



SPARKS

A Game of Magical Girls and their Allies

A Roleplaying Game by
Aaron Smith and Matthew Leonard

Hyokas

A game of Magical Girls and their Allies

**Your friends are your strength.
Together, you can overcome anything**

You'll have to. The Dark is after the power of every innocent heart. You are the Light that protects the hopes and dreams of everyone. You will have to stand tall and firm against the forces of Darkness.

But don't underestimate the mundane world either. It's hard to fight the forces of evil when you're grounded! There are tests to take and friendships to make. Those who take the Bonds of life for granted lose them.

Can you conquer the Dark, protect your friends, and still pass your math final?

Thank you / Version / Dedication

Special thanks to all those who helped make this game possible; my parents, my friends and online fans, my artists, and everyone else who supported me through all my madness.

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System Inspiration

This game draws inspiration from Fate Core Accelerated, Cortex+, Sacred BBQ, Prime Time Adventures, and other roleplaying games. The settings and mechanics of these systems inspired this game.

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Credits

Creators: Aaron Smith and Matthew Leonard

Cover Art: HyaKkiDouR4n

Internal Art: VioletKy (Chiara), North Abyssor, playerprophet (Dawn Davis), Ola Rogula - www.dolldivine.com, Shutterstock, rudall30, Melkor3D, Gow27

Layout: Alyssa Macpherson

Graphical Design: Simon Gillen

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Introduction

So, you've picked up this book and have opened it. Thank you! If you're reading this, you're probably already familiar with the notion of Magical Girls and their adventures. If you're on the fence or unaware, let me tell you a little about them. Magical Girls are an offshoot of Shoujo manga, a type of comic book from Japan. The stories have a strong focus on character interaction, atmosphere, and nuanced dialogue. The girls in question also generate over the top melodrama: angst, true love, fate and destiny all intermingle with high school homework and laser blasts. Magical Girls are usually bestowed with amazing powers to fight off a great evil bent on destroying the most precious parts of human life: love, joy, hope.

Sparks of Light is a tabletop roleplaying game where you and your friends gather around to tell stories full of danger, excitement, romance, adventure, and pathos. You put yourself in the shoes of the heroines (and sometimes heroes) of the magical girl genre and battle with monsters and villains for the fate of the universe with the powers of hope, love, justice, and kindness. You might have played games similar to this before – *Dungeons & Dragons* is a very popular one – but don't worry if you haven't; this book will guide you through it.

The setting in *Sparks of Light* draws its inspiration from a host of manga, anime, live action adaptations, comic books, and even some fan fiction. You might look up titles such as *Sailor Moon*, *Sailor Ranko*, and *Princess: the Hopeful* to name just a few. That's a lot of ground to cover, and we won't claim to be able to hit every possible element. We pick and choose our favorite elements, and you are welcome to rearrange the furniture in your own game. In fact, we hope you do. This game is about what you want to see; that's the point of creative interactive entertainment.

We decided early in development that we would aim for a subset of Magical Girls, creating a system with robust characters and fail-forward stakes. The tone of the book is awash in suggestions regarding the “right way” to play the game and the “expected” outcomes. This is intentional and unapologetic. We want to duplicate the struggles and joys of these heroines as they fight for Love, Courage, Friendship, Hope, and a better world worth fighting for. (Plus, really big magic lasers shaped like hearts and beating up giant monsters with implausible weapons.) A little eye rolling is fine, but we'd really like you to come along for the ride.

Here's what you'll need to play:

- **Three to five people.** One of you will be the **gamemaster** (we call this person the **GM** for short), the others **players**. We'll talk about what those mean later.
- **Eight sided dice**, at least one, preferably one for each person. You can get these dice from many hobby and game stores (probably in the store where you bought this game)
- **A big sheet of paper, whiteboard, or wet-erase mat.** Something that you can use to draw and scribble a sprawling diagram on.
- **Index cards or sticky notes, a pencil or pen** or some other method of recording marks on paper.
- **Tokens for hope points.** These can be poker chips, glass beads, pennies, anything similar will do. Get a handful – about 30 to 40.

Now let's talk about the world these stories are set in...



A Magical Girl's Life

Becoming

Wake with a care, my darling. The heaviness in your heart is change and responsibility, and those first moments are often strange. Why, you might ask, does your heart feel so full it strains to beat?

Fear not. It is the touch of the Light on your soul.

You are a magical girl.

Sometimes hidden, sometimes the paladins of society, but always guardians of love and justice.

Also, we have a fantastic dental plan and fire lasers made of hope and justice.

Up and at them, my Soldier. We have hearts to protect.

– Ariel, Herald, Champion, and teacher

In the modern world, the first most people know of magical girls is their ever popular line of dolls and cartoons. The phenomenon arose in Japan and caught fire across the globe, becoming the television de jour for six year olds all over. Outside of a few obsessed fans and conspiracy nuts, there the soldiers of light and justice stay.

This is just as well. The real magical girls are busy safeguarding the hearts, Bonds, and lives of the world against all assault, whether by agent of the Dark, mad science from Twilight gone wrong, or rampage of the powerful yomi (page 32, *Yomi*).

Yet magical girls must arise from somewhere, and the potential to Spark a light in the darkness waits in every heart. Few children Spark, too busy developing to awaken, and few adults Spark, too firmly grounded in the world as it stands. Most magical girls are drawn from teenagers and young adults, blessed (or snatched, if you ask certain unsavory characters) with entry into a secret world.

Magical girls are powerful. They age far slower than normal mortals. They take hits that crack pavement with mere bruises. They commune with the spirits and minor gods that rule the world. For them, hope is a weapon that can be wielded in both hands; the precious Bonds of family and friends are a sacred well of power that they have sworn to protect.

Thankfully, this power does not rely on any particular adolescent hormone to Spark. The Light chooses, though by what metrics none may say. Perhaps it sees the potential of a girl, or maybe it grabs the closest person at hand when tragedy strikes. On one occasion, the Light chose a cat, so over thinking the decisions of the gods may lead to health problems.

If her heart is open and the stars are right, then the chosen girl Becomes. A Spark rises in her heart, something pure and true. Many girls, in recollection, say that the next moments pass with absolute certainty and a kind of guided grace as though supported by unseen hands.

One girl leaped from sidewalk to the top of a pole and shouted at a rampaging beast to stop in the name of Justice. Another girl called for the spirits of the shrine to aid her in a voice filled with authority, and they did. In that instant, as they called their Chant and opened their hearts, they descended into a private world of light and mist; they were transformed.

On the other side of that timeless instant stood magical girls, garbed in the raiment of the Light, and ready to kick some Dark butt.

After their Chant, the second thing to come out of a magical girl's mouth is usually a squeak of shock. Her first fight is an awkward mix of instinctive powers and Light's providence. She's usually as surprised as anyone when some new, deep instinct causes her to cup her hands and fire a pink beam of love to purify a monster.

After that, she is a Spark, called to dangerous sites, drawn to Dark incursions and Yomi rampages, her Soul armor and Weapon appearing around her when there is a threat to deal with.

Bonds

*Our hearts beat as one
Dreams linked by gossamer strands
When we die
We'll share a shady tree in heaven
-Rosaline, Paladin, to her nakama shortly before their end*

The world of matter and flesh pales in comparison to the currents that flows in between its atoms. Bonds are the connections between people – the little smiles and the warm touches, the shared grief and the friendly competition. The power of the heart is sublime, subtle, and deeply coveted by all manner of evil beings.

Magical girls quite literally guard the laughter in a child's voice and the gleam in a mother's eye.

They do this at risk of their own.

Aging so slowly, magical girls tend to watch their childhood playmates become parents before they are physically twenty. Living double lives as defenders of justice and normal people, they find too little time for proper appearance at parties and events. What use are soccer games and school grades when the world needs saving?

Yet, a magical girl must have Bonds to sustain her righteous powers. While Bonds are a power source for magic of all stripes, the girl who follows the Light must never take by force. The Bond must be freely given, and the only way this happens is if the magical girl remains connected to the people and the places in her world.

Normally, Bonds are not consumed or damaged by their use in Light magic. (Very eco-friendly!) In times of dire need, though, the soldiers of Light may pull on the deeper power of the Bond, causing damage in the name of immediate necessity. Where Bonds have been frayed, fights spring up; birthdays are forgotten; communication drifts apart. The frayed Bond is in need of reaffirmation, lest it decay entirely.

In dire cases, magical girls have been known to pull on a Bond so hard that it shattered. The friend in question simply forgot they even existed, rendered a stranger again.

This is the risk of the soldiers of Light. Not death, for they know the bosom of their goddess awaits them. They must fight to remain a part of a world that constantly seems to want to slip past.

Thankfully, no magical girl is alone.

Nakama

*I could find you by the flash of your hair in the light
from across a football stadium. I could pick your scent
out with a sniff while in a perfume boutique. I know
you as my own hand. When I fall, you will be there.
When you fall, I will be there.*

-Jasmine, Soldier, pledging to her first nakama

Nakama is the Japanese word for companion or compatriot. In the secret world of justice and friendship, it represents the unbreakable Bond of magical girl troupes. Through fire and smoke, danger and love, time travel and spirit invasion, the nakama is the fundamental unit of magical girl society and the bedrock upon which every soldier relies.

The first and closest companion of every magical girl is the Light itself. It nestles in her bosom, present with every beat of her heart. Though it does not use words, it is her closest guide. When she strays from righteousness, it makes her chest tighten; when she flags under the weight of the world, it supports her sagging shoulders. Joined to a tiny fragment of a benevolent god, magical girls wield a determination that foes would do well to respect.

The second form of nakama is the companions in the eternal quest of love and justice. Whether childhood friends or freshly introduced on Spark, this nakama forms Bonds of such ironclad familiarity that great magics become possible. Allied against the Dark and worse, they protect the world.

Soldier nakama tend to follow archetypal patterns. For example, a nakama that includes one girl from every Court is called a perfect troupe and considered to represent harmony. A nakama that includes a Sparkling, a soldier, and a mentor is called a mentorship and represents the training that passes on wisdom.

Third and largest of nakama, the Courts rose from the human need for companionship. Each Court represents an aspect of the greater Light and a particular affinity. Courts are a mingling of powerful Light ritual, tradition, and cultural inertia. Each is ruled by a Queen who holds the wisdom of the Light in her heart, and the choice of Court is often one of the most stressful choices in a young magical girl's life. While a magical girl is not wedded to her Court, the choice to leave rivals divorce for emotional turmoil; best to choose correctly in the first place.

There is no inherent limit to the number of nakama that a magical girl can join. On the other hand, she will gain only as much power as she is able to devote time to the Bonds. There are only so many hours in the day, after all.



Secrecy

When I was a young Soldier, village maidens flung themselves into my arms on the way to battle the Dark's dragons. I was a magical girl, though we used different names back then, and everybody knew it. Now a days, with these silly cell phones and internets, if you so much as peek your head out of an alley without a Seeker veil, you end up on every website on the planet and people are trying to find your house. The disrespect of young people today!

- Elizabeth, that old magical girl who spends all day whining about the young peoples

Once upon a time, magical girls needed no protection for their identity. They were proud knights and shamans, known by name and given all due accord. In the age of smart phones and celebrity culture, the Light draws its glamour about its champions, hiding their identity from easy discovery. This is wisdom, for the greatest struggle of a magical girl is neither her power nor her quest, both of which lay open for her to see in her heart.

The Light itself does not require a magical girl to maintain secrecy. In theory, she could perch on a light pole and announce herself to the world.

Unfortunately, in the modern world with tracking technology and persistent surveillance, such an act imperils not just the soldier herself, but her family and friends. The Dark has access to the internet like everybody else. Governments would no doubt salivate at the prospect of fielding magical troops. Powerful yomi wait for the revelation of a soldier's secret name, the better to wage their magics with. Dangers abound for the overt magical girl.

This is before we consider the issue of fame and its limelight. Countless young women have shot straight from cute little starlets to drugged up wastes in Hollywood; imagine how much worse that corrupting effect could be on girls with magic and super strength. Those magical girls who embrace fame, even in the well worn lie of pretending to be a magical girl on a TV show made to convince people magical girls aren't real, risk falling from the great quest and into Twilight.

Even those soldiers with iron wills and humility find that too much attention makes it difficult to maintain honest Bonds. Overt displays of fame and wealth attract the kind of people who desire fame and wealth, and such Bonds are paltry and frayed on the best of days.

For these reasons, the Courts have adopted strict rules of secrecy. Powerful rituals supplement the Light's ability to cloak a magical girl's identity, muddling memories and smearing pictures. Some magical girls devote their careers to the gentle persuasion of witnesses that the streaking pink blur they saw was, in fact, a meteorite shower. Menders coax broken concrete and shattered windows back to their pristine state, leaving no trace of terrible battles. These jobs may not have the excitement of staring down a great yomi, but they are essential in the background.

A soldier's double life is a rich vein of drama and conflict. Most magical girls have to constantly dance around family and friends, doing their best to avoid outright lies and fulfill obligations. This can be quite difficult when a Dark soldier attacks the little league soccer team to steal the hope from the children's eyes. Yet those who reveal their secret put themselves in a precarious position. The friend or family now has knowledge they should not but no magic to back it up, making them an easy target. Worse, what if the secret leaks?

Worse still. . . . what if that friend is also a magical girl, but not on the Light's side?

GM Dial: Secrecy

The Veil works on mortals only: Mortals are fooled when their girlfriend instantly powers up beside them, but the Dark is not. In this case, the Light and Dark swiftly come to recognize each other even on the street. This allows for tense scenes when known enemies cross paths in a context where open combat is not an option. Everyone at the table probably wonders why the two girls in their party are making evil eyes at each other over milkshakes.

The Veil works on enemies as well <DEFAULT>: The opposing forces cannot recognize each other's civilian forms without some kind of extensive work to pierce the secret magic. This means that anyone at your school or job could also be a magical girl, on either side of the war, and a soldier must work to overcome her own fears and mistrust. It also allows for narrative convenience when the Dark decides to randomly attack family members of a magical girl. The juiciest benefit of this setting is when mundane best friends turn out to be enemies in the great quest. . .

The Dark also embraces secrecy: While the goals of the Dark are shrouded in mystery, this setting option assumes they have a vested interest in maintaining secrecy as well. Dark magical girls employ their own (decidedly less gentle) mental magics to hide their tracks, and magical girl fights can escalate to full power without worry of a breach in secrecy. We leave it to the GM to decide why exactly the Dark desires secrecy. Perhaps they feel that ruling in the shadows is preferable to being a known tyrant, or perhaps they have some dark secret of their own in the depths of their halls. . .

The Dark desires to destroy the Veil: The Dark has no use for the cowardice of the Light and seek to embrace their full destiny – which means ruling mere mortals. They have the magic and the wisdom of ages. Why should they not be given their due? This version of the Dark tends towards outright narcissism and often uses civilian proxies as bait to force magical girls to work even harder to win. They work well as arch villains in the vein of action comics, working to undermine all that is good and just in society. Encounters with this kind of villain will be more difficult because the magical girls will need to safeguard and seclude any civilians as well as fight the Dark itself.

Magic

Champions of Justice! Maidens of Righteousness! The Pretty Pure Puffy Magical Minna use the magic of love and friendship to heal the sick, restore the memories of the forgotten, and banish Darkness from hearts everywhere! When you have the power of love and friendship, nothing is impossible. Minna, ganbatte!

- PPPMM, airs Saturday mornings at 9:00 AM



The Light emerges in many forms, and a growing magical girl learns to harness subtle manifestations of its presence as magic. Unless otherwise stated, all magic requires sight range or touch to activate. Some feats are so simple as to be instinctive, such as perching on light poles (all the better to lecture at the Dark from!), leaping high, and somehow not flashing while wearing a short skirt.

In addition, magical girls age at a very slow rate and exert limited control over this process. For a young magical girl eager to become a woman, this can be torturous, but on the average, most magical girls enjoy the ability to remain in their twenties for centuries. Every year, the magical girl has the conscious ability to either allow time to pass or to resist the currents of time. This has massive implications for her mundane life, especially for those girls still in school. The Veil prevents adults from noticing a girl taking tenth grade ten times, but that doesn't make the lessons any less boring or the loss of friends who graduate any less painful. Worse, the girl's family ages normally. Many a magical girl has gone from the oldest child to the youngest, resisting the flow of time.

Every year that passes grows slightly harder to resist, a subtle pull that reminds magical girls they are not truly immortal. As the decades pass, a girl who clings too heavily to her youth runs the risk of dipping into outright vanity and obsession. A shameful number of otherwise upright soldiers have fallen prey to their own desire to live forever young, falling from the great quest into Twilight and Darkness.

When a magical girl reaches an age and maturity that necessitates joining in combat, she finds that the most essential magic is purification. Even the freshest soldier can perform a rudimentary purification, necessary to remove the Dark's hold on yomi (See page 33) and humans. Such an attack often takes the form of beams of light and healing (you know, lasers!). Other purifications use gossamer mists or shimmering notes from a magical instrument. The form the magic takes varies based on the personality and style of the magical girl in question. Nakama can combine their purification to form new, greater attacks. (See page 75, and page 82)

Purification and the Dark's mental domination exist in a constant arms race, always seeking to outdo the other. Woe unto the magical girl who haughtily thinks she has no need to keep up. She will soon find Dark yomi shrugging off her blasts with an evil laugh.

As a soldier grows in rank and power, she will find new uses for her magic. Protective shields protect bystanders from falling rubble. Secret chants call the powers of nature to her side. Light-attuned crystals allow her to teleport into the secret halls of the Courts from nearly any location. Steadfast hands and the Light's blessing heal flesh or object, returning what was lost. Even magically empowered cooking brings new heart to her nakama with the love in every delicacy.

Light magic does have blind spots, however. No spell is known that will allow a magical girl to hide her true nature while powered up. No spell is known that can force open a walled heart or heal those who reject the touch of the practitioner. The Light, it seems, refuses to allow its chosen soldiers to skulk in the shadows or force their power upon the unwilling.

Other magics surely exist, molding in a forgotten library or hidden from the Courts by the Dark's clever plots. In times of great need, perhaps these techniques can be found once again.

Unfortunately, not all magic is Light.

The Dark is best known for its Harvesting magics. Through techniques callous and well practiced, the Dark steals the essence of hearts from helpless mortals. In some times, the Dark sought dreams, the better to raise a permanent kingdom of night. In others, they stole hope to feed to a powerful yomi so that it would awaken. Harvesting can be catastrophic, rendering its victims catatonic permanently, or subtle, stealing ethereal things like childhood dreams or old memories.

Second, the Dark is notorious for its shadow magics. While the soldiers of Light stand in plain view (Veil notwithstanding), the Dark is capable of pernicious ambushes and escapes. They strike from nowhere, the sky suddenly gone dark and the hope from civilian eyes; when the Light beats them back, they vanish as quickly. To truly corner a Dark General is often the focus of an entire war for the Light's champions.

What else the Dark is capable of remains a subject of rumor, even in these modern ages.

The yomi have magic as well, powerful in its own right. As the heirs to the Earth, yomi exert control over nature by the natural authority written in their very essence. The greatest of them can call hurricanes and tsunami, bringing devastation wherever they may choose. Perhaps this is why the Dark so often covets them.

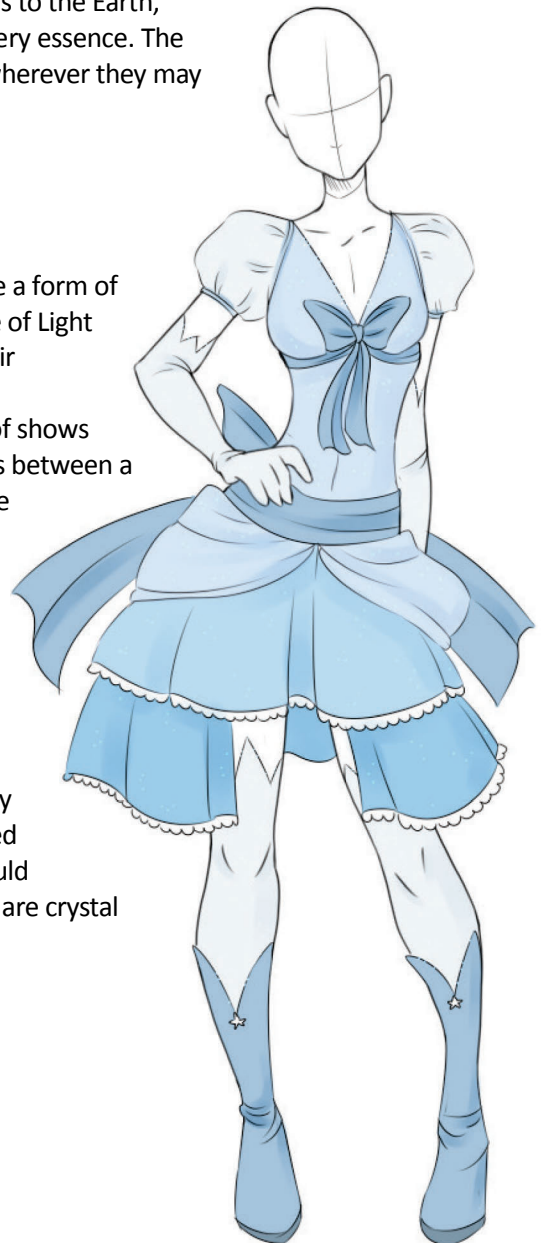
Light Armor and Soul Weapons

A magical girl's battle costume isn't just any cloth. Their outfits are a form of armor stronger than steel, woven from threads of Light. The appearance of Light armor is a reflection of the girl who dons it, their costume shaped by their personality and expectations. In ancient times, Light armor often more resembled hoplite armor than dresses. These days, with the popularity of shows like PPPMM, most girls envision – and thus wear – something like a cross between a short dress, a leotard, and a school uniform. Regardless of its appearance however, Light armor far surpasses mundane armor.

Of course, who inspired the uniforms of PPPMM? The modern magical girl look had to start somewhere. . .

All magical girls also have access to a soul weapon. While the light armor is a birthright, the soul weapon is something earned. It represents the will and intent of a magical girl, woven into a talisman.

There are no hard and fast rules for soul weapons. They don't obey rules of size, shape, hardness, or weight. Champions often wield oversized martial weapons, the size of which far exceeds what a normal person could swing. On the other hand, some magical girls possess soul weapons that are crystal wands, musical instruments, books, or even paint brushes.



Pure Hearts: The Morality of the Light

Listen to your Heart. Truly listen. That is all you must know to be a magical girl. The rest is just window dressing and tradition.

- Ariel, Herald, champion, and teacher

The Morals of the Light: A Quick Overview

The laws, rules, and regulations of the Light can (and do!) stretch for miles in the archives, but the core tenants can be boiled down to:

- Do as little harm as possible
- Protect the weak and encourage them to grow, even as you recognize your own failings
- Never flinch before your enemy
- Tell the truth unless it will cause direct harm. Else keep silent
- Keep your pledged word
- Share the wealth of home and heart with everyone
- Use your power to benefit and defend as many as possible, not to enrich yourself

No magical girl is ever truly adrift. Her heart beats with the Light, and she stands in the sun. If only she will listen and hear, the way will be open.

This is no guarantee that the way will be easy, or even that she will survive.

Worse, a conscience is a quiet thing, and it is very easy to simply assume the Light agrees with whatever the girl feels is best while never truly hearing a thing.

For those who can clear their head and listen, though, the Light will lead them. This is a powerful certainty, the bedrock of the entire Light Courts.

More importantly, the Light itself is a dynamic conscience. While its true nature is left to the GM, the Light in all cases is capable of weighing options in its moral edicts. If the only way to protect a girls' family is for her to lie, it will allow her to lie. If she must pretend to turn against her nakama for their sake, then it will allow such a thing.

Many a young soldier realizes this flexibility in the Light and mistakes understanding for license. "I will simply ask forgiveness and do as I must!" they exclaim. Unfortunately, they forget that the Light exists in their own souls. It has an

uncomfortable degree of wisdom to distinguish true necessity from the laziness of an easy way out. Trying to trick the Light is, at heart, attempting to trick one's own soul. The girl might convince herself of the matter, but somewhere in the depths of her soul she will know.

Magical girl society, unlike the Light, does not have a perfect view of a soldier's heart. As such, the Courts established a set of guidelines for proper behavior. These tomes could stack to the ceiling, accumulated from thousands of years of practice, and they shift with the ages.

At this point, we must point out the difference between the Light and the Courts. The Light is a powerful principle of good and love, dedicated in all ways to a better world. The Courts are human organizations, given centuries of wisdom and experience, but still constrained by human nature and disagreements.

Quite frankly, the Courts are not perfect.

Even when all five Courts agree on the nature of good, the execution varies wildly. The knowledgeable Seekers think that education is the bedrock of good behavior and advocate for more efforts to spread magical girl propaganda and cartoons. The adventurous Champions believe in fighting strong and proud for the Light and want to spend more effort searching for hives of Dark villainy. Neither is wrong, but resources are limited.

GM Dial: A touch of grey

When a magical girl uses her powers in a manner that does not directly serve the great quest, but does not have an obvious harm, she is said to be using a touch of grey. A touch of grey represents a moral minefield for the magical girl because its effects can be either harmless or dangerous depending on the exact context. Examples of touches of grey include:

- Drawing on reservoirs of Light to replenish herself after an all-nighter
- Using mending magic or calling on the Fates to improve her or her family's material standing in the world
- Contact with mundane people while powered up
- Fudging one's grades for success when she takes the 11th grade for the third time in a row
- Peeking with Light magic into the life of the boy she has a crush on
- Overlong loitering at a particular age, refusing to grow older

None of these are necessarily harmful, but they represent the potential for abuse. The GM is encouraged to use touches of grey as subtle ways to pose questions of power to the players. If you could live forever, beautiful and young, why not do so? Isn't it your *right* for all the danger you face? Why should you shy away from riches and wealth? Nobody is *hurt* by your happenstance millions of dollars. . .

Such are the strands that the Dark waits for, ever alert, ever awaiting new converts. As such, the Courts have created the Rules of Grey, which go on for many volumes, but can be summarized as follows. "Do not place yourself above others. Do not take gain for selfish reasons. Do not think yourself better than others." The Courts also take pains to teach young magical girls about the Rules of Grey precisely because they are such a slippery slope.

(In a certain highly popular line of role-playing games, a particular class is known for its strict code of conduct necessary for holy power. The touches of grey can be considered the extension of such a code, representing the boundaries of acceptable behavior from a paragon of good. Be sure to talk with your players about what kinds of behaviors are allowable, grey, and outright Dark! You don't want to end up with the kind of flame wars that spring up over righteous codes of conduct.)

In addition, centuries of experience gives way to centuries of tradition and folk wisdom. The Courts have their own version of history, one that is not guaranteed to be right. Centuries of watching certain types of magical girl behavior lead to corruption has led the Courts to put strict bans on communication with Dark or Twilight opponents. Some of the older magical girls have grown so distrustful of Dark magical girls that they do not trust those who convert to the Light.

In short, the Courts are not towering edifices of perfect good. They are capable of calcification, rigid thinking and stereotyping, and lawful stupid behavior. They distrust; they forbid; they even take revenge.

By default, the stock setting is not a game of moral relativism. There is no revelation that Light and Dark are the same around the corner. The Light Courts truly do mean well, on the whole. Where is the tension then? Even in the real world we can see organizations that mean well and yet cannot agree on a thing. A desire to protect can smother. A desire to educate can patronize. Tensions between Light magical girls can provide intense drama when a soldier must convince her own superiors to trust a crazy plan or a former Dark spy.

But we encourage you to use these elements sparingly. There is nothing wrong with letting most Light characters be legitimately interested in doing good. Since the Light does not give step by step instructions on how to best accomplish this, even friendly differences in opinion can provide tension and good drama for the story.

The Great Quest

Am. . . Am I allowed to steal that quote from the Matrix for my assignment? "Purpose that creates us, that drives us, that defines us"? Do the Courts enforce copyright infringement?

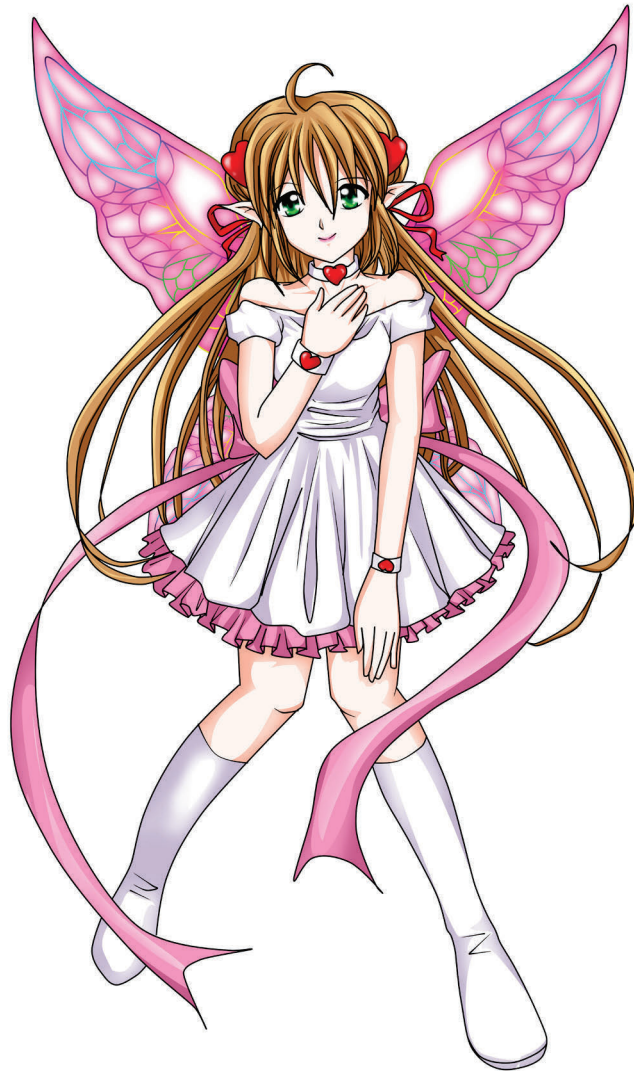
-Jessy, 16 years old, as her speech instructor facepalms with both hands

Clean the world of darkness, bring Light into the hearts of everyone, and protect the Earth from all threats internal or external.

Pretty simple.

The great quest represents more than a set of instructions. It is a fundamentally hopeful world view. Magical girls *can* envision a better tomorrow. Their magic can open hearts and heal wounds. Their wisdom can guide mankind in better decisions and a happier life.

For magical girls, utopia is something that can be achieved. This fact drives their actions and informs their goals. The Light in their heart is the how, and the Great Quest is the why.

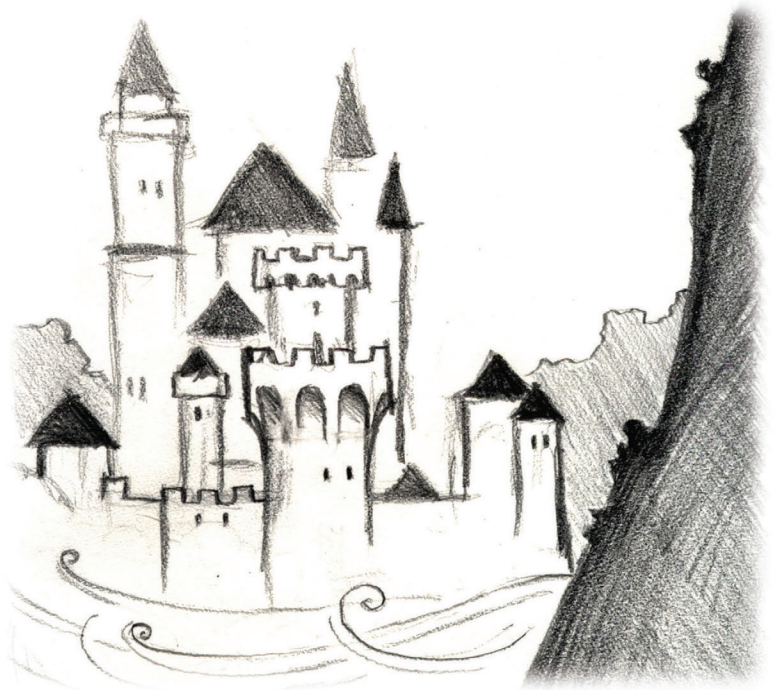


The Five Courts

History and Tales

History is such heavy stuff. All heroics and betrayals. It helps to remember the stuff between the lines. The love and the camaraderie of a hundred generations of nakama.

- Jessy, 12 years old, in her induction speech to the Court of Seekers



The Courts are part militia, part support group, part clubhouse and part church. They are the mortal instruments that follow aspects of the Light, dedicated to some fragment of the whole. Like much else in the Light's domain, they are malleable, adopting the aspects of their age. Currently, they number five:

- **Champions:** defenders of the weak; resilient protectors who weather the greatest storms.
- **Keepers:** world wise and sensitive tenders of nature; tamers of yomi and heralds of nature.
- **Menders:** healers of flesh and mind; crafters and shield maidens.
- **Seekers:** bearers of hidden truths, lore and history; banishers of lies and illusions.
- **Graces:** refined diplomats and muses; artists and troubadours with voices like the sun.

The origins of the five Courts are shrouded by the ages; they predate the eldest of magical girls alive today. Of the Courts that came before, only faint whispers and faded parchment remains. It is an odd thing that such long lived and organized a faction as the Light would allow history to fade. Regardless, here is what is known with any degree of certainty.

The Light is ageless. It has existed as long as existence. It is unknown if the Dark was there, always warring with the Courts, or if some calamitous event gave birth to its tendrils. Those first days long predate even mother Earth.

The old yomi, notoriously tight lipped and elusive, have let slip that magical girls predate humanity itself. . . but what form would such girls have taken? Are there magical girls on far distant planets, wedded to the same Light? Ancient yomi seem to take pleasure in giving contradictory answers to such questions, and insisting that they are not contradictory at all.

Certainly, by the time humanity could form words on paper, the Light and the Dark already warred. The yomi were stronger in those days, and the idea of taming one was unthinkable. Light and Dark fought in the shadows of these giants, and their hatred for each other was outweighed by the need to cooperate for survival on many occasions.

Through prehistory, the war continued unabated and unhidden. Entire nations fell under the Dark's sway. Hannibal's invasion was blamed on a conniving Dark General. Pompeii is rumored to be the result of a furious yomi awoken from its nap by a fight on its slopes. These were brutal times before the creation of the great halls and the Veil, and the fighting spared none, young or old.

Somewhere around the time of Rome, matters changed. The eternal war claimed the children of two Queens – one Light, one Dark. In grief they came together and parleyed.

“No more. The children do not deserve to suffer,” said the Light Queen.

“No more. How will my children grow strong when you strike them in the cradle?” said the Dark Queen. It is certain she plotted treachery in her heart, at first. How could the Dark not? But the Light Queen's grief was too strong even for her shriveled soul. Whatever backstabbing the Dark Queen had planned, she could not accomplish.

Working from shared pain, they cast the Veil on that day. They drew so deeply on their magic that both Queens vanished that day, every Bond to the world severed, even their names erased from history.

Their magic still stands though, and the eldest among the magical girls still fret with worry. What if the Dark managed some tiny loophole, sleeping through the ages? How would they know?

Ever after, the war was changed. Both Light and Dark could withdraw from the field of battle now, fleeing to sanctuaries revealed to their eyes alone. Not every magical girl need be ready to fight at every moment of the day and night; and the arts and magics flourished as society specialized. Children and the eldest knew safety, the better to support their brave warriors, and the prototypes of the Courts were born.

A thousand years passed in this new world, the Courts exploring deeper inside of themselves in relative peace. They grew lax.

When the Dark struck, it nearly snuffed out the Light. It drove them back to their hidden shelters with the great yomi themselves under the Dark's domination. In peace, the Dark had found the means to harness the spirit children of the Earth. The Light had no countermeasure.

It was a common soldier, barely her first year into the Court of Graces, who saved the Light. Morganna, the first Keeper, traveled the astral roads (spirit pathways in the realm of dreams) far and wide, pleading to the yomi for aid. Such was the purity of her heart that they agreed on the condition that the Light protect their sacred places – a promise the Light still keep.

The Light drove back the Dark in alliance with the great yomi. Where the Dark enslaved, they befriended. Where the Dark despoiled, the Light regrew. The yomi saw the dedication of the Light and granted them greater powers than the Dark could withstand.

The Light came very close to finally extinguishing the Dark. Very close to a better world. A tiny trickle of that vision became the arts known as the Renaissance.

In the wake of the victory, the Courts reorganized to make room for Morganna's new charge. The five Courts known today were born as each Queen declared their portion of the great mission. Though the Dark remained, the Light was stronger and better united than ever before.

Then, after many more long years of diligent vigil, a new threat seeped its way into the halls. This one effortlessly bypassed the great crystal wards, passing where no Dark spies could travel. It seemed harmless at first, little more than another outgrowth of the Court's logistics.

The Light had access to untold riches in money and treasure; why should we let it mold in the vaults?

The Seers could insure our protection from mundane threats like economic depression and the tumultuous birth of democracy. Why shouldn't they?

Slowly, insidiously, the temptation to power grew. The touch of grey, that grew darker as the years moved forward.

Then, in 1925, the Twilight broke away. Like a great flood, hundreds of magical girls stood together – conspirators in secret for untold years – and announced they wanted no part of the great mission.

The Courts did not know what to do with these conspirators. They could rise and destroy them, but to do such a thing. . . to attack their own sisters? The Light in their hearts could not bear it. The Courts could only weep as so many of their youngest left to form their own twisted Courts, with their own fallen oaths. Twilight thought that salvation lay in the world of flesh; they thought the Dark was not truly evil.

They were so young. They had not *lived* in the days when Dark atrocities sang on the wind.

Our estranged sisters hold Court of their own now, and they answer our calls with cold voices.

The Courts felt they had no one to blame but themselves.

“Even if the Twilight’s foolishness had its seed in the Dark, we did not properly teach them. ” They said. “We allowed too much contact with silver-tongued Dark girls. ” They said.

The Queens instituted the Rules of Grey and banned communication with the Dark outside of official parley, the better to protect the hearts of their young.

They know better now. Those sent to speak to the Dark or Twilight only do so after rigorous training and with powerful mental protections. But there are still those who think the Dark cannot be so truly evil after all... who believe there must be *some* way to redeem them...

GM Dial: The Grey Wardens

The Light has a tendency to control and smother with the best of intentions. The Rules of Grey go on for volumes and the Queens oversee many cases of magical girls requesting clarification, but there is no ‘police force’ within the Courts that enforces the rules, and shuts down any hint of dissention. Quite simply, the Courts don’t work that way. (*See page 23, **Social Structure***) But what if they did? What if there were Grey Wardens?

- **Informal Club <DEFAULT>**: There’s a group of magical girls who poke their noses into others business a little more than is polite, looking for trouble. They act as a snobby clique, “in group”, and social elite of the courts. (At least they think so.)
- **Court Organization**: The Grey wardens are a recognized organization within the Courts, mostly drawn from the Champions, with official badges, positions, and likely the ears of the Queens. They spend most of their time conducting interventions with magical girls deemed in danger of falling, or leading advice groups warning of the dangers of the Twilight and the Dark.
- **Sparks Internal Affairs**: No one can tell when one innocent act of Grey might lead to a Dark fall. No one can be sure that such a thing even occurs, but one mistake is too many! Constant vigilance is the watch word! And as surely as night turns to day, the desperate belief that any means are permissible to prevent a fall, causes the fall itself. The Grey Wardens flirt with Twilight themselves, all with the best and most noble of intentions, all convinced they hold the moral high ground.



Courts and Halls

Nice digs! I'm really liking the floating spires of singing crystal. Plus how did you get that double rainbow in the sky? This place is, if you'll forgive me, like tripping balls in the best way.

-Amanda, voted "Most Likely to Go Twilight" in her cohort

Each of the five existent Courts has adopted a set of symbols, sworn particular promises to a species of yomi, and claimed a grand sanctuary for the Light. Often, a magical girl's Court is evident in the color and shape of her costume or the form of her yomi.

The Halls exist in the astral mists (*see page 46, **Astral Paths***), each one formed and anchored to the world by grand magical ritual. To access a hall, the magical girl must attune to the crystals that grow in the heart of the hall. Thus, she must be brought inside by one already attuned. The crystals are incarnate Light, and no Dark magical girl has managed to fool them yet. Quite simply, if magical girls do not want you inside, you don't get inside.

Dark sanctuaries operate on similar rules, most likely. Instead of five highly concentrated bastions of Light, though, the Dark operates from thousands of scattered sanctuaries. Each is easier to assault and destroy, but first you must find them. . . .

Smaller Light halls do exist, but they are neither as powerful nor as popular as the five great halls. Some are little more than anointed club houses for a troupe, and others are the retreats of elders and monks who wish to commune with the Light.

The Grand Court of the Champions

The defenders of the weak have a grand citadel, the last respite of all magical girls. The full strength of the Light sings from its battlements, a fortress that overlooks golden astral mists. This was the first hall, and its catacombs span a thousand years of history. Its impenetrable gates will gaze upon the end of time, unbroken.

Queen Dawn rules from a throne of tigerseye. She and her Court wield sunlight and fire to beat back the corruption of the Dark.

A Champion's Light armor is as sturdy as their souls, conjuring armor plates of gleaming gold and silver, shields, and Soul weapons of heft and power like grand swords and maces.

Lions are the yomi of the Champions, their manes lit from within with golden power.

Themes: Sunlight, Day, Light, Swords, Shields, Courage

Court Aspects: Leadership by Bravery, Honorable Word, Steadfast Heart

The Endless Wood Hall of the Keepers

The verdant expanse of the Keeper's domain is a Hall in name only. Rather, these magical girls make their citadel in a vast, primordial jungle, ever ringing with the calls of the wild. The soil is soft and deep, shoes are completely optional, and the ants never bite. The most ancient of the Light-aligned yomi make their nests here, raising their young in the deep tangles.

Queen Rona rules from a throne of living wood. She and her Court call to the Earth herself to rise up against the forces of Darkness.

A Keeper Light armor reflects the beast within, often sporting fur lining and supple leather vests or boots. Some girls become jungle princesses, while others pattern themselves after a favored animal like a totem. Their Soul weapons are often related to the hunt, such as bows and spears, though a few prefer to fight with close range weapons.

The Keepers do not have a chosen yomi – or, as they explain it, all yomi are their favorites.

Themes: Wilderness, Growth, Trees, Spring

Court Aspects: Voice of Nature, Earthen Wisdom, Feral Fury



The Grand Temple of the Menders

Flesh and mind come to rest in the tranquil shadows of the Menders hall. This hall is shrouded in eternal night, bounded by the silver of a million stars. Brilliant white and silver pillars span the passageways, giving glimpses of private gardens and elaborate atriums.

Queen Eulipia rules from a throne of onyx. She and her Court wield the powers of weaving and moonlight, transfiguring the Dark's corrupt touch into a peaceful dream.

A Mender's Light armor is gossamer and shifting as the night sky, glittering with the heavens and leaving a corona in their wake. Their Soul weapons tend to follow archaic magical symbols: wands, chalices, and athames, all imbued with starlight.

Many are uncomfortable with the form of the Mender yomi: great white spiders. Yet these arachnids weave the softest of bandages and drink the dew of midnight flowers, forsaking blood and flesh.

Themes: Silver, Threads, Weaving, the Moon, Night, Stars

Court Aspects: Peaceful Reflection, Moonlight Power, Restoration

The Grand Library of the Seekers

The libraries and classrooms of the Seekers nestle in the clouds of a clear day, perched high above the world. A gentle wind clears the mind, and the smell of fresh ink tickles at the nose. New stories are born every day here, and the eye sees clearly to the horizon. There is no dusk as beautiful as the twilight here, and the dawn seems to light the entire world with hope.

Queen Sophia rules here from a throne of diamond. She and her Court wield the power of truth and light, dispelling ignorance and breaking the shackles of Dark control.

A Seeker's Light armor conceals and teases, often coming with deep hoods or blindfolds. A Seeker may stand in the light of day, yet carry secrets in the long folds of her dress. Their Soul weapons hold knowledge: tomes of ancient age, quills that ripple with ghostly calligraphy, and scrolls filled with runes.

The chosen yomi of the Seekers is the eagle, proud cry singing through the air.

Themes: Air, Clouds, Rainbows, Prisms, Knowledge, Secrets

Court Aspects: Divination and Far Sight, Secrets within Secrets, Cutting Insight

Grand Menagerie of the Graces

The silver tongued take their leave at the Grace's hall, a palace of sprawling galleries and sudden panoramas. Villas and pavilions of white wood stand on white cliffs overlooking the ocean. Here great speakers debate and sing late into the night.

Queen Blanc rules here on a throne of amber. She and her Court wield inspiration and hope, rekindling the Light that has been lost in the Dark.

A Grace's Light armor melds modern and ancient sensibilities with elegance. Asymmetry is a popular fashion at the moment: one shoulder bared, one leg clad in silk, or skirts that hike scandalously high on one leg while entirely covering the other. Their Soul weapons typically mirror their tongues: instruments to spread the Light, whether heavy metal guitar or lute.

The chosen yomi of the Graces is the songbird, flitting from tree to tree.

Themes: Vanilla, Harps, Winds, Dance

Court Aspects: Song of Inspiration, Leadership by Beauty, Grace in all Things

Social Structure

I swear by the Light, Amanda, if you do not get off your cell phone and let the Librarian speak, I will ground you to clean up crew for a month! If this keeps up, I will petition the Queen to cut off the Wi-Fi in the halls!

-Amanda's frustrated mother during chapel

Magical girl society is not meant to replace the land of mundanes. Elders of the Courts often explain it as a very important secret club to the children. While the Bonds of Court nakama are important, they are no replacement for remaining a part of the greater world. Soldiers are encouraged to open activities to their normal friends whenever it will not compromise the Veil.

Therefore, most of the unique pieces of magical girl society are functional. Soldiers face dangers that normal mortals do not understand and harness invisible magics. They need teachers for both. Soldiers need to communicate in a fashion that government agencies can't snoop on, and so someone (usually a youth) needs to run the astral paths and deliver packages. Elders need to maintain the rituals of protection, and troupes need to patrol against the Dark menace.

For such an old organization, magical girl society keeps up with the times well. This is a happy side effect of Bonds; even a four hundred year old seasoned general has friends her own (relative) age to help her keep track of trends and issues of the day. Few would know by looking that their English teacher fights evil by moonlight and looks sexy doing it.

Once or twice a month, each Court holds chapel. This is a less religious affair than the mundane counterpart. Magical girls *know* the Light exists. They have no need to worship it (and the Light is silent on the matter of God with a capital 'G' anyways). Chapel exists as a time for catching up with friends, stuffing face with soulful food, and contemplating the nature of the great mission. Chapel is also the only time when those mundane family members who know the magical girl's secret are allowed into the halls, provided their heart is pure enough to pass the crystals.

When it comes to military matters, the Courts are rigorously trained. The basic unit of combat is the troupe, a nakama of magical sisters anywhere from two to ten strong. Leadership of the nakama usually falls to the highest ranking woman. Councils of troupe leaders report to the leader of an individual Court, and they in turn report to the commander of the war efforts.

Organization of the Courts of Light		
Ranks of Might	Ranks of Wisdom	Ranks of Hearth
<i>Soldier</i>	<i>Herald</i>	<i>Seedling</i> : The young
<i>Captain</i> : Troupe leader	<i>Oracle</i> : Circle leader	<i>Mist</i> : Those without Court
<i>Valiant</i> : Court leader	<i>Seer</i> : Accomplished caster	<i>Elder</i> : Retired
<i>Paladin</i> : Commander of Courts	<i>Princess</i> : Heart of a Court	<i>Teacher</i>

Many magical girls hold ranks in both Might and Wisdom, depending on their disposition towards more overt or subtle magic and combat. There is a Queen for each court, and a Princess for each court. The is, however, only one Paladin, who is neither Princess nor Queen.

Paladins have supreme authority in military matters and in times of crisis. Princesses care for the day to day affairs of their Court. Queens speak with the Light, convey judgment and settle disputes in matters of conflict or debate. Queens are vessels for a fragment of the voice of the Light, a not entirely comfortable thing to be. They often speak half a conversation, their words layered in meanings only they can hear.

A magical girl rises in rank when her peers and mentors decide she is ready with a few exceptions:

- Queens are chosen by the Light, selected when there is an opening by choice or death.
- The Paladin is chosen by the Queens, again selected when there is an opening by choice or death.
- Princesses are elected annually by acclaim of their Court with approval by the Queens.

All of this consensus and pleasantly restrained voting seems, to most new initiates, more unlikely than the existence of magic and spirits. How is it, they demand, that nobody stages a coup?!

If a magical girl feels so injured that she needs to stage a coup, explain the mentors, then clearly a Bond has been frayed and must be healed. The very Light in the girls' hearts pushes them to reconcile. There is no room in the great quest for magical girls to come to blows with their sisters.

(These mentors rarely mention that there *was* a coup, not even a hundred years ago, and the Twilight Bond lays broken. It only complicates matters to explain.)

Compared to its mundane counterpart, magical girl society is extremely close knit. Inside a Court, most everyone recognizes everyone else by the end of a few decades. It is very difficult to hide nefarious activity in the middle of a sermon on the Light when most of the cathedral can sense the general state of your heart. (Even magical girls have their share of busy bodies. . . .)

As such, when matters do get out of hand, the punishment tends heavily towards rehabilitation. Magical girls must live with their friends (and frenemies!) for a long time. Painful experience has taught that zero tolerance policies only lead to long-standing grudges. A magical girl is more likely to get grounded or community service than prison time.

Part of this is pragmatism. A history of mistakes has shown that prison is a breeding ground for the Dark, a place where angry magical girls can grow to believe they are truly separate from their sisters. Neither does it help that a magical girl is seriously difficult to trap, and even harder to hold, as magical girls can flit away through walls, travelling the astral paths, requiring guards and rituals best used to actually fight the Dark.

In all, magical girl society operates with a truly sickening degree of cooperation and trust. Many a dark general has claimed outright mind control is the only explanation. They spend all that effort to forge a rift of condescension and mistrust between two girls only for a tearful hug to ruin the entire plot!

Alas, all that cooperation does tend to come with a horrible side effect: magical girls *work*.

Jobs

So I'm a magical girl. I can punch out a two story tall possessed car. And you want me – chosen by the Light to protect and endure – to spend my spare time knitting together sidewalks and explaining to some dumb kid with an iPhone that what he saw was part of a movie scene?!

-Tabitha, newly assigned to the repair crew

Not every part of the Courts is *quite* as glamorous as the frontal assault on a Dark sanctuary. Dishes must be cleaned after meals, and yomi stables need mucking. Magic can accomplish these tasks, but somebody has to cast and maintain said magic. Every magical girl is expected to devote time each week to a given task, contributing to the well-being of their court.

Some jobs include:

Jobs of the Courts of Light			
Combat		Hearth	
Patrol	Parley	Courier delivery	Augury
Protective Wards	Mending	Cooking	Record keeping
Reconnaissance	Surveillance	Taming	Repair crew

Hearth jobs are typically the province of seedling and elders. The first job most young magical girls have is courier. Astral-walking postmen, the couriers operate the magical girl mail with an average delivery time of under an hour. This job introduces the girl to dozens of potential mentors and keeps her far from the front lines.

Cooks look after the stomachs of the soldiers. Tamers care for the yomi, often forming deep Bonds with a particular spirit. Augurs look to the future and keep careful vigil for the signs of the Dark's foul touch. Librarians maintain the vast archives, teach the young, and conduct sermons on the nature of Light.

One stinker of a job remains, however. The repair crew is the least popular job of all, largely concerned with erasing the evidence of magical girl battles. Many girls view it as an outright punishment, forced to mop up after all the fun is over.

Many more jobs rise as needed, and stern elders hand them down to sulking teenagers. A black market of job trading thrives in the back corners of the halls, out of elder's sights. If the Queens know, they tolerate such mischief. Even magical girls need to feel like they're kicking the trends every once in a while.

Knights

Your hair is as wondrous as shooting stars, your voice clear as angels. I wonder, my magical girl, if you would consider coming to the movies with me this Friday night?

-Silver Armor, Knight and known womanizer

Wait a second. Isn't something missing? Where are all the men?!

Male magical girls are very magical, but not so much girl. Known as Knights, they are the solitary and brooding male half of the Light. Magical girls outnumber Knights roughly ten to one, a ratio that suits the men just fine. No one knows why this is. Perhaps the Light is a feminine force, more easily attracted to a woman's heart. Perhaps Knights can only become after some secretive series of competitive trials which few pass. Perhaps the other ninety percent all hang out on Mars.

Knights operate on their own, prevailing over wide swaths of territory like lone wolves. An individual Knight is stronger than his distaff equal but lacks the strength of Bonds seen in a nakama. They hold their own council, by and large, and show up in the nick of time to help a flagging troupe.

The Queens assure their Courts that the Knights have their own quests to fulfill, serving the Light in another way. Not that the Queens often speak of this matter. What few references there are, note the critical importance of Honor to a Knight, such that a slighted one might challenge his opponent to a duel on the spot. Most magical girls know Knights largely as the flirtatious vagabonds that swoop a girl off her feet (not always with permission).

Regardless, magical girls and Knights marry often enough that the Knights are not truly alien. New magical girls get swept off their feet by a mysterious masked stranger, and elder ones roll their eyes knowingly. Whether a Knight's advances are a dashing romance or a pushy imposition by a puffed up braggart depends on the Knight and the girl. Like so much in love, one girl's version of unwelcome advances is another's heady romance.

The Dark

The air grows dark despite the sun. The civilians around you go glassy-eyed and slack jawed. Oppressively still air and no noise until the shriek of corrupted yomi rises.

The Dark has come to harvest hearts and hope and all things good, but they will have to go through us first.

-Soldier Heartsong, ready for a fight

Dark magical girls seek dominion, destruction, and power. As long as history records, they have sought to drag the world into their shadow. In this, they are well understood: they are the enemy.

In other matters, the Dark is rather opaque. Its ultimate origin is unknown. Its sanctuaries are hidden by powerful shadow magics. Its magic techniques resist investigation, threatening to corrupt any who study them. The Dark can *hide*, vanishing from sight in the blink of an eye. A Dark soldier who does not wish to be found is unlikely to be found, so long as they do not activate their magics.

Thankfully, the Dark seems to exert a gravity on Fate itself. If a Dark girl arrives to cause trouble, the vast majority of the time a Light soldier will be nearby. This might seem like a curse at first, especially to a tired magical girl on her third fight of the week, but what if the Light had not arrived? Better that the fight fall to those with the power and the courage to strike back.

The Light has triumphed over the Dark time and time again, yet always it returns. Most Dark magical girls fight alone, flanked by their yomi slaves, and spurn the value of friendship and nakama. The total number of Dark soldiers is very difficult to estimate as a result. It does not have a consistent hierarchy. At various times, the Dark has been directed by a tyrant, a Dark Queen, a cabal of evil soldiers, the ghost of a vanquished soldier, an alien, a corrupted yomi, and a ten year old girl with split personality. (And those are just the ones known for sure.)

Sometimes, there is no organization at all, and each Dark magical girl operates her own territory like a lone predator. These are the least problematic for the Courts, but present a subtle danger: corruption.

New Dark magical girls come from a familiar source. They are stolen from the Light.

When her heart turns to selfish desire, when her hatred overcomes her compassion, when violence seems like the best solution to problems – this is when a magical girl falls.

The Dark is always on the prowl for the frustrated and the isolated. Some magical girls are scooped up before they ever meet the Courts and corrupted by preying on that first trust. Others are long veterans of the war, emotionally worn down until the difference between Light and Dark blurs.



Nakama are doubly important to provide emotional support in the face of carefully crafted lies. Plus, they make it much more difficult for a Dark magical girl to kidnap a fresh recruit and steal back to a sanctuary for brainwashing.

Dark sanctuaries, much like the halls, are astral fortresses. While the halls are visible from great distance, beacons in the mists, sanctuaries are deep and dark holes. Dark magic hides them from all but the most potent of inquiry. Even when one is found, it's often empty and abandoned.

Does a Dark Hall exist; cloaked by so many magics the Queens themselves can't sense it? The thought troubles many a Princess. If only they could find such a place and ransack the history of their nemesis, they could finally understand the full extent of Dark powers.

For the Dark's goals are as mutable as their sanctuaries. Some Dark magical girls are obliging enough to shout their intentions with every attack. "With one thousand lover's kisses, I will revive the dread vampire Seductra!" That is well and good until the Light soldier makes a jot to the other side of the world and meets another Dark soldier who exclaims with equal sincerity, "When I find the ten true heart jewels, I will transform into the Dark Mother and take over the world!"

Dark magical girls fight each other as freely as they do the Light. Their hearts apparently do not lead them towards a greater harmony. The only time a large number of Dark soldiers cooperate is when a Dark General rises.

Dark Generals are those soldiers of sufficient guile, might, or magic to unite the herd of cats into a single fighting force. They create a singular crisis, molding the Dark into a spear of evil.

The removal of Dark Generals is always a top priority. Unfortunately, anyone who can claim that title has withstood at least a dozen attempts on her life and position by her most potent and "trusted" lieutenants. Generals don't go down easy.



Whispers of the Dark

"You only think we're so bad because that's what you've been told. "

"There's no difference between Dark and Light. We both use power as we see fit. "

"The rules you follow control you. You gave up free will for a sense of smug superiority. "

"What's so great about friendship and love anyways? It won't save you. "

"We're the most dedicated Magical Girls. We do what needs to be done while you prance. "

"Everybody ends up on our side sooner or later. We're the truth. "

GM Dial: Death rate

How many magical girls die in the line of duty and how often?

- **Many:** Death is a part of war, and magical girls go into every battle knowing it might be their last. This creates a more brutal setting, reducing the reliability of redemption and creating character churn. This works best with fatal Harvesting to create a “grim shadow war” scenario.
- **Few<DEFAULT>:** Magical girls are durable, and most conflicts are skirmishes between small numbers on either side. A magical girl risks her life when she faces a powerful opponent like a corrupted yomi lord or a Dark Queen, but her day to day life has some periods of peace.
- **None:** Some unspoken Bond between the very Light and Dark themselves forbids fatal combat. Neither side is capable of overcoming a strange compulsion to spare their opponent. Of course, one can get creative. If you can't kill a girl, maybe you can teleport her to the North Pole, get her flunked out of school, or turn her into a six year old so she can't fight.

In any case, a scorched earth total war would leave very little of the world to be ruled or protected. Ancient conflicts are rumored to have caused tectonic shifts and immense hurricanes, and that was before yomi entered the picture. Add in the modern destructive capability of Earth's mundane militaries, and an open conflict would create an apocalypse worthy of Mad Max. The conflict seems destined to stay behind the Veil in these modern times.

(Though if an adventurous GM wanted to run a post-apoc magical girl game, the authors suggest stealing liberally from the expansive literature on dystopic futures available in roleplaying games and novels all over. Dark magical girl cyborgs ruling vast corporate empires that buy Harvests by the boat from impoverished nations and outlaw the very mention of the Light.)

Dark Combat

Watch out for the sneaky ones. They like to sucker punch while you're talking! They have no respect for the importance of contemplating ontological positions in relation to dualistic warring forces!

-Tam, Champion Mentor, to her new seedling

A Dark magical girl is gifted with great stealth, but her magic is as loud as any of the Light once activated. The sky seems to grow clouded. Mundane people sway, go blank eyed, or start to cry. A pall hangs over the world, oppressive and dangerous.

This all happens in the few moments leading up to the Dark magic. Experienced Light soldiers power up immediately, ready for the inevitable attack. (Experienced Dark magical girls use this as bait, staging a second attack a long distance away after the Light has run to the first scene.)

Few Dark magical girls opt for direct combat. For one thing, a Champion's heel to the face rather hurts. For another, she is almost always outnumbered. For a third, the Dark rarely lacks for yomi or mooks; many Dark magical girls learn an infusion rite that suffuses a person or object with Dark energy and turns them into a monster.

A typical combat, then, is between the troupe of magical girls and one of the Dark's pawns. Depending on the Dark soldier's goals, she might vanish as soon as the pawn is in battle or remain to conduct Harvesting. If the pawn is destroyed, released from infusion, or purified, then the Dark girl can vanish away in a puff of magic, none the worse for wear. (Of course, her own superiors might be very angry if she fails at her goals. . .)

Much like a police detective, a Light magical girl needs to piece together the clues left by individual encounters to reveal the plan, location, and identity of Dark opponents. Maybe a Champion can taunt the Dark soldier into revealing the plan in a fit of anger, or a Seeker catches sight of a school emblem hanging from the Dark girl's pocket. For every encounter, the Light should receive a clue or two, slowly building up into a reveal.

Sometimes, however, the battle goes the Dark's way. The troupe takes too much damage or misses a crucial clue. When this happens, the Dark gains ground either literally or metaphorically. It might:

- **Gain control of territory.** This territory gains a Dark aspect, granting bonuses to the Dark magical girls who fight and patrol there. Favorites include yomi shrines, the better for corruption; youth hang outs, the better for siphoning Bonds; businesses, the better for controlling the mundane world.
- **Gain control of mundane minds.** Favored puppets are authority figures like police and teachers, always great for manipulating a magical girl's normal life. Or, perhaps if a magical girl's identity is known, her family can be targeted. The dark sees no issue with being underhanded.
- **Cause the Light girls to take Bond damage.** Less powerful Dark soldiers should only be able to cause Frayed damage, as mistrust and arguments set in. Powerful, recognized enemies like Dark Generals may be able to cause a Bond to break, but make sure to give the players the chance to reforge it. Bonds are a central power, and repeated attacks against it can cause a death spiral (and make the player feel picked on).
- **Cause a specific magical girl to take a negative Aspect.** This emotional damage represents fear, uncertainty and doubt roiling in the pit of her stomach. She will need to find her courage (hopefully with the help of her nakama) to regain that health.
- **Successfully Harvest** towards its ultimate goal. This is perhaps the most abstract victory condition, and it should result in a slow darkening of the environment. Tempers are shorter, crime is up, and the city's communal spirit seems to waver as the Dark's power grows.
- **Other, stranger goals** as appropriate. Perhaps the Dark magical girl uses her victory to steal the Light girl's place in school for a week, or maybe she finds a way to twist the remains of the fight into a tall tale that turns her into a local hero. Maybe she's just really lonely, and she spends an inordinate amount of time lording it over the Light girl in an awkward attempt at socializing.

Powers of the Dark

Dark magical girls have their own array of powers to face the Light with. The Dark and the Light share the same basic set of combat attributes: magic laser blasts, super strength, super leaps and jumping, durability, and so forth. Both are capable of ritual magic, though it is put to far different purposes. Both can communicate with the yomi and walk the astral paths.

There are five known powers to exist only for the Dark. A Light magical girl can no more access these powers than breathe in space. The powers are:

- **Stealth.** By wrapping herself in the Dark's embrace, she may become invisible to almost all magical sight. A few great rituals (like the Light crystal wards) can forestall this, but in the majority of cases, there is no way to tell that the girl before one is a Dark soldier unless she changes right in front of your face.
- **Corruption.** The Dark may taint the land itself, giving rise to Dark-aligned yomi and influencing the mindset of the people who live there.
- **Infusion.** The Dark soldier may give her power to a yomi, an object, or a person. The power changes them, often converting them into hulking beasts or monsters, and allows the soldier to direct their movements on the battlefield. Infusion does not last long, and most possessed have no memory of the event afterwards.

Light soldiers hate fighting these, since it's very possible to kill a possessed innocent who's attempting to kill you.

- **Mind Control.** More subtle than infusion, but longer lasting. Mind control allows the Dark soldier to grasp the minds of mundanes and yomi, twisting them to her will. Those being mind controlled are rarely aware of the fact, even as they shout curses at their lifelong friends and take part in strange tasks from an unseen director. Even Light soldiers are not immune to this power against a sufficiently powerful Dark spell. Those who are mind controlled *do* tend to remember their actions, and who directed them. This may be why the dark uses this power rarely.
- **Harvesting.** This power leeches the light and hope from the hearts of its victims for the Dark's own use in a twisted reflection of a Light girl's Bonds. By this power, the Dark gathers the power necessary for profane rituals and summoning. It can keep a vain woman young; it can return a banished Dark Queen; it can empower a Dark General to withstand an entire troupe's efforts. Of all the powers of a Dark magical girl, it is the most dangerous. While one Harvest may be small, many can swell the Dark to untold power.

Dark Redemption

Redemption is a topic never far from the minds of the Light when it comes to their fallen sisters. Most Dark magical girls seem incorrigible, but even the Darkest heart may return to the Light's embrace with the proper care. Or, at least, that's the official line.

The reality is that it is difficult, even for a soldier of compassion and justice, to focus on restoring a fallen girl when she is attempting to hit you in the face with a car. Recognizing this, the Courts allow that perhaps it is better to neutralize and capture a Dark girl first. Once in the Light's rehabilitative White Tower, the healing can begin.

Dark magical girls tend to take a very dim view of this so-called healing. They claim that it is no better than brain washing, another sign of the Light's hypocrisy.

Whether or not a Dark soldier can be safely released from rehabilitation when Light conversion fails depends on her power level, her attitude, and her past crimes. The Courts are fully aware that most Dark girls go to rejoin their nefarious cohort as soon as released, but it is the nature of the Light to give second chances. (This is, of course, affected by the GM's decision regarding how much damage Harvesting causes.) There is no easy answer, caught between recidivism and imprisonment, and even the Courts argue over the solution.

Perhaps the only agreement there is that execution is out of the question. Even the Darkest heart must be given its allotted time to come to the Light. Only those who directly endanger the lives of the innocent may be dealt with using lethal force.

GM Dial: Harvesting

How much damage does Harvesting cause?

- **Death:** Harvesting is fatal. Some important aspect of the heart and mind is ripped free, leaving little but a husk behind.
- **Permanent Damage:** Harvesting is the emotional equivalent of a serious car wreck. Those damaged by Harvesting lose half of their Bonds (rounded up) and Fray the rest. Their minds suffer nightmares that last for years, and they face a difficult road to recovery akin to the rehabilitation of a soldier with PTSD.
- **Recoverable Damage<DEFAULT>:** Harvesting is a painful blow, but the soul is resilient. Those damaged Fray all of their Bonds, but they are not permanently scarred. Given time, they will naturally heal what was lost.

The damage that Harvesting causes has a direct impact on attempts to redeem Dark magical girls. A Dark soldier whose Harvest causes death is most likely a mass murderer, bathed in the blood of innocents. Redemption is very unlikely in such a case, and the troupe will most likely be forced to face her in the ultimate trial.

If Harvesting causes permanent damage, then the Dark soldier is a serious offender, the kind of person who would hit someone in a car accident and flee the scene. If they are to be redeemed, they will need to spend many long years in penance for all that they have done. . . but perhaps some spark of hope remains in that dark heart.

If Harvesting causes recoverable damage, the Dark likely views it as little more than a minor imposition. It is easy for Dark magical girls to claim that a temporary ailment (no worse than a bad flu!) is excusable in the face of whatever plan they must implement. These soldiers are the most likely to embrace moral relativism and the idea that they are no worse than their Light sisters. Indeed, they claim, they are the “true realists”, the ones doing what must be done, while the Light simpers.

Yomi

In ancient times, the yomi ignored us. They ignored everyone. They were the hurricane and the earthquake, implacable and distant. We didn't even know they could talk, much less accept the touch of the Light. Always remember: the yomi are Wild. Treat them with the respect they deserve.

-Morganna, First Keeper's book of wisdom

Yomi are the children of Earth. They are the incarnation of her fury and the shelter of her gardens. Their names and aspects are as varied as the seasons: shinigami, spirits, gods, ghosts, monsters, guardian angels. Their forms are as many and varied as the stars in the sky, but they are always primal, powerful, and dramatic. Great beasts, mythic animals, demi-humans or dancing motes of light, in the war between Light and Dark, they are the wild card.



For the first eras of the world, they were distant gods worshiped or pleaded to with equal futility. The occasional yomi favor was the extent of magic available to most people, and entire cults existed for that sole purpose. Sparks on both sides attempted more refined methods of control and failed until the time of Morganna.

The mistake was focusing on the yomi itself. Much as a flame is the result of processes that happen below, a yomi is only the visible end result of a confluence of natural powers. Kill a yomi, and it regenerates in its hearth. Capture it, and its nature is so unbending that the greatest magics basically dent a scale or two. Command it and receive its scorn.

Morganna's great insight was that yomi, like the flame, are part of a greater whole. She appealed not to power, vanity or treaty. She approached their holy places: shrines, hidden gardens, vales, caves. She touched those places with the Light in her heart, and so the yomi changed.

The yomi connection to Earth grants them great, but heavily restricted, powers. Each yomi is a hyper specialist according to its nature. Given the wisdom of a thousand years and the cunning of animals, even a single old yomi can be a match for an entire troupe of magical girls. At the same time, however, they are tied to particular places and particular spheres written in their very souls.

A great bear yomi can no more make itself master of the ocean than a Light soldier kill an innocent. To do such would be to destroy one's self. Perhaps this limitation is why the yomi eventually allowed the Light (and, regrettably, Dark) to touch them. To change them.

Corrupted and enlightened yomi undergo the same transformation, despite their opposite purposes. As the power of the magical girls infuses them, they grow smarter in the manner of mankind, able to read and converse. They grow able to take the shape of men and even walk the broad daylight of the modern world (so long as they are careful). In some way, the Bond between the soldiers and the yomi changes the yomi to become half angel (or half demon).

The original yomi of the Courts, those recruited by Morganna's own hand, are now a strange and powerful mix of Light and Wild. They hold human form at will and command the loyalty of hundreds of children. Their eyes see prophecies in the night sky, and their ears hear the faintest songs of Light with clarity. They are the lynchpin of the modern magical girl army, protected with zeal.

The same can be said for their Dark sisters.

The yomi themselves see this arrangement with relative calm. Even when two yomi of opposite alignment come to blows, they do so with a courteous formality. When one's hearth can be switched from Light to Dark or vice versa in the blink of the eye (sometimes as fast as a few short years!), it behooves the combatant to be polite.

Sometimes, a soldier has to wonder if the Courts truly control the yomi at all, or if this new chapter of the ancient war is all part of a grander plan by the spirit of the Earth herself. . .



GM Note: Names

Yomi, as a word, carries with it some cultural meaning from Japanese. The meaning the authors are most familiar with is “Yomi no Kuni”, the land of the dead in Shinto myth. As far as we know, the word is relatively neutral and unlikely to cause an uproar. However, you don’t need to use our words. Feel no fear in reassigning the yomi any name that makes you feel comfortable. Shinigami, spirits, dragons, angels, titans. Whatever works best for you. We won’t tell.

Yomi Powers

Earth's Domination: The yomi exert a metaphysical control on the land around them. They are capable of hiding and revealing many secrets in their domain as they see fit. They can cause sickness or health, prosperity or violence. These effects are not targeted at a given person so much as an outgrowth of their very nature as expressions of the land.

Nature Control: All of the regular animals in a yomi's aspect defer to the yomi as a monarch. It is capable of mutating its children into forms appropriate for combat or granting them a measure of extra intelligence and compassion. Many a magical girl has thought a small spirit like a rat yomi was no threat at all – until an intelligent swarm of dog-sized rats started chasing her!

Regeneration: Traditional death has no meaning for a yomi. Destruction is a passing phase, and a dead yomi emerges anew not long after its death. During their somnolence, the yomi's lands are vulnerable to being corrupted, and Dark soldiers often repeatedly kill a yomi as a way to start their vile changes to its land.

Yomi Weaknesses

Earth's Memory: The yomi exist as part of the world. They are incapable of seeing outside of it, and their lives are intimately tied with the Earth. A yomi's nature is always itself, and it has no conception of change. Thus, when a yomi becomes Dark or Light attuned, it exerts itself in full capacity as if it was always attuned such. If a magical girl gets tangled up in a time travel plot, then the yomi of her altered future would have no idea that anything had changed. The spirits always exist in the now.

Hearth: Every yomi has a secret, hidden home that holds the essence of its power. Some hearths are massive, sprawling shrines. Others are as small as a single stone in a pond. If removed or destroyed, the yomi truly dies. This hearth is particularly vulnerable to corruption and must be guarded when a yomi regenerates.

In order to corrupt or redeem a yomi, the troupe should apply Aspects to the yomi's hearth while guarding against the aspects of the opposition. Those magical girls who gain the trust and favor of the yomi in question should receive bonuses to this process. The Light does not take the easy road of simply killing the yomi till the corruption is complete, and the high road should have advantages of its own.

GM Note: Using Yomi

As monsters, the yomi are useful to the GM when it comes time for big, sweeping set pieces. Yomi don't mend Bonds and repair hearts. They set entire cities ablaze and cloak entire sanctuaries in shadow. Their nature is muted and variable. Depending on the GM's need, the yomi can come in the form of animals, mythical monsters, possessing spirits, vengeful ghosts, or even stranger things.

Wild yomi are there to mix things up. Another showdown between a Dark soldier and the troupe? Ho hum. Maybe their fight awakens a sleeping yomi, and it's ready to kick butt! What if it's so strong the enemies need to work together just to keep from being crushed? Need a touch of sentimentality? Maybe it turns out one of the troupe's deceased pets has reincarnated as a yomi, bringing in a new ally with a close connection to the girl.

They are custom made to be morality-free monsters of the week as needed, and their connection to the Earth allows them to dispatch vague prophecies and dramatic warnings.

When you need a dash of dramatic explosions or a threat to send people screaming, a yomi is ready for the job.

Twilight

Few things shame me as much as the memory of the day my pupils defected to the new Twilight Courts. I thought I was teaching them to be valiant soldiers of justice. . . they apparently thought I was an abusive old hag who prattled on about a stupid war that they had no stake in. That is the great, seductive lie of Twilight: that the war does not concern you.

-Ariel, Herald, Champion, teacher

The fight against the Dark is as old as the world, but Twilight is a recent wrinkle. The Twilight Courts arose from a schism in the Courts, led by young women who were convinced the great quest had nothing to do with the modern world of nationwide radio and progress. Thousands of years of warfare had not seen victory, they said. Why should they continue a pointless war?

Because the innocent depend on you, retorted their elders.

Some listened, but many left. Abandoning the great quest, the new Courts claimed territory and patron yomi of their own. They established neutrality with both Light and Dark and devoted themselves to worldly dominions.

The Courts of Twilight are in constant flux, springing up and dying in bursts. Having distanced themselves from the Light, these magical girls do not have its steadfast protection of the heart; infighting is very common.

Still, Twilight magical girls remain technically Light-aligned. They may have strayed, but they have not embraced the evil that permeates the Dark. Perhaps, in time, there is hope for them.



The Twilight Courts

In the modern era, there are three dominant Twilight courts.

Mirrors

The Queens of the Court of Mirrors are Queens of the entire world, and every magical girl is a Queen, they say. They challenge the notion of a single Queen for each Court. If each magical girl has a fragment of a god in her heart, why should she hide it? Why should she not take her due?

Mirrors believe in the perfection of all tasks, internal and external. As Queens, they must act and appear the part at all times. The magic of the Light, pulled into grey, accumulates fortunes with ease, and many Mirrors live the kind of lavish, Hollywood lifestyle that only further alienates them from the “peons” they decide to lord over.

When the Mirrors fight the Dark, it is because a perfect magical girl fights the Dark. It’s good publicity. The Mirrors are the most beautiful and splendid creatures in the world – including in combat.

As regal creatures, the Mirrors have adopted the tiger as their yomi. Both are beautiful, dangerous, and self absorbed.

The sin of Mirrors is Vanity.

Chimes

The Court of Chimes believes that Fate itself is the cause of the war; only by defiance of Fate can the war end. They hone their powers to break the chains of Fate, using Mending to alter the world from its set purpose. This power has made them powerful players in the margins of the war, trading favors to both sides. When a seedling is not satisfied with her prospective Court, a Light magical girl cannot stand to see her mundane mother die of sickness, or a man decides he would rather be a woman, Chimes is ready to grant the wish. . . for a price.

Chimes acts as the neutral arbiter of many disputes. Many treaties have been hammered out in the smoky back rooms of their bordellos, and all parties come away satisfied. . . at least until the Dark’s inevitable betrayal. Fate, it seems, is not so easily swayed.

When the Chimes fight the Dark, it is because the Dark cleaves with sickening folly to the Fate of the Dark. Why must they Harvest? Why must they war? These things are nothing more than chains, and the Chimes will break all such Bondage.

As warriors of freedom, the Chimes have adopted the ryuu as their yomi. These dragon serpents are ancient, wise, and well versed in the ways of Fate. One must ask: when the Chimes partner with yomi so closely connected to Fate, are they truly learning more of their enemy or merely dancing to finer strings?

The sin of Chimes is Hubris.

Whispers

The Court of Whispers holds the secrets of the world in high regard. For these girls, the shock that they were magical girls was only the first of many revelations. What else hides further down? Those girls who fall into the Court of Whispers seek further mysteries and deeper revelations. What is the nature of the astral? Why are the Dark and Light connected, yet antagonistic? What causes one person to Become and not another? These mysteries compel them into dangerous places and more dangerous deals with ancient creatures.

Secrets, once discovered, must be guarded in their own right. Much of the lore hidden in the vast vaults of the Whispers Court is dangerous to the mind and quite possibly the world. As such, the Whispers have taken it upon

themselves to decide when a secret may be given out. They extend the Veil into an Orwellian state, launching entire campaigns of propaganda on a daily basis. They gathered the secrets; they get to say who should have them.

When the Whispers fight the Dark, it is because the oracles and seers of the Dark chase after the same secrets. What the Whispers keep from recognition of their own wisdom, the Dark wants only to use for its own foul ends. Only one Court should have the burden of such knowledge.

As the bearers of ancient and forbidden knowledge, the Whispers have adopted the sphinxes as their yomi. The riddles and tests of the sphinx are central to their hierarchy, and a Whisper girl who cannot solve the next riddle is doomed to her current station for life.

The sin of Whispers is Jealousy.

The Dangers of Twilight

The Twilight Courts represent a grave threat to the Courts proper. While the Dark may tempt any magical girl, its own villainy stands against conversions. To join the Dark, a magical girl must willingly surrender to that enterprise. Even a doubtful magical girl of the Light will have trouble stomaching the idea of the Harvest.

Twilight, on the other hand, offers all the benefits of the Light with none of the drawbacks. Want to use grey magic to stay perfectly pert and sixteen forever? Go for it! Want to use it to become fabulously rich and well regarded? Go for it! Twilight is self-indulgent, reveling in the power available to the Light with none of that silly, stuffy morality junk.

At its core, Twilight is a decision by a magical girl to put herself before others. Whether it's her own appearance, railing against the strands of Fate, or delving for secrets, she spends her time on pursuits based around her own interests. Twilight patrols are more concerned with neutrality and enforcing their rules than the protection of innocents from the Harvest.

This takes a quiet toll. Many girls join Twilight thinking there could be no harm. The Twilight Courts, however, stay roughly the same size every year – for the older Twilight girls are always perilously close to falling to the Dark. As the years pass in the pursuit of their own motives, the girls find that the mundane lives around them simply have less resonance than before. The Bonds seem less important to keep up. Given a potential lifespan of centuries and all the pleasures and surprises that could wait ahead, why should she risk her life against the Dark? More will just come along anyways.

Perhaps, in time, the Twilight will be able to find a balance. Perhaps it represents nothing but a passing damage to the Light, and in a few hundred years its Courts will merge with those already standing to form a new alliance. Quite simply, Twilight is simply too young as an organization to tell.

For the time being Twilight is regarded as a threat to young and impressionable magical girls and the Light Courts simply forbid contact. Too many have been lost already.

Too many whispers are already exchanged by teenage girls who grow tired of the slow pace of learning Light secrets and the stuffy necessity of actually doing the right thing instead of the exciting one. . .

GM Note: Themes of the Twilights

Twilight represents the strain of modernity on the ancient war. The Light is powerful and adaptive (in the sense of eons) but life has outpaced the Courts in these last hundred years. Technology has made leaps and bounds, yet the older magical girls in the Courts can remember the time of monarchs well. The ancient prayers of the Light have a deep and abiding power, a solace that reaches into one's heart and refreshes it like the spring from which a tree feeds. These prayers might take hours to complete and years to appreciate. They are absolutely incompatible with regular blips from one's smart phone. In time, the Courts will adapt to a world of social media and television, but few teenagers are known for their patience.

Twilight represents the fatigue of war. Magical girls are called above and beyond. They reject safety for war in the name of protection; they reject anonymity for responsibility in the name of righteousness. These are, without a doubt, wearisome endeavors. A magical girl should have the support of all her nakama and Bonds to draw from, but sometimes things go wrong. A few too many Bonds break, a few too harsh words are said, and she no longer has that family to draw from. As the strain grows, so grows the desire to retreat and care for her own wounds.

Twilight represents the temptation of power. Magical girls are magicians of a fearsome caliber, capable of rewriting destinies and standing firm against giant monstrosities. Yet they are told to age, when they can forestall that. They are told to ignore riches, when they can twist the stock market to their whims. Every magical girl slips a little bit (see "A shade of grey"), but sometimes a little taste only makes the pressure even worse.

The Wider World

Magical girl stalkers

Did you hear?! There was another fight on Central street last night? The cameras were on the fritz – again – and the police insist it was quiet all night, but the message boards are awash in pictures. Sure, they're a little blurry, but its proof! Besides, how else do you explain those new cracks in that alleyway?

David Hooper, head editor of Magical Girls: Reality on our Streets e-zine

By and large, the Veil and the Court's repair crews keep the secrecy of magical girls covered. Careful propaganda makes sure the general public sees magical girls as a phenomenon for idols, children, and unwashed geeks.

Ninety-nine percent success is not, however, one hundred. An underground network of self-styled reporters, journalists, weirdos and kooks maintain a vast ring of internet resources and social groups devoted to the reality of magical girls. These groups intermingle, overlap, and fight with all other manner of conspiracy theorist, magicians spelled with a “j”, and other occult groups. On the whole, they do a perfectly good job of discrediting themselves just by virtue of the company they keep. The Courts rarely have to get involved, though they do keep tabs on things.

Magical girl stalkers are, of course, right. A secret world of pretty soldiers and dire spirits exists. They can't seem to find any hard evidence, but just you wait. . . Meanwhile the internet trolls post photos of nude anime heroines with regularity: “Best proof ever!”

Stalkers come in two stripes:

1. **Out for kicks:** Teenagers, bored thrill seekers, tolerant friends. These investigators tend to spend most of their time poking around creepy, abandoned mansions and old shrines for the fun of it. They don't put too much real effort into the hunt. When they accidentally awaken sleeping yomi or stumble onto Dark plots, they're the ones who need saving.
2. **Professionals:** These are the people who *believe*. Maybe they witnessed an impossible event but somehow avoided the very persuasive words of the local repair crew. Maybe they have family members who vanished years ago, leaving only a cryptic note about a war, and they'll do anything to find their loved one. These are the journalists who invest thousands of dollars into top of the line surveillance gear and coordinate their searches. All too often, they make the perfect pawns for the Dark. Very rarely, they make allies for the Light.

Those stalkers who actually pierce the Veil face immediate danger. Dark magical girls have little compulsion about dominating an annoying private investigator until he can't tie his shoes without permission; worse, they often turn their puppets to finding the identity of Light foes. Certain yomi always enjoy gathering a cult or two, and they're not above a little bit of browbeating.

Even those seekers with good hearts tend to bumble into battlegrounds. They naturally want to help their magical girl friends, yet lack the extraordinary resilience that keeps a magical girl afloat in combat. They also hold the secret identity of their friend in a mind that is all too easy to read. . .

On a happier note, stalkers have a much higher rate of Becoming than the general populace. Perhaps the Light uses the trials of the search as a way to screen applicants, or perhaps the Becoming is karmatic reward for endurance in the face of scorn. Either way, few people are more likely to enthusiastically embrace his or her new life than a stalker. This can be a fast run down the short road to Twilight if the former stalker is more interested in the *appearance* of being a magical girl than the reality.

Propaganda, Rumors, Romance, Scandal

Can Pretty Pure Puffy Magical Minna overcome the Song of Sorrow and restore her friends to the side of good? Is her heart truly pure? She will have to give it her all to defeat the NegaQueen and bring the hope back to the city of Seacouver!

- PPPMM, airs Saturday mornings at 9:00 AM

In the modern world, propaganda has such a negative connotation, yet serves such a useful purpose. It inoculates the idea of magical girls as heroes in the minds of the public and reinforces the idea that they don't really exist. Children are always so willing to say what adults avoid seeing, and it is best if what they say seems to come from a cartoon show they watch rather than what actually happened.

Plus, should the Veil ever need to fall, the public will perhaps have a better impression after a few generations of nostalgia for Saturday morning cartoons.

The Courts own several media companies, and a surprising number of magical girl cartoons have a glint of historical accuracy to them. (The Dark probably owns rival corporations, which might explain the existence of certain magical girl shows with very depressing messages. . .)

Fiction is also a way that magical girls can express the tribulations and joys of their lives without breaching the Veil. By adopting the mantle of an author or comic artist, a magical girl can fictionalize her own accounts and receive a little bit of appreciation for all she sacrificed.

Of course, there was that one time a television yomi dumped a full troupe into a magical girl cartoon, but they prefer not to speak about it. That was just weird.

Mundane media propaganda is hardly the end of mythology for magical girls, though. That many teenage girls in one place? The gossip flies faster than the blows. The elders rebuke the most popular ones over and over, but gossip and rumor are not so easily suppressed.

The two most common insults among the young magical girls of Light are “naive” and “Dark touched”. The first implies a girl so saccharine she'd give a flower to a monster, and the second is for those worldly magical girls who are clearly already one step on the side of evil. The occasional screaming fight graces the Halls as two girls, ostensibly friends, have a public falling out.

The mentors usually wait until the hysterics are past to step in and help mend the frayed Bonds. A little screaming now and then is only to be expected, as long as it doesn't get out of hand.

Romance, on the other hand, is an extremely important subject. The magical girl world is host to strange combinations; this is a universe where a girl and a unicorn can fall in love. Conservative magical girls are going to have a hard time when they see just how common inter-troupe romances are.

The Courts have never been able to find agreement on how best to handle when two magical girls fall in love. Half the Court will adamantly insist that the girls separate so that neither girl is worrying for their lover's safety in the midst of a battle, while the other half insist that the lovers should share a troupe, the better for their loving Bond to strengthen the whole. In the former case, a soldier's mind may not be on the battle; in the latter, they must face the knowledge of danger to their loved one. The Queen's judgment has frequently been necessary to reach settlement.

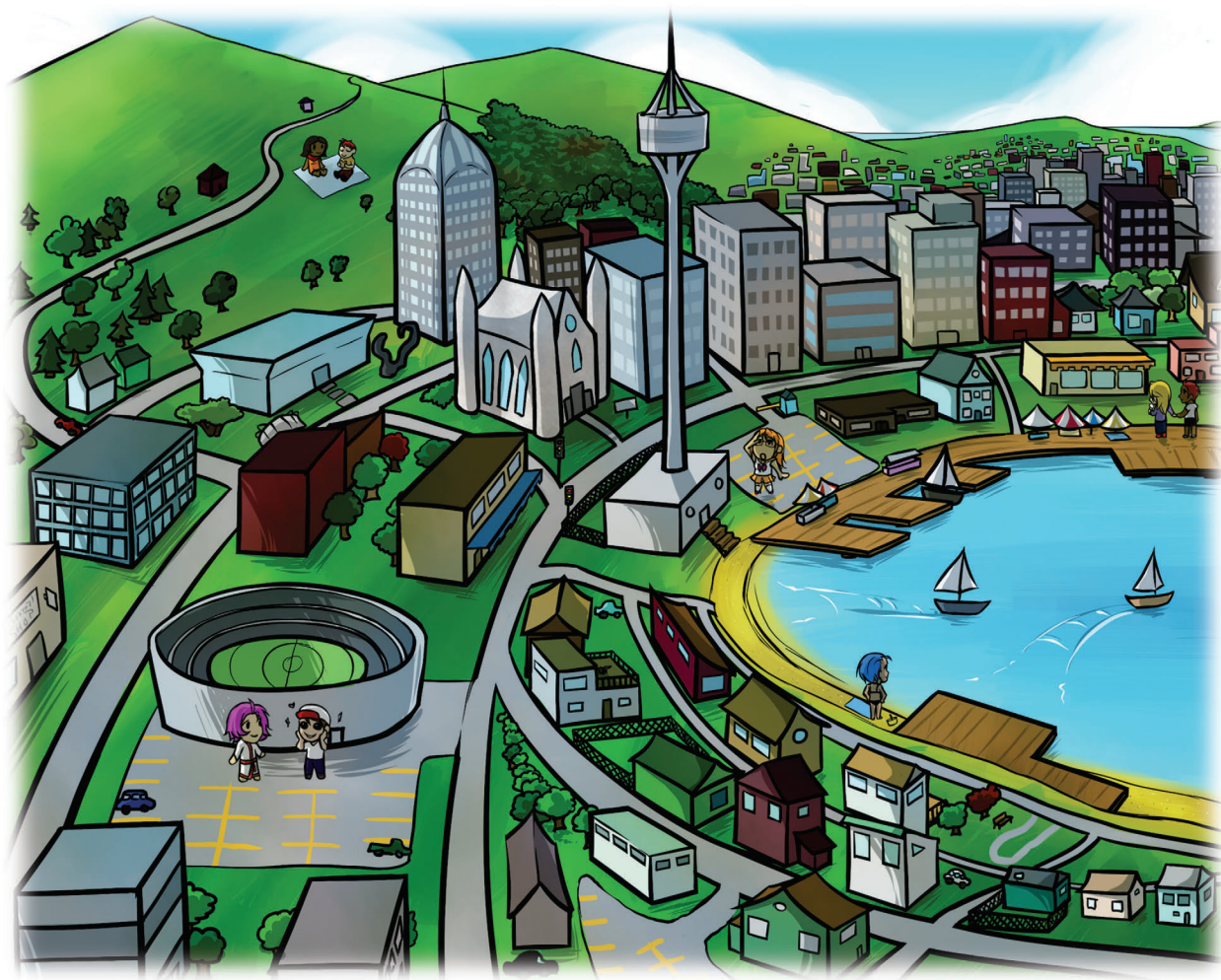
It is a bad idea to fall in love with a Dark magical girl. It is also forbidden.

Therefore, it is both the subject of juicy gossip and a surprisingly common occurrence.

The results of such a forbidden romance are a crashout. Girls have fallen to wretched fates for love; soldiers have redeemed the Darkest of hearts with a kiss. Dark soldiers have used the pretense of love to cruelly manipulate

the Light. Others have been revealed to have sincere Bonds despite all their hateful bluster. A soldier of Light who falls for a Dark girl is in for a world of trouble, both from her new sweetheart and from the disapproving seniors of the Court.

Scandal, on the other hand, is largely the providence of Twilight. A girl who falls to Dark is not scandalous as much as an outright betrayal. Twilight corners the market for that particular mix of forbidden and not quite treacherous that generates the best scandals. Perhaps a girl has been using her spare time to enrich herself after a few lengthy talks with a Mirrors friend. Perhaps an angry soldier arranges for her principal to lose her job in an act of petty revenge. Scandals rise when the best and brightest of the Courts fall to their own vices.



Cities

Seacouver

Half tourist trap, half seasonal enclave for the rich, Seacouver is a pleasant city to look at. The harbor shimmers in the morning, casting its glow onto the paved roads and brick shopfronts. An intimate town, built for long strolls and ice cream. Come visit today!

-Cheesy travel brochure

Seacouver sits somewhere on the northwest coast of America, at a convenient but unspecified distance from the other major hubs on that coast. It sits in a secluded bay filled with dolphins and whales in the summer. Just east of the city, mountains rise high and heavy with snow, peppered with ski resorts, and the occasional smoky plume from the peaks keeps things exciting. Due to the sharp hills, Seacouver has few suburbs, instead preferring modern high rise apartments in the walking-centered downtown area.

It is an upscale city with a great deal of amenities and a focus on the arts and tourism. Acting as a major hub for East-West travel, it has a sizable Japanese influence that is reflected in the school uniforms and Shinto shrines. All three local school districts are above the national average in scholastic achievement and sports (but the school year is long and the academics difficult enough to keep a magical girl up late into the night). The local university has been attempting to become a research institute, and perhaps it would manage better if not for the negative press from the small but vocal Study of Magical Girl Mythology department.

Sports dominate the recreational activity, from winter skiing to sailing. The bevy of cafes, creameries, and parks mean the youth of Seacouver have many public spaces to artfully lounge in, and the trends at the moment lean towards skinny jeans and the affectation of being a starving artist.

Those with less means in Seacouver live in cramped apartment high rises, sharing a one or two bedroom layout between the entire family, and work to support the thriving tourism or shipping industry. The luxury all around often spurs these families into sinking too much money on the appearance of being well off at the detriment of everything else, and a shameful number of teenagers need that part time job for more than just spending cash.

The travel brochures do not mention perhaps the most important feature of the city: it is the battleground of Light and Dark. The heart of the city, open and friendly, belongs to the Courts. The harbors and docks belong to Dark magical girls who use the industry there to smuggle their illicit goods. The Light desires a city of pleasure and respite, the better to bring hope to those who visit; the Dark sees lucrative profit in seamier trades and milking foolish tourists.

Oh, and Seacouver is home to three known great yomi shrines. The Light has one, the Dark has one, and the last one remains independent. . . for now.

Waterfall City

We have had many homes over the years. In past ages, we used literal forts and castles, the better to protect our mundane servants from the Dark. In this era, we defend with our words and our ideals, packaged as cartoons and shipped worldwide. Waterfall City is our bastion.

-Elizabeth Mercedes, Herald, Graces, CEO of Triple Heart Entertainment

Waterfall City is the most beautiful city in the world. Clear waters rush between its wide, clean streets. Well maintained public transportation means that cars are almost non-existent, and the economy thrums along on a mix of entertainment and the arts. It is home to the media conglomerate that keeps the magical girl industry flowing to the world yet suffers few of the drug and paparazzi that mar Hollywood.

As the home of the Light Courts, Waterfall City is blessed. While the Halls themselves exist in the fluctuating space of the astral, the city is home to the mundane corporations and supply chains that see to the Courts' needs. It is the bastion of the Light, defended with a zeal.

Vigorous public works and a strong safety net also make this city the safest in the world.

Unfortunately, the city's limited land and wonderful public works mean high taxes and expensive rental properties. Public housing assistance helps starving artists and college kids manage to stay afloat, but the waiting lists stretch two years out. Waterfall City's greatest failing is that it simply does not have space to grow any more. Not everyone can live in paradise.

The Dark has no presence in Waterfall City. As a result, older magical girls retire to the city in droves each year, looking for a little peace of mind with which to train their successors. The mundane people of the city may not know it, but they live in the safest place on the planet.

West

West is where naughty magical girls go to become naughtier, naïve ones go to have their ideals ruined, and desperate ones go to make devil's bargains. West is the sad reflection of Waterfall City – for there, the Twilight holds its eternal umbra.

-Janessa, Graces diplomat to the city of West

When a magical girl “travels West”, she does it with her face covered and her school uniform tucked away. It is a vice, a town of playthings and lights, and a Vegas for those with spiritual sight.

For mundane people, West is a small town with little to remark upon. It has a few casinos and bars. It attempts to drum itself up as a competitor to Vegas, despite the lack of celebrity appearance. Off the main street of flashing lights, the city fades into run-of-the-mill offices and suburbs. The city's largest claim to fame is its airport, a well used layover between major regional hubs, and its mild climate year round.

West caters to an altogether different demographic. It is, perhaps, the most magical girl-centric community outside of the astral.

Twilight and its twisted Courts rule in West, enforcing neutrality with the sharp points of their spells and wits. Here, the Light and the Dark in full regalia can only glare across the bars at each other, constrained by the intricate rituals of peace-binding (and the Twilight enforcers with no such handicap). Just beyond the mundane Veil, the city is alive with tension. . . and pleasure.

The bars on Main Street somehow twist their space inside, shuffling mundanes into a somewhat cheap watering hole. Magical girls step into the glitz and glamour that only Mirrors would devise. Every comfort a magical girl could desire can be bought in West, favors for favors. For those rich enough, ritual and pleasure can be bought with cash, but the figures are staggering and out of reach for the vast majority of people.

Perhaps because of Twilight's emphasis on worldly goods and pleasures, West has the unique distinction of being a magical girl bank. While the Courts frown upon such grey magic as enriching oneself and the Dark is sure to betray, West is more than happy to find ways to convert a Mender's healing or a Champion's prowess into cold, hard cash.

A magical girl must ask herself if feeding the same well that offers succor to the Dark is a moral move, and the Light never sits well in her breast while she remains in West.

As a neutral entity, West is also the de facto location for negotiations. The Court of Mirrors prefers to hold these diplomatic visits in the full splendor of their own Hall, reminding both Light and Dark of the glory a magical girl can achieve. These negotiations almost always break down into screaming and accusations, since it is virtually impossible to hold a Dark magical girl to her promises.

Virtually impossible, however, is a magical girl forte. . .

Dark Cities

The Dark does not claim territory. That would imply a level of compassion for the people who lived within those borders.

-Mirebelle, Valiant Champion

But where are the cities of the Dark? Where is their territory?

The Dark has not openly held territory in decades, not since the spread of modern travel. For a time, they held parts of the Soviet Union, but the magical girls of Russia beat them back. In this modern time, there are too many paths of travel both magical and mundane to easily lock down a city. While the Dark may have a lock on supernatural stealth, the Light allows such minor deceptions as a flock of magical girls arriving under guise of a school trip. Next thing the Dark knows, their territory is a pitched battleground.

Territory is a tactical loss for them. Though the Dark is quick, silent, and deadly, none of these help when one can be found on any map and attacked at a time of the Light's choosing. When the Courts gather their might and let the hammer of justice fall with singular purpose, the Dark in all its anarchic glory is scattered to the winds.

When the Dark has held territory, it has been because of the Dark Generals. Only a mighty commander of evil can whip the fiercely independent agents of shadow into some semblance of an army and then raise the wards across both the physical and astral worlds.

Perhaps one will rise again in these modern nights to lead a new crusade against justice and hope. Just as likely, however, a new Dark General would be a raging Mongol, leaving a trail of fire in her wake.

GM Note: Relative Location

No hard and fast coordinates are given for the cities above. This is for two reasons.

First, it allows the GM to set the cities wherever he or she feels comfortable. If you want to move Seacouver, Waterfall City, and West to Japan, then go for it! Perhaps you feel they should have the old world charm of Europe, and you want each city to have a thousand year old castle at its center? Sure!

Second, the astral paths make distance a much less important concept to magical girls. By using the Courts (or Dark equivalents) as magical relays, a magical girl can cover a great deal of ground in a small time. If the cities are thousands of miles apart but share crystal relays (*see page 46*), then a magical girl can still travel between them for lunch.

Astral Paths

Tread lightly, my young padawan—whaaat? Come on, don't give me that look. Okay, anyways. Tread lightly, my faithful student, for you walk amongst the dreams of the innocent.

-Amanda, Seer, Seeker, still terrible sense of humor after 50 years

The astral realm is a spiritual cloak that hangs around the world, echoing its features and carrying its past, present, and future. It is the spirit world, home to yomi and stranger beasts. As small children, everyone sees into it naturally. As adults, mundanes gently touch the astral when they have particularly vivid and meaningful dreams. As magical girls, a soldier can walk its paths.

The first step in a soldier's journey is an astral door. This is not a literal doorway, but a way of bringing her spirit into alignment with a specific place. Given time and patience, this is a simple ritual (*See page 82, **Rituals**, and page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, **Astral Jaunt***), often taught and well known. She must attune herself to the location where she wishes to enter the astral. This can be as easy as repeated meditation at that spot, not much different from the mundane practice of astral projection, and obtaining a fragment of the location in question. If the location has a difficult Aspect, however, she must overcome that before she can create a door.

Once the door is attuned, that magical girl alone may use it. If a troupe desires to use a single location, they must all complete the attunement. This is very helpful for escapes, but does tend to cause many fights in home territory to end in a draw even with a superior force. (Yomi shrines often have astral doors, locked with their natural magic against intrusion, and a silver tongued magical girl can often gain access with a few choice bribes.)

The ability to appear and disappear at a moment's notice into or out of the astral is the source of the "teleportation" stories about magical girls, the shadowy flicker and sudden vanishing from sight. In reality, the magical girl has simply stepped into the astral.

Once across the doorway, astral paths appear as corridors of mist, tunnels that fade into indeterminate grey in both directions. Holes in the mist reveal peeks of the physical realm, impressions of nearby minds, the dreams of the innocent, and other spiritual reflections. They act as means of travel for the magical girl in a hurry, reprieve for those who need to hide from battle, and deadly maze to those who travel unaware.

For magical girls, though, there stand five towering beacons: the Halls. Each Hall is visible from a great distance, though that term is somewhat vague. Perhaps the Halls should be said to glow in time with the hearts of those who serve, allowing them to perceive the beacon crystals when all else is lost. With her heart fixed and eyes ahead, she may walk through any path and eventually find her way home.

This won't prevent a hungry yomi from trying to eat her on the way, but at least she'll know which way to run.

The length of an astral path seems to have more to do with how many times it has been walked or how well the path itself is known more than mileage. After a few years, most magical girls can travel from their homes to the Halls inside of ten minutes. These paths are well trod and wide, more like a highway of clouds than a secret passage. The Dark too knows them well, but few are foolish enough to strike when they stand a heartbeat from the bastion of Light.

Sometimes, however, a magical girl wishes to go searching into the deeper astral. This is a dangerous feat, leaving behind the glimmering familiarity of the Halls. The astral paths grow small and gnarled, changing aspect from dirt tunnel to claustrophobic jungle to maze of school hallways. The deeper she travels, the stranger the inhabitants become. Human dreams grow scarce, and other things rise in their place. . .

The deep astral mixes past, future, and imagination in equal measure. It is one part collective unconscious, one part ancestral memory, and one part lurking place of ancient and powerful creatures. A magical girl may die in

such a place, but that is not the greatest danger. Her mind and heart must be guarded well, for the deep astral will pluck out her insecurities and use them against her.

A magical girl knows she is the deep astral when she can no longer hear the ringing of the Halls. In that moment, she and her troupe take a leap. They must rely on more primitive means of pathfinding: sympathetic magic, divination, or just plain guessing.

Thankfully, even in the deep astral, a magical girl can escape if she finds a crystal relay or a natural font.

Crystal relays are constructions of magic, growths of pure power that often reach ten feet tall. Each crystal relay has an Aspect and a corresponding physical location. As long as the Aspect is not antithetical to the magical girl's nature (like a Light soldier using a Dark crystal), she may transport herself through the crystal to that location. Some relays have astral doors on the other side; some do not. Depending on a magical girl's need, it might be preferable to emerge in the middle of the Himalayas versus staying in the astral.

Teenage magical girls like to tell seedlings a horror story. A magical girl wandered too deep, got into danger, and had to leap through a new crystal. When she emerged. . . she was in a different world, and nobody knew her! Contrariwise, there is a story about a beautiful crystal kingdom on the moon, a place of peace, eternal harmony, and true love.

Relays are very useful, but a real pain to build. Their construction takes a great deal of time (and a very powerful ritual) and generates enough magical noise to be obvious to even the most dull-minded enemy. Each Hall maintains a relay to outlying fortresses, monasteries, and important hubs. Beyond that, magical girls are expected to use mundane transportation.

Natural fonts are the inspiration for the crystal relays. All the benefits, none of the work. The only downside is that they appear only on their own whim, according to mysteries of nature. They typically appear as silvery pools of eerily still water whose reflection reveal the location on the other side. A magical girl must be brave or desperate to leap into such icy liquid.

The astral also brushes against mundane dreams, especially those of children, and as such is a frequent target of the Dark. Entire troupes of Light soldiers patrol not city streets and alleys but the corridors of sleeping minds. Seekers seem especially drawn to this kind of lifestyle, perhaps because of the intimacy with which they see other lives reflected in dream.

GM Note: Dream combat

The authors see no reason to recreate the wheel on dream combat. Movies like *Inception* and games like *Changeling: The Lost* have a great deal of inspiration for how to make combat in a dream or astral realm, taking advantage of the quicksilver scenery. Our advice is to try and make the environment become a character in the combat. A scared child's dreams should summon giant parental figures to swat at the battling magical girls like gnats. The confused dream of a student should force the magical girls to battle through math questions (a nightmare indeed!). The footing should be uncertain and the metaphors liberal for best effect.

More bluntly, dream conflict functions just like normal conflict, but with weirder scenery.

Locations and Aspects

The land has feelings every bit as much as us. Beware the Dark aspects that can taint the world around you. They will turn certain victory into crushing defeat.

- Ariel, Herald, champion, and teacher

These common locations are stock scenes for use in battle or as backdrop. Each location comes with two pre-established Aspects for players (and villains!). Suggestions are ways that the scene might evolve or further Aspects that the environment may be tagged with. They are a mix of positive and negative, depending on the situation.

Pros and cons in these examples are not meant to be a restrictive or exhaustive list of proscriptions. They are a launching point for the GM or players when they want to move the scene along.

An Example:

Suburban Park

A cheerful plastic and wood play set and sandpit tucked in between houses. Favorite evening hangout of rebellious teenagers.

Aspects: Happiness, Youth

Suggestions: Familiar territory, cherished memories; Nearby civilians, helicopter parents

The Suburban Park comes with the Aspects of Happiness and Youth. Light soldiers would want to protect such wonderful Aspects, while the Dark would want to negate them. The park, presumably in Light territory, resonates with the nostalgia of familiar childhood fun (positive suggestions), but magical girls need to be careful not to let an argument or battle escalate beyond the playground bounds or attract the attention of meddlesome parents (negative suggestions).

Seacouver Locations

Harbor Park

A harbor-side amusement park featuring booth games, a ferris wheel, a small roller coaster, and a children's area. Kitzchy, but cheap.

Aspects: Warm Memories, First Love.

Suggestions: Many rides, easy to hide in crowds; Well populated with witnesses, property damage risk

Abandoned Factory

Rusted and dusted, remnant of when Seacouver was an industrial town.

Aspects: Forgotten, Rotten

Suggestions: Room to fight, no risk of drawing attention; Creepy aura, possibly haunted

Shrine of the Benevolent Whale

A well maintained Shinto shrine on a hill above the harbor and a perfect place for whale watching in the summer. The gentle wind and shade cool and calm the heart. Hearth of a yomi, a sperm whale of great age and wisdom, who takes the form of the cantankerous old caretaker.

Aspects: Light, Wisdom

Suggestions: A retreat for the soul, guarded by the power of many yomi; None. . . if you're Light-aligned

Shrine of the Shrewd Raven

Tucked behind the mall, this shrine gives honor to the ancient and peckish raven. He has maintained neutrality in the great war since time immemorial, and he doesn't feel like changing now. Few creatures know more of the history of the world than the raven. . . when he's willing to talk.

Aspects: Neutrality, History

Suggestions: Lore of the ages; Equal opportunity betrayal, desired by the Dark

Shrine of the Rapacious Fox

Nestled deep in the hills, this shrine is perpetually shadowed by a pair of great, dead trees. Bones crunch underfoot, and the reassuring sounds of life are dim and faded. Something hungry lives here. . .

Aspects: Dark, predation

Suggestions: No guilt fights; Hungry predators, Dark-aligned

Waterfall City Locations

Triple Hearts Entertainment

A sleek skyscraper rises one hundred stories up, every floor dedicated to the spread of magical girl ideals. The employees may be mundanes, but everyone inside shares the mission of hope. Tours of wide-eyed children come along regularly to see where the magic happens.

Aspects: Entertainment, Hope

Suggestions: Massively profitable, spreading hope; Bureaucracy, slavishly long hours

Strong Heart Dojo

A private facility with a mysterious wait list, Strong Heart Dojo serves as premiere combat training for magical girls. A hundred acres of private land allow magical girls to leap between trees and practice all manners of useful skills, from the prebattle speech to mending the remnants of a fight. Thirty acres have been converted into a rigorous training simulation, complete with battle yomi.

Aspects: Training, Endurance

Suggestions: Every physical amenity, mentors of every discipline; A long way from friends and family, no free time

Pacific Wonders Aquarium

A hybrid of water park, exhibits, and education, this aquarium draws regular crowds of school children, and its darker corners are well known kissing spots for teenage couples. The well-funded facility boasts expansive tanks that offer peeks into the depths: squid, sharks, coral reefs. For those with sight to see, it also offers a glimpse into the ecology of ocean yomi.

Aspects: Water, secrets

Suggestions: Power of the deeps; monsters of many limbs

West Locations

Mysterious Pleasures

This dance club in the heart of West plays host to all the fun of the night life. Behind the screens, Eirwen Vaan and the Court of Chimes hold sway, trading transformations and Fates for a price.

Aspect: Neutrality, Callousness

Suggestions: Heavy security, reputation for fair dealings; Heavy security, strict house rules

Tokens Counting House

The TCH Bank converts the unique goods a magical girl can offer (like Light crystals or mending services) into cold hard cash. It asks no questions, even when perhaps it should.

Aspects: Riches, Greed

Suggestions: Access to wealth, heavy security; No questions asked, partner in crimes

Bountiful Youth Boutique

A day spa and resort, this business offers the promise of youth through an elaborate treatment of creams and saunas. If you pay the right people enough, it actually works.

Aspects: Youth, Vanity

Suggestions: Rejuvenation and restoration; Classism, artificial selectivity and exclusion

Common Locations

Dark Mansion

Shining opulence hidden well back from the road by thick trees. Underneath the glitz of gold are darker secrets.

Aspects: Corruption, Seduction

Suggestions: Privacy, freedom from worldly responsibilities; Lavish gluttony, deep Darkness

The Mall

Sanctuary of teenagers everywhere since 1975, this mall is worn around the ages but still bustles with activity on the weekends.

Aspects: Shopping, Fun

Suggestions: Sweets and ice cream, hunky boys and cute girls; Derelict shops, overzealous mall security

School Gym

This well-waxed building is home to many teenage hopes and fears

Aspects: Vigorous athleticism, Terror

Suggestions: Courtside moves, Cheer routines; Stress, bullying

School Cafeteria

Even at night, this cafeteria bears the faint stench of mystery meatloaf Monday.

Aspects: Unpalatable, Gossip

Suggestions: Pizza Wednesday, network of friends and Bonds; Patrolling security guards at night, civilians in the day

School Classroom

The focus of so much angst in teenagers, this classroom overlooks the fields.

Aspects: Education, Boredom

Suggestions: Teacher supervision, network of Bonds; No room to maneuver, school rules

School Rooftop

Bordered by a fence, the school rooftop is the favorite place to ditch class or eat a leisurely lunch. A small garden is maintained by the horticulture club.

Aspects: Sunlight, Rest

Suggestions: Summer breeze, privacy (for confessions!); Favored spots for truants, sweeps by school staff

School (Elementary)

Loud and colorful, this elementary school is full of memories of when school was actually fun

Aspects: Childhood, First Friendships

Suggestions: The belief of children, protecting the young; Immaturity and fear, mistrustful adults

Your Home

The heart of your life, whether it be a small apartment or a sprawling McMansion

Traits: Familiar Territory, Home Court Advantage

Suggestions: Close to one's heart; Sibling alert

A Loved One's Dream (Astral)

This intimate glimpse of a loved one's mind echoes with the events of the day from a different point of view. Careful where you step.

Traits: Bond of Love, New Point of View

Suggestions: Family affirmation, shared memories; Sibling infighting, old wounds

GM Section: Truths, Options, and Modifications

This section is for the Game master. In it, we will discuss matters behind the curtain: truths behind the mythology, variations on the great quest, and so forth. These options are presented as options the GM may freely cherry pick or ignore. If you happen to be a player, no fear, pick out a location or theme that appeals strongly to you and suggest it to the GM to add to the game.

The Light and the Dark

What is the true nature of the incredible forces that magical girls embody?

Sisters in the world before

In ancient worlds, long before the birth of the modern universe, the Light and the Dark were alive. That universe might have consisted of light and color instead of matter and space for all we know, but in some way, they lived. They were sisters, sharing a family, and grew together through the eons. They had recognizable personalities: the Light was compassionate, sometimes to a fault, and the Dark burned with the desire to make her will and wit known.

Like the universes before, their existence ended. Yet, somehow, these two survived their own demise. Their spirits did more than ride along in the new universe; they became a fundamental part of the cosmic tapestry. The Light and the Dark were transformed, written large across the sky, with power and wisdom too vast to physically enter their creation.

Eventually, the Light and Dark came to disagree. They fought as sisters do, but now their conflict echoed across the foundations of existence. The sisters could not raise arms against each other, not without undoing all that had been done, and so they agreed to settle their arguments through mortal instruments. The great quest represents a wide-spanning resolution to an argument that might be as petty as jealousy over who invented something first or as deep as fundamental disagreement on the purpose of free will in mortals.

This form of the Light is the most compassionate and most intelligent. She is a Goddess-Mother, watching over her children with personalized affection. For those in dire need, she may speak in her true voice, whispering in their hearts. For those who stumble, she forgives as mother.

The Dark, meanwhile, urges her champions to higher and higher feats of bravery and skill. Here, the Dark cannot be truly called evil. She treasures independence and freedom and seeks to see all forms of Bondage shattered. It is easier for this calling to devolve into evil, independence giving way to selfishness, but that is the choice of Dark soldiers. The Dark wants them to learn on their own and become strong of heart. This often results in particularly... brutal teaching methods.

The GM should use this configuration to encourage players to focus on healing and mending. Sibling fights are solved not by blows, but by understanding and compromise. The Bonds of family are writ large across the heavens. With the bravery of magical girls, even the Dark and Light might become one again.

Broken Gods

The hierarchy of yomi does not end with the ancients who slumber in the deep astral. Further and deeper, true Gods await. These immortal creators control entire domains of the universe. Light and Dark number amongst this pantheon, watching over the rise and fall of galaxies.

Character Option: Lightborn and Dark Gifted

For those players who are looking for a more intense roleplaying experience, we offer the Lightborn and the Dark Gifted. These magical girls are personally chosen by their respective patron and transformed body and soul.

If the average magical girl represents a hero, then a Lightborn represents Superman: a girl devoted to the absolute pinnacle of what they can be. Her heart rebels at the hint of a cruel act, and her tongue gags on lies. She puts her life on the line in the battlefield, knowing that she could never kill another, and the compassion that floods her veins makes her seem hopelessly naïve to the more jaded soldiers.

A player who wants to be Lightborn is looking for hard moral choices and a sense of destiny. How do you deal with the Dark and its Harvesting when violence makes you ill? What do you deal with a captured Dark soldier when imprisonment is cruel and magical Seals barbaric? What happens when you learn a dire secret that must be kept, and yet your tongue cannot lie?

Lightborn are pacifists in a state of war, lovers in an age old cycle of hatred, and dreamers in the face of crushing despair. Yet their compassion can draw earnest words from even a Dark-wrought heart, and their ears are open to the mysteries of the world that others ignore. They walk a path that may well lead to their own death for the sake of saving even those who spit in their face.

Whether the Lightborn are publically hailed as the greatest of soldiers or a secret to even the Queens is up to you, but a player who chooses this path has indicated that they want to change the world for the better by taking the hardest of roads.

Dark-gifted are a mysterious phenomenon, virtually unknown across a thousand versions of the world. Most magical girls, even Princesses and Queens, live and die without ever hearing the word. All that is known, by those few who harbor such secrets, is that a Dark-gifted is born when the Light freely offers a Spark to its sister at the moment of a magical girl's birth. . . and that the Dark gifted have both the power to save and to damn.

Perhaps one day a treatise will shed light on the Dark gifted. For now, they remain elusive.

At least, until the rise of Yormungand.

The God of Endings, Yormungand, the Great Foul Worm, grew tired of repeated creation. It thirsted for a meal that would sate the endless hunger of destruction, and it betrayed the other Gods. It devoured the Light and the Dark, ripping them to shreds in the grinding death-world of its gullet.

Light and Dark made one final play before their destruction. They placed their power and their hope in a tiny, insignificant species: humanity. The Sparks of Light and Dark lurk in every human heart, tiny fragments of godhood. A magical girl has awakened to the divinity in her own soul, harnessing its power.

One day, the Light and Dark will become strong enough through the actions of their incarnations to reform. The Gods will rise again.

And Yormungand will be waiting.

In the meantime, it amuses itself by carving a trail of destruction throughout the universe. It is not strong enough to bring about the absolute End of all things (though if it could truly absorb Light and Dark, perhaps. . .), but its foul spirit enjoys the wails of slaughter regardless.

(In the creator's first playtest, we used Yormungand as a form of periodic apocalypse. Every generation, the Foul Worm would return to destroy the Earth anew. Then the world would wink back into existence through the

contingency plans of Light and Dark. This cycle of doom continued forever, no one remembering their own end, and Yormungand relished finding new ways to bring about the End of Earth. At least, until the player characters arose. . .)

This form of the Light and Dark places the most emphasis on the players themselves. Though the Light and Dark are Gods, the power rests with each magical girl individually. The Light provides moral guidance by being an expression of the soldier's highest ideal nature, and the Dark tempts by plucking at the deepest temptations in her soul.

The GM should use this form when they want a game of overcoming a grand villain, saving the world, and ascending beyond the bounds of normal reality. Who knows – when the Light and Dark revive, perhaps they will take their magical girls as angelic (or demonic) servants.

Principles and Duality

The Light and the Dark represent the duality of the universe. They are the incarnate expression of Good and Evil, locked in a conflict that repeats as a cosmic pattern across the universe. Neither Light nor Dark hides a deeper nuance; they are cogs in a vast machine.

This is the most callous expression of the dual forces. The pattern is more important than the people, in this case. There must be Light, and there must be Dark. These fundamental pillars of the universe simply require warm bodies to enact them on demand. The Light may be compassionate, within its bounds, but it must obey its higher function. The Dark, on the other hand, has embraced its role as a villain with a clear conscience. Evil must exist, after all.

The GM should use this form of the Light and the Dark in a universe that requires a complete overhaul. When even the gods are shackled to a mechanistic universe, it is up to magical girls and their love and courage to free everything. If that should require them to charge to the gates of God himself, then that is what they will do.

GM Note: The Supremacy of Bonds

Even if the world must fade, love will endure.

Bonds are a force of Light – a manifestation of transcendental power. Through Bonds, a magical girl can survive the impossible. She can walk outside the world and survive beyond time. When a Dark plot rewrites reality so that she was never born, she may remain and fight to regain her place. A wise Dark general never assumes a magical girl is vanquished entirely, because even death sometimes steps aside.

Yet this very power has a side effect. If a magical girl can persist through various versions of her own world. . . how can she tell? What happens when reality rewrites itself around her? Here are some options:

Instant knowledge: In the simplest option, the Light provides full protection against shifts in causality. Any attempt to change a girl's timeline, even tangentially, instantly attracts her attention. If something changed, she knows what. She might not have the means to fix it right away, but she knows that she needs to.

Written to fit: Alternatively, the Light might insure that a magical girl always has a place in the world. . . but not necessarily the same place or even a place she wants. Changes happen seamlessly, but a soldier is sure to be puzzled why she has Bonds to people she has never met. . . and none to her family!

Left out of the loop: Painfully, the Light might provide no protection at all. A magical girl can be cast adrift entirely. Her entire mundane existence might disappear, and her own family might not recognize her. The world seems to pass her by, and she's not aging properly. She feels like she is walking through a fishbowl, because the world itself rejects her. People ignore her pleas, animals snarl at her, and sliding doors at supermarkets never open for her. Only through faith, hope, and the Light can she right this wrong and restore herself.

Fragments of past realities sometimes escape notice. A magical girl visits a strange shrine where she finds wishing letters tied to the tree. . . from herself. A seedling gets lost on the astral paths and meets herself – except a hundred years older and Dark. Strange books hide in the recesses of ancient libraries, telling of wars and histories that clearly cannot exist. . . so why does that picture of a bloodthirsty general match a soldier's mother?

In this area, yomi are unable to help. Yomi are creatures of Earth, tied heart and soul to the world around them. When the world changes, so do they. They always fit. It is the price of their power, a limitation on their wisdom. A yomi that becomes too curious for alternatives and no longer cleaves to the bosom of the world risks becoming something twisted and hungry. . .

If the Dark can create worlds – which includes rewriting the one everyone lives in – how does anyone know what the true world is? What if, somewhere in the million iterations of Earth, there lies a past where Light and Dark were allied?

What if, somewhere in the iterations, there lies a past where they were the same?

Powers

What are the powers that the Light and the Dark command?

The Light guards hearts and souls. The Dark concerns itself with dominion and physicality. Or, to put it another way:

The Light makes hearts. The Dark makes worlds.

Both are necessary for the function of the universe. Hearts without form cannot act; worlds without hearts have no more spontaneity to their actions than a model train.

Their interconnection even extends to Sparks themselves. The Dark cannot create Sparks; it must steal (or free, depending on who you ask) the work of its sister. The Light cannot save the world when it has been broken; it must trust that its shadowy sister will mend what has passed. For the world to survive, both must contribute to its continued existence. There is no avoiding the war by simply withdrawing: the ruins that remained would be suitable to neither.

The Light's skill with hearts is why magical girls gain power through Bonds. It is why a magical girl can rise beyond elementary forces like time and death, exerting her will across the ages. For a magical girl, remembrance is more important than health. Even a long deceased Queen might be called back to give advice by singing to the Heart that dwells beyond. Light magical girls are creatures of connection.

The Dark thrives on adversity and feeds on competition. It is the thrill of first place and the singing blood of a close race. Thus, it harnesses the power of creation to forge new contests. The limitations of the world are what make the contest interesting. Dark magical girls often see evil as simply another form of competition, and the joy of a fierce fight overrides the trifling worries of morality. Dark magical girls are creatures of creation.

As much as magical girls of both sides may feud with each other, their powers combined can shake the foundations of the heavens.

Perhaps, one must wonder, that is why they fight so. Perhaps darker forces still have a vested interest in the war lasting forever. . .

The Great Quest

How to defeat the Dark in four easy steps:

1. Imprison or Seal every Dark girl.
2. Purify Dark shrines.
3. Destroy the Dark fortresses.
4. Victory at last!
5. Cake Party!

Hidden History: When the Light Has Won

The dark fortress crumbles, and the Dark general has fallen to her own schemes. The rank and file of the enemy have been captured to be rehabilitated, and the yomi shrines have been purified.

The war is over.

Now what?

When the celebrations pass, the Halls must care for the world they have won. Yomi can still run wild, and dark (if not Dark) spirits can still tempt. The powers cannot be so easily relinquished, even if one chooses not to transform. The warriors remain.

Of course, the warriors know so much more than your average human. They're older, wiser, and stronger. With the Dark out of the way, it simply makes sense to implement some rules to help things along.

As the eldest micromanage the safety of the world, teenage magical girls with amazing powers sit around idle. Old proverbs prove true, and it is often harder to resist a touch of grey out of boredom than in a moment of need. After all, they *won*. Don't they deserve a place of honor in the world they saved?

The Halls, at their core, are a militant organization, designed in the face of war. Like so many mundane contemporaries, the transition to peace time is difficult and often overlooked. Elders keep the soldiers distracted by assigning them detail duty, safeguarding this shrine or guiding the heart of this mortal. The youngest chafe at the miles of rules and regulations now rendered moot by the peace.

Stasis. Stagnation. Moral arrogance. The imperatives that keep magical girls strong against a corrupting enemy turn inwards. Some magical girls obsess with purity, competing to be the most Light; others delve into the astral, seeking new thrills to replace the thrill of battles now gone stale.

Years pass, stretching like a long hot summer with nary a cool breeze. The Halls grow more and more rigid, for there is nothing to challenge them to change. . . and they always know right, don't they?

Then somewhere, in a heart dulled by boredom and stasis, a flicker of rebellion flares to life. . .

Hidden History: When the Dark Has Won

The Halls go dark, abandoned. Perhaps their crystal hearts are shattered and they fade to wild astral ruin. Perhaps the Light wards are too strong, and the Halls remain like a tomb, impenetrable and empty. The magical girls who once inhabited them have seen the truth of chaos or fallen to its power.

The war is over.

Now we can do whatever we want.

Maybe it would be fun to take over a country and puppet its leaders. Only problem is that other Dark girls have had the same idea. . .

Dark victory represents a dystopia of anarchy, destruction, and lost history. The Dark has always fought within itself as much as with its fair sister, and the dissolution of its enemy simply removes one of the few reasons for unity.

Who will keep the history of the hidden world when every Dark girl is on her own? Who will decide if the Dark should take visible control of the world, recognized as the gods they are, or lead from the shadows in safety from retaliation? Who will divide up the land and determine which threads of the world should be supreme?

Who will keep Dark scientists from probing ever deeper into the far astral, treading places where horrible things sleep?

When the chaos has mounted to such an extent that the world itself teeters on the balance, even a Darkened heart can look at the masses of terrified, mundane faces and feel a ping of guilt deep in her heart. Was this what she fought for? Is this the freedom she wanted – the freedom of terror and death?

Then a new way opens. A possibility of family and warmth lost in a world gone mad. . .

End the Cycle

The Great Quest is much harder than magical girls believe. Military victory may come at a high price, but it is achievable through effort and time. With no knowledge of the past victories of either side, most magical girls fight for total domination. They honestly believe that to be the way to a new world.

Wise magical girls may wonder, however, why they have been gifted with such ability to tend to the hearts and Bonds of the world when they are expected to brutally fight their estranged sisters. If the power of the Light is love, why is the victory against the Dark conquest?

Thousands of years of wounds on both sides obscure the hardest truth: to truly finish the Great Quest, the Light must *redeem* the Dark. The family must be mended and made anew.

Weirder and Wilder

So, why does a magical girl have to be a girl anyways?

She doesn't, really.

In fact, why does she have to be human? Why not a cat?

She doesn't, really. Nyan.

One of the wonderful things about magical girl anime is that they are seriously *weird*. These are worlds where a cat transforms into a girl into a magical super soldier to fight a house that a loud-talking werewolf made into a clown-nosed monster. Queens send their snot-nosed children back in time to harass their younger selves while posing as a sibling. Soldiers die and get over it at a rate second only to a comic book – and half the time that death is a power up!

Embrace the weird.

If one of the troupe has an insufferable little sister, do a body swap. Plunk your characters in the little girl's body and spend the entire session trying to keep the little sister from ruining the older one's social life forever. If you have a Dark opponent who keeps mouthing off, fix that attitude by turning her into a six year old. She'll have a hard time with the intimidation when she's in time out.

Feel uncomfortable playing a magical girl in romantic situations? Try playing a boy who only swaps genders when he transforms. . . or one whose girlhood is clothes-deep.

Send your soldier's husband-to-be back in time to deal with her as a baby.

Have a Dark plot turn the entire troupe into pretty boy Knights and let the steamy subtext fly.

Maybe it turns out the Dark general was Light all along, and the true enemy was the cute-seeming little animal sidekick that brought the troupe together in the first place. Have the foot tall plush dragon give an evil speech!

Pick one soldier to relive the same day over and over. . . and the rest of the troupe has no idea why she is acting so strange.

Space, time, death, gender, age – none of these stand a chance against the power of love, hope and justice.

Embrace the weird.

How to Make Characters

Now hopefully you've got a few ideas buzzing in your mind after having read the setting information. That's good! So let's dive right in to making characters.

The first thing we'll need to do is find out what kinds of relationships your character has with the other characters, places, and things in the setting. We do this by creating a **Bond map**. This is where that big sheet of drawing paper (or the like) comes in.

Bond Maps

A **Bond map** helps you bring the player characters (or **PCs**) to life by creating a complex web of non-player characters (**NPCs**, played by the GM) locations, and props important to your PCs. You're going to draw them in and then mark up their **Bonds** with each other. At the end, you should have a field of set pieces, MacGuffins, and interesting NPCs rife with dramatic opportunities. The goal of the relationship map is to create characters that are interwoven into the game world, interconnected with other characters and places.

It's important to understand that a Bond is not always positive. The enmity of a Rival qualifies as a bond, just as much as the love of a mother!

Declaring a Bond is a great way to shape the setting and the story. In addition to providing **hope points** (see *Aspects and Hope Points*) for the PCs, they're a way for the GM and player alike to remember how the character feels and interacts with the game world around them, as well as creating entirely new setting elements and future story seeds.

It's assumed that the other PCs will be your friends, but maybe they won't. Maybe these people are complete strangers to you as the game opens? Or perhaps your enemies...

Playing Knights (Boy magical girls)

As mentioned in the setting document, female Sparks outnumber males by 10 to 1. Still, there's plenty of room for a few dashing Knights. Genre expectations are a single Knight per troupe, if that, usually wooing half the girls at once. Discuss your vision of Knights with your group and make sure that a Knight will fall within everyone's comfort zones.

Knights take an extra Aspect: "Natural Loner". This reflects a brooding and mysterious nature.

Knights also gain an additional 5 Hope points in addition to their Bond points.

How Many Turns?

The next decision is how many turns you want to take when creating the Bond map. We recommend eight to twelve turns. A complex game of experienced players might have as many as twenty turns. An even number of turns works best so that players can show the relationships in both directions from the elements, but it's not required.

As the game progresses, new characters and locations will arrive. Feel free to revisit the Bond map to generate new and updated Bonds whenever the world has shifted. If you decide to have subsequent rounds, be sure to let the players know it's okay to keep the Bonds they have; sometimes it's what you hold onto during changing times that is most dear.

Squares, Circles, Diamonds, Triangles, and Arrows

As you develop the Bond map, you use different symbols to represent different things and people. These will be your **Bonds** – things, people, and places that are important to your character. More Bonds are always better for magical girls.

Players don't necessarily need to know all their Bonds at the beginning of the game. In fact, it's completely okay to write in connections to an item that you plan to define later!

- **Squares: Players.** Each PC gets a square in the center of the map. All the PCs should connect. Even if they don't know each other at the start of the game, this connection can give hints on how they eventually meet.
- **Circles: Non-player characters.** The GM is responsible for portraying NPCs. Encourage multiple players to create connections with given NPCs. The game is more fun when players share NPCs, even fighting over them, rather than having a set of distinct pet NPCs for each Spark.
- **Diamonds: Locations.** Scenery and settings that are important to your character, and by extension, the story.
- **Triangles: Props.** Items of importance to your character or the story. This includes heirlooms, magical trinkets, MacGuffins, and material life features like personal riches.
- **Cross: Secrets.** A twist to be revealed! This includes things like discovering a childhood connection or realizing a hidden allegiance. The secret may be publically revealed or shared with the GM privately. We do suggest sharing it with the group however, secrets are meant to be revealed in as dramatic a turn as possible! It's hard to do that if your fellow players don't know how to go about discovering your secret! You can also leave it unspecified if you just don't have any good ideas right now.
- **Arrows: Connections.** Note what the emotion and meaning of the Bond is by the arrow.

We recommend striving for a balance of NPCs, Locations, and Props. When it comes to Secrets, less is better. A single well-groomed Secret can be game changing, but a dozen Secrets littered all over the Bond map become more circuitous than a bad mystery story. Please don't spend the majority of your rounds making Secrets. Even though they're fun, we want to know more about your character!

Building the Bond Map

Now that you know what the symbols on the map mean and how Bond maps are drawn, time to actually draw one!

One at a time, players choose an action from the list below. It's important to note that the GM gets a turn too! They just don't get a PC. We recommend round robin order, though you can also have players gamble their slots if you want a bit of chaos. As players draw their arrows, make sure they label the new connection. Don't wait until the end to write the label, or you'll forget half of them! Continue taking turns until the group is satisfied. (If decisions slow down to the point that it takes several minutes to decide the next item, then that is usually a good time to declare enough Bonds for now and jump into game. You can always return!)

Map Actions:

- Create a new NPC (circle) and connect your PC to it
- Create a new Location (diamond) and connect your PC to it
- Create a new Prop (triangle) and connect your PC to it
- Connect any NPC or Location that you created to another player's NPC or Location
- Connect any NPC to any existing element
- Connect any PC to any existing element
- Add a Secret (cross) to an existing connection

Make sure players label their connections to the other players.

Veto

In a perfect world, a Bond map would emerge in a single hyperactive surge of ideas. Real creation isn't quite so simple. Even good friends can disagree on a new Bond when it changes the concept of a character. The rule for Bonds is simple:

If a player doesn't like the Bond, it doesn't exist.

If the player isn't comfortable with a hidden Secret sitting on a connection, it doesn't exist.

If you're not sure, speak up!

This is a cooperative game at the core. The PCs can war like siblings, but the players need to cooperate and respect boundaries. If you declare that a particular NPC is yours, it is yours. However, if your character's Bond map is completely isolated, then you should consider why you feel the need to protect yourself from the network. Building a wall between your toys and the game means getting left out of the plot!

Hope Points

Each Bond you have grants one hope point. If two players take a mutual relationship, both gain the hope point.

Fast Start

If you want to skip the Bond map, each character starts with 10 hope points.

Appendix 4 has example characters to fuel your imagination.

Go save the world in a fuku! You, that is. You wear the fuku. Not the world. (That'd be weird. Where would you even get a pleated skirt the size of an equator?)

Building Aspects

With your Bond map in place, you have a much better idea of your Spark's place in the world. We're going to use that information to build the framework of your character. Grab your character sheet and a pencil.

Aspects in a Nutshell

An **aspect** is a phrase or sentence that describes part of the essence of your character. Aspects include a personal motto, a personality quirk, a particularly important Bond you have with another person, place, or thing, or any other part of your character that stands out.

You change the story and the world through the use of aspects that represent your character's tendencies, skills, or problems. Like the Bond map, you can also use them to establish facts about the setting. This is particularly useful if you didn't get a chance to include all your ideas on the Bond map.

Your character will have a handful of aspects (between three and five), including a **trouble**. We discuss aspects in detail in *Aspects and Hope Points* below – but for now, this should help you get the idea.

Starting Aspect

Think of something really important or interesting about your character. Are they a reincarnation of a famous spark? Is their soul's weapon known by sight for a thousand miles? Do they talk too much? Are they filthy rich? Are they the Prom Queen of their school? Now you have your first aspect. Go ahead and write it down.

Examples: *Holder of the Rainbow Crystal Scepter of Queen Eulipia, Darling of the School, Teacher's Pet, Hidden Intelligence, Too Naive to Live*

Trouble

Your Trouble aspect is the thing that always gets you into **trouble**. It could be a personal weakness, or a recurring enemy, or an important obligation – anything that makes your life complicated. Don't be afraid to go big with troubles. Magical girls can learn how to fling cars, tame dire creatures, and leap the tallest buildings (without flashing!). When they hit trouble, it's going to be similarly hero sized.

The major difference between a trouble and other aspects is implication. For example, a girl might take "Beauty of the Midnight Sky" as either an aspect or a trouble. As an aspect, she implies that her beauty is a trait she can use to influence the world and define herself. As a trouble, she implies that her beauty causes problems, whether by making her vain, attracting jealousy of Dark girls, or ending up kidnapped on a weekly basis.

Examples: *Most Beautiful Herald, Secret Crush on Teammate, Romance with Dark Knight, Stolen Sword of the Dark Queen, Motivated by Love but not Justice, Failing Math Class*

Optional: One or Two Additional Aspects

We recommend adding another one or two aspects to your character, though you don't have to. In fact, you can take many more if you like! Limiting it to two can help choice paralysis and avoid draining your hope points from continuous invocations. A very useful choice is to make the name of your signature move or soul token an aspect, as you can gain free invokes from them in combat. (See page 66, **Invoking your Signature Move or Soul Token**)

If you prefer, you can leave one or both of these aspects blank right now and fill them in after the game has started.

Examples: *Initiate of the Scarlet Moon, Golden Tongue, Wealthy beyond Avarice, Entertainment Industry Connections, Impenetrable Silverlight Shield, Convinced Rose is going to die, Jasmine is too eager for battle, In Love with Jamie, Friends with Sizarl the Spider King, Spiral Love Twister, Golden Moon Wand*

Name and Appearance

Describe your character's normal and powered appearance, pick a theme for her costume, and give them a name. Choose the appearance of your **soul token**, the manifested element of your soul in powered form.

Examples: A giant sword, a bow and arrow of rainbow light, a crystal wand, a baseball bat.

If you're looking for inspiration, **Appendix 4** contains example characters which might help you generate ideas.

A note on appearances

A Spark's powered up form often looks slightly different from their normal form. It's not unknown for the first transformation to have a profound and lasting effect on the spark's appearance in both powered and unpowered forms. Usually this is mild, hair that becomes a more vibrant shade when powered up, eyes that change color slightly, and so on, but more extreme cases are not unknown. It's important to note that the changes are never unwanted or unwelcome though, merely surprising. When the Spark takes time to think about the change, it's always an outgrowth of some unconscious desire or belief on their part. The Light is not cruel to those who would fight for its cause.

Aspects and Hope Points

An **aspect** is a word or phrase that describes something special about a person, place, thing, situation, or group. Almost anything you can think of can have aspects. A person might be the **Greatest Swordswoman of the Courts**. A room might be **On Fire** after you hit it with a fire burst. After a run in with a Dark General, you might be **Terrified**. Aspects let you change the story in ways that go along with your character's tendencies, skills, or problems.

You spend **Hope Points** – which you keep track of with pennies, glass beads, poker chips, or some other tokens – to gain bonuses to your rolls. You **earn** hope points by letting a character aspect be compelled against you to complicate the situation or make your life harder. As mentioned earlier, you start with a number of hope points equal to the number of Bonds you have. If you skipped creating Bonds, start with 10 hope points.

Hope Points replenish during downtime to your **Bond strength** (the number of Bonds you have with others).

Hope Points **roll over** between games. There is no hard and fast maximum. If the players are sitting on a large number of points, the GM may wish to offer them a trade. Everyone's Hope Points reset to their Bond strength, and in exchange something fortuitous happens in the game world.

Example: You earned a lot of hope points during your game session, ending the day with fifteen. Your Bond strength is 10, so you'll start with fifteen hope points the next time you play. Your friend, on the other hand, ended the same session with just one hope point left. Assuming the ending of the session wasn't a cliffhanger with no chance for downtime between sessions, she starts the next session with 10 hope points, her Bond strength.

What Kinds of Aspects Are There?

There's an endless variety of aspects, but no matter what they're called they all work pretty much the same way. The main difference is how long they stick around before going away.

Character Aspects

These aspects are on your character sheet, such as your trouble and relationships with other characters. They describe personality traits, important details about your past, relationships you have with others, important items or titles you possess, problems you're dealing with or goals you're working toward, or reputations and obligations you carry. These aspects only change under very unusual circumstances; most never will.

Examples: *Most Beautiful Paladin; Secret Crush on Sempai; Ritual of Harmonious Purification, Rainbow Prism Heart Beam; Good With Kids*

Situation Aspects

These aspects describe the action scene. This includes aspects you create or discover using the “**create an advantage**” action. A situation aspect usually vanishes at the end of the scene it was part of or when someone takes an action to change it.

To get rid of a situation aspect, you can attempt a roll to eliminate it, provided you can think of a way your character could accomplish it: dump a bucket of water on the *Raging Fire*, use a ritual to calm the rage of a yomi who has been *Betrayed and Wounded*

Examples: *Bright Sunlight; Crowd of Angry People; Knocked to the Ground; Flooding room*

Consequences

These aspects represent injuries or other lasting trauma that happen when you take a Disadvantage. Often, these are caused in Conflicts, coming directly from what you were trying to accomplish or overcome. They go away slowly, as described in *Healing & Recovery*

Examples: *Sprained Ankle; Fear of Spiders; Concussion; Debilitating Self-Doubt, Terrified of the Dark warrior Obsidian Scythe*

Boosts

A boost is a temporary aspect that you get to use once (see “*What Do You Do With Aspects?*” next) before it vanishes. Unused boosts vanish when the scene they were created in ends or when the advantage they represent no longer exists. These represent very brief and fleeting advantages you get in conflicts with others.

Examples: *Unsure of Her Backup; Distracted; Unstable Footing; Blinded by Sand; Rock in His Boot*

How many Hope Points Does the GM Have?

As GM, you don’t need to track hope points for each NPC, but that doesn’t mean you get an unlimited number. Start each game with a pool of three hope point per PC per scene. Spend hope points from this pool to invoke aspects (and consequences) against the PCs. When it’s empty, you can’t invoke aspects against them. This might seem like far too few, but remember, your antagonists aren’t losing HP when they’re hit like PCs.

How can you increase the size of your pool? When a player compels a scene’s aspect or one of an NPC’s aspects, add the hope point to your pool. (You can call it a Despair pool if it helps.) Hope points you award for compels do *not* come from this pool. You never have to worry about running out of hope points to award for compels.

Aspect Actions

There are three big things you can do with aspects: **invoke**, **compel**, and **establish facts**.

Invoking Aspects

You **invoke** an aspect to give yourself a bonus. You can invoke any aspect that you **know about** and **can explain** how you use it to your advantage – including aspects on other characters or on the situation. Normally, invoking an aspect costs you a hope point – hand one of your hope points to the GM. To invoke an aspect, you need to describe how that aspect helps you in your current situation.

- *I attack the zombie with my sword. I know zombies are **Sluggish**, so my blazing fast strikes should work really well*
- *I really want to scare this guy. I’ve heard he’s **Scared of Mice**, so I’ll release a mouse in his bedroom*
- *Now that the guard’s **Distracted**, I should be able to sneak right by her*
- *The Dark girl is **Buried in Debris** from the collapsed ceiling, so I can get away before she digs out*

What does invoking the aspect get you? For the cost of one hope point, choose between:

- Add a +2 bonus to your die roll
- Aid a friend's roll. Invoke your aspect to give them the +2 bonus.

Important: You can only invoke any aspect **once** on a given die roll; you can't spend a stack of hope points on one aspect and get a huge bonus from it. However, you *can* invoke several *different* aspects on the same roll. If you're invoking an aspect to add a bonus, wait until *after* you've rolled to do it. No sense spending a hope point if you don't need to!

Free invocations: Sometimes you can invoke an aspect for free, without paying a hope point. If you create or discover an aspect through the "**create an advantage**" action, the first invocation on it (by you or an ally) is free (if you rolled an 8 on your die when creating the advantage, you get *two* freebies). If you cause a consequence through an attack, you or an ally can invoke it once for free. If the aspect is a **boost**, it vanishes after the free invocation.

Aspect Advice

If you're still not really clear on what Aspects are even for, well, they're the director's prompts the players can yell at the screen. They're to tell the game "No, that's NOT how the story goes!" and let the player direct the actions the way it should have gone, and will go now that they've made their opinion known. Hope points are for players too, not just the characters. Make the story come out the *right* way, the way it *should* have come out. That's what being a Spark means.

Invoking your Signature Move or Soul Token

There is a special exception to the cost of invoking an aspect. If you are in combat, and you (the player, not the character!) declare your attack's name/style out loud, **once per session** you get a free one time invoke of that aspect. This assumes that you made your signature attack move or soul token an aspect, of course. . . you can't invoke an aspect you don't have.

Compelling Aspects

If you're in a situation where having or being around a certain aspect means your character's life is more dramatic or complicated, anyone can **compel** the aspect. You can even compel it on yourself! Compels are the most common way for players to earn more hope points. There are two types of compels.

Decision compels: This sort of compel suggests the answer to a decision your character has to make. If your character is *Princess of Champions*, for example, you may need to stay to lead the defense of the Court rather than fleeing to safety. Or if you have a *Defiant Streak a Mile Wide*, maybe you can't help but mouth off to the Queen when she questions you.

Event compels: Other times the compel reflects something happening that makes life more complicated for you. If you have *Strange Luck*, of course that ritual you're working on in class accidentally makes your mentor's yomi loose its fur. If you *Owe Darkling Valdeon a Favor*, then the Dark Knight shows up and demands that you perform a service for him just when it's least convenient.

In any case, when an aspect is compelled against you, the person compelling it offers you a hope point and suggests that the aspect has a certain effect – that you'll make a certain decision or that a particular event will occur. You can discuss it back and forth, proposing tweaks or changes to the suggested compel. After a moment or two, you need to decide whether to accept the compel. If you agree, you take the hope point and your character makes the suggested decision or the event happens. If you refuse, you must *pay* a hope point from your own supply. If this brings you to zero, you must fray a Bond to refresh your hope points or collapse, taken out of the conflict.

Establishing Facts

The final thing that aspects can do is **establish facts** in the game. You don't have to spend any hope points, roll dice, or anything to make this happen – just by virtue of having the aspect ***Executive at Three Lions Publishing***, you've established that there is a publishing company called Three Lions and that you are an executive there. Having the aspect ***Mortal Enemy: The White Ninjas*** establishes that the setting has an organization called the White Ninjas and that they're after you for some reason. (Did you make an enemy of the Hollywood ninja guild?)

When you establish facts of the setting this way, make sure you do it in cooperation with other players. This is why character creation flows better when everyone knows each other's aspects, even if (or *especially* if!) the *characters* don't know of the aspects. Don't make an aspect that clashes or conflicts with what other people want out of the game. Likewise, if someone proposes such an aspect, speak up. Make sure that the facts you establish through your aspects make the game fun for everyone. Otherwise you'll strain the real Bonds around the table.

Composing Good Aspects

When you need to think of a good (character or situation) aspect, think about two things: how it helps (when you would invoke it) and how it hurts (when it compels you)

For example:

“Obsidian will face justice, by my hand!”

- Invoke this when acting against or chasing down Obsidian to improve your chances.
- Get a hope point when your desire to bring Obsidian to justice for her misdeeds makes you do something foolish to try to get her.

“Whatever you want is fine...”

- Invoke this when being overlooked or self-effacing would help you.
- Get a hope point when this causes you to go along with a problem rather than make a fuss

Obviously, your trouble aspect is supposed to cause problems – and thereby make your character's life more interesting and get you hope points – so it's okay if that one's a little more one-dimensional, but good character and situation aspects are double-edged.

Optional Extra: Fan Mail

Instead of handing the GM the hope points you spend when you invoke one of your aspects, or compel another player's aspect, you may opt to put the spent hope point in the “fan mail” pool. This is a pool of hope points that you may give to other players (not yourself!) when they do something particularly entertaining, cool, dramatic, or makes the session and story better for everyone. Anyone may give a hope point that's in the fan mail pool to another player, though the GM isn't allowed to touch the fan mail points. She can't get them, and can't give them, so don't be stingy with them. If there's fan mail points left in the pool at the end of the session, they go away, nobody gets them. If you use this option the GM will be short of hope points, so they should get 10 extra to start.

One caveat: hope points that are spent to compel scene or NPC aspects go to the GM instead of the fan mail pool.

Suggested Optional Extra: Character Arc Aspects

When you create your character, think about the kind of story or plot you'd like them to be involved in. Maybe you're a big fan of ending the Dark Queen of Nightmares hold on children's dreams? (And also having a Dark Queen of Nightmares to defeat, one presumes!) Consider the aspects "The Fall of the Nightmare Queen" or "Big Boss Buster". Maybe you want your character to struggle with the dilemma of personal friendship vs family expectation? Consider taking the aspects "Family vs Friends" or "My Heart or my Honor". Think of these aspects as the central conflict of a story you want your character to experience.

You can draw on these aspects when your character is doing something related to them, just like any other aspect. In addition, you can invoke them for free once a session (provided they're relevant of course). They also give your GM a head's up. "Hey, I'd really like to have this be a thing in our game."

Character Arc Aspects are extra aspects you can take in addition to those you chose at character creation.

Getting Better at Doing Stuff: Character Advancement

People change. Your skills sharpen as you practice them. Your life experiences accumulate and shape your personality. *Sparks* reflects character advancement with **milestones**, a chance to update your aspects.

Milestones

Stories in TV shows, comic books, movies, and even video games usually continue from episode to episode, season to season. It took Frodo three big books to take the Ring to the fiery mountain. It took Aang three seasons to defeat the Fire Lord. You get the idea. *Sparks* can tell those kinds of stories; you play many game sessions in a row using the same characters – this is often called a **campaign** – and the story builds on itself. But within these long stories, there are shorter story arcs, like single episodes of a TV show or single issues of a comic, where shorter stories are told and wrapped up. *Sparks* can do that too, even within a longer campaign.

In *Sparks*, we call those wrap-ups **milestones** – whether they're small ones for short stories or really big ones at the end of many sessions of play. There are three types of milestones.

Minor Milestones

A **minor milestone** usually occurs at the end of a session or when one piece of a story has been resolved. Rather than making your character more powerful, this kind of milestone is about changing your character and adjusting in response to whatever's going on in the story. Sometimes it won't really make sense to take advantage of a minor milestone, but you always have the opportunity in case you need to.

At a minor milestone, you can choose to **rename one aspect** that isn't your high concept.

Significant Milestones

A **significant milestone** usually occurs at the end of a scenario or the conclusion of a big plot event (when in doubt, at the end of every two or three sessions). Unlike minor milestones, which are primarily about change, significant milestones are about learning new things – dealing with problems and challenges has made your character generally more capable at what they do.

In addition to the benefit of a minor milestone, you may **take two turns on the Bond map**, thus increasing your hope points.

Major Milestones

A **major milestones** should only occur when something momentous happens in the campaign: the end of a big story arc, the final defeat of a main villain, or any other large-scale change that reverberates around your game world. These milestones are about gaining more power. The challenges of yesterday simply aren't sufficient to threaten these characters anymore, and the threats of tomorrow will need to be more adept, organized, and determined to stand against them.

Achieving a major milestone confers the benefits of a significant milestone *and* a minor milestone. In addition, you may take an additional 4 turns on the Bond map for a total of **six turns on the Bond map**. You may also **rename your character's high concept**.

Changing the World

Players have several options when they wish to accomplish a goal:

1. Roll a conflict
2. Create an advantage
3. Apply hits (combat)
4. Cast a magic ritual
5. Negotiate without rolling

Conflicts are the most general case. They cover anything from mundane skills like Math to magical skills like yomi taming.

Advantages are how magical girls shape the world around them and interact with the aspects of a scene directly.

Hits represents tense situations against opposition. Combat might be physical blows, a heated argument, or mental tests of willpower.

Rituals allow magical girls to dramatically change the world at the cost of Hope Points. These take time and concentration, but they offer unique effects far beyond laser beams.

Finally, the players may at any time **negotiate** with the GM and other players for events to play out in a predetermined fashion. This is especially useful if a player wants to play out an angst arc. Players shouldn't ever intentionally fail a roll to get their drama on. If you think it would be fun to get kidnapped, bring it up!

Conflicts versus Hits?

The difference between conflicts and combat is that combat is an actively opposed situation where the magical girls need to exceed a success threshold or suffer a failure.

Conflicts

Conflicts, advantages, and hits all use an **eight sided die** to determine the outcome. (We will call that a **d8** from now on.) Players should roll when the outcome of an event is in doubt and *important to the story*. Add in any bonuses from aspects and compare the results against **Conflict Result Chart**.

Only the player ever rolls a die. If the GM wants to give the player some trouble, they can tag an aspect and give the player a Hope Point.

As you can see, there are 4 possible results, **Success** with a **bonus**, **Success**, **Success** with a **Disadvantage**, **Twist**, & **Twist** with a **Disadvantage**. Let's take a look at what those mean.

Conflict Results Chart

8:	Success with Bonus
7:	Success
6:	Success with Disadvantage
5:	Success with Disadvantage
4:	Twist
3:	Twist
2:	Twist
1:	Twist with Disadvantage

Success

A success represents your triumph, big or small. You accomplish your stated goal. The GM and other players can embellish or add details, but **they can't add anything that takes away your victory**. The GM is responsible for determining how your triumph and the overall story line up. If a success isn't possible, the GM needs to let the player know *before* the roll.

Success with a bonus

For those of you from other roleplaying systems, a **Success** with **bonus** is like a critical success. You get the outcome you desired, and then you get an additional bonus something that you weren't trying for. What is it? Well, that depends on what you were trying to do, how you were doing it, and a whole lot of other factor. Perhaps the biggest is "What would be really cool for the story right now?" It could just be that your success was beyond what you'd aimed for, or it could be a boon that is tangential to the action you were taking.

The team entire team and the GM may provide options for a good bonus. In the end, though, you choose your bonus.

The only caveat is the scale of your bonus. Don't ask for something that is wildly inappropriate or world spanning. Other players and the GM can veto your bonus if it breaks all the rules or ruins the story. This is your chance to be cool and have something cool happen, it's not a free pass to ruin everyone else's fun. Work with your fellow players (and that definitely includes the GM) to make the game better.

Example: *Soldier Melody is trying to confess her affection to a Knight. She writes the confession letter and presents it to him. The GM has the player roll a die to see how well she does. Wanting this to be a successful event in the story, the player asks if they can spend a hope point on the Knight's aspect "True Romantic". The GM agrees. Thanks to the bonus, the player's result of a 6 becomes an 8.*

The GM suggests that, as a bonus, the Knight was secretly interested in her as well. Another player suggests that the Knight has important information about the Dark he can share with the roller. Being a romantic, the first player chooses the GM's option. Thus, the Knight soon confides that he has noticed her as well, and they set up a doki-doki first date.

Twists

A **twist** means that you don't succeed as you wanted. This might mean that your apparent success had a side effect or that you simply flubbed your action. The key point is that **the twist must change the situation**. Twists are

there to shake things up. Maybe an unexpected foe shows up, the environment becomes unstable, or an embarrassing secret leaks out in the heat of combat. Regardless, you should never just be able to reroll the same conflict.

As a guideline, consider that the lower the result of the die roll, the worse the position the twist will put the character in. A result of a 4 is almost a success, while a result of a 2 is going to really sting.

Example: Soldier Harmony is trying to talk Obsidian Spike, a dark magical girl, into releasing her Yomi slaves. She rolls a 4. Obsidian laughs mockingly at Harmony's "hopelessly naive prattle" and gives a monologue about her plans before teleporting away. Harmony did not succeed in getting Obsidian Spike to release the Yomi, but she now has a clue as to where Obsidian plans to strike next and why. If Harmony had instead rolled a 2, Obsidian might very well have forced the Yomi slaves to attack Harmony, giving her a difficult fight and a troubling dilemma. Will she fight the Yomi she came to save to stop Obsidian?

Who Narrates the Twists?

Ideally, everyone! It's a lot more fun to get your character into interesting and dramatic jams than to try and slip out of them by downplaying your failures! It's traditionally the GM's responsibility to narrate what the results of the twist are, but the GM can't just say you do something that goes completely against your character. If Soldier Harmony doesn't like strawberry ice-cream, then a Twist result in the ice cream shop is not going to suddenly make her consume a pint of the stuff! (It *might* make her buy some of that mint chocolate chip and ruin her diet though...)

In our system, think of the d8 as a dynamic writing prompt, not a judge. It's not about rolling the die to find the arbiter of the outcome. The die is there to give you a launching point for your contribution to the scene. That's why most results have either a twist, an advantage, or a disadvantage. We're not interested in the players spending 10 rounds chipping away HP from a monster block. Short and dynamic is better!

Disadvantages

A **Disadvantage** is a new aspect that you take to represent being (no shocker) at a disadvantage. Perhaps the counter attack of the Yomi has *Injured* you. Perhaps you are *Furious* that your best friend is being threatened by the dark magical girl. Perhaps you're simply *Scared* of the Yomi enemy.

Disadvantages don't have to be all about combat. A disadvantage could also be a condition like *Lost* if you ran away, or *Broken Hearted* if you were confessing your love to someone who rejected you.

Disadvantages are usually applied by the GM, though standard veto rules apply.

Disadvantages can be tagged by your foes (represented by the GM) in a conflict, giving you a -2 for each aspect tagged. (You'll receive a Hope Point for this, of course.) Fair warning, tagged disadvantages stack, so if you've got three disadvantages and your opponent tags all three for a conflict, you're going to be at a negative six! You'll want to get rid of disadvantages as quickly as possible. We'll handle how to do that in *Getting Better and Calming Down* below.

Example: Let's look at Soldier Melody's confession to the Knight from the example above again. Say she hadn't known that the Knight was a True Romantic or forgot to tag it. She rolls a 6. That's a success with a disadvantage. She gives the letter to the Knight, but he replies sadly, "I'm sorry, Melody, I've already promised to attend the dance with Herald Sunlight. If... if you had asked me sooner..."

The GM suggests that Melody's player choose between two disadvantages: "Jealous of Soldier Sunlight" or "Furious at Herself". Melody's player chooses the latter. She narrates her character quaking in anger with the letter clenched in her fist, cursing herself for waiting too long on love.

Advice for Generating Outcomes

It can be difficult for the GM to spontaneously generate outcomes for every die roll. One way to approach the problem is to treat each player roll as a question. The answer to the question is one of 'Yes and', 'Yes', 'Yes but', 'No but', 'No', or 'No and'. So, for example, some possible answers to the question "Do I pick the lock on the Dark girl's diary?" could be:

- "Yes, you pick the lock, and within moments you find the entry that you were looking for. "
- "Yes, you pick the lock. The diary is thick and filled with lots of entries. What next?"
- "Yes, you pick the lock, but you hear the sounds of the Dark girl's heels in the hallway outside. What do you do?"
- "No, the lock is too complex. But as you turn away from the diary, you spot an interesting photograph on her dresser. It looks important to her. . . "
- "No, the lock is too complex for you. If you stay much longer, the Dark girl is sure to find you. What do you do?"
- "No, and as you try the lock pick snaps, leaving obvious traces over the diary. The Dark girl is sure to know you were here. What do you do?"

None of these outcomes should stop the story. **Fail forward.** If there is critical information in the Dark girl's diary and no other way to get it, *then every roll should result in the heroines getting that information.* You should not let a roll result stop the story, but that doesn't mean that things can't become *interesting* for them with a failure. Perhaps if they fail, they duck out of the Dark girl's room (with the diary) and the Dark girl is waiting for them. Perhaps the Dark girl has set a cunning trap on her diary and is now hunting down the heroines. Perhaps it's as simple as the fact that they fail to find the information they were looking for, but they found another clue which leads them forward in the story.

The key to a good outcome is options.

When NOT to Roll

Not every roll is a good one. The game needs consistency based on the capabilities of the characters. Magical girls can leap high easily. With the right ritual, they might fly to the moon. Yet they cannot declare that they jump to the moon. If your magical girl happens to have wings, she can probably fly, but no amount of arm flapping is going to substitute.

By the same token, rolls can be trivial. If your character is a renowned young musician, you probably don't need to roll to have a good performance at a recital. Even magical activities don't always need a roll. An experienced magical girl has no reason to fear shifting into the Astral in the morning. If the failure state for a roll is "try again with no penalty", why bother to roll at all?

One of the GM's many duties is to determine when a roll lands outside the realm of the possible, even for magical girls, or when an activity can succeed simply to keep the game moving. The challenge of negotiating with a wild Yomi for directions might be thrilling to a seedling, but a Princess can probably succeed by virtue of a hundred years' experience.

Creating an Advantage

Creating an advantage is about changing the scenario. You may do this during normal conflicts or during magical combat. You give up a direct conflict roll in exchange for insights or updates to the scene. Use this to build up steam against your opponents, support your friends, or level the playing field.

An advantage is anything you do to try to help yourself or one of your friends. Taking a moment to aim your Sunshine Heart Beam, spying on your best friend's crush to figure out who he likes, spending several hours doing research in the school library, or having a sudden insight in the middle of battle into why the Dark magical girl went Dark – these all count as creating an advantage. The advantage you create lets you do one of the following things:

- Create a new situation aspect. You get a free invoke of that aspect next turn, or you may hand it to a friend for a free invoke this turn. Teamwork!
- Remove an existing situation aspect. This means it can't be invoked against you now.
- Discover an existing aspect that your character didn't know about either the situation or another character. Remember, you must know an aspect to invoke it!
- Set up a called shot for next turn against an enemy's character aspect. This functions as a free invoke of the declared aspect next turn. (You do not have to spend the Hope Point). This saves you on HP at the cost of time.

Just as with conflicts, you may use Hope Points to boost your roll to create an advantage. Maybe your *comforting* song leads the *innocent* bystanders to safety, or your *brave heart* gives you the strength to brave the fire and turn on the sprinklers.

Once you've rolled, don't forget to add your new aspect to the scene on a sticky note or card!

Advantage Results Chart

8:	Two aspects with free invoke
7:	Aspect with free invoke
6:	Aspect with free invoke
5:	Aspect with free invoke
4:	Aspect but enemy invokes
3:	Aspect but enemy invokes
2:	Aspect but enemy invokes
1:	Aspect but enemy invokes and gets an additional invoke against your Trouble

Working as a Group

Sparks does not have a defined initiative order for conflicts or combat. In the interest of fairness, we expect everyone to get a turn, but the order is up to the group. That means it makes good sense to have your first magical girl or two focus on creating advantages for their friends to immediately use. If for some reason the group can't decide who should go first, have everyone roll a d8 and go in that order.



Hits (Combat)

In the normal course of things, you only need one roll to determine the outcome of a conflict. But when the stakes of the conflict are emotional or physical harm, then the **hits** start to fly. “Combat” does not necessarily mean kung-fu moves, blasting, and shooting. It can also mean a big argument between friends or a really hard test. An insult, a blow to confidence, or a bout of self-doubt all count as hits every bit as much as bruises. Often times, the arguments and the attacks blur together, especially in a high stakes battle royal at the end of the story arc.

Combat is resolved through a series of rolls instead of just one. The goal is to score enough **hits** on your opponent to defeat them. The table to the right summarizes these results. An 8 or more inflicts 2 hits on your opponent. A 5-7 on the die scores one hit. On a 5, you inflict a hit, but you take a disadvantage. A 2-4 has no effect. On a 1, you score no hits, and you gain a disadvantage.

When you’re fighting in a group, each person’s hit results count towards the total number of hits required to defeat the opponent.

After all the players have rolled and narrated their results, any opponents still standing inflict their **damage rating** on everyone who participated in the combat. The value of the damage rating is subtracted from the character’s hope points. When a spark loses hope points, it isn’t necessarily bodily damage or wounds. Thanks to the potent defenses of regalia and soul tokens, magical girls can take massive hits without the damage that we squishy mortals would suffer. Rather, as the fight progresses, the emotional strain begins to take its toll, eroding the hope in her heart (and thus Hope Points). Sparks might get mussed up or sport a few bruises, but they never seem to take serious injury unless they lose all hope.

When a non-Spark reaches zero hope points, they will collapse, either mentally or physically exhausted by the strain. Sparks, however, have another option. When a spark reaches zero Hope Points, they may choose to draw on their precious Bonds to gain a **complete refresh** of Hope Points. Doing this **frays** their connection with the Bond and weakens it. The Spark must declare which Bond is to be frayed and appropriate narrate how they make the choice to sacrifice and fight on because of some reason related to the Bond in question.

Fraying is a grave danger to Bonds. One fraying will result in a relationship that grows weak and tenuous. Friends may fall out of touch, parents might become busy with work, or lovers might start a fight. The magical girl will need to devote time and care to restore what she spent. A Bond frayed twice without recovery severs completely.

Example: *Soldier Harmony is in a battle with a dangerous Yomi, and has just been dealt 6 points of damage with only 5 Hope Points remaining. She knows she can’t let this Yomi drain more dreams from the city and draws deeply on her aspect “I Trust Naomi Completely”. The player has Harmony declare “I can’t give up now! If I do, Naomi won’t see the joy in the city any longer!” She instantly regains 10 Hope Points as though she had had time to recover, and rejoins the fight full of renewed conviction.*

Note that damage does not spill over. You regain hope points starting from zero, even if you were dealt damage which should have pushed you below zero. In the example above, Harmony would have 10 Hope Points, not 9.

When a character reaches zero Hope Points and they either cannot or choose not to draw on an aspect, they collapse emotionally, physically, or both. This means they fail to accomplish the outcome of the conflict. The enemy might capture them, seed doubt in their heart, or leave them behind as “no longer a threat”. It is up to the GM to choose the exact outcome of the loss, including assigning troublesome aspects or new twists.

Combat Results Chart

8:	Two Hits
7:	One Hit
6:	One Hit
5:	One Hit with Disadvantage
4:	No Hit
3:	No Hit
2:	No Hit
1:	No Hit with Disadvantage

The GM should be careful not to punish the player beyond redemption. While it may seem a trivial thing, the loss of the fight itself should be a major blow. Whatever evil the Spark was fighting to stop went ahead; the Dark plan finished because of the Spark's failure. That failure all by itself can be a source of more drama than the aspect and HP loss.

Bonds and normal people

Under normal circumstances, Bonds are beyond the reach of your average normal person. The magic of friendship remains a matter of companionship for most people, most of the time.

However, this is not a game of normal circumstances. In times of dire need, even a normal person can tap a small portion of the power of Bonds. This is not a conscious decision but rather rises from their courage in the face of danger. In this world, tales abound of someone who stood up for their family or their friends and managed to do something that surprised even them.

Perhaps they lifted a car long enough for a friend to get out from underneath. Perhaps they took a bullet and lived to tell the tale. Perhaps they stood up for a friend and found themselves speaking in eloquent and powerful terms that changed even a hardened mind.

A normal person cannot stand for more than a moment or two against an agent of the Dark in all its evil glory. But, sometimes, a moment is all it takes.

Option: Fighting Defensively vs Fighting Aggressively

Before you roll, you may choose to **fight defensively** or **fight aggressively**. If you choose to fight defensively, you subtract 2 from your roll. However, when dealt damage, you only take half the value rounded down. So instead of losing 5 hope points, you would only lose 2. Alternatively, you may choose to fight aggressively. This gains you a +2 on your roll; however, when damage is dealt you lose twice the base hope points. So instead of losing 5 hope points, you would lose 10.

Note that if the opponent is defeated before damage is dealt, the opponent deals no damage at all! Finish the fight quick, and take no damage in the final round. This is a good time to describe your character's special moves or combo attacks. This is typically the powerful finishing move for most Sparks, which makes an excellent Aspect. (See **Invoking your Signature Move or Soul Token**)

If you fight defensively and tag one or more aspects, you add up all your bonuses and the penalty before you roll. So tagging two aspects and fighting defensively would be $2 + 2 - 2$, for a total of +2 to your roll.

Healing & Recovery

Now that you've dished and eaten a lot of damage, you probably want to recover. Good news – it is really easy! After combat, all you need is some rest and recovery in someplace safe. Maybe that's in your bedroom hugging a stuffed animal, or maybe that's at an amusement park riding all the rides three times over. After a little while, you'll recover back to your Bond rating.

Sometimes it's not possible to catch a break. Perhaps you are lost in the spirit realms or you're in the middle of the ocean without a place to rest. The GM should carefully monitor the player's resources to make sure the team has a chance to recover on occasion. Otherwise, the buildup of disadvantages can cause a cycle of decay and player frustration.

Getting Rid of Disadvantages

Disadvantages need special attention. At a minimum, a disadvantage should take a scene devoted to its removal. That might mean a trip to the Mender's hall to recover from *Broken Arm* or a good cry with a friend to heal *Broken Heart*. Disadvantages are an opportunity for players to explore seldom seen parts of their character or prove their strength in adversity.

Some negative aspects can be very tricky to get rid of. How do you recover from *Self Doubt*, for instance? This healing is a negotiation between the GM and the player. When both agree that a scene should allow the removal of an aspect, then it's removed.

Healing Frayed Bonds

Now let's talk about repairing that frayed Bond. Even a non-Spark can feel the fraying of the Bond, even if they're not precisely aware of what it is. They feel less emotional resonance for the Spark and react with something approaching apathy or forgetfulness. In order to repair that Bond, your character needs to spend some serious quality time with the person.

What about Bonds with places? Here the frayed connection takes a slightly more mystical tone. Somehow, the Spark's ability to visit and enjoy that location decreases. Perhaps the park is closed for renovations, or the school adopts some new policies that make it harder to hang out on campus. Reclaiming that Bond will require the Spark to find a new way to create wonderful memories at that place.

If you are unsure if an attempt to heal a Bond was successful, roll for it at the end of the scene. If you score a hit (with or without tagging aspects), then you have mended the damage.

Of course, if you frayed the Bond twice and thus broke it...things get harder. You have to start from zero.

Forging a Bond

So you want to make friends with the Dark spark who's been terrorizing your troupe because she's just lonely. Maybe you're just interested in the darkly mysterious past of the Dark bishounen you keep running into. Maybe you only want to recover what was lost when you had to fray a Bond to destruction. Whatever the case, you can *force* a Bond on someone, gaining a Bond (and an aspect) with them.

In order to do this, you need to have knowledge of at least three aspects of the target you want to establish a Bond with. Then you need to make a successful hit on them and spend 10 Hope Points for any reason while in a scene with them. Hope Points spent in a fight, a compel, or a Ritual can count for this purpose; the player may also simply drop all 10 Hope Points and declare their intent.

This is a *major* scene, and should be an opportunity for detailed narration, for extravagantly emotional declarations, actions, and revelations. If all you're saying is "I roll. Success. I spend 10 hope points." you're cheating yourself and your fellow players out of a great opportunity.

The GM may dictate the form of the new Bond to fit the story. For example, a Spark who forges a Bond with a Dark enemy might be expecting a happy chance for reconciliation. However, she is just as likely to get a *Rival Fixation* where the Dark girl constantly seeks her out to prove who is best once and for all!

Putting It All Together: An Example

For brevity, the Light Sparks have 10 HP each.

We open the scene as follows:

*Thanks to the astute investigations of **Shimmering Whisper**, the magical duo interrupts the attempt of a Dark girl to Harvest some unlucky campers in the mountains. They leap onto the scene, where the sky has gone lead grey and the campers lay slumped in catatonic fear. The evil witch **Astral Despair** stands over them, her Dark soul weapon - a heavy tome - open and ready to absorb the hopes and dreams of the innocent.*

*"We won't let you get away with this!" **Shining Scarlet** announces, already transformed into her crimson and white battle uniform. She conjures her soul weapon, a fencing foil, and leaps forward.*

*"This isn't right!" **Shimmering Whisper** agrees more softly, wearing her uniform of silver feathers like a cloak and clutching her soul weapon, a harp.*

***Astral Despair** thumps her book closed so she can focus on the Light idiots. "You two again. You're never going to let me Harvest my quota in peace."*

*"Wherever the innocent need protecting, we'll be there!" **Shining Scarlet** retorts.*

"They're hardly innocent. Just look at all this litter."

"That's no excuse to Harvest!"

***Astral Despair** shrugs. "They're not using their souls. Why shouldn't I?"*

*The Light duo leap forward to fight and the Dark witch retaliates by throwing down a quick summoning circle. If **Astral Despair** were a PC, this ritual would take up her turn. As a villain, she elects to deal no damage herself and leave matters to a minion. She summons **Crunch** to fight in her stead. "Come forth, **Crunch**! I have more bones for you to gnaw! Eat them whole!"*

*With a trailing laugh, **Astral Despair** vanishes from sight as the corrupted bear erupts from the ground, swinging at the approaching magical girls!*

The combat begins:

Shining Scarlet's player is eager to get into the action, and narrates going first. She rolls and gets a 6. That is one hit against the yomi; they need six to defeat it. She narrates as follows:

***Shining Scarlet** leaps forward, flipping over the bear's claws, and scores down its flank with a swipe of her sword. She lands with a skid behind **Crunch**, putting herself between the yomi and the innocents.*

Shimmering Whisper goes next. She rolls and gets a 4. That's not enough for a hit. She narrates:

Dramatis Personae

Astral Despair: a Darkling Girl

Crunch, great bear Yomi

Damage Rating: 3HP (per round)

Hits: 6

Shimmering Whisper: a magical girl

Aspects: Musical Inspiration

Quiet Start, Big Finish

Wisdom of the Owl

Purity of heart

Trouble: "Whatever you want is fine. . . "

Shining Scarlet: a Magical Girl

Aspects: "I don't ever hold back!"

Passion like a bonfire

Shining Justice Sense

Always there for a friend

***Shimmering Whisper**, being a young and inexperienced Soldier, freezes briefly at the sight of a battle. However, she knows that the innocent must be protected. By the power of the Light, she needs to be the one to do it! She shakes herself and advances on the bear, starting a melody on her harp.*

Both magical girls have gone, so the yomi deals its damage rating to the party. Both girls take 3 damage. The GM narrates:

***Crunch** roars in fury, not pain, at the cut in its side. One massive foot swings back, catching **Shining Scarlet** in the side. One gnarled claw reaches out and slaps **Shimmering Whisper** backwards into the dirt. The bear opens its maw, revealing a set of bloody and cracked teeth, and barrels towards the easier prey: **Shimmering Whisper**.*

Shining Scarlet gets another turn. She rolls a 3, missing. She narrates:

***Shining Scarlet** leaps after the bear, ready to save her friend. Though she strikes several times on the yomi's flank, the blows fail to penetrate its thick fur or deter its advance.*

Shimmering Whisper's player rolls a 5. That is a hit with a disadvantage. She narrates:

***Shimmering Whisper** manages to fire off a string of mystical notes that ring painfully in the yomi's ear, reminding it of a time before its evil existence. Unfortunately, she is not able to get out of the creature's way, and it tramples her. She gains the disadvantage "Blooded" as **Crunch's** powerful claws cut through her battle uniform.*

The yomi once again deals its damage rating to the party. The magical girls have each taken 6 damage out of their original 10 HP. **Crunch** will take four more hits to defeat, so they need to get their act together.

Shining Scarlet's player rolls a four. However, she's worried about the beating her partner is taking. It's better to finish this fight fast. She decides to fight aggressively, adding two to her roll and risking double damage. Then she invokes her aspect "I'm Always There For A Friend!" for another two. This brings her up to an 8 which counts as two hits. She narrates:

***Shining Scarlet** screams the name of her dear friend and leaps forward, determined to drive the yomi away. "Shimmer! I'm here for you!" she declares with her sword before her face, her eyes narrowed in concentration. She strikes hard and true, each blow stronger for the memories of her time with her partner, and forces Crunch back.*

Shimmering Whisper's player rolls a six. She should deal another hit. . . but wait. The GM decides to tag her Disadvantage. She accepts the tag and gains a Hope Point (putting her at 5), but her roll drops to a 4. She narrates, with a bit of GM prompting:

***Shimmering Whisper** stands up, holding a hand to the vicious cut in her side. Though she wants to help her friend against the creature of the Dark, suddenly her vision goes cloudy and grey. She staggers, unable to form the mystical song on her heart, and spends several moments on one knee recovering.*

The yomi once again deals its damage rating to the party. **Shining Scarlet** takes double damage, reducing her to 0 HP; **Shimmering Whisper** drops to 2 HP. **Shining Scarlet** needs to Fray a Bond in order to renew her Hope Points or drop out of the fight and hope that **Shimmering Whisper** can wrap things up in a single round. She doesn't like those odds, so her player decides to Fray the Bond she shares with her mother and narrates:

***Shining Scarlet** drops to the ground, feeling the world shake around her. Her heart falters in the face of Dark fury. In this hopeless moment, her mind falls to memories of her mother. It was her mother who taught Scarlet to fence, teaching her daughter the intricacies of form and feint. Scarlet feels the warmth and power of those moments renew her heart in the moment, but drawing on the Bond weakens her connection to her mother in the present.*

Now **Shining Scarlet** rolls a seven. That's another hit. She narrates:

Steeling herself, **Shining Scarlet** pushes to her feet. She wipes the sweat from her brow and points her foil at the bear. “You will never get past me!” The magical girl forces **Crunch** back with a blow of wind from her sword, slamming the creature into a tree.

Shimmering Whisper rolls an eight. That's two hits, enough to bring the yomi down. She narrates, with a bit of help from **Scarlet**:

***Shimmering Whisper** nods at the brave words of her friend. Shaking her head clear of the fog, the inexperienced magical girl joins hands with her partner. They focus the Light and the hope in their hearts together, summoning up a glow of purifying power. Together, they shout their attack: “Rainbow Love Purification!” Then, with a strum of her harp, **Shimmering Whisper** sends the torrent of Light and color into **Crunch**, blasting away the Dark spell that keeps it ensnared.*

The GM narrates the end of combat:

As the glow clears, a confused yomi bear falls to all fours. It can't remember how it arrived at this place or why it left its shrine, but it certainly has no quarrel with the people here. It lumbers into the woods to return home, cleaned of its taint. Meanwhile, the campers shake their heads of a foul nightmare and sit upright just in time to see the flashing skirts of two vanishing magical girls. They don't quite believe what they see, since magical girls are only a fairy tale.

Shining Scarlet and **Shimmering Whisper** return home feeling tired and in pain but happy. They have saved the innocent from the Dark today. However, **Whisper's** disadvantage (“Blooded”) won't go away just because combat is over; they need to devote a scene to tending to her wounds first. They return to **Scarlet's** house in mortal guise to heal **Whisper** and find a rude surprise. **Shining Scarlet's** mother has decided to quit fencing! A Bond needs mending, lest it break entirely. Being a magical girl isn't always easy!

Rituals

Sparks can do magic. That shouldn't come as much of a surprise, given their flagrant disregard for physics. But the way they do it is very different from how traditional witches and wizards work spells.

Sparks can manifest the strength to punch out a possessed rollercoaster, armor to turn concrete crushing blows into minor scuffs, command and tame Yomi, fire magical beams of love, conjure weapons forged from their soul, and jump, leap, and fight in heels. These abilities are second nature to Sparks. These are manifestations of who and what they are. They can become more powerful and more effective with training, but all Sparks know how to do these things on an instinctual level, even right after their Becoming. In a session, these effects arise as descriptive narrations of fight scenes and special attacks. You can specify a special kind of attack and mark it as an aspect, but aspects are not inherently magical. Ritual magic is above and beyond all of that.

Learning Rituals

The first thing to understand about ritual magic is that it has no shortcuts. That means it takes time, research, and often strange and exotic items not easily obtainable at the corner store. A stone from a Yomi's nest, a pebble from the court of frozen rainbows, a shard of crystal from the first tear wept by a Princess of Mirrors, or the honest word of a Dark General are all possibilities that might be required for a ritual spell. Getting the materials for a ritual is often an adventure in itself! However, once you have the item (and provided you have the Hope Points) you can cast the spell over and over again as long as you hold onto it.

The second thing to understand is that every ritual spell is different. Every spell a Spark learns for whatever reason is its own aspect. That specific ritual can only ever cast that specific spell. You can start the game with a ritual you know or seek out the knowledge as you go along. The Seeker libraries are full of rituals, and each court has ritual specialists that are willing to teach new Sparks.

Casting Rituals

Ritual magic is always very visible and very obvious. Light, Twilight, or Dark, all ritual spells surround the caster with a shimmering aura of swirling colors. They come with an ethereal wind that swirls around them and sometimes musical notes singing in the air. The color of the spell aura is affected by the Spark in question and the intentions of the spell, usually matching the Spark's color theme.



All spells cost Hope Points to cast, and this cost can be split evenly (rounded up) among the members of the nakama. As long as one member of the nakama knows the spell, all the members of the nakama may benefit from and contribute to it. Contributing to the Hope Point total of a spell is a full time action; you can't do anything else that turn. During the full moon, it costs fewer Hope Points to cast rituals that are Light aligned, and during the dark of the moon, it costs fewer Hope Points to cast rituals that are Dark aligned.

There is no roll necessary for a ritual to succeed. Rituals are all about time and effort, not chance.

She did WHAT to me?! – When too much is too much

As you might notice, rituals can do *incredible* things. There really is no upper limit on what they can accomplish, provided you can fuel the ritual requirements, get the necessary items, and have the Hope Points. But sometimes too much is too much.

The purpose of these spells is not to remove a PC from play. Magical girls have a tendency to recover from death, dismemberment, being ejected from reality, forgotten by their family, and/or written out of being a magical girl. In genre, there's really no such thing as a ritual that can't be undone, has no loophole, and can never be discovered.

So don't be a jerk with these spells. Just because Princess Moonbeam has been ejected from reality and forgotten by her nakama, doesn't mean that is the permanent set of affairs.

On the other hand, GMs, don't be afraid to allow your players to have that massive over the top ritual to bring closure or really show off their stuff. The love beam that purifies the entire world of the Dark threat (for that season) is a perfectly reasonable end goal for a troupe of dedicated Sparks.

Spells of the First Shard: The Spark (5HP)

These tend to be spells that the Spark might find a use for during an adventure. They are short enough in casting to make use of during a combat, and they allow a Spark to overcome obstacles directly in her path. A first shard spell might allow the magical girl to sprout wings and glide to the top of a local landmark building in a single round, where a normal magical girl would have to bound up the side over a few stories at a time. Damaging spells of this type typically deal 3 hits to the target, while healing spells could remove a disadvantage.

You must spend 5 hope points to cast a ritual of the first shard.

First Shard Casting Requirements

Special Item/Unusual Ingredient: An unusual item is required. Bathing your soul token in a court's spring, a rainbow flagstone, or the like. The item is relatively easy to come by. (Some bartering, a short journey or a minor favor)

Line of Sight: The Spark must be able to clearly see her intended target.

Casting Time: Casting the ritual takes up a turn for the character (s) casting it.

Special Knowledge: The Spark must conduct some research before he or she has the necessary information to cast the ritual. Around a day or so of study or a few hours of one on one tutoring.

Lunar Key: Light spells cost 3 less Hope Points than usual during the night of the full moon. Dark spells cost 3 less Hope Points during the dark of the moon.

See **Appendix 1** for example rituals.

Spells of the Second Shard: The Bond (15 HP)

Spells of the Second Shard allow the Spark to reshape the world around her to a degree that would take mundane people months of effort, if possible at all. A spell of the second shard can cause a skyscraper to rise into the city, completed built and magically integrated into the street plan. It might allow a Spark to transform someone into another form. For the Dark, this level of magic unlocks the potential of mind control. Damaging spells of this type typically deal 10 hits to the target, while healing spells could remove a major disadvantage.

You must spend 15 Hope Points to cast a ritual of the second shard.

Second Shard Casting Requirements

Special Item/Rare Ingredient: A rare or very difficult to obtain item is required. A Yomi's tear, a Twilight's true promise, the pendant of a former Queen.

Casting Time: Casting the ritual takes two turns for the character (s) casting it.

Special Knowledge: The Spark must conduct lengthy research before he or she has the necessary information to cast the ritual. Around a week or so of study or a few days of one on one tutoring.

Lunar Key: Light spells cost 6 less Hope Points than usual during the night of the full moon. Dark spells cost 6 less Hope Points during the dark of the moon.

See **Appendix 1** for example rituals.

Spells of the Third Shard: The Web (30HP)

Spells of the third shard unlock the raw power of the Light's chosen. These rare spells can bring down Evil queens, defeat a millennia old god-king, and revive the dead. Damage and healing values for this type of ritual are utterly irrelevant.

These are the rituals that allow a Spark to be, for a fragment of a moment, every bit as much a god as the Light or the Dark.

You must spend 30 Hope Points to cast a ritual of the third shard.

Third Shard Casting Requirements

Special Item/Unique Ingredient: Beyond rare, one of a kind, unique, impossible to find. The true words of a Dark General, the blood of a stone, the first paving stone laid in the Champions hall, the first word never to be spoken, the first ray of sunshine.

Casting Time: Casting the ritual takes several minutes of careful concentration and meditation (10 turns or so) and blows the entire special FX budget for the year.

Special Knowledge: The Spark must conduct lengthy research before he or she has the necessary information to cast the ritual. Several months of study or a month of one on one tutoring, if a tutor who knows the spell can even be found! Most third shard spells are custom one of a kind creations.

See **Appendix 1** for example rituals.

The Great Divide: Mind-affecting spells

Spells that directly interfere with a person's psyche or his perceptions, such as mind control and mind reading, are not within the Light's purview. Simply put, Light aligned Sparks cannot use any form of mind affecting spell. The Light *must* respect the free will of every being, even if that leads to disaster. Even Twilight's can only strongly *suggest*, not *control*. If only the Dark were so limited. . .

Mind control spells are never permanent, but they can cause massive havoc while they are in effect. Yomi, Spark, or Mundane, they always cause problems. . . and then more problems for the caster when the spell unravels and the person who was being controlled realizes what they've done. Court sages theorize that mind control is never permanent because it attempts to create Bonds, something the Dark is curiously bad at.

Mind control rituals are best represented by aspects. Adding and removal of a Mind Controlled aspect can be the source of a major episode arc. Just be careful to make sure the entire group is on board first.

Taming or Befriending Yomi - or, Spirit wrangling for fun and profit

Taming or befriending a yomi is never a simple event. Fortunately the *rules* are very simple indeed. A yomi companion is an aspect and a Bond. They follow the same rules as forging a Bond for people: 3 aspects, 10 Hope Points.

It is a misconception of many new Sparks that they *tame* yomi. A yomi is no more tamed than your next door neighbor. To a Light Spark, a yomi is a companion and a friend, albeit one with a very strange form. Like any friend or companion, they will ask for help and want to spend time with you. Do not assume that a yomi is like a pocket monster you pull out in the middle of a fight, and then put back in their ball afterwards. A yomi so treated will soon break all Bonds with the spark and go on a rampage.

A properly tended yomi is a powerful friend in combat. Mechanically, the yomi is controlled by the Spark who has taken the Bond on their sheet. (If the entire nakama has that Bond, what happens when they have conflicting orders? About the same as when a dog hears conflicting information from two masters.)

Gamemaster-Fu

Being the GM

The GM has many responsibilities, such as presenting the conflict to the players, controlling NPCs, and helping everyone apply the rules to the situation in the game. If you're new to GMing, it can seem very intimidating and difficult. It's a big responsibility to run good games for the players, and there's a lot to keep in mind at once. Don't worry. You will get better the more you do it... and really, you're probably better at it than you think.

Let's talk about the GM's jobs.

Build Campaigns

A **campaign** is a series of games you play with the same characters where the story builds on what happened in earlier sessions. All the players should collaborate with the GM to plan how the campaign will work. Usually this is a conversation among all of you to decide what sort of heroine (or hero) everyone wants to play, what the ground rules of the world you live in are (the GM options in the setting guide) and what kinds of villains you want to face. Talk about how serious you want the game to be and how long you want it to last, and then tweak the setting dials until the world matches your desires. Some ideas:

Epic adventure defeating the Dark Queens and their World Devourer

Slice of life adventure, monsters of the week, and romance subplots

Hidden secrets and dangerous betrayals in the local high school.

See **Appendix 2** for an example campaign and **Appendix 3** for some further ideas.

Build Scenarios and Run Game Sessions

A **scenario** is one short story arc, the sort of thing you might see wrapped up in one or two episodes of a television show, even if it's a smaller part of a bigger story. Usually you can wrap up a scenario in one to three game sessions, assuming you play for three or four hours at a time. But what is a scenario, and how do you build one?

A scenario needs two things: A bad gal (or guy) with a goal, and a reason the PCs can't ignore it.

Bad gal with a goal: You've probably figured this out already. The campaign's main opposition, or one of her allies, is probably your bad gal.

Something the PCs can't ignore: Now you have to give the PCs a reason to care. Sparks as a rule should care about the things around them. (Apathetic magical girls are neither powerful mechanically nor very interesting to play.) Pick one or two things from each player's relationship chart to include in the plot.



Don't leap straight to killing or destroying that relationship, though. You don't want the players to feel like you're picking on them. A good starting point is a major life upheaval. Maybe an unnoticed side effect of the Dark plot is that a Spark's good friend would have to move and leave school!

GM Note: The Transformation

Savvy and strategic players have probably already asked the question, "What if we just shoot her before she transforms?" There are three issues here to tackle.

- The transformation into one's battle form is instantaneous and protective. There is no such thing as sniping a magical girl from a hundred yards. By the time the bullet leaves the chamber, the Light (or Dark) in her heart has recognized danger and wrapped her in its charge. The reason for this is because the creators want to see dramatic battles between magical girls, not a game of Hitman played by teenagers. Given the power of a soldier, if assassination was possible, it would be the most preferable strategy to deal with any opposition before power up.
- Secret identities cut both ways. A player who suggests taking pot shots at people in the hope of nailing the right enemy is grievously violating the tenets of the Light. The Light holds its soldiers to the ideals of protection and redemption, neither of which are reflected in assassination.
- Preemptive strikes do not make for good drama or play in the creator's opinions. Player reaction to realistic guerrilla warfare has been uniformly frustration and withdrawal from emotional connection with the character. Why bother forming a deep Bond with your character persona if she is going to step on an IED? This game is not interested in reproducing the horrific effects of actual warfare

The upshot of these effects is that the transformation can be (and usually is) deliberately called upon before a battle, but if there is battle to be joined or physical danger, a Spark will transform even without it, posing and declaration optional... but the Light admires that sort of heroic behavior and the Dark is too arrogant to ever go without it.

Running Game Sessions

Now that you have the PCs' attention, start your session. Sometimes the best way to do that, especially for the first session of a new story arc, is to put them right in the action. Once the PCs know why they should care about what's going on, you just get out of the way and let them take care of it.

That said, there are a bunch of tasks the GM needs to perform to run the session:

- **Run scenes:** A session is made up of individual scenes. Decide where the scene begins, who's there, and what's going on. Decide when all the interesting things have played out and the scene's over.
- **Adjudicate the rules:** When some question comes up about how to apply the rules, you get final say.
- **Play the NPCs:** Each player controls their own character, but you control all the rest, including the foes. This can be tiring if you have a big scene. Don't be afraid to keep a few post it notes with clues to help yourself keep it all straight.
- **Keep things moving:** If the players don't know what to do next, it's your job to give them a nudge. If the players don't have a clear idea of where to go, give them a few hints. If they're still stuck, reveal a major plot clue to them. Better to have to reveal your awesome plot details early than to have a game bog down with the frustrated players unsure how to act.

- **Make sure everyone has a chance to be awesome:** Your goal isn't to defeat the players but to challenge them! Make sure every PC gets a chance to be the star once in a while, from the Champion with her enormous sword to the shy little Mender.
- **Talk to your players:** This may seem obvious, but you are a player too, so talk to your fellow players and find out what they're feeling, what they think works and what doesn't. There's no substitute for finding out what makes a good game like asking.
- **Look at the character sheets:** This isn't to make sure the players get the characters 'right'. This is so you can figure out what kind of story or person the player wants to have. Ask them questions about their aspects and Bonds. Their aspects give you a window into what the player wants.
- **Be a fan of the characters:** All those Hope Points are for using to change the world through aspects and Bonds. They're going to succeed a *lot* of the time, and they should. Sparks are powerful! When you want to press them a little, declare that they don't have a chance to refresh Hope Points. After all, a refresh is more than fifteen minutes and some Gatorade. The rise and fall of Hope Points is the way you can control the tension in the room.
- **Rotate the Focus:** Using your player's aspects as a starting point, have a plot that focuses on one aspect each session. Each session choose one player to be the "star" of the episode and have the episode focus on them and their issue.

Playing the Slice of Life

Don't forget the "slice of life" elements. Each character has a daily life with very ordinary struggles. Whether it's a test, a crush, or a scraping up cash for a present, each character has challenges that magic and love lasers won't solve. These obstacles don't need to be another Yomi attack or another Dark General rising. What if the cheerful

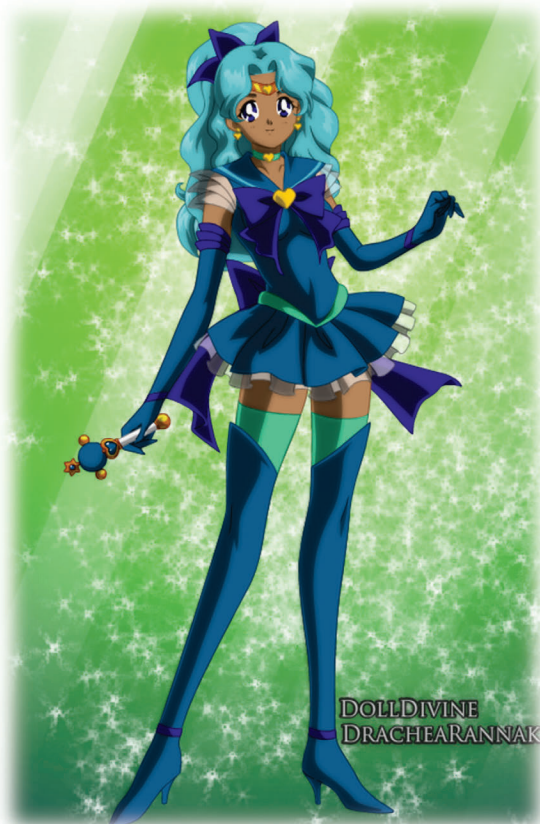
athletic girl wants to join the baseball team, but her math scores aren't high enough? What if the brain of the nakama is offered a "once in a lifetime" chance to study overseas? What will the nakama do to pull together when the currents of life tug them apart?

These obstacles give your players room to experience failure and hardship without the automatic end of the campaign. The question is not if the nakama will defeat the yomi. Rather, it is if they will defeat the yomi in time to get to the school pageant. It is if the Yomi destroys the precious park where so many memories are shared before they drive it off.

Sparks are people who *care*. They're not always right and they're not always well behaved, but they have a part to play in the world.

Great, so... how do I do that?

Fairly easily actually. There are several example scenarios that deal with this in **Appendix 3**, but the core idea is pretty simple. All the characters are going to want something. Sometimes what they want is to destroy an ancient Darkling undead demon queen who wants to use the world's hope and



joy to fuel an apocalypse and awaken her Dark lord... but sometimes what they want is for their best friend to be happy with a difficult home life. Sometimes what they want is to catch the eye of the cute boy in the class. Sometimes what they want is to pass a difficult math test. Sometimes what they want is to win the homecoming baseball match. In fact, really, when you think about it, that's what they probably want *most* of the time. Ancient Darkling undead demon queens just don't show up every day.

So, look at the characters and ask the players directly. "What does your character want in life? Who are they?" Look at their character sheets, look at the Bond map, and ask questions. Do they want a boyfriend? Do they already have one? Is their soul weapon a baseball bat? It's probably pretty likely they play baseball. Who is their team? Do they play on one? If the prickly and proud proper lady of the nakama uses a bow and arrow, does she compete in archery tournaments? Is that what her father wanted, or something she likes about herself? Find the challenges that might crop up in every day high school and college life. Passing a tough final. Dating. Winning a sports match. Hanging out with your friends vs doing your homework. Turn these events into conflicts in the game and you'll be well on your way.

Bad Gals & Guys

When you make a foe, you don't need to stat them out exactly like the PCs. The only thing foes need are aspects, the number of hits they can take in a conflict, and the number of hits they deal in a conflict. Don't be afraid to use social conflicts as threats to challenge your players. Not all "foes" are going to engage the Sparks in direct combat. In addition, the resolution of a conflict does not need to represent a single brief burst of frantic action and choreographed fight sequences, it can represent a much longer period of time, perhaps as much as several weeks.

See **Appendix 4**: Threats, Foes & Fiendish plots for examples.

Estimating the Threat Level

On average, a magical girl troupe will deal $\frac{1}{2}$ a hit for every magical girl in it. So you can expect a troupe of 4 to deal 2 hits a round, and a troupe of 6 to deal 3 hits a round. Scaling how much damage the opponent can take in a combat round to this average will make sure you don't defeat your troupe by accident, though of course you can still do it on purpose! It's intended that your magical girls should need to do a refresh of their hope points for a tough fight, so if you want the opponent to last long enough to deal its damage twice, you'll need to give it double the hits + 1 that you expect the troupe to deal out in a turn. Of course, they can still surprise you. That's why we use the dice.

If you're running a solo game for a single player, use this as a rule of thumb for scaling down the challenges. Alternatively, you might include some NPC helpers and assign them a standard damage.

*Example: **Soldier Songstream** is the only player in this GM's game, but it's tough going alone. The GM decides that an elder Spark assigns Songstream two other magical girls as a nakama, but the game's focus is on Songstream's trials. Therefore, the GM and player agree that Songstream's NPC nakama will deal one hit each every other turn (like a damage rating of one half). That way, Songstream is getting a bit of help for tough spots, but not so much that she can sit back and ignore the fight.*

Appendix 1: Example Rituals

The rituals listed here have bland functional names. This is so the reader can understand what they do, this is not however what the ritual is typically called. Sparks tend to name their rituals overblown and highly fanciful names. Rainbow Harmony Love Spiral, for example. Is that an attack power, a “let’s all get along” ritual, or a ritual to find your true love? When you compose the names of your rituals, don’t be afraid to be poetic and romantic. Consider *Harmonization of the Celestial Sphere*, *Aurora’s Dawn*, *Light’s Healing Touch*, *Endless Darkness Despair*, or *Shackles of the Sightless Mind* might all be ritual names. Typically shouted out and posed dramatically as they’re cast. A ritual is an Aspect after all, it should be taggable.

First Shard Example Rituals:

- **Astral Jaunt:** Teleport anywhere in the worlds as long as you have attuned to the essence of that place.
- **Call of Light:** Send a beacon to the heavens, visible to any nearby Sparks
- **Corrupt/Enlighten Shrine:** Corrupt a shrine of a yomi to the Dark/enlighten a yomi for the Light
- **Curse/Blessing:** Cause misfortune and malaise to a target; or reverse the effects of such
- **Divination:** Seek a glimpse of the future. (Mechanically, treat this as a free invocation that can be applied at any time as a result of the divination.) Example: “Ah ha, I foresaw that you would use the *Lover’s Blade* against me, and I brought the *Shield of Hope*!”
- **Look over there!:** Cause a distraction that somehow preserves one’s magical girl identity through improbable coincidence.
- **Minor Light ward:** Create a crystal ward that senses and repels the touch of Dark. Useful for protecting one’s home and immediate environs.
- **Music of Hope:** Refresh the hearts and minds of those who listen, granting them hope anew. Functions as a recovery.
- **Minor Mending:** Heal the damage to objects, or create a new mundane item. Very useful for the repair crew.
- **Open Astral Door:** Open a doorway that anyone can use to enter the astral paths
- **Pacify Yomi:** Calm yomi, giving you a chance to talk or run away
- **Reveal Dark influence:** Reveal the hidden corruption of the Dark on a target or area
- **Reveal History:** See the history of a location, including its dark secrets and aspects

When in doubt, treat a ritual of the first shard can be treated as a coupon for a free invocation on an aspect to be chosen in the future.

Second Shard Example Rituals:

- **Defy Fate:** Breaks Fates, changing the mundane destiny of life. Examples: changing one’s grades in school, insuring two star crossed lovers meet, or the fortunes of mortal life.
- **Gain/Enhance Beauty:** Enhance the target’s appearance, likely gaining one or more Aspects related to the beauty. Commonly used in the Twilight courts.
- **Major Light ward:** Ward a significant area such that the Dark cannot enter without triggering the alarm.
- **Major Mending:** Erase the damage to large areas like an entire scene. Heal major wounds or life changing afflictions like paralysis. Create a large amount of matter or something rare.

- **Mind Control/Remove Mind control:** Take control of or dispel control of a magical girl, a bystander, or a Yomi
- **Nakama Teleport:** Send your nakama to wherever you need to go. To the moooooooooon!
- **Harmony Beam:** A high powered beam of love and hope suitable for use against powerful bosses
- **Restore Youth:** Restore the youth of the caster, such that they return to a target age. Once there, the only way out is the usual aging, so think twice about being a teenager again!
- **Reveal Dark Sanctuary:** Reveal the location of a Dark sanctuary within the immediate area.
- **Rewrite Minor History:** Rewrite the causality of a small event or area, such as a particular classroom for one day
- **Trait swap:** Trade traits (age, beauty, etc) between two people
- **Transformation:** Physically transform one thing or person into another thing or person

When in doubt, a ritual of the second shard should be able to solve any issue that a magical girl faces as long as there is no opposition from other magical forces.

Third Shard Example Rituals:

- **Bastion of True Light:** Consecrate an area with the touch of the Light herself such that the Dark and those of impure hearts are utterly unable to enter.
- **Craft Shard Realm:** Create a pocket realm of reality, such as the Courts or the Dark Sanctuaries
- **Great Isolation:** Suspend all the Bonds of a magical girl, causing the world to forget she exists
- **Greater Mending:** Restore anything, even that lost to the void. Heal the wounds of gods and abstract concepts. Create unique things, like a new species.
- **Identity Steal:** Steal everything about a person, including their powers, their aspects, and their fate.
- **Resurrection:** Return a person to life after their destruction
- **Rewrite Major History:** Bring sweeping changes to the present in unpredictable ways. Might result in the rewriting of nations, cities, or lives. Safer than time travel, less likely to make one their own grandparent, but difficult to target exactly.
- **Time Travel:** True time travel, such that can alter the past and the future. (Warning, this ritual has been known to give GMs nosebleeds and headaches)

A ritual of the third shard should send the entire campaign on a new direction.

If these rituals seem like they can solve all the issues a player might face... that's the point! A Spark who decides that she wants to solve the problem with rituals is handing the GM a free adventure to find rare parts and forge new Bonds. After all, you can't cast a ritual without people, places, and relationships to target and an understanding of what exactly should happen. A Spark who tries to brute force a ritual with a guess will probably find herself with more problems than Marty McFly.

Appendix 2: Example Episode

Hound on the Trail

Here's a sample episode with threats to get your started. The threat levels on the challenges are calibrated for a group of 4 Sparks. Insert this episode as the campaign starter to help the players get a feel for the world, or use it mid-season as a bridge between plots.

The episode starts with the nakama getting the call: a yomi has appeared at their school gym. The spirit has possessed the rack of balls from the equipment locker. A competitive creature, the yomi does not appear to be Dark tainted. It seems its shenanigans as a sports competition, though the students might disagree! Born from innate competitiveness of the volleyball team, you could say it is a problem of too *much* school spirit. The nakama need to end the yomi's game somehow, whether by speech, soothing, or beating it into submission. Of course, fighting a sports yomi is more likely to take the form of a mean game of ball than kung fu.

Sports Yomi

Aspects: Competitive Ego, Team Spirit, Shrill Whistle

Hits per turn: 1

Number of Hits to KO: 6

Special Attack - Gym Teacher Voice: Forces those affected to take part in gym activities like calisthenics, pick-up basketball, or running laps. A meek girl's worst nightmare!

Once the Yomi has been subdued, the real threat will materialize. The next day, the school newspaper runs an article by the school's resident magical girl fan, Toby Chopra. It's well known what his obsession is, but this time he has blurry photographs of the team as well as an account and evidence that don't match up with the official explanation. (The official excuse is that the school's automatic ball launcher malfunctioned.)

Toby is determined to show everyone that magical girls are real, and worse, he's got a few ideas who they are. Not only does he have photographs of the nakama fighting the Yomi (in blurry low definition) he watched outside the gym to see who came out. And the only young females he saw leaving the gym were the nakama's mundane identities. He can't prove it... yet. But he's smart and capable and he's going to get real proof.

Toby Chopra: Nosy Reporter

Aspects: Entirely too perceptive, "The Truth is out there!", lonely

Hits per turn: 2

Number of Hits to KO: 7

Description: A decent and honest sort, but hopelessly naive about the world and the press. Eager to prove himself, and very sharp. He's a serious threat to the nakama's secrets based on his trusty camera and willingness to spend his entire life tracking the faintest of clues. If he keeps this up, he's going to end up in the midst of a *real* battle and get himself killed.

A little investigation should turn up reams of evidence for Tony's obsession. He's a huge fan of investigative journalists and sincerely believes that the freedom of information will solve all issues. Frankly, he's pretty naïve. On the side, he dabbles in conspiracy theories, the better to explain why he can't seem to ever get any traction. Even the newspaper club president doesn't believe him! The club keeps him on because he's quite a talented reporter when he's not off about this magical girl nonsense.

Discrediting him about magical girls won't work; as far as the school is concerned, he's already a loon. A simple and Dark solution is to get him thrown out of the newspaper club, but what kind of Sparks would arrange something as cruel as that? They need to protect someone who doesn't realize he needs protecting. If the nakama choose to tell him the truth, then the conflict stops being about getting him to lay off the story and shifts to keeping him from taking the story nationwide! Remember, he's determined that *no* secrets are worth keeping, under any circumstances.

However the nakama approach the matter, the mechanical resolution is a combat stretching over days or weeks. Toby's hits to the nakama don't represent actual injury (Toby certainly isn't throwing them into a building!) but a gradual wearing down of their resources and optimism against Toby's remarkable determination.

Beyond the Obvious

Successfully reducing Toby to a KO represents breaking through that special brand of stubborn only teenage boys can manage. Whether that is by kind words, well placed hints, or a frontal assault is up to the nakama.

At the same time, the number of yomi increase dramatically, all within the nakama's patrol area. (Consider negotiating a set number of HP to spend to defeat the yomi instead of running the full combat each time.) Plus, Toby is following them, armed with a brand new high tech camera. Successful conflict checks will let the players notice him early, but even with their checks, he's going to be there for some of the battles. The players will likely suspect something more sinister is going on. How does Toby know where to go so unerringly?

Restless Yomi

Aspects: Angry Spirit, Natural Forces

Hits per turn: 1

Number of Hits to KO: 4

Special - Swarm: The nakama cannot take a rest until the source of these yomi is dealt with.

It is no coincidence. Remember the brand new camera? It was given to him by a thoughtful admirer who wants the real truth to come out for her own benefit. Once Toby's conflict has been resolved, one way or another, the final boss will show herself. This is the Dark magical girl who's been enraging all these yomi and flinging them at the nakama. Her plan (which she will gloatingly go on at length about if given a chance) is to find out the mundane identities of the nakama so she can make their lives a living Darkness.

Obsidian Scythe, Darkling

Aspects: Cruel Heart, Nasty Traps, Secret Romantic

Hits per turn: 4

Number of Hits to KO: 4

Special - Practiced Monologue: Obsidian Scythe is capable of expounding her entire evil plot in a single round! Pretty impressive, and somewhat weird if you time it...

If the combats have worn the players down such that they've already had to Fray a Bond, consider giving them a half refresh in the moments leading up to the final confrontation. This adventure is meant to push them to the point of Fraying, but don't feel you have to set them up for failure.

Cleaning Up

Toby is a good person at heart, and he's unlikely to want to stick around with a Dark girl.

Unless the players manage a critical victory, Obsidian will get away to torment them another day.

However, there are issues remaining. Whatever method Obsidian used to aggravate the yomi is still around and ready for misuse. Toby's camera is a Dark gifted artifact, and it's sure to cause trouble for whoever finds it. What of the school spirit, who was taunted and tormented into attacking the magical girls? Has the school lost its spirit now?

It is tough work to protect the hearts of the world. Find out how the players deal with the new issues next time on Sparks!

Appendix 3: Plots, Plans, & Villains Foul

Most threat seeds spin from the corruption of mundane events. In character, this is because the Dark preys on normal people most of the time. For the GM, this is a way of making sure the supernatural and natural sides of the game converge. Mundane Bonds should have as much screen time as the dangers of the Dark, and that's easier when the threats take place in everyday life. We recommend saving the dramatic astral fortress of Darkness for arc climatic battles.

Here are some seeds to get your GM juices warmed. The threat seed takes place behind the scenes, and the plot seeds hook the players in.

Gathering for the Harvest

Threat seed:

The Dark needs energy, and it needs it fast. Quality isn't so much the issue. Is the Dark Lord really going to notice the difference? So the Dark plots to gather a great number of people in one place and Harvest them en masse!

Plot seeds:

Circus in town: A new circus has rolled into town, plastering ads everywhere. The prices are rock bottom and the clowns are reputed to make you laugh so hard you'll die! The nakama all get tickets from parents, friends, or school events, so why not check out some of the games and that super creepy haunted house?

Public concert: The town symphony has a new conductor. Little is known about his origin, but the reviews say his work is intense and powerful. Maybe it's time for the nakama to take a night on the town, get dressed up and cultivate their aesthetic sense with the music of the greats?

Art gala: A troubled artist has started a new gala, and it's the talk of anyone who is anyone. The artist's last works were optimistic, but this new set is black as night. What could have set him or her into such a spiral of depression? Maybe the nakama can breathe some wind into the sails of a despondent artist.

Sports game: The sports rivalry up at the college has always been a bit energetic, but lately they're almost out of control! The local team is playing like somebody lit a fire under their butts, and the crowds aren't much calmer. With that kind of excitement in the air, who could stay on the bench?

Search for the Crystal

Threat seed:

Forget those Dark girls who foolishly try to Harvest the masses. What we need is a single soul of outstanding purity! Hard to find, but unmatched in power. Get hunting!

Plot seeds:

Mysteriously win a prize: Did you know that you entered the Live Life Love contest? Well, neither did the rest of the nakama! One way or another, though, you won. The prize can be claimed at the corporate headquarters down by the waterfront. Better hurry, supplies are limited!

Auditions: The idol contest is back in town, and any girl with a taste for fame had better get going. The director is famous for being super picky: he wants a certain kind of girl and no other. His words might be hurtful, but an aspiring actress has to have a thick skin!

Entrance exams: A new cram school is offering free tuition to anyone who can pass their entrance exam. It's reputed to be so hard, even most graduates can't pass! Naturally, one of the nakama manages to get in, but this new school is demanding late hours alone with the teacher. . .

This Just Got Weird

Threat seed:

Wild energies, crazed spirits, and ritual mishaps can all lead a magical girl into some downright peculiar circumstances. The mystery here is piecing together which combination of events led to circumstances distinctly surreal.

Plot Seeds:

That one cartoon everyone is thinking of: One miscast ritual, one Saturday morning cartoon, and the nakama appear in a world that involves more hooves and magic than toes and science. Yet the Light and the Dark live even here, and there are rumors that a certain evil invader from a nearby celestial body plots to cause eternal night!

Something seems off... The nakama wake on a usual morning. A usual day, ready for fourth grade. After classes they can play their favorite game: magical girl! Yet something seems vaguely wrong. One girl is sure she could reach the top shelf yesterday, and another finds some confusing high school homework in her bag. Plus, why is that funny dressed girl boasting about how now she can complete her plan without any interference by the Light?

This happens more often than you'd think: One of the nakama comes down with a nasty cold. When they wake up, they've swapped genders! How in the world are they going to show up at school and take that test when they're swinging for the other team today?

Temptations and Trials

Threat seed:

Even with the guidance of the Light, the world isn't a clear cut place. What happens when circumstances conspire to test a Spark's dedication to the life of higher standards?

Plot seeds:

Dark tome: By means unspecified, a tome of the Dark has appeared in the local library, ripe for the discovery by a magical girl looking for study materials. The book is heavy with secrets of Dark rituals, and she knows she should turn it right in. . . but will that resolve hold up when she discovers the spell to solve her issues at school?

Sheltering a Dark girl?! A wounded Dark girl has shown up in a magical girl's back yard! She claims to be on the run, ready to turn over a new leaf, and she needs someone to hide her. Problem is, that means lying to her nakama and the Courts. Can you really trust a Dark girl? Maybe she really does want a new life. . . but what if the life she wants is the magical girl's?!



Suspicion: Nobody else seems to see the way a member of another nakama is lagging behind in patrols or asking odd questions in the Halls. Nobody else has seen the Dark crystal in her locker! The Courts could have a traitor in their midst. Can the nakama expose her, or will they risk everything to bring a straying soldier back into the fold?

Secrets

Threat seed:

Part of being a magical girl is putting one's duty ahead of one's ego. That means eschewing the fame that Twilight girls glorify in. But a dual life isn't always easy to lead.

Plot seed:

Little sibling spies: Maybe it was a spurned birthday. Maybe an offhand comment about an outfit, or refusing to take the sibling to the mall. Whatever the cause, one nakama member's little brother or sister is out for blood, and the little brat found the perfect ammo - evidence that the girl is sneaking out for mysterious purposes! What will the nakama do when the threat is right at home?

Nosy school journalist: A good scoop is hard to come by, and the school paper is scraping the bottom of the barrel. Stooping to a bit of yellow journalism, one aspiring writer decides if you can't find a good secret, make one up! Rumors swirl fast that the nakama are a *gang*! After all, they're always hanging out together, and they all have those color-coded bracelets!

A Stalker and a blurry photograph of a posterior: The worst case has happened - a witness to a full out battle with a Dark yomi! Thankfully, the only evidence the stalker came away with was a blurry flash of underwear that nobody is going to take seriously. At least, that's easy to say when it's not your butt on display! Now the stalker is playing Cinderella with posteriors, and one magical girl is feeling majorly creeped out.

Mundane Events

Threat seed:

Older magical girls know better than to underestimate the troubles the world can throw your way. Not everything is a rampaging yomi to be purified, and using rituals to try and solve every little problem runs dangerously close to attempts to control the world as the Dark would.

Plot seed:

The promotion: One of the nakama has good news. Their father or mother got a promotion at work! This is fantastic until everyone realizes that means the soldier needs to move! There's no enemy to defeat here – only the creep of change. Will the nakama find a way to keep everyone together, or will the tides of fate drag them apart?

Flat broke: A busy magical girl has gone flat broke. Time to hit up some part time jobs! If the magical girls are lucky, they can hand out fliers by the mall. If not, they'll be wearing costume suits and advertising for toddler television shows. Oh, the things we do for money. . .

Summer beach vacation: Summer vacation and the beach, the perfect time for a confession or a contest. Tempers can flare and jealousy reach a head when magical girls discover that their favorite beau (whether Knight or Soldier) has landed on the same sunny shores!

Straining Bonds

Threat seed:

Hearts can be so fragile, and insults can leave lasting marks. The soldier who forgets to act in the grace of the Light makes enemies who will go to incredible lengths to get their due.

Plot seeds:

New girl: The new girl at school needs help in the subject that one of the soldiers is best at. She pleads for personal tutoring, almost to the point of tears. She demands so much attention that the soldier finds herself drifting from her friends. . . just as planned.

The stray: A stray cat or dog proves a loveable and loyal companion. . . as long as the soldier stays with it. When the soldier leaves, the pet turns to ruining furniture, trashing mementos, and pinning the blame firmly on the soldier! Bonds strain with family as nobody suspects lovable and sweet pets.

Beloved memento: Oh, joy! A childhood memento has surfaced after being lost from years. In its warm memories are the wonders of childhood and good times. Such good times, really, that it's hard to leave it at home during school. Or, you know, go to school at all. What use are Bonds with strangers? All the warmth a soldier needs is already in hand. . .

Idoru Offer: A local recording company has "discovered" one of the nakama! She's gotten an offer letter and a huge publicity promo... she's going to be a pop star! But... how is she going to find time to be a magical girl when every waking moment something new comes up that needs to be dealt with right now? And there's a concert tour coming up so very soon, and her manager has to get her to a recording studio right away...

Ultimate Danger (Arc climax)

Threat seed:

The plan has reached fruition. All that was will be swept clean by the Dark. The world will bow before the might of eternal night!

Plot seeds:

Forgotten: The nakama wake together in a hotel, unsure of how they arrived. When they check their phones, no one is in their contacts. When they contact their families, they are treated as strangers. Their Bonds feel frayed and their school friends ignore them. What in the world happened while they slept. . . and why are Dark girls living their lives?!

Frozen moment: Silence is deafening when the world pauses in its motion. Snow does not fall and people do not breathe, frozen in a single instant. From somewhere in this unreal landscape, a dark laugh rises. The nakama know what they have to do. It's time to restore the world to the warmth and sound of life!

Dystopia from Nowhere: Unnoticed, unremarked, a tower or fortress of Dark power rises among the landscape. The people trudge under its cold gaze, convinced it has always stood. Newscasters have become propagandists, police have become enforcers, and teachers have become disciplinarians. When the world goes wrong, it's up to the nakama to protect everyone's smiles for good.

Quick Episode Generator

The group is coming over, and you haven't prepared a thing! The quick episode generator is here to help. Just roll 1d8 on each of the tables, and you've got your episode.

D8	The Location*	D8	The Event	D8	The Opponent
1	A subway station	1	New Encounter	1-2	A Twilight Spark
2	City Hall	2	Sudden Change	3-4	A Dark Spark
3	A factory complex	3	Magical Mystery	5-6	A Yomi
4	Central City Park	4	Villain Reveal	7-8	A Mundane
5	High School	5	Trouble at School		
6	College	6	Personal Danger		
7	Sports Stadium	7	Character Arc		
8	Water Park/Amusement Park	8	Secrets Revealed		

*Any locations can be abandoned or populated. Populated locations are higher difficulty due to the complications of witnesses and potential victims of the Dark.

Threats, Foes & Fiendish Plots

The example foes and threats below are calculated assuming a troupe of 4 Sparks.

D-Class Foes, Mooks: These are the unnamed thugs, monsters, or goons that are there to make the PCs' day a little more difficult. They are designed to be swept aside, especially by powerful PCs. They're flavor fights and a chance for PCs to show off.

Horde of Mind Controlled Mortals <i>Aspects:</i> Mindless Horde, Innocent Victims <i>Hits per turn:</i> 1 <i>Number of Hits to KO:</i> 3	Low Power Yomi <i>Aspects:</i> Elemental Spirit, Enigmatic Nature <i>Hits per turn:</i> 1 <i>Number of Hits to KO:</i> 4
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C-Class Foes, Lieutenants: These are mini-bosses, built to force players to draw on their Bonds. Build up to them with a few mooks for warm up.

Nosy Reporter <i>Aspects:</i> Entirely too Perceptive, "The Truth is out there!" <i>Hits per turn:</i> 2 <i>Number of Hits to KO:</i> 7	Crush on a Cute Classmate <i>Aspects:</i> Words Stuck in Throat, Romantic, Emotional Vulnerability <i>Hits per turn:</i> 3 <i>Number of Hits to KO:</i> 3
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A-Class Foes, Generals: Here is the big gun, the season finale, the right hand of a cosmic evil, or the big cheese. They may take more than a single combat to take down.

Serious Falling Out with your Nakama <i>Aspects:</i> Painful Truths, Pent up Frustration, A Twist Comes to Light <i>Hits per turn:</i> 3 <i>Number of Hits to KO:</i> 8	Obsidian Scythe, Darkling <i>Aspects:</i> Cruel Heart, Nasty Traps, Secret Romantic <i>Hits per turn:</i> 4 <i>Number of Hits to KO:</i> 4
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S-Class Foes, Season Villains: Villainy doesn't stop at A-class! Every evil general needs a cosmic evil or a dread lord to reawaken. These are the cosmic evils, your true end of the universe style villains. Climax of the entire multi season campaign, and the kind of thing that shows up when your whole game is going to end with a bang.

The Dark Four, Servants of the Endless <i>Aspects:</i> Fanatical Brainwashing, Cruel and Heartless, Peer into Your Deepest Desire, Twist Your Words Against You <i>Hits per turn:</i> 5 <i>Number of Hits to KO:</i> 8	The Endless <i>Aspects:</i> Bottomless Hunger, Eternal existence, World-spanning horror, Hatred of Light <i>Hits per turn:</i> 4 <i>Number of Hits to KO:</i> 20
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These are just some possible examples of conflicts. Upgrade and downgrade as needed. A nosy reporter might be a mook if he's the dorky kid in your class who nobody listens to; he might be an S-class villain if he's a Pulitzer Prize winner with the cutting edge of technology and the resources to destroy the Veil itself. The dramatic scale of the campaign matters more than the literal power level.

Appendix 4: Allies, Acquaintances, Friends, and Foes

Example Sparks

Below you will find several individual examples of Sparks, drawn from stereotypes and broad themes of the magical girl genre. These are by no means the only possible stereotypes. Use them for inspiration, or throw them into the game when you need a quick NPC.

Fireball Heroine

The fireball heroine is energetic (often to a fault), passionate, and full of energy. She is eager to leap into action, very effective at frontal assault, and often lets her emotions cloud her judgment. When there's a wrong to be righted, she won't rest until she sees it dealt with.

In the anime, fireball heroines are the ones who discover the Dark plots and come to the aid of their more meek friends. Sometimes they're a bit too stern or go overboard, but they mean well and won't give up no matter what.

Possible Aspects: *"That's not fair!" "For Great Justice!" "I can't let a friend down!" "We've got to help!" "Helping hand" "Sense of great justice"*

Possible Troubles: *"We've got to help!", "How could you!?",* Hot blooded

Example Character Concepts: Blazing Rookie, Brash Kid, Everyman Hero, Karate Expert

Soul Token: Sword, spear, or other martial weapon

Signature Move: Fire or heat related themes. *"Fiery Justice Trump!"*

Likely Courts: Champion, Grace

Examples from anime: Sailor Mars, Cure Black



Calculating Heroine

The calculating heroine is cool and calm under pressure, exceptionally good at devising and sticking to a plan. They are highly skilled and often come from a high class background. Everyone around them is a target of intense critique (whether they appreciate the criticism or not), but a calculating heroine tends to be hardest of all on themselves. Often, they feel an obligation to overachieve from family or because of underlying need for acceptance.

In magical girl anime, this character is usually the high class lady of refined breeding who gets perfect grades all the time. Another take is the shy brain of the team, usually with huge glasses.

Possible Aspects: *"I have a plan" "Everybody calm down" "I've read about this before" "Straight A's" "Family connections" "Student Body President"*

Possible Troubles: *"Family obligations"* *"I must not disgrace my family's honor!"* *"Are we... friends?"* *"That doesn't make SENSE!"* *"Who reads comic books?!"* *"Why can't you stick to the plan!?"* *"I have to study."*

Example Character Concepts: Aspiring Athlete, Ballet Dancer, Dedicated Priestess, Perfect Elite, Prodigy, Doctor-in-training

Soul Token: Spear, bow, or gun: weapons with range, strategy, and preparation

Signature Move: Ice, snow, or water themes. *"Shooting Star Snowflake!"*

Likely Courts: Seeker, Grace

Examples from anime: Sailor Mercury, Cure Beauty

Wildcard Heroine

The Wildcard heroine is typically the outsider. Isolated at a distance, she often sees the situation from a different angle. This role is particularly well suited to the aloof Knights. Their off kilter obsessions and novel outlook can be the fresh perspective a problem needs or a temptation to the Dark.

In anime, the wildcard tests nakama unity. Often, the wildcard appears as a Knight with eyes for one girl alone, and the new dynamic can cause serious in-fighting. Once their loyalty is earned, however, their unique knowledge makes them crucial for understanding what the adversary is doing.

Possible Aspects: Inside Out Mind, Outsider Looking In, *"But it's so obvious!"*, Trust your heart and Leap, Reverse Psychology, Unorthodox Approach, Easy to Underestimate

Possible Troubles: *"Just a little longer!"*, Odd Speech Patterns, Distinct Accent, *"I need to finish this first"*, *"I'm sure it's harmless!"*, Clueless Demeanor

Example Character Concepts: Unconventional Thinker, Dedicated Musician, Expert Pilot, Serious Scholar, Technical Wizard, Timid Genius

Soul Token: If anyone is likely to have a weird token, it's the wildcard. Some use cards like a jester; others manipulate strange symbols in the air itself

Signature Move: Obscure references or wordplay: *"Mace of spades!"*

Likely Courts: Keepers, Seekers

Examples from anime: Cure Pine, Sailor Saturn, most male supporting character



Cute Heroine

The cute heroine, like the fireball heroine, showcases her passions. Both are inspirational and enthusiastic about everything. Where the fireball is all about willpower and drive, the cute heroine is about communicating feelings and trying your best. She tends to be more stereotypically feminine, baking cookies rather than making a speech.

Another variant of the cute heroine is the clumsy girl (*dojikko* in Japan) who fumbles her way cutely forward. This variant of the cute heroine can be spoiled and pampered since most people want to take care of her. When her nakama is threatened, she needs to put aside her cutesy quirks and move past her flaws to help the

team.

Possible Aspects: *"I don't get it. ", Homemaker, Giving Heart, Heart Sight, "Everything will work out. ", "I have faith in you. ", "Everyone, let's give our all!", Brighter than she acts*

Possible Troubles: *"She can't really be evil!", "It's just a misunderstanding!", Kitchen Poisoner, Too Ready to Trust*

Example Character Concepts: Aerobics Instructor, Airhead, Aspiring Idol, Feminine Elite, Kind Nurse, Schoolgirl

Soul Token: A wand or staff of some kind, usually with a heart motif.

Signature Move: Whatever it is, it's almost sure to be pink or pastel, and have a heart theme to it. *"Healing Hearts Prism Beam!"*

Likely Courts: Menders, Graces

Examples from anime: Sailor Moon, Cure Happy

The Pillar

The Pillar of the team stands as the steadfast rock around which all else flows. When the chips are down, the nakama can count on them. When the Fireball is discouraged, or the Cute Heroine has run out of optimism, the Pillar steps up to the plate. They are a source of constant strength and endurance to their nakama, and faith in them as well. They can sometimes be overly focused on the task in front of them, and they often lack a grand vision, but they always know the next step.

Possible Aspects: *"I won't let you down. ", Eye of the Storm, Deep Heart/Deep Mind, "I'm here for you. ", Bones of Stone, "I won't fail you again. "*

Possible Troubles: *"I won't let you go!", Old Promises, Broken Promises, Unspoken Truths*

Example Character Concepts: Big Brother, Charismatic Friend, Kindergarten Teacher, Rational Hero, Silly Child, Well-Intentioned Prankster

Soul Token: A sledgehammer, club, tetsubo, even a baseball bat... something big, heavy, slow, and unstoppable.

Signature Move: Usually linked with Earth or Rock, and the powers of stability. *"Unrelenting Force Blow!"*

Likely Courts: Champions, Menders

Examples from anime: Sailor Venus, Mami Tomoe

Dutiful Heroine

The Dutiful Heroine has a lot of overlap with the Calculating heroine. Both are likely to be upper class, and both are likely to be extreme overachievers from a sense of duty or obligation. Where the Dutiful heroine is different though is her determination. Rather than the source of obligation being entirely or even mostly external, a dutiful heroine does it because she's certain it's the right thing to do, and she believes in it all the way... even when she's wrong. When she's focused and determined, nothing will stand in her way. Her great weakness is her worry that she's wrong, her greatest fear that someone will show her proof she's failed. This often leads her to stand alone, even when she should call for help.

Possible Aspects: *"I won't let the courts down!", "The Dark must pay for its crimes!", "You can count on me!", Indomitable Will, Formidable Training, "I can't lose!"*

Possible Troubles: Alone against the World, Hidden Heart, *"I don't need your help!", "You don't understand. ", Only Survivor, Unbending Devotion*

Example Character Concepts: Aloof Celebrity, Expert Loner, Gentle Bear, Otherworld Survivor

Soul Token: A spear, book, or magic papers. (Throwing the book at them.)

Signature Move: Usually a straight blast of pure Light, or other “pure” assault. *“By the Light, I will punish you!”*

Likely Courts: Champion, Seeker, Grace

Examples from anime: Sailor Mars, Homura Akemi

The Mentor

For some reason, The Mentor almost always takes the shape of a small furry animal to the new magical girls, perhaps to ease their fear. The mentor or companion knows *far* more than they’re letting on. Despite being nonhuman (usually, at least at the start) this never stops them from becoming part of the nakama, and then later, becoming pretty young heroines who take part in the adventure. In the world of Sparks, an older Spark usually takes this role. They’re very experienced, and often know a great deal of useful lore and information, but they frequently have limitations or issues that mean they can’t or won’t use their full power.

Possible Aspects: *“Let’s see what you can do”, “This is your story now”,* 100 Years of Light, Living Lore, Legendary Secrets, Battlefield Mentor

Possible Troubles: Battlefield Memories, Painful Secrets, Hidden Past, *“I can handle it. ”, “They’re not ready yet. ”, “I can’t bear it again. ”*

Example Character Concepts: The Boss, The Chief, Tired Veteran

Soul Token: Any, but tend towards the **Dutiful** or **Calculating** archetype choices.

Signature Move: Same as above.

Likely Courts: Any, or none. Not all mentors are even magical girls... to start.

Examples from anime: Luna, Kyubey, Mepple



Example Nakama – The Shooting Stars

During the Limbo Wars, a crack nakama was sent to prison by the Light Courts for a crime they didn't commit. These women promptly escaped from the Light's maximum security penitentiary, The White Tower, to the Twilight underground. Today, still wanted by the Light Courts, they survive as soldiers of fortune. If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find them, maybe you can hire – the Shooting Stars.

The Shooting Stars are an example nakama, useful as an antagonist or potential ally. They're not Twilight, despite the fact that they have to hide from the Light courts, but their methods are "Unorthodox but Effective", if you're polite. "Disorganized madness on a platter" is what most in the Courts would say.

Loretta

Loretta has a problem. She doesn't like to use the astral pathways. This is a pretty big problem for a magical girl, since it's the fastest way to travel. When this nakama was first formed, Marzia helped the group escape along a particularly harrowing stretch of the Astral, and ever since Loretta has been afraid of it. Not that she'd ever *admit* to being afraid, of course...

Court: Champion

Aspects: Tougher than Stone. Heart bigger than all outdoors. Slow but steady.

Trouble: "You can't trust the astral!"

Soul Token: Giant Sword

Signature Move: *"Spinning Grande Blade Strike!"*

Hope Points: 10

Bell

Bell is either the most brilliant strategist you've ever met or impossibly lucky. Some say both. Whatever the case, her "plans" look more like incarnate chaos than orderly logical things, but somehow her team comes through every time, no matter how improbable. She likes to cosplay, but often ruins the effect by chewing on an unlit stogie.

Court: Seeker

Aspects: *"I love it when a plan comes together!"*, Best seamstress in LA, Lateral thinker

Trouble: Caught in her own Web

Soul Token: Needle and thread

Signature Move: *"Heaven's Cloud Piercer!"*

Hope Points: 10

Rituals: Minor Mending

Callidora

Callidora is *strikingly* beautiful, a fact of which she is all too aware and all too willing to make use of. She also happens to have a PhD in fast talking, and she's more slippery than a snake oil saleswoman. She's charming, personable, likeable... and really not very sincere at all. Many a man has lost himself trying to figure out what her heart really hides.

Court: Grace

Aspects: Unctuously Glib, PhD in Fast Talk, Too pretty to be dangerous.

Trouble: Too pretty to die

Soul Token: A wand of rainbow crystal

Signature Move: *"Beauty Love Rainbow!"*

Hope Points: 10

Marzia

Marzia is insane. Or is she? Hard to tell sometimes. The act and the reality blend at the edges. Part of this is because Marzia has an incredible affinity for the Astral realms, where impossible things like temporal paradoxes or impossible spirits both occur. She quite simply sees reality on a different level than most. She has an easier time with yomi than people, a fact supported by her extensive menagerie of pets.

Court: Keeper

Aspects: Uncanny Insights, Astral Adept, Yomi wrangler

Trouble: *"Completely sane. Today."*

Soul Token: A pouch that holds seeds for her yomi companions

Signature Move: *"Whirlwind Backflip!"*

Hope Points: 10

Rituals: Minor Mending, Astral Walk, Yomi Friendship

Aldin

Aldin *claims* that he's not a member of the Shooting Stars. Yet he keeps showing up whenever they're in trouble. He fishes up information for them from the Seeker halls and gives a hint when the Courts are getting too close. Don't mistake that, though. All just a coincidence. After all, Aldin is a Light, and the Shooting Stars are known to be Twilights! (Aren't they?) Plus, he's a Knight, and Knights always want something from a magical girl (right?).

Court: Seeker

Aspects: Darkly Handsome, Court Insider's Knowledge, Courtly Manners

Trouble: *"Who's side is he on!?"*

Soul Token: A thick tome

Signature Move: *"Knowledge Cutting Secrets!"*

Hope Points: 15

Rituals: Minor Mending, Astral Walk

Inspiration

- *Sailor Moon* (anime, live action, and manga adaptations)
- *Pretty Cure* (a connected universe of anime and OVA magical girls)
- *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (anime and OVA series, viewed as a major deconstruction of the genre)
- *Wedding Peach* (anime series)
- *Cardcaptor Sakura* (anime and manga series)
- *Magical Girl Lyrical Nanoha* (anime and manga series)
- *Ojamajo Doremi* (anime and manga series, solidly aimed at younger children)
- *W. I. T. C. H* (Italian animation, adapted for American audiences, & a comic book)
- *Sailor Moon* (anime, manga, and live action)
- *Sailor Ranko* (web comic, and fan spinoff of *Sailor Moon*)
<http://sailorranko.com/>
- *Sailor Nothing* (another deconstruction, but with a happy ending. Also truly scary and horrific)
<http://stefangagne.com/sailornothing/>
- *Hex Hall* (a series of paranormal romance novels)
- *Amethyst; Princess of Gemworld* (American comic book series)
- *Princess: the Hopeful* (A roleplaying setting and system created by fans using the *Storyteller* system from *World of Darkness*).
[http://princesswod.wikia.com/wiki/Princess: The Hopeful Wiki](http://princesswod.wikia.com/wiki/Princess:_The_Hopeful_Wiki)

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empowered by Light and Hope,
and find out how far
your heart can carry you.***

TWISTED  DIE

You'll have to. The Dark won't stop until it has Harvested every last innocent and taken over the world itself. You are the Light that protects the hopes and dreams of everyone's heart. But don't underestimate the mundane world. It's hard to fight the forces of evil when you're grounded! Better study hard if you want that grade, and make sure to leave time for your friends. Because those who take Bonds for granted lose them. Can you conquer the Dark, protect your friends, and still get an A on that math final?