insights might grant you a new power—

- **Power**. Gain a flexible miraculous power, typically either a miraculous power you can use every scene or some sort of 1/chapter or 1/book Imperial miracle—I'm thinking something like "can see through deception," "can find a way," or "can bring stories to life."

Or it might physically reshape you into something extremely powerful:

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction representing your new form (e.g. "Affliction: I am the phoenix.")
- **New Form**—
  - you can take your inherent Skill points spent on mundane Skills and Superior Skills and re-divide them between (new or old) mundane Skills, Superior Skills, and Shine.
  - you *also* receive 1-3 power-up Perks, each adding +1 to one of your new Superior Skills.

5:

Blurring the Boundaries

You merge with some spiritual force. You become its exemplar or its host. You are you and you are also *that*.

Result: you've grown into who the new combined-self you will be.

Alternate Otherworldly 5 Quest

Storyteller Arcs

Storyteller Arcs focus on telling stories that come true, or, more generally, on changing the boundary between ideas and life.

A Storyteller Arc will go something like this:

- Quest 1 is told in a mood of *interest* and *excitement*.
- Quest 2 is more of a mood of determination, stubbornness, or pride.
- Quest 3 is more about confusion, puzzlement, and being a little lost.

And maybe you finish that up and you're not lost any more. You pull everything together. You *solve* it and you tie it up with a bow.

Or maybe you haven't gotten enough XP to finish the Arc yet, or maybe it just *can't* end there, you can't make it.

- Quest 4 is more about transcendence—rising above the world and yourself.
- Quest 5 is more about katabasis—about a mythical descent into the underworld, place of death, or the coast. (That is, "dealing with grief" and "become queen of the beach" both work well.) Less metaphorically, you have something really rough to deal with and you deal with it here.

I'm not implying that transcendence is always followed by a fall here—it's perfectly plausible for you to do quest 4 and finish the Arc there without needing to go on to do quest 5. What I *am* implying is that if you *do* find your Arc unfinished after reaching that summit, you'll probably have to fall a lot farther than just "back down."

Storyteller 1

1:

You're excited about the future. You've found or gotten involved in something neat!

Result: Bored now? Or still awesome? You've gotten used to it either way.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Maybe you've learned to see things in a new way?

- **Dramatic Vision**. 1/chapter, you can invoke a special vision mode[72] that lets you see highlighted dramatic information about things—e.g., a readout of a person's stats as they'd be in a computer RPG or sports almanac; information on people's blood type, zodiac animal, and favorite foods; a free labeling of troublemakers vs. sheep; notes on romantic compatibility; and the like. This technique is considered to be magic.

Or maybe you've learned to handwave one of life's little inconveniences?

- **Dramatic Life**. You're a little stylized. 1/chapter, you can waive a level 1-2 Obstacle for some particular unrealistic thing you do, e.g.,
  - changing clothes in the blink of an eye;
  - wandering the sewer without getting dirty;
  - people not noticing the giant axe you're always carrying around; *or*
  - using staplers, guns, pez dispensers, etc. without ever refilling them.
- **Magical Technique**. You've learned a new Obstacle 1-2 technique for one of your magical Skills that lets you do something cool.[73]
- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.

Or, just possibly, you radiate awesome?

- At Arc 1+:
  - **Shine**. Gain a new level 1 Shine Perk.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to a Shine Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Maybe you want a stronger version of the Dramatic Vision/Dramatic Life perks, above?

- **Power**. Gain a miraculous version of "Dramatic Vision," above—a special visual mode that lets you see highlighted dramatic information about things.
- **Power**. Gain a miraculous power that waves away some circumstantial obstacle, e.g. allowing instant clothes changes or making *sure* everyone ignores the giant axe you're always carrying around.

Maybe you've become a little more stylized?

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk.
- **Variable Affliction.** Gain an Affliction Perk with variable level equal to your Mystery. The less others understand you, the more powerful your ways become.
- **Magical Skill.** Gain a level 2 character-trait or genre-trait magical Skill, e.g.
  - "can always have flip-charts"
  - "the power of friendship" *or*
  - "gun magic"

Or, just possibly, you radiate awesome?

- **Shine**. Gain a new level 2 Shine Perk.
- +1 to an existing Shine Perk.

72 If sight isn't your primary sense, or you have a good idea as to how it would work, you can have a special mode for some other sense instead.

73 Putting these two Perks next to one another makes it look like you're meant to use them together, when in fact it's more that you just *can* use them together—you *can* totally use Dramatic Life for magic, and an Obstacle 1-2 technique to do "something cool" is particularly likely to fit well, but Dramatic Life is *meant* more for overcoming Obstacles on mundane Skills.

Taking Charge

You're taking charge of a situation.

Result: an enemy/opponent praises you, threatens you in a vaguely flattering way, or tries to recruit you.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Did you learn something new or reveal a new aspect of your character?

- **Magical Technique**. You've learned a new technique for one of your magical Skills.
- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill—probably something you succeeded or failed at during the course of the quest. It's now one of your normal applications of the Skill; sufficient practice will establish that to the point that you'll no longer even need this Perk.
- +1 to your Connection with a sidekick, friend, ally, rival, opponent, or treasure (max 5).

Have you shown something odd about the way your life works?

- **Superior Skill.** Gain a level 1 Superior Skill. You're too awesome to be real.
- Rewrite one of your Afflictions.

Did you impress others?

- **Connection**. Gain a new level 1-2 Connection Perk.
- **Accessory**. Get, claim, or receive a new cool item.
- At Arc 1+:
  - **Shine**. Gain a new level 1 Shine Perk.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to a Shine Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Conceptually, the reward for this quest is a *plot hook*. Maybe it's a cool car or mecha. Maybe it's a destiny. Maybe it's just a hairdo.

Whatever it is it operates kind of symbolically—

Possibly it's *magical* symbolism, like, your hairdo is Winter, and you can flip your hair to make it snow; or possibly it's more of a metaphor, like, your car is your heart, and so when you rev up your courage you also rev up its engine to do astonishing things (and when you love someone, your car will show up when they need it even if you aren't there.)

How do you express this power?

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk.
- **Variable Affliction**. Gain an Affliction Perk with variable level equal to your Vice Issue. The more you distance yourself from the ordinary world, the stronger your plot hook becomes.
- **Power**. Gain an appropriate miraculous ability that you can use on a regular basis—e.g., something that costs 1 MP per use no matter how often you use it, or that you can use 1-2x/scene for free and more often with MP, or whatever.
- **Magical Skill**. Gain a new level 2-3 Magical Skill Perk.
- **Superior Skill**. Gain a new level 1-2 Superior Skill Perk.
- **Bond**. Gain a new level 2-3 Bond Perk.
- **Power Up**. Increase an inherent level 2-3 mundane Skill to 4.
- **Accessory**. Gain a magical or supertech *thing*.
- **Connection**. Gain a new level 3-4 Connection Perk linking you to some sidekick or treasure.

2: 

Your Way

You're ignoring the pressures on you and just doing things your own way.

Result: you've attracted dangerous attention and/or trimmed down the problem to an approachable space. Usually it's both, one during the quest and one when it ends.

Alternate Storyteller 2 Quest

You're in a confusing situation! You must traverse a labyrinth, maze, or noir mystery. Or, if not *literally* any of these, that's what it feels like!

Reward. You've cut through the confusion. You've found what you needed to know, and either:

- Tied everything up neatly with a bow; *or*
- You've got your eyes on your prize and you know where to go but you've got a ways to go before you actually *get* it.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

So if you think back to the labyrinthine mazes of confusion you've had in your life—puberty, high school, your first job—you may find that you emerged with something that would have looked an awful lot to your pre-labyrinth self like a superpower. I don't mean that the whole experience is good, or anything, just that the reward for getting through it often is!

I'm thinking stuff like:

- shapeshifting
- venom
- control over an Element (fire, shadows, plants, &c.)
- incomparable beauty
- incomparable strength
- the ability to petrify people with a glance

Now, I want to stick to relatively low-end powers here, so you'd probably implement this with something like:

- **Bonus**. You can invoke your superpower 1/chapter as a +1 Tool. For instance, your face and body are just malleable enough that it can help you a little with something once per week, or you can glamour up your beauty or strength for an action now and then, or use your "petrifying glare" as a Tool for intimidation or for winning a contest by slowing an enemy down.
- **Magical Technique**. Gain a superpower as a new technique for one of your magical Skills.
- **Superior Skill**. Gain a quasi-superpower as a level 1 Superior Skill.
- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.

If you want something stronger, I'd suggest:

- rewriting an Affliction or Bond
- moving 2-3 points from your inherent Skills (of any sort) to a brand-new Superior Skill.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Again, I'd like to focus on the idea that you pick up a new "superpower"—

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk.
- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 3-4 Superior Skill Perk.
- **Power**. Gain a direct, potent miraculous power which you can use quite often, such as:
  - shapeshifting
  - venom
  - control over an Element (fire, shadows, plants, &c.)
  - incomparable beauty
  - incomparable strength
  - the ability to petrify people with a glance
- **Power**. Gain a sleeping power hidden in some body part—I'm specifically thinking of tattoos sealing something in your arm or a weird eye behind an eyepatch—that you can activate roughly 1/chapter (or more often with MP spending). You'd choose this instead of just having a "can use all the time" power if you wanted:
  - something a little too powerful for you to be using all the time at this Arc level;
  - an indirect tactical power like "a forest of needles hidden in my arm."

If the quest marked or cursed you in addition to giving you a reward, the HG could offer you a free level 1 Bond or Affliction Perk as well as the benefits above. You don't have to take it! They don't have to give it! It's just a possible bonus that you could get.

Storyteller 4

4: 

The Ascent (1)

You're *ascending*. You're going beyond the world, rising past your limitations, reaching for some transcendent height.

...because you're chasing someone, or you have something you have to obtain.

Reward. You catch them. You obtain it. You've surpassed the trials of the peak.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Maybe you've just obtained a treasure or technique:

- **Accessory**. This quest has won you a cool object of some sort.
- **Magical Technique**. Gain a new Obstacle 2-3 technique for one of your magical Skills.
- **Trick**. You've mastered a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.

Or maybe you've become more comfortable in whatever environment you were in—for a literal climb, I mean something like "mountains" or "the climber's life," but for a metaphorical climb, it's probably whatever context you spent most of the quest living in:

- **Connection**. Gain a new level 2 Connection Perk to a relevant context.
- +1 to a relevant Connection Perk (max 5).

Or maybe you've just picked up that distant and world-conquering air of the kind of people who climb a spiritual peak:

- **Superior Skill**. Gain Superior Inscrutability 1 as a Perk.
- **Health**. You've gained a new Normal Health Level.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- At Arc 1+:
  - **Cool**. Gain a level 1 Cool Perk.
  - **Shine**. Gain a level 1 Shine Perk.
  - +1 to an existing Cool or Shine Perk (max 3).
- At Arc 3+:
  - **Health**. You've gained a new Tough Health Level.
  - **Auctoritas**. Choose whether this Arc protects you from the Bleak power of the Outside or protects some feature of your character from the power of wishes. You gain a level 1 Auctoritas protecting you, or that feature, against those effects.
  - +1 to a previously obtained Auctoritas Perk of that form (max 3)

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Often, on completing this quest, you'll gain a pretty strong defense against people figuring you out—

- **Power**. You have some defensive power—e.g., an equivalent to **Weathered** that you can invoke, not against physical damage, but against people learning the truth about you or seeing through your masks; or an inherent low-level Auctoritas+Obstacle pair that makes that harder; or an ability that automatically stuns/dazes/messes with people who see the truth about you.

Or you'll win some treasure or technique:

- **Accessory or Power**. Gain a magical item or power suited to what you were looking for in undertaking this quest in the first place.

Or you'll gain in health and strength:

- **Health**. Gain a new Health Level as a Perk. This is normally a Divine Health Level, but if you hurried through the quest or don't *want* more Divine Health Levels, you could get a Tough or Normal Health Level instead.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)

Or perhaps, having seen the top of the world, you seem to shine:

- **Shine**. Gain a new level 2 Shine Perk.
- +1 to a Shine Perk.

4: 

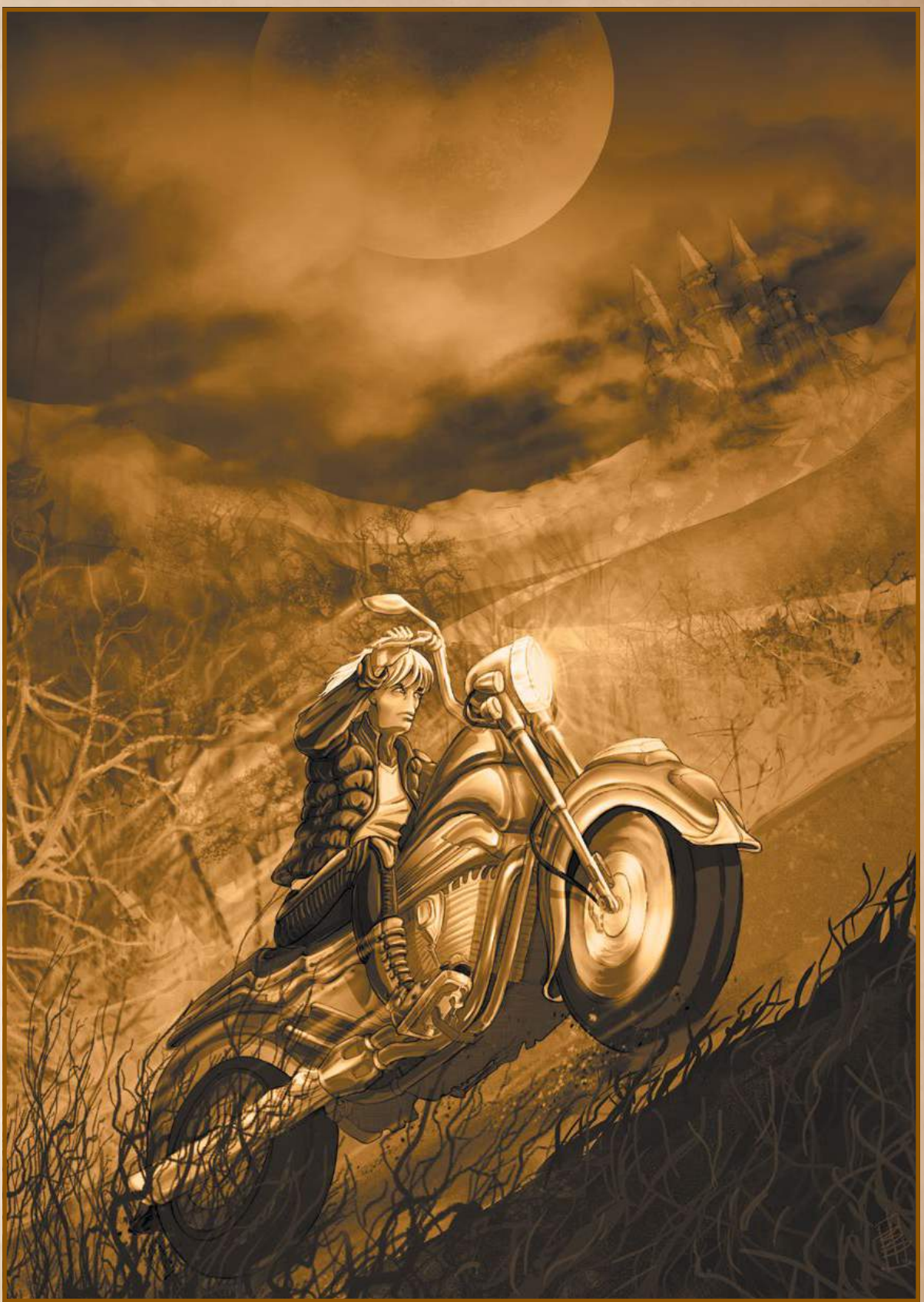
The Ascent (2)

You're *ascending*. You're going beyond the world, rising past your limitations, reaching for some transcendent height.

...because that's what you decided to do.

Reward. You reach the top—or your target, anyway, or as high as you can go—and gain some level of self-confidence, self-acceptance, or release.

Alternate Storyteller 4 Quest



The Descent

You're doing rough, terrible work. You're facing hard truths of death, guilt, embodiment, meaning, identity, and failure.

Result: you complete the work; you can go on with your life.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

It's not the point. It's not why you were doing it. But you may very well have changed the world.

- **"You may have heard of me."**: In this or a recently completed quest, you've changed the world. To make sure that this doesn't get forgotten/drift into irrelevance, 1/book, you can explain to the HG how you think it should play into the course of events. They don't have to go along with it, but they have to listen; and that chapter or the next chapter, they have to narrate how the change *is* playing into the course of events.
- **"It's a Living."** You've become someone important. To make sure this doesn't get forgotten/drift into irrelevance, you can ask the HG 1/chapter to narrate something to do with the politics of the role or someone being impressed by it. (This doesn't have to be more than a sentence or two—"oh, someone comes by to ask for a favor again" or "you have to make a new ruling or two on doctrine this week" suffices!)
- **Accessory**. Along the way you picked up a really cool treasure—something hardly anybody else in Town (or wherever) possesses.

Or perhaps you've just changed yourself:

- **Alternate Identity**. You are now living two lives—as yourself and as a new/underused Main Character. At first the changes are small: when you're in your alternate identity, you move 2-3 points of your inherent Skills to different mundane, Superior, and magical Skills. (You can change your Cool, but your Shine should stay the same.) In the future, though, you can choose to apply new Perks and non-Perk quest bonuses like "you can rewrite your Affliction" to only a single identity.

  Both characters should always have this Perk.

  You can take this again for a third, &c. life if you like.

- At Arc 1+:
  - **Cool**. Gain a level 1 Cool Perk.
  - **Shine**. Gain a level 1 Shine Perk.
  - +1 to an existing Cool or Shine Perk (max 3).
- At Arc 3+:
  - **Auctoritas**. Gain a level 1 Auctoritas Perk protecting you from the Bleak power of the Outside.
  - +1 to a previously obtained Auctoritas Perk of that form (max 3)

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Again, you may have changed the world:

- **Affliction**. Gain a powerful new Affliction that changes or expresses a change made in the world.

Or become a very different person:

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction representing your new self (e.g. "Affliction: I am the god of death.")
- **New Form**—
  - you can take your inherent Skill points spent on mundane Skills and Superior Skills and re-divide them between (new or old) mundane Skills, Superior Skills, and Shine.
  - and also receive 1-3 power-up Perks, each adding +1 to one of your new Superior Skills.

Or become *two* different people:

- **Alternate Form**. You gain an alternate identity as a new/underused Main Character. Think of this as choosing or building a new PC—if everyone's playing awesome near-gods, you are now playing *two* awesome near-gods. If you've all just scraped your way to the miraculous level, so has your new PC.

  Playing two Main Characters works like this:

  You can only control one character at any given time. They share a pool of Health Levels, since those are mostly a player resource, but the wounds themselves affect one or the other.

  Other resources (Will, MP) vary by character if possible. If this becomes too much of a headache for you or the HG, you'll fall back to a single pool of each. If *that* becomes too much of a headache—e.g., one of your characters has special rules interacting with MP—use a single pool, except that the backup character always has 2-3 left if they haven't done anything themselves.

  Choose which character you'll use for advancement. (You can change this choice between stories.) The HG advances your other character at roughly the same rate. If they don't have time/interest in doing that, or you really don't like their choices, fall back on advancing both characters down the same Arc and assigning them the same Perks, possibly with different details.

  That said, please make sure to keep this Perk active on both characters.

  You can gain more than two identities, but only if your existing identity is a hit—that is, if other players are independently playing off of it to dramatic or comedic effect on a reasonably regular basis. If you're the only one getting anything out of this Perk, I'd ask you to not take it again[74].

74 Yes, this is weird

Or you've gained a useful and meaningful power:

- **Power**. Gain a powerful utility power that takes a few minutes' work (or 4 MP) to activate: you can shapechange, or create bridges, or change temperatures, or turn people into animals or vice versa for a day.

5:

Torn

You're torn between two loyalties.

Result: you make a choice between them; if you've already done so, you come to an acceptance of it.

Alternate Storyteller 5 Quest



Aspect Arcs

Aspect Arcs are the ones where you develop and unleash new powers from your body, mind, and training.

They play out sort of like this:

- Quest 1 is your struggle against whatever's been holding you back.
- Quest 2 challenges your way of thinking.
- Quest 3 is a bunch of weird social obligations getting in your way.

Sometimes followed by:

- Quest 4, an epic struggle against something out of nightmare; *and maybe*
- Quest 5—time spent lost in the dark.

Wondering where on the Arc you get the goofy kung fu training stuff? Where you get thrown into the deadly pit of **Death or Kung Fu**, or forced to wrestle alligators until you master alligator stance, or flung amidst the bladed clockwork ballet training dolls until you learn ballet, or taught the "No-Shadow Step?"

The answer is pretty much "at any time, but it's off the main path of the Arc"—that's going to be handled as "quest miracles," which we'll discuss on pg. 454 (top) and pg. 462.

Aspect 1

1:

You're blocked. Frozen. *Stuck*. There's something you can't get past.

Reward. You push past it.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Maybe your heart grew a little stronger?

- **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk related to the moment that you fixed things.
- Arc 1+:
  - +1 to an appropriate Bond Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Or you picked up a mentor?

- **Connection**. Gain a level 1-2 Connection Perk to a mentor.
- **Bonus**. Your mentor's given you some sort of gnomic advice. 1/book, this Perk counts as a +3 Tool when its meaning falls into place and you act on it.

Or, maybe, you've learned to do something amazing?

- **Magical Technique**. You've learned to do something that, to be honest, you shouldn't actually be able to do. This acts as a level 2-3 Obstacle magical technique for one of your magical Skills.
- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.
- **Bonus**. You've pushed past a key block with heart, will, and the power of your "Chi." 1/chapter, you may "channel Chi" into something you have a level 2+ Skill in, spending 1 MP as a +2 Tool.

Learned to do something a little bit ridiculous?

- **Dramatic Life**. You're a little stylized. 1/chapter, you can waive a level 1-2 Obstacle for some particular unrealistic thing you do, e.g.,
  - changing clothes in the blink of an eye;
  - wandering the sewer without getting dirty;
  - people not noticing the giant axe you're always carrying around; *or*
  - using staplers, guns, pez dispensers, etc. without ever refilling them.

Or become a little bit more protagonistic and awesome?

- **Bonus**. You can sometimes feel when someone is in trouble and needs you. 1/book, this acts as a +3 Tool for showing up at the right moment to rescue/help someone, including "being aware that it's worth trying to do so" and "realizing the impending crisis early enough to be in position to do something about it when it happens."
- Arc 1+:
  - **Bonus**. You've demonstrated an undying will. 1/book, you may escalate your defense against an environment or category of attacks up to the level of a miraculous action. This lasts while you sustain the relevant Intention.
  - **Cool**. You gain a new level 1 Cool Perk.
  - +1 to an existing Cool Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating
- Arc 2+:
  - **Variable Bond**. Gain a Bond Perk with a variable level equal to your (being a) Hero Issue. This represents the daring, forceful, or tricky nature that pushed past the difficulty you encountered. That expresses itself more and more in you as your Hero Issue and this Bond's power rises; after the "main story" of that Issue ends, though, and the Issue temporarily reverts to level 0, there's a period where the Bond has no effect.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Again, the simplest way to push past whatever was holding you back is a Bond:

- **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk as part of the quest's result, *or*
- +1 to an appropriate Bond Perk
- **Variable Bond**. Gain a Bond Perk with a variable level equal to your (being a) Hero Issue. As above, this represents the daring, forceful, or tricky nature that pushed past the difficulty you encountered.

Or you could improve in raw Skill or general untouchability:

- **Cool**. Gain a new Cool Perk at level 1.
- **Power Up**. Increase either your inherent Cool or an inherent mundane Skill that's relevant to this Arc by +1. (This is a modifier and not a number—if the inherent Skill goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.)
- +1 to a mundane Skill or Cool Perk

Or your efforts as you pushed against your limitations might net you a cool new power:

- **Power**. Gain a miraculous power, typically costing 1 MP to use, that lets you channel your "Chi" or heart power to perform some specific miraculous feat.
- **Power**. Gain a defensive power, typically comparable to **Weathered**.
- **Power**. You automatically sense when someone is in trouble and needs you, *if* the HG remembers. This power is a miraculous action and comes with free Strike equal to the Arc Trait's rating.

Or special effect:

- **Power**. Gain a miraculous power that waves away some circumstantial obstacle, e.g. allowing instant clothes changes or making *sure* everyone ignores the giant axe you're always carrying around.

Aspect 2

2: 

You're presented with the option of another way of life or another way of thinking.

Result: you have an insight: you see or hear something that you wouldn't have been able to before.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

This might change your nature—

- rewriting one of your Afflictions
- changing the details of a Perk
- moving 1-2 points between your existing Skills, or to a brand-new mundane Skill

Connect you to somebody—

- **Connection**. Gain a new level 1-2 Connection Perk tying you to a romantic interest, mentor, or rival that you've spent time with during this Arc.
- +1 to such a Connection Perk (max 5).

Give you a pretty straightforward power-up—

- **Bonus**. You've practiced a trick for one of your favored Skills. 1/chapter, this Perk acts as a +1 Tool for a relevant situation and that Skill.
- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.

Offer you an alternate approach to certain problems:

- **Magic**. You've learned a tricky alternate approach to problems. Gain a magical technique you can use with an otherwise mundane Skill 1/book.
- **"This isn't even my final form."** You can spend an MP to adopt an "altered mode" that reverses 1-3 Afflictions, Bonds, or Skills, or that replaces/alters a single Affliction, Bond, or Skill in a more complicated way. This lasts until you spend another 2 MP or the chapter ends.
- **Ticket**. This Perk is a Superior Skill 1 granting you access to a particular road, vehicle, place, or transportation method. In short, your right to use it is so well-established as to give you 1 Edge against anybody trying to stop you.

Or teach you something strange:

- **Magical Technique**. You express the quest's effects on you by gaining a new technique for an existing magical Skill.
- **Power Up**. One of your mundane or Superior Skills gains a supernatural twist. You can invoke this power 1-2x/book to treat that Skill as a level 2 Superior Skill for the duration of a scene (complete with up to 2 Edge and the ability to do borderline-supernatural things.) In addition to its other effects, spending a Recharge Token automatically refreshes your available uses of this power.
- At Arc 1+:
  - **Magical Skill**. You gain a new level 1 magical Skill as a Perk associated with this Arc. You may only choose one such Skill for this Arc.
  - **Bond**. You gain a new level 1 Bond Perk conceptually related to one of your magical Skills or magical Skill perks.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to this Arc's associated magical Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You might change your nature—

- **Affliction**. You pick up a new Affliction with a level tied to this Arc.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)

Open yourself to new worlds or ways of being—

- **Power**. You gain some power that functions as an alternate shape or mode.
- **Power**. You gain a power for moving between worlds or ways of being that is:
  - easy to use—highly applicable and relatively cheap to use at least 1/chapter
  - probably kind of inflexible—a single trick.
- **Magician's Path**—
  - Increase an existing magical Skill Perk to 3, exploring the limits of your magic.
  - Gain a level 1 Superior Skill Perk, as that magic changes you.

Or simply become a more dangerous opponent:

- **Accessory or Power**. Gain control of a powerful weapon.
- **Power**. Your touch becomes a powerful weapon of some sort.
- **Superior Skill or Power**. You've learned a powerful destructive or transformative technique—a miraculous power you unleash in short bursts or a level 2-3 Superior Skill Perk that lets you do something like throwing lightning or playing a style of Chess so cold that it lowers your opponent's body temperature or ices over the room. This is often based on one of your existing Skills—that is, you'd get Superior Ice Chess 2-3 on top of an inherent Skill in Chess, or a lightning-throwing ability on top of and as an extension of an inherent mundane ability with Martial Arts.

Aspect 3

3:

You're dealing with stressful, bizarre, and confusing social situations[75].

Result: you finish up your latest obligation, optionally come home and take your literal or metaphorical shoes off, and learn something shattering.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

In general you'll wind up with a power that you don't really *want*—

- **Bonus**. 1/chapter, this Perk acts as a +2 Tool for something you didn't really want to be good at—something embarrassing to you or something that tends to get too much responsibility put on your shoulders.
- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 1 Superior Skill Perk that you didn't really want—similarly.
- **Foe Yay**: Pick an enemy, rival, or antagonist. When they are cooperating with you, this Perk acts as a +1 Tool. If you ever become friends, colleagues, or teammates, this Perk reverts to an ordinary Bonus, and you may thereafter only use it 1/chapter.
- **Accessory**. Gain a neat thing that everyone around you is really impressed by that you didn't want, like a plasma TV when you don't like television or a new car when you can't drive. Include some reason you can't just give it away or loan it out on a permanent basis, although letting people use it surreptitiously is probably fine.
- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill—usually, something social *or* something party-trick-style weird. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.

But you could also get a little better at handling weird situations:

- rewrite one of your Skills, Bonds, or Afflictions
- **Connection**. Gain a new level 2-3 Connection Perk for navigating an environment that doesn't really suit you or dealing with a person you claim not to like. Unlike the stuff above it's probably not *actually* that bad—you're probably more in denial about liking it or them than you are actually unhappy with your new ability.
- +1 to such a Connection Perk.
- Arc 1+:
  - **Cool**. You gain a new level 1 Cool Perk.
  - +1 to an existing Cool Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Again, you'll generally wind up with a power that you don't really *want*—

- **Bond**. Gain a level 4 Bond Perk representing a failure, vice, or trauma.
- **Bond**. Gain a level 2 Bond Perk representing a minor obligation.
- **Power**. Gain a power for seeing into the mind or heart of your natural enemies.
- **Power**. Gain a power that echoes one of your antagonists' tricks.
- **Power**. Gain a useful power that's hard to control once unleashed—something that spreads chaos, raises emotional intensity, invokes fire, or summons vicious beasts.
- **Accessory**. Gain an awesome item that's bound to you but doesn't fit you—a blood-thirsty sword for the dainty socialite, magical tiara for the warrior, or soccer cleats for the hopeless nerd.
- **Superior Skill or Magical Skill**. Gain a level 2-3 Superior or magical Skill Perk based on your unnatural awesomeness at something kind of embarrassing. Or at something that people will demand you do more often once they find out you're great at it.

But you may also get a bit more raw power:

- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- **Cool**. Gain a new Cool Perk at level 1.
- **Power Up**. Increase either your inherent Cool or an inherent mundane Skill that's relevant to this Arc by +1. (This is a modifier and not a number—if the inherent Skill goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.)
- +1 to a mundane Skill or Cool Perk

Or you might make a truce with an established and not all that terrible enemy:

- **Foe Yay (Miraculous)**: this power acts as a level 4 Connection Perk with a former enemy and as a Power Perk that allows you to unleash some power when you work together. This also implicitly puts you on a "no maiming or killing one another" footing, which should be fairly reliable from both sides, although obviously breaking with that is possible if circumstances or story so require.

75 Your best friend wants you to romantically intercede for them. With the person you love, to boot! Or, there's factional conflict at your school or temple. Your parents have ridiculous expectations of you. You're living at the house of your worst enemies.

... stuff like that!



Aspect 4

4:

This is an epic struggle with something terrifying and supernatural.

Result: you win. Sometimes you're left stranded and far from home, sometimes you get a victory parade; sometimes there's more to do, sometimes it's 100% triumph; sometimes the HG has to delay your victory a few scenes or invoke silly tropes like "but that wasn't the *real* big bad" to stop play from grinding to a halt, and sometimes your victory is pure awesome. But, no matter what?

You win.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Do you pick up a weird new trick?

- **Hax**. You've learned some trick that makes you a puzzle to be solved in combat—some trick that makes you unbeatable by mortals unless they work around it first. You can invoke this power 1-2x/book to impose an Obstacle 4 on any attempt to beat you without such a workaround. In addition to its other effects, spending a Recharge Token automatically refreshes your available uses of this power.
- **Magical Technique**. Gain a new Obstacle 2-3 magical technique.
- **Offensive Aura**: Pick a more specific special effect. 1/chapter, your presence can trouble those around you. This is an action that you take that adds +1 to the Obstacle (max 3) for a certain category of actions, such as "evil magic," "breathing," "speaking," or "feeling at ease."

Or do you just get tougher?

- **Health**. You've gained a new Normal Health Level.
- **Accessory**. You gain access to a useful defensive or force-multiplying object.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- At Arc 1+:
  - **Cool**. You gain a new level 1 Cool Perk.
  - +1 to an existing Cool Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating
- At Arc 3+:
  - **Health**. You've gained a new Tough Health Level.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

The most common benefit here is that you'll gain a "trick"—a weird technique, the result of your training, that makes you a puzzle to be solved for anyone who'd want to go against you. Maybe you can ignite yourself with fiery Chi hot enough to melt any weapon that strikes you, maybe you can control every sword in the room, maybe you can trap people in their minds or make them feel what you want them to feel, maybe you can switch places automatically with any of your paper "duplicates." This is normally a combat-focused technique, mostly meaning that you can't relax and enjoy yourself while using it.

- **Power**. You gain such a power as a miraculous ability, usually something you can use regularly.
- **Affliction**. Or you gain it as an Affliction that is always on or activates automatically in certain situations.

Or you may just become generally hardier:

- **Health**. Gain a new Health Level as a Perk. This is normally a Divine Health Level, but if you hurried through the quest or don't *want* more Divine Health Levels, you could get a Tough or Normal Health Level instead.
- **Power**. Gain a new defensive power, probably roughly comparable to **Weathered**.
- **Bond**. Gain a new level 4 Bond Perk, something that sustains you.
- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction that expresses that inner strength.
- **"Guess You're Stuck with Me."** Gain a new, defined mechanism for coming back from death or absolute defeat. This operates on the player/game level rather than the character level so it's situationally better than immortality itself.

Aspect 5

5: 

You're lost in the dark.

Result: you find your way home, maybe even with some treasure, maybe having left something good behind—

But the experience has changed you.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You've come out of your time in the dark with something neat:

- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.
- **Accessory**. Along the way you picked up a really cool treasure—something hardly anybody else in Town (or wherever) possesses.

Or, you've been purified, exalted, made immortal and transcendent:

- **Superior Skill**. Choose between Superior Immortality 1 or Superior Holiness 1.
- Arc 1+:
  - +1 to a Superior Immortality or Superior Holiness Perk
- Arc 2+:
  - **Power Up**. Increase your inherent Cool, Superior Immortality, or Superior Holiness by +1, up to the Arc Trait's rating. (This is always "+1, up to the Arc Trait's rating," and not a number—if the Skill or Arc rating goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.)
  - **Auctoritas**. You gain a level 1 Auctoritas protecting you from the Bleak power of the Outside.
  - +1 to a previously obtained Auctoritas Perk of that form (max 3)

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You've become better at something:

- **Power Up**. Increase an inherent Skill or Bond that's relevant to this Arc by +1. (This is a modifier and not a number—if the inherent Skill or Bond goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.) This can increase Bonds, Shine, Cool, magical Skills, Superior Skills, and mundane Skills, but only while you keep this Perk.

Reached out to an antagonist:

- **Power**. You gain a limited power to call upon the support of your enemies in some fashion, or, to duplicate one of their common or signature powers.

Or improved your health and strength:

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk with variable level equal to your (being a) Hero Issue. This represents the quality in you that brought you back from being lost in the dark. It expresses itself more and more in you as your Hero Issue and this Affliction's power rises; after the "main story" of that Issue ends, though, and the Issue temporarily reverts to level 0, there's a period where the Perk has no effect.
- **Health**. Gain a new Health Level as a Perk. This is normally a Divine Health Level, but if you hurried through the quest or don't *want* more Divine Health Levels, you could get a Tough or Normal Health Level instead.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 2 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate 2 MP.)
- **Power Up**. You can strengthen one of your existing powers or make it easier to use. You can apply this Perk to one of your inherent powers or layer it on top of another Perk.

Or did it cost you something?

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk with variable level equal to your Sickness. This represents the damage done to you by your interlude lost in the dark. As your Sickness rises, the damage expresses itself more fully; when you resolve the Sickness Issue, the damage recedes for a little while.

Superior Immortality

I'm not giving a full description of this Skill—it's just a Skill that you can use to do the kinds of things that being immortal would let you do, with Edge in the kind of contests that being immortal gives you an edge in.

That said, the levels look *something* like:

- Level 1: You're good at surviving.
- Level 2: You're terrifyingly tough, though ultimately mortal.
- Level 3: You have functional immortality, but the cause is some pretty specific magical, biological, or technological kind of thing: that is, you have a spell, or a weird body structure, or redundant backups, or something, that makes you immortal—immortal enough to walk around in tanks of hydrochloric acid or ignore/survive explosions, anyway—but it's not good enough to make you actually immune to *death* if someone finds a way for you to die.
- Level 4: You have theological or fated immortality: you're just not *supposed* to die.
- Level 5: You have logical immortality—for some reason, killing you would be nonsensical, or would require/release infinite energy, or would break the rules of physics as they are known.

Bear in mind that at all levels an Immortality Skill can be beaten by the unmaking power of the Bleak Academy or the power of the wishing heart to make the impossible possible—in short, even level 5 Immortality actions might not protect you against damage from miracles.

At levels 1-2 you may wish to think of Superior Immortality as "Superior Healing" or "Superior Never Seems To Die" instead of as actual immortality.

Shepherd Arcs

Shepherd Arcs teach you to guard things, guide things, and wake powers in things. They're about taking care of others.

Usually that starts like this:

- Quest 1: you're living your ordinary life...
  and then a new responsibility falls on you out of nowhere.

And one can debate whether the real *beginning* of the Arc is quest 1 or that moment at its very end when suddenly everything is different.

After that, anyway, there's

- Quest 2: you struggle with stuff.
- Quest 3: you face, and conquer, some trouble from your past.

That's the simplest form of the Arc. After that, your life could slip back to its normal course. Or, of course, you could go a little further:

- Quest 4: you travel strange worlds, fight epic battles, and otherwise face big tests.
- Quest 5: you're living a totally awesome, over-the-top life.

This is pretty optimistic stuff; there's generally a lot of annoyance and difficulty in the XP actions for the quests, but on the whole, these are deeply uplifting Arcs where you get the chance to do what you love and love what you do. Even when you get dragged down, even when you *give up* on the stuff you love, these are the Arcs where that doesn't stick—

Where you rise up, inevitably, driven by new ideas or good fortune, and get back to doing what you care about again.

Making Stuff

There are a number of different game mechanics that you could use to build or make something. You could formulate an Intention to "build this thing," or just "to work on it." You could use a relevant miracle. You could build something slowly, over time, as a quest or even a full Shepherd Arc. Because part of creation is the will to build things "right" or "correctly," you may find yourself wondering which game mechanic is the right one to use.

In this, regrettably, I cannot help.

This is a game about how to live your life. This is a game where your thoughts, and the players' thoughts, on how life should be lived *matter*—and creating stuff cuts too close to the bone, at least for me, for there to be a single answer on how to do that well. Sometimes dedicating a quest to building something is a foolish waste of energy and devotion; other times a full three Arcs won't be enough. Sometimes trying to get something done with a single Intention is just ridiculous; other times, it'll be just right. The game can't tell you how to make things. It can't tell you the right way to build things. All *the game* can tell you is that a single level 4 Intention is effective, a single level 5 Intention is productive, a miracle makes something happen, and a quest earns you a Perk and advances your Arc. For the rest, you'll have to come up with your own life philosophy about how much work to put into what and when, and go with that.



Shepherd 1

1:

This is the story of your ordinary life—the everyday work, stresses, and pleasures that form the fabric of your days.

Result. A responsibility falls on you out of nowhere.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Have you made a given place (say, a shrine, park, or home) a little healthier or happier?

- **"It's like a home to me."**: This Perk tracks your work on a given project or place. 1-2x/book, you can invoke it to have the HG describe the environment there—this isn't necessarily more than a few sentences; it's just something to evoke that it is still there and your work still stands.

  In addition, you can pick one of the benefits below. You can add other benefits to this Perk, or allow other players to add their own benefits thereto, with further quests (and without using a new Perk slot):
  - It gains +1 Auctoritas against the influence of the Outside (max 3)
  - It gains +1 to the Obstacle for using certain types of magic (e.g., "discordant," "hostile and unwholesome," or "fire") there (max +3, max 5).
  - Being there now gives a +1 Tool bonus (max +1) to—
    - feeling happy
    - feeling at home/making others feel at home
    - feeling at peace
    - taking shelter from your past
    - getting along with others who live there
    - connecting to the spiritual world
    - encouraging dignified, traditional behavior
    - connecting to people
    - sleeping well
    - keeping things clean
    - purifying things
    - getting organized
    - getting comfortable
    - finding what you need
    - last-minute saves
    - overcoming attempts at sabotage *or*
    - something else (as appropriate)
  - You and the HG agree on some small but cool mundane action that may now be taken using the Connection to this place as the underlying Skill.

  If you dispose of this Perk the benefits will fade over time—roughly one quest's worth every four books, barring NPC involvement to sustain them, but really, it's up to the HG and their willingness to track stuff. Alternately, another player who has contributed or plans to contribute in the near future to this Perk can take it over themselves.

Did you make a new, or deeper, spiritual connection with something?

- **Bond**. Gain a new level 1 Bond Perk.
- **Connection**. Gain a new level 1 Connection Perk.
- **Superior Skill**. Gain a new level 1 Superior Skill Perk—a "Superior Affinity," e.g. "Superior Affinity to Birds" or "Superior Affinity to Winter," connecting you to some element or portion of the world.
- gain +1 to an existing Connection Perk (max 5).
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to an existing Bond Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Do you get a little stronger?

- **Accessory**. You've picked up a cool thing or lifestyle improvement.
- **Skill**. Gain a level 1 mundane Skill Perk.
- Arc 2+:
  - **Power Up**. Increase an inherent mundane Skill that's relevant to this Arc by +1, up to the Arc Trait's rating. (This is always "+1, up to a maximum of the Arc rating"—if the Skill or Arc rating goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.)
  - +1 to an existing mundane Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Do you build or create something cool?

- **Accessory**. You've built something cool.
- **"It's coming along."** You've substantively advanced a project too large to finish with just this quest alone, and will complete it before the end of your current Arc. Much like with an Accessory Perk, this Perk protects that progress with your health levels—you can take a wound instead of accepting it if something happens to undo the progress that you've made.

  You can replace this Perk with a different one if the story's direction changes so thoroughly that this Perk's promise (that you'll complete the project this Arc) is no longer sound.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Did you make a new spiritual connection with something?

- **Bond**. Gain a new level 1 Bond Perk.
- **Connection**. Gain a new level 2 Connection Perk.
- **Power Up**. Increase an inherent Connection by +2, up to a maximum of 5.
- Gain +1 inherent Connection to something.
- (or, if you'd really rather) gain +1 to an existing Connection Perk.

Or some element of the world?

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 2 Superior Affinity to that element.

Or did you, maybe, learn to see things in new ways?

- **Power**. Gain a miraculous version of "Dramatic Vision" (pg. 413)—a special visual mode that lets you see highlighted dramatic information about things.

Shepherd 2

2:

You're having a little trouble keeping your life on an even keel.

Result. You're doing OK, but there's a big challenge coming up.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Has your work changed you? Bound you to something?

- rewriting one of your Afflictions
- rewriting one of your Bonds
- moving 1-2 points between your existing Skills, or to a brand-new mundane Skill

Deepened your Connection to something?

- +1 to an existing Connection Perk (max 5)
- at Arc 2+:
  - +1 to an existing Bond Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating

Stretched the limits of your existing magic and knowledge?

- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.
- **Magical Technique**. Gain a new Obstacle 2-3 technique for one of your magical Skills, ideally building on and enhancing an existing technique.

Sharpened your senses?

- **Superior Skill**. You have a level 1 Superior Skill Perk representing your sharper senses.

Or given you the chance to make life better for someone else?

- **"It's OK, I'm here."**: This Perk tracks the support and guidance you give to a particular NPC. That NPC can use your presence as a +1 Tool for (choose one)
  - feeling at home
  - feeling safe
  - being safe
  - feeling at peace
  - connecting to the spiritual world
  - doing things in the traditional, proper way
  - connecting to other people
  - sleeping well
  - keeping things clean
  - being organized
  - being comfortable
  - being good
  - finding what they need *or*
  - something else (as appropriate)

  If the NPC has access to you, and hasn't had noticeable problems with those things lately, you may ask the HG 1/chapter to narrate their receiving the benefits of success—that is, a sentence or two showing the NPC feeling at home, feeling safe, being safe, feeling at peace, etcetera.

  This Perk has an additional benefit when used to support children and pets: you may use your own Health Levels to protect them from damage. This doesn't mean you can use your *physical* health to protect them—just, if someone randomly shows up and dumps them into a volcano, you have the right to use a Health Level to say "and now they're captive of the volcano spirits!" or something instead of their just being dead.

  This Perk was created for use with children, but as long as you choose appropriate benefits it should be fine for use with pets, friends, students, romantic interests, and allies.

- Expand an existing **"It's OK, I'm here."** Perk by giving the target:
  - another thing you act as a Tool for;
  - +1 Auctoritas against the influence of the Outside (max 3);
  - +1 to the Obstacle for using hostile magic against them (max +3, max 5)

  This does not increase the frequency you can invoke the power or allow you to push that Tool bonus past +1.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Has your work changed you? Bound you to something?

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction.
- **Bond**. Gain a new level 1 Bond Perk.
- **Connection**. Gain a new level 2 Connection Perk.
- **A Shared Path**—
  - Increase an existing Bond or Connection Perk by 1, deepening your connection to someone or something.
  - Gain a new level 2-3 mundane Skill Perk, representing something you worked on or learned or studied together.

Have you gained some feature or quality relating to the things and places you've been working with?

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a new level 2 Superior Skill Perk.
- **Power Up**. Increase an inherent mundane or Superior Skill that's relevant to this Arc by +1. (This is a modifier and not a number—if the inherent Skill goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.)

Have your senses sharpened?

- **Power**. Gain a modest sensory ability relating to something you've been taking care of—e.g., improved smell if you've been spending a lot of time with a hunting dog, or a sense for the depth of water if you've been maintaining a pond.

Shepherd 3

3:

Absolution

There's something haunting you from the past, but you've got the chance to make it right.

Result. It's the most amazing thing. You *do*.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Have you grown stronger?

- **Power Up**. Increase an inherent Skill or Bond that's relevant to this Arc by +1, up to the Arc Trait's rating. (This is always "+1, up to a maximum of the Arc Trait's rating," and not a number—if the Skill or Arc rating goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.) This can increase Shine, Cool, magical Skills, Superior Skills, and mundane Skills, but only while you keep this Perk.
- **Ticket**. This Perk is a Superior Skill 1 granting you access to a particular road, vehicle, place, or transportation method. In short, your right to use it is so well-established as to give you 1 Edge against anybody trying to stop you.
- **Accessory**. Gain something cool that you'd been wanting for a while.

Learned a marvelous secret?

- **"Trust Me."** You know something of the pattern of fate and the meaning of the world. This can give you an insight into what's going on; 1/book, you can ask the HG for a flash of sourceless, oblique insight about the current problem, and you'll receive something like that by the end of the following chapter.

Lightened your heart?

- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- **Shine**. Gain a level 1 Shine Perk.
- Gain 2-3 Recharge Tokens
- At Arc 2+:
  - Gain +1 to an existing Shine Perk (max 5)

Or evolved into something greater than you'd been?

- **"It's a Living."** You have an important role in the world. To make sure this doesn't get forgotten/drift into irrelevance, you can ask the HG 1/chapter to narrate something to do with the politics of the role or someone being impressed by it. (This doesn't have to be more than a sentence or two—"oh, someone comes by to ask for a favor again" or "you have to make a new ruling or two on doctrine this week" suffices!)
- You can rewrite one of your Afflictions
- You can rewrite one of your Bonds
- You can move 1-2 points between your existing Skills, or to a brand-new mundane or Superior Skill

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Have you taken on a new role as one of the forces that keep the world running? Evolved into something grander than you were?

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk.
- **Connection**. Gain a new level 4 Connection Perk.
- **Power**. You gain a relatively strong defensive, transportation, or insight-related miracle. Talk to the HG about what's appropriate for the game in terms of power and cost.
- **Power**. Gain an Imperial miracle, probably with a problematic element—something that comes with a job to do, a *responsibility*.

Become generally stronger?

- **Power Up**. You can strengthen one of your existing powers or make it easier to use. You can apply this Perk to one of your inherent powers or layer it on top of another Perk.
- **Power Up**. Increase a level 2-4 Skill by +1. This can increase Cool, Shine, magical Skills, Superior Skills, and mundane Skills, but only while you keep this Perk and have an underlying level 2+ Skill.
- +1 to a level 2-4 Skill Perk, including Cool, Shine, Superior, magical, and mundane Skills.

Or lightened the burden on your heart?

- **Lighter Heart**. 1/book, you can invoke this power as if it were a Recharge Token. The HG may require you to do something that reminds you of who you are—some characteristic or affirming activity—before this power becomes available again. (That is, once used, you must wait until a new book *and* until you've done something identity-affirming before this power is again available for use.)

3:

An Extraordinary Life

This is the story of your extraordinary life—the larger-than-life magic, battles, and wonder that form the fabric of your days.

Result. A chance at greater happiness falls on you out of nowhere.

Alternate Shepherd 3 Quest

Shepherd 4

4:

You're facing a big challenge or adventure.

Result. It ends, leaving you battle-hardened or refreshed and, either way, ready to face the trials of your ordinary life.

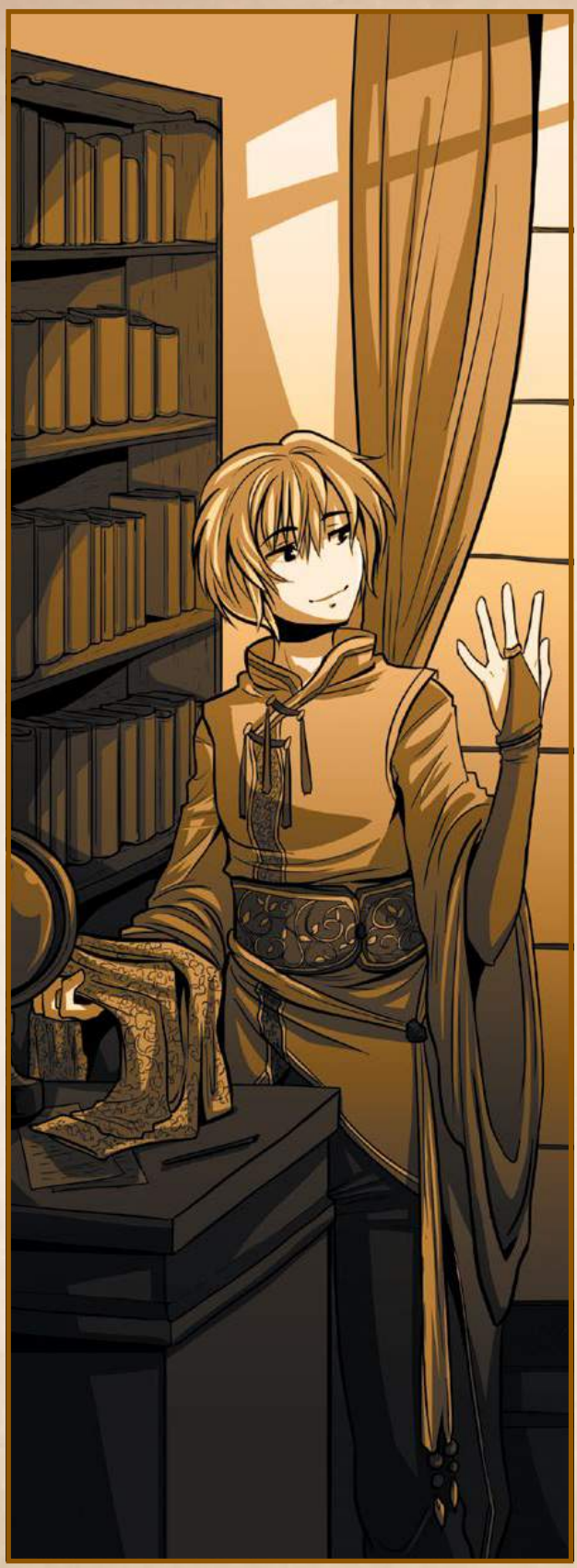
Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Did you pick up something completely unexpected on your adventure?

- **Bonus**. You've got a devastating move you can pull out of your pocket for doing something you hardly ever do—e.g., a kung fu trick or near-perfect pitching skill for a scholar, or the ability to shift gears and become a politician for a delinquent. You can invoke this move 1-2x/book as a +2 Tool for the relevant Skill. In addition to its other effects, spending a Recharge Token automatically refreshes your available uses of this bonus.
- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.
- **Defensive Aura**. Pick a more specific special effect. 1/chapter, your presence can shelter the people around you in some fashion. This is an action that you take that adds +1 to the Obstacle (max 3) for relevant attacks.
- **Support Aura**. Pick a more specific special effect. 1/chapter, your presence can support and help the people around you in some fashion. This is an action you take that acts as a +1 Tool for others taking certain actions. In the event that your presence would already normally be a Tool to those actions, this improves it by a further +1 (max 3).

Or did you just learn the normal kind of stuff?

- **Power Up**. Increase an inherent Skill or Bond that's relevant to this Arc by +1, up to the Arc Trait's rating. (This is always "+1, up to a maximum of the Arc Trait's rating," and not a number—if the Skill or Arc rating goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.) This can increase Shine, Cool, magical Skills, Superior Skills, and mundane Skills, but only while you keep this Perk.
- **Skill**. Gain a new level 1-2 mundane Skill Perk
- **Connection**. Gain a new level 1 Connection Perk
- +1 to an existing Connection Perk (max 5)
- at Arc 2+:
  - +1 to an existing Bond Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating
  - +1 to a mundane Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.



Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

At the miraculous level, the ordinary things you'd pick up include stuff like:

- **Skill or Bond.** Gain a new level 2-3 Bond, mundane Skill, Cool, or magical Skill Perk.
- **Power Up**. You can strengthen one of your existing powers or make it easier to use. You can apply this Perk to one of your inherent powers or layer it on top of another Perk.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)

Or you might learn something off-the-wall:

- **Power**. You can invoke some sort of miraculous aura around yourself, giving a defensive or support effect to appropriate characters in your vicinity. You could also have an offensive aura, although that's rarer.
- **Power**. Gain a flexible Imperial power that does stuff you weren't ever really *looking* to be able to do—telepathy if you're kind of a physical person, ownership of Excalibur for an academic, the ability to make half-plant half-robots, whatever.
- **Power**. You gain an *astonishingly* powerful Imperial power, but it's seasonal (or, if appropriate, 1/book) and doesn't do stuff you ever really wanted to do. You learn how to flood Fortitude, e.g., or bring back dead gods. You can experiment with this power to try to *find* uses for it; that'd be a quest.

Shepherd 5

5:

You've become a new person—a stronger, better person. Isn't it awesome?

Result. You create or do something amazing and revolutionary.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Have you created some wonder?

- **Accessory**. You now possess a potent magical wonder.
- **Connection**. Gain a level 2 Connection Perk to a new/underused Main Character and one of the following relationships:
  - you created them.
  - you dazzled them with your work.
  - you rescued them or found a way to provide for them, and you're now their keeper and guardian.

  They come into the game as your minion/pet/associate/friend/creation, and not as an independent actor, although they may stretch their wings and become their own person in good time.

Do you practically *glow* with awesome now?

- **Shine**. Gain a new level 1 Shine Perk.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to a Shine Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Are you dipping your metaphorical toe in the waters of cosmic power and conflict?

- **MP**. This Perk adds 2 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate 2 MP.)
- **Divine Path.**
  - Increase an existing Bond Perk to level 5.
  - Gain a new Superior Skill Perk at level 2, representing some quality you express on the cosmic stage.

Have you built a deep and true relationship with someone or something?

- **Connection**. Gain a new level 3-4 Connection Perk.
- +1 to an inherent Connection.

Strengthened your natural virtues?

- +1 to an inherent Bond.

Become a better mentor and guardian?

- **Cheer Them On**. 1/book, you can invoke this power to give someone else a recharge (as if they'd just spent a Recharge Token.) The HG may require you to weather a trial of some sort before this power becomes available again. (That is, once used, you must wait until a new book *and* until you've faced some trial yourself before this power is again available for use.)

Or have you just created something amazing, and that's all?

- **Accessory**. Gain a potent item of mystical regalia.



Emptiness Arcs

Emptiness Arcs draw on the bleak, lifeless power of the far Outside and sometimes on the more vivid chaos of the near.

They're generally character and setting pieces—

While stuff does happen in them, and you do change and grow during them, the change is handled delicately; the focus of the story is a slice of life exploration of the basic status quo. That means something like:

- Quest 1 explores how you live with what you are.
- Quest 2 explores your obsession with some person or problem
- Quest 3 puts you in an impossible situation and watches as you crack under the strain.

Sometimes you'll follow this with:

- Quest 4, where you face a brooding presence of the unnatural; *and maybe*
- Quest 5, where you find answers or reach closure on something.

Emptiness Arcs assume that there is something wrong with you or the world around you. There's something hollow, alien, broken, or twisted. You're corrupt, or sick, or you have this damage or trauma in you that you can't ever completely fix.

It doesn't *have* to be an objectively bad thing.

It doesn't even have to be a subjectively bad thing—it will always *be there*, for you, with you, but it doesn't have to *haunt* you. You can get past it. But it's the thing that means that sometimes, no matter how many years go by, your friends or family or lover or whatever will wake up to find you sitting on the edge of something, unable to sleep, staring out at the world, because there is this thing that hurts and you don't know how to completely heal.

This is your Arc's **Curse**.

Emptiness 1

1:

This quest is about the daily routine of living with the chaotic, evil, alien, or Outside-touched elements of your life. It may also touch on the lives of others in similar situations. A big focus on clothing, mealtimes, and having philosophical discussions while sitting on the edge of a cliff is common.

Result. You make a change in your life.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Maybe your commitment to that forthcoming change is really strong?

- **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk reflecting that change in your life.
- At Arc 2+:
  - **Variable Bond**. Gain a Bond Perk with variable level equal to your (in) Over Your Head Issue. The more you get out there in the world and do stuff, the more powerful this Bond becomes; after you finish a big adventure, though, and the Issue resolves, you might slack a bit on this side of yourself.

Maybe you've broken through into a new way of approaching your life?

- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.
- **Magical Technique**. You've learned a new way to solve your daily problems. This is a level 1-2 Obstacle magical technique for one of your magical Skills.

Maybe you've demonstrated that you're pretty cool, but also a little bit detached and alien?

- **Superior Skill**. Gain Superior Inscrutability 1 as a Perk.
- **Cool**. You gain a new level 1 Cool Perk.
- **Connection**. Gain a level 1 Connection Perk to someone you've been talking to about all this stuff.
- At Arc 1+:
  - **Limitless**. You've demonstrated an undying will. 1/book, you may escalate your defense against an environment or category of attacks up to the level of a miraculous action. This lasts while you sustain the relevant Intention.
  - +1 to an existing Cool Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating

Maybe you've strengthened or found new uses for your already-extant weirdness?

- **Bonus**. You can draw upon your alien/unusual nature to succeed at ordinary life. 1/chapter, when taking an action you have a level 2+ Skill in, you may spend 1 MP and use your inherent weirdness as a +2 Tool.
- **Bonus**. Something in you hungers. 1/chapter, this Perk acts as a +1 Tool for sensing when there's something that can feed or soothe that hunger.
- **Bonus**. Your Curse is a little bit infectious sometimes. 1-2x/book, this Perk acts as a +2 Tool for sharing your melancholy, corruption, flu, or whatever, with someone else. In addition to its other effects, spending a Recharge Token automatically refreshes your available uses of this power.
- **Bonus**. There's a touch of strange fate on you—a thing you're meant to do or be. (Name it.) 1/book, you may invoke this Perk as a +3 Tool for achieving something important to (or at least *related* to) that fate.
- At Arc 1+:
  - +1 to an appropriate Bond Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Did you learn something new?

- **Magical Skill**. Gain a level 2 Magical Skill relevant to your experiences with this Arc.
- **Power**. Gain a subtle power for deceiving others about your intentions—e.g., something that waives the normal rule that emotes must be honest 1/chapter (and you don't have to declare when you use it), or a low-level Auctoritas against being seen through by others, or a power that lets you hide your feelings even from yourself.

Is your new path strengthening you?

- **Health**. You've gained a new Normal Health Level.
- **Cool**. Gain a new Cool Perk at level 1.
- **Power Up**. Increase either your inherent Cool or an inherent mundane Skill that's relevant to this Arc by +1. (This is a modifier and not a number—if the inherent Skill goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.)
- +1 to a mundane Skill or Cool Perk
- +1 to an existing Bond Perk

Do you gain new powers related to your Curse?

- **Power**. Spend an MP to infect something near you with some element of your Curse.
- **Power**. You can sense something that can feed or help you.
- **Power**. Gain a defensive power, comparable to **Weathered** (pg. 108).

Emptiness 2

2:

There's something you can't stop thinking about—it absorbs your thoughts, it obsesses you, it's sucking you into the abyss of its enigmas, emptiness, and strangeness.

Outcome. Your ordinary life stops feeling safe/normal/OK to you.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Have you learned to crystallize the Curse inside you into a power?

- Rewrite one of your Bonds or Afflictions to suit.
- **Superior Skill**. Gain a new level 1 Superior Skill Perk reflecting your unnatural qualities.
- **Trick**. You've learned a bizarre new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.
- **Bonus**. Your power tempts you to do wicked things. 1/chapter, this Perk acts as a +1 bonus for (choose one):
  - ...manipulating people?
  - ...tempting others into your vice?
  - ...spying on people?
  - ...finding someone's weakness?
  - ...taking something from others?
  - or something else of that sort?
- **Bonus**. Or is your power simply to destroy? 1-2x/book, this Perk acts as a +2 bonus for breaking, crushing, smashing, or otherwise ruining physical or emotional targets. In addition to its other effects, spending a Recharge Token automatically refreshes your available uses of this power.
- **"This stuff just *happens*."** 1/book, when taking unopposed action, you may invoke this power as a level 6 Intention. Opposition from a level 2+ Intention[76] causes this power to automatically fail, but also refreshes its use.

Have you learned more about chaos and the Outside than you'd really wanted to know?

- **Connection**. You know the ways of the Bleak Academy (or a similarly fearsome enemy with a connection to your alien nature.) Gain a level 1-2 Connection Perk thereto.
- +1 to that Connection (max 5).

After a wound, or simply becoming brittler, have you constructed better defenses against the world?

- **Shelter**. Home isn't safe enough; you retreat to somewhere else or somewhere specific within. This Perk is a Superior Skill 1 that grants you access to the place you consider to be your shelter, protects you while inside it, and makes it harder for trouble to follow you "home."
- **Bonus**. You've learned to shrug off the occasional bit of nastiness. 1/chapter, this Perk acts as a +1 Tool for defending yourself against social or emotional attacks.
- **Health**. You've gained a new Normal Health Level.
- **Cool**. You gain a new level 1 Cool Perk.
- At Arc 1+:
  - +1 to an existing Cool Perk.

76 Level 1- Intentions might not necessarily affect the outside world at all, so I'm not letting them disrupt your groove.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Have you learned some of the secrets of the world's enemies (or your own?)

- **Power**. Gain a miraculous or Imperial power that in some fashion lets you spy on or tells you the secrets of the Outside and the Bleak Academy, or some other relevant and probably malign force.

Gotten stronger and more alien?

- **An Alien Strength**.
  - Gain a new level 1-2 Skill or Superior Skill Perk—you've changed;
  - ...but that change fits together with the person you already were. Gain +1 to an existing Skill or Superior Skill Perk.

Have you learned to crystallize the curse inside you into a power?

- **Affliction**. Gain a new, uncomfortable but practical Affliction.
- **Bond**. Gain a level 4 Bond Perk representing your vice, weakness, or frailty.
- **Power**. Gain a miraculous power that, while in itself completely under your control, tempts you by the very fact that you have it to do wicked things that you'd rather not do. (E.g., mind/emotion control, the ability to inflict bad luck, or anything that makes your personal issues worse, such as invisibility or telepathy for the kinds of characters who'd abuse them.)
- **Power**. A power to exaggerate or alleviate something like your "curse" in others.

Emptiness 3

3: 

You're trying to cope with an impossible situation. This quest spends a lot of time on your emotional state, your memories, and your history as you do.

Result. You remember something important that you'd forgotten, and make a decision on how to deal with it.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

This quest often changes or marks you in little ways...

- you can rewrite an Affliction or Bond;
- you rename and adjust a Skill, or move a point from one inherent Skill to another

Or big ones:

- **Apotheosis**. 1/book, you can draw on the power of the mark or change this quest made in you as a +3 Tool for anything appropriate. You may define this Perk in such a way that almost anything is appropriate, or hew closer to a specific title or power, as you and reason prefer.
- Arc 2+:
  - +1 to an appropriate Bond Perk or Superior Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Or gives you a deeper Connection to someone:

- **Connection**. Gain a level 1-2 Connection Perk to someone your memories have been lingering on.
- +1 to such a Connection Perk

Or the quest teaches you something strange:

- **Magical Technique**. You express the quest's effects on you by gaining a new technique for an existing magical Skill.
- **Power Up**. One of your mundane or Superior Skills gains a supernatural twist. You can invoke this power 1-2x/book to treat that Skill as a level 2 Superior Skill for the duration of a scene (complete with up to 2 Edge and the ability to do borderline-supernatural things.) In addition to its other effects, spending a Recharge Token automatically refreshes your available uses of this power.

Starting at Arc 1 this quest might open up a new magical Skill tied to the Arc—something tricky and unnatural drawing on the power of your Curse and the Outside.

- At Arc 1+:
  - **Magical Skill**. You gain a new level 1 magical Skill as a Perk associated with this Arc. You may only choose one such Skill for this Arc.
  - **Bond**. You gain a new level 1 Bond Perk conceptually related to one of your magical Skills or magical Skill perks.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to this Arc's magical Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Often you'll find yourself changed or strengthened:

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- **Power Up**. Increase an inherent Skill or Bond that's relevant to this Arc by +1. (To a maximum of 5.) This can increase Shine, Cool, magical Skills, Superior Skills, and mundane Skills, but only while you keep this Perk.
- **Magician's Path**—
  - Increase an existing magical Skill Perk to 3, exploring the limits of your magic.
  - Gain a level 1 Superior Skill Perk, as that magic changes you.
- +1 to an existing Skill or Bond Perk.

Or you'll suddenly see something about someone else that you'd never expected:

- **Power Up**. This Perk sets one of your existing Connections (whether Perk or inherent) to level 4.

Or you'll learn a strange new power:

- **Power**. You may transform yourself into something else, gaining access to a small number of special abilities while in that form.
- **Power**. You gain access to a powerful "curse"—e.g. *De Solis Solidera*, which is a set of words I have just now strung together out of nowhere that probably means something like "of the frozen sun" or "of the sun's soldier" or "the soul is flowing time, made still"—that functions as a *deus ex machina* of a sort. When you first use it, it's an Imperial miracle with a very specific application, but you can spend Recharge Tokens to develop and broaden its power over time.

  If your Arc Curse is a magical curse, the two curses are probably related; if your Arc Curse is "despair" or "poisoned," they may or may not actually relate.
- **Superior Skill or Power**. You've learned a peculiar adaptation—a way to use a mundane Skill to command one of the elements of the world. This often manifests as a level 2-3 Superior Skill Perk that lets you do something like Cooking meals that speed or slow time as they're consumed or as a miraculous power to manipulate some element, based on a power from a miraculous Otherworldly Arc (e.g., something based on **Spirit Boost** on pg. 517, with costs based on your current Emptiness Arc level), but adding a mundane action requirement to its MP cost.

Emptiness 4

4:

You deal directly with something unnatural—pacifying it, taming it, or maybe struggling and losing against it.

Reward. You find "the key to the world"—something mysterious but which seems to hold the key to making your life, or the things around you, have more value to you.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Again this quest often changes or marks you in little ways.

- you can rewrite an Affliction or Bond;
- you rename and adjust a Skill, or move a point from one inherent Skill to another

Finding the key *can* be internal and psychological, but often it's kind of a big (objective) deal:

- **"You may have heard of me."**: In this or a recently completed quest, you've changed the world. To make sure that this doesn't get forgotten/drift into irrelevance, 1/book, you can explain to the HG how you think it should play into the course of events. They don't have to go along with it, but they have to listen; and that chapter or the next chapter, they have to narrate how the change *is* playing into the course of events.
- **Support Aura**: Because you found the key to the world, your presence can support and help the people around you in some fashion. (Pick a more specific special effect.) 1/chapter, you can take an action to invoke this Perk and it will act as a +1 Tool for others doing whatever this aura supports. In the event that your presence would already normally be a Tool to those actions, this improves it by a further +1 (max +3).
- **Accessory**. Along the way you picked up a really cool treasure—something hardly anybody else in Town (or wherever) possesses.

Even if it's not a physical thing, or even if you give it up later on, you might seem more glorious than you were:

- **Shine**. Gain a level 1 Shine Perk.
- **Defensive Aura**: Pick a more specific special effect. 1/chapter, your presence can shelter the people around you in some fashion. This is an action that you take that adds +1 to the Obstacle (max 3) for relevant attacks.
- At Arc 2+:
  - **Auctoritas**. Gain a level 1 Auctoritas protecting you against the bleak power of the Outside.
  - +1 to a previously obtained Auctoritas Perk of that form (max 3)
  - +1 to an existing Shine Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.
- At Arc 4+:
  - **Defensive Aura**: 1/chapter, you may share your Auctoritas against the bleak power of the Outside with people and things that are near you.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

This may just provide a relatively simple power up:

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction Perk.
- **Power Up**. You can strengthen one of your existing powers or make it easier to use. You can apply this Perk to one of your inherent powers or layer it on top of another Perk.

Or it may establish you as something terrifying to reckon with:

- **Power**. You gain a nasty power costing either 2 or 4 MP for a standard use and giving you a truly absurd effect—you can unwind time, bind everyone around you into being puppets to your will, or something like that. This is generally built as an Imperial Miracle or as an Affliction that you can turn on and off.
- **Power**. You have access to an aura of unholy glory—a Major Miracle that can intimidate or awe the people around you. Pick an emotion that you can inflict on people. The aura itself is usually a 1/chapter power, usable more often for 1-2 MP, but if you're aiming for something particularly flexible (e.g. targeting individuals in crowds or emotions like "I want to please this awesome person with this aura") it may have a standard use of 1/book instead.
- **Accessory**. You gain access to a place or item of vast power, which you can deplete seasonally by pulling a vast power out of it. This power is an Imperial miracle you can invoke 1/book, or at other times for a cost of 4 MP; you may "train" or "shape" the power to a new form, changing what this power actually does, with 3-10 chapters of prep work and mundane actions.

Emptiness 5

5:

Solutions

You find out what to do, moving forward.

Reward. You gain a sense of completion.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

The simplest way to reward yourself for this quest is to directly change your character:

- rewriting one of your Afflictions
- rewriting one of your Bonds
- **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk representing your character's new equilibrium.
- **Shine**. Gain a level 1 Shine Perk.
- Arc 2+:
  - +1 to a Bond Perk representing that equilibrium, up to the Arc Trait's rating.
  - +1 to a Shine Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating

Often, though, you've changed in intangible ways—possibly too subtle to express even with a Bond. This might manifest in the game as:

- **Connection**. You've earned a level 2 Connection Perk to a new/underused Main Character, who admires you for who you've become.
- Gain 2-3 Recharge Tokens
- At Arc 2+:
  - **"I'll be OK."** This is a level 2 Connection Perk to whatever life you're living. You can change what kind of lifestyle that refers to 1/book.
  - **Lighter Heart.** 1/book, you can invoke this power as if it were a Recharge Token. The HG may decide that this power comes from some element of your everyday life and require you to indulge in that for a while before this power becomes available again (that is, once used, you must wait until a new book *and* until you've spent enough time doing your everyday thing before this power is once again available for use.)

Or maybe the change in you is pretty darn tangible—maybe the closure or answers that you've found have resulted in your totally becoming a creature of the Outside or the Bleak Academy.

- **Superior Skill**. Choose between Superior Immortality 1 (pg. 426) or Superior Dreamer 1.
- Arc 1+:
  - +1 to a Superior Immortality or Superior Dreamer Perk
- Arc 2+:
  - **Power Up**. Increase your inherent Shine, Superior Immortality, or Superior Dreamer by +1, up to the Arc Trait's rating. (This is always "+1, up to a maximum of the Arc rating"—if the Skill or Arc rating goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.)
  - +1 to this Arc's magical Skill Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Is there an ability you no longer need?

- **Swap**. Ditch a magical or Superior Skill Perk and replace it with a new one, level 4-5.
- **Swap**—
  - Ditch a level 1-3 magical or Superior Skill, replace it with a new magical or Superior Skill of comparable level, *and*
  - Take a new **Power Up** Perk that raises that Skill to level 4-5.
- You can also replace a level 4-5 Superior or magical Skill with a new magical or Superior Skill at the same level without using a Perk.

Have you grown stronger?

- **Power**. You gain a new, flexible Imperial power.
- **Health**. Gain a new Health Level as a Perk. This is normally a Divine Health Level, but if you hurried through the quest or don't *want* more Divine Health Levels, you could get a Tough or Normal Health Level instead.

Or gained the power to escape your circumstances?

- **Affliction**. Gain a powerful new Affliction.
- **Connection**. Gain a level 2 Connection Perk to, and the loyalty of, a new/underused Main Character.
- **Accessory**. Gain a potent item of mystical regalia.
- **Power**. You gain a potent miraculous transportation power, comparable to **Appear** (pg. 522)

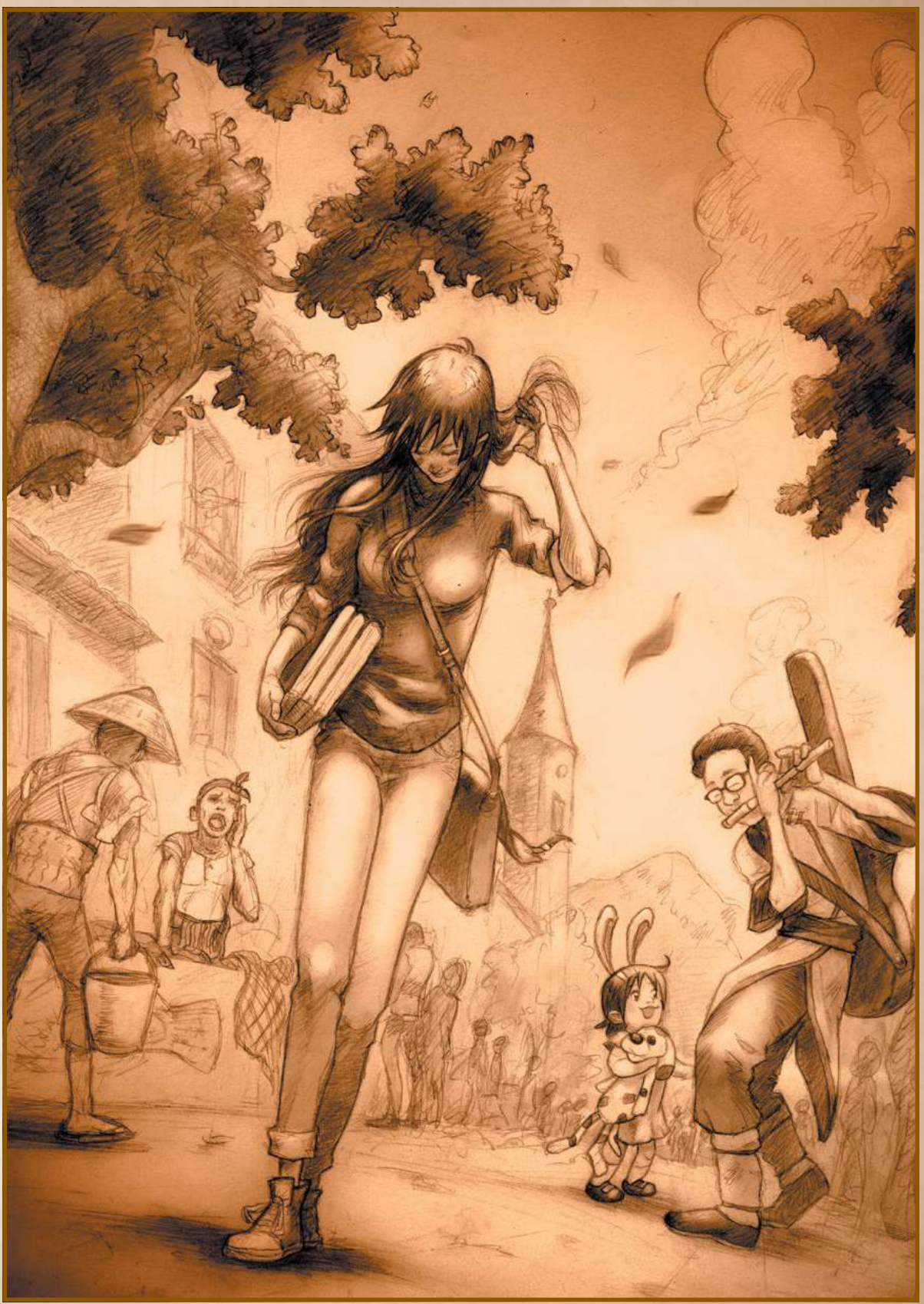
5:

Answers

You tackle a mystery that's been bugging you for a long time—something where *not knowing* has been driving your character Arc and hurting you. It's often a social or emotional thing, or a senseless crime, but it could also be a scientific mystery.

Reward. You find the answers that you needed.

Alternate Emptiness 5 Quest



Mystic Arcs

Mystic Arcs take you outside of yourself; you give yourself into the keeping of, and walk in the footsteps of, higher powers.

They typically start like this:

- Quest 1 is a confused and ominous time—it's in the shadow of events to come...
  ...and then there is a miracle.

I think of that time as like a river seen through glass. It's full of motion and darkness and there is beauty in it but you can't see where it's going until you're there.

Once the miracle strikes, you're bound to some **Principle**—you're giving yourself into the service of Love, or Justice, or Protection, or whatever. The Arc then continues like so:

- Quest 2 showcases a tempter, someone who wants to lure you from the path.
- Quest 3 is a rough, scary time of your life. Everything is confusion.

And maybe you need another quest or two to finish things out:

- Quest 4 is about you falling off that path, falling into darkness.
- Quest 5 is about your creation of a new miracle yourself.

This is a pretty bleak Arc in its quest descriptions but you shouldn't think of it like that. The thing about all of this is that hope and miracles are a constant, thrumming presence in this Arc. There are good things all around you in this Arc, waiting for you to accept them, waiting for you to need them, waiting for you to *make* them or whatever, I don't know. The point is, this isn't an Arc about despair.

It's an Arc about how terrifying the world and miracles can be; and that's intended to make the things that sustain you matter all the more.

I don't know what respite or solace you will get when you are on this path; but if you are on this path, then it will make you greater by the presence of the things you have faith in and the powers that you serve, and so that respite and that solace must somehow and eventually be enough.

That's all I can give you in game mechanics. That it must eventually, somehow, be enough.

Anything more wouldn't be faith, or hope, or strength; it'd only be causality.

Mystic 1

1:

This quest is built of portents. You know something is coming. You can *feel* that something is coming.

The person you've been... is going to have to die. And something new, be born.

Result. You are confronted by a miracle.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

The passing touch of a miracle often changes you:

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a new level 2 Superior Skill Perk.
- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction.
- **Bond**. Gain a level 1 Bond Perk related to the miracle or events.
- Gain +1 to such a Bond Perk.

Or leaves you in possession of an ally or item with a useful ability, often related to transporting or protecting you:

- **Accessory**. Gain such a magical item or ally.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Does the passing touch of the miracle change you?

- Rewrite an Affliction or Bond.
- **Superior Skill**. Gain a new level 1 Superior Skill Perk.
- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.

Do you emerge from these struggles with something that can lift you up, transport you, or shelter you from the storms?

- **Accessory**. You gain access to an unusual vehicle.
- **Accessory**. You gain access to a useful, often lightly magical, tool for self-defense.
- **Accessory**. You gain access to an unusual, but loyal, servant.
- **Ticket**. This Perk is a Superior Skill 1 granting you access to a particular road, vehicle, place, or transportation method. In short, your right to use it is so well-established as to give you 1 Edge against anybody trying to stop you.
- **Magical Technique**. Gain a new Obstacle 1-3 technique associated with one of your magical Skills—something for self-protection, summoning an ally, or traveling about.



Mystic 2

2:

You're courted and tempted by your "opposite number"—by someone who's playing in the same basic cosmology you are, but for the other team.

Someone with a decent pitch, too—

If you're fighting for Love, for instance, then you won't get a growly enemy dude who fights for Hate and sticks to "'cause Hate is awesome" as their argument. You'll get someone awesome and seductive who happens to stand for Hate; or someone clever enough to make a good play to get you to hate someone; or, most likely of all, you'll face off against Science, Reason, Duty, Dispassion, or Will and not against Hate at all.

Result. Your life falls apart. You're betrayed by something you had faith in or you're abandoned by your own "side" in some fashion. Your spiritual pleas go unanswered.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Have you built a deeper connection to your enemies?

- **Foe Yay**: Pick an enemy, rival, or antagonist. When they are cooperating with you, this Perk acts as a +1 Tool. If you ever become friends or colleagues, however grudging, this Perk reverts to a Bonus, and you may thereafter only use it 1/chapter.
- **"They Know Your Scent."** It's not *perfect* but your opposite number will *tend* not to get out of control and hurt people you care about—1/chapter, when the HG describes your opposite number doing something cruel to someone you care about, you can propose that they either hesitate out of courtesy or develop a matching interest (a desire to have your friends, family, etc. as friends, family, &c. of their own), instead. The HG can accept or reject your idea, but has to take a moment to consider it first.
- **"I Know How They Think."** You have a pretty deep insight into how your opposite number operates. 1/chapter, you can ask the HG for a hint about what your opposite number *is* thinking, or, conversely, have an imagination spot where your adversary gives what their honest advice would be in a situation like this.
- **Connection**. Gain a level 1-2 Connection Perk to your opposite number.
- +1 to such a Connection (max 5).

Or become something a little different yourself?

- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.
- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 1 Superior Skill associated with your Principle.
- **Shine**. Gain a level 1 Shine Perk.
- Rewrite an Affliction or Bond.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to an existing Shine Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Have you built a deeper connection to your enemies?

- **Connection**. Gain a level 3 Connection to your "opposite number."
- **Power**. Gain a copy or reversed version of one of the powers that they've shown themselves to possess, at an effectiveness appropriate to your current Arc Trait.
- +1 to an appropriate Connection Perk.

Given yourself over to the hand of the divine?

- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction.
- **Power**. You gain access to a powerful technique, alternate form, or living weapon that functions as a *deus ex machina* of a sort. When you first use it, it's an Imperial miracle with a very specific application, but you can spend Recharge Tokens to develop and broaden its power over time.

Or is the glory that accumulates your own?

- **Shine**. Gain a level 1 Shine Perk.
- +1 to an existing Shine Perk.



Mystic 3

3: 

Your life's a mess, and you're not sure what to make of things, but over the course of this quest you hammer out a plan for moving forward.

For putting together a new life. A new purpose. A new plan.

Result. Your plan falls apart. Things get confused and out-of-control and the whole affair sort of ends with you feeling carried along by events. You might get to do something awesome, but it doesn't feel like you had much of a chance to be consciously decisive in how it all played out.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

You'll usually emerge from this quest with a new, holy power—basically, something that sustained you or saved you when you lost control of events. This is often an aura:

- **Defensive Aura**: Pick a more specific special effect. 1/chapter, your presence can shelter the people around you in some fashion. This is an action that you take that adds +1 to the Obstacle (max 3) for relevant attacks.
- **Support Aura**: Pick a more specific special effect. 1/chapter, your presence can support and help the people around you in some fashion. This is an action you take that acts as a +1 Tool for others taking certain actions. In the event that your presence would already normally be a Tool to those actions, this improves it by a further +1 (max 3).
- **Offensive Aura**: Pick a more specific special effect. 1/chapter, your presence can trouble those around you. This is an action that you take that adds +1 to the Obstacle (max 3) for a certain category of actions, such as "evil magic," "breathing," "speaking," or "feeling at ease."

A mildly supernatural power:

- **Bonus**. 1/chapter, this Perk acts as a +1 Tool that represents (choose one)...
  - a surge of strength;
  - a healing, calming light;
  - a will to rebuke or exorcise the wicked;
  - a kindness that can help people move past their guilt;
  - a power to grant peaceful sleep.
- **Superior Skill**. Or, gain a level 1 Superior Skill Perk for something of that sort.
- **Luck**. 1-2x/book, you can invoke this power for a bit of good luck. It doesn't always work, but the HG must always take a moment to consider the possibility that good luck will strike. In addition to its other effects, spending a Recharge Token automatically refreshes your available uses of this power.

Or a more generic holiness:

- **Superior Skill**. Gain a level 1 Superior Holiness Perk.
- At Arc 2+:
  - +1 to your Superior Holiness, up to a maximum of the Arc Trait's rating.

You may also get through things on your own strength:

- **Trick**. You've learned a new application for an existing Skill. Sufficient practice will establish this as something that the Skill actually does, at which point you will no longer need this Perk.
- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- **Health**. You've gained a new Normal Health Level.
- At Arc 2+:
  - **Variable Bond or Skill**. Gain a Bond or Skill with variable level equal to your It Never Stops! Issue. The tougher things get, the stronger you become.
- At Arc 3+:
  - **Health**. You've gained a new Tough Health Level.

Note that Superior Holiness gets weird at level 4-5; I'm giving you the option, but I don't actually recommend taking it that high.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Did some higher power reach down to save you, blessing you with a new power, in the end?

- **Power**. Gain a power that symbolizes holiness in some fashion—
  - an aura of fire or glory or light
  - access to vast strength
  - the power to heal
  - the power to rebuke or exorcise the wicked
  - a sword that can cut the guilt or sadness from someone without hurting their flesh
  - the ability to shield yourself and someone else
  - the ability to grant peaceful sleep
- **Power Up**. One of your existing mundane Skills improves to level 4-5 while you have this Perk.
- **Power Up**. Extend the flexibility of a miraculous ability.

Or did you make it on your own?

- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- **Power**. Gain a power related to luck or survival in some fashion.
- **Variable Bond or Skill.** Gain a Bond, Skill, or Superior Skill with variable level equal to your It Never Stops! Issue. The tougher things get, the stronger you become.



Mystic 4

4:

There's a hole in the world. Or at least a hole in the way your life is put together. It's partly psychological but it's symbolized by a very real monster, trap, curse, demon, or miraculous effect.

Result. You manage to suppress it with the help of your family and friends. Or, if you're completely cut off from all of those, by the intervention of a higher power or an unexpected friend.

...It's probably not a permanent solution.

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Are you clawing your way up towards the realms of great and holy things, even as your life falls apart at the edges?

- **Glory**. 1-2x/book, you may take on a subtle glory and increase your Shine to 4. This is an action you must sustain for its effect. This power refreshes automatically when you spend a Recharge Token.
- **Apotheosis**. 1/book, you can take on your full glory and power and use this Perk as a +3 Tool for anything appropriate. You may define this Perk in such a way that almost anything is appropriate, or hew closer to a specific title or power, as you and reason prefer.
- Gain 2-3 Recharge Tokens
- Arc 2+:
  - **Power Up**. Increase an inherent Skill or Bond that's relevant to this Arc by +1, up to the Arc Trait's rating. (This is always "+1, up to a maximum of the Arc Trait's rating," and not a number—if the Skill or Arc rating goes up, or even down, the Power Up changes appropriately.) This can increase Shine, Cool, magical Skills, Superior Skills, and mundane Skills, but only while you keep this Perk.

Or maybe you've just gotten a little cooler?

- **MP**. This Perk adds 1 to your starting MP. (You also get an immediate MP.)
- Arc 1+:
  - **Cool**. You gain a new level 1 Cool Perk.
  - +1 to an existing Cool Perk, up to the Arc Trait's rating.

Miraculous Perks ther Benefits (Choose 1):

You're losing yourself in it sometimes—it's hard not to drown in it, sometimes—but when you are at your best, perhaps you can act as a conscious medium and expression for some holy force: enlightened, exalted, as if everything has become easy—

- **Power**. You have a new ability—either an Imperial or Major Miraculous ability—that you may use 1/book for free, or at other times for a cost of 4 MP. This transforms you into something theologically or metaphorically potent. For example, you become an avatar of winter who can stalk through the world bringing ice and snow, or an angel who can show people the flaws in their lives, or a congealing power that can hold the substrate of things together against a tide of the Outside. Usually this functions as a wish (a specific but abstract wish, like "I wish I were an avatar of winter") or Bleak power, so you can handle the details differently each time.
- **Lighter Heart**. 1/book, you can invoke this power as if it were a Recharge Token. The HG may require you to spend some time meditating on and practicing holy things (or whatever fits your Arc) before the power becomes available again (that is, once used, you must wait until a new book *and* until you've done something redemptive again before this power is again available for use.)

Or perhaps you gain an invincible, undying strength?

- **Health**. Gain a new Health Level as a Perk. This is normally a Divine Health Level, but if you hurried through the quest or don't *want* more Divine Health Levels, you could get a Tough or Normal Health Level instead.
- **Power**. Gain a new defensive power, probably roughly comparable to **Weathered**.
- **Bond**. Gain a new level 4 Bond Perk, something that sustains you.
- **Affliction**. Gain a new Affliction that expresses that inner strength.
- **"Guess You're Stuck with Me."** Gain a new, defined mechanism for coming back from death or absolute defeat. This operates on the player/game level rather than the character level so it's situationally better than immortality itself.

4:

Things Are OK

Trouble? Whatever. Awful trouble? *Whatever!* You're going to stay happy and optimistic. Ganbatte!

Outcome. You get a shattering piece of news. Your efforts fall to pieces in your hands. This probably means that you or somebody you care about is dying.

Alternate Mystic 4 Quest

Mystic 5

5:

This is your struggle to live as a better person; to be a blessing unto others, in spite of everything. To be the light of a miracle.

To make things right.

Result. Unknown. Call it a canon flexpoint—if you're ever going to find out that it was all worth it, or all for nothing, it's at the end of this quest. If you're ever going to find out that your faith has value, or that it was all a lie... it's at the end of this quest. There'll be some campaigns where which one'll happen is obvious, but others where it might surprise you!

Mundane Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Has your success changed the world forever?

- **"You may have heard of me."**: In this or a recently completed quest, you've changed the world. To make sure that this doesn't get forgotten/drift into irrelevance, 1/book, you can explain to the HG how you think it should play into the course of events. They don't have to go along with it, but they have to listen; and that chapter or the next chapter, they have to narrate how the change *is* playing into the course of events.
- **"It's a Living."** You have an important role in the world. To make sure this doesn't get forgotten/drift into irrelevance, you can ask the HG 1/chapter to narrate something to do with the politics of the role or someone being impressed by it. (This doesn't have to be more than a sentence or two—"oh, someone comes by to ask for a favor again" or "you have to make a new ruling or two on doctrine this week" suffices!)
- **Accessory**. Along the way you picked up a really cool treasure—something hardly anybody else in Town (or wherever) possesses.

Earned you a boon companion?

- **Connection**. You've earned the loyalty of a new/underused Main Character, and a level 2 Connection Perk thereto.

Made you a little bit epic?

- **Dramatic Survival**. Gain a single Divine Health Level. Once wounded, this can never heal until such time as you have access to miraculous Arcs.
- **Dramatic Travel**. You're a little stylized. 1/chapter, you can waive a level 1-2 Obstacle between you and getting somewhere where something interesting is happening.

Given you a certain *je ne sais quoi?*

- **Shine**. Gain a level 1 Shine Perk.
- At Arc 1+:
  - +1 to an existing Shine Perk

Or just changed you into something else?

- You may rewrite one of your Afflictions
- You may rewrite one of your Bonds
- You can take your inherent Skill points spent on mundane Skills and Superior Skills and re-divide them between (new or old) mundane Skills, Superior Skills, and Shine.

Miraculous Perks and Other Benefits (Choose 1):

Have you become something numinous and divine? One of the axes or axioms of the world?

- **Power**. Gain an extremely flexible Imperial power.
- **New Form**—
  - you can take your inherent Skill points spent on mundane Skills and Superior Skills and re-divide them between (new or old) mundane Skills, Superior Skills, and Shine.
  - you also receive 1-3 power-up Perks, each adding +1 to one of your new Superior Skills.
- **Affliction**. Alternately, transfigure into something new and gain an Affliction to represent that new form (e.g. "Affliction: I have become the Queen of Fire.")
- **Shine**. Gain a level 2 Shine Perk.
- +1 to an existing Shine Perk.

Have you found yourself in control of a precious resource?

- **Accessory**. Gain a potent item of mystical regalia.
- **Loyalty**. Gain the loyalty of a new/underused Main Character, as:
  - a new level 2 Connection Perk;
  - a new level 2 Bond Perk; *or*
  - +1 to an existing Connection or Bond of that sort.

Or have you transcended a normal feature of the mortal condition?

- **Power**. Gain an extremely useful transportation or defensive power—something that boils down to "of course I can show up there/of course that can't hurt me."
- **Swap**. Ditch a magical or Superior Skill Perk and replace it with a new one, level 4-5.
- **Swap**—
  - Ditch a level 1-3 magical or Superior Skill, replace it with a new magical or Superior Skill of comparable level, *and*
  - Take a new **Power Up** Perk that raises that Skill to level 4-5.
- You can also replace a level 4-5 Superior or magical Skill with a new magical or Superior Skill at the same level without using a Perk.



Chibi-Quests

A handful of quests don't really fit into the Arc structure—

They're marked with the generic logo



instead of an Arc; they're *always* or almost always side quests; as a rule, you'll need 15 XP if you want to finish one, and you'll earn a different kind of reward.

Projects

Chibi-quests are the way ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** handles stuff that you're doing for instrumental or temporary effects—

Stuff that you're putting energy and time into that won't, on its own, have long-term effect.

For instance, if you pick up a part-time job at a grocery, you'll definitely get some Skill in doing stuff there, and if you were already financially OK, you'll pick up some financial leverage—but if you quit, and look at your character sheet and your life, you're not going to see a major change in circumstances or one of your tiny handful of Skill points invested in being a grocer.

If you clean up and get really organized; if you set up a formal partnership to get a business off the ground; if you do a ton of studying for an impending test—

Whatever.

That's all good stuff to do, and it all has impact, but if it matters at all a year from now, it won't be for itself but for what it allowed you to do. A chibi-quest like this is usually an any-time quest with the same color as your Advancement Arc; it will cost 15 XP; and it will have one of four possible rewards:

- a temporary level 2 Skill.
- a temporary +1 Tool bonus on appropriate things.
- (if it happens to be better) a temporary, Arc-appropriate Perk.

or

- you're healing a little faster from an ongoing wound (pg. 126-128)—it drops a level in severity.

You keep a quest like this active after finishing it, as one of your four possible quests, and you keep the reward for as long as you do.

Characterization

Characters often have a 15-XP side quest that they stay on for multiple stories—or rather, as soon as they finish it, they start it again.

This is called your character's "basic" quest.

For instance, one of Town's Main Characters, **the Wishing Boy**, defaults to having a quest to just... have fun with friends and make precious memories. This hunger is never completely satisfied—it just earns a reward every 15 XP.

A quest like this does a couple of things for you.

First, it gives something to think about when you're not able or willing to actively move forward on the big plots in your life. If you're someone like **the Wishing Boy**, for instance, and you don't know what you should be doing, you can look at that quest and it'll tell you: relax, set the rest aside, and have some fun with your friends.

Another thing a basic quest does for you is give you a little progress meter that runs even when you're not doing anything important at all. Just playing your character and ignoring the quest should still get you 1-3 bonus XP for it a session; eventually, your character will grow from the quest no matter what you do.

If you play a lot of tennis, that could be a basic quest for you. Or if you spend a lot of time looking after your cats. Rinley Yatskaya's basic quest is telling and listening to stories; Miramie Mesmer's basic quest is feeling aggravated and under siege.

For me it seems to be writing fantasy & SF & RPG stuff. I was writing when I was 9. I was more into bad poetry and bad comics when I was younger than that, but it was still basically the same. I was writing when I was starving and I was writing when I was successful and I was writing when I should have been doing other things. I've made friends by writing and I've lost them by writing. I met Excrucians and Powers, I came to Town and hung out with rats and magic, I saw the sun rise over Grayvale and I ate manna from the tree, and *still* I'm writing!

It hasn't changed.

It's my chibi-quest!

But maybe I'm being too kind to myself. Maybe the thing I do is actually freaking out unnecessarily. Or being overwhelmed by ambient sound. Or making random, goofy connections between unrelated concepts. Or never quite making it to things going well, but never *quite* having them fall apart on me either with any finality. Maybe it's even something bitter, like *not* doing all the things that I'm not doing because I put my energy into writing instead. Or maybe it's something uplifting, like, maybe I actually get to make people feel happy in my company or with my words often enough that it could count as a thing, as *the* thing, that I chibi-do.

What is it for you in real life, do you think?

What's the thing your character does?

The standard reward for a basic quest is a **Recharge Token**—a precious memory or keepsake that you can call upon exactly once in the middle of a chapter to refresh your Will and "wish power" (MP) to full. There are also miscellaneous other things in the game that you might be able to use a Recharge Token for—mostly, and this is kind of me cheating, things I'd like to charge you some XP for but also allow you to do on the fly, like expanding the use of a *deus ex machina* power (see pg. 438 or pg. 501/506).


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Mortal Arcs

For a mortal PC, level 0 Arcs come with the following benefits:

- a level 2 Bond
- an Affliction tied to the Arc Trait's rating *and*
- a level 0 Arc Trait, which isn't inherently useful but can become so later on.

Each completed Arc gives a mortal character:

- +1 to the Arc Trait
- +1 Skill Point to an existing Skill, +1 to an existing Bond, or a new level 1 Bond
- a new level 1 Skill, *and*
- you can optionally move a point from an existing Skill into the new Skill.

The first Arc usually takes 120 XP to complete; after that, the HG should set the target based on the advancement rate they or the group as a whole would like.

If you reach Arc level 3, you'll also get a new Affliction tied to that Arc.

Character Growth for NPCs

I don't want to give the impression that the PCs are normative.

The *rule* is that an NPC has whatever abilities the HG thinks that they ought—but the *normative expectation* is that an ordinary person gains a single Skill or Bond point per Arc, doesn't get any free Bonds, and has no access at all to Afflictions. Nor do they accumulate the benefits they do get indefinitely—major transition points in their life (such as puberty, graduation, and meeting the PCs for the first time) effectively start a "new campaign" for them, refactoring their character sheet back down towards 8 points of Skills, a possible Bond, and 0-2 Perks.

Even in a mortal game, in short, PCs and the other Main Characters will tend to start stronger and grow faster than the NPCs around them.

Miraculous Rewards for Mundane Quests

Talk to your group and HG about it; if they're OK with it, you may be able to sacrifice the Skill/Bond part of a mundane Arc's rewards for a small miraculous ability like **Well-Liked** (on pg. 401) or **Octopus Singer** (pg. 106).

Miraculous Arcs

At the miraculous level there is more distinction between the Arcs; each has a power uniquely its own.

I'll give you one example for each of the eight colors below, plus a few extras—

All of them fairly generic, so as to allow you but not to expect you to create your own.



Quest Miracles

Characters with established miraculous Arcs gain access to a new range of possible chibi-quests and projects. These are the "quest miracles:" 15-XP or occasionally slightly-more-than-15-XP side quests with the color and the flavor of their Arcs.

These are *slow miracles*, miracles of effort, miracles wrought by work, despair, and dreaming over a good length of time. Not the kind of thing that you'd do in miraculous combat, not the kind of thing you can do just by pointing at the sky, at the sea, at some mountain, and yelling, "Bam!"

—but the kind of thing that you'd use if you wanted to cart a mountain away a pebble at a time, only, planning to finish it in weeks or months or labor instead of the great slow aeons. These are the powers you'd use to build a bridge to Heaven brick by brick, or summon rain by consciously gathering up the clouds, or find a path through thought and effort by which to send a lost spirit to its home.

A great work like this is usually piggybacked on an any-time quest: when you've flipped your sign, or said your catchphrase, or gone over the top, or whatever, 15 times, the miracle self-invokes.

You'll pick up your options for quest miracles like this from your Arcs.

Each color of miraculous Arc, at each level, offers a possibility or two for quest miracles, and you'll retain access to the earlier levels' quest miracles if you'd like. A few miraculous Arcs, like the Knight Arc "**Reality Syndrome**" (pg. 500-507), have specific additional options of their own. The options I'm going to list here aren't actually the end-all and be-all of your options, either way: you can always negotiate with the HG to do something miraculous that your character ought to be able to do, or at least attempt, and—unless the HG disagrees strongly about its possibility in the world—you can probably get it done with a sufficiently expensive quest. If you're willing to go all the way to 50-60 XP, you can probably earn both the effect *and* an appropriate advancement along the course of your Arc!

You don't have to stay on the Arc to have access to its quest miracles—once you've, e.g., hit Arc Trait 1 on a Storyteller Arc, you can always do the appropriate quests.

Quest Miracles and MP

If you're questing for a miraculous action, it won't generally have an additional MP cost. The quest itself pays the price, and it's invoked automatically at the end of a short-term quest.

Quest Miracles, Conflict, and Strike

Unlike most quests, you don't have to put away the quest card when you complete a quest miracle—although the HG is within their rights to insist on your doing so at the end of an IC season or an OOC book.

Instead, on completion, the miracle is "sustained" for as long as you keep it an active quest.

You don't need a separate action to invoke or sustain it and you can add Strike to it later on if you've encountered unexpected opposition or an Auctoritas.

The Deeds of the Binder



Bindings

Quest miracles for a Bindings Arc are usually **Paradigmatic** (pg. 93) any-time quests.

Arc 0-1

Quest miracles at this level focus on imbuing some of yourself, or some of some occult power, into an object, person, or thing. This is typically well-controlled while the quest miracle is sustained and then fades into the HG's hands thereafter—

Not necessarily becoming completely uncontrolled, or even less effective, or anything, just that it *can* if the HG *wants* it to.

Arc 2

Quest miracles at this level focus on summoning out some larger power from one of the things you have bound—often opening a gate or portal or transforming a place in some eldritch way.

If you want to create a new artifact—a wonder of magic or science—you can generally do so, from this point forward, with a 45-XP quest. In addition to creating the artifact itself this acts as a quest miracle to unleash that larger power.

See **Glass Magic**, on pg. 464, for an example of how this kind of thing might work.

Arc 3

Quest miracles at this level focus on conjuring servants, reshaping regions, and constructing fortresses; the results are usually chillingly effective while the miracle is sustained (or when you invoke a follow-up miracle) and quirky/idiosyncratic/mildly rebellious otherwise.

Arc 4

Quest miracles at this level are massive ritual attacks on your enemies—you'll chain them, bind them, destroy them, or transform them, although if they have Health Levels or the HG treats them as having Health Levels then they may negotiate a mitigation of the effects.

Arc 5

Quest miracles at this level tend to focus on reshaping the entire cosmos and setting new principles for it; this is sadly a slower and more expensive process than the typical quest miracle, possibly costing 35 or more XP, and to some extent its very open-endedness makes it more vulnerable to the HG's choices about what to allow, but the end result is still pretty good.

Knight Path Miracles



Knight

A miraculous Knight Arc is typically going to feature:

- at least one **Truth**—something definite and certain about you;
- a **Failing**—something that is holding you back; *and*
- a **Role**—something that you will aspire to.

Quest miracles are usually **Struggles** (pg. 99-100) built around these three ideas.

Arc 0-1

Your quest miracles generally involve trying to be someone better. If you know who you want to be—if you're a candidate for the Horizon Student Council, or the Fortitude Regional Council, or you're learning to be a veterinarian, or you're planning to be a rock star, or whatever—then you practice or think about your role and try to figure out how to do it right.

If you don't know that yet, you work on trying to be whatever you think you should be trying to be today—honest, "cool," diligent, dangerous, whatever!

At the end of the quest, you'll get your choice of:

- an insight that helps you understand what you need to do (and which is typically a +1 Tool for emulating that role, attaining that virtue, or doing something context-specific that's relevant to your Arc situation while you sustain the quest); *or*
- a kind of metaphysical/social armor that displays your worth—it becomes *blatantly obvious* that you are on this path and that your Truth (whatever it is) is true.

  If absolutely necessary—I guess if you're infiltrating Hell or something?—you could make your Failing obvious instead or as well.

Here's an example: you're lost and adrift in a distant land—Shangri-La, Kentucky, or even Mars! No one is going to care there that you're (e.g.) a candidate for the Fortitude Regional Council with an exemplary history of honesty. *But* you could use this miracle to make it obvious to anyone who even *looks* at you that you're a civic-minded and honest person. Your virtue pierces the walls between social worlds.

For Arc 0-1 **Struggles** I recommend the "Fake it Till You Make It" signs on pg. 456.

Arc 2

Quest miracles at this level focus on doing things "appropriate" to your role. If you're training to be a knight, that could mean pulling swords out of stones and defeating knights in darker armor. If you're an magical star princess apprentice, instead, it might mean manifesting Town-defending force fields from the wishful powers of people's hearts! If you're planning on being a veterinarian, though, this might be a little unimpressive—

I mean, you can probably stop a plague that's running rampant in the canine population or something, which is awesome, but only if there *is* such a plague; or invent a new veterinary technique, maybe, which is also awesome but pretty hard to give actual meaning to in-game.

Still.

The point is, if there *is* something that's established in play as the kind of thing that someone in your role does—if you're the kind of person that *does* pull swords out of stones, or reliably save fantasy kingdoms, or fly across the timewinds in a ship made of fragile dreams, or negotiate with the Kings and Queens of the birds, basically, if the game has established anything like that as being true?

This is the level at which you can back that up with a quest miracle.

The "Fake it Till You Make It" signs on pg. 456 are also suited for an Arc 2 **Struggle**.

Arc 3

Quest miracles at this level draw on some external power. Ideally it's something that's already granting you power—a knight's patron saint, say, or the magic of your company credit card, or a symbiote that lives inside you. But you could also use this quest itself as a way of declaring:

"I, as someone in this Role, am entitled to invoke and call upon the power of (X)!"

...where X is something *like* a patron saint, or alien entity, or secret weapon, or symbiote inside your chest.

This power usually manifests an amped-up version of one of your existing powers or Perks.

The quest is normally a **Struggle**. Evoking this power is agonizing, traumatic, or disorienting, but you keep control, e.g. showing an **Agony** sign from pg. 457.

Arc 4

Quest miracles at this level tend to make the world around you flourish or otherwise transform it in accordance to your role.

It's plausible that when you get there this will feel like the kind of thing that works best as a **Pastoral** or **Exciting** quest. (Or it might still be best suited for an agonizing **Struggle** quest using the signs on pg. 457.)

Arc 5

Quest miracles at this level focus on empowering or redeeming others—you can pull them from their ordinary or fallen lives and give them a new role in service to your own.

This is usually a bit of a blast from the past, quest-wise—these **Struggles** will usually use the "Fake it Till You Make It" signs again.

Side A

I Know What I'm Doing

Side B

(You don't know what you're doing.)

Side A

It'll be OK

Side B

(You don't know what you're doing.)

Side A



Calm

Side B

!!!!asdfasdfaegoihaergF*CK

I'm Fine

Side A

(Please make it stop.)

Side B

Given my position... I could hardly do anything less

Side A

(Where am I?)

Side B

Calm

Side A

I can hear it whispering in my head

Side B

Otherworldly Miracles



Otherworldly

Otherworldly Arcs generally connect you to and make you an exemplar and servant of some fundamental force—

Your **Element** or **Estate**.

For instance, you might develop a deep connection to Fire, Roads, Daydreams, or Sloth.

The quest miracles for an Otherworldly Arc reflect that, using **Lurid** (pg. 96-97) any-time quests wherein your thoughts drift away to the realms of your Element or your Element shows its nature in your countenance.

Arc 0-1

Typical quest miracles at this level are divinations—you try to use your dreams to find something out from or about the Element you are connected to.

Arc 2

Typical quest miracles are protective—you stabilize situations against the influence of the Outside, heal spiritual wounds in things, and strengthen something's spirit. Your element must somehow be involved.

These are Major Miracles by default.

Arc 3

Quest miracles at this level expand your control over your Element—if such suits your Element, they allow you to summon up epic, Town-shaking storms; conjure endless summers; reshape streets and grow buildings whole and entire from the ground.

These are Major Miracles by default.

Arc 4

Quest miracles at this level are epic miracles for driving your Element away or limiting its presence somewhere—you can erase species, turn manifestations of your Element invisible and intangible, and the like. Such a miracle it might have been that ended the age of progress here in Town.

These are Major Miracles by default.

Arc 5

Quest miracles at this level allow epic-scale adjustments to the "state" of things with regards to the Element you're bound to—if it fits your Element, you can afflict a nation with storms or change what it means to dream.

These are Major Miracles by default.

Weather Mantra

an example Quest Miracle

Type: Miraculous Action, Major, Quest Miracle

Cost: —

You may conjure up weather effects—summon storms, winds, or droughts. You can call up and befriend a spirit of the weather; they will stay beside you for a week or two before they fade. In general you may work any number of effects involving creating weather, summoning weather, or bringing weather patterns to pseudo-life. However, each use of this power requires a 15+ XP quest, such as **Bring the Storm**, below.

This is a miraculous ability appropriate for characters with a suitable **Otherworldly** Arc at 3+. By "suitable" I mean that not every spiritual character connects to the weather—if your otherworldly path connects you to fire, or water, or wishes, or music, or something, then weather manipulation might not be an appropriate quest miracle for you. It's also possible that you'll have a unique Otherworldly Arc that's particularly inappropriate for this kind of thing, even though it *is* about the weather, or a unique Arc of some other sort that this *fits*.

Bring the Storm

XP

25

Bonus XP

You're summoning a storm.

This quest comes with a division of states—there's the you who is grounded in the world around you, and then there's the you whose mind can be suddenly snapped away from the here and now into the chaos of the coming storm. Your thoughts may suddenly be snatched from you and blown about as the clouds that you're dragging closer rip from their leashes. You'll be vague and unfocused for a while when that occurs.

I've made a sign for this—a reversible card, which you could in theory have on the table in front of you in play to show which state you're in. You can earn a bonus XP at any time (though only once per scene/15 minutes) by flipping the card, showing that you're moving between states—coming down to earth or being ripped out into the storm.

If you can't actually keep the card in front of you, holding up the card with the relevant side facing people or just saying or emoting something appropriate can earn you the XP instead.



Here and Now

Distant Storms



Legends and Dreams

Storyteller

Quest miracles for a Storyteller Arc are usually **Melodramatic** (pg. 91)—you're always admiring yourself in mirrors and lakes, seeing omens, reacting strongly to the good or bad character of others, and the like. You're disdainfully cynical or in love with the world or something in it and surrounded by the substance of miracles.

Arc 0

Your life is just a bit too stylized to be real. You've got access to "the power of friendship," or sparkle-cam, or unlimited ammunition, or convenient clues—whatever. Or you're turning into something mysterious and awesome, and that numinous nature shrouds you.

Quest miracles at this level take the form of genre-appropriate attempts to solve a given mystery or problem, but they aren't necessarily very powerful—you're guaranteed to get at least a hint or a small victory, but not necessarily anything worth the quest.

Arc 1

You've got some mysterious, magical, and awesome stuff going on with your life. You've got *plot hooks*.

Quest miracles at this level tend to improve you with *extra* plot hooks: story-specific powers, bonuses, or upgrades that'll become unreliable when you abandon the quest and go away entirely at the end of the story.

Arc 2

You can manifest yourself in places where you're not. Rumors spread. Signs of your coming presence appear. Then there you are, equipped with a temporary level 2 Connection to someone or something, pre-integrated into the place or person's life. If your target is a person, the miracle also gives them a temporary level 2 Connection to *you*.

Optionally, you may then feed off of your target, wounding them with this miracle in some desired fashion.

Arc 3

You may use quest miracles at this level to transform others' lives. You act as a cathartic influence on their lives, getting them out of their rut, helping the broken take power over themselves again, shaking the cruel from their foolish ways. This can involve your other powers or just... being yourself.

This tends to work better on random NPCs than Main Characters—it's not that it *can't* work on a Main Character, but if the HG or player wants to let you change a Main Character's heart, they'll usually either let you do it for free, let you do it with in-game work, or demand a *lot* of XP. And if they don't want you to do that, you probably can't! Wanting a short quest to prove your intentions is pretty rare.

Arc 4

As you ascend into Arc 4 on a Storyteller Arc, you tend to become something of a dilemma—a contradiction. You wind up pulled between two competing forces and the ultimate direction of your loyalties gets muddy.

You can't resolve this on your own. For that, there's something you need from the people around you.

At this level you're a catalytic, transformative force that pulls people into your own story; and usually, that story is in a state of unresolved tension between two opposing poles.

Quest miracles at this level manifest or banish things that "fit" one of the two stories you have going on.

Arc 5

Quest miracles at this level break down barriers that stand in the way of your will, shape the Outside to that will, create powerful servants and artifacts (sometimes even at the Main Character level), and twist fate. They express the wishing (or bleak) power of the heart that can make the impossible, possible—

The way to get a handle on what they can and can't do is to imagine that they're a metaphor on a grand scale for some force you serve. If you're Law, then they can bind vast regions into order; if you're a representative of Love, you can shatter sea walls and transform animals into people; if you're a representative of Despair, you can dim or douse all light and bring cities tumbling down.


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Aspect

Quest miracles for a miraculous Aspect Arc are usually **Exciting**—you can use the generic Exciting quest on pg. 94-95.

Arc 0-1

Quest miracles at this level train you temporarily in some sort of special martial arts ability or secret art—typically manifesting as a temporary level 2 Superior Skill. For instance, you learn the implausible Roleplaying Martial Arts style, which gives you edge in a martial arts duel while you stay in character, or the No-Shadow Punch to "throw" your punches a few feet beyond your fist, or a special Life-Awakening Cooking style that infuses your soup with enough heart power to wake a wounded hero or old grandmother practically from the dead.

(But not *all* the way from the dead, and they should rest again when they can, because as a Superior Skill 2 this has to make *some* concessions towards realism.)

Arc 2

Quest miracles at this level are still "special techniques," but now they can be goofier: you train in Chi techniques that approximate animalistic or monstrous abilities or do supernatural martial arts things (as a level 3 Superior Skill) or that change your body in ways appropriate for a persistent miracle.

This quest is an implicit claim that any—human? Are you human?—whatever you are, if their heart is sufficiently heroic, can get to this technique with the appropriate training regimen. However, you don't have to make this claim with a straight face; you just have to be willing to *make* it.

Arc 3

Quest miracles at this level manifest spiritual auras around you that have strong effects. You can typically direct these effects with your mundane or Aspect-enhanced actions—if you surround yourself in a storm of spirit swords, you can attack people with them using your mundane actions or your other Aspect powers.

Arc 4-5

Quest miracles at this level teach you invincible (and often, kind of goofy) perfect techniques. You can take the kind of stuff that your higher-end Aspect powers let you do—e.g., the stuff from **Determination** and **Anime Moment** (pg. 532), for an Ace—and learn to do it on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, because these powers are a single miracle, using this power is a little tricky. You can't turn it on and off because as a quest miracle, it's already on; instead, you'll have to:

- Declare an automatic trigger for its activation, like "I flash-step when it's helpful in fighting [[some particular enemy]];" *or*
- Activate/control the power with your mundane actions, meaning that someone could theoretically outfox even your perfect, invincible action by being smarter than the brain behind it.

Starting at Arc 5, or at Arc 4 if you're willing to put some extra XP into the quest miracle, you can take these techniques past the local level—powers like **Anime Moment** might not let you take action extending beyond your vicinity and the scene, but these quest miracles can.

The Shepherd's Way



Shepherd

A Shepherd's path generally relates to:

- a **Craft**—some work of mortal Skill that you have taken to magical levels.
- a collection of things and people you have a spiritual connection to: your **Treasures**.
- a collection of places you have a connection to: also called **Treasures**, or, **Gardens**.

Do you guard and watch over animals, buildings, family, or friends? Do you empower your works of art? Do you have a collection of magical gear from which you evoke potent effects? Do you fish up magical fish, then feed them to the people you care about? Duel your enemies using magical kites?

That kind of stuff is the Shepherd's path.

Quest miracles for a Shepherd Arc are usually **Pastoral**—you can use the generic Pastoral quest on pg. 90.

Arc Level 0

Your quest miracles at this level usually focus on training or improving things, making them unnaturally responsive and alert (for animals) or convenient and functional (for places). This creates a +1 Tool, which is only really better than a mundane quest miracle in that you can share the benefits with others.

You can use your Craft in some fashion to teach animals or people borderline supernatural techniques. For instance, you might put them through bizarre cinematic martial arts training, magical training, use your Treasures in some weird fashion to improve them, or have many long, heartfelt conversations about what they're really capable of until that turns out to include ventriloquism, charm, traditional Damascene smithcraft, or whatever else you'd like. This gives them the equivalent of a Superior Skill 2, which remains part of them from the time you finish the quest to the time you set it aside. If you want to teach your dog hang-gliding or a person how to become unnoticeable using the Shadow Step, this is the appropriate technique.

If you want to do this, and you don't have an appropriate Arc-related Craft, you can probably get away with it as long as you involve your Craft into things *somehow*. You can train them against or with your fish or kites or glasswork or whatever else.

Arc Level 1

Your quest miracles at this level tend to transform your Treasures, physically and spiritually, unleashing their "true form" or "true power." Or, if the Treasure is already magical, you activate, revitalize, and control its powers without necessarily initiating a transformation.

If you want to create a new artifact—a wonder of magic or science—you can generally do so, from this point forward, with a 45-XP quest. In addition to creating the artifact itself this acts as a quest miracle to unleash its true power.

See **Glass Magic**, on pg. 464, for an example of how this might work.

More generally unless your Arc has a weird condition for getting Treasures, a 45-XP quest is usually enough to both obtain/create and then miraculously activate a new Treasure.

Arc Level 2

Quest miracles at this level focus on quiet moments of beauty—they're about bringing a good closure to things through... basically, being Santa, or a good witch, or the secret angel in the shadows who makes everything come out OK.

About turning your skills and position and talents to the end of making things end well.

You can think of the result as a miracle that declares that the relevant actions, including the stuff you've already done towards the quest, *will* lead to moments of beauty and positive closure. The standard failure mode, if the opposition is too strong, is for it to produce results that are only happy endings, moments of beauty, or positive closure in the most bittersweet, vaguest, or most ironic sense.

Still, if you beat any countermiracles or Auctorita, a happy ending is guaranteed! There's a *reason* Santa's never lost his hold on the winter throne.

The quests themselves are normally **Pastoral**, but in some cases a generic **Paradigmatic** or **Exciting** quest may be more fun.

Arc Level 3

Quest miracles at this level let you find, temporarily have around, and invoke the powers of epic versions of the kinds of Treasures you already have around. That is, if you normally have a pet bear that can be pretty awesome, these quest miracles are what you'd need to wake up one of the nearby hills that happens to be a sleeping bear. (Then, later on, after the quest miracle is finished, the HG can explain away how the hill gets back in place and why nobody much mentions it with "let us never speak of this again.")

If you usually invoke PCs as your Treasures—e.g., bringing a special power in them out—then you probably shouldn't go around finding more epic versions of them to use. Instead, these quests scale up the power you can get from them; if that winds up overlapping with or duplicating an ability you have through other channels, such as **A Fearsome Blessing** (pg. 535), well, you have my regrets.

Arc Level 4-5

Quest miracles at this level are creative—you build things that have cosmic meaning and applicability. They're usually concretized Afflictions: while they exist, even once the miracle subsides, a new convention governs the world. Perhaps you wish to give people hope: you erect a stone; and then for a long time after, a person may come and pray before that quest-made stone to have the burden of their life lifted from them. Something transformative will then happen; those who dreamed of the sky too often, for instance, might learn to fly.

Sometimes these quest miracles create local concretized Properties instead: while the physical structure remains, a Property locally prevails.

Glass Magic

an example Quest Miracle

Type: Miraculous Action, Quest Miracle

Cost: —

You may bring out the hidden power in a piece of glasswork, making something ranging from a glass that's just extra-pretty or a little lucky to an artifact opening into a mirror-world or a window into dreams. Each use of this power to forge a new wonder requires a 45-XP quest such as **The Mirror-House** below.

You must also create the actual glass, which makes this quest difficult to complete in less than a book and often stretches it out to several—although a good glass-working Skill and a willingness to challenge Obstacles might let you finish a small piece in a timeframe measurable in chapters.

This power is a permanent transformation in the glass but your precise control over it is limited: you'll need to keep the quest active to maintain that control, or recover it later with a smaller, 15-XP followup quest miracle. Otherwise the results become a little unpredictable or "muted"—less likely, no matter how clever your plan, to have a major impact on the game or on others' lives. This "muting" functions as a level 3 Obstacle in the way of getting productive things done using that artifact's power.

Glass Magic is a miraculous ability suited to characters with an appropriate **Shepherd** Arc at 1+.

Simpler Work

If the desired effect is comparatively minor—the limits here are the HG's call—you don't need a miraculous Arc; a glass-making Skill will suffice!

An example of such an effect is **the Blessing-Piece**, below.

Glass Magic and Perks

I want to clarify what you're doing here, because it would be easy to misunderstand. The 30 XP surcharge isn't for a mechanical advantage, although it may produce one. It isn't to buy you access to a Perk, although you'll have the option to get one.

The bonus for doing the 45-XP version isn't a game mechanic.

It's that you've created a wonder, in glass.

It's likely that you'll want to choose a Perk that fits this creation. That's probably necessary to make this a Treasure that you can use in the future. And that Perk might help you work around the level 3 Obstacle—or, then again, it might not. If you're late in an Arc and can talk the HG into a Perk like "**Accessory**. Gain a potent item of mystic regalia," then maybe the glass has big, always-available miraculous powers, regardless of quests or your other abilities; if you're at the beginning of an Arc and/or your miraculous Shepherd Arc is low-leveled, maybe all you get is that it *is* a Treasure; or maybe you're making the glass as a gift for a friend and never expected a new Treasure yourself.

None of that is the point.

That's all a system implementation of the results of the quest, and it matters, but the 30 XP surcharge isn't for a thing you do in the rules system.

It's for creating something. It's for a *great work.*



The Mirror House

XP

15

45

Bonus XP

You're building or taking control of a looking-glass that serves also as a portal—an opening to a reflected copy of the glass-maker's shop where you work. It's a place where you can seal away glasswork too dangerous to keep in the physical world and let it temper for a while in the light of the reflected sun. You might also use it to keep a secret room that stores rare treasures in or to duplicate objects (with a left-right flip) by pulling them through the glass.

You can earn a bonus XP at any time (though only once per scene/15 minutes) by ***proposing a theory about how you should construct or revitalize such a glass***. This can be technical or just a vague discussion of the world, light, glass, the Outside, and reflections.

Imbuing the Glass

If you are creating the mirror-house rather than simply invoking its power, this quest costs an additional 30 XP.

The Blessing-Piece

XP

15

45

Bonus XP

You're designing, building, or evoking the power of a piece of glasswork that expresses your strong feelings for someone—your wish for their safety and prosperity and health, your blessings upon them.

You can earn a bonus XP at any time (though only once per scene/15 minutes) by explaining what you're doing in a scene or what you've *been* doing through this lens—

"I'm thinking of [name's] future." or

"I want to make [name] something special."

The idea is that by saying that, you either confirm that something is *actually* about your good wishes for that person and your work on this particular piece of glass, or you make yourself seem a little goofy and perhaps overly earnest.

Imbuing the Glass

If you are creating the blessing-piece rather than simply invoking its power, this quest costs an additional 30 XP.

Miracles of Emptiness



Emptiness

Quest miracles for an Emptiness Arc are usually **Setting**—you can use the generic Setting quest on pg. 100-101.

Arc Level 0-1

Quest miracles at this level tend to create minions—*shikigami*, imps, helpful spirits, floating-mask spirits, animated objects—that are not terribly useful for most things but which accurately express something in your heart. You can:

- Kill them once they fully manifest, purifying your heart;
- Use them as a sympathetic link to some part of yourself you wish to magically strengthen, or to some inner demon you want to face and learn to live with;
- Use them as messengers;
- Use them to siphon 1-2 MP from a willing or unsuspecting associate who keeps the shikigami close to their heart or sleeps beside it; later you can wring it out for the MP and use it again;
- Empower them to perform simple chores and functions.

The minion itself usually appears at the beginning of the quest; however, it is not until the quest miracle completes that it becomes useful or performs its proper magical function.

While you sustain the miracle the minion is effectively a part of your character—you have a say in what happens with it. Afterwards, it's still a loyal minion that's linked to you, but someone could, e.g., subvert it with the appropriate coin[77].

Arc Level 2

Quest miracles at this level tend to create gates, labyrinths, and pocket worlds—they create *twisted spaces* where things do not behave properly. There is a tendency for these, too, to express something in the heart, so that navigating them teaches you something or gives you an insight; if the actual *value* is in the navigation, in the insight or the power that you acquire by navigating it, then the labyrinth or world or gate itself will tend to open at the beginning of the quest, and the navigation complete for the first time at the end; otherwise, the world or gate typically appears at the end of the quest.

As with a minion, the twisted spaces are effectively a part of your character while you sustain the miracle—you could even defend them from attack with your own Health Levels, if you so chose.

Arc Level 3: Quest Miracles

Quest miracles at this level tend to transform you into something that can express your strong feelings—you take on a numinous or monstrous form, warping reality as you go, and pursue some aim; then, when you fail, or when you've exhausted the cathartic power, you dwindle back to yourself. Often there is a lingering effect on your mood and spirit. There may even be a small physical legacy of this technique, a silver armband or single remaining wing or something; this would increase the cost of the quest to 20 XP for a near-pointless alteration and 45 XP for something that comes with a useful Perk.

Arc Level 4: Quest Miracles

Quest miracles at this level allow you to exalt someone else—to open their eyes to a beautiful or terrible truth, to refine their spirit, to show them something astonishing. You shatter a chain on them, free them from some delusion, and/or give them an absolute power to pursue their goals or follow some path. If you tightly constrain what this power does, it's an ordinary miracle; if you describe the power's effects in sufficiently loose terms, so that it's fun to imagine a potential opponent using semantics or symbolism rather than raw power to oppose it, it escalates to a Major miraculous power.

Here's how it works.

Near or even at the beginning of this quest, you can show the target something amazing but inexpressible—

You can show them that you have something to *offer*, and begin refining their spirit.

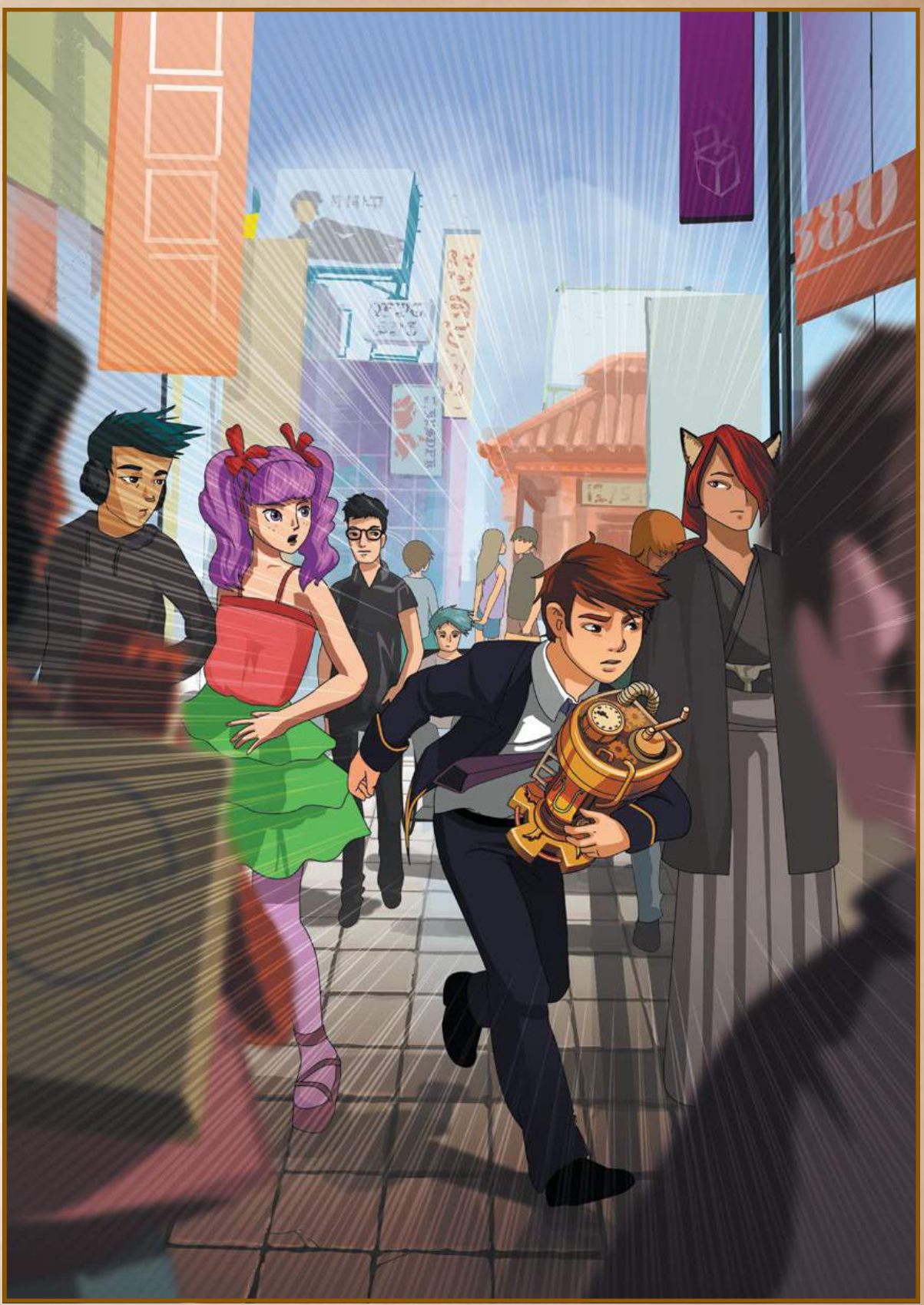
The quest then plays out over a series of conversations, observations, or shared encounters. When or soon after the quest completes, they finally *get it*—you open their third eye or whatever or sever their chains.

Arc Level 5: Quest Miracles

Quest miracles at this level typically shape a new comparatively-mortal identity for yourself, a person destined to accomplish something specific before shaking themselves off and returning to being you.

Normally this miracle takes effect at the end of the quest and you then sustain it over the course of your mortal experience; however, as with previous Emptiness-based quest miracles, it's possible to enact the effect itself at or near the beginning of the quest and have it be comparatively troublesome or useless to you—a source of play, not power—until the moment that the quest is complete.

77 Watanabe candies?



Transcendent Experiences



Mystic

Quest miracles for a Mystic Arc are usually **Symbolic**—you can use the generic Symbolic quest on pg. 102.

Each of these Arcs will usually bind you to some **Principle**—love, or pain, or freedom, or something else.

Arc 0-1

Quest miracles at this level get you inspiration or small new powers to help you solve a problem that you're facing. Over the course of the quest, you'll develop a unique extension to your normal thematics and abilities that helps you with the problem.

For instance, let's say you're **Principal Entropy** (pg. 242) and you're stumped about how to recreate this really good lemon coffee cake you had once, so you undertake a quest miracle. You normally bleed mutagenic blood from your hands, and you're normally in the company of evil creatures, so, those are your normal thematics.

Based on that...

Over the course of the quest, you might begin to bleed colors, evil bees, and the like. As the quest evolves, you and the HG will work on ways to tie the original semi-random effects more tightly into the quest: the bees will become increasingly adept at cooking, and the blood thing increasingly relevant, until near the end of the quest your hostel room's ceiling is covered with a growing lemon coffee cake hive and your blood, spilled on a recipe book, will naturally pervert it into an accounting of appropriate cakes.

Arc 2

Quest miracles at this level dissociate you from yourself—you're ripped from your life, given a new form, insights, powers, and location, in some fashion that fits your Principle and the Arc. It's usually a tradeoff between control and power: if you just let the hand of fate work through you, then you'll do some pretty awesome things, but really, it's just the HG doing them. If you insist on total control over the process, it's like, you can maybe hear a few whispered words of the world talking to itself, walk through a wall or two, or gain a temporary level 1-2 Superior Skill.

No matter what, you'll probably hear a secret and wake up somewhere you weren't expecting to be.

Arc 3

Quest miracles at this level create powerful blessings and invisible/elusive servants—mystic forces go to work on the land, particularly when you're not around to see it, to make things more like you feel they ought to be. They may also open paths and create dramatic displays—by which I mean, vast Biblical plagues or singing choirs of angels, which are specifically intended to "be awesome" rather than "produce a specific effect in-game."

Arc 4

Quest miracles at this level are massive ritual effects on your enemies or sometimes on your domain (on the things you claim the right to govern or protect)—you'll burn them, purify them, protect them, or shape them into weapons of war, although if they have Health Levels or the HG treats them as having Health Levels then they may negotiate a mitigation of the effects.

Arc 5

Quest miracles at this level generally focus on establishing divine law—raising a sanctuary and mini-realm if you don't have a larger one; creating purposive buildings and landscape features within it; setting forth new Properties and determinations for your sanctuary, realm, or followers; empowering faithful servants; creating mystical objects embodying part of your power; and so forth. You can in short do the things suited for a divine entity to do, including bringing out low-end Mystic powers in others.


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Fly Away

an example Quest Miracle

Type: Miraculous Action, Quest Miracle

Cost: —

You may take on the shape or Properties of a spirit bird for a time—

- A spirit bird wears the air of Celestia (pg. 286);
- A spirit bird soars over the world;
- A spirit bird may travel into dreams;
- A spirit bird may guide you;
- A spirit bird represents freedom, faith, and hope;
- A spirit bird may find what you're looking for;
- A spirit bird is in service to the sun.

You'll choose how much of a bird you become, and whether you leave your body behind or transform it. However, each use of this power requires a 15-XP quest or more.

Only one element of this is a miracle, so if you decide to swirl a cloak of feathers around you and turn into a spirit bird to hunt for something that you've lost, you don't get to miraculously guide people and awaken hope—but while the miracle is sustained the HG may allow you Superior Qualities rated 1-3 to do appropriate things, including wriggling your way into someone's dreams or guiding someone to a revelation. Just how powerful this is generally depends on how human you remain—if you grow a few white feathers in your hair, then you're probably stuck with the original miracle and maybe one Superior Quality of 1. If you leave your body helpless somewhere you'll probably be able to waltz in and out of dreams; if you physically transform, then that'll be possible but harder.

If you want to wear an air of Celestia for more than three days' time—so that people don't recognize you as someone acting with conscious agency, tending to dismiss your actions, powers, and presence as just an ordinary bird—that'll have to be the focus of your miracle.

This is a miraculous ability suited to characters with a suitable **Mystic** Arc at 2+.

Fly Away

XP

15

Bonus XP

You're dissociating from reality.

There is something reaching towards you as if from a vast distance away. There is something struggling inside you to change its form.

Like a chick trapped within its shell—

You will let the sun and the wind and the Lake and the air and the changes inside you break you free and give you another form, something that will make answer to your needs.

You can earn a bonus XP towards this quest at any time (though only once per scene/15 minutes) by declaring that you can feel the touch of the impending miracle upon you—you can phrase it another way; just give some indication that you're triggering this quest condition—and then free-associating for a few moments about what your character is experiencing, feeling, thinking.

Talk about being cold, or warm; talk about visions; whatever. Clenching muscles in your arms. Foxfire in the sky. Whatever. Random rambles and chill sensations across your back, the sun full in its glory in your head behind your eyes. That kind of experience, the taste of the wind in your teeth, and that brings you in a bonus XP for this quest.



A Wish-Chang'd World



The Rules of a Wish

- A daring heart may unlock its hidden treasures.
- A wish shapes itself to who you are.
- Your enemies are terrifying but not unbeatable.
- Changing your nature takes time
- It takes time and effort to learn and master the new world.
- Emotional resolution mirrors itself in the resolution of the wish.

Many Imperial miracles are strictly strategic. They add Properties to a Region. They affect the user's own Traits. They change the world, and they cannot be opposed in changing the world, but their power isn't so much *cosmic* as *narrative*—

They play out like acts of deity, but a deity subtle, nuanced, and restrained.

The ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** RPG calls an Imperial miracle a "wish" if that sense of restraint isn't there. A wish is a potentially limitless game-changer. If you wish for something impossible like "I wish it were twenty years ago;" or something world-changing, like "I wish everyone was a rat"—it happens. It *becomes*.

The rule here is simple—

A wish changes the setting.

Basically, you should pretend that the wish was written into the campaign material all along.

If someone wishes that a pirate ship would sail into port, then that's like the HG suddenly remembering: *and at this point in the campaign, I'm supposed to have a pirate ship sail into port.* They make this as cool and dramatic or as boring and plausible as they want.

If someone has a wishing coin, and doesn't realize it, and they wish for everyone to be dead? Then all the players should figure out who their PC is in a dead Town. Does the Dream-Witch become a ghost? Is the Principal now a floating skull? The HG can take the lead in figuring this stuff out but they don't have to.

If Chuubo over in Horizon fires up his Wish-Granting Engine and wishes for something vague, like, "I wish that everything was OK," then the meaning of that wish might not be obvious at first. Play it out as something weird I wrote: *look, Jenna wrote that "everything's OK in Town," so this too must be OK.*

This is mostly in the HG's hands at first. The HG is the one who describes the world. So while players can help the HG figure out what happens, the only part where players really *have* to have a say is the part where a wish retroactively changes their PC.

As usual, the HG can assign miracle or mundane action levels to individual effects of the wish—"oh, this wave of fire is a level 4 miracle, this bat flies up as a mundane action"—but ultimately it's just their job to play the new world that the wish has set forth.

However, I want wishes to be plot arcs that everyone can participate in exploring. If a martial artist accidentally breaches from meditation into the steampunk space inside the wish-granting engine and wishes for everyone to get super martial-arts and have a battle tournament, then I don't want the HG to have to make every call on the powers people get and the way the fights play out. I don't want the players or even *the PCs* to just feel like passengers.

So here are six rules that are almost always true of the worlds and effects that wishes create.

A Daring Heart...

Dangerous experiments and gambles are the best way to find any special powers that you have in a world shaped by a wish.

Basically, if a wish gives you such a thing, you need to unlock it with the acts of epic fantasy:

- **Science, Faith, and Sorcery Actions**
- **Decisive Actions** *and*
- **Wicked Action**

or through

- Developing or resolving an Issue colored blue.

If these actions are out of genre, but the HG thinks that such a special power should or ought to exist, then they should be lenient about letting you take them—any big gamble, risk, or act of faith that you engage in should lead to an epic Action or opportunity for a blue Issue. Conversely, if the HG or the group as a whole decides to handle some element of a wish as an epic fantasy-styled Action, or by handing out blue Issues, that should be a cue that a special power might exist.

Not every wish does this, not even then. I mean, just because Shokyou wishes for Leonardo to shut up doesn't mean de Montreal now gets special miraculous shutting up powers[78]. Not even in an epic fantasy-themed game!

But if there are such powers? Well—

Often, before a wish will let you fly, you'll have to first climb up to a height, and *jump*.

Wishes as Quests

Wishes that principally affect the future, and in a vague way, are good material for quests. If someone wishes to have a pirate adventure, or for *another PC* to have a pirate adventure, or to get good grades this year, or to conquer the Earth, or whatever, then playing out how that *actually happens* would probably be a quest or even an Arc.

78 Though, a girl can dream....

A Wish Shapes Itself...

If it becomes necessary to resist a wish in order to remain yourself, you may take a wound. You have the right to say:

"Yes, this wish says that I shut up. But I won't."

This is usually a Serious or Deadly wound if you're working around *part* of the wish. If you are trying to tear free of the wish completely, it's one of the most difficult things in the game—

You'll take two Deadly Wounds, and no matter what you do to heal them they'll last until the end of this book and the next. But you *can* do that, and if you do do that, then you're immune to the power of that and any substantively similar wishes until those two wounds heal.

Your Enemies...

If a wish accidentally leaves Town under the boot of an autocratic despot, or floods it with a gigantic wave, or a bunch of fiendish ghosts, then those things can be legitimately scary—even for the toughest PCs.

But not unbeatable.

There is always hope for a wishing heart. In sum, there's an implicit promise that you can find a road to victory, and that if you do, the worst of the losses suffered along the way might prove illusory or at least recoverable.

Mechanically that means the following:

- play generally shifts to **the Road of Trials**
- resolving an orange Issue always buys an opportunity for victory
- (in general, resolving any Arc, Issue, or quest can do the same.)
- enemy action tends to inflict **Sickness** and not wounds
- bad situations are opportunities for dramatic suffering rather than principally mechanical fights.

It's worth note that two of the nuances of the Road of Trials—the ubiquity of breaks from reality and the threat of the **Illusion** Issue—give players and the HG more wiggle room for recovery even when hope is blatantly lost.

Changing your Nature...

Changing a person's nature takes time.

A real world-changer of a wish—"I wish that we were all kids again"—might have an instant effects on how everyone *looks*, sure. That might change instantly, at least to whatever extent the players are good with.

But actually changing who a person *is*—that happens more slowly. Whether it's the outright corrosive influence of "you're now a werewolf" or "you're now a nice person" or the subtler process of acclimating to a fresh new childhood or a shiny pair of wings, that change is... well... a little slow!

That means:

- if the wish torments you into changing, it often takes 3+ **Adversity** Actions.
- if the wish corrupts you, it does so slowly, over 3+ **Corruption** Actions.
- if it changes you in a neutral/positive fashion, 3+ **Metamorphoses**.
- most changes worth tracking play out as **Sickness** and not as wounds.

If these actions are out of genre, but the wish *should* change who you are, then the HG and the group should be lenient about allowing them. Conversely, if the HG or the group as a whole decides to handle some element of a wish as you suffering from Adversity, Corruption, or Metamorphosis (or, to a lesser extent, if you find yourself fighting it off with **Never Say Die!**) you should take that as a sign that the wish is trying to change you.

It Takes Time and Effort...

It's pretty common for a wish to offer characters new Skills or new applications for their existing Skills—if you become a farmer, then you should have a farming Skill. If you become a giant robot or romantic lead, you might even pick up a relevant Superior Skill or Bond!

The best way to figure out the rules for a wish and cultivate powers like this is simple, honest living. Invest thought, work, diligence, attention, and study in your new life. Talk to your friends about it. Live in the wish-chang'd world.

The second-best option is the shortcut:

Desperate, frenzied, and obsessive striving, resulting ultimately in a breakthrough—or so you can hope.

In short, to figure out powers like these, perform Pastoral and/or Gothic acts:

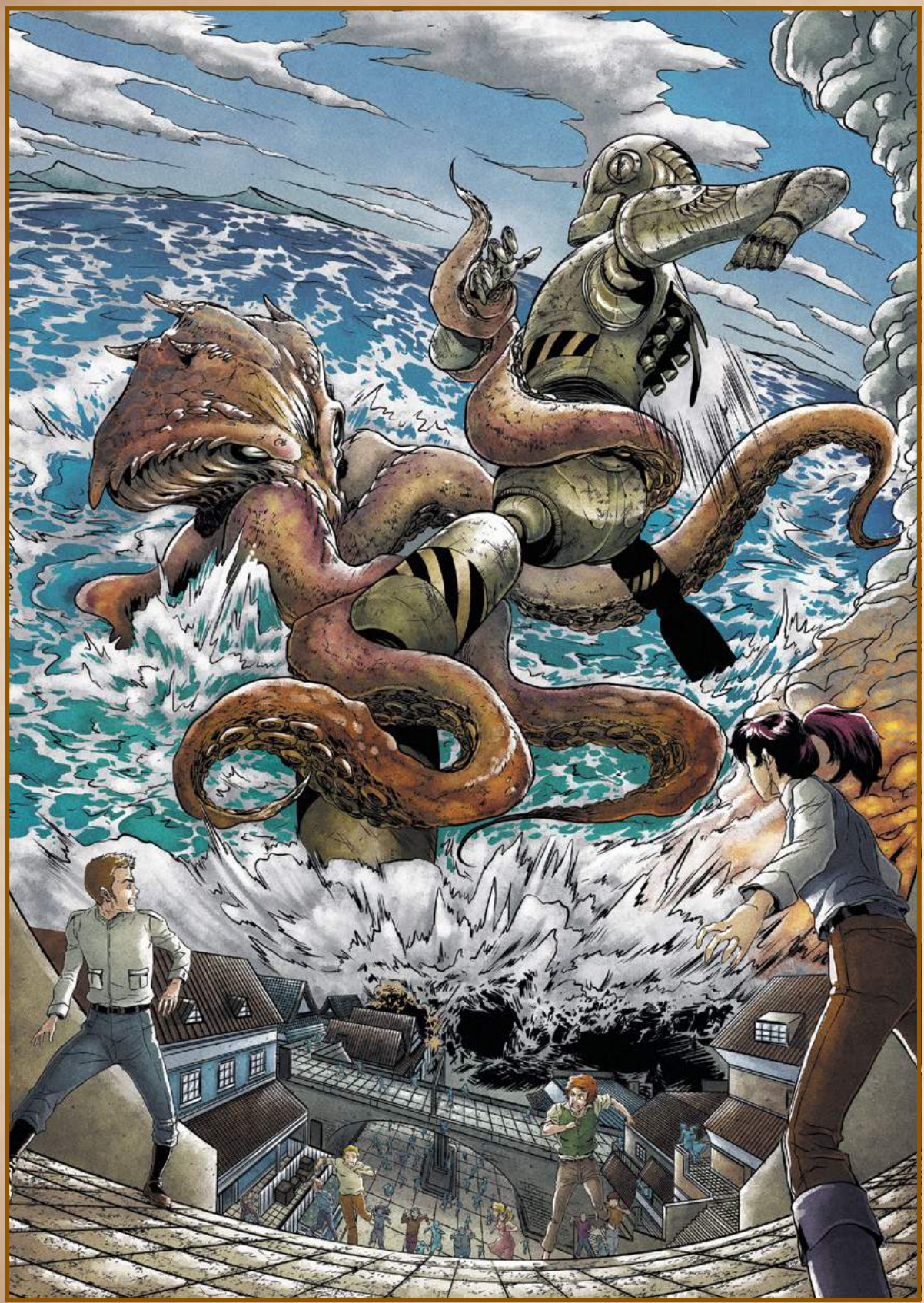
- **Shared Action**
- **Shared Reactions**
- **Slice of Life** *and maybe*
- **Obsessive Action**

or build up

- an Issue colored purple or gold.

If these actions are out of genre, but the HG thinks they're appropriate, then the HG should be lenient about letting you take them—any sufficiently simple, honest scene should lead to a Pastoral Action or opportunity for a purple Issue. Any sufficiently obsessive scene should lead to an opportunity for Gothic Action or an Issue colored gold. Conversely, if the HG or the group as a whole decides to handle some element of a wish with Pastoral or Gothic-styled Actions, or by handing out purple or golden Issues, that suggests that wish-based Skills, Skill applications, Superior Skills, and/or Bonds of some sort can probably be found.

Benefits like these will tend to fade away at the end of the book, and new tricks for your existing Skills will go back to having Obstacles, even if the wish is a permanent change to Town. If you're actively working to sustain these abilities, though, and on a quest that will give you access to these abilities as a reward, the HG is allowed to let them linger while you do.



Emotional Resolution Mirrors Itself...

A giant octopus attacks Town! You've just been turned into a giant robot (by a wish) and sent to fight that octopus.

Whatever will happen now?

In an **Adventure Fantasy**, of course, it's a fight! Combat actions! Decisive Actions! Science, Faith, and Sorcery!

Or, if it's too scary or too wimpy, Trouble[79]!

But if you're *not* playing an Adventure Fantasy, then there's a real chance that the octopus-robot fight is going to be cinematic but not actually terribly exciting. Random excitement is out of your genre! You're going to fight it, sure, because that's what the wish says you'll do, but there isn't a narrative buildup for a big fight, so you'll have to either *create* that build-up during the fight or ignore it and focus on the personal or social issues that you actually care about:

You'll start seeing things about the fight that matter to you. Things that make it *relevant* to your Pastoral, Gothic, Epic, Techno, or whatever life.

Did it just knock over a building that you cared about? Now the fight's about anger, or saving civilians. Did it just remind you of an old friend that you used to do mock-fights with? You miss them! The way you keep throwing off the tentacles when they wrap around you—is that symbolic of your commitment issues? Is it actually time, maybe, that you settled down? Is that what the octopus fight is trying to tell you?

You'll see things, in short, that integrate the battle into your life.

That's what matters—

The fight *itself* can be on autopilot, for all you care, and in fact to some extent it *is*, because, after all, there was a wish.

Seeing meaning in the events of a wish like this is usually going to be an act of Immersive Fantasy[80]:

- **Foreshadowing**
- **Sympathetic Action/Shock** *or*
- **Discovery**

And once you've done that, as you do that, you'll tie the resolution of the wish increasingly to the proper resolution of the stuff that's going on in your heart. That could just mean a big decision, particularly in epic fantasy where the octopus really isn't a match for you anyway; or it could mean the resolution of an emotional Issue; or it could mean that you'll automatically beat the octopus as soon as you find a way to use the fight to connect to your friends; or even that you'll lose, and you'll have to lose, because that's what the octopus in your heart is telling you to do.

And now I've made it sound all weird, and sometimes it is, but mostly it isn't.

Mostly it's that when you understand what's going on here, you reach a point where you're like: "at last, I can forgive this person" or "that's why I hate this octopus! It's reminding me of my father!" or "Mr. Octopus, you've just put your tentacles on a comic book store, and that is one step too far."

And then you punch it into space, or, you know, whatever, and it isn't weird at all.

As in the previous cases, if these Actions are out of genre, but the wish seems like it should work like this, then the HG should be lenient about letting you take them. Conversely, if the HG or the group as a whole decides to handle some element of a wish with Immersive Fantasy-styled actions, this suggests that the wish as a whole is best handled as a source of meaning rather than a source of events.

Aside

Please note that I'm expecting the typical wish to be on the order of "I want this party to go well," "I want to catch the biggest fish ever," "I wish I had a beachfront house," "I wish everything would be OK," "I wish I had some new DVDs," or whatever.

It's just that giant octopi *happen*, and sometimes turning everyone into robots or vampires is the only logical response.

Chuubo/Shokyou

One day a perfectly ordinary child with no particular talent or ability broke into the empty house on that child's street, unrolled a sheaf of plans, picked up a hammer and nails, and built a Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine there.

What does it do? I'm glad you asked!

It grants wishes.

One wish every chapter or so, sometime after the chapter's start.

As any child would, this child went a little mad with power, wishing for ice cream, a best friend, and a nice sweet sunny day without even *thinking* of the terrible consequences that could befall...

But, well.

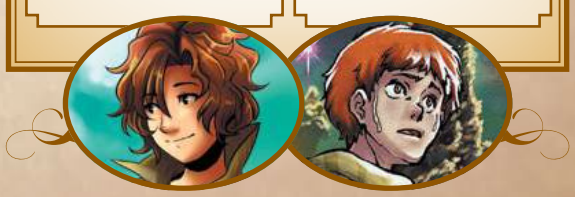
Perhaps they were not so terrible?

It's a few weeks, months, or years later, after all, and Town's surviving yet.

This ordinary child is usually the PC-aged **Chuubo, the Wishing Boy**, but could be **Shokyou, the Wishing Girl**, instead. The best friend they wished for is normally a PC-aged boy named **Seizhi Schwan**, but could be a girl named **Suzy Schwan** instead. They live over the hills in Horizon but visit the other Regions now and then.

Chuubo, aka **The Wishing Boy**

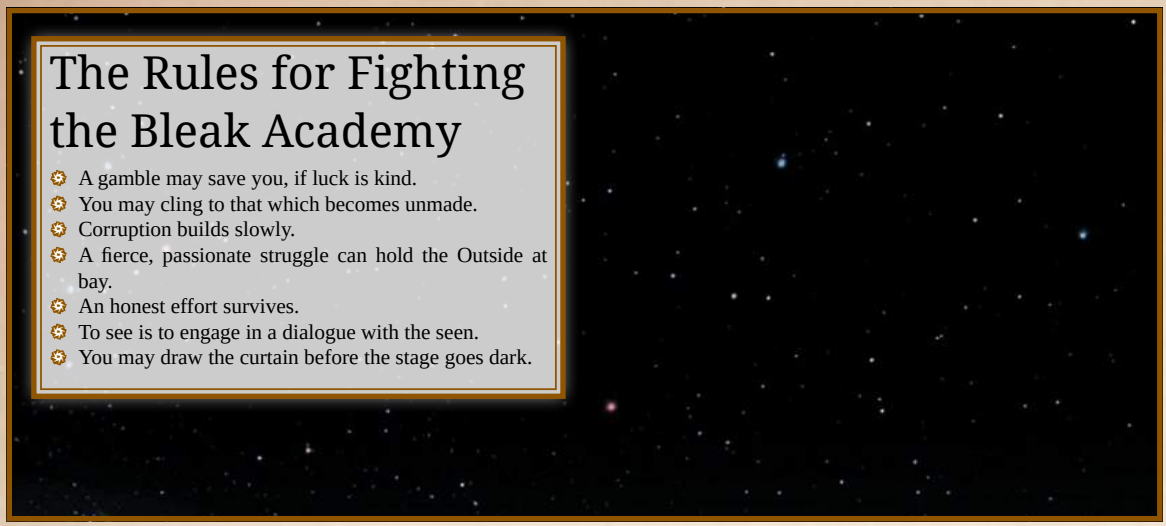
Seizhi Schwan, aka **The Best Friend**



79 Wait, you might say. "Too wimpy?" Here's why you'd use Trouble if the octopus is too weak: you're a player, right? And you're steamrolling the octopus? And maybe you don't really want to be, because tension and Trouble are cool? Then this is a good time to *add* in some tension, something to leave you overwhelmed and outmatched, which is something that the Trouble action lets you do. Maybe your engine goes critical?

80 Technically it's probably "an act of magic realism" or something, but bear with me.

Making Answer to the Bleak



The Rules for Fighting the Bleak Academy

- A gamble may save you, if luck is kind.
- You may cling to that which becomes unmade.
- Corruption builds slowly.
- A fierce, passionate struggle can hold the Outside at bay.
- An honest effort survives.
- To see is to engage in a dialogue with the seen.
- You may draw the curtain before the stage goes dark.

There is a bleak power of despair that yearns for everything's unmaking. There is something out there beyond the world, something in the nature of the Outside, that looks upon the world and finds therein no good.

This is a different problem than a wish. It's not that the power of the Outside, or the Bleak Academy, or personifications of death, or unweavers, or anti-wolves, or the worst of the Rider magicians, or whatever—

It's not that they're mechanically unstoppable.

It's just that if you happen to lose, it's really bad. If you don't have a defense against a power that would simply unmake you, or would *break* you, that's...

Really bad.

Sometimes you'll have that defense. Sometimes you'll have something in you that can with raw numbers and actions protect you against unmaking.

Other times you must turn to something different with which to make an answer to death, dissolution, the creeping Not. To fight back you will need to rely on the intrinsic virtue of the world: that it is real, and beautiful; that life is worth having; that it's worth living. You must stand by your belief that the world has a point, that existence means something, and that it can't and shouldn't all just drown in the endless sea of the Beyond.

That *you* have a point, that *you* mean something, that *you* shouldn't be lost.

And neither should your friends, or even the littlest and worst of things.

A Gamble May Save You...

Faith and trust are always gambles. So are science, love, and sorcery in their own degrees and ways.

If you're being overwhelmed by a power of the Bleak Academy, you can pivot from death to a defining moment by spelling out what you believe in. Give a dramatic monologue that says what you're gambling on in the face of death, what you're putting your faith, love, or trust in—and then take a risk in the name of that belief.

Or as much as a risk as you can, anyway—you might not have anything left to lose!

In an epic fantasy, or an adventure fantasy, or any game where the players and the HG find your monologue cool enough to allow this, you can turn a dramatic monologue like that into:

- a **Science, Faith, and Sorcery Action**
- a **Decisive Action** *or*
- a possible resolution to a blue Issue

...and then the HG has to stop and think about what you've done.

They can't just go with their first reaction, whether that's "that can't possibly stop this attack" or "yay, you win." They have to take a moment to let your monologue sink in to their consciousness in peace.

Then they decide.

And look. Sometimes they'll decide against you, you know? This won't always save you. Sometimes it'll even doom you. Sometimes it'll even take away whatever little other chances you might have had.

That's what it *means* that you're gambling.

That's what it means that even faith and love and trust, even solid scientific conjecture, and certainly sorcery are risks.

But it *could* save you.

And if the HG decides that yeah, this saves you, that overrides all the rest of the rules on what beats what.

You May Cling...

Here's another way to hold off the power of death, unmaking, and the Bleak:

Embrace that which is being destroyed, or that which is doing the destroying. Cling to it. Try to hold the destruction at bay as you do so.

Host a last desperate struggle to stave destruction off.

In an adventure fantasy, on the road of trials, or in any game where the group or the HG lets you, this turns the threat into:

- **Trouble**
- **Never Say Die!** *or*
- a possible resolution to an orange Issue

The actual destruction is put on hold for the next little bit of play. Instead, the pressure on you and the problem you're facing gets worse and worse. You can try to do other things while this is happening, you can try to take advantage of the stay of execution, but trying to win anything more than the smallest tactical victories as the pressure rises is almost certain to fail. Even if you don't lose immediately, you're *losing*;

And it leads to this terrifying moment when it seems like all is lost.

This moment is also an opportunity for a certain kind of miracle.

That is:

The HG, or the player of the PC whose action wields the power of the Bleak, must then stop and take a moment to consider relenting.

They don't necessarily have any new reason to.

There's no special emotional power here to *make* them relent. Just, they have to stop for a moment, and consider whether they *will*. And the character in question has something *like* that moment's pause to consider, IC, too—a moment in the spiritual center of them, where they can make a choice. If there is anything left in them capable of that.

If they don't relent, then, well, this attempt failed. The HG could conceivably give you a chance at a heroic countermove, or conversely have you fail even harder than you otherwise would've—but that's not part of this rule. That's just a part of HG discretion in the abstract.

Tactical Timing

Incidentally, I don't want to encourage meaningful tactical benefits or drawbacks to rushing or lingering over conflicts using these rules. So please assume that they can play out as fast as they *should* play out to keep this from turning into a cheap victory for either side in the larger tactical picture.

If you need to slow them down a little more than that to make the story go well, well, the HG can let the winner—whichever, of existence or unmaking, comes out ahead—win a little more effectively to make up for whatever time these rules have cost.

Corruption Builds Slowly

Changing a person's nature takes time.

This isn't really a way of *fighting* the power of unmaking. I just wanted to make it clear that this is as true for the power of the Bleak Academy as it is for the Wish-Granting Engine. Changing someone, corrupting them, transforming them—it takes time.

Cutting out all of someone's good qualities, for instance, to make them a bad person?

Cutting out their memories to make them an innocent, and then filling their head with lies?

It takes *time*.

On the road of trials, or in a fairy tale setting, that means:

- most changes worth tracking play out as **Sickness** and not as wounds.
- if it's corrupting you, it does so slowly, over 3+ **Corruption** Actions.
- if it changes you in a neutral/positive fashion, 3+ **Metamorphoses**.
- if it's breaking you, it often takes 3+ **Trauma** Actions.

And that also means:

- many such changes get thrown off/rejected after the Sickness Issue hits 4;
- players can use the wound rules and can sometimes use the player-defined elements of a Sickness Issue to mitigate or define what the power of unmaking actually does to their PC.

In other genres, you may see some of these benefits. You probably will—but I cannot say.

A Fierce, Passionate Struggle...

Here's another way of fighting the Bleak Academy.

Let's say you're being erased from existence. But you don't want to go.

So you *fight*. You name and claim all your mistakes: all the things you do wrong, the things you've screwed up, all your errors and your selfishnesses. Because they're real. You name and you remember everyone who loves you, everyone who'd miss you, everyone whom you'd be torn away from.

Because that's real too.

You say what you love, what you hope for, what you dream of. You say what you've wanted your future to be. What matters to you. That stupid little thing you forgot to say to someone you cared about the other night.

Do it. Tell the world what it's costing it, to lose you. Tell the world and the Bleak Academy what will be gone.

And heck.

You can do this, you can fight like this, even if it's just your natural science paper on sandpipers that's getting blasted out of reality. You can tell that paper what it is. What it *really is*. How it came to be created. What it means. You can talk about all the good

times you had together. You can talk about what paper is made out of, or the fact that you don't know but that it comes from trees or something. You can talk about the hand cramp you had when you were writing all those words and clauses down.

Further and further. Over the top and then, when a new top shows up over the mists beyond the peak of that first mountain, you go over *that* top, too.

In a Gothic story, or on the road of trials, or in any game where you can sell the group or HG on it:

- **Obsessive Action or Adversity** may replace dissolution—you tip over the edge into delirium or obsession instead of losing what you otherwise would.
- the resolution to a golden Issue, *even though* it usually involves bad ideas on your part, is often antithetical to the Outside.

An Honest Effort Survives

That which is made well survives well. That which is built and maintained through simple, honest effort and the dedicated heart is strong against the Outside.

This mostly means that things that people take good care of have:

- a certain level of Auctoritas which protects them against attacks by the Outside;
- a certain level of resilience, as if they had a small number of PC-style Health Levels.

Sometimes it also means that all you need to do to hold the Outside at bay, death at bay, the Bleak Academy at bay, to fight off *nothingness itself*—

Is something simple and honest. Something that reaffirms the world.

Something orderly. Something patterned. Something *true*.

Doing this at the last minute isn't anywhere near as effective as taking care of something over months and years, but maybe if you can tap into a bigger reservoir of effort and heart then you can still invoke a temporary level 1 Auctoritas or a miraculous partial survival.

Do you want this? Then:

Do your chores. Talk about your feelings. Contextualize the Outside as a sea and sail it. Contextualize it as a mountain and climb it. Walk your way through a private ritual, like a kata or cleaning a gun. Brush and floss. Scrub behind your ears. Do your homework. Read Blake or Rilke to the chaos. Take someone's hands and promise you'll be together, forever, somehow, even if you're both utterly unmade.

In short, in a Pastoral or Gothic game, or any game where you can sell the HG or group on it,

- a **Shared Action**
- expressing your love, your friendship, or even some other feeling through **Shared Reactions**, *or*
- resolving a purple Issue

can affirm and protect the reality around you; and if the HG decides that it's sufficient, particularly for Issue resolution, you may be able to stand against the weight of the Outside.

At least, against its weakest, Strike 0 manifestations! (And heck. If you're invoking true love or true friendship or lifelong practice or something like *that*, you might even get a temporary level 2+ Auctoritas or a temporary bump in the level of an existing Auctoritas now and then!)

To See...

Here is another sometime answer to the power of the Bleak.

The power of unmaking is typically philosophical or metaphysical. It rests on something like "the world dissolves into formless, tumbling chaos," "the world was never there at all," or "this is unworthy of existence."

But to see a thing is to enter into a dialogue with it.

To see a thing that is formless is to see its form. To see the world being destroyed because it was never there at all is to see a thing which happens; a destruction which cannot justify itself by its own terms. To witness a judgment is to put pressure upon it: unwitnessed, it may speak of itself as eternally, cosmically just; before an audience, it must actually validate its own existence.

What I mean here is that emotionally honest and humble observation of what's happening when a power of unmaking strikes... can reverse it, sometimes.

It's hard! It's scary! But if you stand there and say what you see, if you speak the chaos and the Outside and the unmaking back at itself as it devours you, as it kills you or what you care about—

Then there is a chance at a eucatastrophe. At an *anti*catastrophe.

Because afterwards, when the metaphorical or literal waters have stilled, the HG must consider whether your truth has poisoned the lie of the Bleak; whether your compassion has poisoned its cold malice and uncharity; whether that dialogue with you has spread through death and unmade it, unwoven it, turned it into something more like strands of death-colored cloth than death, a *show* of endings and not an ending at all.

There is a chance that instead of an unmaking—whether that means "you are gone" or "it is gone" or something as simple and small and silly as "you take a wound"—

That the metaphorical flood-waters will draw back, and everything will be OK. Sometimes even better than OK. Sometimes you'll even have something more than you started with, sometimes you'll have even won a treasure *back* from the unreal, from the shattering, from the unmaking, from the counteracted power of the multicolored void.

In a Pastoral, Gothic, Immersive Fantasy, or Techno game, or in one of the others if you can sell the group or HG on it, you can use

- **Slice of Life**
- **Discovery**
- **Foreshadowing**
- **Sympathetic Action** *or*
- the resolution to a red or gray Issue

to perform this act of description and reclaim (or possibly reclaim) the world.



You May Draw the Curtain...

The last option for dealing with the destructive and dissolutive qualities of the Outside is to go into a sort of a spiritual fugue. You choose not to see what happens. You choose not to know what happens. Ideally you invoke this before the HG describes what happens. You experience it in disjointed, symbolic terms, instead of as cold hard facts, and the metaphorical curtain falls.

Rather than watch as the Headmaster of the Bleak Academy snaps his fingers and your heart vanishes from your chest, or Fortitude cracks in half and drowns under the tidal wave of the Outside, or whatever, the game turns away to a bit of poetry[81]. What actually happens is not shown.

This isn't always possible, and it obviously needs the HG to go along with it—

Basically, to play along when you say, "Um, can we draw the curtain here instead?"—

But if it works, play skips the actuality of the scene and moves on to some "meanwhile" or "later." The game leaves the actual result of things in doubt until the next occasion to have them formally described.

Further, the HG is encouraged to let that result be at least a little kinder than one would have expected theretofore. Generally you're not dead, for instance, even if your heart was destroyed; rather, you're clutching your chest, staggering, and having trouble connecting to who you are. Generally there are survivors, for instance, even if Fortitude was cracked and flooded; the highest buildings endure, and there are boats—

Or whatever.

And so on.

Formally speaking, this is an attempt to invoke a

Transition

Suitable Poetry

I'd recommend against long poetry readings here. 1-3 verses should suffice; if that leaves more of the poem you've chosen, then pick up that poem again from the last line read or the next one after the next time a Transition like this comes up.

I'm making a point of this specifically because one poem I really like for this specific purpose is **the Rime of the Ancient Mariner**, and let me be frank: you're not going to interrupt your heart-deletion or even Fortitude's full destruction with a complete recitation of the Rime of the Ancient Mariner without making every other person at the table a little restless.

I mean, unless your group has a real Coleridge *thing*.

So anyway, the poems I'd recommend for this are:

- The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, if your group is one in three;
- La Belle Dame Sans Merci (particularly IV-XII)
- The Tao Te Ching
- A Far and a Sunless Land (see pg. 268)
- They Look Away (below) *or*
- Some poem the HG has picked to be a "campaign theme."

81 This sounds totally stupid when I say it like that but honestly I'm pretty sure this is good gaming practice.

They Look Away

Here's a short piece I've designed for this specific Transition, although please do not expect me to be comparable to Coleridge. Because that'd be pretty unfair!

I've marked some suggested breakpoints with numbers. If you're going to play out Transitions like this a lot, you can read one section per Transition, and at the next Transition, move on to the next. If it's a one-time thing, just read the first one, or pick whichever section catches at your eye.

They Look Away,

by Jenna Katerin Moran

(1) There is a city there, full forty miles squared

Dug out with oxen, dragging great jagged rocks;

Risen up from the bones of the Earth

And the back of a cloaked man who is walking towards it

Where Jotun dandelions were

(2) It swallows that man. It crunches him up, the teeth of the city:

Great granite bones

Like a heat shimmer, he moves into it and he is gone,

A paste it swallows down

…

And overhead high brass reflections

Around the bulging of the sun

(3) There it is said there is no death, and no plants grow from the ground;

(4) Meals are disbursed in dry biscuits from the maws of the granaries

Great night-black insects crawl upon the walls

Disease passes through but then it passes

(5) And they who tire of it they rise up

The devoured of the city, the given up for a second eating, and becoming

The re-devoured of the sun.

There in that land, in that place, there is no death and there is no greenery.

They are beyond sorrow and are beyond repentance.

They are made hard by that land, like stone.

If there are women there I have not seen them.

The children are stretched gaunt.

The men do not look at you. They look away.

A Bit of the Tao te Ching

For the Tao Te Ching reading here, I'm fond of j.h. mcdonald's translation—for instance, the first few times it comes up, you might start with:

Tao te Ching 1

(1) The tao that can be described
is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be spoken
is not the eternal Name.

The nameless is the boundary of Heaven and Earth.
The named is the mother of creation.

(2) Freed from desire, you can see the hidden mystery.
By having desire, you can only see what is visibly real.

Yet mystery and reality
emerge from the same source.
(3) This source is called darkness.

Darkness born from darkness.
The beginning of all understanding.





The Rules for Conflicts

- A player can always act.
- A player can interrupt an unacceptable act.
- A flurry waives the concept of going first or last.
- A stalemate can be broken.
- Action happens in the context of the *now*.
- Sometimes things just *are*.

Sometimes the casual gameplay of taking your actions as you see fit will leave you uncertain how things should play out.

What happens if somebody takes a unitary action to "burn [your PC] alive?"

What happens if there's a standoff, where everyone wants to see somebody else's action before they move?

In this context there are six rules—player-level rules, mostly, though they do have some meaning in the game—to help you turn your character concept into actions.

A Player Can Always Act

Somebody does something nasty while you're asleep. Somebody takes the kitten that you want to pet, boxes it up, and ships it off to Eris in a rocket. Somebody makes an attack "too fast to see."

What can you possibly do now?

The rule here is pretty simple—

You can do... whatever you can do. If you have a power that lets you pet that kitten, even though they're on Eris, you can pet that kitten. If you have a power that says you can wake up quickly when you need to, you can wake up in time to stop that nasty act. If you have a power that lets you interrupt someone moving too fast to see—

Well, you can do that too.

It doesn't matter that they've already described it—taken action, as a PC, or declared the truth of things, as the HG. It doesn't *matter*. If necessary, you can always answer that with: "Not so fast!"

That doesn't mean you do or *must* have the power to pet that kitten, wake up from that sleep, or stop such an attack. It just means that you can't be denied the right to try. The HG in particular can arbitrarily make all your actions fail, I mean, it can be *brutal*, but they can't stop you from *taking* those actions first in the game.

A Player Can Always Interrupt an Unacceptable Act

One thing that means is that sometimes you'll have to *interrupt* what was going to happen in order to use your defense. For instance, somebody declares a unitary, atomic miracle:

"Your house just blew up."

You'd like to invoke something like **Superior Spiritual Energy 4**, that is, the power to see this kind of disaster coming in advance. But they've already spent, say, 4 MP on blowing up your house.

Your defense, in this case, *interrupts* them—

The HG unwinds their action to before the MP was spent. They can still take it, as per the above, but if you have a way to defend yourself (by, say, making your house out of marzipan, if their explosion miracle is weak against the sugared), then they'll get the chance to re-evaluate their choice in the light of the new informational state.

You might want to phrase this in play as: "I need to interrupt that."

A Flurry Waives the Concept of Going First or Last

If you've noticed that taking turns isn't working—that you're involved in a conflict, but the action that gets taken first at the player level is going to be less effective than the action that follows it up and so people are progressively moving towards a waiting game—

You can call for a *flurry of action* instead.

In a flurry, you still choose your actions, and the HG still chooses what happens; but there's an implicit assumption that everyone involved is watching the others and can change their ac-

tions throughout the course of that moment to better fit the actions the others take. In short, during a flurry, after hearing someone else's action, you can change out the details of your action without a new expenditure of Will, consumable resources, or MP. You also have the option to completely discard your action, sacrificing whatever resources you already spent on it, and do something completely different instead.

For instance, you throw rock; they throw paper; but ah, no, you threw scissors; though they, apparently, threw rock.

Of course, that's a stalemate, so let's not leave things with the players exhausting themselves proposing new outcomes and choices until one of them cons their way into victory ("It's rabbit season!")—

If the battle doesn't converge towards a stable equilibrium, that qualifies as a Bleak effect supervening on both sides' actions and forcing a stalemate to emerge.

A Stalemate Can Be Broken

It's hard to do, but you can break any stalemate—whether it's a stalemate in a flurry, which I've just noted as Bleak, or a bigger-picture stalemate in a conflict spanning hours of play.

The first may be broken, of course, with the rules for fighting the Bleak:

Rather than simply conceding that you both threw rock, or that you couldn't manage to pull off a fair RPS contest, you could give a passionate soliloquy about why you trust in paper, and then gamble on it. *A gamble may save you, if luck is kind.*

Or maybe you could attempt to invoke a Transition—to draw the game's metaphorical curtain over the final throw of the game.

You may draw the curtain before the stage grows dark.

If you're fighting someone back and forth and, while you're taking sequential actions and not trying to flurry, it's still getting kind of samey and pretty much determined to be a tie? You can treat *that* as a wish. You can look for emotional resolution to the stalemate—*emotional resolution mirrors itself in the resolution of the stalemate*.

Or you could try to develop new powers based on the fact that you're locked in an endless struggle with somebody:

A daring heart may unlock its hidden treasures.

You can treat the conflict, in short, as somebody wishing: "I wish these two would get stuck in an irresolvable conflict" and figure out how you should proceed from there.

These aren't rules that you'll want to use every time. Sometimes you just need to play out that RPS game out of character; or accept a tie; or have the PCs get a little bored and break off their endless fight.

But if it matters?

If you have to have a winner?

The wish- or Bleak-fighting rules will apply.



Action Happens in Context

Someone's just used an effect you can't possibly defeat. They've set fire to your building, say, and you don't *have* anything strong enough to oppose the action or the miracle that they used.

That doesn't preempt your action, though.

You might look at your options and say: "But I can't do anything. I don't have the numbers for it."

But that isn't true. The only thing you can't do is make their action *not work*. You can still take any action available to you on the premise that the building is getting set on fire. If you want to leave the building, say, they don't get to stop you unless "burning the building *with you in it*" was part of the action they took. If you want to fireproof your room quickly using a fireproofing miracle, they don't get to stop you unless "burning *everything in the building*" was a part of the action they took.

In short, your actions aren't taken in the context of their *number*, with their higher number necessarily winning; even if their number *is* higher, so your actions can't defeat it, or miraculous when you're limited to mundane actions, or whatever, your actions aren't taken in the context of their *number* but the context of what their action *does*.

This is why, even though there's nothing I can do to stop the moon from tiding up the waters all the time, and nothing I can do to stop the great figures of the world from throwing around level 7+ actions, nothing I can even do to stop some random person from miracling at me, I can still take actions: because all that said, my life is my life, it's just within the context that those things create.

I don't have to be able to beat the moon unless I'm actually trying to stop the tides!

Sometimes Things Just Are

The last rule that I'd like you to remember is that not everything is a player action.

If the HG decides that you throw yourself out of the way of a gunshot, that doesn't count as you taking an action to throw yourself out of the way of a gunshot. You can either accept that description, or take an action to change it, but the HG can't put *their* words in *your* mouth.

If the HG decides that you hear a noise while asleep and it wakes you, again, you don't have to spend an action to hear that noise. It doesn't *count* as you spending an action to hear that noise. It's just the HG describing something that you hear, and then describing something that happens (your waking up) as a result.

Actions like this—things the HG does on your behalf, like "you hear something," or does against your behalf, like "you reflexively shudder and draw back"—are called *reflexive actions*. Most of your senses invoke reflexive actions: you might need an action to *listen* or *look*, but not *to hear* or *to see*. Afflictions invoke reflexive actions: you might need an action to use a Skill, but Affliction-based stuff just kind of *happens*.

These things aren't things you do, even if they're described by the HG as things you do. They're not even things you do if you use some player-level rule to make them happen.

They just... are.

They're a part of the HG's realization of the world.


Miraculous Arcs

Miraculous Arcs

The last thing I want to cover in this book is some of the Miraculous Arcs themselves—powers and paths you can develop in this game.

There's strictly speaking an unlimited number of these—

I'm only even like 80% sure that they'll all fit the eight colors I have. So you shouldn't look at this list as exhaustive. Instead, these are examples and starting points. I do expect that most PCs will stick to these, or to Arcs written up in later supplements, because that'll save you some work and means you won't have to run everything past your group—but the core thing here is that these aren't *the* paths but *some* paths you could walk.

They're also examples for miraculous powers in general—

I'd recommend that when picking up miraculous powers as Perks you look at the kinds of things other Arcs might give you at your current Arc Trait level and base your new power on that.

Arc Powers

Certain miraculous Arcs offer particular benefits to characters while, and only while, they are being pursued.

In particular—

- certain Arcs are for those who cling to their mortality despite their power; you earn the MP-regeneration power **Frantic** (pg. 487) when you follow Arcs like these.
- other Arcs are for the slow intrigues of immortals on the miraculous stage; you become immortal, and earn the power **Immortality** (pg. 488), when pursuing those Arcs.
- a few Arcs are for those beyond questions of mortality; these offer **Sickly** (pg. 489) or maybe (in later books, or for player-created Arcs) something else.

Frantic

a Miraculous Ability

Type: Special

Cost: —

You're never so resilient as when you're terrified.

You may take the **(Be in) Trouble** Action any time you can meet its condition. Doing so earns you 1 MP, up to a maximum of your starting MP. Each additional group XP that you earn from this Action also earns you an additional MP.

Immortality

a Miraculous Ability

Type: Miraculous Action, Major

Cost:

- 0 MP—damage or enchantment has only temporary, appropriate effects on you
- 1 MP—you totally recover and shrug everything off 1-2 times mid-scene
- 2 MP—starting mid-scene, you shrug off attacks and other effects like they're paper tigers
- 4 MP—you're basically unaffected by the world around you

You're immune to damage that breaks your paradigm—essentially, you can only die or take an injury when and how it fits your character.

For better or worse, when Immortality applies, any wound you take fits itself to your native F/X and heals automatically between scenes—or mid-scene, if you spend MP. If something that's too powerful for Immortality to counter wounds you, you'll still tend to heal the resulting Surface Wounds in a scene, Serious Wounds in an hour, and Deadly Wounds in 0-2 chapters.

You can limit your immortality to a conditional version—

Either because it makes sense to do so, or because wounds in this system tend to come with cool powers up until the point where they kill you. In that case it's up to you how quickly you heal the wounds your limited Immortality lets through.

Despite all that talk about things getting past your Immortality, or things your Immortality lets through, this power makes you ridiculously tough—I mean, if...

- Someone hits you?
- You forget to eat for three months?
- You're hit by a nuclear barrage?
- People are pouring molten steel over your head?

You can probably just shrug it off!

Maybe you get a bruise. Maybe you look hungry. Maybe you actually take one of those chapter-length wounds from radiation sickness or whatever and wind up hiccupping miserably all the time like people who are hit by nuclear barrages will do. Maybe you have steel poured all over you, and it hardens, and now you're stuck in place; but then you spend MP, or the scene ends, or whatever, and whatever your F/X are for getting out of steel (e.g., "when nobody's looking, I turn up again, just fine" or "I reform nearby from vacuum energy") they come into play.

Bam!

You're fine.

You're also immune, as that last case might suggest, to most adverse effects in general—Immortality defends you against *attacks*, against *things that cause harm*, and not just against gross structural damage. However there are four exceptions to this comprehensive protection that I want to call special attention to:

- You can still suffer from the Sickness Issue—it's just that the individual manifestations of turning into a werewolf or being turned to the service of evil or whatever are fit to your Immortality's special effects.
- The state of being confined is only considered wound-like if it's boring or keeps you out of play. Sufficiently interesting captivity just doesn't count[82].
- Extremely deadly stuff, like nukes, volcanoes, Imperial miracles, and other Major miracles of similar Arc level can still hurt you. Your wounds will still be much less severe than a reasonable person would expect, and they'll still heal in two chapters or less, but if someone uses an orbital mass driver to shove the spear of Longinus through your guts, you *will* get a terrible wound.
- Occasionally I'll introduce an effect that lets you take some action at the cost of "a terrible wound," or that seals a wound so that no effect can heal it. If you're doing something like that to yourself, Immortality will not heal such wounds.

Conditional Immortality

If you're on an Arc that promises **Immortality**, you are potentially eternal, invincible, and immortal.

You could be like the default **Wishing Boy (or Girl)**—nothing *really* hurts you, although you may show cosmetic effects like torn clothing, bruises, and mind-control-induced whirly eyes. Even *those* wounds tend to heal as soon as nobody's looking.

Or you could be more like **Harpy, who is named Disdain**; you could kill her if you made a game of it, a party of it, if you laughed as you killed her, and that's why she's dead now, the rats they killed her, and no more does she haunt the Stagger of Rooftops down by Lethwillam Sore. But if they hadn't laughed, then she'd've survived.

You could be like the default **Principal**, who can be torn to shreds but takes no harm therefrom—

Or you could be like the *kaiju* the fishermen occasionally bring in to Fortitude, who turn aside most of the harpoons that come for them, who struggle mightily in the nets, who are arguably Immortal in that there's no specific effort sufficient in itself to kill them, but who eventually are caught, suffer, and die because it is natural for them to do so—creatures whose Immortality is not so much bounded by conditions as exhaustible, able to *be burned out.*

Anyway, the point is, being on an Arc like this gives you a rules-set based Immortality. It's not perfect: even aside from the conditions you choose, it's just a powerful miracle, and there are certain methods—e.g., Afflictions, the Auctoritas, and stronger miracles—to overcome its force.

But when you're starting an Arc where you'll have it, you should decide how limited it will be.

82 This rule isn't here to make it easier to capture you, incidentally, although it certainly does that—it's here to help explain why you can potentially escape a bodysuit of hardened steel without breaking it but can't then casually slip it back on.



Sickly

a miraculous ability

Type: Special

Cost: —

You are prone to trials and your life is a sorrowful thing. Once per session you may declare yourself under attack by corruption or trauma, invoke a suitable

- **(Suffer) Corruption** or
- **(Suffer) Trauma**

XP Action, and automatically pick up a point of Sickness unless your Sickness Issue is either at 5 or has just recently been resolved.

Wounded Angel

Wounded Angel is a miraculous Bindings Arc. It's suited for characters who tried to be good and perfect and awesome, but didn't make it. Or characters who are currently trying, but are finding it really quite hard!

This Arc offers the following abilities:

- **Dramatic**
- **Devices**
- **Divine Health**
- **Blasphemy** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Empowered Wounds** (starting at Arc 1, improved markedly at Arc 2+)
- **Recover** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Supreme Invocation** (starting at Arc 3)
- **Salvation** (starting at Arc 3)
- **Union** (starting at Arc 3)

In addition, Main Characters receive the power **Sickly** (pg. 489) while actively pursuing this Arc.

Powers

Dramatic

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost: —

You have a fate—a kind of karmic role. You tend to show up in certain kinds of scenes. It's something like, you tend to show up when people are being wicked; or when they're expressing a wish for vengeance; or when they need you; or when they're at their best; or when they're at their worst; or when innocent children are threatened; or when people talk about you; or whatever. Something like that.

You can choose which kinds of scenes we're talking about, and if you're not sure when you start this Arc, you can let things play out for a bit before deciding while you try to figure out what's fits.

This isn't really a very *useful* power—this game assumes that in general everyone has the power to choose what scenes they appear in, barring being explicitly locked out or tied up elsewhere, and this doesn't come with any inherent ability to circumvent those states. But just because it doesn't give you any more *rights* as a player doesn't mean it doesn't make it a little more functional and cool to appear in those scenes—it can shift the footing from "wait, you're here?" to "of *course you'd be* here."

Devices

Type: Special

Cost: —

You've a collection of pacts, devices, tattoos, infernal creatures, mysterious servants, or something of that sort. You have, in short, a *theme*.

Pick one Skill—usually a magical Skill; you can change this Skill later on if it doesn't fit.

You get a +1 or +2 Tool for using that Skill when you properly employ your pacts.

Divine Health

Type: Special

Cost: —

You receive an additional Divine Health Level, plus one further additional Divine Health Level for each level you acquire of this Arc.

For instance, at Arc level 3, you'd have a total of +4 Divine Health Levels.

This isn't as cool of a gift as it might seem, since you'll wind up committing a number of them to the powers of this Arc later on.

(Cage for a) Blasphemy

Arc 1+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost: —

There is something particularly nasty bound inside you. It's usually the price for some of your other powers, and you'll pick it up at the end of your first miraculous Bindings Arc, or somewhere in the early portions of the next.

It's something *required* in order to advance along the Arc.

If you ever lose your last Divine Health Level, that nastiness will get out. Maybe it's a red world bound inside you and when it rages out everything around you will bleed, suffer, and catch fire. Or maybe you're more like **Nightmares' Angel**: the sky will fill with stormclouds, the ground will seep with foul water, and you will begin to vomit out poison, rotten chunks of wood or flesh, and corrupting spirits from your mouth and your hollow chest. Maybe your inner blasphemy is unique: if you lose your last Divine Health Level, everyone nearby will lose their souls, or their heads will explode, or the world will revert to 18th dynasty Egypt all around you, or candy will start raining from the sky. Evil candy. Candy, that is bad!

This blasphemy functions as a wish, basically.

It's a wish for something terrible and awful to be unleashed.

On the bright side, it's a disincentive for anybody to kill you; and if they *do* hurt you badly enough some interesting things will happen.

The thundercloud to that silver lining, though: you have this terrible thing *inside you*.

If you permanently wound your last Divine Health Level using **Empowered Wounds**, below, the blasphemy is freed, but if it is then dealt with, you can postpone its return indefinitely by refusing to recover from your wounds and avoiding anything that would earn you a new Divine Health Level.

Empowered Wounds

Arc 1+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP, 1 Divine Health Level—empower one wound per book
- 4 MP, 1 Divine Health Level—empower one wound at any time

You can take a ritual wound to bind something to yourself, turning it into a power source. I'm designing this power in light of the most effective and generic version, which takes *any* wound or attack that comes in and declares it a ritual wound, but if you'd rather have a less reactive or violent aesthetic, that's OK too—

You could, for instance, cut yourself or open your soul in order to let spirits in, or to swallow animals whole, or to let in divine inspiration, or something of that sort.

Regardless, the regular or ritual wound removes one Divine Health Level from your character sheet, binding it inextricably to the wound, but gives you the following abilities:

Arc 1+: A new miraculous ability, usually something you can use 1/chapter or at any time;

Arc 2+:

- a new Imperial ability that helps or strengthens you—that is, its focus must be on you, not on attacking or changing someone or something else; *and*
- optionally, a third ability that completes or competes in some fashion against one of the other two.

You have rough control over the kinds of powers you get, but may have to experiment some to fully define or discover them. These powers replace the normal benefits of a wound (pg. 126-128).

Empowered wounds cannot heal and no one can free you from them save yourself—you must invoke **Recover**, below, before *any* healing effect of any sort can lift the burden from your flesh or soul.

If you're confused about how to handle wounds and removing a health level from your sheet, proceed as follows:

- If the thing you're transforming isn't a wound, take a wound or use it *to* wound your highest remaining Health Level anyway.
- If you just wounded a Normal or Tough Health level, swap the wound with the wound in a Divine Health level.
- Remove the new wound and the Divine Health level simultaneously from your character.

Recover

Arc 1+

Type: Special

Cost: —

You may stop empowering a wound at any time, allowing you—potentially—to recover from conditions acquired in play. The associated powers go away and you gain a new, wounded Divine Health Level. You do not immediately heal; rather, healing becomes possible.

As a special exception to ordinary procedure, self-healing powers may remain active long enough to help you recover from the wound that created them. For instance, if someone cuts off your head, it's perfectly legitimate to

- take a cool temporary power where your head flies around and a slower 1/chapter power "neck viscera hands" that lets you knit your spine back together;
- fly your head around for a while enjoying the thrill of decapitation; *and then,*
- when being a head in the game gets boring, disempower the wound, hook your neck viscera hands in, and start healing.

Suffering is a power source for you: it's painful and awful and you do not like it one bit but it is rarely incapacitating for very long.

Supreme Invocation

Arc 3+

Type: Imperial Miracle, Ritual Power

Cost (Arc 3):

- 0 MP—invoke this power 1/book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a book

Cost (Arc 4):

- 0 MP—invoke this power 1/book
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time in a given book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a given chapter

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—invoke this power 1/book
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time in a given book
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time in a given chapter
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a matter of minutes

Once per book, you may use an empowered wound as justification for a wish-level effect—wish that something is so, and tie it thematically to the wound, and it becomes so. Normally this is instant but if the connection to the wound is ephemeral or vague then the process takes some time. For instance, if a head wound compromises your memory, you might be able to use this power to erase an incident (for the most part) from the memory of Town. Ultimately, you can probably do anything at all here: the question is, *what do you want to wish for?* And *how can you tie this to your core and current wounds?*

Salvation

Arc 3+

Type: Special

Cost: —

Once per campaign, you may offer salvation to someone when all is lost, using your power of **Binding** to connect to them in some way and see them through. This functions as an Imperial miracle:

> *I wish there were something I could do to help here, to make even this hopeless situation work out.*

Except for the HG, a given player can only invoke this power once per campaign, even if they later change PCs; after that, if you play a different character who reaches Arc 3+ in a Bindings Arc, the HG will choose who, when, and if you save; you can prompt them if they don't seem like they're getting around to this, and you can veto their choice if it doesn't fit you, but you cannot invoke this power a second time on your own.

Union

Arc 3+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—connect to a specific character 1/book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a book

After using **Salvation** to rescue or connect to somebody, you may invoke this power once per book while talking to (or, if you can't talk, using the most practical communication method available with) them.

Your earlier sacrifice will come into play somehow. Your target will gain 1 point of inherent Connection with you (up to a maximum of 5) and their Connection with you will rise to 5 for the remainder of the scene.

Their player has the option to reject these benefits, in which case the power does not invoke.



Become Somebody

Become Somebody is a miraculous Knight Arc. It's suitable for characters who know what they want to be but haven't gotten there yet, as well as anyone who has gotten somewhere but has much further to go.

The **Become Somebody** Arc offers the following abilities:

- **The Wages of Sin**
- **Shared Experience**
- **Your Truth** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Adaptable** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Unstoppable** (starting at Arc 2)
- **Commanding Aura** (starting at Arc 2)
- **Reject** (starting at Arc 2)
- **Touchstone** (starting at Arc 2)

In addition, while you are pursuing **Become Somebody**, you have the special power **Frantic** (pg. 487). You can rename this power if you are more stoic than "frantic" might suggest.

These powers are going to be a little different for everyone—or, more precisely, they're going to play out differently depending on who you are and who and what you are trying to be. When you're thinking of starting this Arc, or during the first quest that starts you on that path, you should:

- choose a Truth;
- think about options for your Failing; *and*
- think about options for your Role.

Until you've done that, some of these powers won't work very well!

Choosing Your Truth

Before you can really become somebody, you need to know a little something about who you are.

There has to be something *about* you. Something that isn't exactly like everybody else.

That is this Arc's **Truth**.

It's probably a good thing. Like, you're...

- honest?
- brave?
- true?
- quick-thinking?
- clever?
- well-prepared?
- of good heart?
- chaste?
- loving?
- diligent?
- strong?
- an excellent baker?
- extremely kind to children and small animals?
- or something else?

But it could be a bad or kind of neutral thing like...

- you're incredibly lazy
- or mean
- or, you almost won that big soapbox derby a few years back!

So, what's your Truth?

- _____

Starting at Arc 1, you may buy additional Truths by spending one Recharge Token each. If you think you're both valiant *and* honest, for instance, this is the way to prove it so.

Choosing Your Failing

You'll also want to choose a **Failing**—something in you that makes it hard to live up to who you want to be.

Is it...

- something serious, like
  - pride
  - recklessness
  - cruelty
  - greed *or*
  - dissipation?
- something minor but which needs fixing, like
  - poor planning
  - poor motivation
  - overconfidence
  - easily tempted *or*
  - excessive materialism?
- something that isn't a real *vice*, but which you think of as your tragic failing anyway, like
  - being too beautiful (legitimately)
  - being too beautiful (under the false impression that you are)
  - looking too plain
  - being a robot
  - being an unreal or imaginary creature
  - having red hair
  - being a vampire *or*
  - being short?

What's yours?

- _____

Choosing Your Role

At some point—ideally before the end of the first Arc, and certainly before your first use of powers like **Shared Experience**—you'll want to work with the HG to find your **Role**.

This is basically—who and what are you trying to be?

Are you trying to be

- a heroic doctor?
- a knight?
- an idol?
- a teacher?
- a ninja?
- a cop?

Or are you already something—let's say, a god or goddess? Royalty? A vampire?—and you just want to learn to do it "right?"

Or are you aiming for a more specific title?

Do you want to

- take over as head of the Student Council at Horizon's School?
- be the Guardian of Time?
- the Prince of Bees?
- Magical Star Princess Vega?

You're not actually limited to "real" positions here—

That is, you *can* just declare yourself the Guardian of Time and slowly develop suitable powers—

But you'll grow in power a lot faster if you don't have to invent your own role. That's why I say that you should work with the HG, because it's better to be "the Custodian of Time" that's a real thing that people in your position can be than to be "the Guardian of Time" if that isn't.

So anyway...

Don't answer until you want to, but... what's *your* role?

- _____

Powers

The Wages of Sin

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 1 MP at Arc 0—see the influence of a Failing
- 0 MP at Arc 1+

There's some failing—some vice you're trying to overcome, and to some degree have.

Because you're intimately familiar with it, you can see its signs even when they're not obvious; invoke **the Wages of Sin** and you can *see* the vice and its influence on a situation, as if it were flowing water, livid fire, or glowing thread.

Shared Experience

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 2 MP at Arc 0—understand the part of a person that shares/resembles your Role
- 1 MP at Arc 1
- 0 MP at Arc 2+

You're not alone.

Knights aren't the only ones who fight for the right. Magical star princesses aren't the only ones who believe in the power of wishes. Guardians of Time aren't the only people who care about time not coming unstrung, and there are plenty of honey farmers who don't qualify as a Prince or Princess of Bees but who care about the health of the bees around them *anyway*.

Invoke **Shared Experience** and you're in tune with those people—

Or, well, with that *part* of them, anyway.

This functions as a temporary Affliction with a rating equal to the Arc. What that means is that the world will sometimes just... *give*... you insights into this stuff, into that part of what makes a person tick. If you're the Prince of Bees, and a honey farmer near you has a passing thought about using a different floral basis for their honey, you'll *know*—it's like, you'll recognize that look. If you're Magical Star Princess Vega, and you have to make the call on whether to trust someone in a crisis, you'll be able to *see* the part of them that's thinking about how to defend the hopes and wishes of the world against the oppression of the Outside (or, if you don't see anything like that, you'll know it isn't there.)

Plus, it means that if someone wants to hide this stuff from you—if a drug-addicted Rider wants to hide their secret from the Marquis of Addiction or whatever or someone wants to keep the Prince of Bees from spotting a honey farmer in a crowd? They'll need to use a miracle with [Strike ≥ your Arc Trait.]

This only works for seeing the part of people that's like your Role so you will have to choose a Role before it becomes practically useful as a power.

Your Truth

Arc 1+

Type: Auctoritas

Cost: —

There are certain things that are simply *true* about you. They resist the power of miracles, wishes, and the Outside.

Write down a two-point bullet list, starting with:

- I am [your Role, e.g. "the Guardian of Time"]
- I am [your Truth, e.g. "honest."]

These are protected by an Auctoritas with rating equal to the Arc Trait. If you buy additional Truths (as noted on pg. 494, you can spend a Recharge Token to do so), they are added to the list.

Unstoppable

Arc 2+

Type: Special (activates an Auctoritas + Obstacle when used; can wound)

Cost:

- 2 MP at Arc 2—strip the world of its ability to oppose your performance of your Role
- 1 MP at Arc 3
- 0 MP at Arc 4+

Invoke **Unstoppable** while you're acting in the person of your Role and expressing that to somebody else—

You do need someone to express it to, so the only thing you can use this for in the absence of communication is to facilitate or cause communication—

And you become really hard to stop.

Opposition falters in the face of how *good* you are at being your Role; an Auctoritas equal to the Arc defends your action and your ability to communicate it, and an Obstacle equal to the Arc prevents anyone from actively impeding your expression or communication of that Role with mundane actions.

Adaptable

Arc 1+

Type: Special (activates an Affliction when used)

Cost:

- 2 MP at Arc 1—belong somewhere you hadn't
- 1 MP at Arc 2
- 0 MP at Arc 3+

You're learning to handle yourself in a wide variety of situations—whether it's wandering the Far Roofs or traveling back in time, you can spend 0-2 MP and basically make yourself at home.

While you sustain an action, you have an Affliction that's basically:

- "I belong here."

This has the following effects:

- you have at least a +1 Tool bonus to doing whatever you should be doing;
- you get your Arc Trait's rating ( ) as a free Connection to the environment;
- the HG will sometimes throw miraculous coincidences and bursts of inspiration in to help you out;
- you'll have a lot of trouble remembering that this isn't *always* who you are and where you lived.

Also it takes a pretty powerful miracle (with at least [Strike ≥ your Arc Trait]) to forcibly make you feel *out* of your element.

Commanding Aura

Arc 2+

Type: Special

Cost: —

While **Unstoppable** is active, you can infect people with your ideas, values, and purpose. The exact manifestation depends on your Role—

The people around you will reflexively respond to your self-presentation.

They'll become more like you, or more *fit* to you, depending on the role. You infect them with your own call to heroism, or twist them into minions to your deviant science, or sweep them up as followers in your path. You'll choose how this works when you first use this power, but you can adjust the details later on.

This is a terrifying power.

I mean, if you're a shining hero or a great leader, then yes, you can use this to make people better than they are. But even then if you push it too hard you can literally brain-bend people into being cogs in your machine. If your Role *isn't* something awesome like that, then it's going to be kind of creepy every time.

Think of the effects of this power as a non-physical "wound."

You "wound" the structure of their identity with your values and ideas. If they're an NPC they can give in and go along with it or take the equivalent of what, for a PC, would be a wound. If they're a PC, the target almost *has* to take a wound, because this power is directly targeting the self-determination that Health Levels and the wound system represent.

You do not have to invoke this feature of Unstoppable. Those targeted by it will know instantly if you do. After that,

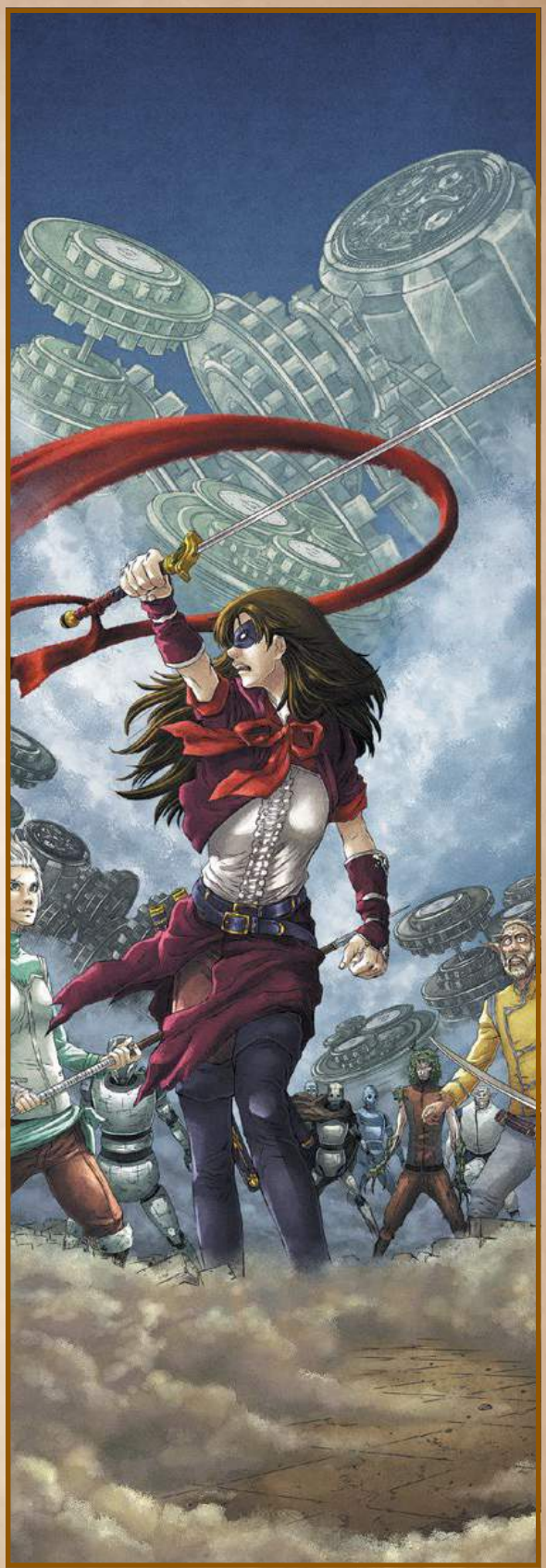
- a few seconds of conversation can dazzle someone and give them a Surface "Wound";
- a few minutes can build that up to a Serious "Wound";
- a few days with a captive audience can give them a Deadly "Wound."

This power is basically a mundane action that has special rules while **Unstoppable** is in force, so how much control you have over the process and how readily it applies to whole crowds is up to your action level and the HG. If you're targeting a PC, their player also has a lot of say about what exactly the wound that they take does.

Note that this action is protected by the Auctoritas, so even immortal characters will need to use Strike or mundane actions to resist it.

Charisma or Magic?

Sometimes when I'm writing social mechanics I'm neutral or equivocating on this point, but this particular power is totally a psychic attack. It's not quite mind control—there's a key part of it that uses your ordinary communication skills and mundane performance of your role—but you *are* softening them up first with weaponized enthusiasm.



Reject

Arc 2+

Type: Special (activates an Auctoritas + Obstacle when used)

Cost:

- 4 MP at Arc 2—make things less like you, or exile them from the story of your Role
- 2 MP at Arc 3
- 1 MP at Arc 4+

If you ever have a reason to, you can also do the *opposite* of Commanding Aura—invoke **Reject** and you can force someone to be *less* like you or make them *less* fit to support your role. *De*-minion people, brain bend them *out* of being cogs in your machine, force them to cut ties with you or think for themselves or be your rivals or enemies: whatever *not* being like the targets for Commanding Aura would make them be.

While you sustain this power, it basically puts an Obstacle and Auctoritas the Arc Trait's rating in the way of the target being like you, or in the way of their fitting to and supporting your Role, as appropriate. Further, you can use your mundane actions (as per Commanding Aura) to push them even further away, towards some opposite point—a few seconds of conversation can escalate that rejection to a Surface "Wound," a few minutes to a Serious "Wound," and a few days or so (with a captive target) can escalate it to a Deadly.

By social convention you may apply this power to *things* as well—while you can't use your Commanding Aura directly to make a fully inanimate object respond to your role, you *can* Reject an object as unfit to your story, placing an Obstacle and Auctoritas of the Arc Trait's rating in the way of the target *seeming* like you, *seeming* connected to you, or *plausibly/functionally* fitting to and supporting your Role—for instance, if you feel that vegetables have no place in a deviant scientist's refrigerator, you can simply make it impossible for someone to find the right place to put them there.

Touchstone

Arc 2+

Type: Special (activates an Auctoritas + Obstacle when used)

Cost:

- 4 MP at Arc 2-3—fake a deep connection with someone
- 2 MP at Arc 4
- 1 MP at Arc 5

You can bind yourself to something (or someone). You can *fit* yourself to it, making it a touchstone to reality for you, a place where for however short a time you genuinely belong.

While you sustain this action you have an effective level 4 Connection to that thing, and any miracle that would break this effect or disrupt your use of that Connection needs at least [Strike ≥ Arc rating] to succeed. Mundane actions to drive a wedge between you and the target would face a minimum Obstacle of that level.

You can invoke **Touchstone** and your first mundane action with the new Connection simultaneously.

Commanding Aura (Powered Up)

Arc 3+

Type: Special

Cost:

- 4 MP at Arc 3-4—take "Commanding Aura" to a new, terrifying level
- 2 MP at Arc 5

Spend a total of 4 MP on your **Unstoppable** ability[83] and you can force a break from reality—

The world goes weird. Reality distorts.

Your Commanding Aura becomes a monstrous, overwhelming force. Before your targets can attempt to resist—before options like "physically run away," "close down physical channels of communication," or even "give in" are available—they have to play through a terrifying or goofy chase, haunting, or impact sequence first.

That is, a *break from reality*.

You're like some creature from horror or of religion: you batter their senses and their mind.

Now, the downside of this is that you can't actually apply the *effect* of Commanding Aura to them until the sequence ends.

The upside is that this actually happens. It's dream-sequence-*like*, but it's actually real. Or at least, it's a break in the nature of the real. If you glow with divine glory and angels sing your praises, you actually glow with divine glory and angels sing your praises. If you have to chase somebody, you can warp your physical body, crawl through televisions and appear around corners, and have your words thunder through hallways and impinge directly on people's minds. Basically, you can use all kinds of horrible special effects as long as they have the effect of underlining your Role and making it easier to communicate with your target. Use the mundane action system if you want to achieve any other benefit from this—e.g., scaring someone besides your target, fixing a broken television, using the singing angels as a signal or message, or winding up closer to where you wanted to be.

83 Or 2 MP, at Arc 5.

Reject/Touchstone (Powered Up)

Arc 4+

Type: Special

Cost:

- 4 MP at Arc 4-5—power up **Reject**
- 4 MP at Arc 5—power up **Touchstone**

At Arc 4, you may power up **Reject** in the same fashion as **Commanding Aura** above.

At Arc 5, you can power up **Touchstone**—it becomes something that gives you, essentially, an on-demand soulmate or true companion relationship. This comes complete with the dramatic freedom to appear in any scene they're in and vice versa; to take wounds for them and vice versa; and, as the most powerful effect available in this Arc, to talk the HG into letting you do other things expressing your connection to that target. You may use the same sort of dramatic special effects, and the same system for accomplishing unrelated things with them, as for **Commanding Aura (Powered Up)**.

Reality Syndrome

Reality Syndrome is a miraculous Knight Arc. It's suitable for kids and adults whose peculiar beliefs in their own special powers not only get the better of them but of everybody else.

Basically, if you're on this path, you're *hax*.

You cheat at the world. More than magical Skills do. More than practically anybody. You have something that means that your wildest flights of imagination just might represent the truth.

When you're thinking of starting this Arc, or during the first quest that starts you on that path, you should:

- choose some kind of Experience you'll learn to share with those around you;
- choose the nature of your impending reality-breaking Hack.

This Arc will grant you the following abilities related to your Experience:

- **Shared Experience**
- **Dreams Made Flesh**

And characterize your Reality-Breaking Ability as:

- **Childish Dreams** (at Arc 1, and sometimes after)
- **A Little Push** (at Arc 2, and sometimes after); or a
- **System** (starting at Arc 3)

Augmented later on with:

- **Someone Else's Rules** (starting at Arc 4); *and*
- **Purpose** (at Arc 5).

Finally, Main Characters receive the special power **Sickly** (pg. 489) while they are actively pursuing this Arc.

Choose Your Experience

Each **Reality Syndrome** Arc features a normally private **Experience** that you may share with others. It could be—

- something elaborate and narrative, like:
  - "my memories"
  - "my daydreams"
  - "my delusory life"
  - "my plans" *or*
  - "the legends about me."
- something that's kind of external, like:
  - "this flavor that I am tasting"
  - "my criminal record"
  - "my social status" *or*
  - "my shadow."
- something that you're *doing*, like:
  - "who I am pointing at"
  - "what I am paying attention to."

It's not the most important thing about you, but it's a starting point. What's yours?

Choose Your Hack

Each **Reality Syndrome** Arc *also* comes with a reality-breaking power. Something egregious, ridiculous, and unlimited. One trick that's just plain *qualitatively* off the charts, something that justifies entire strategies just to deal with it, and even then, your enemies and rivals can never be entirely certain that they have.

Something like **the Wishing Boy's** Wish-Granting Engine.

Like **the Ideologue**'s ability to borrow the powers and Traits of others.

Something impossible, ridiculous, unbounded, deep.

What's yours?

- Can you make your wishes come true?

...actually, let me stop there for a moment. That's this book's theme. That's probably the one that you *should* be on this path for. Walking this path should normally give you your own version of the Wishing power.

Can you make your wishes come true?

...or do you have something else?

- Can you control causality?
- Can you skip around freely through time?
- Can you copy others' powers?
- Can you change the rules of local reality?
- Can you move at near-light-speed without boredom or exhaustion?
- Can you foresee the outcomes of every move everyone around you makes?
- Can you take a normal power so far past the limits of reason that even something normal like "really good baker" or "telekinesis" becomes a reality-breaking threat?
- Or something I didn't think of at all?

Whatever it is, it means that in alternate worlds where your particular group's game is the subject of a massive Internet fandom, there are people *right now* shutting down whole "who'd win" fights by claiming that *of course* it has to be *you*, because how could anyone or anything beat *that*?

Quest Miracles (Addendum)

Arc 0-2

At this level you may wish to pursue the typical quest miracles for a miraculous Knight Arc.

Arc 3-5

Generally at this point you have a fully-functional reality-breaking Hack going on, so you won't *need* quest miracles to do even the most absurd stuff any longer; and if the point of the quest miracle is to work around the genre conventions and the limitations of your Hack—

Well, that's going to be kind of counter to the *point*.

So instead, at this level, **you'll usually use quest miracles or Recharge Tokens to shift and change the limits of what you can do with your Hack**—to expand what you're allowed to do. For instance, if you're Chuubo or Shokyou, quests are what you need to expand the "wishing map" (pg. 506-507) that defines the safest elements of your power.

I'm not going to *forbid* you to use the standard Knightly quest miracles here;

I just don't think that they'll be best.

Powers

Shared Experience

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost (Arc 0-1):

- 0 MP—1/book, you can share your experience with others.
- 4 MP—you can invoke this power at another time

Cost (Arc 2):

- 0 MP—1/chapter, you can share your experience with others
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter
- 4 MP—invoke this power instantly.

Cost (Arc 3+):

- 0 MP—after a few minutes, you can share your experience with others
- 4 MP—you can invoke this power instantly.

You can share your private **Experience** of something with others. Your daydreams; your philosophy; your physical sensations; the things you taste. Memories. Control over your left arm[84]. Guilt and blame.

Whatever!

This takes a few minutes' work; you have to sharpen and focus on your own experience of that thing. Then a Region Property manifests in your immediate vicinity—either:

You can Perceive and Adjust (your name)'s Experience of (experience type) ***or***

You Share (your name)'s Experience of (experience type)

You can only use one of these, but you can experiment with both of them when you first get this power to see which fits you best.

For example, if you've chosen to let other people perceive and adjust your daydreams, then they can physically move elements of your thought balloons around and converse with characters you're daydreaming about even if you have headphones in and can't hear their words yourself. If you've chosen to share control over your left arm, then everyone in the victinity can take mundane and miraculous actions using your left arm.

You can use this power offensively, but because it's a Region Property, doing so is at the mercy of the target's player's interpretation of what you do. That is, if you blind someone with your daydreams or burden them with your guilt, they treat that as an effective level 2 Bond; if they don't want to play along, they don't have to *do* something to resist you—they just have to explain the matter away OOC.

84 Idle hands are everybody's plaything! Let's all do our best!

Dreams Made Flesh

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost (Arc 1-2):

- 0 MP—1/book, you can manifest your experience physically.
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time per book

Cost (Arc 3):

- 0 MP—1/chapter, you can manifest your experience physically
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours
- 4 MP—invoke both **Shared Experience** and this power instantly.

Cost (Arc 4+):

- 0 MP—every few hours, you can manifest your experience physically
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours
- 4 MP—invoke both **Shared Experience** and this power instantly

After invoking **Shared Experience**, you may invoke **Dreams Made Flesh** to manifest that experience physically. This has the following effects:

Descriptive Experiences. For an experience that's mostly descriptive, like "daydreams" or "memories," you can pull something from that description and use it in a comparatively peaceful interaction with the world. You can, for instance, climb a fictional ladder or ride a fictional cloud chariot. However, you shouldn't try to inflict serious wounds on people—even a direct attack with a rocket launcher pulled from dreams shouldn't do much more than cosmetic damage or a Surface Wound at the worst. Maybe it fires a dud; maybe it stuns the target, surrounds them in a cloud of smoke, but they should be basically fine.

Possessive Experiences. For an experience that's more of a... fact of your existence, like "things I am tasting," "my criminal record," or "my phobia of snakes"... you can share it with everyone around you directly.

They experience or possess it as sharply as you!

Active Experiences. For an experience that's more active, like "pointing at someone" or "paying attention to someone," you effectively take that mundane action on behalf of everyone in your vicinity. They can overcome this with their own Intention if they don't want to do it, or shelter behind Obstacles that would mute their Intention but not your own, but otherwise, well, they do it even as do you.

Childish Dreams

Arc 1

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost: —

You've learned to capture and express childish desires—

"I want *that*!"

—through the medium of your reality-breaking power. The standard rules[85] are these:

- this power enhances a mundane Intention to fetch something, create something, or otherwise fulfill an immediate and visceral desire;
- that specific enhancement is "it is feasible for you to use your Hack to do this."
- you can use this power more or less at will.

The effects of this power last only as long as you can sustain interest (an Intention or, if appropriate, some other sort of action), after which they fade away, you discard them, or reality reverts. In some cases other characters may augment their own Intentions with this, essentially "managing" you and your power.

For instance, at this level, time travelers and speedsters can pop over and grab almost anything that catches their attention, generally without even seeming to move at all. Pure wishful hearts pop tools and treasures out of nowhere. People who can copy the powers of others tend to show off for a few minutes by doing something like what they're watching someone else do, then lose interest.

This power normally evolves into **A Little Push** when you reach Arc 2—if necessary, you can keep **Childish Dreams,** but normally it will go away or become cosmetic at that time.

85 It's possible these won't work for your particular idiom for some reason.

A Little Push

Arc 2



Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost: —

You've learned to support fairly simple activities and obligations—chores, school projects, and social interactions—with your reality-breaking power. Basically, when you're doing something fairly local and simply defined and it just isn't working out like you want—

When you're not getting the level 2-5 Intention result that you want, either because of conflict or an Obstacle or because you just don't have the Skill and Will you need and the best you can do is try your best and hope for HG leniency that didn't come—

You can declare that such is the situation, figure out how your power could support it, and use your Hack for that. This is usually something you can do once per chapter, although it recharges when Will does (e.g. from a Recharge Token.)

Individual uses of this power tend to carry you to a climactic and victorious moment in a very narrow task and tend to fade or fall apart soon after or when pushed outside those boundaries; a term often bandied about is "Cinderella Syndrome," where your magic does great work getting you to the ball (as it were) but starts to fall apart once the official night of the ball has ended and the morning of the ball begun.

Some classic examples of this power include:

- using your reality-bending magic to mop the floor, potentially getting into trouble but only after it's already clean;
- using your Hack to dry clothing for a big date in a hurry, and then—
  - nothing particularly bad happens?
  - it takes a little damage that you only notice on the way home?
  - it suddenly reverts to being wet and soapy after a kiss?
- using your control over causality to win a Chess game
- borrowing another person's powers and Skills to participate in a School play, only to have them desert you after a climactic scene or become unreliable when you start playing around with them for other things.

Your free-form Intention support powers evolve into a more tactical **System** as you reach Arc 3, and your access to **A Little Push** tends to go away, become cosmetic, or become just another part of your **System** power at that time.

System

Arc 3+

Type: Imperial Miracle, Ritual Power

Cost: —

You've systematized your reality-breaking power—you've learned, created, or internalized a set of rules and limitations that let you use it on a tactical, thoughtful level.

This typically works like so:

- you have a limited palette of "safe" uses
- you can buy others with quests
- you're reliant on a set of props—phrases, techniques, places, tools, and the like
- incorrect use is dangerous—it's usually *possible*, and potentially useful or necessary, but it's intrinsically likely to create problems for you.
- there may be associated drawbacks or curses

Basically, your power is contextualized by a set of *rules*—it lives in its own little semantic milieu and you can expect both that the HG and other players will exploit this for comedy, drama, and interest and that your enemies will use the rules of that milieu to restrict you.

At this level the power is typically "for" bringing a scenario to life: a *what-if* of some sort. Whether or not that fits your specific power, though, there's definitely an instrinsic *structure*: a **System** comes with codified ways of invoking your power, things that you can but shouldn't do with it, risks, prices, and miscellaneous rules.

A time-based limitation like "this power can be used once per chapter" is *almost* universal—

You use the power, and then you face the consequences for up to a chapter; use the power, and face the consequences for up to a chapter; and so forth.

The two standard examples of **Systems** are:

- **Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine**, which grants one wish a chapter, and comes bundled with a "map" of reasonable applications. You can expand that map with quests or wish for things that are off the map, but the further off the map you go the more risk there is of things going terribly wrong;
- the **Second Skins** power, which you can use once per chapter to copy another person's powers, Skills, and Perks and add them to your own (as the eponymous "Second Skin"). You generally need to study that person with a quest before you can borrow their powers—usually, 15 XP can add a random NPC to your list of skins, a Perk costing 20+ XP can add a non-miraculous Main Character to your list, and a Perk costing 35+ XP can give you access to the powers of a peer. You can keep the new powers indefinitely, or at least until the chapter's end[86], but if someone commands you to do something for them in the name of the Skin you're wearing you have no choice save to obey or lose the powers themselves.

86 But only one skin at a time! Or two, counting your own.

Someone Else's Rules

Arc 4+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, define how someone else may help you work around your System.
- 4 MP—do so at another time

You may work with others to bypass elements of your **System**. I'm categorizing this as something that uses wishing rules, even though technically it's a little weird for Imperial miracles to change how other Imperial miracles work—

But basically, it boils down to:

- "I wish that working with this person would help me do something cool." *Or*
- "I wish that there was a person whom I could work with to get around this particular limitation, and that I'd have some way of finding out who they are."

The former version is usually a little weaker than a 15-XP quest to expand your limitations, but that's really up to your group; the latter can be arbitrarily useful, but the more power you want, the more awkward the working relationship is likely to be.

Shared Experience (Powered Up)

Arc 4+

Type: Special

Cost:

- 0 MP—you may invoke **Shared Experience** on someone else's experience 1/chapter
- 1 MP—do so a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—do so a second or later time in a handful of hours
- 4 MP—do so instantly.

After a few minutes contemplating somebody's else's experiences, you may invoke this alternate version of **Shared Experience** to share *their* experience.

You may have

- the power to share what you *think* is their experience (possibly augmented by divination or mundane/Connection actions) *or*
- a power to share their actual experience

You only have one of these, but you can experiment with both options when you first get this power to see which fits your character best.

You may and probably should use this in combination with **Dreams Made Flesh**.

Purpose

Arc 5

Type: Special

Cost:

- 0 MP—bypass the limitations of your System 1/book
- 4 MP—do so at another time

You have seen beyond some of the limitations of your **System**; once per book you can waive one limitation on your reality-breaking power:

- Invoking it without the normal props, tools, or invocations;
- Ignoring the normal time limits on its use; *or*
- Waiving the general restrictions on incorrect use, replacing them with this: that the power is cosmically inclined to go wrong to the extent, and only to the extent, that it tries to force what ought not be forced.

In general you can only waive one limitation at a time, although the HG can bend that at their option.

Example System:the "Wishing Map"

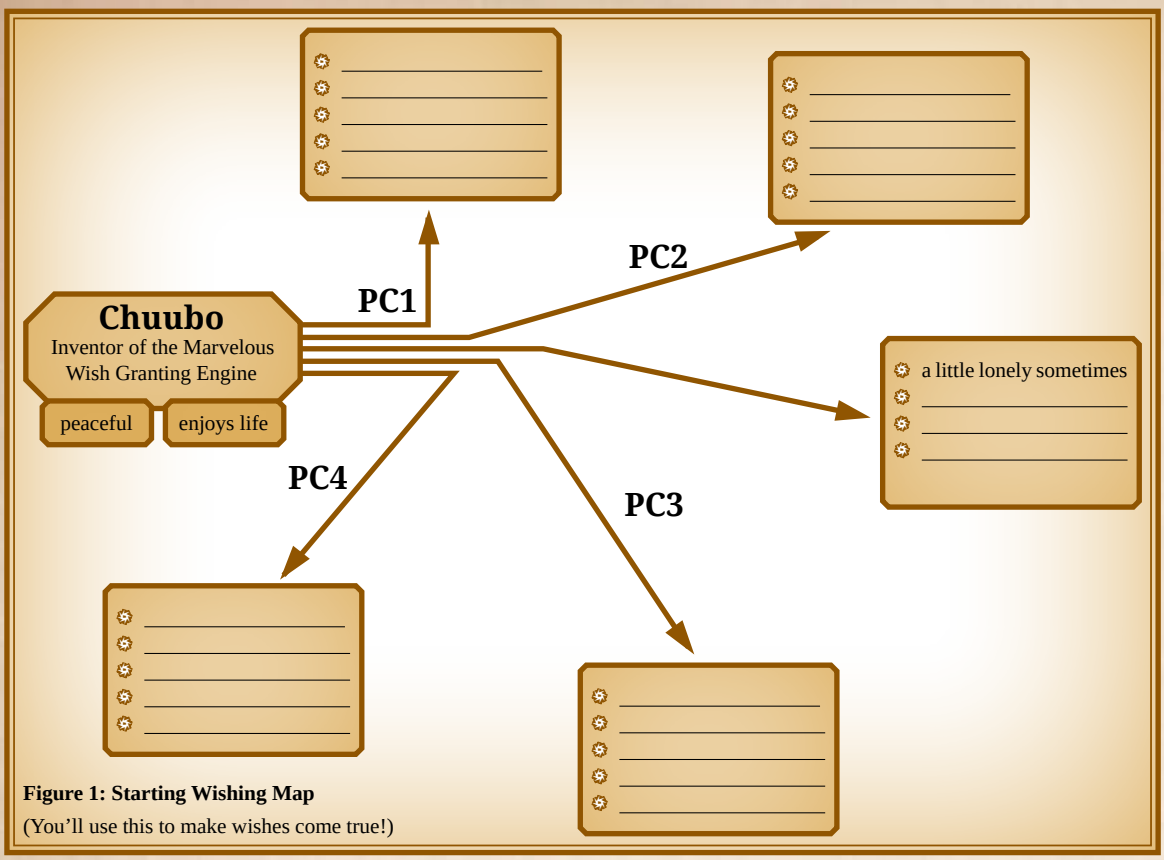


Figure 1: Starting Wishing Map
(You'll use this to make wishes come true!)

If you're playing **Chuubo** or **Shokyou**, your power of wishes will be based on the **Wishing Map**, which is in turn built on your relationship to the other PCs. You start, as shown above, with the raw power of being a peaceful kid who enjoys life and is a little lonely sometimes.

For anything more, you'd talk to each of the other players either before or after the first couple of sessions. Get a single phrase from each of them to summarize what they think of your PC or what their relationship with them might be.

This is the basis for your Wishing Map!

Every wish you make flows from something on this Map. For instance, there's "enjoys life" written up there on the left. A nice, sunny day would help you do that, so you could go up to the Wish-Granting Engine and wish for a nice, sunny day. Becoming the Mayor of Town, or bringing Picasso back from the grave—that would be harder for you, because by the time you've come up with a justification like "I'm a little lonely, so I wish Picasso back from the grave" you're on very thin ice with the wishing power of the heart that allows the Engine to work at all.

That said, if nobody but undead Picasso will do, you *do* have two things in your favor:

- an extremely tenuous wish will probably still *work*—it's just that it's more likely to go horribly wrong instead of just entertainingly wrong.
- you have the power to add phrases to the Wishing Map in play.

Once you've gotten one phrase from each PC, you can spend Recharge Tokens for additional phrases—or, if this Main Character is an NPC, the HG can just add a phrase or two in every now and then.

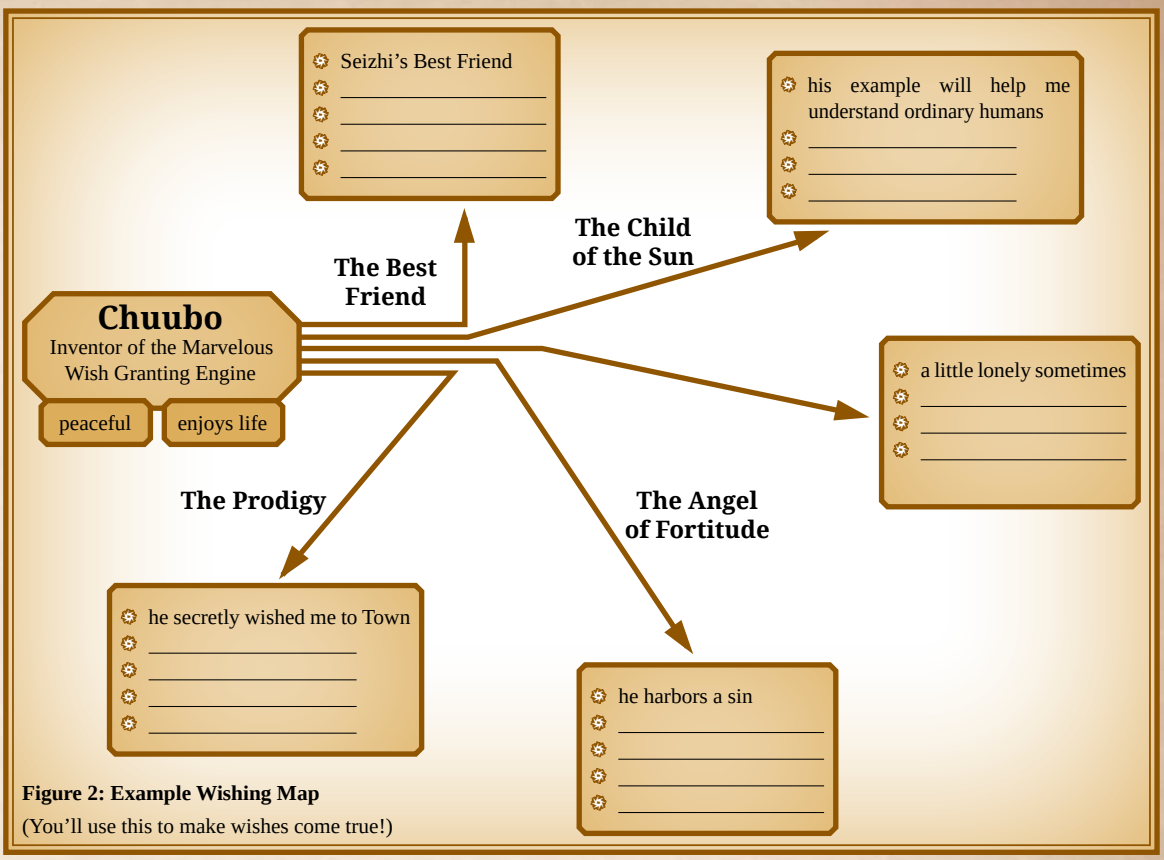


Figure 2: Example Wishing Map

(You'll use this to make wishes come true!)

Suggested Phrases

Here are some possible descriptions of Chuubo, taken from "Fortitude: the Glass-Maker's Dragon." Note that these are just my guesses! The other PCs, and even the NPCs, could have very different ideas about who Chuubo is and what he is about.

- **The Best Friend** thinks Chuubo...
  - is Seizhi's best friend
  - needs someone to watch over him
  - is kind of goofy
  - is fun to talk to

- **Nightmares' Angel** thinks Chuubo...
  - is frustratingly simple-minded
  - does not grasp the seriousness of the situation
  - is secretly everything Leonardo wishes he could be

- **The Troublemaker** thinks Chuubo...
  - has a grand destiny
  - has a good smile
  - is fun to play tricks on

- **The Dream-Witch** thinks Chuubo...
  - holds the key to her lost memories
  - is honest, good, and kind

- **The Prodigy** thinks Chuubo...
  - is a pretty ordinary kid
  - is a good guide to Town
  - is deeply suspicious

- **The Child of the Sun** thinks Chuubo...
  - is very down-to-earth
  - needs help
  - reminds her of herself

- **The Angel of Fortitude** thinks Chuubo...
  - should be planted and turned into a tree of worlds one day. Yes. That.
  - is making pretty improbable claims with this whole "Wish-Granting Engine" thing
  - is an admirable child

Child of the Ash

Child of the Ash is a miraculous Otherworldly Arc. It's suitable for characters who are exceptionally *real*—characters so thoroughly themselves, so indomitably real, that if they lost themselves in the depths of the Outside new worlds would congeal around them.

The **Child of the Ash** Arc offers the following abilities:

- **Set the Mood**
- **[Mood]-Splosion**
- **Wicked Mode**
- **Kaiju Form**
- **Mortal Form**
- **Shed Scales** (at Arc 1+)
- **Defensive Shield** (at Arc 2+)
- **Natural Weaponry** (at Arc 3+)
- **Elemental Connection** (at Arc 3+)
- **Non-Euclidian** (at Arc 4+)
- **Attention Control** (at Arc 4+)
- **Bramble** (at Arc 5)

In addition, Main Characters receive the power **Immortality** (pg. 488) while actively pursuing this Arc.

There's some foundational choices you should make before, or soon after, starting this Arc. When you're considering this Arc, or during the first quest along its path, you should:

- think about the conditions for your Immortality (pg. 488);
- choose your preferred Element (or, more conventionally, environment);
- choose an appropriate Mood; *and*
- choose your future *kaiju* form.

These choices will define how this Arc plays out for you.

Choosing Your Element

Like most Otherworldly Arcs, a **Child of the Ash** Arc connects you to an **Element** or **Estate**—typically, and specifically, you become a creature of:

- "the woods primæval"—dense, tangled forest and its life
- "the concrete jungle"—brownstones, cracked sidewalks, dandelions, and wire fences; children walking to school under a beating sun
- "the labyrinth of steam"—tangled pipes, valves, and steampunk machinery
- "the first city"—ziggurats, mud-bricks, and flickering high-hatted ghosts; *or*
- "the hammering of the storm"—a raging storm pounding on the doors and windows to get in.

You don't have to choose one of those exactly, and in fact I haven't really given you more than impressionist details *to* choose one of them with, but it's something *like* that. You become a creature of a possible world. You become the creature of a notional endless or at least egocentric reality: a reality that can think of itself as the sum total of things and stand as an island in the chaos.

An *arrogant* little world, and one that can manifest itself, in bits and pieces at least, in Town.

Choosing Your Mood

This path comes with an associated *Mood*—an emotion you can evoke in the area around you. Do you...

- create a sense of peace and calm?
- shroud things in darkness, shadow, and despair?
- order, regiment, and light the world?
- fill things with a sense of confusion, incomprehensibility, and wonder?
- ...or something else?

Choosing your Kaiju Form

Finally, this Arc comes bundled with a "*kaiju* form"—you'll have the power to turn into some sort of giant monster, robot, beast, or numinous being.

This isn't a good idea.

Seriously! I don't recommend it! Particularly not a giant snake. Turning into a giant snake doesn't help! But I don't recommend going *kaiju* for anybody, snake or not, not until like Arc 2 at the earliest.

...But you *can*.

Pick your form.

Are you...

- a really long snake?
- A firebird?
- a congeries of unholy energies?
- a thing of wings and hands and faces opening and closing are they all?
- a standard mecha?
- a giant crocodile?
- maybe an octopus, in a hat?
- ...or something else?

If you wind up really unhappy with this you can usually change it with a quest—particularly the kind of quest that would let you rewrite an Affliction or other character Trait.

By default your *kaiju* form uses the same basic character sheet. If you want to differentiate your *kaiju* form from your normal form in a way more profound than the powers of this Arc allow, you can talk to the HG about how to get a Perk that functions like the "Alternate Identity" Perk on pg. 418, or, all else failing, use that Perk.

Set the Mood

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—given time, you can evoke a certain mood.
- 4 MP—you can invoke this power with a word.

Invoke **Set the Mood** and the Arc's Mood will spread. For instance, if your Mood is "peaceful," things become progressively nicer and quieter around you.

After a few minutes, this qualifies for a Region Property in the setting for this scene—e.g.,

Things Become More and More Peaceful.

You can also invoke this power in a targeted fashion to affect a specific target. This isn't an absolute effect, but after a few minutes, the target has a moment of being... *as much* of that mood as is possible under the circumstances. This is pretty much "whatever the target's player or the HG thinks is the closest feasible result"—

For instance, if your Mood is "darkness and despair," then you won't be able to apply it to a sunbeam. Sunbeams don't *do* darkness and you'd need a more absolute power to get them to do despair. If you were targeting a motorcycle, though, you might be able to put it into shadow and make its running engine sound kind of tired and dismayed. If you were targeting a person already inclined to despair, they could easily wind up sitting in a shadowed corner crying into their hands, but if they're a cheerful person on a good day you might not be able to do much more than give them a moment of doubt.

[Mood]-Splosion

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, invoke a "[Mood]-splosion"
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a book

Once per book, you may evoke the Arc's Mood on a grand scale. This functions as a wish, though a fairly specific one—e.g., for an **Orderly** Mood, it works something like:

> *I wish this [[situation/place/thing]] would be clean, organized, and well-lit!*

Or, for a **Peaceful** Mood,

> *I wish this [[situation/place/thing]] would just calm down!*

Like a wish, it gives the HG and the group as a whole a lot of leeway in deciding what that means. For instance, if you wished an atmosphere of peace and calm onto a war zone, the HG and the group would have broad discretion as to whether its soldiers, e.g.,

- stop fighting
  - to admire the sunset
  - to have a party
  - to have peace talks
  - because the entire battlefield freezes over in ice
  - because the wind scatters them to the four corners of Town
- or keep going, but start using really quiet weapons and whispered battle cries

The time it takes to invoke this effect is variable but cosmetic—it never takes "too long" to invoke, so it's just a matter of whether it makes more sense for you to stand there making soothing gestures for a few minutes (or whatever) or not. If you're spending 4 MP, you can set this time frame yourself, including "instant."

Wicked Mode

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost: —

You have a defined if fairly prosaic means of "monstering out"—e.g., taking off your tie and tying it around your head to show that you're ready to rock; fishing brass knuckles out of your purse; gelling your hair into spikes; drawing lines on your face with mud; donning an orange robe that you keep with you in your backpack; or slipping red contacts onto your eyes. You do something that shakes up who you are and totally reverses your Mood.

Instead of being peaceful and laid-back, you're now *ready to rock*.

Instead of being orderly and refined, you're now *chaos incarnate*.

Instead of being a creature of the incomprehensible, you are now *an avatar of revelation*.

As described, this mode is a function of your mortal form, but by overcoming a suitable Obstacle, you can invoke Wicked Mode even when transformed into something else.

Wicked Mode (Powered Up)

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost: —

At Arc 4, there is no longer an Obstacle to using Wicked Mode while transformed: you can freely adopt the *spirit* of gelling your hair into spikes even if you don't have gel, hands, or hair.

Kaiju Form

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost (Arc 0-2):

- 0 MP—become a *kaiju* over the course of several minutes
- 4 MP—become a *kaiju* instantly

Cost (Arc 3):

- 0 MP—become a *kaiju* over the course of several minutes
- 2 MP—become a *kaiju* instantly

Cost (Arc 4):

- 0 MP—become a *kaiju* over the course of several minutes
- 1 MP—become a *kaiju* instantly

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—become a *kaiju*.

You have the power to take on an alternate form—a large, powerful alternate form. You can become a gigantic monster, beast, or being.

The change takes a few minutes.

Once completed, it's permanent—you need a different power, **Mortal Form**, to revert.

Early Days. This power starts out kind of goofy and unhelpful. You don't turn into a *cool* giant monster or whatever. You can pick up some pretty good reach—growing to a couple of stories in height or length up to a hundred and some yards—and you might wind up with wings or something, so all that's cool. In general this power can change what's *feasible* for you in the same way that a level 1-3 Superior Skill might, but it doesn't actually *give* you that Skill and there's generally a level 1-2 Obstacle to doing complex things with your new limbs or abilities.

This is probably worst for those like **the Wishing Boy** whose natural alternate form is a giant snake—it's practically a cosmic law that turning into a giant snake never helps anything—but even if you turn into a giant jewel-headed octopus or whatever you're likely to wind up knotting your tentacles if you try to get clever.

There's a reason that giant jewel-headed octopuses don't run the world![87]

Later On. After sufficient practice, or automatically when you reach Arc 2, you start to be the *cool* kind of *kaiju*. You no longer have the Obstacle to using your alternate form properly and you can even weasel around world-rules like "turning into a giant snake never helps" and School campus regulations like "turning into a giant octopus merits only the darkest of detentions!"

(My recommended excuses include:

- "it's not turning into a snake that's helping! It's my wishing, snakeful heart!" *or*
- "bah, it's more like I *stop* turning into a human!"

But what really matters isn't the specific excuses so much as the fact that around now the HG should start being inclined to actually buy them.)

87 Several, actually.

Mortal Form

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost (Arc 0-1):

- 0 MP—1/book, between two chapters, revert to your non-*kaiju* form
- 1 MP—switch back a second or later time per book
- 2 MP—switch back mid-chapter (over the course of a few minutes)
- 4 MP—assume your non-*kaiju* form instantly

Cost (Arc 2):

- 0 MP—revert to your non-*kaiju* form between chapters
- 1 MP—switch back mid-chapter (over the course of a few hours, unobserved)
- 2 MP—switch back mid-chapter (over the course of a few minutes)
- 4 MP—assume your non-*kaiju* form instantly

Cost (Arc 3-4):

- 0 MP—revert to your non-*kaiju* form over the course of several hours, unobserved
- 1 MP—switch back over the course of a few minutes
- 4 MP—assume your non-*kaiju* form instantly

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—revert to your non-*kaiju* form over the course of several minutes
- 2 MP—assume your non-*kaiju* form instantly

Turning back into whatever you were before—that's a little harder. You need to get away from Main Characters at the end of a chapter, go somewhere unobserved, and work at it for what can take you *days*. In fact, for a while, it's so difficult that it may well be worth having someone talk you back to normal as the resolution of an Issue instead of paying the normal cost.

Turning back, like turning into a *kaiju* in the first place, is permanent; you don't have to sustain an action.

Shed Scales

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—starting mid-scene, adjust your *kaiju* form's scale 1-2x/scene
- 1 MP—starting mid-scene, adjust your *kaiju* form's scale an additional time
- 2 MP—starting mid-scene, adjust your *kaiju* form's scale as often as necessary this scene
- 4 MP—adjust your *kaiju* form's scale as often as you'd like this scene.

Your *kaiju* form has become indifferent to scale. Are you three stories tall? Skyscraper tall? Or just barely small enough to fit into someone's house?

...maybe a little of both?

You can invoke **Shed Scale**s to ignore a size-related Obstacle[88] up to the Arc Trait's rating while taking a mundane action. This automatically re-scales you to somewhere between insect- and Regional scale where taking the relevant action with the relevant level of success is feasible, and you stay that size until you leave *kaiju* form or use this power again.

Starting around Arc 4, you'll occasionally find that insect- to Regional-scale isn't really sufficient for what you want to do—you're trying to grab the moon from the sky or swim in someone's bloodstream, say, and you're in a relatively real environment where a Region- or insect-sized person can't do that kind of thing.

In such a case you'll want to use the power-up, below.

Note that you're allowed to use this power even if there's an [Obstacle > the Arc rating], but it won't negate or even reduce the Obstacle so you might have a hard time.

Some characters with this power stop having a fixed size at all—

Let the HG know if you're OK with them fudging your size now and then, and when that might tend to happen.

88 Including square-cube-law-related Obstacles and most strength, weight, and flexibility-related Obstacles, but only if the HG can figure out a size that makes the action feasible.

Shed Scales (Powered Up)

Arc 4+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, scuttle the limitations on your *kaiju* form's size.
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time per book.

Starting at Arc 4, you may invoke **Shed Scales** to reach truly ridiculous sizes—not as a matter of *practice*, but now and again.

This power functions as a wish:

> *I wish I could get [[big/small]] enough to take [[intended action.]]*

I've phrased it as a wish to make it a little more flexible in terms of how long this effect lasts, how you achieve it, whether you'll get stuck at the new size, and so forth. Normally, you'll grow or shrink to an excessive extent "naturally," and then have to undergo some extremely laborious process to return to normal, but it's really up to events.

Defensive Shield

Arc 2+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 2 MP—when your *kaiju* form is wounded mid-battle, establish a defensive element

When your *kaiju* form takes a wound in a battle situation, you can waive the normal rules for the advantage that you get and instead construct a "defensive feature"—something evocative of technology, magic, or your Element.

You're sheathed in living shadow; or, you raise a local force shield; or, cyclones or orbiting drones defend you from that attack. Essentially, instead of the wound, you twist the attack into a point-defense wish:

> *I wish I'd had something effective to deal with* that *threat.*

You're the authority on your own thematics but, as always with the wish, the exact manifestation is in the HG's hands.

This power lasts until the end of the scene, or until the wound heals if it heals during the scene; after that, the shield fades to the potency of an ordinary wound.

Defensive Shield (Powered Up)

Arc 5

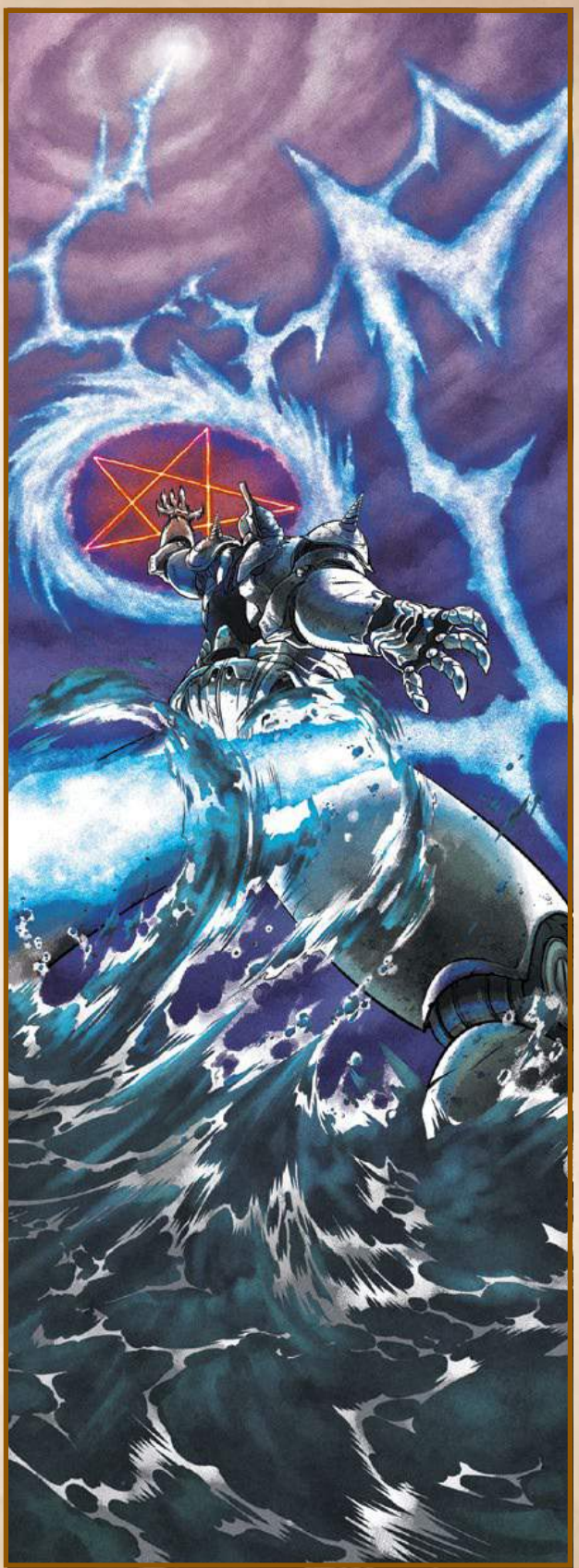
Type: Special

Cost: —

At Arc 5, when you invoke a "defensive shield," you may restate the wish as:

> *I wish I had something that could deal with all the threats currently coming at me.*

Further, you can usually expect that combat with your *kaiju* form will operate at a time scale such that this is useful. I mean, it's up to your group and the HG! But you can expect it.



Natural Weaponry

Arc 3+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 2 MP—starting mid-scene, make a miraculous attack in your kaiju form
  1 MP at Arc 4
  0 MP at Arc 5
- 4 MP—make an immediate miraculous attack in your *kaiju* form.

In your *kaiju* form you can now make physical attacks essentially anywhere within reach that you can focus your attention. If you don't have a proper ranged attack by nature, figure out something appropriate to the aesthetic of your Element and form.

This power is meant to be a basic sort of weapon—you stab, or pummel, or spit acid, or, at most, set people on fire with a look. The scary part of this power is just that it's brutally fast and effective. If your weapon starts getting flexible (e.g., if you can choose between stabbing people or gluing them in place, or if your range of poisons includes lethal, painful, and medicinal, or if you can turn people into animals with your eyes) the HG may ask you to dedicate your next appropriate Perk slot to the idea.

You can automatically use (the normal version of) **Shed Scales** with this attack with an effective Intention level of 6. This does not require a separate action or MP. At Arc 4+, you may automatically use **Non-Euclidian** as well, and at the same level.

Elemental Connection

Arc 3+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—connect to your Element 1/book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a book

You may invoke this power once per book to open a cosmos-spanning Connection to some instance of your Element.

- You may gain an point of inherent Connection to some creature or place belonging to your Element, or give that creature or place a point of inherent Connection to you;
- Your mutual Connection rises to 5 for the remainder of the scene;
- You may communicate with the target—normally, using emotes, but at this level of Connection that should be as good as speech—for the remainder of the scene.

This power has inherent Strike equal to your Arc rating.

Non-Euclidian

Arc 4+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—starting mid-scene, adjust your *kaiju* form's structure 1-2x/scene
- 1 MP—starting mid-scene, adjust your *kaiju* form's structure an additional time
- 2 MP—starting mid-scene, adjust your *kaiju* form's structure as often as necessary this scene
- 4 MP—adjust your *kaiju* form's structure as often as you'd like this scene.

Your *kaiju* form has become indifferent to geometry, at least to the extent that you're willing to let it be. Just how do those wings made *of* wings work? How can you possibly chase someone down your own throat? What does it *mean* that you've fallen asleep and turned into a mountain range?

Your normal mode has one of these two options—

- **Symbolic Option**: You can blend ambiguously into appropriate environments for your Element—it becomes weirdly hard to draw the line between you and the mountain range, forest, or apartment complex you've merged with;
- **Lurid Option**: You can go fully Escheresque and non-Euclidian, including getting into fistfights with humans and zeppelins at the same time or opening portals in your own stomach to crawl through.

Your "wicked mode" has the other option instead.

In both cases, this essentially waives the normal Obstacles you'd face for doing that kind of thing. Instead,

- **Symbolic Option**: the longer you stay blended in somewhere, the harder it is for people to spot or target you but the harder it is for you to become fully alert or active again in a hurry.
- **Lurid Option**: each use of this power establishes *something* about your current location and structure, and acting on that information is Obstacle 0; other interactions between you and the world have Obstacle 1-3 for others *and for you* based on how complicated and abstract your position has lately gotten. (Basically, if you chase someone down your own throat, you can definitely fight them there without Obstacles, but if you want to bite someone on the outside, even *you* are now at Obstacle 2-3 because wtf?)

Attention Control

Arc 4+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—over the course of a few minutes, construct something that can make a mental or social attack for you
- 4 MP—do so instantly

In your *kaiju* form, you can invoke this power to develop—"grow," really—a natural weapon that can make a mental or social attack. This is specifically what you'd use to make a tool for fascinating prey, pacifying them, and/or drawing them in or making psychological attacks that spread your Mood.

Bramble

Arc 5

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, or when wounded, fill the area around you with an ongoing effect
- 4 MP—do so a second or later time per book, without taking a wound

Once per book, or as a "defensive shield"-like alternative to taking a wound, you can fill the area around you with a hostile environmental effect. In practice, this plays out as a wish:

> *I wish this territory around me were dangerous for roughly [[this reason.]]*

Spiritual

Spiritual is a miraculous Otherworldly Arc. It's suitable for characters who feel a deep connection to some element of the world—

It makes you an exemplar and servant of some fundamental force:

Your **Element** or **Estate**.

For instance, it might connect you to—

- "the long days of summer"
- "the harvest season"
- "the wild hills"
- "the limestone cliffs"
- "the beaches and the stones"
- "the will of fire"
- "the happiness of celebrations"
- "the peacefulness of the heart"
- "the insects and the flowers"
- "the birds in the skies"
- "the roofs and their rat-roads"
- "the moonlight (and starlight)"
- "the rain and the thunder"
- "the drying of laundry"
- "the frost and the dew"
- "the bounty of the lake"
- "the bounty of the land"
- "the winds of the high places"
- "winter"
- "spring"
- "the hearth and home"

Or to something stranger, such as

- "the health of the trees"
- "the health of the teeth"
- "packages and the post"
- "the roads and the paths"
- "the snails of the beach"
- "the caves and the tunnels"
- "the stirring of the soup"
- "bicycles and carts"
- "canning and preserves"
- "the auroras and the rainbows"
- "rumors and reports"
- "the maintenance of the account books"
- "the cakes and the pancakes"
- "money and trading"
- "recycling and garbage collection"
- "the bends of the river"
- "steam and electricity"
- "the constellations"
- "the sakura blossoms"

To connect you to your chosen Element, this Arc offers the following abilities:

- **Elemental Warning**
- **Illusions**
- **Spirit-Sense** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Spirit-Speaker** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Spirit Boost** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Divine Mantle** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Spirit-Shaper** (starting at Arc 2)
- **Summons** (starting at Arc 2)
- **Chastise** (starting at Arc 3)
- **Secret Wisdom** (starting at Arc 3)
- **Destiny-Shaper** (starting at Arc 3)

In addition, while you are pursuing the **Spiritual** Arc, you have the special power **Frantic** (pg. 487) You can rename this power if you are more stoic than "frantic" might suggest.

Powers

Elemental Warning

Type: Miraculous Action [with free Strike = Arc level]

Cost: 0 MP

You'll know when something globally bad is happening to your Element.

For instance, if you become spiritually connected to "garbage collection and recycling," you'll know if something is about to happen to strike at the very foundations of recycling—whether it's an increased efficiency to urban and suburban life that renders recycling redundant or a nanovirus that corrodes recycling plants throughout the world.

Or, if you wind up connecting to "the birds in the skies," you'll know if something is going to happen to all of those.

They'll cry out to you. You'll hear them wailingly birding or recycling in your dreams.

Technically you should get this warning whenever something threatens the whole Element, everywhere at once; but that's not fun, so let's do this another way. You'll get the warning whenever the HG remembers to give it, even if it's just a local issue!

Illusions

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost (Arc 0):

- 1 MP—use this power (every few hours)
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours

Cost (Arc 1+):

- 0 MP—use this power (every few hours)
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours

You can invoke a... *sense* of your element being present, or absent, or doing something.

This is not a very strong power: all it does is create is an impression, a *feeling*. If someone stops and looks carefully, they'll be able to see right through the visuals. If they stop and listen carefully, they'll realize they were probably mistaken about the sounds. In short, if people ignore the *feeling* that your element is now present, or absent, or acting in the way you command, then this power has no or minimal effect.

Conversely, though, even if someone consciously tries to ignore you and this power completely, there will always be a dream-like sense of your element obeying your commands.

For instance, if you're connected to **the Long Days of Summer**, you can make a room seem warmer or time seem to pass more slowly. You can encourage someone who's prepping drinks in another room to pick summer drinks like iced tea.

Spirit-Sense

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost (Arc 1):

- 1 MP—learn things about your element

Cost (Arc 2+):

- 0 MP—learn things about your element

Starting at Arc 1, you can become extra-knowledgeable about your element—just by looking, you can get a sense of the most detailed and obscure arcana about how your element works. Even if something is tangential to your element, you can use this power as an extremely effective diagnostic tool.

For instance, if your Element is the **Health of the Trees**, you just have to look at a tree with this power active to know how old it is, its disease history, and its expected lifespan; if you're interested in its height and climbability instead, this power is probably worth a +1 or +2 Tool.

You can sustain this power once invoked—if you want to wander a forest gathering information on many different trees, for instance, you can do that with one mundane action for the wandering part and one miraculous action to invoke this power and keep it on.

Spirit-Speaker

Arc 1+

Type: Special

Cost: —

While you have **Spirit-Sense** active, you can speak directly to the things of your Element. To a limited extent, they'll be willing to do favors for you—generally the kinds of things you could explain away as coincidence or imagination if you didn't know that powers like this existed. For instance, you could ask one of **the Long Days of Summer** to last long enough for you to finish your walk, or ask some **Bicycle or Cart** to slew out of control.

To make sense of this power you'll have to be in an animistic mindset—

If stuff like **the Long Days of Summer** *did* have the power to act, and were in fact taking actions on a regular basis, what kinds of things would they be able to do? It seems to me, in that mindset, like they *can* be hotter or gentler, experientially longer or shorter, more or less insecty or flowery, but that they definitely can't change how long they last *by the clock* by more than the error margin (probably... half an hour?) on my vague awareness of when a given summer's day should end.



Spirit Boost

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost (Arc 1):

- 2 MP—boost your element 1/chapter
- 4 MP—use this power at any other time

Cost (Arc 2):

- 1 MP—boost your element 1/chapter
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time this chapter
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours

Cost (Arc 3):

- 0 MP—boost your element 1/chapter
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time this chapter
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours

Cost (Arc 4+):

- 0 MP—boost your element, every few hours
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours

You can invoke this power to miraculously strengthen your element. The effects are limited to the neighborhood scale, more or less, and should have some level of dream-logic to them—if you're strengthening **the Will of Fire** to melt through a steel wall, it should take a few minutes; if you're extending one of **the Long Days of Summer**, you should have trouble holding it for more than a couple of days, and the next few days will tend to blur by in a rush. That said—

You can be pretty awesome.

Divine Mantle

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action [Special]

Cost: 1+ MP

Spend up to the Arc's rating in MP and invoke **Divine Mantle** to give all your miracles, for the rest of the scene, miraculous "Edge" equal to the MP spent. (This caps at a total of 3.) Miraculous Edge works just like Strike, but it doesn't add to Strike (you get whichever is best) and it doesn't break Auctorita.

When you invoke the Divine Mantle you are wreathed in an aura of your Element—

You're obviously wielding spiritual power over it.

This aura is a subjective/experiential radiance, like the **Illusions** power gives, and not a matter of visible light or tangible effect.

Spirit-Shaper

Arc 2+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost (Arc 2):

- 2 MP—invoke or control your element (individual/house scale)

Cost (Arc 3):

- 1 MP—invoke or control your element (individual/house scale)
- 2 MP—invoke or control your element (neighborhood scale)

Cost (Arc 4+):

- 1 MP—invoke or control your element (individual/house or neighborhood scale)

Invoke **Spirit-Shaper** to command the movements of your element or pull some of that element from your dreams/imagination/spirit into the world around. As with **Spirit Boost**, you can be pretty awesome—just keep to relatively local stuff and make a few nods to realism here and there.

For instance, if your Element is **the Limestone Cliffs**, you could probably dream a wall into being covered by limestone in seconds or dredge a house a few yards into the air on a new-sprung limestone cliff. Once you get to **Spiritual 3**, you can probably bump a whole city block or all the houses on one side of a long straight street up ten or twenty yards on a newborn cliff.

Summons

Arc 2+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost (Arc 2):

- 2 MP—summon a small instance of your Element from afar
- 4 MP—invoke this power a second or later time within a handful of hours

Cost (Arc 3):

- 1 MP—summon a small instance of your Element from afar
- 2 MP—invoke this power a second or later time within a handful of hours

Cost (Arc 4+):

- 1 MP—summon an instance of your Element from afar.
- 2 MP—invoke this power a second or later time within a handful of hours

Invoke **Summons** and you can call something of your Element to you. With the appropriate Element, you could

- divert a small rivulet from the Twisting River
- summon a statue
- call a specific piece of mail to you
- invoke a named spirit, *or*
- pull a known and named chunk of limestone from the limestone cliffs north of Fortitude to you from anywhere in the same Region.

Arc 4+. Starting at Arc 4, you can invoke this power to summon large or unusually powerful instances of your Element.

Chastise

Arc 3+

Type: Miraculous Action, Bleak

Cost (Arc 3):

- 2 MP—dissolve some of your element
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours

Cost (Arc 4+):

- 1 MP—dissolve some of your element

Invoke **Chastise** and some portion of your element just... goes away. By default it melts over the course of a few minutes but that's just a genre thing—if you're in a hurry, you can just snap your fingers and it's *gone*.

Secret Wisdom

Arc 3+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost (Arc 3):

- 2 MP—know a little more than you should
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours

Cost (Arc 4):

- 1 MP—know a little more than you should
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—know a little more than you should
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours

Your tie to your Element gives you a secret wisdom.

Invoke **Secret Wisdom** to know a little more about anything that's come up in play. If the HG doesn't want to share, you can generally come up with new information yourself!

As a special rule, if the HG isn't sure you're right—whether they want to give you tentative information or are skeptical of your proposed new bit of data—you get the MP back.

Destiny-Shaper

Arc 3+

Type: Miraculous Action, Major

Cost (Arc 3):

- 4 MP—move your Element around inconspicuously, or shape its destiny

Cost (Arc 4):

- 2 MP—move your Element around inconspicuously, or shape its destiny
- 4 MP—invoke this power a second or later time per book

Cost (Arc 5):

- 1 MP—move your Element around inconspicuously, or shape its destiny
- 2 MP—invoke this power a second or later time per book
- 4 MP—invoke this power a second or later time per chapter

You can change the destiny or context of your Element in a given Region.

The destiny thing is a lot like a wish—you declare that something is *going* to happen to some part of your Element, like, "on this particular **Long Day [sic] of Summer**, **I'm going to be King of the Waves**," that's basically a wish.

Only, because it's *not*, because it's a miracle, there are the following differences:

- resisting is easier,
- outright ignoring the effect inflicts just a single Deadly Wound instead of two,
- the effects are awesome but comparatively understated,
- the power of the effect is that of a Major Miracle while sustained, and
- once you stop sustaining the miracle, the power level normally[89] fades to that of a series of mundane coincidences and Obstacles.

When I say that you can change the "context" of your Element, I'm talking about stuff like this:

If you want to say that there've "always" been a couple of **the Long Days of Summer** in the middle of Fortitude's winter "to keep the earth from getting too cold," bam, you've got it, done.

You've changed the context of those particular days.

Or if you want to point at a given instance of **Bicycles and Carts** and say, "That one's mine" and make it *true*—

This is the effect that you need.

The nice thing about this power is that it's extremely subtle. You won't get the old owner of the bicycle complaining to you—at most, they'll wonder why they bought you a bicycle and failed to give it to you until right then. You won't get people *surprised* by those mid-winter long days of summer; they're right there on the calendar of Fortitude, after all.

Again, if someone fights this power, it works a lot like a wish, except for the differences noted above.

89 Once you stop sustaining the miracle, it's in the HG's hands, and they can technically do whatever they want with it, including ignoring it immediately or scaling it up all the way to wish level—but normally, it gets pretty weak.

Creature of the Light

Creature of the Light is a miraculous Storyteller Arc. It's for characters infected by a shard of something supernal—something higher and holier than the mortal world.

It offers the following abilities:

- **Tireless**
- **Well-Lit**
- **The Auctoritas Magister** (at Arc 1+)
- **Appear** (at Arc 1+)
- **Transfix** (at Arc 1+)
- **Obsession** (at Arc 2+)
- **Open the Vault** (at Arc 2+)
- **Fade** (at Arc 3+)
- **Transition** (at Arc 3+)
- **Ritual** (at Arc 4+)
- **Inspire** (at Arc 5)

In addition, Main Characters receive the power **Immortality** (pg. 488) while actively pursuing this Arc.

Powers

Tireless

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost: 0 MP

You are not human. You are made of sterner stuff.

Arc 0. There's something you do compulsively, obsessively, something that's potentially useful but not usually directly on point to the affairs of play. Running all night, counting things and doing paperwork, making traps, climbing things. You have access to miraculous Will (pg. 67) when you give in to this obsession and perform this activity without really thinking about it.

Arc 1. You have conditional access to miraculous Will in a broader range of circumstances, e.g., "as long as there's an audience" or "when wrestling with literal or metaphorical chaos."

Arc 2. You have access to miraculous Will.

Well-Lit

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—obtain the best reasonable lighting
- 2 MP at Arc 0—declare lighting out of nowhere.
  1 MP at Arc 1
  0 MP at Arc 2

You are a creature of the Light and have the right to invoke **Well-Lit** and demand dramatic lighting from the world.

The normal effect is that you're simply in the best possible spot to be well-lit—you're supernaturally perfect at being in an ideal being-spotlit location, whether that's standing in a beam of moonlight, making your way to the center of a stage, having starlight sparkle all around you, or having a giant beast with lamp-eyes look suddenly your way. If you're trying to do this "naturally," then it's possible that the best reasonable lighting isn't all that great[90].

However, if you like, you can outright declare that there's:

- a ray of sunlight to strike you full-on, even at night;
- a stage light out of nowhere;
- a nimbus of mundane or arcane light around you;
- a blinding glare behind you.

And *that*'s an Imperial miracle.

Why does this happen? It's usually up to the HG. The two most common explanations are "break from reality" or "shocking coincidence"—although, like most powers requiring unexpected work from the HG, the HG has the right to handwave this or make you figure out the explanation yourself.

90 In keeping with this, as part of maintaining the illusion that this is "natural," this version of the power counts as a level 4 miracle and not an Imperial miracle—if you're just in the best *possible* spot, someone with access to miracles could conceivably *stop* you from being well-lit.



The Auctoritas Magister

Arc 1+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—starting mid-scene, swathe 1-2 actions in the Auctoritas Magister
- 1 MP—starting mid-scene, swathe an extra action in the Auctoritas Magister
- 2 MP—starting mid-scene, swathe yourself + your actions in the Auctoritas Magister
- 4 MP—swathe yourself + your actions in the Auctoritas Magister

Starting mid-scene, you may invoke **the Auctoritas Magister** to protect your mundane actions from the influence of miracles and the Outside. This power shelters them behind an Auctoritas equal to the Arc Trait's rating—e.g., **Auctoritas 2** when you reach level 2 in **Creature of the Light**.

To a limited extent this protects your person—if your action is defensive, or if something would hurt or transform you in such a way as to impede your action. If you've spent 2+ MP, then your body and mind are directly protected.

What is this for?

The Auctoritas Magister allows you to take actions so ominous and inexorable that they give even miraculous entities trouble.

Appear

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action, Major

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/chapter, appear to someone you have a Connection to
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter
- 4 MP—appear in seconds instead of minutes, or even less than that if dramatically required

You may transport yourself to anyone you have a Connection to, materializing over the course of a few minutes from whatever is most evocative of or likely to have been mistaken *as* yourself. If there's nothing at all appropriate you can manifest with the building sense and omens of your presence, instead.

You depart in the same fashion at the end of the scene, fading back into something that is revealed to not have actually been you at all.

Obsession

Arc 2+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/chapter, invoke **Obsession**
- 1 MP—invoke a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—invoke a second or later time in a matter of hours

Invoke Obsession as you act and your actions may obsess, entrance, or otherwise provide a profound emotional effect on a selection of desired witnesses. It etches its way into their mind. This is functionally a miraculous attack.

If this defeats them you may sketch out the details of the effect; otherwise, it's up to the target to decide how they process the impact.

You may invoke **Obsession** and **Transfix** simultaneously, paying the higher relevant cost.

Transfix

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, transfix those around you with your mundane actions
- 4 MP—do so a second or later time per book

Invoke **Transfix** to add a glamour to a slow and careful mundane action—something without sudden movements—and you can transfix those who are observing you, making it effectively impossible for them to pay attention to anything else.

Open the Vault

Arc 2+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/chapter, invoke **Open the Vault**
- 1 MP—invoke a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—invoke a second or later time in a matter of hours

When interacting with someone, invoke **Open the Vault** and name an emotion/experience and your actions dredge up a flashback from your target—

A specific experience, or a mélange of experiences, best fit to evoking the desired mood.

Your target's player normally emotes the experience, although they can abbreviate it (potentially as far down as "stuff") if they can't think of anything interesting. Your target can take an IC action to keep these feelings from becoming obvious in-character, or, if appropriate, use an ongoing Intention to do so; this, however, faces an Obstacle equal to your Arc Trait. Thus, you can use this power to prime the target for a certain mood or response (guilt, despair, peace, happiness, liking or disliking something) and/or to figure out bits and pieces of their past.

Starting at Arc 4 you can target an entire crowd and "open the vault" of a given emotion/experience for them.

Appear (Powered Up)

Arc 3+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, specify the circumstances around your appearance
- 2 MP—invoke this power a second or later time per book
- 4 MP—invoke this power a second or later time per chapter

Starting at Arc 3, you may specify thematic circumstances for your appearance—

- "I appear as you are falling into despair."
- "You realize you have wandered into my killing ground."

Pick the basic circumstances when you reach Arc 3, although you can adjust the details or talk to the HG about changing them completely at a later time.

This power functions as a wish that arranges those circumstances and then, as soon as they arrive, manifests you with **Appear**.

Fade

Arc 3+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, fade away into the Outside
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time per book
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter

Over the course of a few seconds (or less, if dramatically necessary), you may slip away to the closest portion of the near Outside, leaving behind only something that others had mistakenly believed was you, as if you'd arrived by **Appear**—

Even if you hadn't.

In many places[91] there's a level 2+ Auctoritas between you and the near Outside, and you'll have to invoke a Bond or spend extra MP on Strike in order to escape. If you're actually *in* the near Outside already, then this power functions as a neighborhood/vicinity-range teleport.

91 Anywhere that isn't regularly touched or troubled by the Outside, that is, such as Horizon, Arcadia, Old Molder, western Fortitude, Little Island, and... I don't know whether Bluebell Park counts!

Transition

Arc 3+

Type: Miraculous Action, Major; Unreal

Cost (Arc 3-4):

- 0 MP—1/book, non-interactively change the world according to your will
- 4 MP—invoke this power at another time

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—1/chapter, non-interactively change the world according to your will
- 2 MP—invoke this power at another time

Construct a desire—an Intention—and invoke **Transition**, and that desire plays out upon the world around you. For instance, if you know that you'd have to prove yourself for a thousand years, ten thousand, a hundred thousand years before someone would consider trusting you with a secret, you could replace the world around you with:

> **"The world fades away. You're in an endless, perfect garden. I'm there. You're there. Everything's at peace.**
>
> **I reach down. I pull a flower from the pool. I hold it in my hands. I look up.**
>
> **"You can tell me," I say. "It's safe."**
>
> **And it's safe. It's been a hundred thousand years since there's been any need for you to keep any secrets from me.**
>
> **And oh, you want to speak!**
>
> ***[[pause, during which they say whatever they think they'd say then]]***
>
> **...A while later, the moment ends."**

This is a solipsistic and non-interactive power; you can declare actions and feelings onto other people, but you can't *change* what you do next based on their response. In short, except to the extent that people may use counteracting effects or take wounds to prevent portions or the whole of it from happening, things simply happen as you originally willed.

("Don't change what you do based on what happens" is generally on the honor system in a tabletop game, since you're generally invoking the power live in play. In fact, you can even massage that rule for drama's sake or by taking a wound yourself. The *point* is just that even interactive things like interrogation and chess are pre-scripted IC, so you can't play them out dynamically.)

This power ends with an equally forced scene break—that is, afterwards, unless people are taking actions to avoid it, time jumps forward by a variable amount as the world around you tries to contextualize the actions that you took.

Ritual

Arc 4+

Type: Miraculous Action, Major; Ritual Power; Unreal

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, interactively change the world according to your will.
- 4 MP—do so at another time

Starting at Arc 4, you may interrogate the world in a different fashion—

You may produce hallucinatory experiences, travel to far places, and explore the characters and intentions of others in a space of altered reality that you and the HG construct together as a ritual.

Specifically, each book you can propose a new, general special effect and concept for:

- Delving into a target's psyche;
- Afflicting people with evocative (pleasant or unpleasant) experiences;
- Interacting with someone otherwise inaccessible (dead, fictional, or whatnot); *or*
- Traveling to certain places.

and invoke it as a ritual as soon as you and the HG have worked out how that ritual might function. Once defined, this works like any other Ritual (pg. 42-43), save that you can always and only invoke the ritual by also invoking this power.

As with **Transition**, this power ends with an equally forced scene break—that is, afterwards, unless people are taking actions to avoid it, time jumps forward by a variable amount as the world around you tries to contextualize the actions that you took.

Gaming Terminology

Unreal—An Unreal power is a power that you're not supposed to be able to explain. It replicates the feverish unreality of rituals, transitions, corruption, and the Outside and blurs the line between experience, description, and action.

Most of the time if a power leaves the world in an inconsistent state, you're supposed to figure out what that means.

Not so here.

Instead, if events involving such a power are sufficiently bizarre, the world may write them off as a "break from reality," and restore broken topology, sense, and causal chains therefrom. For instance, if you twist a room around so that it's inside itself, the Outside's fine with that; around the time that you start wondering what that looks like from the other side of the wall, though, Fortitude will be writing the whole thing off as a dream sequence and Horizon will be postulating some sort of writhing, reshaping box suspended on a needle in the middle of some gloomy square.

Example: Interactive Flashbacks

Your family was up to their *chin* in secrets relevant to the evolving story of the game. You decide to create an "Interactive Flashback" Ritual invoked by grabbing the table and saying "The world wavers around me." This bridges the game into a luridly-colored reconstruction of your childhood wherein you interact with your family's spirits and they tell you at least three true things.

The standard ritual actions here are:

- State or emote your reaction to some recent event;
- Emote your reaction to what's happening in the ritual itself;
- For *you*, savoring the memory;
- For other PCs:
  - Flickering between reality and the flashback;
  - Playing as children, elsewhere;
  - Playing as children and encountering the "you" of the flashback;
  - Interacting as children (or at least their younger selves) with the you of now or with your family's spirits
- Demanding and receiving a first, second, or third true answer from whichever family member's spirit is present;
- Invoking another Ritual to blend the two effects together (e.g., if you've run out of those three questions, dragging your family member to Bluebell Park to attempt to beat/duel them into a fourth forced answer.)

Inspire

Arc 5

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, invoke **Inspire**
- 2 MP—invoke a second or later time per book
- 4 MP—invoke a second or later time per chapter

Invoke **Inspire** and you may give others hope and purpose—your actions may awaken something good and lost in them.

If all this would take is a choice on their part—

If the only thing that stands between them and a brighter, happier life is that nobody's used this power on them yet, or their conscious choice to resist it—

Then this functions as a straightforward miraculous attack. *Do that!*

If there's something wrong enough with them or their life that that would be a false and unpalatable hope, then this functions as an Imperial miracle instead. This power always means *something*. If you can't inspire them by zapping them with your metaphorical inspiration stick, you instead create a wish effect: a wish that this miracle should be a presence in their life, and that it would offer them something or drag them into something that *does* have meaning, *does* give them hope, *does* offer them something better than they had.

Creature of Fable

Creature of Fable is a miraculous Storyteller Arc. It's for characters whose identity has been compromised by a story—characters who are becoming creatures of fiction as much as the real.

It offers the following abilities:

- **Between the Boundaries**
- **Iconic**
- **Cut the Soul** (at Arc 1+)
- **Superior Hunter** (at Arc 1+)
- **Resemble** (at Arc 2+)
- **Declare** (at Arc 2+)
- **Blind** (at Arc 3+)
- **Summons** (at Arc 3+)
- **Revelation** (at Arc 4+)
- **Peace** (at Arc 5)

In addition, Main Characters receive the power **Frantic** (pg. 487) while actively pursuing this Arc.

Between the Boundaries

Type: Affliction, based on your **Something to Deal With** Issue

Cost: —

if you're an NPC, then this is based instead on someone else's **Mystery / Illusion**

You are a creature of stories, infected by a wild strand of the unreal, and sometimes your methods for doing things are a little unbelievable.

These are things that shape the backdrop of the story.

They take place between its pages.

I mean that in two senses. First, you're not going to use this power "during" play—it's a power you'll use between scenes and in flashbacks. Second, they set the stage, rather than put things in motion: notionally, you don't use this power to launch attacks or build weapons. I'm not going to say that you *can't*, because there's not a bright line between setting the stage and starting things in motion. I'm just going to say that that's not what it's *for*.

It's for stuff like:

- getting from place to place;
- coming up with a bit of cash or something valuable to sell;
- cleaning or clearing something;
- fixing a particular kind of thing—
  - repairing clothes and things made of fabric;
  - repairing broken-down machines;
  - rewiring or repurposing machines
- constructing a particular kind of thing—
  - setting traps;
  - constructing towers;
  - redecorating/redesigning a small building;
  - gardening;
  - setting up a campsite *or*
- reading up on something

Pick one or two of these things that you're good at to start with when you pick this power up. However, you can treat this as an application of your Storytelling Skill or some other, similar Skill—basically, it applies your ability to tell the story of how it happened. Accordingly, you can stretch the limits of this power by practicing with that Skill or acquiring the Perk **Trick**.

In terms of how it works, this power is premised on your **Something to Deal With**.

The more you spend time in peaceful and quiet places, doing laid-back and bittersweet scenes? The more likely you are to casually mention something outrageous that you've recently done.

Any time you have 1+ points in the **Something to Deal With** Issue, the following rules apply:

- You can invoke your unusual methodology between scenes or in a flashback to handle whatever it is you want to do either automatically as a miracle or with player and HG collaboration as a Ritual. It takes an Auctoritas of some sort or an opposing miracle with [Strike ≥ your Something to Deal With] to prevent your work from completing.
- As a Ritual, it goes something like this: regular play stops for a bit while you summarize or narrate the details of what you do/did to complete this task. Other players can participate by either:
  - throwing in descriptions of things going on around you as you do this;
  - throwing in descriptions or suggestions of things you might do as part of this;
  - giving emotional reactions to the story; *or*
  - contradicting your claims with a proposal of their own—explaining aloud why some part of your description can't possibly have happened or "revealing" the magician's trick of how you "actually" achieved some effect.
- Of these things, only contradictions slow you down at all. You can usually hand-wave a contradiction away by providing an explanation of how you overcame that obstacle or why their declared trick couldn't possibly be what really happened, but if a Main Character uses a miracle with [Strike ≥ your Something to Deal With] to cast your story into doubt, or if they point out that your story is going to bump into an Auctoritas of some sort and you can't explain your way around it, that stops you just as completely as their using a miracle against the action itself.
- If you get into trouble because of something introduced with the use of this power, the HG may award you with some number of MP or Will up to and including your Something to Deal With rating.

If an NPC has this power, and the HG doesn't want to track Issues for NPCs (which is the normal case,) then this triggers off of someone else's Issue instead—basically, the **Mystery / Illusion** Issue of the character whose story they're most important in, or, if that's not obvious, then that of whomever they've been interacting with the most.

Iconic

Type: Imperial Miracle or Miraculous Action, Major

Cost:

- 0 MP—maintain an iconic appearance, to the extent reasonable.
- 1 MP—invoke a major miracle to revert your appearance instantaneously.

You have a particular appearance. A particular *style*. You're so messy it's impossible to make you look neat, or, so practically perfect that tar slicks right off of you. It doesn't matter how many hours people spend dolling you up, or, conversely, how long you must trudge through the bog—

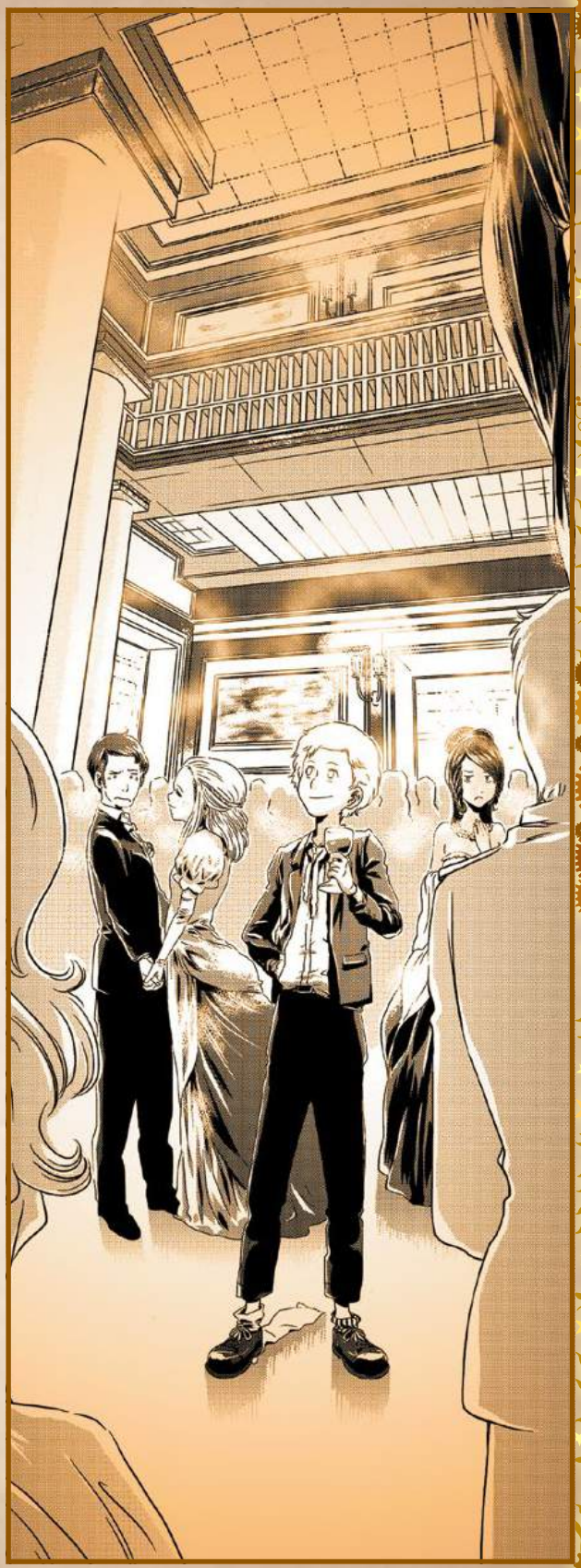
Whether it's fashionable, dorky, scruffy, pure, or "cool," one shake of your hair and one pat-down of your clothes and bam! You're back to yourself.

This power has two models for operation.

The free version is limited by reason. It's an Imperial miracle, and it lets you resume your normal standard of appearance *to the extent reasonable*, and via a visible progression that could be stalled or held back by others if they fight. If your hair's been shorn by a marauding shorn-beast, it might not pop back to its full length instantly; instead, you hold out your hand, someone tosses you a wig, and you put it on, just in time for the wind to blow on a hat. If you've been forced into an elaborate get-up for a marriage ceremony, it might unravel slowly enough for panicking servants and relatives to keep on top of things until the moment before the pledge.

If that's unsatisfying, the second version lets you spend an MP to invoke a major miracle that simply instantaneously rewrites you as looking the way you ought to look.

If you ever wish to change your iconic appearance you may do so by spending a Recharge Token; when the book ends, or the next book if you barely had any time to evaluate it, you'll decide whether to keep the new version of yourself or go back to the old.



Superior Hunter

Arc 1+

Type: Superior Skill

Cost: —

If you have a spare Perk slot for it, you receive a free level 1 Superior Hunter Perk. This is a Superior Skill Perk useful in hunting, tracking, riding, and archery.

Arc 2+. If you have a Superior Hunter Perk, it automatically powers up to your Arc's Trait level.

Cut the Soul

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action, Major; Bleak

Cost (Arc 1):

- 1 MP—1/book, cut away someone else's power
- 2 MP—invoke a second or later time per book
- 4 MP—invoke a second or later time per chapter

Cost (Arc 2-3):

- 1 MP—1/chapter, cut away someone else's power
- 2 MP—invoke a second or later time per chapter
- 4 MP—invoke a second or later time per scene

Cost (Arc 4+):

- 1 MP—1-2x/scene, starting mid-scene, cut away someone else's power
- 2 MP—invoke a third or later time in a scene
- 4 MP—invoke at the beginning of a scene

You have a way to twist or break the powers of others. You can *stop* or *mess with* someone else's miracles, magic, or supernatural-themed Superior Skills.

Invoke **Cut the Soul** when somebody uses a power in a way you don't like and it:

- defeats any lower-level miraculous action
- defeats some comparable miraculous actions
- defeats most supernatural mundane actions
- weakens most Imperial actions; *and*
- strips that power (e.g., "Iconic" or Perk: "X") from their character sheet for as long as you sustain this action.

If you prefer to weaken or twist their power instead, you may be able to do so. Talk it over with your group!

Resemble

Arc 2+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—resume an impersonation used earlier in this chapter
- 1 MP—impersonate somebody
- 4 MP—impersonate somebody based on minimal evidence

Invoke **Resemble** and you may infallibly take on and parrot the mannerisms, style, and voice of someone else you've interacted with this story. To whatever extent you have access to disguise or shapeshifting, you may borrow their appearance as well.

If you wish to borrow the mannerisms, style, and voice of someone you haven't interacted with, but have some evidence on—e.g., someone's father or mother, after interacting with *them*—you may do so at a higher cost.

Declare

Arc 2+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost (Arc 2-3):

- 0 MP—1/book, invoke **Declare**
- 1 MP—invoke a second or later time per book
- 2 MP—invoke a second or later time per chapter
- 4 MP—invoke a second or later time per scene

Cost (Arc 4):

- 0 MP—1/chapter, invoke **Declare**
- 1 MP—invoke a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—invoke a second or later time per scene

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—1/chapter, invoke **Declare**
- 1 MP—invoke a second or later time per chapter

Invoke **Declare** and you may force an emotional truth on one or more of those who can hear you—e.g., "you've just lost the most important thing in your life," "you fear me," or "you think you might be in love."

It's effectively an emote taken on their behalf, and it will linger with them, sticking with them, while you sustain the action and a little after.

Summons

Arc 3+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, summon someone to you
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time per book
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter

You may send out a spiritual call to someone, drawing them towards you. This functions roughly as a wish:

I wish they would come and find me here

although it tends more towards the low-impact sort of wish that adds progressive Obstacles to moving away from you and progressive Tool bonuses towards finding a path to you rather than teleporting them or having long-haired glue-tongued cloud-riding demons sweep by, lick them up, and carry them to you while cackling vigorously.

You may name a desired time frame; otherwise, the assumption is that they *must* arrive within a day and a night and are likely to arrive within hours. They will often see you in the distance or hear you calling intermittently throughout the course of this power's work.

Starting at **Arc 4**, you may use this to wake or call back the dead.

Blind

Arc 3+

Type: Miraculous Action, Bleak

Cost:

- 2 MP—blind someone to something.

This is an aggressive miraculous attack; you may invoke **Blind** and strip your target, potentially permanently, of their ability to see, recognize, or understand something in particular.

Revelation

Arc 4+

Type: Miraculous Action, Major, Unreal

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, reveal an awful truth
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time per book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter

Invoke **Revelation** to change the nature of a scene—

You declare retroactively that some aspect of the situation has been hidden all this time, allegedly by some power like Blind, and dramatically reveal the truth. For instance, someone stabs you? No, that wasn't *you*. That was *their friend*.

You were over there!

Make an argument, tell a story to the world, about how this happened—what really went on. This is technically a lie and an illusion, and so you can pretty much declare anything you like here; the only cost is that if your revelation is too outré, too far off of the plausible, or too complicated, or your story isn't good enough, then as an Unreal power it will fade away soon thereafter.

You may optionally use this power to declare the entire scene unreal; it fades away as a dream or vision—none of this is happening and all those present will wake up elsewhere with a gasp.

Even then you must tell a story—

Where were they? When did the break from reality begin?

If your story is less tenable than the truth, then it will fade slowly; by the time the individuals involved next go back to sleep, perhaps, they will find themselves back where they were when you confronted them, and it will be revealed only that *you* were not there, having slipped off into the near Outside.

Peace

Arc 5

Type: Miraculous Action, Major or Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, invoke Peace
- 2 MP—invoke a second or later time per book
- 4 MP—invoke a second or later time per chapter

Invoke **Peace** and you may grant it—may bring rest, solace, and respite to something troubled; may allow someone to *live* with something that is otherwise tearing them apart.

If you believe that they are only resisting by choice—

That there is only guilt and stubbornness that stands between them and acceptance—

Then this is a straightforward miraculous attack. *Rest. Be at ease. Let it go.*

But if you believe that they are right to be troubled; that there is something unjust in their circumstances, or that they are being hounded, driven, damaged by others, that letting it go would be bad—then this is an Imperial miracle instead. Something that grants them respite; something that expresses the wish:

I wish things could be easier for you.

or

I wish that you could find peace.

The Ace

The Ace is a miraculous Aspect Arc. It's for people who are basically awesome—people who have a supernatural or mythical quality of being better at what humans (or whatever they are) do.

If this were the only miraculous Arc out there, the Ace would be the one who always wins.

You wouldn't be able to tell anything else about them!

Just, they'd be the one that seemed pretty normal, but for some reason (flawlessness, timing, luck, or just plain grit) they'd keep winning. Maybe now and again they'd recognize a non-dramatic crisis as hopeless from the beginning, or they'd get backstabbed by someone they care about or by a third act twist, but mostly they'd just *win*.

Usually they'd even get to win with their own kind of fight. If they were the perfect fighter, then all the stories of their life would, ultimately, end with them punching somebody in the face or winning a martial arts duel. If they were the perfect rap battler, stories would always end with their victory in a rap battle. A cook could always win someone's heart, or the judge's, with cooking; a singer, with singing!

Or whatever.

In the real world, the world where there are plenty of other miraculous paths, being the Ace isn't as much of a game changer—a high-level Ace is still probably the best at *winning*, but not at reshaping the world. When it comes to hanging out in pastoral environments and talking about geeky stuff, the Ace may even be at an actual disadvantage!

The Ace Arc offers the abilities:

- **Tireless**
- **Cool Bonus** (at Arc 1+)
- **The Ace** (at Arc 1+)
- **Push Yourself** (at Arc 1+)
- **Legendary Master** (at Arc 2+)
- **Anime Moment** (at Arc 3+)

In addition, while you are pursuing the Arc **The Ace**, you have the special power **Frantic** (pg. 487). You can rename this power if you are more stoic than the term "frantic" might suggest.

Powers

Tireless

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost: 0 MP

Your extraordinary but mundane competence gives you a limited access to miraculous Will (pg. 67)—a pool of 3 Will that refreshes every time you perform an in-genre XP Action or share a scene with somebody who does. You can spend this bonus Will to enhance ordinary and Superior Skills but can't use it to enhance magical Skills. Specifically...

Arc 0. You can use this extra Will for maintenance-type chores—basically, for your daily routine and self-care. You don't *have* to use it, but if you want to, you can stay organized, on top of homework, and looking good even in an emergency.

Arc 1. You can use this extra Will for other mundane actions with ordinary and Superior Skills as long as you act out being really tired and pushing yourself too hard.

Arc 2. You can use this extra Will freely with any ordinary or Superior Skill.

Cool Bonus

Arc 1+

Type: Special

Cost: —

If you have a spare Perk slot for it, you receive a free level 1 Cool Perk.

Arc 2+. If you have a Cool Perk, it automatically powers up to your Arc's Trait level.

The Ace

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 0 MP—starting mid-scene, take 1-2 enhanced actions
- 1 MP—*see "Push Yourself," below.*
- 2 MP—starting mid-scene, all actions are enhanced
- 4 MP—enhance arbitrarily many actions for a scene.

Starting mid-scene, you may invoke **the Ace** to enhance the occasional mundane action with a +1 Tool bonus. As with **Tireless** this only improves actions taken with an ordinary or Superior Skill.

You probably think of this IC as determination or the fruits of long practice, but from a game standpoint this is "wish power"—the power of your heart molds you into someone more like the person you want to be.

You can invoke **the Ace** and the mundane Intention it supports as a single action. Once you reach Arc 3, the mundane Intention isn't necessary any longer, although you're still limited to the things that are mundanely feasible for you and you can still use a mundane action if desired (if, e.g., you happen to have it running already and just want to pump it up a bit, or something.)

Arc 2. At Arc 2 the bonus from **the Ace** becomes a +2 Tool.

Arc 3. At Arc 3 the bonus is no longer a "Tool." Instead, an enhanced action is notionally "perfect"—you can invoke **the Ace** to

- perfectly execute any act of mundane skill, e.g. fishing, typesetting, running, fire-eating, accounting, dancing, or planning an invasion. This includes being effective, productive, and really impressive with that action if you want it to be;
- automatically beat anybody's mundane action with your own; *and/or*
- execute an action with perfect timing and grace.

Arc 4. At Arc 4+ you may augment this with:

- the strength of a bear *and/or*
- the mental speed and precision of a computer.

This always at least doubles your mundane strength and precision, so if you were already a bear with a cybernetic brain[92] you'll still be a little more effective than you were.

92 Don't judge me.

Push Yourself

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 1 MP—starting mid-scene, push yourself beyond the normal limits of **the Ace**
- 4 MP—do so at the beginning of the scene.

Starting mid-scene, you can **Push Yourself** to take an action beyond the normal limits of **the Ace**—basically, you take an immediate enhanced action as if your Arc Trait were one point higher.

Legendary Master

Arc 2+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 2 MP—starting mid-scene, take perfect control over your body
- 4 MP—do this at any time

Starting mid-scene, you can invoke **Legendary Master** to perfectly control and exert full strength through any and every part of your body—including, e.g., your hair. This also includes a "light foot" technique—you can move as if your body were much lighter or heavier and make extremely long, precise jumps.

You may choose to combine this with a specific action, which then also receives the benefits of **Push**[ing] **Yourself**, or just flood your body with this power in general[93].

93 You might think that the second option is always better, or, if you misunderstand what it's doing, you might think that it's always worse. It's neither! Keeping **Legendary Master** going is a "sustained action." Basically, in ***Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine***'s action model you can be doing around two things at any given time. If you're sustaining an action, that's one of them—it uses half of your attention! So if you just kind of power up into a **Legendary Master**, and then get into a fight, you're powering-up and fighting and that's your two actions right there—if someone asks a question, you don't have the spare attention to talk. In fact, you might not even really have the spare attention to *notice.*

(This is a pretty soft limitation in some ways because "fight and talk" is actually every bit as much of a valid action as "fight"—but only if the talking is part of the fighting, or if you knew when you started fighting that talking would be important too. If it comes up unexpectedly, you'd have to stop fighting or stop powering up to reassess priorities.)

Determination

Arc 2+

Type: Miraculous Action, Major

Cost:

- 4 MP—invoke an arbitrary miraculous strength and speed
  2 MP at Arc 4
  1 MP at Arc 5

Invoke **Determination** at any time to give yourself whatever power and speed you need to accomplish a task, even ridiculous tasks like building a tall stone wall in 15 seconds or outracing a jet. The task still needs to be notionally possible as an extension of your mundane abilities—

For instance, you can outrace most soft sci-fi lasers, because outracing a red beam of light from a gun-like object just takes an absurd level of speed, but against a *hard* sci-fi laser you'll have more trouble, and painting onto the sky is just plain out.

Anime Moment

Arc 3+

Type: Miraculous Action, Major

Cost:

- 4 MP—take an effectively impossible action

You may invoke **Anime Moment** to do something outright impossible (but mythically plausible) with local and short-term effects (e.g., punch out a movie character from the audience, drink a whole lake, surf on a sound wave.) This includes any relevant benefits from **the Ace, Push**[ing] **Yourself**, **Determination**, and **Legendary Master**.

You may be able to do better than this with quest miracles.



Sentimental

Sentimental is a miraculous Shepherd Arc. It's for characters who treasure a set of friends, places, things, and creations so deeply that they can awaken (greater) powers from them.

It offers the abilities:

- **Miraculous Ease**
- **Haunt**
- **Lend Spirit** (starting at Arc 1)
- **A Waking Dream** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Treasure's Call** (starting at Arc 1)
- **The Shepherd's Blessing** (starting at Arc 2)
- **A Fearsome Blessing** (starting at Arc 3)
- **Combo Move** (starting at Arc 3)
- **Wish** (starting at Arc 4)

In addition, while you are pursuing the Arc **Sentimental**, you have the special power **Frantic** (pg. 487).

Arc Terminology

Craft: your "Craft" is the thing you use to create, train, or shape new Treasures. If you're not the kind of person who makes things, it's "long heartfelt conversations." You're allowed to have more than one Craft, although you usually won't.

Treasure: something is a "Treasure" if you're spiritually connected to it by:

- a level 3+ Connection;
- a Bond that mentions it by name;
- a Perk like:
  - **Bond**. (as long as it mentions it by name)
  - **Connection**. (as long as it's level 3+)
  - **Accessory**.
  - **"It's OK, I'm here."** (pg. 430)
  - **"It's like a home to me."** (pg. 429)

These are things that your heart treasures, and the proper subject of your generic powers.

Powers

Miraculous Ease

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost: 0 MP

You have a limited access to your pool of miraculous Will (pg. 67). That is, like everyone else you have 8 Will to spend each chapter to enhance your mundane actions—but if you are taking certain actions involving your Treasures, you *also* have access to your pool of 3 miraculous Will. Miraculous Will replenishes when you complete, or are in a scene with someone who completes, an in-genre XP Action.

Arc 0. Pick a central person or thing for your life—ideally someone who qualifies as a Treasure. If you are taking actions for or with that person or thing, or that express your feelings for them, you have access to your pool of 3 miraculous Will.

Arc 1. Pick a second person or thing that you receive this benefit for.

Arc 2. You receive access to your miraculous Will when taking any sort of action for or with any of your Treasures, or when doing things that express your feelings for those Treasures. This replaces the Arc 1 version, but you don't have to upgrade immediately if this won't work better for you.

Haunt

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 1 MP (at Arc level 0)
- 0 MP (Arc 1+)

When you are asleep you can project yourself into the company of one of your Treasures.

You float around its physical body.

You can perceive through its senses. If it has none, you can dimly sense the world around it. If it's asleep, you can perceive its dreams. You can speak to it mind-to-mind, in total silence.

Most importantly *you can do this from any distance.*

When you project yourself more than a block or two you become "present" where the Treasure is. Any miracle that would normally target your Treasure can optionally affect you instead of or in addition to it. This ought to but doesn't *have* to make sense—if you're projecting your dream-self to your friend Ivan, for instance, and someone uses a miraculous action to stab him with a sword, they can automatically stab you with a sword *instead of* or *in addition to* stabbing him. They don't have to explain how that works. They don't have to make sense of it. Ultimately that's all on you. Further, even after you stop using this power, you can still be remotely targeted in this fashion until the end of the scene.

Lend Spirit

Arc 1+

Type: Special

Cost: —

While you are using **Haunt** you may choose to extend your abilities and knowledge to the important person or thing that you're visiting.

This gives the following additional benefits to the person or thing in question:

- they resist or outright ignore attempts by others to influence their thoughts or actions, unless you are also under that influence.
- they gain a small amount of added mobility, at the HG's discretion—a precious library can shift its books or shelves around slowly, for instance, when this power is in force.
- they may call upon your abilities, powers, MP, and knowledge in addition to their own.

People and things you lend your spirit to do not retain the knowledge, abilities, or powers that you share with them after you stop lending them your spirit. In fact, their memories of events afterwards become muddled to whatever extent they actually drew upon your knowledge and your abilities! Thus, if someone wants to remember a secret of yours from when you lent them your spirit, they'd have to write it down.

A Waking Dream

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 1 MP—visit a Treasure astrally/spiritually while awake
- 4 MP—do so a second or later time in a matter of hours

You may detach a bit of your spirit and send it to someone even while awake. While you do so, you're aware of both your environment and theirs. You can't **Lend Spirit** while using this power, but if you support what they're doing, their mundane actions gain a +1 Tool bonus and (all else being equal) 1 point of Edge.

The Treasure's Call

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost: 0 MP

You can now "hear" or "feel" when one of your Treasures needs you or is desperately trying to reach you, no matter how far away it might be.

The Shepherd's Blessing

Arc 2+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 1-2 MP (Arc level 2)
- 1-2 MP, minus a 1 MP discount (Arc level 3)
- free (Arc level 4+)

You can grant a single special power to any of your Treasures. If you've already experimented with granting a power to something via an Arc 1 quest miracle (pg. 463), the power here is probably something similar, but smaller and more immediate in scope.

If you spend 1 MP, the target can use that power as a mundane action.

If—

- you spend 2 MP, or you and the Treasure each spend an MP;
- the two of you agree on how to use the power; *and*
- it's something that helps and strengthens you

—they can invoke the power as a miraculous action, instead.

The first time you invoke **the Shepherd's Blessing** for a given Treasure, you define the power that it receives. From an IC perspective, this isn't really a choice—it's just the power that "fits" the Treasure: the power natural to it or the power you can most readily evoke or imbue. From an OOC perspective you have a pretty free hand, right down to giving a random tree the supernatural martial arts powers "that it had inside it all along" or awakening a deep knowledge of Russian literary traditions in your dog, but you do have to fit your character's aesthetic and that of the Treasure at hand.

A Fearsome Blessing

Arc 3+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost:

- 2 or 4 MP (Arc level 3)
- 1 or 2 MP (Arc level 4)
- 0 or 1 MP (Arc level 5)

You invoke the special power you've granted to one of your Treasures in a stronger and scarier fashion.

For 2 MP, you can invoke that power as a miracle to attack somebody or inflict an unfavorable effect.

For 4 MP, you can invoke that power as a Major miracle to help you, support you, attack somebody, or inflict an unfavorable effect. It's not just a +3 bonus to your action level—the effects scale up, too, and you or the Treasure can do epic, world-shaking things. This can risk the Treasure's safety and health—often, you or the Treasure will be wounded afterwards.

For 4 MP, as an alternative, you can invoke the power of a Treasure to accomplish... well, anything, really... as a miraculous action. This isn't as epic, and might take a while, and in fact could leave you sustaining an action for weeks, months, or years if you're doing something really complicated, but you can *do* it, and it's a miracle so hardly anything can stop your inexorable advance.

These costs diminish as your Arc level rises.

Combo Move

Arc 3+

Type: Major Miraculous Action or Imperial Miracle, Ritual Power

Cost:

- 8 MP, 1 Deadly Wound (Arc 3-4)
- 4 MP (Arc 5)

You can invoke **Combo Move** to supercharge the powers of an innately miraculous Treasure with your own power, whatever that might be. When it first becomes available, this ability costs 8 MP and a terrible spiritual wound, which no effect can even begin to heal for at least one book.

This power is normally a deliberately shapeless *deus ex machina*—it solves the kinds of problems that you'd think, in a story, flooding something with wish power would solve. If you've claimed a super-strong ogre as a treasure, then maybe you're flooding her strength with wish power to let her pull down the sky or seize a storm and shove it back over the Lake. If you've claimed **the Child of the Sun** as a treasure, maybe you're flooding her with wish power to sear away an incursion of the Bleak Academy.

A more specific version of this effect, if you or the HG would rather nail it down precisely, is an absolute force obeying two rules:

> *it must substantially alter the situation in your favor, even given the miraculous and imperial forces in play*

and

> *it temporarily expands the powers of the treasure in question in a fashion that evokes either your own character themes or the general thematic quality of "wish power and wishes."*

This power normally requires a Ritual to invoke. It often runs on wish rules, but it's worth note that the two rules above supercede the rules for a wish—it's no good to say "well, changing a person's nature takes time!" if that means this power doesn't alter the situation at all!

Wish

Arc 4+

Type: Imperial Miracle, Ritual Power

Cost:

- 8 MP, 1 Deadly Wound (Arc 4)
- 4 MP (Arc 5)

At most once per chapter, you may use one of your Treasures as a cauldron of miracles and destiny—through it, you reshape the world. When it first becomes available, this power costs 8 MP and a terrible spiritual wound, which no power can even begin to heal for at least one book.

This functions as a wish, and can be a fairly generic effect—but the more your wish "fits" the nature of the treasure, the more reliable and predictable the effects. In short, if you claim **the Idol** (pg. 72) as a Treasure, and wish that you ran Fortitude's TV station (and that it had one), that's probably easy; if you claim **the Angel of Fortitude** (pg. 538) as a Treasure, and wish money would fall out of the sky, that... is surprisingly unlikely to end well.

This power usually takes a few minutes or hours to activate, and in that time you'll have occasional glimpses of what's to come. If these glimpses cause you to abort the power, you won't get the MP back, but you *will* stop the terrible wound.

A Keeper of Gardens

A Keeper of Gardens is a miraculous Shepherd Arc. It's for characters who learn to claim and maintain magical places as their own.

This is a glorious, soulless, and idealistic path.

It makes you a gardener of cities, forests, swamps, lakes, seas, and human tribes.

A Keeper of Gardens offers the abilities:

- **The World, Like Clay**
- **Land-Rule**
- **Toxic**
- **Guide (Arc 1+)**
- **The Great Magic (Arc 1+)**
- **Perk Bonus (Arc 2+)**
- **Guardians (Arc 2+)**
- **Symbiotes (Arc 3+)**

In addition, while you are pursuing the Arc **A Keeper of Gardens**, you have the special power **Immortality** (pg. 488)

Arc Terminology

Garden: a "Garden" is a place linked to you by a Perk—specifically, the Perk

"It's like a home to me." (pg. 429)

You can claim a pretty big garden, but it should be at least an order of magnitude smaller than a Region in scope. For instance, **the Angel of Fortitude** (pg. 538) rules a garden in Fortitude—its paved streets, and the space between the residential streets and the houses. **The Principal** (pg. 242) rules the garden named School.

Treasure: your Treasures for this Arc include the Gardens themselves, their key features, and any "guides" or "guardians" you create.

Craft: your "Craft" is the ability set or Skill you're most likely to use when you're shaping your gardens.

Powers

The World, Like Clay

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost (Arc 0+):

- 0 MP—mold the things of your Gardens by hand, given a few minutes' concentration

Cost (Arc 1):

- 0 MP—1/book, mold a large portion of your Gardens
- 4 MP—mold a large area of your Gardens a second or later time per book

Cost (Arc 2+):

- 0 MP—mold your Gardens by hand near-instantaneously

Cost (Arc 3):

- 0 MP—1/chapter, mold a large portion of your Gardens
- 1 MP—mold a large area of your Gardens a second or later time per chapter

Cost (Arc 4):

- 0 MP—given a few minutes, mold a large portion of your Gardens

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—mold your Gardens as fast as you can visualize the result

Invoke **The World, Like Clay** and you can shape the things of your Gardens as if they were malleable clay.

After a few minutes of concentration, you may...

- mold them by hand; *or*,
- (starting at Arc 1 as a 1/book power) mold a neighborhood-sized area by dancing, drawing architectural plans, wiggling your fingers, describing what you want, or whatever.

This power uses your normal mundane abilities—probably using some Skill like "Tinker," "Art," or "Domestic Skills"—but it elides the normal Obstacle and waives the limits of human power.

The World, Like Clay is a metaphysical, supernatural action and not just psychic matter-molding so function will tend to follow form. If you stretch out a street lamp, the top stays lit; if you squish the top bulb to nothing, the whole thing probably ceases to be wired for power. If you give a mailbox a pair of eyes, it may come to life; if you give a dandelion puff wings it may fly away[94].

The HG may elect to impose Obstacles specific to this power—not, perhaps, the Obstacle 4 of "nobody can bring a mailbox to life by squishing part of it to look like eyeballs" but at least the Obstacle 1-2 of "bringing things to life is very hard." In short, these are Obstacles for things that the HG imagines that even a metaphysical world-sculptor might have some difficulty with, and reflect the overall tenor and tone of the game.

94 In fairness it may do this even if you do not give it wings. That's its precognitive fitness!

Toxic

Type: Level 2 Bond

Cost: —

There is something toxic about you—something that can poison, burn away, or change the world. You exude it, either continuously or with a conscious act.

For instance, **the Angel of Fortitude's** "Change-Blood" is a useful tool for eating through obstacles, poisoning things, sickening things, mutating things, and transforming things. It is classified formally as a *blank toxin*, meaning that it enhances the malignancy of toxins and viruses it mixes with and exaggerates the structural weaknesses of the things it touches rather than bringing its own distinct effects to the table as a poison.

- Invoke **Toxic** when you're using the toxin as a practical tool to overcome an Obstacle or win a conflict and you can add the Bond rating (2) to your Intention level. You can only add this bonus from one such Bond.
- Invoke **Toxic** when you're using the toxin to enhance a miraculous action and you can add the Bond's rating (2) to your Strike. Strike from a Bond doesn't add to Strike from other Bonds, but it does add to Strike from MP and Strike intrinsic to a miracle.
- Invoke **Toxic** when your use of the toxin backfires—as a first-order effect, this can only happen when you want it to, but as a second-order or indirect effect it can happen on its own—and the HG may give you up to the Bond rating (2) in Will or MP. You can also get this MP if you spend 2-3 chapters in dedicated use or study of the toxin.
- It is notionally possible for you to replace food, water, sleep, and even air with the act of spreading your toxin. For instance, if you're a poison bird and can fly around as a cloud of ill omen, spreading ill luck behind you—well, that's probably something you can do indefinitely, even when the sun goes out and the food runs out and you're left afflicting an empty, cold, bland, lifeless world. This gets unpleasant almost as fast for you as for a normal person, though, and the Obstacles can range as high as 4.

But... I'm nice....

Toxic isn't necessarily a bad thing. A high and holy character can easily have it; heck, an *angel* can have this power, because where an angel goes, the world is driven thereby to change. And normally I'd totally let you rename it in such a case, like, call it **Catalytic** or **Transformative**—

Except really if there's *anyone* who needs to remember that this is a power to use with discretion it's a Keeper of Gardens who intends to be good.

You do have the option to rename it **Corrosive** or **Infectious**, though, if you want to shift the connotation just the tiniest little bit. Or to get a Power Up Perk to change it; or, of course, to ignore this box in its entirety and rename the power however you'd like!

The Angel of Fortitude

There's stories in Fortitude of a strange biker who travels with monsters. Blood drips from his hands when he takes off his gloves.

Streets move sometimes when he walks or drives by—he pulls them into a new arrangement.

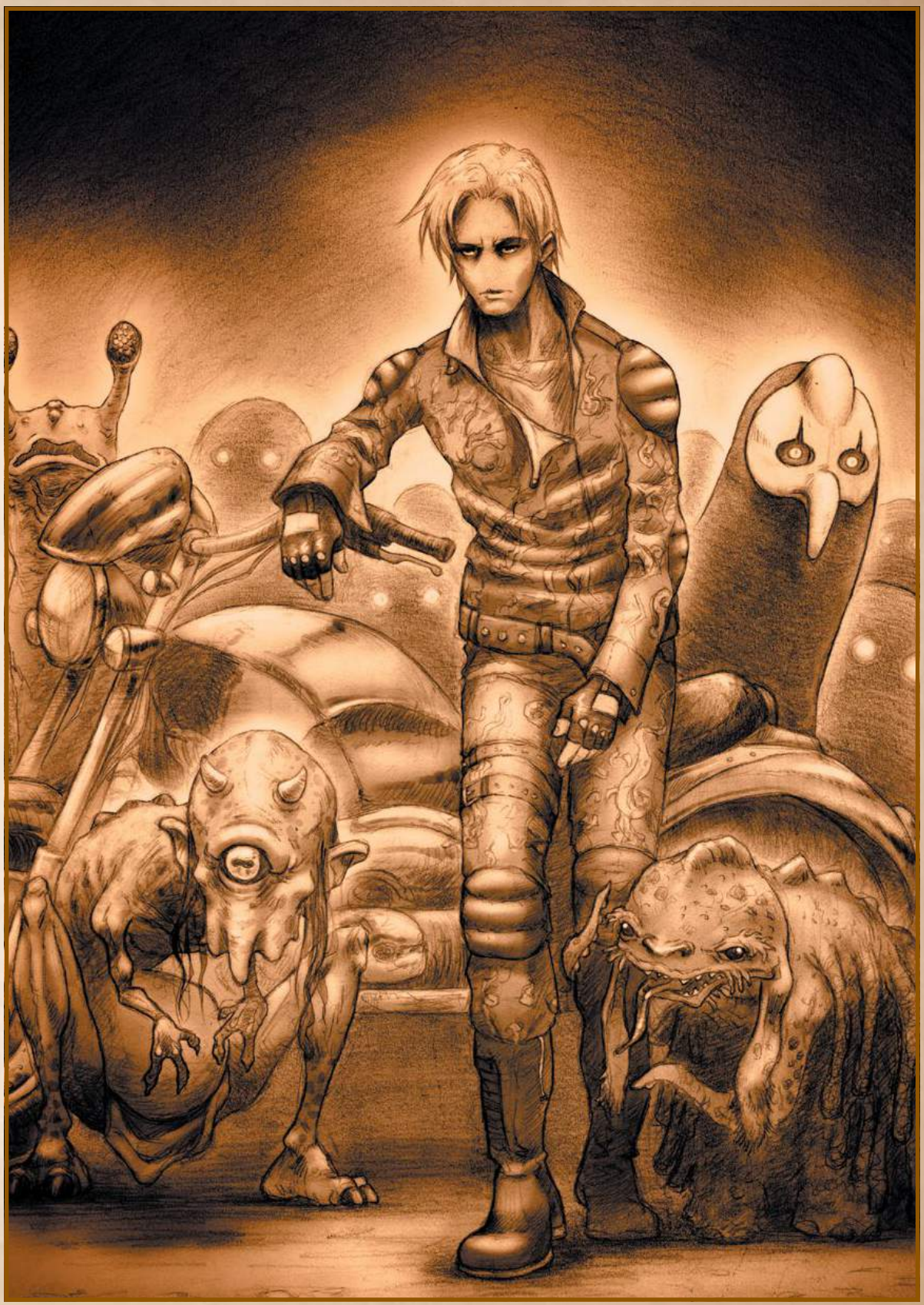
They say sometimes he'll help people who are in need. Old Mrs. Silva was dying and he poured a sort of respirating slime down her throat to help her breathe. Young Heath couldn't get his dog to stop barking and the mysterious biker installed a volume control on Heath's whole house. And my friend Lilith swears she saw him this one time fixing a pot hole in the road.

So they call him **the Angel of Fortitude**.

By default this Main Character is the same person as **the Principal**—a 22-year-old male scholar named **Entropy II**, the female variation **Attaris II**, the *secretly* female **Entropy II**, or a kid the PCs' age. That said, this is just a guess of mine—they could be two different people, particularly as NPCs.

Principal Entropy II Magister, aka
The Angel of Fortitude





Land-Rule

Type: Special

Cost: —

You may shift 1-2 points from other Skills into the Skill "Superior Land-Rule" upon starting this Arc, or back out again if you wind up abandoning it.

This is a Superior Skill that makes you good at wrangling the native creatures from your gardens—keeping tabs on them, keeping them from getting into too much trouble, and protecting yourself from their violent potential. This Skill is principally used for things like "I have an eye-eating dog-squid following me around, but hilarious hijinx where people's eyes get eaten *don't* necessarily ensue."

In rules terms, this Skill is easiest to use when there's some social context for it—when the environment and situation support your authority and are relevant to it. It's easiest of all when you're trying to stop some creature of yours from seriously hurting someone, transforming someone, or sacrificing itself for someone. If all you're trying to do is stop them from embarrassing you, doing goofy things, causing a little bit of harm, wandering off, or getting into a little bit of trouble, you might not receive the full Edge from this Skill; and if you're doing politics with it or trying to earn respect from the sentient creatures of your gardens with it, you might not have any bonus Edge at all!

The Great Magic

Arc 1+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP, 1 Health Level—1/book, create a new Property for a garden
- 4 MP, 1 Health Level—do so a second time in a given book

You may reshape the nature of one of your gardens, wounding one of your Divine Health Levels to add a new Property thereto. Eventually this becomes a natural part of the garden, although this can take weeks, months, or years. In the meantime, your wound does not heal normally; rather, you must voluntarily abandon the magic before the wound can heal, and even then the Health Level does not return for the remainder of the book.

You do not receive a separate wound power when you use this ability, although you may treat turning this power off as some sort of spiritual damage and take a wound at the time that you do.

Guide

Arc 1+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost (Arc 1-2):

- 0 MP—1/chapter, construct or invoke a guide from the substance of your Gardens
- 1 MP—do so a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—do so a second time in minutes

Cost (Arc 3):

- 0 MP—construct or invoke a guide from the substance of your Gardens

You may impute the personality and knowledge of a "guide" into something you've just shaped from a Garden with **the World, Like Clay**.

You create a living creature that is sufficiently aware and knowledgeable to:

- instruct, guide, or lead others through its Garden;
- instruct others in some other principle or rule.

For instance, you can construct a roly-poly bird that knows people should look both ways when crossing the street, can analyze whether they're doing so, experiences distress when they don't, and can even philosophize on why that might be important; or a pageboy, pagegirl, or hopping lamp from the substance of your realm to lead people from one place in it to another.

You may use mundane means to summon an existing guide, but it's only guaranteed to still exist and be reachable by you if you use this power to summon it again.

Perk Bonus

Arc 2+

Type: Special

Cost: —

You receive a bonus Perk slot pre-filled with **"It's like a home to me."** (pg. 429) at Arc level 2. Let's call this a Garden Perk.

(This normally increases your total available Perks to 9.)

You receive another bonus Perk slot and Garden Perk at Arc level 4.

The HG may give you a free Garden Perk, or replace one of your existing Garden Perks, if play suddenly moves to a new location—for instance, if the HG suddenly ships you all to Calcutta, you shouldn't have to do a quest just to have *something* to work with there. This may come with a temporary Perk slot ("well, you're only here for the summer, so don't worry about it") but won't come with a permanent one.

You can use these Perk slots for anything. I don't think that rule will come up very often, because seriously, you want at *least* two gardens, but if it does come up, yes, you can fill them with whatever you like.

Guardian

Arc 2+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost (Arc 2-4):

- 0 MP—1/chapter, construct or invoke a guardian from the substance of your Gardens
- 1 MP—do so a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—do so a second time in minutes

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—construct or invoke a guardian from the substance of your Gardens

You may mold one or more "guardians" out of the substance of your garden, kneading some principle or abstract thought from the world of ideas into the creatures' flesh.

They become motivated to enact or enforce that idea.

A guardian might aggress against those who defy a rule, or simply help them to abide by it; might demand the solution to some riddle, or simply give rewards to those who make answer to it; might recite some description on demand or simply hang around remembering it.

You may mix together multiple principles but this makes things more difficult—typically it's just

- Obstacle 0-1 to work an entire canon of material into a guardian, *but*
- Obstacle 2-3 if you're mixing together 2+ unrelated principles, purposes, or foci.

You use **the World, Like Clay** to construct these creatures, so matters like "just what can they do?" and "how far can I stretch 'some principle'" come down to your mundane actions; the actual effect of this power is that you can mix abstract ideas into that clay.

Guardians may have special powers. Even though there's an Imperial miracle in play to change what's feasible for you, this pretty much follows the usual rules for mundane actions on your part—for instance, if you want to put together a guardian with some sort of time magic, you might need to practice for a bit and work up to it. Once you've figured out what you're doing, though, a level 4 mundane action should be enough to make something with cool time magic and a level 5 enough to make something with time magic that's definitely more of an advantage than a drawback. Conceptually, a guardian almost always has mundane powers, although a guardian that becomes an important character in its own right may start on a miraculous path, and you can usually use a quest miracle to endow a guardian with miraculous abilities.

Symbiote

Arc 3+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/chapter, construct or find a symbiote from the substance of your gardens
- 2 MP—do so a second or later time per chapter

You may create or dig up a creature from one of your gardens *suited* to helping somebody—to helping them abide by some rule, solve some riddle, or accomplish some task.

This functions as something like a wish:

I wish I had something to help you with this.

As one might guess from the phrasing of the wish, the effects play out over a space of time and what happens if you try to "help someone" abide by a rule that they don't actually want to abide by is a little vague—

It's not that you instantly pull out a creature from your gardens and bam, the problem is solved, so much as that you create something that *in potentia* can fit into their life and provide a solution to the problem that you see.

A symbiote receives a **Superior Fitting into their Lives 2** Skill for free—such a creature is automatically adept at insinuating itself into the target fold.

Empower

Arc 4+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, empower something to the Imperial level
- 4 MP—do the same, at another time

You can rouse the power of one of the guides or guardians of your gardens, increasing their natural abilities—essentially wishing that they would show a vast, situation-altering power.

Accursed

Accursed is a miraculous Emptiness Arc. It's for those who have lost some portion of their natural comfort in the world—those who are being driven away from existence by some curse or alienation woven into their nature.

Accursed offers the following abilities:

- **Sanctuary**
- **MP Bonus** (starting at Arc 1)
- **The World-Breaker's Hand** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Falling From the World** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Nourishment** (starting at Arc 2)
- **Damaged** (starting at Arc 2)

In addition, Main Characters receive the power **Sickly** (pg. 489) while actively pursuing this Arc.

Arc Terminology

Your Curse: there's something broken in you—a part of you that the Outside or some other bleak power infests.

This is your Curse, and its manifestation is this:

There is something wholesome and normal and good that twists, for you, into something sick and awful. This is called the Curse's **Trigger**. Maybe you dare not dream, because your dreams will turn into snakes of fire and crawl under your skin. Maybe you can't do simple, honest work, because if you do simple honest work it gets tainted by the curse. Maybe you can't touch anybody, because that risks killing them, or you can't eat your vegetables, like, no tomatoes, no broccoli, not at all, because you'd grow horrible shoulder-mounted tomato-launchers and broccoli-lumps from your skin.

There's something you can't actually live without, in short, but—

Well. You can't do too much of it, either, or it'll devour you, with awful supernatural effects.

Your Curse doesn't necessarily hurt your capacity for action. Sometimes it does—I mean, you *could* have a curse that disables you—but it could also just provide adversity while leaving your effectiveness intact.

Powers

Sanctuary

Type: Miraculous Action, Major

Cost: —

You have a place you can retreat to when the world becomes too much for you to bear. Its entrance is something symbolic—you can get there by (pick one)

- wandering through any collection of books, records, and art large enough to wander?
- heading down any lightless tunnel?
- drawing a door on any surface and then going through?
- crawling into any fireplace?
- feeding yourself through any keyhole?
- climbing any multi-story set of stairs?
- something else?

In addition, there's a specific entrance that works for everyone else—which means, if you've chosen something like "feeding yourself through any keyhole," there's one *particular* keyhole that *anyone* can feed themselves through to reach your sanctuary, and which also serves as or is in the rough vicinity of the exit from your hidden place.

There's a level 2 Auctoritas guarding reality's edge that makes it a little harder to do stuff like this across that boundary—you'd need 2+ Strike to enter your sanctuary from the Outside. More generally, if there's a spiritual barrier between you and the entrance to your shelter, you'd have to travel part of the way on foot or someone[95] would need to break past that barrier with Strike before you could get inside.

95 Probably you.

MP Bonus

Arc 1+

Type: Special

Cost: —

You receive a bonus to your starting MP equal to the Arc Trait's rating.

Falling From the World

Arc 1+

Type: Affliction, based on your **Sickness**.

Cost: —

if you're an NPC, then this is based instead on someone else's **Trust**

Your Arc **Curse** falls upon you—slips down upon you.

There is a bleakness in you that drives you from the world. You may oppose it while you have wish power (that is, MP) but when you've spent your last MP, it will drive you from the world into your sanctuary or the Outside.

You have wide leeway to define the nature of the curse—what triggers it, what it does to you, what advantages it might convey. Often it involves your identity and transformations in some fashion. Often it externalizes something internal, emotional, or private. Regardless, though, it has the following basic form:

Anytime you have 1+ points in the **Sickness** Issue, the following rules apply:

- There is something that the curse makes unpleasant for you. It starts with minor stuff, stuff that could be coincidental and/or stuff you can just laugh off, but by Sickness 3+, the curse's effects are overtly supernatural and escalating.

  What happens?

- Your Miracle Points are your lifeline. If you have **Sickness 1+** and 0 MP, you have the following three choices:
  - Somebody uses a miracle with [Strike ≥ your Sickness] to help you out;
  - Something happens that paralyzes you/renders you ineffectual. Do you have an emotional collapse? Fall unconscious? Start screaming uncontrollably? Turn into a swarm of HG-controlled bees? Pick a general option when you're choosing the curse:

  - If neither of those things happens, you must head for your sanctuary at best possible speed, often with some supernatural side effect (e.g., you're drawn out into a long, thin thread even before you reach the keyhole you're going to slip through). You're allowed to pause briefly for things like picking up a baby that's just lying around on the street, blowing out a lamp that's about to set a room on fire, or knocking on a doctor's door and pointing the doctor towards a dying friend, but for anything less important or more time-consuming than that you're limited to meaningful glances and turning away. Maybe a few distracted noises or moans. You've got to get *away*.

  If *none* of those things happen, if nobody uses a miracle with enough Strike and you don't become ineffectual and you don't head for your Sanctuary, the HG can do... curse-appropriate things, generally even worse than the above.

- The HG will invoke your **Curse** to protect you from effects, *with the specific exception of your sanctuary*, that:
  - stop the effects above from taking place;
  - get in the way of the Curse's Trigger; *or*
  - ...well. Is there an or? Is there anything that your *particular* Curse might defend you from?

  It's still possible for something to happen that stops your Curse, or gets past any specific defenses it gives you, but such an effect would need [Strike ≥ your Sickness] to succeed.

- When this Affliction causes actual, meaningful trouble to you, the HG may give you up to your Sickness in MP. However, you must use these MP immediately; they fade at the end of the current scene (or, if the current scene ends almost immediately, at the end of the next scene where you take a meaningful action.)

In general you'll pick up your first point of Sickness either from **Sickly**, from trauma, or from people messing with you, and then later points will come from the consequences of this Affliction. You can also start the vicious cycle if someone tries to corrupt you, or if you just get naturally sick!

If an NPC has this power, and the HG doesn't want to track Issues for NPCs (which is the normal case,) then this triggers off of someone else's Issue instead—basically, the **Trust** / **Isolation** / **Hollow** Issue of the character whose story they're most important in, or, if that's not obvious, then that of whomever they've been interacting with the most.

The World-Breaker's Hand

Arc 1+

Type: Miraculous Action, Bleak

Cost (Arc 1)

- 0 MP—1/book, declare something unmade
- 1 MP—unmake something a second or later time per book
- 2 MP—unmake something a second or later time per chapter
- 4 MP—unmake something a second time in a matter of hours

Cost (Arc 2)

- 0 MP—1/chapter, declare something unmade
- 1 MP—unmake something a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—unmake something a second or later time in a matter of hours
- 4 MP—unmake something a second or later time per scene

Cost (Arc 3+)

- 0 MP—starting mid-scene, declare 1-2 things unmade
- 1 MP—starting mid-scene, unmake a third thing
- 2 MP—starting mid-scene, destroy as many things as you like.
- 4 MP—destroy as many things as you like this scene.

Your connection to the Outside imbues you with a terrifying power of un-creation. Maybe you . .

- point and something vanishes, *poof*, gone?
- snap your fingers and cast something into
  - the furthest depths of the Outside?
  - a state of chaos and disorder?
  - a sea of vivid nightmares?
- see the "weak point" in any structure that lets you touch it and shake it apart?
- research and discover a shareable and infinitely advantageous weakness?
- cover your target in a patina of corrosive Outside dust?
- wave your hand and something, anything, even a deck chair, becomes suicidal and hurls itself into the path of destruction?
- revert things to a pristine, ancient, traditional form, *or*
- strip away years and memories from the target?

Whatever your power is, it isn't limited to unmaking *things*, either.

With **the World-Breaker's Hand** you can burn the sparkle from a child's eyes or the footfalls from a cat. You can blast away someone's property of being loud or of being near you, unmake the "heap" quality from a stack of sand, or cast your having lost a fight into the deep Outside. You can flatten the bumps from a bumpy beach or clip the gnarledness off a log. You can take away somebody's being a bad comedian, although this won't make them a good one; you can bleach the violence from a killer's soul, although this will not make them kind. If this doesn't seem to fit the way your power works you can define a variation (a "how you handle abstractions") for which it does.

Note that while this is absurdly powerful it is also a bleak power and as such is vulnerable to the standard antidotes to the bleak (pg. 476-481); further, many things you do to a Main Character with it could be reframed, instead, into some Deadly Wound.

Nourishment

Arc 2+

Type: Miraculous Action, Major

Cost: —

You may replenish yourself by hiding out for a while in your sanctuary. Specifically—

- when you spend an XP Action there, gain 1 MP (max 8).
- when you skip one of your per-chapter XP Actions to be there, gain 1 MP (max 8).[96]
- when you fail someone, miss an appointment, or otherwise let something bad happen or cause something bad to happen because you were in your sanctuary, gain 1 MP (max 8).
- when you come out of the sanctuary with 5+ MP, at least one of which came from your sanctuary, you're ready to face the ordinary world again. In addition,
  - You may sustain a Major miraculous action that does cool, useful stuff that is also in some fashion the antithesis of your curse. Decide what this does:

    _____
  - Plus, you get some neat bonus based on what the sanctuary itself is:

    _____
  - And finally, there's often a disturbing but not necessarily unpleasant visual effect:

    _____

  These benefits remain until you stop sustaining the action, spend down to 4 MP or fewer, or suffer a specifically relevant setback:

  _____

Other characters may accompany you into the sanctuary, and exit through its normal exit. Other characters may even *use* the hidden room to gain MP and acquire the other benefits. However:

- only one person can gain MP from the sanctuary on any given day;
- most attempts to enter the sanctuary without your presence and consent fail,
- there may be weird special effects or curse effects for them using it; *and*
- people who try to get into the sanctuary without you escorting them occasionally get hurt[97].

At Arc 5, the maximum MP you can get from this Sanctuary rises to 13.

96 If most of the game is XP-giving actions, this doesn't actually cost the players anything—you'll just move on to someone *else* earning XP for the group. On the other hand, if the HG has a lot of stuff going on that isn't earning XP, then maybe finding something you can do in there (even if it winds up earning you Isolation, Illusion, or Hollow) would be a better choice.

97 The risk of failure and the risk of something going wrong are cosmological constants; if a character manages to eliminate either risk, they simply can't get into your sanctuary.

Damaged

Arc 2+

Type: Special

Cost: —

You no longer recover 1 MP at the beginning of each chapter, though you still recover MP up to your normal maximum at the beginning of a book.

Further, as a special rule, *any effect that causes you a wound, or fails to cause you a wound because you do not have the relevant wound type available*, also costs you one MP. If you run out of MP while you have the Sickness Issue at level 1+, this weakness interacts with the **Falling from the World** Affliction to drive you into the comfort of your hidden room.

I'm sorry this happens.

It sucks.

The World-Breaker's Hand (Powered Up)

Arc 4+

Type: Miraculous Action, Major, Bleak

Cost (Arc 3+):

- 0 MP—starting mid-scene, declare 1-2 things unmade
- 1 MP—starting mid-scene, unmake a third thing
- 2 MP—starting mid-scene, destroy as many things as you like.
- 4 MP—destroy as many things as you like this scene.

At Arc level 4, the effects of your World-Breaker's Hand power become Major. This should allow you to win most straightforward miraculous conflicts. It also enables epic, Town-shaking acts of destruction — but only if they fit the established thematics for your character and their powers or if you change those thematics with a Power Up Perk.

Primordial

Primordial is a miraculous Mystic Arc. It's for those who are transforming into some great and nameless power—some elemental, supernatural force with an existence no longer really measurable in human terms.

This Arc tangles up an Element, a Mood or "Principle," and a physical transformation all into a single idea—it's an artistic evolution and not a rational one, turning you into a concept and a symbol without the neat categorical distinctions of the logical adult mind. The canonical example is **the Child of the Sun**, who is becoming the Sun, and Hope, and also a primordial deity with symbolic extra limbs. *You* might do that, or turn into an Earth/Ground/Soil-tied Dragon who also represents Peace and Stability, or into a shapeshifting, amorphous siren tied to both Longing and the Sea, instead!

Primordial offers the following abilities:

- **Unnatural Action**
- **Scry**
- **Digest** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Bindings** (starting at Arc 1)
- **Shared Witness** (starting at Arc 1)
- **A Distant Mood** (starting at Arc 2)
- **Evocative Transformation** (starting at Arc 2)
- **Transform and Devour** (starting at Arc 2)
- **Tokens of your Power** (starting at Arc 3)

In addition, Main Characters receive the power **Immortality** (pg. 488) while actively pursuing this Arc.

Choosing Your Principle

This Arc comes with an associated **Principle** or **Mood**—a high and holy, or at least exalted, cause you serve.

Are you an agent of

- Freedom?
- Love?
- Truth?
- Hope?
- Mystery?
- or something else?

You'll also want to choose a way of writing your belief in that principle as a Region Property—something like:

- "You can claim your freedom."
- "It's OK to love."
- "Love conquers all."
- "The truth will out."
- "The truth is worthwhile."
- "There is reason to hope."
- "You're driven to tackle mysteries!"
- ...or...?

Choosing Your Transformation

This Arc is transforming you into something, in the name of that principle.

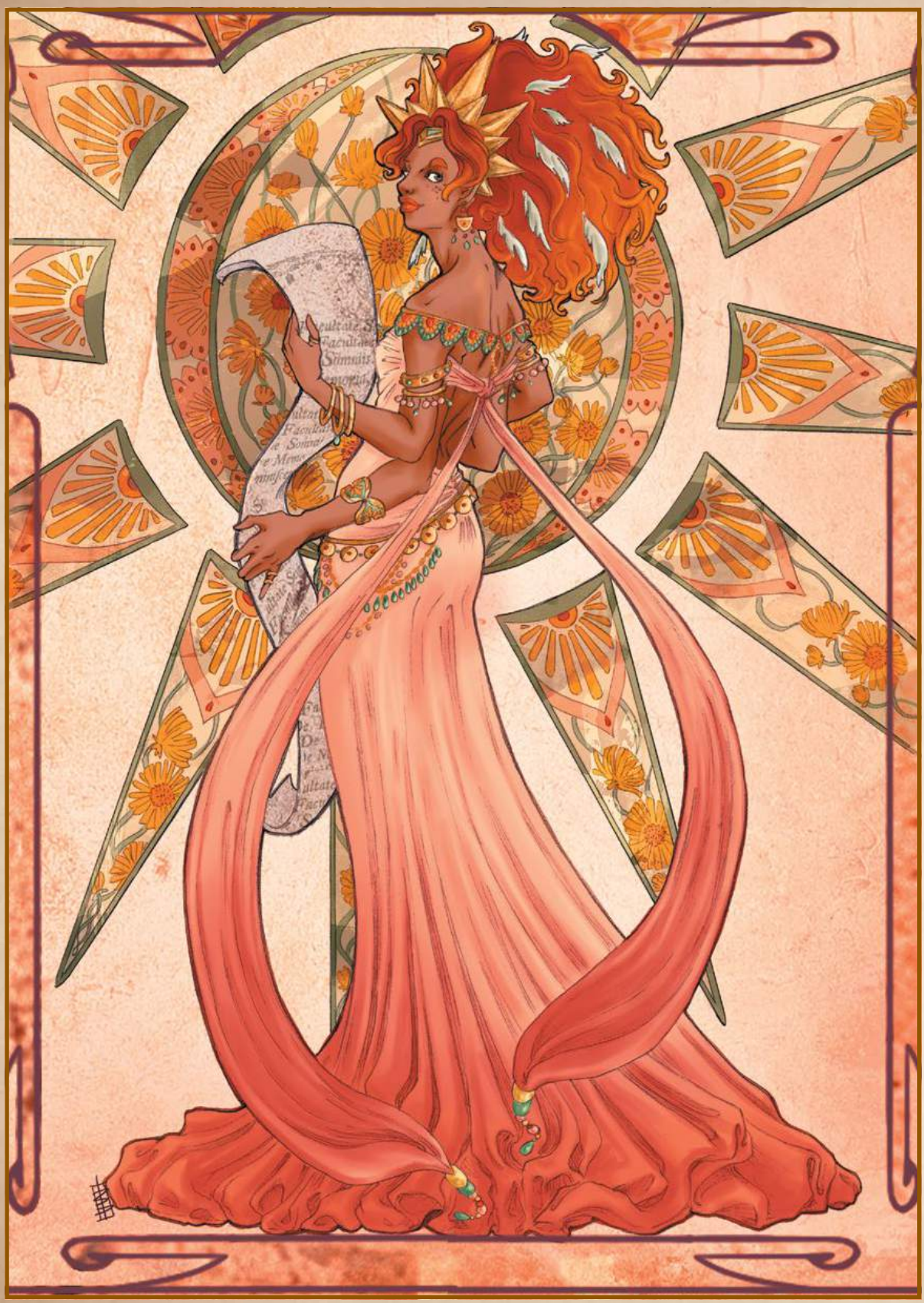
Are you becoming...

- a bird-faced sky-spirit?
- a prophet?
- an elemental spirit?
- an angelic being?
- a shapeshifter, claimed by the Lake?
- an emissary of the Bleak Academy?
- or something else?

This ties you loosely to some **Element** of the natural world—

- the wind?
- the sky?
- the lake?
- the sun?
- twilight?
- shadow?
- the color gray?
- fire?
- the dawn?
- Church bells?
- or something else?

If you pick a physical element like the sun or Church bells, this usually extends to a conceptual area influenced by that element—sunlight, or the places where the bells are audible. In general, you can think of your Element as a kind of Skill, in that you have a great deal of freedom in defining its applications but have to work at it to push those limits once defined.



Powers

Unnatural Action

Type: Special

Cost: —

You aren't just a person. You aren't just one lonely little body in the middle of nowhere not connecting to anything else.

You're... well, *part* of your Element.

That means that you can use your Element to emote with. If you're a shapeshifter tied to the lake, you can sit by the sea and move your hand and change the pattern of the crashing waves. If you're the goddess of the sun, you can cloud over to show that you're upset or illuminate something that's caught your attention with a sparkling sunbeam.

With practice, you can also use your mortal Skills to take action "as" your element—not just casual emoting, but also conscious action. Smash a particular sand castle with a wave cresting from the lake. Search for something using a sunbeam, or write kanji on the clouds. Darken the twilight, not to express a pensive mood, but to make yourself harder to find.

Initially you'll be limited to things that are pretty normal for your element—the idea is that the sun *knows* how to glitter and shine and cloud over, but hasn't ever really used its Skills to do conscious stuff like using sunbeams as searchlights or writing on the clouds. The lake *knows* how to have a sudden surge but not how to targetedly attack a given sand castle or use its wave-motion action to sift the beach for hidden treasure.

But, like any other use of mortal Skills, you can practice until you've learned new tricks.

The practical effect of this power is that if you say "I'm going to have big surfable waves today" or "I don't like this guy. I'm going to glare at him all day from the sky and make him uncomfortably hot" or something appropriate to your Element, the HG should ask you for an action level instead of just squinting at you with a dubious look[98].

98 If they squint at you anyway you should draw yourself up to your full height, level an accusatory finger at them, and say, "You, sir, madam, or other, are squinting at me in *direct* contravention of the instructions of Jenna Katerin Moran. I hope you're proud of yourself." Then, stick out your tongue!

And run away!

Scry

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—after a few minutes concentrating, use your element to find something
- 1-4 MP—speed this process up

Spend a few minutes concentrating and you can invoke an Element-themed search method. This has two separate forms:

First, you can send out your sight and hearing in a "mote" or "speck" of your element which can dart around within the space your Element covers. It can:

- move through your Element very quickly;
- focus your senses to see and hear from any specific place therein. However, you can only see and hear things that are "within" your Element—no matter how vivid or loud, you can't actually see or hear outside your Element's boundaries.

As a speck of your Element that can only really exist *in* your Element, your mote is invisible for most practical purposes—but it does have unusual consistency of form and a bit of extra spiritual *thereness*, so extremely alert characters may overcome a level 2-3 Obstacle and spot it anyway.

For ubiquitous Elements like sunlight on a sunny day or water in Big Lake, it usually takes around an hour to search a Region for a specific person-sized object that is visible to you. Sometimes you're lucky or unlucky. It's faster to find large things and things you have an approximate location for, and it's slower to find things that are smaller or that spend less than an hour at a time in your Element. (For instance, if your Element is rain, and you're looking for a puppy in the rainy season, and the puppy sensibly spends most of its time indoors—it might take you a few days to find it. Conversely, a large building is only going to take you a few minutes!)

If you're trying to move your senses to a specific, known point in the Region you're in, and your Element is there, it takes a minute or less; a specific, known point anywhere in Town takes up to five minutes. It's slowed down a little if you have to jump between non-contiguous patches of your Element, but not by *that* much.

You can spend additional MP to hurry this process. This is up to the HG—simply ask them, "can I get better results if I dump some MP in this?" and they'll either shake their head sadly and apologize or say, "Sure, [1? 2? 4?] MP and I'll skip most of the concentration and get the mote right to where it needs to go." Make sure the HG knows that they can refund some or all of the MP if there's nothing to actually find, so naming a price isn't necessarily a spoiler.

You can optionally activate your other senses for use with this power, including smell, touch, and any strange new senses your nature might grant you (see below), but you are strictly unable to use this power to sense things that are not in your Element. You can't even hear an air raid siren that's right next to your virtual "ear" if it's not within your scope.

The range of **Scry** is initially limited to Town, but you may spend a Recharge Token to learn to connect to your Element in a Region somewhere beyond it. If you want to widen the scope dramatically rather than increasing it in bits and pieces a Perk might be able to add disproportionately large chunks of territory to this power's reach.

Arc 3+. Starting at Arc 3, you'll pick up a secondary manifestation. You can now spread your Element out from a known point—from yourself or from an existing reservoir of the Element—in a series of branching tendrils that have a sense of touch. Adding in sight, hearing, and other senses is *essentially* an incompatible function: it's not outright *impossible* to spread out tendrils and see through them, but there's a large Obstacle to the mundane sensing action from the effort of concentration, sort of like feeling out somebody's face with one hand while typing a description of it with the other.

Arc 5. At Arc 5 you can now sense dimly *from* your element rather than just within it—there's a level 2 Obstacle in the way of getting clear information, but you *can*.

Digest

Arc 1+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost: —

These are absolute and unquestionable truths:

- You can digest anything you eat over the course of 2-3 hours, making it a part of you.
- There is nothing that is notionally impossible for you to devour.

There are many things in the world that you have *no idea* how to eat, like shadows, energy, and the moon. Like, you put a shadow in your mouth, you close your mouth, you swallow—that doesn't work! What a crazy idea!

...but with the right help, the right power, or the right trick, it's possible. No miraculous or mundane action, Affliction, or condition can make it impossible for you to eat something, only very difficult. Conversely, only the most dedicated effort that exploits wish rules can *stop* you from digesting something that you've discovered a method to eat[99].

Your digestive system is abnormal and mystical; if you get poisoned, you might still take a wound, but you have a really good excuse to define that wound however you like. (e.g. jellyfish venom might make you translucent instead of paralyzing you; deadly despair toxin might make you bleed shadows everywhere instead of feeling despair.) If you throw up, you'll tend to throw up the stuff of your Element.

At the HG's option, devouring something suitably magical and powerful will give you MP, XP, or even a new Perk.

99 Do I expect this power to come up very often? No! I absolutely do not. But if your worst enemy ever transforms himself into an olive or you find yourself morally obligated to devour God, the Devil, and the Deep Blue Sea, you'll thank me for specifying that digestion of this sort is never notionally impossible.

Bindings

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—after a conversation, bind to someone's heart or vision
- 4 MP—skip the conversation & do this after a single (metaphorical) glimpse of their heart.

You have the power to "hold" someone else's experience of your Principle close to your heart.

To start, you talk to them about that.

If your Principle is Truth, talk to them about the truths that are most important to them. If your Principle is Hope, talk to them about their hopes and dreams. If your Principle is Grief, talk to them about their sorrows.

If you have a Principle that doesn't fit that very well—

If you're not sure how to talk to someone about their "freedom," or, at least, if your sense of what that means falls a little flat—

You can talk to them, instead, about the stories of the thing you're turning into, about your Transformation, and "hold" their vision of that. Their sense of what an "Angel of Freedom" or "Spirit of Justice" might be like.

(This is particularly effective if you've chosen something very subjective to turn into, like a "serial killer of the urban legend kind" or "a magical princess.")

While you hold their experience, your body changes and you gain a power. This manifests as:

- an inconspicuous and probably pleasant physical or attitudinal change and a tiny power, like a level 2 Bond or level 1 Superior Skill, which you must "store" in an unwounded Normal Health Level;
- a conspicuous but concealable physical or attitudinal change and a larger power, like an Affliction, level 2-3 Superior Skill, or a miraculous ability that you can use 1-2x/scene, which you must "store" in an unwounded Tough Health Level.

At Arc 2+, it can also manifest as:

- a disturbing and inhuman (though possibly aesthetic) physical or attitudinal change, with roughly the same power level as those stored in your Tough level, which you must store in an unwounded Divine Health Level.

For instance, if you connect to somebody's dream of going into space one day, maybe you'll pick up "Martian" antennae and enhanced cold and airlessness survival skills. (Or, because they're antennae, the ability to communicate with dogs[100].) Or, after talking to someone about Town's stories of bird-faced spirits, you could grow soft wings of light or a few feathers in your hair. The wings would use a Tough level; the feathers, a Normal level; the antennae could go either way.

You can generally play around with these alterations and redesign them a little over the course of that conversation and later ones. You don't have to sustain this change as an action, but if you take a wound in that Health Level, you'll lose the relevant effect.

100 I assume this is how antennae work.

Binding to an Enemy

Your **Bindings** power relies most fundamentally on *insight*—it's not about the *words* that you hear from the person you're talking to so much as the channel that that conversation opens to that person's heart.

If your target really doesn't want to share their ideas or experiences, doesn't want you to bind to them with this power, but *is* in communication with you, you can use the action system (usually, the mundane action system) to arbitrate whether they reveal a glimpse of themselves anyway.

The default assumption is that they probably do. It's *possible* for someone to keep up a good front in front of you and avoid your access to their experience, and being taciturn and "careful" helps with that, but it isn't always enough.

Shared Witness

Arc 1+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—someone whose experience you hold can tell you what they'd want you to know
- 1 MP—after a few minutes, know the rough location/status of such a person
- 4 MP—know this information immediately

If you're "holding" someone's experience or concept of something, it can give you insights into their life and circumstances. For starters, they can emote to you from wherever they are. There's a level 4 Obstacle in the way of your parsing this to get detailed information—I mean, there's nothing inherently *wrong* with someone emoting, "Wow, I sure feel stressed about the kidnappers demanding that I go alone to 1642 Rue d'Angleterre," but parsing the address out of that is going to be difficult—but any time they want to share with you, you can get the basics of their emotional state.

If you're willing to spend MP, you can use this power to locate someone whose experience you're holding or to figure out how they're holding up. Specifically, you'll learn their:

- rough location;
- near-exact direction; *and*
- their current level of your Mood and its inverse—for instance, if your Mood is "grief," you can get a reading on how much grief and/or... joy?... they're feeling at the time.

You can keep checking as long as you sustain this action, and you won't need to spend additional MP—it just takes a few more minutes (if you spent 1 MP) or a thought (if you spent 4 MP) each time.

A Distant Mood

Arc 2+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—use this power for someone whose experience you hold 1/chapter
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time this chapter
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time in a handful of hours

Invoke **A Distant Mood** when someone whose experience or thoughts you hold is in need of or at least lacking in your Principle.

This has two possible applications—

- a small, literal application that you'll have to define after thinking about your Element and Principle and Transformation: your Element manifests in some fashion to help them.

  For instance, if you're a creature of Earth/Stability, you might be able to form earth bulwarks to help stabilize someone's environment. Or you might be able to grant them perfect balance on an earthen surface, or have hands of earth catch them as they fall—but not all those things, just the one that seems to fit. You can learn additional applications with a Perk.

- a more metaphorical application that manifests as a temporary level 2 Bond for them. For instance, **the Earth Stabilizes You**. This is what you'd use if your target isn't *literally* falling over or having things fall down, but is feeling disrupted and unstable and is somewhere where there's an abundance of earth and stone. They could then use the Bond to calm themselves, or to help themselves think things through, or whatever else.

A Distant Mood (Powered Up)

Arc 2+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 0 MP—1/book, do something awesome with **A Distant Mood**.
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time in a book.

Cost (Arc 3):

- 0 MP—1/book, do something awesome with **A Distant Mood**.
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time per book.
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter.

Cost (Arc 4):

- 0 MP—1/book, do something awesome with **A Distant Mood**.
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time per book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—1/chapter, do something awesome with **A Distant Mood**.
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter

Special: This power includes a free invocation of **A Distant Mood**.

Once per book, you can use **A Distant Mood** to do something really amazing.

Pick 2-3 possible wishes that fit your general use of **A Distant Mood**—for instance, if your usual Mood invocation is "the Sun Lights the Path," to give people hope, you might invoke the powered-up version to illuminate a *really good* and *really hopeful* path.

This would manifest as one of the following wishes:

> *I wish that there'd be something at the end of this journey that's worth the trouble.*
>
> *I wish that by the end of this journey you'll understand that* you're *worth the trouble.*
>
> or
>
> *I wish that the sun would keep you safe on the course of this journey.*

This tends to be a kind power—it's more of a power to strengthen than a power to harm—but it's legitimate to handle this as a psychic attack. For instance, if someone doesn't *want* to think they're worth the trouble, then that middle wish above would just be a primordial psychic assault upon them that runs on wish rules. If you're the kind of melancholy siren of longing that summons people to the Lake to drown, that would be a miraculous attack as well.

(Heck, it'd be an attack even if they *didn't* drown, but just grew cold and sprouted gills and had to live beneath the Lake thereafter.)

Shared Witness (Powered Up)

Arc 2+

Type: Imperial Miracle, [certain applications only:] Bleak

Cost:

- 0 MP—know many things about someone whose experience you hold 1/book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time per book.

Once per book, if you're "holding" someone's experience or concept of something, you can invoke **Shared Witness** to know all kinds of things about that person. Specifically, this power will tell you how to give them/make them feel [[your Principle.]]

For instance, if your Mood/Principle is Hope, it'll tell you how to give them hope.

If your Mood is Sorrow, it'll tell you what would make them grieve.

This tends to just give you whatever information the HG or the target's player thinks might be relevant to competently pursue inspiring stability, hope, freedom, love, truth, or whatever in them. However, if this starts getting into secret information or stuff they don't want to share, this may switch to Bleak rules—it becomes a kind of corruption or breaking down of boundaries, and is resistable as such.

Once invoked this power usually remains in force until there's a substantive narrative payoff or the story ends—it's not a one-time thing, where the HG or the target's player has to think up everything you might need to know right then or there; rather, it's a continual flow of information to back up your ability to inspire them towards your Mood. The information will grow a little out-of-date if you stop holding their experience but (since some of it represents an instant of deep understanding) it won't actually stop.

Evocative Transformation /Transform and Devour

Arc 2+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost (Arc 2-3):

- 0 MP—an instrumental transformation 1/book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time per book.

Cost (Arc 4):

- 0 MP—an instrumental transformation 1/book
- 2 MP—use this power a second or later time per book.
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter.

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—an instrumental transformation 1/book
- 1 MP—use this power a second or later time per book
- 4 MP—use this power a second or later time per chapter.

Once per book, when your Mood is far from you, when its opposite threatens to consume you, you can invoke **Evocative Transformation** or **Transform and Devour** and change yourself in a fashion that fits your Transformation—

In its most limitless, thematic sense—

To answer the situation. There is something more raw and primal to this than a wish: the key to your new power isn't conceptual or semantic, but rather this:

This change must be instrumental in inspiring or invoking your Principle,

or suppressing its opposite,

in a meaningful and well-grounded way.

That language doesn't seem very primal in the generic case, but that's purely because "the generic case" isn't a very primal idea. The key to this power, the primal thing about it, is that you don't just, e.g., "create Hope."

You become something that meaningfully improves your chances of handling a situation—real, justified hope.

You don't just "create Longing."

You create something or make yourself into something worth longing for, by the standards of the game. If you're an NPC siren, and you're trying to make a PC who is totally disinterested in longing for you do so, you become something that can grant them something they *genuinely want.*

If you're transforming to devour the despair in a beleaguered army, you might become something that can raise their fallen dead.

You don't just get a power to crush despair in the heart:

You get a power to crush the hopeless element of a situation.

And to fulfill that rule, this means the new transformation that comes upon you will have whatever powers the HG thinks it *must* have, and they're as easy or difficult to use as the HG thinks appropriate, to guarantee that that rule applies. It might be a +1 Tool when you need it. It might be a miracle. It might be an overpowering wish-level effect. The only real limitation is that if the transformation has a Bleak or Imperial power that overrides ordinary miracles, or complex powers that need time and effort to figure out, the standard wishing rules or Bleak rules will apply.

Since it's just 4 MP to invoke this power at any time, you can often invoke it to resolve an Issue. It's particularly common for you to invoke **Transform and Devour** for resolution when you have

- a level 4-5 Calling
- a level 5 Hero Issue
- a level 4-5 Over Your Head Issue
- a level 5 Sickness
- a level 5 Vice
- an enemy that has just showily defeated you and your friends *twice*

...and you'll treat it as an Issue, and get the 4 MP discount for "resolving an Issue" in that last case, even if you don't actually have a relevant Issue to resolve.

The HG assigns the transformation to one of your Health Levels—normally to a Divine Health Level, but it can use one of your subtler Health Levels if appropriate. The transformation displaces a held experience if necessary and can even displace a wound. However, if it displaces a wound, the change is temporary: it lasts only as long as necessary to fulfill its function, and then, unless the wound would have healed by then, the change goes away and the wound returns.

If you had an available, unwounded Health Level of the necessary level or above, you are absolutely allowed to keep the change afterwards, for as long as you like. (Even into the next story, if that's what you'd prefer!)

Tokens of Your Power

Arc 3+

Type: Miraculous Action

Cost (Arc 3):

- 0 MP—1/book, you may pull some of your Element or Principle out of a situation and create a token from it, or unleash it from a token formerly created
- 1 MP—do so a second or later time per book
- 2 MP—do so a second or later time per chapter
- 4 MP—do so a second or later time in a single scene

Cost (Arc 4):

- 0 MP—1/chapter, you may pull some of your Element or Principle out of a situation and create a token from it, or unleash it from a token formerly created
- 1 MP—do so a second or later time per chapter
- 2 MP—do so a second or later time in a single scene

Cost (Arc 5):

- 0 MP—starting mid-scene, invoke this power 1-2x/scene
- 1 MP—do so a third or later time in a single scene
- 4 MP—release a powerful token as an Imperial Miracle, instead.

You can extract some portion of your Principle or Element's presence in a place into a physical object—wrapping up sunlight into a gem, extracting the freedom or hope from a situation for use later, and the like. It becomes a *token*.

Doing this usually takes a few minutes and the precision of your efforts—

Not its fundamental effect, but your ability to avoid overdoing it or underdoing it if you're doing something tricky or someone's struggling—

Is based on a mundane action that you take.

Later on you or someone else can release the bound Principle or Element. You're the one who has to supply the MP, so you can veto the use of a token, but you don't need an action or to be on-scene when it happens to do so; you just have to consent to a token breaking and the Element or Principle in it getting free.

Bindings (Powered Up)

Arc 4+

Type: Imperial Miracle

Cost:

- 1 MP—1/chapter, you can "talk to yourself" and hold your own experiences
- 4 MP—do so a second or later time per chapter

You're no longer strictly dependent on others to transform—every now and then, you can put together something based on your own ideas. This can be as situational as you like: if right this second, you're longing for a lockpick, and you're a shapeless Siren of Longing, you can probably manifest, say, lock-picking hair.

You don't need to actually talk to yourself aloud, but you do need to think things through properly and/or thoroughly feel a given mood.

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Jenna Katerin Moran

Looking for More?

Other products in the ***Chuubo’s Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*** transmedia project include:

- the novel ***Fable of the Swan***,
- the setting book ***Fortitude: by the Docks of Big Lake*** (early 2015) *and*
- the campaign ***Fortitude: the Glass-Maker’s Dragon*** (early 2015)

Recommended works by other creators include:

- Heartwarming anime like ***Aria***, ***Azumanga Daioh***, ***Haibane Renmei***, ***Kanon***, ***Kino’s Journey***, ***My Neighbor Totoro***, and ***Laputa: Castle in the Sky***
- As well as more daring choices like ***Angel Beats***, ***Princess Tutu***, ***Revolutionary Girl Utena***, ***Shingu***, and ***Spirited Away***
- Transmedia works like ***Higurashi no Naku Koro ni***, ***Umineko no Naku Koro ni***, ***Homestuck***, and the ***Touhou Project***
- Western animation like ***Adventure Time*** and ***My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic***
- Movies like ***Babe***, ***The Goonies*** and ***the Princess Bride***
- The ***Young Wizards*** novels by Diane Duane
- The ***Senyaza*** series by Chrysoula Tzavelas, *and*
- ***The Weather Warden*** series by Rachel Caine

Welcome to the
Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine RPG—
a game of heroic innocents growing up against a backdrop of
strange events and haunting landscapes.

Come drink tea, explore your new home, and fight strange horrors.
Come argue over television shows, shop for the latest thing,
read books mined out from the literary veins under the earth,
and challenge Death.
Meet the reborn sun. Feast on giant monsters.
Stress over your homework, your family,
and love.

Welcome to a game that's designed to run away with you.
To take the little things you think and do in play and turn them
into ever-escalating stories.

A guidebook for finding magic and wonder in an ordinary life.

