

# THOUSAND-FACED HEROES



  
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# THOUSAND-FACED HEROES

*An Epic Fantasy source book*

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## INTRODUCTION:

### REDISCOVERING MYTH

By and large, our society thinks that it's turned its back on myth. We see it as something we've outgrown, part of a superstitious past. Even those of us who still hold to a religion consider it to be a rational choice, unlike the beliefs of our ancestors.

What we forget is that our ancestors thought that believing that the world was stirred into existence by the spear of Izanagi or that it was bad luck to mentioning the name of a dead relative was as rational as universe created by a Big Bang or the other truths we hold to be self-evident ("that all men are created equal...").

Now I'm not a post-structuralist. There is a huge difference between those beliefs that are testable, falsifiable and verifiable and those that aren't. If you can test something and that test can be repeated then you can rely on the result. Myth is different – myth deals in hope, in inspiration and in meaning.

For some of you, the first time you heard the names of Paris, Hector or Agamemnon was when you watched that Brad Pitt movie, but, two or three generations ago, a (Western) man wouldn't be able to call himself educated unless he was able to read the myths of Ancient Greece in the language in which they'd been written. I'm sentimental enough to think that something has been lost.

The epic fantasy genre – both of literature and of role-playing games – puts the characters into starring roles in the myths of their cultures. Their successes and failures will be things of legend and will shape the future of their world for generations. Our exploration of the character's myths should encourage us to think about the things – the stories – that give meaning to our own lives.

SotC is an OGL role-playing game written by Evil Hat Productions and based on their FATE system. This supplement contains additional rules to tailor SotC to the epic fantasy genre; the SRD for SotC can be found at <http://www.faterpg.com/dl/sotc-srd.html>. If you don't want to use this game, the information will be useful for any tabletop campaign.

As well as the rules, this book also contains an exploration of the role and function of myth in historic and present day societies and a history of the epic

fantasy genre of fiction (also known as "high fantasy"). Hopefully, this will help you, the GM, to construct myths for your players to explore.

### MYTH

The Oxford English Dictionary defines myth as "a traditional story, typically involving supernatural beings or forces or creatures, which embodies and provides an explanation, aetiology<sup>1</sup>, or justification for something such as the early history of society, a religious belief or a ritual, or a natural phenomenon".

I've divided myths into five categories: creation stories, apocalypses, explanatory stories, social myths and folk heroes. This isn't an academic text and my degree is in Computer Science, not Anthropology. I'm concentrating on the use of myth in role-playing games so I've skipped and amalgamated certain categories of myth and deliberately avoided academic jargon.

### CREATION STORIES

Every society has a story about where they came from. The Babylonians believed the world had been carved from the body of the goddess Tiamat, while the ancient Finns believed it was formed from a gigantic broken egg.

It is a falsifiable, verifiable and testable fact that around fourteen billion years ago, our universe was created in something analogous to a huge explosion, but, by referring to it as "the Big Bang", we've created a story – a myth – around this fact (parodied by Terry Pratchett: "In the beginning, there was nothing – which exploded."). Some epic fantasy RPG campaigns will tie directly into a creation myth (the characters could be born into the first few generations of mortal creatures). It's more likely that the myths will be part of the world's back-story. The characters will encounter creatures, people and locations featured in the myth or have to deal with plot threads that have been left unresolved since the dawn of time.

### APCALYPSES

While we have been conditioned to think of an

<sup>1</sup> Aetiology is the study of how things are caused – it's most often used in medical or philosophical theories where it refers to the study of why things occur and the reasons behind the way that things act



apocalypse as referring to the events leading up to the end of the world, the word more properly refers to a great change affecting the whole of society. Both the Norse Ragnarök and the Christian Book of Revelation<sup>2</sup> discuss the destruction *and re-creation* of the whole of reality (“Then I saw a new Heaven and a new Earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”). Apocalypses are great RPG material – preventing the end of the world is an obvious character motivation. Alternatively the characters can find out that the end is inevitable, but they can affect the outcome in some way, shaping the new world (and authoring a new creation myth). If you want to go a particularly dark place, the characters could bring about the end of the world. Unless the PCs are both evil and insane this should be by accident, but an intriguing (but challenging) option is to write a campaign world so malevolent that ending it will be a relief (especially if the characters can create something better).

## EXPLANATORY STORIES

Explanatory stories are small-scale versions of creation myths. Instead of explaining how the whole world was created, the explanatory story picks one small detail (such as a leopard’s spots or a camel’s hump) and provides an explanation. If those two examples sound familiar, they’re taken from Rudyard Kipling’s “Just-So” children’s stories which *may* be based on tales he heard as a child in India. The GM can use these stories to introduce clues to the party – a monster’s vulnerability, for example or the dangers surrounding a semi-mythical location.

## SOCIAL MYTHS

The fourth category of myths are those that explain how a person should behave. These explain how a particular social taboo came about and the consequences (real or mythical) for breaking this taboo. These are, effectively, a special case of explanatory stories.

Social myths are not usually suitable for an RPG campaign unless the lesson is very carefully handled. A trickster deity (see page 10) could incorporate the characters into the deity’s story in order to teach the characters a lesson, but this is likely to annoy the

<sup>2</sup> That’s “Revelation” not “Revelations” (or “Apocalypse” if you’re not a Protestant) – it’s a pet peeve of mine. If the editor has added an “s” then they haven’t read this footnote.

players unless they are convinced their characters deserve it (hint: use lots of humour).

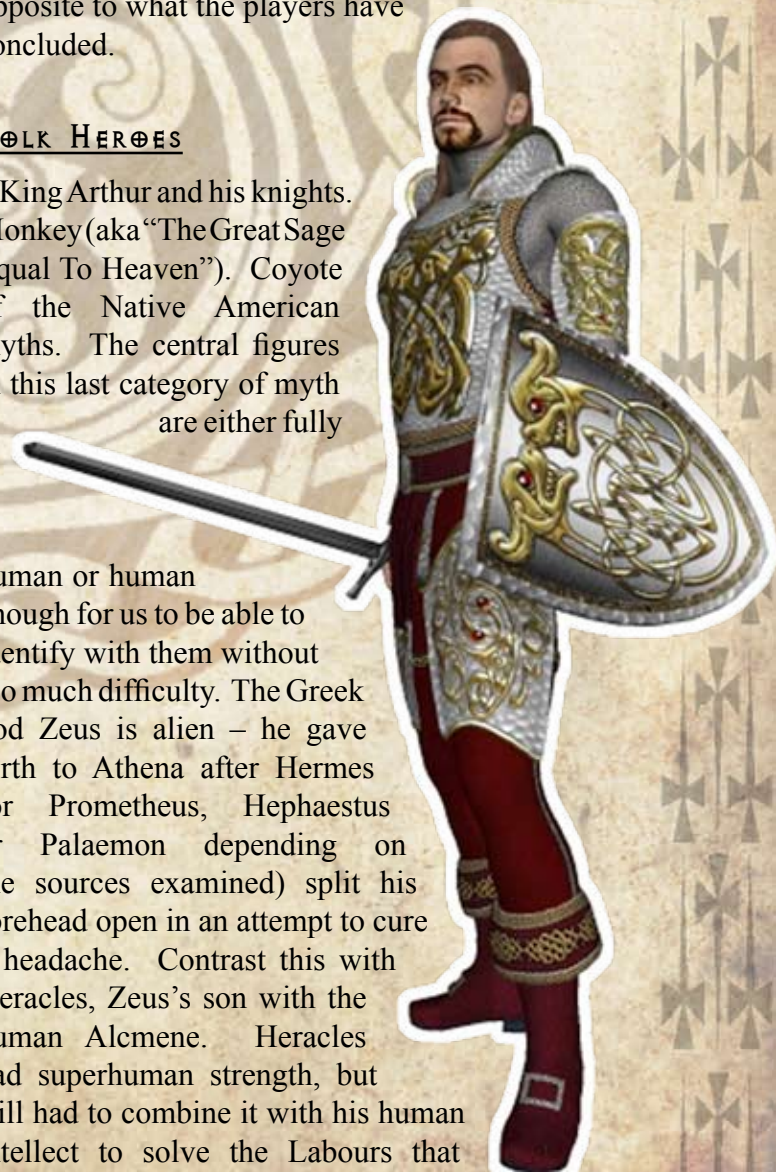
As with explanatory stories, discovering the truth behind a myth is always a good subject for an adventure. The details of an unusual ceremony can provide be clues for observant and academically-inclined PCs. If you’re old enough to remember the Tom Baker incarnation of Doctor Who, he identified the origin of Leela’s ancestors by the gestures she used to ward off evil – based on the technique for securing the seals of a “Starfall Seven” space suit.

If a particular myth is being used for social control (“do what I say or the Black Beast of the Marsh will eat you”), then it’s only natural that folk hero PCs (see below) will want to slay the beast (or equivalent) or to prove that it is fake. A sneaky GM will provide ambiguous clues and let the players decide whether or not the myth is real – then reveal that the truth is opposite to what the players have concluded.

## FOLK HERØES

King Arthur and his knights. Monkey (aka “The Great Sage Equal To Heaven”). Coyote of the Native American myths. The central figures in this last category of myth are either fully

human or human enough for us to be able to identify with them without too much difficulty. The Greek god Zeus is alien – he gave birth to Athena after Hermes (or Prometheus, Hephaestus or Palaemon depending on the sources examined) split his forehead open in an attempt to cure a headache. Contrast this with Heracles, Zeus’s son with the human Alcmena. Heracles had superhuman strength, but still had to combine it with his human intellect to solve the Labours that





Eurystheus used to challenge him.

Western society has created its own set of folk heroes, but those who look (e.g.) to Winston Churchill or Martin Luther King for inspiration tend to gloss over King's persistent womanizing or Churchill's advocacy of the use of weapons of mass destruction against the Kurds nearly seventy years before Saddam Hussein. No human is perfect (and the best of us frequently also have a monstrous dark side), but we need to believe in our heroes so they can continue to inspire us.

It's almost inevitable that the characters in an extended epic fantasy campaign will become folk heroes – often while they are still alive. Clever players will take this opportunity to shape the nascent myth to their player's advantage (at the very least they'll be able to cadge free drinks!). It can be interesting to create a campaign sequel set a couple of hundred years after the original. The players can see how their retired characters have shaped the world and how their activities have been warped into legend.

Folk heroes are often tricksters (see page 10); Winston Churchill was famous for his exchanges in Parliament (an apocryphal tale has him entering the toilets, seeing a senior MP at the urinal and moving to the opposite end – when challenged he said it was because whenever the government of the day saw something big they attempted to nationalise it).

## GODS AND RELIGIONS

Without exception, myths feature some sort of divine or semi-divine figure. While the gods themselves may take a back seat, their presence will cast a shadow over the story.

Religion defines how a god or gods are perceived. This can be very different to how the god is or how the god wants his or her worshippers to see them. As a deity, once you pass your message, your myth, onto imperfect human beings they can and will distort its meaning. A religion can and will change in nature in the centuries since the initial revelation. If you're running a campaign sequel (as suggested in the previous section), then you'll also need to think of how the society's religion will have changed.

Sometimes the worshippers can be better people than their gods. Terry Pratchett mentions in passing a priestess who created an advanced system of ethics on

the behalf of a goddess whose only real interest was hairdressing.

Gods and goddesses give meaning and purpose to their followers through their religion, but what does the deity get out of it? Several writers have explored the idea that a deity draws power from their worshippers; other deities might just be lonely. Many modern pagan systems suggest that the gods are human creations, formed from our need for meaning (and what would happen to a deeply religious society if this truth was discovered?).

A perennial question when designing a universe for a role-playing game is whether or not to give game statistics to the deities. Personally, I'd only bother doing this if they are intended to be direct allies or adversaries. To be a proper object of worship a deity should have a peak skill at least two levels higher than their worshippers, but "small gods" (thank you once again, Mr. Pratchett – sorry Sir Terence) will be appropriate in many campaigns (think of a local deity worshipped by a single village). The section on putting the "epic" back into "fantasy" (see page 20) contains ideas on appropriate skill levels and stunts for deities and demigods and the "religious aspects" section (see page 21) is about how to reflect the beliefs of a particular character in terms of aspects.

## FORMATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRITUALITY

The big question for any worshipper is this: what does the god or gods want? The worshipper's answer to this question will dictate his or her behaviour and form part of their identity (hence "formative spirituality"). Religions based on around formative spirituality will tend to be the dominant faith in a given society and will exist to preserve the culture in its current form. Deities of a formative religion will tend to be "bigger" and more powerful versions of human beings and behave much like humans would if given unlimited power – think of the Norse or Greco-Roman deities.

Transformative spirituality is about becoming a better person and using that transformation to improve the society around you. The deity or deities will be more alien – perhaps incomprehensible or (more correctly) ineffable or inscrutable. The religion will present a code of ethics that will be almost or even completely impossible for a human being to follow



and then encourage the adherent to follow it. This may sound insane, but the major real-world religions take this approach; think of the Buddhist search for enlightenment or Jesus' command that his followers "be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Theoretically, transformative spirituality should reduce self-righteousness and hypocrisy (because no-one will have got everything exactly right) and constantly encourage every adherent to become a better follower of the religion's ethical code (and thus a better person – at least from that religion's point of view). However, transformative spirituality is not always a good thing – in the wrong hands it can and will lead to witch-hunts and scapegoating.

Formative spirituality tends to be more practical. The worshipper will ask not what they can do for the deity in question, but what the deity can do for them. The gods will typically only be invoked on special occasions (births, marriages and deaths, the "hatching, matching and dispatching" of cultural Anglicanism) or in emergencies. The rest of the time, they'll be left on the shelf – literally if the gods are represented by idols. I'll leave the last word on formative spirituality to Conan:

*Crom, I have never prayed to you before. I have no tongue for it. No one, not even you, will remember if we were good men or bad. Why we fought, or why we died. All that matters is that today, two stood against many. That's what's important! Valour pleases you Crom, so grant me this one request. Grant me revenge! And if you do not listen, then to hell with you!*

Frequently, a religion will be transformative in its early history and then become formative as it matures (think of the evolution of Christianity from underground mystery cult to official religion of the Holy Roman Empire). A particular religion can exist in both formative and transformative forms – a popular preacher or evangelist can trigger a revival in a the most moribund of parishes.

Now what does this mean for a PC or GM? The party could get involved in the conflict between an existing formative religion and a new transformative faith, or the formative and transformative elements of the same faith. They could wind up on the wrong side of a witch hunt or be encouraged to defend a person or group scapegoated by a transformative revival. If one or more of the PCs are priests or followers of the same deity, that deity might want them to be part of a new

movement within their faith (and what if it's not their deity that's encouraging them, but an imposter?)

## PANTHEONS

Religions without a hierarchy of mythical figures are rare; they might be called gods, demi-gods, saints or prophets.

Individual members of a pantheon will have different areas of authority. Nut was the Egyptian goddess of the night sky; Apollo was a sun god, but also god of doctors; St. Jude is patron saint of the lost causes, hopeless situations and the Chicago Police Department<sup>3</sup>. In game terms these are all portfolios and represented by a religious aspect (see page 21).

A monotheistic faith will often insist that that it's only the head of the pantheon that has any special powers and the other figures are only exceptional in their piety. Any miracles, etc. are and were caused by the deity working through them. If this is the case, the religion will usually have rules to prevent blasphemous heresy (a Catholic or Orthodox Christian does not pray to the Virgin Mary and can get quite irate if you suggest that this is what they are doing; instead they ask Mary to add her prayers to their own. The difference is subtle, but important – at least to them).

If a conflict within a religion isn't over doctrine (see page 11 on schism), then it will be between followers who emphasise different elements of a pantheon. Different deities might have subtly different portfolios or methods of worship in different parts of the world. This can lead to conflict between geographically isolated followers of the same religion.

When designing a religion for a game world, it's easiest to sketch out the major figures, their hierarchy and outline their portfolios. Details can be filled in using declarations.

## MONOTHEISM AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Unless the game world is a boring utopia (and, thus, without the conflict needed for a good campaign) having a single, all-powerful, creator deity (or pantheon of creator deities) throws up the theological conundrum, known as "the problem of evil". Here's one classic presentation of this problem, as written by Epicurus:

*Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then*

3 I'm not joking



*he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing?  
Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing?  
Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor  
willing? Then why call him God?*

How these questions are answered in your game world will fill in some important details.

Perhaps the deity isn't all-powerful. He or she might have made mistakes, allowing flaws to emerge. The deity might be inherently good, but needed to make pacts with evil beings in order to create the world.

Perhaps the world was created perfect and evil entered later. If the deity is absent for some reason (dead – perhaps he sacrificed himself to create the world, missing, asleep, imprisoned or addicted to a game that's occupying all of his attention) then evil could have seeped into the world from outside.

Perhaps the deity is has a good and an evil side (like nature itself), is malevolent, or is so alien that their concepts of good and evil, pain and suffering are completely different to those of mortals.

Lastly, perhaps the world itself is an illusion, making evil a consequence of faulty perception. You might think that this option would remove some of the opportunity for drama, but Monkey never had this problem.

### SATAN AND DUALISM

Religions with a single, creator deity often have a single figure that's the source of all of the suffering and evil in the world; Satan in Christianity or Angra Mainyu in Zoroastrianism. If the creator deity also created this Satan-figure then the religion is monotheistic (and has a *serious* Problem of Evil). If the good deity and the evil deity are evenly matched (like Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu in Zoroastrianism) then the faith is known as dualistic.

In Christianity, and its cousin religions Islam and Judaism, Satan has a dual role as tempter and accuser. The serpent in the Garden of Eden tempts Eve and then Adam away from the path that Yahweh<sup>4</sup> has set for them. The serpent is cursed (“...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike at his heel.”), but, by the book of Job, 4 The Bible uses many names for God, but “Yahweh” (also spelt “Jehovah”) is the name most commonly used in the stories under discussion



Satan (lit. “Accuser”) is present at a council between Yahweh and His angels. Satan accuses the eponymous Job of only serving Yahweh because of what Yahweh has given to Job. Yahweh responds by allowing Satan to kill Job's family, take away his possessions and inflict his body with painful sores. Job is tempted to curse Yahweh (and thus prove Satan right), but resists. Throughout the Bible (not just in Revelation, but also in (e.g.) the apocalyptic prophecies in the book of Daniel), the myths emphasise that the scope of Satan's activities is limited by Yahweh. In some campaigns with a monotheistic religion, the characters will be able to use Mysteries stunts (Psychic, Whispers on the Wind) to find the restrictions that their adversaries are operating within in a given situation and use the rules against them.

In dualistic religions, the tempter or accuser figure is under no such restrictions. Typical RPG campaigns are dualistic and feature a “counter-pantheon” of evil deities.

### TRICKSTERS

Another important type of mythic figure is the trickster; a being that plays tricks or otherwise disobeys the normal rules or standards of behaviour. Archetypal tricksters include Loki from the Norse sagas, Monkey from the Chinese “Journey to the West” and Coyote from Native American legend, but many other folk heroes also have elements of the trickster in their personality (Robin Hood, Brier Rabbit, Odysseus,



Bugs Bunny).

First and foremost, a trickster breaks the rules – both of the gods and of nature. They can be cunning, foolish or both, but are almost always funny. The trickster brings transformation, opens us up to life's multiplicity and paradoxes and is often involved in creation stories.

In legend, a trickster figure is almost always depicted as male, but can change genders or exhibit ambiguous sexual behaviour. Loki transformed himself into a mare in order to seduce and distract a magical horse (and later gave birth to Odin's steed, the eight-legged horse Sleipnir); Bugs Bunny always seems suspiciously good at dressing up as a woman.

In more modern versions (such as "One Thousand and One Nights" or the fairy tales of Anderson and the brothers Grimm), the trickster is incarnated as a clever and mischievous person or being who tries to survive the challenges and dangers of the world using cleverness, trickery and deceit as a defense: Aladdin, Sindbad, Rumpelstiltskin. Examples from this century include Bugs Bunny and the characters played by Groucho Marx and Charlie Chaplin. To bring things right into the present (and thus make this book looked dated in five years), think of Vince Noir of "The Mighty Boosh" or Phobe from "Friends".

Tricksters are not always benevolent. Loki certainly wasn't and Satan has elements of the trickster about him (particularly as described in Anton LaVey's *Satanic Bible*).

## DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE

In "real life" death is more inevitable than taxes, but SotC encourages characters to offer concessions before being taken out.

There are exceptions, but in most religions your behaviour while alive will govern what happens to you after your death. This makes the priesthood an important mechanism for social discipline – if you believe that they can decide where you go in the next life they can control your behaviour in this one.

## REINCARNATION

Buddhist and Hindu mythology life and death are part of a cycle. Your behaviour in this life will govern your circumstances in the next. The details of



"karma" vary, but, typically, an individual soul who's good over a number of incarnations can work their way up from insect, to animal, to sentient being and then up the social ladder. Only an extraordinarily virtuous person will escape this cycle entirely, but, in Chinese mythology, certain particularly intelligent animals can side-step the wheel of incarnation by taking on human form. This rarely ends well.

A previous incarnation can be represented by an aspect, particularly if friends or enemies can be carried from one incarnation to another. The Death Defiance feat can represent a near-immediate reincarnation (instant karma?).

## THE LAND OF THE DEAD

The Jewish Sheol, the Norse Hel, the Christian Limbo and the Greco-Roman Hades are all startlingly similar myths. A dark and gloomy place where the dead (or certain of the dead) are imprisoned either for all eternity or until the end of time. This place isn't particularly unpleasant, but it's not a beach holiday either. It's, well ... Limbo.

Going down to the land of the dead is a common myth – in particular to rescue someone (the Greco-Roman Orpheus and Eurydice; Enki and Innana from Babylonian legend). If a character has recently been taken out and the player wishes to take a back seat for a session or two, then the rest of the party could attempt to bring them the character back from the dead. Alternatively, the only source of some vital information



could have passed on. Either way the journey will not be easy and there will often be restrictions on the information or people who can be brought back or the manner of their exit (Orpheus couldn't look back on the return journey, for example). All of this is good opportunity for compels.

## HEAVEN AND HELL

The afterlife can also be a place of either reward or punishment (depending on the subject's behaviour in life). In most mythologies, heaven is also the home of the good deities and hell the home of the disloyal opposition. Punishment and reward will usually be symbolically appropriate; Dante depicted misers as having to push huge bags of money for all eternity, while the Chinese Chamber of Eye-Gouging was for leers and Peeping Toms.

## SCHISM

While there were many other side-issues, the major difference between Catholic and Protestant Christianity at the time of the Reformation was this: at what point did the bread and wine used during Holy Communion become the body and blood of Jesus. Catholics believed that it was transformed when the priest blessed it; Protestants believed it was when it entered the body of the person who ate or drank it<sup>5</sup>. This may seem a ridiculous thing to die over today – and it is – if you genuinely believed that your answer to this question will control where you will spend eternity then you'd look at it rather differently.

Religious conflicts are always disguised political disputes. The Pope issued rulings on inheritance, succession and marriage, giving him significant political as well as spiritual power. Luther's reforms offered a way of "doing Christianity" without having political decisions overruled by Rome. So when King Henry VIII needed to find a more fertile replacement wife and the Pope wouldn't co-operate then he could set up his own (Protestant) religion and grant himself a divorce.

In a religious society, a schism is effectively a civil war, with all of the attendant potential for drama. If the object of the campaign is to prevent this, the characters

will need to discover the underlying dispute and defuse the tension. Unlike "real life", the theological dispute will need to be plausible – unless of course you're going for comedy.

## MAGIC

Aleister Crowley defined magick (which he spelt with a "k" to avoid confusion with stage conjuring), as "*the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with the will*". This is a little broader than is useful for our purposes (for a start it includes computer programming), so here's an alternative: magic is the process whereby a character invokes an external supernatural force in order to produce a physical, mental or spiritual effect.

Most of the Mysteries stunts in the SotC SRD will fit into this definition of magic, particularly those in sections 6.20.2 (Hypnosis) and 6.20.4 (Spirits). Many of the new Mysteries stunts (see page 33 and following) also fit. Characters that use magic will have one or more aspects that describe the origin and nature of their powers.

The tapping into this "external supernatural force" comes at a price. This force might answer the character's prayers, it might work miracles through them or the characters might have been granted command over or have an alliance with angels or demons. However, it – or they – will want something in return.

In a monotheistic or dualistic universe, magic that calls on the power of heaven is called theurgy, while magic that calls on the power of hell is thaumaturgy. A religious aspect (see page 21) would be expected for a character that uses theurgy or thaumaturgy. If specific rituals are needed or the deity may remove abilities for disobedience then stunt aspects (see page 22) should be applied to these stunts.

Nature can have its own magic and should be treated like a (very primal) religion. The Druid or Beastmaster stunts (see page 38) would be common for a servant of nature. Alternatively, the character may have a mysterious mentor for a patron or get their powers from a mystic artefact.

## THE HERØ'S JOURNEY

The monomyth or hero's journey is an apparent

<sup>5</sup> Nowadays most Protestants don't believe that it changes at all and that it's only a symbol of Christ's body and blood



pattern found in myths and legends from around the world. It was first described by Joseph Campbell in his book “The Hero with a Thousand Faces” (the title of this book is taken from Campbell). He believed the myths from different times and cultures seemed to hold certain common characteristics. As he put it “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”

While modern anthropologists typically believe that Campbell overstated his case, the concept is still a big influence in popular culture. Movies as diverse as “The Matrix” and “The Lion King” quite deliberately follow this pattern and you’ll never look at the original Star Wars trilogy in the same way again after reading this next section.

Campbell’s original formulation of the monomyth has seventeen stages, divided into three sections. Each stage represents a step or segment in the hero’s journey, but they don’t always happen in the order below and it’s very rare for a myth to include all of the sections.

## DEPARTURE

### THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

Every story has a beginning. Buddha becomes bored and dissatisfied with his royal life and ventures out into the world. Sometimes a Morpheus or Gandalf figure will offer the adventure to the hero; sometimes Alice will fall down the rabbit hole. Either way the nascent hero realises that his or her world is bigger and filled with more opportunity (and more danger) than they could have imagined.

### REFUSAL OF THE CALL

Both Jonah and Luke Skywalker turned their back on adventure; Luke needs to finish the harvest, while Jonah flees in terror towards the opposite end of the world. Alternatively, they might hear the call, but treat it trivially until their lack of seriousness leads to disaster.

### SUPERNATURAL AID

In this stage a mentor gives the hero tools and/or

advice that they will need on their journey. Arthur receives Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake; Father Christmas arms the Pevensie children; Ben Kenobi gives Luke his father’s light sabre and trains him in the use of the force; David Carradine’s character constantly has flashbacks to advice given to him by Master Po.

## THE CROSSING OF THE FIRST THRESHOLD

The hero takes a irrevocable step (“the blue pill”) marking a boundary (or threshold) between who they were and who they will become. Often there will be a guardian that will need to be overcome before the character can leave their old life. This may be something as simple as a parental figure that the hero has to stand up to and defy.

## BELLY OF THE WHALE

Instead of crossing a threshold, the hero can begin their new life through a baptism – a death and rebirth that can be symbolic or actual. The motif is named after the story of Jonah, carried in the belly of a whale for three days and nights.

## INITIATION

### THE ROAD OF TRIALS

Having passed the threshold (or having died and been reborn), the hero enters a new world, subtly or radically different to his old existence. Often it will be a dream-like landscape of ambiguous or symbolically significant forms (think of Dorothy in Oz). The hero is challenged by a series of obstacles. In overcoming them, he or she grows as a person. Often the hero is helped covertly by the mentor from the “supernatural aid” stage.

## MOTHER AS GODDESS

The ultimate trial may involve a marriage or sexual encounter between the hero and a queen-like or mother-like figure. In a Gaian-style religion, this Goddess may literally be a Mother (think of Slainé’s marriages). This represents the hero’s mastery over life (represented by the feminine). If the hero is female then the figure will be a male.



## WOMAN AS TEMPTRESS

Another tricky one to describe without lapsing into cliché or unfashionable imagery. Frequently a male hero will have to choose between a wholesome “girl you’d bring home to mother” and one that you ... wouldn’t (Flash Gordon resists Princess Aura and chooses Dale Arden instead). In the first three episodes of Star Wars, George Lucas attempts to combine both “Mother as Goddess” and “Woman as Temptress” in the relationship between Anakin and Amidala, with questionable success.

According to Campbell, the hero’s rejection of the temptress is supposed to represent a fixation with the disunity between the truth and the hero’s subjective outlook, “inherently tainted by the flesh”, but this may be too deep to be useful.

## ATONEMENT WITH THE FATHER

This is getting a little too Freudian for (post-) modern tastes, but a father figure represents both tyranny and

mercy. By confronting this figure, the hero reconciles the two sides of his own personality. Luke and Darth Vader; Jesus and God the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane

## APOTHEOSIS

Having overcome the obstacles, the hero’s consciousness is expanded and their ego is conquered. This can be seen as a second symbolic (or real) death and rebirth (Neo at the end of The Matrix, for example). Frequently, the hero gains new abilities or begins to see the world in a different way.

## THE ULTIMATE BOON

The hero is now prepared to achieve his or her goal or gain the item that was the object of the quest. This is never a selfish aim. The “boon” will always benefit the society which he or she left – whether the defeat of the Dark Lord or (like Prometheus) bringing fire down from the heavens.





## RETURN

### REFUSAL OF THE RETURN

The hero may be reluctant to return to their society of origin or to the “real world”, particularly if the goal they’ve achieved involves peace, contentment, bliss and/or enlightenment – Michael Moorcock’s Tanelorn, for example.

### THE MAGIC FLIGHT

During the return to the “real world” or the society which the hero left, the hero may be pursued. Sometimes hero might have stolen the boon (think of the “goose that laid the golden eggs” from “Jack and the Beanstalk”) or the boon is guarded in some way and the guards will pursue. In other times it’s the hero that’s pursued (think of Wassalissa’s flight from Baba Yaga). In many fairy tales or folk tales, the flight is literally magic, with the hero transforming objects to frustrate the pursuit (Wassalissa, again) or transforming themselves or their companions to hide themselves or assist in their escape.

### RESCUE FROM WITHOUT

When Innana descends into the underworld in Babylonian myth, Enki has to rescue her. The palace of Jabba the Hutt is another symbolic Hell that the other characters descend into in order to rescue Han Solo. The hero has either refused to return or has been successfully blocked from returning with the boon, so forces from the ordinary world enter the fantastic to rescue him. The hero’s need for rescue can humble them and force him or her to re-evaluate his behaviour.

### THE CROSSING OF THE RETURN THRESHOLD

The hero returns, either to the real world or to the society which they left. They’re forced to either except this world as real (and give up something of the fantasy) or to choose between the society of their birth or the one from which they obtained the boon.

One common element in this type of scene involves the character meeting people or viewing scenes in the real world that echo encounters they had in the fantasy world. Think of the final scene of “The Wizard of Oz” where Dorothy sees something of the Cowardly

Lion, the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow in the farmhands.

### MASTER OF TWO WORLDS

Luke and/or Anakin bring balance to the Force (depending on your reading of the closing scenes of “Return of the Jedi”). Jesus appears to his followers, having united God and humanity. Because of the boon or because of the experience gained on the journey, the hero now straddles two worlds and can bring the boon from one world to another.

### FREEDOM TO LIVE

The hero grants the boon to the rest of their society. In becoming the “master of two worlds”, they’ve been transformed, often retaining any gifts or abilities they gained during the journey.

### ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS OF THE JOURNEY

While Campbell’s is the most well known, there are other formulations. Phil Cousineu divides it up into the following eight steps:

1. The Call to Adventure
2. The Road of Trials
3. The Vision Quest
4. The Meeting with the Goddess
5. The Boon
6. The Magic Flight
7. The Return Threshold
8. The Master of Two Worlds

David Adams Leeming also has an eight-step formulation, but uses clearer descriptions and introduces a couple of other common elements:

1. Miraculous conception and birth
2. Initiation of the hero-child
3. Withdrawal from family or community for mediation and preparation
4. Trail and Quest
5. Death
6. Descent into the underworld



7. Resurrection and rebirth
8. Ascension, apotheosis, and atonement

### USING THE HERO'S JOURNEY IN YOUR GAMES

The reason why these elements recur again and again is the same reason why authors and film-makers keep on using them – it works. The stages tap into something deep in our sub-conscious, making them feel familiar and comforting.

One potential difficulty is that most hero myths have a single central character that is the focal point of the action. This will frustrate all but the most generous player groups. One solution is found in the most famous use of the Hero's Journey – the original Star Wars trilogy. The major characters are each on their own Hero's Journey, Luke and Han in particular (Anakin/Darth Vader's Journey begins in "The Phantom Menace" and continues until his "Ascension, apotheosis and atonement" at the end of "Return of the Jedi").

Luke undergoes multiple symbolic deaths: on Hoth, on Dagobah, in his fall from Cloud City and Han's freezing in carbonite definitely qualifies as a "Belly of the Whale". The attacks on the Death Star in "A New Hope" and "Return of the Jedi" can be viewed as "Roads of Trials" and as "Magic Flights" – the parallels are near-endless. Different heroes are the focal points at different parts of the Journey.

As a GM, you should be on the lookout for elements in your game where you can incorporate imagery from the Hero's Journey. If you pull it off, you'll be grounding your story within the greater mythic

traditions of our culture, for a more satisfying all-round experience. For

example, if the characters are searching for a particular item, you can make it into a "Belly of the Whale" by placing it down a well or at the bottom of a lake. One of the character's – the focus for this particular session – will experience a symbolic death and rebirth while obtaining it, but the others will be involved supporting the character and (e.g.) fighting off the orcs or zombies that are attacking while the hero is down the well or under the water. The next session another character might experience "Atonement with Father" (defying their religious hierarchy?) or the whole group might go through "The Road of Trials".

## A SHORT HISTORY OF THE EPIC FANTASY GENRE

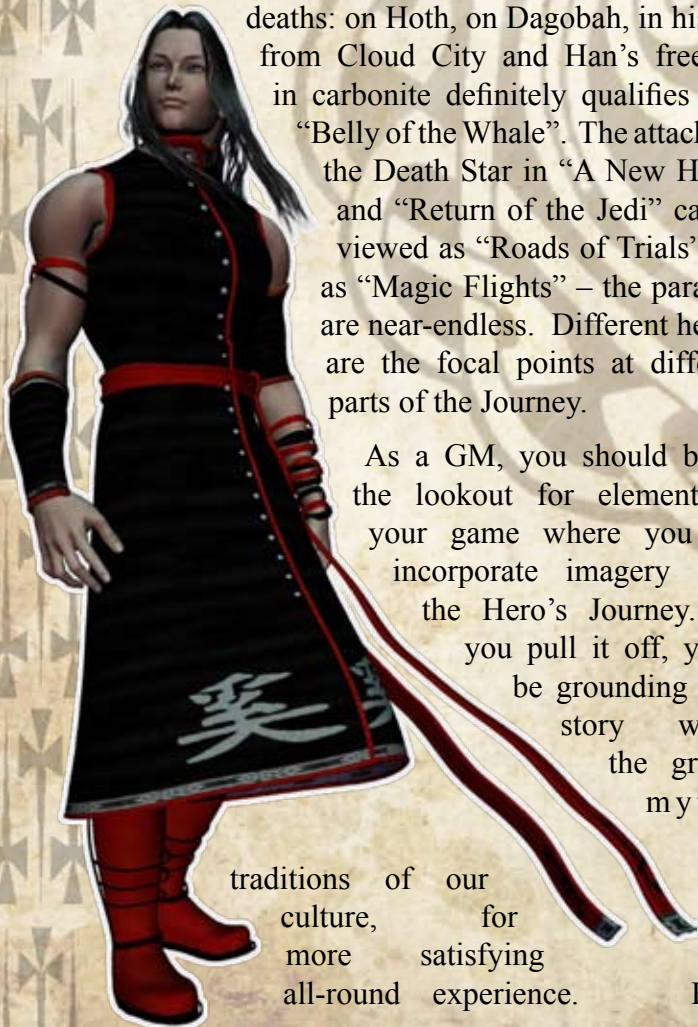
It's difficult to judge where myths end and fiction starts. Does Mallory's reworking of King Arthur count as an original work? Michael de Larrabeiti's "Borribles" sequence uses the Heroes Journey and contains fantastical elements, but is firmly set within the modern world.

I've chosen to define an epic fantasy story as one where the author has made a conscious decision to create a myth or myths for the world that they've created and where the main characters become part of those myths. The rest of this chapter is an introduction to the major works of epic fantasy and where they fit into the genre.

As the title says, this is a short history. I've had to stick to what I feel are the high points and the important works so I've probably left out your favourite author. For that, I apologise.

### EARLY MODERN FANTASY

Up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, fantastic tales were set in our world, often in the past, or in far off, unknown places ("long ago and far away"). George MacDonald's "Phantastes" is generally accepted to be the first fantasy novel written for adults (arguably the name of the genre it taken from its title). The other major fantasy author of this period was William Morris; while other writers wrote of dream worlds or foreign lands, Morris's works are the first to be set in an entirely invented world (e.g. "The Well at the World's End"). Edgar Allen Poe and Oscar Wilde experimented with darker fantastic





works. H. Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs created and developed the “Lost World” sub-genre, where stories set in the present day, but in remote parts of the globe.

Around the turn of the century, several classic children’s fantasy tales were published such as “Peter Pan” and the “Wonderful Wizard of Oz”. Their influence was such that fantasy was more accepted in juvenile literature in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, right up until Tolkien’s release of “The Lord of the Rings”.

## PULP FANTASY

In 1923, “Weird Tales” was created, the first all-fantasy fiction magazine. Many similar “pulp” magazines followed (named after the cheap wood pulp that was used to manufacture the paper), bringing fantasy fiction to a wider audience. The pulps were also used to publish science fiction; it was at this time that the two genres began to be associated together.

Fritz Leiber (the “Fafhad and the Grey Mouser” tales) and Robert E. Howard (Conan) began their careers in the pulps, and practically defined the “Sword and Sorcery” sub-genre. H.P. Lovecraft created pantheons of beings worshipped as gods with his the Cthulhu Mythos tales (originally published in the pulps), but his stories don’t have the inspirational or optimistic qualities that are usually part of epic fantasy.

The pulps brought fantasy to a wider audience, but not into the mainstream. This didn’t happen until a group of Oxford academics decided to do an in-depth study of the works of George MacDonald and produce new works in his style.

## TOLKIEN AND THE INKINGS

The Inklings were a writers circle which included J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis and other less well known authors such as Charles Williams. They met in an Oxford pub to discuss and produce new works in the style of George MacDonald. The most famous are Tolkien’s “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy and C.S. Lewis’s “Narnia” books.

It’s almost impossible to overstate the impact that “The Lord of the Rings” had on the fantasy genre. The depth and richness of the world that Tolkien created

still has not been surpassed (though many have tried).

Although she had no relationship with the Inklings, I’m mentioning Ursula K. Le Guin here (particularly her “Earthsea” series) because she doesn’t deserve to be lumped in with the “bloody fantasy trilogies”. Michael Moorcock has also been writing since the 60’s. His “Eternal Champion” stories are a series of interlinked myths that span many worlds within a “multiverse”.

## DUNGEØNS AND DRAGØNS

In the early 1970’s Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson realised the potential in a war game where the players controlled a single character instead of an army. They created a setting for these games, (influenced by Tolkien and another fantasy author, Jack Vance) and sold this new “role-playing game” as Dungeons and Dragons. Other publishers followed suit, creating games set in similar fantasy universes (including a licensed version of Tolkien’s Middle Earth). The games and the novels continue to have an influence on each other – both positive and negative. Some of the worst “bloody fantasy trilogies” (see below) smell like they were write-ups from sessions of Dungeons and Dragons. There are always exceptions; the setting of Raymond E. Feist’s excellent “Riftwar” books grew out of the activities of an extended group of Dungeons and Dragons players. R.A. Salvatore writes books set in Dungeons and Dragons settings that are, apparently, rather readable.

Another exception is Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne, a fantasy world created by Professor Muhammad Abd-el-Rahman Barker over the course of several decades. Like Middle Earth, Tékumel is a fantasy world created by an academic and at least partially as an exercise in linguistics. Several role-playing games have been produced in the Tékumel setting – one by the publishers of Dungeons and Dragons. Professor Barker himself has been running games in this setting for over thirty years.

## “BLOØDY FANTASY TRIØGIES”

The title of this section is taken from a review column written in the late ‘80s by author and critic Dave Langford, frustrated at the state of the genre. With the immense success of Tolkien, publishers tried





to find a new series with similar mass-market appeal. It wasn't until Terry Brook released "The Sword of Shannara" in 1977 that the genre had a novel that topped best-seller lists. This was followed by multiple novels attempting to ape Brooks success by copying the salient features. This resulted in piles and piles of "bloody fantasy trilogies" in which "Swords, Crowns, Wizards, Sceptres and Witch-Queens combine Forces to Create Sentences as Silly-Looking As this One."<sup>6</sup> David Eddings, for example, wrote the same fantasy trilogy, twice, over ten volumes (the Belgariad and the Mallorean) – and he's one of the better authors.

The "The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant" by Stephen R. Donaldson are two linked fantasy trilogies that rise above the mass. The hero isn't heroic in

<sup>6</sup> This second Dave Langford quote is from memory as it was written before the Internet and I'm interested in finding the exact wording. It was from one of his Critical Mass columns in White Dwarf. I know there's a collection of Langford's columns out there so if anyone has a copy and can find the exact quote, I'd be grateful

his behaviour and repeatedly doubts the existence of the fantasy world into which he is thrust. Robert Silverberg's Majipoor series was begun in the 1980's and sits on that tricky and arbitrary boundary between fantasy and science fiction.

## ENTER (THE) SANDMAN

In 1989, DC's new horror arm, Vertigo, released, "The Sandman", a new comic by an up and coming author, Neil Gaiman. His tale of a supernatural being, the titular Sandman (aka Dream), in charge of dreams, nightmare, myth, imagination and stories was not an instant success. It was only when his sister, Death, entered the comic in issue 8 that readers and critics realised that something special was happening. In this epic, ten-volume graphic novel and in later works such as "Anansi Boys" and "American Gods", Gaiman examines the relationship between myth and believer, between worshippers and worshipped.

Neil collaborated with another fantasy author, Terry



Pratchett on a apocalyptic comedy called “Good Omens”, but Terry Pratchett is more famous for his Discworld novels. These began as parodies of the epic fantasy genre, but evolved into a more sophisticated deconstruction.

Neil and Terry (now Sir Terry), revitalised the genre (yeah, I know “The Colour of Magic” came out in ‘83, but if I talked about it first then I wouldn’t be able to make the pun in the title of this section).

During this period Robert Jordan wrote a series of novels (“The Wheel of Time”) whose scope was even wider than Sandman. Another significant author and setting is Terry Goodkind’s “The Sword of Truth”, who uses his novels to explore philosophical themes such as Ayn Rands’ Objectivism.

## RULES

This is the meat of this book, a series of optional additions to the SotC SRD that allow the GM to customise it to an epic fantasy campaign.

## PUTTING THE “EPIC” BACK INTO FANTASY

The default SotC setting features characters whose skill ladder peaks at Superb, with five stunts and ten aspects. This is significantly better than the average human being, but some characters in epic fantasy tales are on an entirely different level.

If the player characters are demi-gods (Hercules, Beowulf or the Immortals of Chinese legend) then the GM can choose to have the players build them with a skill ladder that peaks at Fantastic (so they have one skill at Fantastic, two skills at Superb, three skills at Great, four skills at Good, five skills at Fair and six Skills at Average), with six stunts and ten or twelve aspects.

If the player characters are full deities, the players can build them with skill ladder that peaks at Epic (so they have one skill at Epic, two skills at Fantastic, three skills at Superb, four skills at Great, five skills at Good, six skills at Fair and seven Skills at Average), with seven stunts and ten, twelve or even fourteen aspects.

The Organised Religion, Deity and Immortal stunts would be appropriate for demi-gods and deities

## RACIAL ASPECTS

When an epic fantasy campaign features characters of non-human origin, each character should have an aspect that represents their species of origin (characters of mixed heritage might have two – or even more). This aspect could cover their appearance, temperament, natural environment (desert, woodland, subterranean) and perhaps idiosyncrasies such as the race’s attitude towards technology or any ancestral enemies. It’s speciesist, but if the campaign world includes humans, then it’s easiest to take us as the standard – any species that deviates from the human norm should reflect this in their racial aspect. The sample background includes four races and their racial aspects, but here are some more examples (with illustrations of how the aspect could be used in a game):

**Brekkit** (frog-legged, long-tongued, amphibians):

The Brekkit are, effectively, frog-men. The player could invoke the “amphibian” or “frog-legged” section of the aspect on an appropriate Athletics roll or invoke the “long-tongued” section of the aspect for effect to surreptitiously snatch a ring of keys off a nearby table. The GM can compel the “amphibian” section of the aspect if the current environment is too hot or too dry for the character.

**Taurant** (strong, tough, bovine, horned): A hybrid race, the Taurant appear half-bull, half-human. If the PC wants to use the horns regularly in combat, then the player should take the Natural Melee Weapons stunt (see page 33), but they can invoke the “horned” section of their aspect for be considered armed for a scene of hand-to-hand combat. “Strong” and “tough” and be invoked for appropriate Might or Endurance rolls.

**Vrark** (winged, fragile, feathered, avians): The Vrark might only be able to glide (unless the PC also takes the Flight stunt – see page 31), but the player would certainly be able to invoke “winged” to reduce falling damage. The GM should keep the “fragile” aspect in mind when deciding for physical (or even mental) Consequences for the character.

Racial aspects should be represented on the character sheet with the name of the species, followed by the text



of the aspect in brackets – for example: Vrank (winged, fragile, avian) or Brekkitt (frog-legged, long-tongued, amphibian).

These aspects can be modified by the character's relationship with their species – for example: Brekkitt Royal Family (frog-legged, long-tongued, amphibian) or Outlawed Vrank (winged, fragile, avian).

Humans can also have racial aspects. These should be chosen by the GM and will reflect his or her view of humanity within the campaign. Typical aspects might include: ubiquitous, creative, stubborn, charismatic or even primitive.

### NO MORE ORCS!

Multiple non-human races are a staple of the epic fantasy genre, but there's always a temptation to pick one race (usually the ugliest) and make them the “baddies” and another race (usually the elf-analogues) as the “goodies”. You can't blame Tolkien for creating this trope; it goes as far back as the Frost Giants of the Norse sagas.

In Tolkien's Middle Earth, the elves were purer and innately closer to the gods, both physically and morally. The orcs were created as parodies of the elves by the Satan-figure and (thus) inherently evil. In a theistic or dualistic universe, certain races may be blessed or cursed by the god(s).

Any decision to make a whole race irredeemable must be made carefully. The PCs will be able to kill them with impunity and this will make a difference to

the nature and character of the campaign. Some groups will like this (old-school D&D players, for example), but others will want a more ambiguous boundary between good and evil.

## RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

A religious aspect is similar to a racial aspect, but covers the character's belief system rather than their species. Religious aspects would describe the nature and portfolio of the deity worshipped (if there is a deity), its major tenets and perhaps its adversaries. The sample background includes four religions and their aspects, but here are some more examples (with illustrations of how the aspect could be used in a game):

El Passionarta (love goddess, passion, honesty, commitment, art): “The Passionate One” is the goddess of love, marriage, art, creativity and young women. Her priests and priestesses are artists (singers, poets, dancers, painters) as much as they are spiritual guides.

Old Lottie (local forest spirit, nature-loving, kind): Old Lottie is the spirit of the forest that surrounds the village that is at centre of this particular campaign. She's a parochial goddess, with little interest of anything that happens outside of her forest. However, little happens within her territory that escapes her attention and no-one in the village would make a big decision without seeking her advice.

The Overmind (creator god, protector and sustainer of creation, inscrutable): Little is known about this deity except it is supposed to have created the universe aeons ago and is concerned with little else other than protecting and defending its creation. Its' priests are equally inscrutable, but are known to be capable of committing atrocities to remove a potential risk to the universe.

Particular gods may have relationships with particular races; the deity may have created the race or the race may have chosen the deity as a patron. In this situation, the race should be part of the religious aspect.



## STUNT ASPECTS

As it sounds, a stunt aspect adds an aspect to a stunt. For example: the player of a fire mage may add the stunt aspect “Fire” to their Offensive Magic stunt. This would be written on their character sheet as “Offensive Magic (Fire)”. When this stunt is in use that can be tagged or compelled as normal. For example, the mage’s stray fireball can be compelled to set the building on fire or the player of the character can tag the Fire aspect to do extra damage to a water elemental. Certain new stunts (see the New and Modified Stunts section on page 29) have optional or obligatory stunt aspects. Existing stunts (either from the SotC SRD or another source) can have stunt aspects added to them with the GM’s approval.

If a character derives their powers from a supernatural force then this might come with restrictions. These can be represented by stunt aspects. If a ritual or special ingredients are needed for certain stunt then it might have a stunt aspect of “Ritual” or “Eye of Newt, Tongue of Frog”. If the character attempts to use the stunt without the ingredients or the ritual then the GM can compel the use of a fate point.

## OPTIONAL CHARACTER GENERATION PROCESS

The standard character generation process in the SotC SRD is tied pretty strongly to the default setting and doesn’t seem very appropriate for an epic fantasy campaign. If you don’t want to use Fast Character Creation, here are some guidelines

### CHARACTER IDEAS

Some of the character ideas in SotC can be used without modification (“Academic”, “Explorer”, “Jungle Lord”, “Man of Mystery”) or can easily be given a fantasy flavour (the “Plucky Reporter” becomes a bard or entertainer, the “Science Hero” or “Gadget Guy” gained their powers from magic rather than science and the “Two-fisted Pilot” has a ship instead of a plane). Here are a few other ideas for epic fantasy characters.

### PRIEST

Religion provides meaning, purpose and focus to the

lives of the average person in an epic fantasy campaign. Priests act as the conduit between the faithful and the Faith; they tend to be more educated than the masses. A deeply flawed priest or one that has lost his or her faith can be as interesting to play as a zealot, but a simple, honest and decent man or woman of “the cloth” is less of a cliché.

**What are you doing:** Serving your deity to the best of your ability.

### QUESTING KNIGHT

You have a duty – either self-imposed or one that has been laid on you by your superiors. This duty and the relationship with order will be reflected in one or more of your aspects. You are cynical warrior, a naïve paladin, or anything in-between. Even in the historical medieval period, knights didn’t absolutely have to be male – the Norse had their Shield Maidens and Joan of Arc wasn’t the only woman ever to don plate armour.

**What are you doing:** Fulfilling your duty, keeping your honour and hoping that these two drives never come into conflict.

### WISE MAN/WOMAN

The wise “person” is a lot like a more independent version of the priest. While they may have a formal belief system and might even be part of an organised religion, the wise woman or man is usually someone you go to when a priest isn’t available or isn’t appropriate. Most villages and all communities of any size will have someone who acts as a combination of doctor, shaman and general purpose advisor. In societies with a repressive religion, the wise woman/man will act as an alternative to the official faith and risks being condemned as a witch because of this. The Discworld novels of Terry Pratchett (“Carpe Jugulum” in particular) show the differences between the formal religions of the priesthood and the informal (and more practical) spirituality of the witches.

Without formal training, some of what you do will be inevitably hokum, but it’s your hokum and in a remote village it’s often the only thing available.

**What are you doing:** Serving your community the best way you know how.



## PHASES

These phases replace the character generation phases found in the SotC SRD. They're completely optional and are intended to get you thinking about your character in terms of aspects. In each phase you should select between one and four aspects, for the usual total of ten.

### PHASE ONE - ORIGIN

In this phase you decide where your character came from and the events of their youth from around birth to just before they're considered an adult by their society. In this phase you choose their racial aspect and perhaps one of two aspects related to their family, place of birth, a childhood friend or a significant event from this time.

Where the character grew up and who they grew up with will influence the character's attitude towards nature, towards magic or technology and towards non-native species. Are they cosmopolitan or xenophobic; a Luddite or superstitious? These attitudes might be important enough to reflect as part of an aspect. If the place of origin is famous or an important trading hub then this can become part of an aspect.

### PHASE TWO - BACKGROUND

This phase covers your character's teenage years and early adulthood (if they are an adult). If your character completed secondary or tertiary education or undertook professional training then an aspect could reflect this. A first love is always significant and some friendships – or enemies – made at this time can last a lifetime. At this point your character be starting on their initial career – professional relationships and adversaries can be a source of aspects.

While we're on the subject of relationships – has this character ever been in love (if his/her/its species does "love"). Have they been married (or equivalent)? How did it work out? Do they have offspring? What's happened to them?

### PHASE THREE - UNIQUENESS

All Thousand-Faced Heroes are exceptional in some way. In this phase you decide how this unique nature is reflected in their aspects. An aspect should be

linked to your character's Superb skill, customising or clarifying its use. In addition aspects can be related to their Great skills to one or more stunts (particularly if they are in a chain of pre-requisites).

Is there something else that makes them special? Are they the heir to a politically important family or the head of a guild; famous or infamous for something they didn't actually do, but legend has blown out of all proportion?

### PHASE FOUR - MOTIVATION

This is the phase where you tie your character to the rest of the party or into the campaign. The GM might have a list of allied or protagonist organisations – if your character has an aspect that relates to one of these organisations it will be easier to relate the character to the GM's concept of the plot.

What does the character want? Money? Power? Fame? A successful career? To find or rescue their true love? The character's drives and goals should be reflected in their aspects.

Do the character's already know each other? Are they acquaintances, friends, professional rivals or even enemies? What is it that will get each character in the party to the first location of the first adventure of the campaign?

### PHASE FIVE - ROUNDING OUT THE CHARACTER

If you're still stuck for that last aspect, think about their hobbies, passions, pet peeves or prejudices. If completely clueless, Risus<sup>7</sup> clichés are practically identical to SotC aspects and the Risus Companion has many ways of generating that last #@!% cliché including the "Megaversal Omnigroovy Background Machine", "The Random Bad Thing That Just Happened To My Character Table" and, of course, "The Last #@!% Cliché Table". If you're *still* stuck, then just leave a gap and add it in play.

<sup>7</sup> Risus™ is S. John Ross' trademark for his Anything RPG. It (and the excellent, but completely optional, Risus Companion) can be found at <http://risus.cumberlandgames.com/>



## NEW AND MODIFIED SKILLS

### ARCHERY

The new Archery skill replaces Guns in epic fantasy campaigns – even if the campaign world includes firearms, they will be fired using the Archery skill. The Archery skill is used in exactly the same way as the Guns skill. Applicable Guns stunts have been renamed to Archery stunts and can be found starting on page 29.

### DRIVE

In some epic fantasy campaigns this skill is inappropriate and should be dropped entirely. However, if the campaign world includes horse-drawn coaches or carts then the Drive skill would be used to control these vehicles.

### ENGINEERING

In epic fantasy campaigns, the standard of technology is generally lower than in the default setting of SotC. Because of this, the GM should ensure that the use of this skill fits in with his or her conception of the campaign world. The easiest way to do this is to restrict the Engineering stunts that a character can take (for example, if the campaign has no explosives then the Demolitions stunt is inappropriate).

### MYSTERIES

Magic (see page 12) is an important part of most epic fantasy campaigns and the Mysteries skill governs the theory and practice of magic. Depending on the campaign, mesmerism or fortune telling might not be appropriate uses for the skill. There are a number of new Mysteries stunts, beginning on page 33. A character can use the Mysteries skill to defend against a magical attack using Offensive Magic (page 34) or in a social conflict where the attacker is using Forked Tongue, Silver Tongue or Dark Passenger (pages 35, 37 or 36).

The history of magic, biographical information about witches and wizards and the abilities of supernatural creatures will be covered either by the Mysteries or the Academics skill; the player and GM can decide together. Theology and religious studies would normally be covered by Academics unless the question



is about how to invoke a miracle or another piece of magic.

### MAGIC!

In an epic fantasy campaign, the Mysteries skill can be used like the Science skill. Instead of explaining something with “Science!”, it can be explained using “Magic!” (See section 5.25.3 of the SotC SRD). When confronted with a challenge, the character can apply a mystical explanation, and roll against a difficulty set by the GM. This is a declaration action. If a character acts in accordance with the resulting magical advice, and he succeeds on the roll, he gains a +2 bonus or a re-roll on the action, by tagging the aspect he’s introduced. Since the bonus comes from tagging an aspect, the first one’s free, and subsequent uses will cost a fate point.

### CHARMS AND CURSES

Charms and curses are types of Mysteries manoeuvre. As normal, they add a temporary aspect to another character that can be tagged for bonuses, re-rolls or compels (first one is free – as usual). Charms and curses are usually fragile aspects unless spin is generated on the roll. If spin is generated, the sticky charms and curses usually last only for a single scene (but the person laying the curse or charm gets to decide which scene that is).

### PILOT

Most epic fantasy campaigns don’t feature air vehicles, but airships, gliders and even heavier-than-



air vehicles aren't completely alien to the genre. If these vehicles exist then the Pilot skill can be used as normal.

### SAIL

This new skill is effectively a combination of Drive and Pilot, but for sail boats and ships, rather than ground or air vehicles. Most of the guidelines for Drive and Pilot (including chases) apply to Sail. As well as being used to manoeuvre a boat or sailing ship, Sail is also used to navigate the vessel. New Sail stunts begin on page 39 – most are modified versions of Drive or Pilot stunts.

### SCIENCE

The Science skill stays much the same, but it will be limited and guided by the level of technology in the campaign. Using “Science!” as a declaration action (see section 5.25.3 of the SotC SRD) will generally be inappropriate (but see “Magic!” on page 26). The Theory In Practice and Scientific Invention might work, but Weird Science and Mad Science will only fit in a steampunk campaign (in which case you'll want the forthcoming “Brass, Blood and Steam”, also from UKG Publishing).

## GADGETS AND GIZMOS

### STATE OF THE ART

The level of technology in epic fantasy campaigns ranges from prehistoric right the way through to the early Renaissance. Gunpowder and steam aren't usually appropriate.

Magic can replace technology to a certain extent – if we take Arthur C. Clarke at his word, then any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable.

One typical feature of fantasy worlds (and inspired by the real world) is to give different races and cultures different levels of technology. Unlike the real world, the more primitive races tend to have better magic or a closer connection to their deities, maintaining a balance of power.

### DOLLARS AND CENTS

If you're designing a campaign world in detail, you need to produce your own version of the table in the Dollars and Cents section of the SotC SRD. An example is on page 52 of this book, but, frankly, I'd just wing it.

### TRAVEL AND COMMUNICATIONS

The major limiting factor in pre-modern civilisations was the communication links. Even with their extensive road network, it still took weeks to get a message from Rome to the edge of the Empire. Magic can bypass these limitations; as a GM you'll need to make a conscious decision about how much and in what way. If you allow the players to instantly send a message across the country once, they'll expect to be able to do it again – and they'll want to do it at a point where it will be inconvenient for your story.

### ARMOUR

Armour doesn't usually play a large role in epic fantasy. Sure the heroes might dress up for the climactic battle, but it doesn't usually make a difference. Whether the character is in field plate or a chain-mail bikini, it doesn't make a difference in game terms. Gadgets and artefacts with the Armoured improvement are something special and are treated as described in the next section.

### IMPROVING THINGS

The Artificer stunt doesn't exist in an epic fantasy campaign; any character with the Mysteries skill can use the skill to create and modify artifacts. The rules as detailed in the SotC SRD stand, with a few exceptions:

The Speculative Science and Unbelievable improvements are inappropriate; the Futurization improvement covers experimental technology that is beyond what is available to the general population in this campaign. A character must have the Technomancer stunt (see page 36) in order to apply the Futurization improvement.

The new Legendary improvement is Futurization for artifacts. The artifacts or the magic used to



create it is from a forgotten civilisation or was granted to the character by a deity. A character must have the Magus stunt (see page 33) in order to apply the Legendary improvement to an artifact.

An Independent or Conscious gadget has a single skill, at Mediocre level – this can be improved by the Upgrade or Craftsmanship improvements.

If the Armored improvement is applied to a wearable suit, then its effect is extended to the wearer. This means that if someone is struck for a single point of stress while wearing a gadget with this improvement, then damage does not roll up even if that box is already checked off (it doesn't prevent the stress, just the roll-up).

If the gadget also has the Futurization or Legendary improvement, Armored can be taken twice. This means that if the gadget, or someone wearing it, is struck for one or two points of stress, the damage doesn't roll up even if those boxes are already checked off (it doesn't prevent the stress, just the roll-up).

Armored usually applies to physical stress, but it can also apply to mental stress in (e.g.) telepathic combat. The decision about which type of stress it applies to should be taken when the improvement is selected; the Armoured improvement may be taken twice so it will apply to both physical and mental stress.

## NEW IMPROVEMENTS

The following improvements can be added to any gadget or artefact in an epic fantasy campaign, subject, as always, to the GM's approval:

**Dire:** A Dire weapon can harm characters with the Immortal stunt (see page 32). A character will need to spend a fate point to invoke this improvement for a scene, tagging the artifact or gadget for effect. In some campaigns, a Dire artifact will also need to have the Legendary improvement.

## SAMPLE ARTEFACTS

### THE PARANG ØF ELLIS

This bone-hilted machete was wielded by the wandering bard and storyteller Ellis before his disappearance in mysterious circumstances.

**Parang of Ellis** (Machete, □□□): Upgrade (+2 to Endurance rolls when resisting poisons), Craftsmanship (+1 to Intimidation), Upgrade (+2 to Art rolls when creating an Artistic performance that targets an individual or group, according to the satire and eulogy guidelines in section 8.3.3 of the SotC SRD).

### CRYSTAL BALL

The classic prop of fortune-tellers and mystics.

**Crystal ball** (Scrying device, □□□): Upgrade (+2 to Mysteries rolls when fortune-telling), Alternate Usage (can use Mysteries instead of Contacting when Gathering Information), Special Effect (on a successful Mysteries roll when gathering information, shows a picture of the person or location being investigated).

### LEGENDARY SWORD

This can be the McGuffin of the campaign, the only weapon that can help the Great Evil That Has Covered The Land.

**Legendary Sword** (Sword, □□□): Legendary, Dire, Craftsmanship (+1 to Resolve)

### HERNE'S BUCKLER

The god of hunting granted this light shield to his favourite disciple. It's designed to be worn on the arm of an archer.

**Herne's Buckler** (Shield, □□□□□): Armor, Rugged, Craftsmanship (+1 to Archery)

## NEW AND MODIFIED STUNTS

The following stunts are appropriate for any epic fantasy campaign, at the GM's discretion.

### NATURAL RANGED WEAPONS (ARCHERY)

The character has some sort of ranged attack "built-



in” to his or her body. This can be fire breath, the ability to project spines or something else. The Archery skill is used to attack with this ability. A stunt aspect (see page 22) should be taken as part of this stunt.

### LONG SHOT (ARCHERY)

The character can hit targets at much greater range than normal. All ranged weapons can be used at targets an additional zone away (or two if your GM is feeling generous).

### SHOT ON THE RUN (ARCHERY)

The character is light on their feet, able to fire their bow at targets that are close enough to touch. They can use Archery as a defensive skill against physical attacks; normally Archery cannot be used defensively.

### EAGLE EYE (ARCHERY)

Whenever performing an aiming maneuver against a target, you may roll your Archery at +1 to place the aspect.

### TRICK SHOT (ARCHERY)

Your character gains +2 on the roll for any Archery action that involves shooting an inanimate object. While this cannot be used to actually attack another character, it can be very useful for indirect effects, like shooting down a chandelier.

### EVERFUL QUIVER (ARCHERY)

Your character never seems to run out of arrows, bolts, sling stones etc. – no matter how many they fire or hurl. Normally, a character is considered to be carrying “enough” ammunition for their given situation and it doesn’t become an issue until something happens to make it relevant. A lack of ammunition can show up one of two ways. First, “out of ammunition” can often show up as a minor consequence for someone with a bow or a similar weapon. With this stunt, the character may spend a fate point in order to remove this consequence immediately, at the end of any exchange.

The character is still considered to have taken a minor consequence for purposes of determining whether his next consequence is moderate – the minor consequence

simply won’t be there.

Second, “out of ammunition” can show up as a temporary aspect resulting from a maneuver (to try to get someone to use up his arrows). Whenever this character is the target of such a maneuver, he may defend at +2.

### LAST SHOT (ARCHERY)

That last arrow, quarrel or sling stone has a kind of magic to it. A character with this stunt may declare that his quiver or pouch is empty, and may make any single Archery attack at +3. This is the character’s last shot – its use means that there’s nothing left. The only way the character is going to be able to use his Archery skill in the scene is if he takes an action acquiring more ammunition, which may not always be possible. Even the Everful Quiver stunt cannot be used to remedy this situation; you really are out of ammunition.

### HAIL OF ARROWS (ARCHERY)

Your character is skilled at laying down a scathing hail of suppressive fire. When using Archery to perform a block (see “Block Actions” in section 4.3.4 of the SotC SRD), the character can ignore up to two points of penalties imposed by the GM due to the complexity of the block.

### QUICK DRAW (ARCHERY)

This allows a character to bring his weapon to hand so fast it’s as if by magic. The character takes no penalty for drawing a bow (or similar ranged weapon) as a supplemental action. If someone is actively blocking such an action (see “Block Actions” in section 4.3.4 of the SotC SRD), you may treat that block as if it had a value two steps lower.

### ZEN ARCHERY (ARCHERY)

#### **Requires Quick Draw.**

The character and his bow are as one; the thought to take aim and fire is the same as the action. With this stunt, the character may use his Archery skill to determine initiative, instead of Alertness.



## SNAP SHOT (ARCHERY)

### **Requires Zen Archery.**

Once per exchange, between or before other characters' actions, the character may spend a fate point to pre-empt the usual turn order and act next.

The action taken must involve a roll with his Archery skill – usually an attack. This may be done in addition to the character's normal action, but each time it's done in the same scene, the fate point cost increases by one.

## BOWYER (ARCHERY)

When working with bows, crossbows, slings and other ranged weapons specifically, this character may use Archery instead of Engineering.

## LEGENDARY ARCHER (ARCHERY)

### **Requires two other Archery stunts.**

Any time this character uses a weapon fired using Archery and hits a target for at least one stress, the stress of the hit is increased by one (meaning, essentially, that he never hits a target for less than two stress when he hits).

Furthermore, any defense against maneuvers to deprive the character of his bow (or equivalent) is improved by one. After all, the two belong together in the hands of a Legendary Archer.

## LEGENDARY BOW (ARCHERY)

You have one special ranged weapon that you hold above all others (despite the name, it can be a crossbow, sling or other weapon that's fired using the Archery skill). This weapon is a gadget, automatically receiving the craftsmanship improvement (giving you a +1 to your Archery when using this weapon) and two other improvements that can be changed between sessions. In addition, the weapon is so well-made that it never needs major repairs if damaged; reduce the time it takes for you to repair it by four steps. A stunt aspect (see page 22) would be appropriate for this stunt.

## FLIGHT (ATHLETICS)

The character can fly. This can represent wings,

innate psychic powers or some other natural ability. When flying, they use Athletics for all skill checks and maneuvers. The character should have either have an aspect explaining the source of this power or a stunt aspect (see page 22) should be taken as part of this stunt.

## IMMORTAL (ENDURANCE)

The character cannot die. He or she accumulates Health stress as normal, but won't take physical consequences in normal circumstances. When an injury would be an appropriate consequence (for example during a sword fight), the character takes a mental or social consequence instead. A cut wrist becomes a dropped sword; a broken leg becomes significant social embarrassment at being bested in a fight. If a character is taken out in a physical conflict, the humiliation might be enough to get them thrown out of heaven (or its equivalent depending on pantheon). It's still possible to add physical consequences to an Immortal character. Firstly certain artefacts (those with the Dire improvement, see page 28) can be tagged for effect. Secondly, the GM can add an aspect to a scene that, if identified and tagged, will allow a particular Immortal character to be harmed (for example, a church will have a font of holy water, capable of damaging vampires or demons). Thirdly, every Immortal character must have an aspect that indicates the reason why they are Immortal and the circumstances in which they are vulnerable (Baldr and mistletoe; Sigfried and the patch on this shoulder; Achilles and his heel). Tagging this aspect forces the character to take a physical consequence instead of a mental one.

Immortality includes at least partial immunity to most common poisons or diseases. They never catch a cold, for example, and typically need to drink prodigious quantities of alcohol in order to become drunk.

**Author's Note:** This stunt is a munchkin trap. In most games, an ability that gives a character immunity to normal damage would be prone to abuse. However, in SotC, this stunt is balanced because mental and social combat has consequences (pun intended) that are as serious and lasting as physical combat.

## MAGIC RESISTANCE (ENDURANCE)

Something in the character's constitution rejects magic. The character can use Endurance instead of



Mysteries or Resolve to resist a curse (see page Error: Reference source not found). In addition, if someone is using Mysteries to attack the character (in mental, physical or social combat), then character's player may chose to defend with Endurance. This stunt may be given the aspect of Immune; this aspect can be tagged to compel the character to resist a particular magical effect, even if they don't want to. On the positive side, this stunt aspect can be invoked when resisting any Mysteries effect that targets or involves the character (such as an attempt to locate the party using magic).

## WATER-BREATHING {ENDURANCE}

The character can breathe water as well as they can breathe air (they should have an aspect – not a stunt aspect – explaining the source of this power).

## WIDE RIDE {ENDURANCE}

The character is unusually large – the size of truck or bus. They can carry cargo and a small number of people (perhaps the rest of the party). The character can negotiate their approximate maximum capacity

with the  
play

GM or establish it in  
using declarations or  
compels. If a  
character  
aspect



doesn't cover this  
character's size then a  
stunt aspect (see page 22)

should be taken as part of this stunt.

## ARROW CUTTING {FISTS}

The character can block or dodge any normal ranged attack (such as an arrow or thrown knife) using their Fists skill. This won't work against supernatural attacks such as ranged Offensive Magic (see page 34) or the fiery breath of a dragon.

## NATURAL MELEE WEAPONS {FISTS/WEAPONS}

The character has teeth, claws, tentacles or other pointy implements of destruction built into his, her or its body, making them impossible to disarm without major surgery. These weapons are operated using either the Fists or Weapons skill (decide when the stunt is picked). This stunt should have stunt aspects; note this on the character sheet as (for example) Natural Melee Weapons (cat-like claws – use Fists) or Natural Melee Weapons (razor-sharp beak – use Weapons).

## ORGANISED RELIGION {MYSTERIES}

Your character is a major figure in a religion that has a significant presence in the game world – a bishop, archbishop or a mythical figure such as a saint, demi-god or deity. This stunt is similar to the Leadership stunt Personal Conspiracy from the SotC SRD. Companions can be created on the fly with a single advance or with the Independent advance and two other advances. However, this stunt must have a stunt aspect (see page 22) representing the beliefs and goals of your religion. When this stunt is active, you may not refuse compels of this stunt aspect when they come up.

## DEITY {MYSTERIES}

### **Requires Organised Religion.**

Your character is a mythic figure in a religion that has a significant presence in the game world. When dealing with members of this religion you may use your character's Mysteries skill in lieu of the Rapport skill (or roll Rapport +2) in order to gain a favourable reaction. In addition, you can use Mysteries instead of Resources to obtain tithes etc. from your character's followers. The downside is that this stunt must have a stunt aspect (see page 22) representing your character's



role in this religion and how their worshippers expect the character to behave. You may not refuse compels of this stunt aspect when they come up. Despite the name, this stunt is not obligatory for a character that's a deity, but deities that don't have this stunt will often have a side to their nature that they keep hidden from their worshippers.

## MAGUS (MYSTERIES)

Your character is a respected authority in a specific field of magic. Possibilities include divination, necromancy, summoning, and so on. In the elite circles of that particular field, the character is recognized for his expertise. Even if his skill level is low, it merely means he is towards the bottom of his particular group of the elite.

Whenever the character makes a Mysteries roll pertaining to his area of expertise, he automatically receives a +1 knowledge bonus. In addition, you should pick a specific area of specialization for the character (like crystal balls, exorcisms or fire demons). When a Mysteries roll involves that specialization, their knowledge bonus increases to +2, and any research efforts involving the specialty are resolved one time increment faster.

## DEFENSIVE MAGIC (MYSTERIES)

### **Requires Magus.**

Mysteries is used to defend against a purely magical attack, but a magician that neglects the physical is likely to die from metal poisoning (i.e. a knife in the back). A character with this stunt can use Mysteries to defend against any attack using Archery, Fists or Weapons. This stunt should have stunt aspects (see page 22).

## OFFENSIVE MAGIC – MELEE (MYSTERIES)

### **Requires Magus.**

The character's mastery of the ultimate forces of nature allows them to harm others in the same zone. This stunt should have stunt aspects (see page 22).

## OFFENSIVE MAGIC – RANGED (MYSTERIES)

### **Requires Offensive Magic – Melee.**

The character can hurl their magic to strike enemies at a distance of up to two zones (perhaps three if the GM is generous). This stunt should have a set of stunt aspects (see page 22) similar to the aspects for Offensive Magic – Melee.

## SORCERY (MYSTERIES)

### **Requires Magus.**

The character is master of the forces of creation and can apply them to almost any situation. Instead of using Mysteries to make a declaration, the character may, for a fate point, and only once per scene, use her Mysteries skill to substitute for nearly any other skill (subject, as always, to the GM's approval). If the roll generates no shifts, the magus takes a minor consequence (such as "Flustered", "Bad Luck" or "Singed Eyebrows") to represent her failure for the rest of the scene.

## EXORCIST (MYSTERIES)

### **Requires Psychic.**

The character can use Mysteries to attack and defend when engaged in social or physical combat with a spirit, demon or other incorporeal entity. The GM would rule as to which creatures are and are not affected by this ability; the exorcist might have to tag an aspect on the creature before using this stunt.

## AKASHIC RECORD (MYSTERIES)

### **Requires Magus.**

There is a philosophical theory that the sum-total of all knowledge is stored on mental plane that certain mystics can access. A character with this stunt can access the Record – at all times they are considered to have a Library and an Arcane Library with a quality equal to their Mysteries skill. In addition they can substitute Mysteries for Academics when researching a topic or declaring minor details.

## GUARDIAN SPIRIT (MYSTERIES)

The character has someone – or something – watching over them. They can substitute Mysteries for Alertness when surprised. Taking an aspect or stunt aspect (see page 22) describing this guardian would be appropriate.



MUSE (MYSTERIES)

Someone speaks through the character, inspiring to ever-greater feats of artistry. They can use Mysteries to modify Art when using the skill for craft, communication, performance and forgery.

SUPERNATURAL AGILITY (MYSTERIES)

The character can use the Mysteries skill to complement any Athletics roll.

ARCANE TRICKSTER (MYSTERIES)

The character is either blessed by the god of thieves (or other trickster spirit) or has honed their magical abilities in a nefarious direction. The character can use the Mysteries skill to complement any Burglary roll. In addition, the Mysteries skill can be used instead of the Burglary skill when casing (see section 5.6.1 of the SotC SRD).

WEB OF SOULS (MYSTERIES)

One common mystical theory is that all sentient beings are connected on some level. A character with this stunt is tapped into this network and can use the Mysteries skill to complement any Contacting roll. In addition, the Mysteries skill can be used instead of the Contacting skill when gathering information or “getting the tip-off” (see sections 5.7.1 and 5.7.2 of the SotC SRD).

FORKED TONGUE (MYSTERIES)

The character can use the Mysteries skill to modify Deceit rolls. They can also use it instead of Deceit in an appropriate social conflict.

IMMORTAL'S HEART (MYSTERIES)

The character can use the Mysteries skill to modify Endurance rolls.

TECHNOMANCER (MYSTERIES)

The character has a relationship with some sort of deity or spirit of construction or technology. Because of this the character can use the Mysteries skill to modify Engineering skills and can create gadgets with the Futurization improvement.

EYES OF THE HEART (MYSTERIES)

The character can use the Mysteries skill to modify Empathy rolls. They can also use it instead of Empathy in an appropriate social conflict.

LUCK OF THE GODS (MYSTERIES)

The character has a supernatural knowledge of odds and probabilities and can use the Mysteries skill to modify gambling rolls. In addition, the character can use the Mysteries skill instead of Gambling when calculating odds and probabilities.

DARK PASSENGER (MYSTERIES)

Some characters with this stunt have made a pact with a spirit of justice or terror, others have supernatural knowledge of their victim's deepest nightmares. Either way they can use the Mysteries skill to modify Intimidation rolls and, in an appropriate social conflict, can use Mysteries instead of Intimidation.

SPIRITS SIGHT (MYSTERIES)

This character can have a spiritual companion that whispers clues into their ear or they might have mystically enhanced their senses. They can use their Mysteries skill to modify Investigation rolls and to declare minor details in a scene that's being searched.

THE ART OF WAR (MYSTERIES)

Perhaps the character can see the links between people and has an instinctive knowledge of terrain; perhaps they have a pact with a god of war. Either way they can substitute Mysteries for Leadership when commanding troops or organising workers.

STRENGTH OF MANY (MYSTERIES)

The character can channel supernatural strength through his or her body. They can use Mysteries to modify Might rolls and can substitute Mysteries for Might when lifting, moving or breaking things.

SILVER TONGUE (MYSTERIES)

The character can use the Mysteries skill to modify Rapport rolls. They can also use it instead of Rapport in an appropriate social conflict.



## WILL OF STEEL (MYSTERIES)

The character has mystically enhanced his or her strength of will. They can use Mysteries instead of Resolve when defending in an appropriate social conflict.

## EVER-FULL PURSE (MYSTERIES)

Have they sold their soul to a demon? Does the god of merchants owe them a favour? For whatever reason, the character is never short of money. They can substitute Mysteries for Resources when spending money (see section 5.24.1 of the SotC SRD).

## MASTER OF WIND AND WAVE (MYSTERIES)

The character is more at home at sea than they are on dry land – to an unnatural extent. They can use the Mysteries skill to modify their Sail rolls. They can also use the Mysteries skill when navigating at sea or when predicting weather.

## WISE WOMAN/WISE MAN (MYSTERIES)

Maybe it's a demon whispering secrets into their ear

– maybe it's an angel. Either way, the character can use Mysteries to modify all Science rolls and can substitute Mysteries for Science when performing lab work (see section 5.2.1 of the SotC SRD). For this character an arcane laboratory is identical to a laboratory.

## PRESTIDIGITATION (MYSTERIES)

The character mixes together stage and “real” magic, allowing them to use Mysteries to modify all Sleight of Hand rolls. When using the art of distraction (see section 5.26.2 of the SotC SRD), they may substitute Mysteries for Sleight of Hand.

## CREATURE OF SHADOW (MYSTERIES)

Even on the sunniest day, the character seems permanently shrouded in darkness. They may use Mysteries to modify all Stealth rolls and may substitute Mysteries for Stealth when hiding (see section 5.27.1 of the SotC SRD).

## UNNATURALLY SILENT (MYSTERIES)

The character seems almost to absorb sound and rarely speaks above a whisper. They may use Mysteries to





modify all Stealth rolls and may substitute Mysteries for Stealth when skulking (see section 5.27.2 of the SotC SRD).

### DRUID {MYSTERIES}

Some people have a supernatural connection to nature; a character with this stunt is one of them. They can use Mysteries to modify all Survival rolls and can substitute Mysteries for Survival when scavenging or creating camouflage (see sections 5.28.3 and 5.28.4 of the SotC SRD).

### BEASTMASTER {MYSTERIES}

The character has a mystic rapport with the natural world and with animals in particular. They can use Mysteries to modify all Survival rolls and can substitute Mysteries for Survival when riding or animal handling (see sections 5.28.1 and 5.28.2 of the SotC SRD).

### DYNAMIC ASPECTS {MYSTERIES}

The character can transform between two forms, has two personalities or can change their nature in some other way. They have two sets of aspects and can switch between the two at any point by invoking an aspect for effect and spending a fate point. The lists will have at least some overlap – one or more aspects should cover the two lists, the differences between them and the trigger (if any) that causes the character to switch between the two sets of aspects.

### DYNAMIC FORM {MYSTERIES}

#### **Requires Dynamic Aspects.**

This is a more extreme version of Dynamic Aspects where the character can completely alter their form. As well as two lists of aspects, the character has two lists of skills and two lists of stunts (both lists must include Dynamic Form and Dynamic Aspects). As with Dynamic Aspects, the character can switch between the two sets of lists by invoking an aspect for effect and spending a fate point.

### STEP SIDWAYS {MYSTERIES}

#### **Requires Voices from Beyond.**

Certain campaign worlds contain a parallel universe

that's more esoteric than the usual: the astral plane, the spirit world, the umbra or even Heaven. This stunt allows the character and a small number of companions to enter this parallel universe. Depending on the campaign world, this will usually require a ritual and a Mysteries check, the length of the ritual and the difficulty of the check decided by the GM. For example, it should be easier to enter the parallel universe at designated "holy" sites or in the deep wilderness.

### GESTALT CONSCIOUSNESS {RESOLVE}

#### **Requires one of Lieutenant or Minions or any other stunt that creates companions or minions.**

You are mentally linked with one, some, or all of your companions or minions. Anything that happens to one of these companions or minions is known by you. Except for during combat, you can decide whether to use your skill level or your companion or minion's skill level, for rolls made by yourself, your companions or your minions.

### SHIP'S CAPTAIN {SAIL}

While on-board a ship, when commanding sailors or when using it in any nautical situations, your character may use their Sail skill instead of Leadership.

### MASTER AND COMMANDER {SAIL}

Your character owns and commands a sailing vessel (this includes a crew, but unless you also have the Minions stunt they have no in-game effect). When sailing this ship they receive a +1 bonus to Sail rolls. In addition, the ship has a little something extra. Once per session you may spend a fate point and declare that it has some extra device (grappling hooks, a quick-deploying spinnaker for a speed boost, a ram or the like) – for guidelines see the Universal Gadget stunt in the SotC SRD. A stunt aspect (see page 22) can be used to describe the class, type and nature of this ship.

### LEGENDARY SHIP {SAIL}

#### **Requires: Ship's Captain, Master and Commander.**

Your character owns and commands a one-of-a-kind ship. For starters, your once-a-session gadget, as



described above, can have any kind of improvement.

Secondly, the ship has three additional built-in improvements you may select. These improvements must be defined in advance of a session (only at the beginning or end), but you needn't pick all of them at the time you take this stunt. Once they're picked, they're set, until a shipwright can get a chance to work at changing them.

The ship is instantly recognizable as something unusual, unless you spend one of your improvements on making sure that it looks just like any other vessel of its base type. Regardless, once people learn of its nature, there's almost certain to be attempts to steal it or otherwise learn its secrets. You'd be well advised to take an aspect tied to your character's ship, so you can get fate points when this happens! A stunt aspect (see page 22) can be used to describe the class, type and nature of this ship.

## SHIPWRIGHT (SAIL)

When it comes to ships and boats, your character knows them inside and out. Whenever working on a ship, you may use your Sail skill instead of Engineering.

## SEAMANSHIP (SAIL)

When attempting a sailing manoeuvre in a chase or in ship-to-ship combat, you may treat the difficulty as if it were one lower. The difficulty of the manoeuvre is not affected, however, for any ships that might be chasing you.

## ONE HAND ON THE WHEEL (SAIL)

Sailing while doing some other action normally results in a -1 penalty. With this stunt, you don't suffer that penalty, regardless of whether you are rolling Sail (sailing is your primary action, and the supplemental action is something minor), or rolling some other skill (you're taking some other primary action, but keeping the ship on a steady heading isn't all that challenging, allowing sailing to be the supplemental action). Furthermore, if Sail would be a secondary skill that restricts or modifies a primary skill, but your Sail skill is lower than the primary skill you're using, your Sail skill has no negative effect.

## LEGENDARY SEAMAN (SAIL)

### **Requires Seamanship.**

No matter how crazy you sail, you always seem to pull it off. You can make near-impossible turns or manoeuvre in very shallow water without suffering any sort of increased difficulty due to environment, unless it is in fact physically impossible for your ship to sail through (e.g.) a reef. In many ways this functions like the Seamanship stunt, but instead of lowering many difficulties by one, it potentially lowers these specific difficulties quite significantly.

## FLAWLESS NAVIGATION (SAIL)

Unless bizarre circumstances are afoot (such as a curse by the god of the sea), the character can never be lost at sea. If something strange is happening, the difficulties to her Sail rolls are never reduced by more than two.

## LASHED TO THE WHEEL (SAIL)

The character never faces increased difficulties due to environmental factors (darkness, weather) when sailing. This does not protect his ship from taking damage from the environment – but his skill remains unreduced.

## ARROW CUTTING (WEAPONS)

See Arrow Cutting (Fists) on page 33.

## QUICK PICK STUNT PACKAGES

### DRAGON

You're an iconic supernatural creature, exceptional even in a world of magic. Traditionally, all dragons (winged or not) are capable of flight, but some are also aquatic.

Some dragon's are linked with a rider, psychically or otherwise. This can be represented by the Lieutenant and Gestalt Consciousness feats.

**Core Stunts (2):** Flight (page 31), Natural Melee Weapons (page 33)

**Other Stunts:** Natural Ranged Weapons (page 29, Lieutenant (section 6.18.1), Gestalt Consciousness



(page 39), Wide Ride (page 32), any Resources stunt, any “Toughness” Endurance stunt (see section 6.11.3 of the SotC SRD), Magus (page 33), Sorcery (page 34), Water-Breathing (page 32), Natural Ranged Weapons (page 29)

### DRUID

You’re dedicated to a god or goddess of nature, or perhaps even to Nature itself.

**Core Stunts (2):** Druid (page 38), Herbal Remedies (see section 6.20.3 of the SotC SRD)

**Other Stunts:** Beastmaster (page 38), Minions (see section 6.18.1 of the SotC SRD), Lieutenant (see section 6.18.1 of the SotC SRD), Wise Woman/Wise Man (page 37), Headquarters (see section 6.24.2 of the SotC SRD), Lair (see section 6.24.2 of the SotC SRD), any Survival stunt

### DEITY

You’re a god or a goddess, a central figure or the central figure in the faith of a significant number of people.

**Core Stunts (3):** Immortal (page 32), Deity (page 33), Organised Religion (page 33)

**Other Stunts:** Minions (see section 6.18.1 of the SotC SRD), Reinforcements (see section 6.18.1 of the SotC SRD), Personal Conspiracy (see section 6.18.1 of the SotC SRD), Funding (see section 6.18.3 of the SotC SRD), Center of the Web (see section 6.18.3 of the SotC SRD), Ubiquity (see section 6.18.3 of the SotC SRD), any Contacting or Resources stunt

### INQUISITOR

All organised religions have their dark side; your job – your calling – is to keep this side in darkness and to mitigate its worst excesses. You could be a detective of the supernatural or a licensed exorcist.

**Core Stunts (2):** Big Man in Religion (see section 6.7.2 of the SotC SRD), Subtle Menace (see section 6.16.1 of the SotC SRD)

**Other Stunts:** Scholar (see section 6.2.3 of the SotC SRD), Magus (page 33), Defensive Magic (page 34), Hearts Secret (see section 6.10.2 of the SotC SRD), Impossible Detail (see section 6.17.2 of the SotC

SRD), Uncanny Hunch (see section 6.17.1 of the SotC SRD), The Serpent’s Tongue (see section 6.16.1 of the SotC SRD), Legal Eagle (see section 6.18.2 of the SotC SRD), Organised Religion (page 33), Eyes of the Heart (page 36), Dark Passenger (page 36), Spirits Sight (page 36), Psychic (see section 6.20.4 of the SotC SRD), Spirit Companion (see section 6.20.4 of the SotC SRD), Voices from Beyond (see section 6.17.2 of the SotC SRD), Exorcist (page 34)

### MAGUS

Even in a world where magic is part of life you’re something special. Perhaps it’s a natural gift with magic, but more often you’ve had some formal training – either apprenticed to another Magus or at a magical school, college or university

**Core Stunts (2):** Magus (page 33), Sorcery (page 34)

**Other Stunts:** Headquarters (see section 6.24.2 of the SotC SRD), Lair (see section 6.24.2 of the SotC SRD), Big Man (see section 6.7.2 of the SotC SRD), any Academics or Mysteries stunt

### MASTER ARTISAN

The character is this world’s equivalent of Daedalus or Leonardo Da Vinci, introducing reliable technology into a world of magic.

**Core Stunts (1):** Technomancer (page 36)

**Other Stunts:** Headquarters (section 6.24.2 SotC SRD), Lair (section 6.24.2 SotC SRD), Stately Pleasure Dome (section 6.24.2 SotC SRD), any Academics or Engineering stunt (sections 6.2 or 6.12 SotC SRD).

### SCHOLARLY PRIEST

Religion might be your day job (and it might even be your true passion), but you’re not a zealous fanatic. You have a thoughtful approach to your faith – perhaps a little too intellectual for your society – and are a recognised expert in your field. It’s possible that you’ve lost your faith (or never had it in the first place).

**Core Stunts (2):** Big Man in Religion (section 6.7.2 of the SotC SRD), Scholar (section 6.2.3 of the SotC SRD)



**Other Stunts:** Network of Contacts (section 6.7.1 of the SotC SRD), Best Foot Forward (section 6.22.1 of the SotC SRD), Five Minute Friends (section 6.22.1 of the SotC SRD), Ebb and Flow (section 6.10.1 of the SotC SRD), Hearts Secret (section 6.10.2 of the SotC SRD), Organised Religion (page 33)

## SHIP'S CAPTAIN

Perhaps you're a pirate, perhaps a navy officer, perhaps a privateer (which is basically a pirate with a piece of paper saying he's not a pirate) or perhaps you're that rarity – an honest seaman. Either way you have access to an ocean-going vessel and its crew.

**Core Stunts (2):** Ship's Captain (page 39), Master and Commander (page 39)

**Other Stunts:** Minions (section 6.18.1 of the SotC SRD), Lieutenant (section 6.18.1 of the SotC SRD), Reinforcements (section 6.18.1 of the SotC SRD), any Sailing stunt

## WERECREATURE

You have been blessed or cursed with the ability to change into the form of an animal. In European tradition, this is often a wolf, but bears and big cats are not unknown. Alternatively you could be an animal with the ability to transform herself into a human. Either way, your aspects will dictate what triggers this change.

**Core Stunts (2):** Dynamic Aspects (page 38), Dynamic Form (page 38)

**Other Stunts:** Natural Melee Weapons (page 33), any Endurance stunt, any Athletics stunt (with the possible exception of Equestrian), Immortal (page 32)

## WISE WOMAN/MAN

You're a respected member of your community, revered and feared for your skills and knowledge.

**Core Stunts (2):** Wise Woman/Man (page 37), Herbal Remedies (section 6.20.3 of the SotC SRD)

**Other Stunts:** any Mysteries stunt





# THE THOUSAND ISLANDS

## - A SAMPLE CAMPAIGN

### BACKGROUND

#### INTRODUCTION

The Thousand Islands is a campaign backdrop set in a “kitchen-sink” fantasy universe. I’ve deliberately thrown in all of the staples of a typical fantasy trilogy (see page 19), but with fresh twists (however, that’s what all second-rate hack fantasy authors say – you can be the judge of my success).

The campaign universe is divided into two planes of existence, the physical Known World and the spiritual plane known as the Beyond. Most adventuring will take place in the Known World.

#### THE KNOWN WORLD

The Known World is a flat plane apparently extending to infinity in each direction, but with a habitable area of a hundred million square miles in the centre (this is approximately the surface area of the Earth, so you’ve got a lot of space to play in). The cardinal directions (north, south, east and west) are known as Order, Chaos, Creation and Destruction in this world. As you travel towards one of the poles, the world becomes more ordered, chaotic, creative or destructive respectively, until it becomes too dangerous to live there and a traveller can’t progress any further.

Every dawn, Telos, the sun god (religious aspects: balance, light, heat, rebirth) is born in Creation and travels across the sky before dying at dusk in Destruction. At night, a gentle light comes from the stars. The constellations slowly move and shift in an eternal dance; characters with the Mysteries skill can use astrology to predict the future.

#### THE POLAR REGIONS

No-one, god or mortal has ever travelled to any of the poles, save Telos and the inscrutable Pure deities (see page 47) – and none of these beings is talking. The conditions in the polar regions are too dangerous for anyone to live for long. Each day a character spends in the polar region, they must take a consequence

or concession; the nature of which is decided by the nearest pole.

#### ORDER

As one travels towards Order, the world becomes less random. Plants begin to spontaneously arrange themselves into straight lines or grow in geometrical patterns. People living in an area influenced by Order live law-abiding and structured lives; diseases (particularly cancers and birth defects) are rare. Art and architecture are formal and abstract. Eventually, this ordered land gives way to a flat, featureless wasteland – cold and icy as you move towards Destruction, hot and sandy as you approach Creation. Consequences for travelling into the polar realm include stiffness and joint pain and dehydration/heat stroke or frost bite/hypothermia from the weather conditions. Concessions include a blandly regularised appearance and the loss of any aspect related to Chaos.

#### CREATION

The region surrounding the Creation pole is filled with energy; light, heat and life. Soil becomes more fertile, plants and animals grow faster and become healthier. Residents are more creative, artistic and happier. The land becomes too wild to tame and eventually the woods become too thick to penetrate. If, at this point, the traveller turns towards Order, the woods give way to desert – the energy and heat of Creation is still present, but it becomes too ordered to support life. In the direction of Chaos, the forest becomes rain forest; the life becomes more diverse, mutated and, well, chaotic.

Consequences for this realm include animal, parasite or disease attack and dehydration or heat stroke in the desert region. If a character has cancer or similar degenerative disease, a consequence could make it worse. Concessions include adding or modifying an existing aspect to include an accelerated metabolism, possibly replacing an aspect related to Destruction. For female characters, an alternative concession is pathogenesis; spontaneously becoming pregnant with a child that will be destined to be a hero of Creation (and thus an enemy of Destruction, Apotheosis and the Chaos Cults).

There is a rumour of a temple in the Creation polar region of the Beyond where the souls of the unborn are



spawned, but only the gods of Creation and their most senior priests know the truth.

## CHAOS

The Known World becomes more random as you approach Chaos. Birth defects and mutations are more common and it's more difficult to maintain an organised society. The terrain itself becomes unpredictable; a group of explorers can go to sleep in a forest clearing and wake up in tundra. Travelling towards Creation the explorer will enter an endless rain forest where no two trees are even slightly the same and even the animals will shift form from moment to moment. Change continues as one travels towards Destruction, but always shifting towards decay.

Consequences for travelling in the polar realm include temporary mutations or degenerative diseases such as cancers or wounds that won't heal. A concession could make these permanent or modify a mental aspect to make it more chaotic.

## DESTRUCTION

Everything ends in Destruction. Even the gods eventually die and only Telos is reborn each morning. As one approaches Destruction, life spans become shorter and rot and decay sets in faster. The region surrounding the pole becomes less substantial, less real, and gradually fades into non-existence. This region turns into a cold, trackless desert in the direction of Order and a stinking, trackless swamp in the direction of Chaos.

Travelling in Destruction's realm has consequences. Premature aging is the most common, but illness from decayed food or stagnant water and accidents from broken equipment are all possible. Concessions could include modifying existing aspects to indicate that the aging has become permanent. In severe cases, a subject can become infected by Destruction, becoming wraith-like; an existing aspect can be modified or replaced by one reflecting this infection and/or an existing stunt can be replaced by Step Sideways (see page 38).

## THE BEYOND

Everything that exists – or has existed – in the Known World has its reflection in the Beyond. When people die, or “pass over”, they are judged, receive their

reward or punishment before passing into Destruction. The reflection will last for as long as the original is remembered. The gods were once mortals whose stories grew into myth. They gain power from their worship and use this power to induce miracles in the Known World. As a god, former mortal, object or place beings to be forgotten in the Known World, it starts to fade into Destruction.

A mortal can use Psychic, Spirit Companion or Voices from Beyond stunts to communicate with the Beyond and the Step Sideways stunt to enter it.

People have died and then returned from the Beyond to the Known World, but this requires powerful magic and the consent of an equally powerful deity. Any such individuals will be hunted by the servants of Destruction for the rest of their renewed life.

## RACES

There are four major intelligent races in the Known world, three humanoids (humans, the Zatonich and the Melinpelonians) and one reptilian (the Sssh-hss-ess).

### ZATONICH

The Zatonich claim to be the oldest of the Known World races – older even than the gods. Legend has their ancestors emerging from beneath the Known World through tunnels that have now been lost and praying Telos, the sun god into existence.

They are a proud, old and, frankly, short people, with a reputation for smithing, metalworking and sticking close to their ancestral tunnel complexes. They have their own harsh and guttural language Zatonichanon (lit. *tool for communicating the concept of the first people*). Most significant texts on engineering and smithing are written in this language.

**Racial aspect:** Zatonich (creative, short, tough)

### MELINPELONIANS

The Melinpelonians dispute the creation story of the Zatonich. Their myth has Telos crying at the barrenness of the Known World when he saw it during the first dawn. The first Melinpelonians sprang from these tears (the Zatonich aren't mentioned at all). The name of a species is taken from the first few words of this creation myth in their native tongue. As a species,



the delicate and ethereally beautiful Melinpelonians believe they have a duty to protect and care for the natural world. As such, they tend towards Creation and Chaos. The Melinpelonians have a beautiful and melodic language that is difficult for outsiders to learn due to its irregular grammar and inflected nature.

**Racial aspect:** Melinpelonian (beautiful, delicate, nature-lover)

### SSSH-HSS-ESS

The Sssh-hss-ess don't have a creation myth. As far as they are concerned, the Known World has always existed and, as long as Order is maintained, it always will continue to exist. As you might imagine, the species tends towards Order. They are bipedal, reptilian, cold-blooded, strict carnivores and reproduce by laying eggs. Sssh-hss-ess have their own language, which is difficult for non-reptiles to speak unless they have the Gift of Tongues stunt (see section 6.2.1 of the SotC SRD).

**Racial aspect:** Sssh-hss-ess (reptilian, cold-blooded, strict carnivores). Certain Sssh-hss-ess bloodlines have reptilian characteristics such as Amphibious or Poisonous Bite aspects or the Natural Melee Weapons stunt.

### HUMANS

The three older races all agree that the humans are relative newcomers to the Known World. One theory is that the species is the result of a magical crossbreed between the Zatonich and the Melinpelonians. Humans are everywhere in the Known World, from the polar regions to the heartlands. As a species they have a reputation for being strong-willed and stubborn, which also makes them good worshippers. Deities compete strenuously for human worship. Naturally cosmopolitan, humans have no native language and tend to speak the tongue of the local culture.

**Racial aspect:** Human (ubiquitous, cosmopolitan, strong-willed)

### SOCIETY

In a society where the existence of the gods can be proved, there is no separation between church and state. There are perhaps a thousand, thousand gods

and goddesses, with more being created or vanishing into Destruction each day. If enough people come to believe in them, any mortal can become a god after they die.

### PURE DEITIES

Just as the poles can't be reached, the god or gods of Order, Destruction, Chaos and Creation can't be understood. Without any semblance of balance, they are simply too alien to understand. Direct contact with them is usually fatal – even for another god. They are typically referred to simply as “the Four that are and the Four that shall be”.

### COURT OF THE JAGUAR EMPRESS

Government and religion are one and the same in the Jaguar Empire. Yottalissa, the Jaguar Empress herself is the major deity (religious aspects: order, creation, justice, government) worshipped alongside with her consort Lo-Pin (religious aspects: order, creation, family, masculinity). The Empire is the largest political structure in the Known World, taking up approximately a quarter of the habitable zone and bordered on two sides by the Order and Creation polar areas. Her court is constantly at war; its borders with the chaos cults, the Passionate and Apotheosis are eternally in flux. Each of the Empire's legions has its own deity whose aspects cover the legion's speciality. The Jaguar Empire is a government of law, structure and bureaucracy. Each town has temples to Yottalissa and Lo-Pin as well as the patrons of the town and its major industries and a temple to La-Mei (religious aspects: order, creation, justice, vision) that also doubles as the law courts. Schools, universities and libraries are also temples to Log-Theos (religious aspects: order, creation, knowledge, writing, libraries, and silence). All four of the major races are represented in the Empire, but the Melinpelonians are less common. Two languages are spoken in the Empire, one a debased polyglot of the other. High Speech is spoken by nobles, aristocracy, priests and other high-status individuals; Low Speech is the language of the people and includes loan-words from Melinpelonian, Zatonichanon and the languages of the border kingdoms. Most subjects of the Empire can make themselves understood in both High Speech and Low Speech.



## THE BORDER KINGDOMS

At the edges of the Jaguar Empire are the border kingdoms, areas where Order is not well-enough established for the Empire to rule and where Chaos or Apotheosis has not yet triumphed. The kingdoms are small, centred on ancient fortresses or walled towns, and whose governments are constantly in flux. The larger kingdoms have their own languages. Life is hard in the border kingdoms, but many of the residents would say they prefer their freedom to the ordered, structured and repressive Jaguar Empire.

## CHAOS CULTS

The chaos cults are spawned in the intersection between the Chaos and Destruction Polar Regions, spreading out into the rest of the Known World to kill, destroy, convert and infiltrate. Their exposure to Chaos causes mutation and contact with Destruction causes insanity. The government of the Jaguar Empire and the Border Kingdoms are both paranoid about chaos cult infiltration – and with good reason. The cults are all focused around one or more capricious and unpredictable gods of chaos and destruction. Major deities include Cyradis (religious aspects: chaos, destruction, change, fire) and Williams (religious aspects: chaos, destruction, blood, murder). Sssh-hss-ess are rarely members of chaos cults, but when they are they tend to be horribly mutated. The other three intelligent races are all well-represented, as well as unique mutants whose original forms are no longer recognisable. They have no common language.

## APOTHEOSIS

While the chaos cults want to drag the Known World into Destruction, they are unfocused and chaotic. Apotheosis (religious aspects: order, destruction, death, knowledge, endings) and its servants have a plan – or at least the beginnings of one. From their base in the intersection of the Order and Destruction Polar Regions, they send out “Research and Destroy” teams investigating the best ways to end all life in the Known World – including themselves. As they have a deeply unattractive philosophy, they recruit by kidnapping and brainwashing children as well as using magic to clone themselves. Apotheosis has created a language, the Dead Speech, designed to discuss and communicate its plan. Learning it is said to be hard on the mind –

more than one academic has gone insane and/or joined the cult after studying it.

## THE PASSIONATE

Beyond if you travel from the Jaguar Empire in the direction of Chaos and Creation you will pass through the Border Kingdoms and into a region of outstanding natural beauty known by many names: Sanctuary, Gardinalia, Tashalan. It's tended and fiercely protected by a community known euphemistically as “the passionate”. Outsiders are usually killed on sight unless they can demonstrate a connection or commitment to both Chaos and Creation. Most Passionate are also Melinpelonians – this is the centre of their culture and the place they believe the first Melinpelonians were born from the tears of Telos. Sssh-hss-ess are rare. The Passionate speak Melinpelonian almost exclusively. Passionate deities include Neptson (religious aspects: chaos, creation, sea, wind), Gruidia (religious aspects: chaos, creation, nature, pregnant and newborn beings), Zephyr (religious aspects: chaos, creation, weather, rivers) and Voltanis (religious aspects: chaos, creation, rock, minerals, volcanoes and volcanic activity).

## BALANCE

The gods of balance are above the conflict between Chaos and Order, between Creation and Destruction. They understand that the Known World only exists because of the Balance between the “four that are and the four that shall be”. Because their followers are committed to the balance, rather than to any force in particular, outsiders regard them as untrustworthy. Telos the sun god (religious aspects: balance, sun, light, ritual, repetition) is the most famous and accessible of the gods of Balance.

## MAGIC

In the Known World, magic is focused belief. Gods and goddesses can act as this focus, but (despite what most religions preach); they are rarely able to grant the ability to perform miracles. Despite this, almost all magic users will have a religious aspect of some sort (even if it's a belief in the power of nature).



## THE THOUSAND ISLANDS

The Thousand Islands is an area in the Border Kingdoms, an ocean archipelago in a key location close to the centre of the Great Ocean at the heart of the Known World. It's a melting pot and an important stop on a trade route. The climate is tropical, with a Caribbean feel and plenty of archipelagos.

### MAJOR LOCATIONS

#### PORT MACOND

This island is named after its largest town, a port based around a natural harbour. It's a major staging post on an important trade route across the Great Ocean. It's nominally part of the Jaguar Empire, and there is a naval and marine presence in the fort that overlooks the town (also named after the discoverer of the island). However they keep themselves to themselves other than making customs inspections and administering taxation. Only the most heinous crimes are brought before the governor, Count Ta-Lind.

All four of the major races are represented in the town. The richer residents live at a distance from the sea, up by Fort Macond while the lower classes are concentrated around the docks. There is a small, but growing middle class – tradesmen and service providers – living on the hillside.

After a serious fire ten years ago, the richer parts of Port Macond have been rebuilt in Empire style, including an underground sewer network that leads into the harbour. However, the dockside still as slummy as ever.

Port Macond is a town of temples. As part of the Empire, the largest shrine is dedicated to Yottalissa and Lo-Pin; the priests attached to the temple of La-Mei act as police in the docks. Lesser Empire deities also have shrines as do the more tolerant deities of the Passionate, Telos and other deities of Balance.

#### TEMPLE ISLAND

This small island is precisely beneath the path of Telos as it passes across the sky each day. Home to a community of monks devoted to this god, the central temple is illuminated at precisely midday by a shaft of light passing through a small hole. It's renowned

throughout the world as a peaceful and mysterious place and a pilgrimage destination for worshippers of Telos. Non-devotees are welcome, but will be subtly and gently proselytised.

Every few decades, someone (chaos cult, Apotheosis or one of the many pirate groups in the Thousand Islands) will try putting together a fleet to sack the island; about once a century they'll actually give it a try. If they somehow manage to navigate their way through the wall of storms that will blow up out of a clear sky they'll find that the reef surrounding the island no longer corresponds to the usual map.

#### PRINCESS VERBENUM

There are many chaos cults operating in the Thousand Islands. Almost by definition, the cults have no central base or organisation, but the Princess Verbenum is the most central and organised of the bases they don't have.

Chaos has spawned many sea monsters, but the Princess is one of the largest and most bizarre. Empire academics have discovered that the Blue Princess, a creature that they thought for years was a type of jellyfish is actually a colony of four different types of tiny creatures that have created an air-filled bladder to allow them to float in the sea (the equivalent in our world is the Portuguese Man O' War). Princess Verbenum is version of this creature large enough for community to live on and in it.

The Princess is in no way intelligent, but can sense the allegiance of any creature that approaches it. Anyone, or anything, without a chaos-related attribute will be attacked by one or more of its tentacles (Good Minions with the equivalent of the Wrestler and Hammerlock stunts that also deliver a poison of Good severity and Fair subtlety on a successful attack). Enough tentacles will overwhelm even the largest vessel.

At any one time, Princess Verbenum will have three or four groups of cultists living in improvised shacks on its surface, on rafts tethered to dead tentacles or hollowed into one of the segments of the bladder. The Princess moves at the mercy of the winds, but a good weather mage can direct and guide it (or "her" as the residents insist on calling Princess Verbenum). Normally the cultists co-operate, raiding or infiltrating nearby islands, but there are frequent disputes that often turn violent. The government of Port Macond is



concerned that if the cultists ever became organised they could be a real threat to the security of the Thousand Islands, but that's kind of missing the point.

## THE THOUSAND ISLANDS

No-one has managed to count them all, so there might be more than a thousand islands in the archipelago, some of which appear and disappear with the ebb and flow of the tides (the passage of each day Telos causes a tide which peaks at noon). Port Macond is the largest; Temple Island in the top-ten and most of the other large islands have some sort of inhabitants, even if it's a tiny fishing village or a hide-out for pirates or smugglers. Outside of civilised areas, the islands are covered in tropical jungle and are typically coral atolls or volcanic in origin.

## MAJOR PLAYERS

### COURT OF THE JAGUAR EMPRESS

The Empire claims the whole of the Thousand Islands, but the area is too chaotic for the type of bureaucratic government that the Empire favours. Outside of Port Macond and a couple of the nearby islands, Empire presence is limited to the occasional naval vessel patrolling for smugglers or pirates. In the long-term the Court plans to extend the influence of Order by populating and developing the islands. They suspect (correctly) that upsetting the balance would be resisted by the residents of Temple Island.

### THE PASSIONATE

The Passionate are drawn to the life in the tropical jungles of the Thousand Islands. Most of the native tribes worship one or more of the Passionate deities in overgrown temples deep in the jungle. The few Sssh-hss-ess followers of the Passionate live in the Thousand Islands.

On Port Macond, the Passionate deities offer an alternative to the pantheon of the Empire, especially in the dockside. They're also popular among the youth of the upper classes (not just in Port Macond, but in the wider Empire).

Long term plans aren't really in the Passionate nature, but they have an interest in protecting further expansion of the Empire (particularly in its efforts to

further develop the Thousand Islands) and frustrating the plans of Apotheosis and the Chaos Cults.

## CHAOS CULTS

Cults thrive in the docks. Some of the more rational chaos cultists have infiltrated the small and disorganised religions of the Passionate, twisting the worshippers towards a more destructive version of the faith.

Two local pirate fleets worship Lady Storm (chaos, destruction, sea, storms, and piracy), Hazzard's Crew and the Lords of Misrule. The groups resident on Princess Verbenum are constantly changing, but currently a clutch of violently mutated Sssh-hss-ess (the Children of the Egg) share the upper sections with mixed group of raiders called Domino.

## APOTHEOSIS

To put it mildly, the core philosophy of Apotheosis is not attractive. Its followers know that they have to hide who they are even in a place as lawless as the Thousand Islands. There is a rumour of a small base in the sewers of Port Macond, but this is not true. Instead, one of the minor noble families has come under the influence of the god.

The Black Sail is a semi-legendary hulk that the followers of Apotheosis use for Research and Destroy missions in the Thousand Islands. Mother's use its name to frighten their children: "Be good or the Black Sail will come for you."

## BALANCE

The Thousand Islands is close to the centre of the Known World and the most accessible of the gods of Balance has his major temple at the edge of the archipelago. As such, Port Macond and the surrounding islands are a hot-bed of Balance activity (the mysterious residents of Temple Island would make a great patron in an ongoing campaign).

The underground struggle between Apotheosis and the monks of Temple Island is referred to as the Shadow War and is blamed for any inexplicable deaths, disappearances, thefts or arson – even if it had nothing to do with either side.



DOLLARS AND CENTS

As part of the Jaguar Empire, Port Macond and the civilised parts of the Thousand Islands use the Empire's decimal currency. Ten Spokes make one Wheel, Ten Wheels make one Priest, Ten Priests make One Noble, Ten Nobles make one Empress. The Spoke and the Wheel are copper coins, the Priest is silver and the rare Noble is gold as is the incredibly rare Empress (most transactions at this level are made using letters of credit). The spoke is wedge-shaped, while the rest of the coins are circular. The table below is for campaigns in the Thousand Islands and takes into account the less developed nature of the region

Price	Amount	Can Buy
Terrible	5 Spokes	Cheap meal, bed for a night in a flop house, round of watery beers
Poor	2 Wheels	A night in a boarding house, hand tools, cheap clothes, backpack, knife, lamp, a round of good ale or a bottle of quality wine
Mediocre	7 Wheels	Common medicine, decent clothes, one night in an excellent hotel or a month in a fleabag apartment
Average	2 Priests	Military weapons and armour, simple charms and curses, craftsman's tools, burglary equipment, a month in a quality lodging house
Fair	7 Priests	Fancy clothes, custom weapons and armour, horse, personal servant
Good	2 Nobles	Carriage and team of horses, bodyguard
Great	7 Nobles	Small farm or town house with staff, small shrine with staff and worshippers, tavern or shop
Superb	2 Empresses	Mansion or small castle with estate, sailing ship and crew, temple with staff and worshippers
Fantastic	7 Empresses	Locally popular religion (multiple temples across the region, with staff and worshippers), trading company (warehouses and offices in towns and cities along a trade route, plus transport)
Epic	Priceless	Ship of the line, ducal estates (multiple houses, castles and tenants paying rent to the character)
Legendary	Priceless	Monarch of a country, significant figure in a major religion



# THE DYING GOD'S TALE

## - A SAMPLE ADVENTURE

### INTRODUCTION

This adventure is intended as a campaign introduction, bringing the PCs together, introducing them to the culture of the Thousand Islands and some of the conflicts that will be part of a chronicle set in this area. At least one character should have a Mysteries skill of Good or better. A character with the Voices from Beyond or Step Sideways stunts will be useful, but not essential.

### PLOT OUTLINE

The characters are recruited by sisters, successful merchants who were born on one of the less settled of the Thousand Islands. They've never forgotten their roots and the tribe are now in need of their help. The tribal deity, Tornmantra, has become angry with them and cursed the island, but they've been unable to find out how they've offended him and how he can be appeased.

The PCs travel to the island, enter the god's temple and make contact with the god. They discover that, for generations, the tribe and their deity have failed to communicate properly (not an uncommon issue with primitive tribes). As a result, the god is dying and has been unable to protect the tribe.

The island and the tribe have been infiltrated by chaos cultists. They're using an ancient artefact, the Tear of Telos to curse the island and damage their god. Eventually they plan to trigger a volcanic eruption and present a chaos cult god to the inhabitants of the island as the only being that can save them. The PCs have to defeat the cultists, safely dispose of the artefact and reconcile the tribe and their god.

### ACT ONE: INTRODUCTIONS

#### SCENE ONE: THE HOOK

Dorothy and Lotisha Del Marco are twin sisters and the owners of Del Marco Shipping, a significant player in Port Macond merchant community. The PCs are

invited to the Del Marco's offices discuss a difficulty which the Del Marco's believe that the PCs can help to resolve. The invitation will be hand-delivered by messenger.

The Del Marco's have a reputation as both rich and honest traders, on good terms with the local authorities without being fanatical supporters of the empire. If a PC is a gambler, the Del Marco's can have brought up some of their debts, providing additional leverage.

An Average Contacting roll can be made to gain information on Dorothy and Lotisha and Del Marco Shipping itself. Each shift generated gains another piece of information from the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	Del Marco Shipping is a medium sized shipping company based in Port Macond. It's run by two elderly sisters, Dorothy and Lotisha
2	It, and they, are significant players in the merchant community. They deal shrewdly, but fairly and pay their bills on time, but have never been fully accepted by the aristocracy of Port Macond
3	There's a bit of forty-year-old scandal. Dottie and Lottie were originally slaves of Old Man Del Marco and inherited the company on his death. The power struggle over the succession was stuff of legend
4	They were born on one of the outlying islands of the archipelago and captured as children
5	It's a volcanic island called Ataba. Ships have been giving it a wide berth recently because the volcano has begun to smoke ominously. Looks like the tribe's is having trouble with its deity

The offices of Del Marco Shipping are part way up the hill, with a good view over the bay that makes Port Macond into a port. The characters are ushered into a waiting room when they arrive and offered coffee, wine, etc. Once they are all present, Dorothy and Lotisha ("Please call me Dottie"/"And you can call me Lottie") will make the introductions if the PCs don't already know each other. This works best if some of the PCs have skills or a reputation that would be useful on an expedition to placate an angry god – guides, sailors, priests (particularly of Balance or the Passionate) or



religious academics. As GM you should come up with a reason for each of the characters and have the sisters work it into their introductions. Lottie and Dottie should be played like your favourite auntie, with heavy doses of Nanny Ogg. They will take turns relating their life story, interrupting each other to clarify details, and take their time getting to the point.

They were born “on this tiny little island” called Ataba and “couldn’t have been more than knee-high” when a group of pirates raided their village. Dottie and Lottie ended up on the auction block in Port Macond.

They were brought by the Del Marco family and worked their way up the household until they came to the attention of the head of the family. The power struggle about who would inherit had become bloody and a pair of young, exotic twins was just the thing to “relax” him: “Oh it was nothing creepy.”/“It was a little, dear. More than a little.”/“Well maybe at the beginning, but he needed a friend and so did we.”

The Del Marco succession war had no winners; the last remaining heir died of a curse-born fever. Percy Del Marco (“Everyone called him ‘The Old Man’”/“Except us”/“Except us of course.”) made the sisters his concubines and trained them to run the company after he died. His will gave them the company along with his name.

Dottie and Lottie used the resources of the company to track down the island of their birth, re-establish their relationships as much as possible and help develop the village. The island, and the tribe, had a deity called Tornmantra. Over recent years, this god has become less and less accessible, despite continued worship and sacrifices. In recent weeks the volcano at the heart of the island has become active, rumbling and spewing smoke and ashes. The priests have interpreted this as an expression of Tornmantra’s wrath, but have been unable to explain exactly what has made him angry. Dottie and Lottie want the PCs to travel with them to Ataba, make contract with Tornmantra and find out what can be done to placate him. The expedition will take around three weeks to a month; around a fortnight of which will be travelling time (depending on the winds). If one of the PCs has a ship then the sisters will suggest using it for the mission, otherwise they will travel in the Pride of Del Marco, the company’s flagship. The ship will take a couple of days finish outfitting, giving the PCs time to do a little research.

## SCENE TWO: RESEARCH

Priests and academics in good standing with the Empire will be able to get access to the temple of Log-Theos and its library and it’s Good library (specialising in religion). A Fair Academics roll can be made to gain information on Ataba and its deity. Each shift generated gains another piece of information from the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	Ataba is a small island on the edge of the Thousand Islands. It has a small community that supports itself by fishing. Tornmantra is a fairly generic sea god
2	The character digs out the records from an exhaustive survey of the inhabited islands, three hundred years ago during the reign of the last Emperor. According to it, the Atabans supplemented their diet by farming and worshipped a god of fishermen called Tornmantra
3	When the Jaguar Empress ascended to godhood and took over the throne, a supplement to this census was made. This was just over a hundred years ago. Much was destroyed in the Great Fire, but the character manages to find the records on Ataba. According to this survey, the Atabans did almost no farming and Tornmantra is a fish god rather than a god of fisherman
4	Behind a set of shelves, the character finds the diary of a ship’s captain. It was written over five hundred years ago, during the initial exploration of the Thousand Islands. The parchment is fragile and the ink faded, but the priests will be very excited by this discovery and apply all of their skills to restore the text. According to the diary, the Atabas were sophisticated farmers, with strict crop rotation and a terrace system to make the most of the limited soil. Tornmantra was a demi-god figure who’d developed their agricultural technology and worship of Tornmantra was replacing an older fish god also named Ataba



5	Interesting. All this information seems to support Benjerner the Apostate's General Theory of Cyclic Religious Decay. Over the past five hundred years, Tornmantra has risen from a heroic, exemplary figure, into a god that replaced the existing figure of worship. Because Ataba-worship fulfils a need in the nautical Ataban's, worship of Tornmantra is now in its decay phase. It appears that one or even both of the deities is attempting to coerce more commitment out of the Atabans, but more research is needed. There's definitely a paper in this!
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SCENE THREE: AN INTERLUDE

It's traditional for ships to embark on a long journey at dawn. As well as asking for Telos's blessing, the rising sun brings a rising tide that will help the ship on its way. This evening, the The Pride of Del Marco (or the PC's ship) is just one of the vessels completing its final preparations. The characters will be sleeping on board tonight to avoid any possibility of delay.

The PCs aren't the only people that the Del Marco's have consulted about the difficulties that the Atabans have with their god and word has got back to the chaos cultists on Ataba. They have contacted the Princess Verbenum and asked the Children of the Egg if they can interfere.

If the PC's don't have a ship, the Pride of Del Marco is the flagship of the Del Marco merchant fleet, designed to carry a mixture of cargo and passengers. Dottie and Lottie will take the master stateroom; the PCs will share two to a stateroom. The night before departure, they host a banquet in the wardroom – simple food, but exquisite and tastefully prepared, accompanied by wines imported from the mainline, plus a couple of local vintages. The Del Marco's are experimenting with viticulture, but they're finding it difficult to find the right soils.

Dottie and Lottie will retire around midnight and insist that everyone gets a good night's sleep. At three am, the ship will be assaulted by hideously mutated Sssh-hss-ess climbing up the chains of the four anchors. The PCs will be sound asleep when the alarm is sounded unless they tag an appropriate aspect (Insomniac, Compulsive Carouser, etc.). In addition they will have a minor physical consequence

(Half-Asleep or possibly Half-Cut if they continued drinking) for the duration of this scene (unless they have the Tireless stunt and gain one or more shifts on a Mediocre Endurance roll). The stats for the Sssh-hss-ess can be found on page (page 71). There will be one Children of the Egg (plus minions) for each PC, armed with tridents, nets and short spears. When the players arrive on the scene, they are fighting with the sailors on watch, but you can assume that the sailors back off when the cavalry arrive. Aspects for this scene include: But It's The Middle of the Night, Slippery Decks, Swinging in the Rigging, Man Overboard!, Lizard Overboard! and What's a Belaying Pin For?

If any are captured you can either role-play the interrogation as a social combat (probably Intimidation verses Resolve with one piece of information from the table below given up for each consequence) or just have the interrogator make an Average Intimidation roll with one piece of information given for each shift. In both cases this information will be interspersed with curses, threats and insane ranting. Alternatively, a PC can make a Good Academics roll and infer the first two pieces of information (but not the last) from general knowledge and the tattoos, mutations and ritual scarification on the Sssh-hss-ess:

Shifts/ Consequences	Information
1	The captive is a Chaos cultist, a Child of the Egg
2	The Children of the Egg are based on Princess Verbenum
3	Another chaos cult hired them to attack the Pride of Del Marco. They were paid in slaves and dried fish – both of which they ate. It doesn't know the name of the other chaos cult, but they were Cyradis-worshippers

The noise and activity will alert what little authority patrols the docks – a patrol of monks from the temple of La-Mei. With typical timing, they'll arrive once the fight is over. They'll attempt to take charge and delay the Pride's departure until after an investigation. A Good Rapport or Leadership roll – particularly from an authority figure – will be needed to persuade them otherwise (if none of the characters succeed then Dottie and Lottie will intervene). Once the bodies have been



tossed overboard and the worst of the ichor swabbed from the decks, there will be very little of the night left.

## ACT TWØ: THE JØURNEY

### Scene one: Departure

After the night's excitement, getting under way in the morning will be an anti-climax. It's traditional for ships and boats to race for the exit to the harbour, but Dottie and Lottie insist that the ship's departure is stately and controlled. While at sea, you should feel free to give PCs without high Endurance and appropriate aspects or stunts temporary aspects such as "Sick as a Parrot" or "No Sea Legs" and compel them where appropriate. A refresh will occur at the end of the voyage, but not during it.

The first two days are uneventful, but at around noon of the third day, there is a shout from the crow's nest. It's the Princess Verbenum, but initially describe it as a huge pale blue cloud, very low in the sky, that is sending the sailors into a panic. Once an NPC blurts out the name in terror, all of the PCs will be aware that the Princess is a huge sea monster associated with the chaos cults and can make a Fair Academics roll to see if they know anything more. Each shift generated gains another piece of information from the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	It's supposed to be giant version of Blue Princess jellyfish, with tentacles big enough to snatch a man right off the deck of a ship
2	It's big enough that whole tribes of chaos cultists live on it
3	Fascinatingly enough, the Blue Princess is not actually a jellyfish. It's not a single creature at all, but a colony of four different types of tiny creatures that have created an air-filled bladder to allow them to float in the sea. Of course, in the case of the Princess Verbenum, the creatures are gigantic rather than tiny
4	The normal-sized version of the Princess has no means of locomotion and moves at the mercy of the winds and tides. The chaos cultists must have found some way of navigating the Princess Verbenum, but it's probably not be as manoeuvrable as the Pride of Del Marco

5	A couple of months ago, you managed to lay your hands on a copy of an anonymously-published monograph written by someone who claimed to infiltrated the cultists living on the Princess Verbenum. According to the author, at any one time there are three or four groups of cultists living on or in Princess Verbenum and the biggest area of conflict between them is over the navigation of the colony. The Princess is entirely wind-powered and one or more weather mages or priests are needed to propel and guide it. It can't be that easy to manoeuvre
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As you might have realised, this is intended to be a chase scene. It will work best if it's the PC's ship being sailed rather than the Pride of Del Marco and/or one of the PCs is an expert sailor. The rules in section 8.3.8 of the SotC SRD should be used, with Sail replacing Drive. Stats for the two vessels can be found beginning on page 71. The vessels are close enough to a coral archipelago that it could and should be used as a feature in the chase.

Any PCs with Sail or the Master of Wind and Wave stunt and assist the captain or helmsman. PCs with Mysteries can attempt a manoeuvre to disrupt the weather magic used to propel the Princess (treat the priests and mages on the Princess as having a Mysteries skill of Great – most of their attention is taken up by keeping their own spells running). The other PCs can be occupied by fighting off chaos beasts (hippogriff, pterosaurs, etc. – see page 71 and following) flying from the Princess or, if it manages to get close enough, fighting off the tentacles (see page 50). The Princess has been given deliberately low stats so the PCs should be able to get away without serious difficulty.

### SCENE TWØ: ARRIVAL

The ship has had favourable winds throughout its journey, so it's not surprise when Ataba is sighted on the evening of the fifth day. It's a volcanic island formed from a caldera surrounded by coral reefs. Black smoke drifts ominously from the volcano at the heart of the island (and was used as a navigation aid during the last part of the voyage). Much of the rest of the island is covered by thick jungle. It's too dark to safely navigate through the reefs so the captain drops a pair of sea anchors to prevent the ship drifting too far



during the night.

At around 4 am, everyone will be woken from their sleep by an explosion and subsequent earthquake. Assuming that the PCs rush to the deck along with the rest of the crew, they'll see an eerie red glow emanating from the mouth of the volcano, partially masked by thick billowing smoke. As the PCs watch, the volcano will spit pieces of red-hot pumice into the air – some of which explode in mid-air, most shatter when they hit the water, but the rest land in the jungle. The PCs will hear a loud whistling sound as a piece arcs directly towards the ship. They have the chance to take one action before it smashes through the rigging and impacts on the deck. Treat the exploding pumice “bomb” and the collapsing rigging as a Good physical attack that can be resisted with Athletics (or Mysteries if a character has Defensive Magic). If a character hits the deck (literally in this case) or otherwise took evasive action then they resist at +2.

Almost immediately, the eruption will cease and the characters will (presumably) take part in the clean-up operation. Lottie has a broken arm from a shattered spar; she's a little shocked but is taking it in her stride. A few sailors have minor injuries and the cabin boy (who is not called “Roger”<sup>8</sup>) has to be fished out of the water after jumping overboard to escape the explosion. A full assessment of the damage will have to wait until the morning, but it looks like the PCs are stuck here for at least a couple of days.

ACT THREE: ATABA

SCENE 01: WELCOME TO ATABA

At dawn, the Pride of Del Marco (or the PC's ship) will begin its slow approach through the reefs that surround the island. Almost immediately, they will be sighted from the village just above the shoreline. Fishing canoes will come out to greet them, surrounding the ship and helping to guide the injured vessel through the shoals. The villagers are all human, so non-humans will be treated with a polite curiosity.

On landing the Del Marco sisters will be treated as a

<sup>8</sup> This may need explaining to our American cousins. “Roger” or “rogering” is one of the many, many British slang terms for sexual intercourse, leading to very old and predictable jokes along the lines of: “Roger the cabin boy? Is that an order, sir?”

combination of visiting dignities and long-lost family members. The PCs and the rest of the crew will also be garlanded with flowers, offered baskets of fruit, etc., etc. There's an underlying tension – particularly after last night's earthquake, but now “the sisters are back”, the village hopes that everything will be right again.

The village is more developed than many settlements of its size. Most residents have a metal knife of some sort, the points of the fishing spears are also metal and the well is stone-lined with a proper well-head. There are even a couple of stone buildings (though the roofs are still made from palm leaves).

The arrival of the Del Marcos will be a trigger for a day of celebration: a banquet, dancing, large amounts of a potent drink brewed from coconuts (well, mostly coconuts) and speeches praising the Del Marco sisters and all they have done and will do for the island. Tornmantra is never mentioned, unless the PCs bring him up. The priests are keeping a low profile.

During this period the PCs can make an Average Rapport or Contracting roll to try to get more information. Any Contacting rolls will be at +2 difficulty due to unfamiliarity, unless the character has the Walk the Walk stunt or uses Network of Contacts to specify he or she knows someone on the island – something that is so unlikely that it will require the tagging of an aspect. Each shift generated on the Rapport or Contracting roll gains another piece of information from the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	Things are bad. Very bad. The fish have gone, the wells are dry and no healthy children have been born in nearly a year
2	The priests are no good. Tornmantra? Tornmantra who? We need a new god. Who do you worship?
3	There's a temple to Tornmantra up in the hills, but no-one goes there any more – not even the priests. It's too dangerous. Strange beasts live there and the god himself is angry
4	A couple of days ago, the priests and a couple of the families who still worship Tornmantra went up to the volcano to try to placate Tornmantra. When they got back, one of the little girls was missing. They said that she'd slipped on the path, but who knows?



5	It never used to be like this. My grandfather told me that we used to be farmers, not fisherman. But who knows how to farm nowadays?
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If they decide to confront the priests on the matter of human sacrifice, the stats for the Pan Lang, the head priest can be found on page 72. Dottie and Lottie will intervene to prevent any conflict from becoming physical and Pan Lang will be difficult to beat in social conflicts. He won't allow any character to speak to him for long enough to read him using Empathy. If they push him too far, he'll use his Sleight of Hand to introduce a fast-acting poison of Good potency and Fair subtlety into the most aggressive character's food or drink. If detected he will initially attempt to brazen it out before fleeing if his attempts to Intimidate are unsuccessful. The poison is made from a local mushroom and will cause stomach cramps and muscle weakness. If it is analysed with a Fair Science roll, the appropriate treatment will be to induce vomiting. Pan Lang will claim that it's due to demonic possession and attempt a phony exorcism, including the ingestion of a "holy tonic" that will – you guessed it – induce vomiting.

Part way through the evening – after any excitement has died down – Dottie and Lottie will discuss the plan for placating Tornmantra. The PCs, and a local guide called Tan-Tan will travel to the temple, attempt to contract Tornmantra and find out what's wrong (stats for Tan-Tan can be found on page 72). If he's still present, Pan Lang will warn of dire consequences if they attempt this, but will eventually insist on accompanying them. The ship will be fixed while the PCs are inland. Once this has been agreed, the party will continue, finally breaking up in the early hours of the morning.

If no-one in the party has the Step Sideways stunt then one of the village elders will give them an idol that's supposed to have been used in the worship of Tornmantra. An Average Mysteries roll will confirm that it's enchanted; if spin is gained on the roll then the PC will discover that it acts as a key of sorts. If placed in the right location (probably) the temple, and the correct ritual cast then it will grant access to the Beyond. Pan Lang claims to know the ritual and he'll want to carry the artefact. However, it's been given to the PCs, not Pan Lang, so it shouldn't take much Rapport with the elders or Intimidation of Pan Lang to

make him back down.

Aspects for this scene include: Welcome to Our Humble Village, It's Made from Coconuts – Well, Mostly Coconuts and Hidden Tensions

## SCENE TWO: A STROLL IN THE JUNGLE

Tan-Tan will wake the PCs in the mid-morning, showing off his Irritatingly Sunny Disposition. Anyone who has imbibed a significant quantity of Mostly Coconuts will have a stinking hangover, but Tan-Tan has prepared a foul-smelling concoction that will relieve the worst symptoms. The temple is around a two-day trek into the heart of the island and he'll want to get started as soon as possible.

Tan-Tan will lead the way, pointing out plants and wildlife that he thinks that the PCs will find interesting. Pan Lang (if present) will be at the rear, grumbling all of the time. The trail follows a river up into the mountains and after half an hour it enters a valley that's clearly (Fair Alertness, Academics or Survival check) artificial in nature. Terraces have been cut into the valley sides and it looks (Good Investigation, Academics or Survival check) that they used to be cultivated, perhaps fifty to a hundred years ago. If asked about this, Tan-Tan will shrug. Some people come up here to collect fruit and vegetables, but no-one has tended these gardens in living memory. He doesn't know why. If a player decides to investigate further (another Good Academics or Survival check, modified by Investigation), then they will find that it's good soil. With proper cultivation, it could easily support the village and provide a good surplus. If anyone thinks to ask, the terracing and orientation of the valley makes the upper reaches ideal for growing grapes – which should please the Del Marco's.

It's a steep climb once they leave this valley, particularly with Pan Lang whining all the time. This trail hasn't been used in a while, so Tan-Tan has to hack his way through the undergrowth and occasionally halt to ensure they are heading in the right direction. By mid-afternoon, he'll be pushing the party so they'll to reach the place he wants to camp for the night. Due to Pan Lang's dawdling it will be getting dark before they reach the camp, which will make a flicker of annoyance cross Tan-Tan's normally sunny face.

Encourage the PCs to set a watch and play up the strange noises and mysterious rustlings that will



surround the camp the whole time, but nothing will happen during the night. By the time that the PCs wake in the morning, Tan-Tan will already have a fire lit and be cooking breakfast – a bush pig that wandered too close to the camp.

As the PCs travel further into the mountains, they pass the edge of the tree line and the air starts to get thinner. “Not far now.” says Tan-Tan. The trail is now cut into the wall of a steep and rocky valley. PCs that make a Good Alertness check will spot a large flying creature in the distance. If they point this out to Tan-Tan, he’ll already be aware of them. “Hippogriff,” he says, “It’s been shadowing us since we left the tree-line. There’s a nest of them around here somewhere, but I’ve never found it. Hopefully they should leave us alone.”

Famous last words. As they leave his mouth, the PCs are ambushed by two hippogriff swooping down from above them (use the ambush rules in section 5.27.3 of the SotC SRD, allowing each character a single Alertness roll against the hippogriff’s Stealth check to avoid surprise). One more will arrive each exchange (including the one in the distance) until there is one creature per PC and NPC (including Pan Lang – who they won’t attack). The hippogriffs are being manipulated by Pan Lang, so each beast won’t flee until it takes a major consequence (physical or social). Pan Lang will spend the whole combat chanting under his breath – if challenged, he’ll claim that he was attempting to banish the creatures. A Good Mysteries roll will confirm that he was attempting to manipulate the behaviour, if spin is gained on the roll then the PC will realise that he was forcing the creatures to attack. If challenged on this, Pan Lang will attempt to grab the idol (if present – a fate point will force him to fail) and then leap, screaming with rage, into the valley. A hippogriff will swoop down on his plummeting body and he’ll land on its back. He’ll make one pass at the PCs, throwing a poisoned spear at Tan-Tan (roll as a normal attack – Tan-Tan should be able to dodge it easily, but even if he doesn’t then the PCs are close enough that they don’t need him any more) and then quickly flying out of sight. If anyone tries to counter-attack, compel misses as necessary – Pan Lang should survive. Aspects for this scene include: Narrow Mountain Ledge, Gusting Winds and That’s A Long Way Down.

SCENE THREE: THE ROPE BRIDGE

Once the excitement has died down, Tan-Tan (if he’s still alive) will continue to lead the PCs along the mountain trail. After about an hour, they will round a corner and suddenly be confronted by a large stone temple, cut into the other side of the valley. The traditional, precariously rickety rope bridge leads from this side of the valley to the other. It will take a Fair Athletics roll to cross it without risk falling. If this roll is failed, then the PC will slip – if they or another person invoke an aspect to prevent them from falling then this will represent them catching themselves or being caught just in time. If Pan Lang is still with the party, he will attempt to steal the idol (if present) and cut the bridge with one or more of the PCs still on it. If the bridge is cut, Tan-Tan and the PCs should have brought some rope and it can be repaired with some creative Athletics and/or Engineering rolls.

Aspects for this scene include: It’s A Really, Really Long Way Down, Traditional and Precariously Rickety Rope Bridge, Gusting Winds and “Temple of Doom” Rip-Off.

SCENE FOUR: THE TEMPLE OF TØRNMANTRA

Once they are across the bridge, the PCs find themselves on a large flat area – about twenty by twenty metres – that has been cut into the mountainside and overlooked by the temple. In the centre of this area is what appears to be an altar. The temple itself is a cave that has also been cut into the mountainside. The entrance was blocked by a large and intricately carved wooden door (about twice the height of a man) that’s now rotten and collapsed. The pillars on either side of the entrance have been carved into statues and (assuming that the PCs investigate), they’ll find another altar inside the cave/temple along with more statues and carvings. If the PCs search the area, they can make a Fair Investigation check, each shift gaining another piece of information on the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	The temple itself has been abandoned for years. There are scorch marks on the two altars. Looks like something – or someone – used to be burnt here, but not for many, many years



2	Even animals avoid this area. There's no tracks or nests and nothing has used this cave as a den
3	There are faint stains as well as burn marks on the altar. It looks like some of the carvings have been cut away and replaced – perhaps more than once
4	The stains aren't blood. They look more like sap. Maybe incense or aromatic resins. There have been three stages of decoration in this temple. The first has almost been obliterated by the second (which consists of pastoral themes – crops, farming, etc.). The third stage is cruder than the second and includes boats and fishing themes

A character examining the carvings and layout of the temple can make a Fair Academics roll, each shift gaining another piece of information from the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	The carvings and statues indicate that this is a temple to a god of farming
2	The carvings in the temple tell the story of the death of an evil god (Ataba) and the ascension of Tornmantra to godhood. He's the one who designed the terraces and discovered the best ways to farm them
3	The carvings around the shrine outside the temple describe two rituals. The first mimics the Voices from Beyond stunt, the second the Step Sideways stunt (see page 38). If the PCs still have the idol from the village elders, this will make the ritual easier, but it's not essential. As spin has been gained on this roll then the PC can get +1 on either the roll to contact Tornmantra or the roll to Step Sideways
4	The carvings and statues have replaced those of a previous god – probably Ataba. Ataba was a god of fish and fishermen, as well as chaos, destruction and – possibly – deceit. The sort of deity that the Chaos Cults would worship. However, the most recent additions to the temple are of fish and fishing paraphernalia such as boats and nets. This indicates that the worshippers were confused about the nature of the god they are worshipping

Finally, a character can attempt a Fair Mysteries check to “pick up” the energies/vibrations, etc. in the area, each shift gaining another piece of information from the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	As expected, there are two nexuses of mystic energy in the area, focused around the two altars
2	The walls between the Known World and the Beyond are particularly thin around the altar in front of the temple
3	This place was once a focus for worship, but hasn't been used for many years. The altar in the temple was used to ceremonies dedicated to the worship of Tornmantra, while the one in front of the temple was used to commune with and contact him. As spin has been gained on this roll then the PC can get +1 on either the roll to contact Tornmantra or the roll to Step Sideways
4	Tornmantra still lives, but is very weak. It's unlikely that he has the power to create the eruptions or the curses
5	Tornmantra didn't create the eruptions or the curses. He still loves the villagers, despite the fact they've turned away from him. There are echoes of an older, dead god of chaos and destruction to which this temple was once dedicated and he might be responsible

Hopefully, after the research, the PCs will make the decision to use the altar outside the temple to contact Tornmantra. This will require a Great Mysteries roll (if the PCs have the idol, they get a +2 bonus) and the contact will be brief and distant: “Come my children.”

Stepping Sideways will require a Superb Mysteries roll (again, if the PCs have the idol, they get a +2 bonus). Once the ritual is completed, the PCs will find themselves in an almost identical area in front of the temple. In the Beyond, the colours are brighter and every detail seems a little bit sharper. The door to the temple is repaired and is slightly ajar. In the dust in front of temple, a little girl is playing with a doll.



SCENE FIVE: THE BEYOND - OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE

The little girl is Lissa. She is six years old, scared, hurt and confused. Three days ago she was sacrificed to Tornmantra by being thrown into the volcano. Her parents were part of the group that sacrificed her so, quite naturally, she feels betrayed. She doesn't understand what has happened to her – Tornmantra has done his best to explain, but he's not used to dealing with children. Not knowing what else to do with her, he's appointed her as the guardian of the temple (it keeps her out of from under her feet and she seems to like the open air).

If the PCs ignore her and attempt to enter the temple she will make a casual gesture and the door will slam shut. The heavy door requires a Good Might to open and will be resisted by Lissa's Fair Might, so the PCs will need to beat a Might of Superb in order to open it against her will.

If they threaten or intimidate her, things will turn scary. Lissa has long hair that she can use to cover her face, which gives you an opportunity to do your Samara or Sadako impression (if you haven't seen "The Ring" or the original "Ringu" then you really ought to watch these films at some point). It's possible to intimidate or physically defeat her (if they don't mind beating up a six-year-old girl). She'll offer a concession of letting them into the temple if they inflict a moderate consequence on her, but Tornmantra will know this and be very, very angry (his inclination towards the players will be negative – see section 8.3.21 of the SotC SRD). Rapport or Deceit are much better approaches. You can run the conversation as a social conflict; the PCs Deceit verses Lissa's Empathy or the PCs Rapport verses her Resolve. Again, she'll offer a concession of letting them into the temple if they inflict a moderate consequence on her, but this won't offend Tornmantra.

Aspects for this scene include: Spirit World, Abandoned Temple, Abandoned Shrine

SCENE SIX: THE BEYOND - TORNMANTRA

Once they get past the door they'll find the temple lit by dimly flickering torches. There's a throne in place of the main altar and seated on the throne is a very old man – Tornmantra. He looks up at them with rheumy eyes and says "Greetings, my children."

Tornmantra is an old, dying god, who has lost touch with his worshippers. He dimly remembers being a human who figured out the secret of farming and used it to revolutionise his community. Over the years the secrets were lost, the terraces fell into disuse, the villagers went back to fishing and they worshipped him less and less. Without their memory, Tornmantra has become older and has begun to fade from existence.

Because he receives so few visitors, Tornmantra's initial inclination towards the PCs will be positive (see section 8.3.21 of the SotC SRD) unless they've fought or intimidated their way past his doorkeeper. If they achieve a positive or at least neutral inclination through Rapport, he'll tell them of his history and of the temple's fall into disuse. He's not responsible for the curse on the village ("look at me, the strongest curse I can manage is 'bugger off'"), but knows that Pan Lang is a chaos cultist and that the cultists are causing the curse and the eruptions. The cultists are based under the volcano, in a sea cave that's only accessible at low tide. If Tan-Tan is still alive, he'll know the location. It has an evil reputation and strange creatures have been seen in the area over the past few months.

If the PCs ask about Lissa, Tornmantra's mood will turn dark. Pan Lang convinced the villagers that the god desired a virgin sacrifice and Tornmantra expended much of his remaining power to preserve her soul ("what in Destruction's name am I supposed to do with a virgin? The dead can't learn, can't change. She'll stay six years old until she fades into Destruction because that's all she knows how to be. If I wanted a human sacrifice – and I don't – I'd take a matched pair of courtesans any day of the week."). One of the best possible endings for this adventure is for Dottie and Lottie to become his consorts, thus renewing his connection to the villagers. If the PCs mention the twins to Tornmantra, he'll be very interested; as long as a ghost is well-remembered, their appearance usually reverts to the time in the life when they were the happiest and this is usually their youth (a PC can confirm this on the Good Academics or Mysteries roll).

As the conversation continues, Tornmantra will appear to become slightly younger. He's gaining strength from the contact with the PCs and especially from Tan-Tan's worship (if he's still alive). A PC can choose to channel power to him by invoking a religious aspect they have in common and making a



Fair Mysteries roll.

Tornmantra will offer each of the PCs (and Tan-Tan) a boon and a blessing if they do the following:

- Avenge the dead of Lissa by killing Pan Lang (if he's still alive) and the chaos cultists beneath the volcano
- Destroy or remove whatever is causing the volcano to become active
- Teach the villagers the rituals they need in order to contact Tornmantra (the carvings in the temple and on the shrine outside)
- Encourage the villagers to start cultivating the terraces and to worship regularly at the temple (Tan-Tan will agree to do this, if he's still alive)

The boon is a promise – effectively a wish – that Tornmantra will fulfil if it is within his ability. However, even when he's back to full strength, Tornmantra's powers are limited to this island. The blessing will be a charm (see page 26) that will add a sticky manoeuvre called Tornmantra's Blessing to each of the characters (plus Tan-Tan, if present). Assume that Tornmantra gained spin on his roll (he is a god after all) so each player can choose the scene when they wish the manoeuvre to be active and it will last for the whole of the scene. The PCs may ask if Tornmantra will apply the blessing before they leave. The effort to do this will leave Tornmantra near-dead so a PC will need to give a convincing reason and make a Superb Rapport roll before he will do this. Once the negotiations have concluded, Tornmantra will clap his hands twice, dust will swirl around the PCs and they will find themselves still in the temple, but now in the Known World rather than the Beyond.

It's just possible that the PCs might decide to attack Tornmantra. If so, his stats can be found on page (as might be expected, Tan-Tan will fight at the side of his god). As an Immortal, Tornmantra will not take physical consequences unless the PCs have a Dire weapon (see page 28) or somehow guess that a nature god might be vulnerable to chemical preparations that damage plants and have them available (Superb Academics or Mysteries check to infer the weakness; Good Science or Survival check to create something that will damage or destroy plant life). Social consequences will represent damage to his temple – as he continues to

take damage, the temple will start to collapse. A mild consequence will be a Disintegrating Wall Carvings, a moderate consequence will be Toppled Statues and a severe consequence will be Imminent Roof Collapse. Tornmantra will assume that any attacking PCs are chaos cultists. He will fight until he's taken out, at which point he will fade into Destruction and his temple will collapse. Roll for a Fantastic attack on any PC in the temple, resisted by Athletics) and the PCs will have to run for the collapsing portal to the Known World at the shrine outside the temple (Fair Athletics check). Unless the PCs have the location of the sea cave, they are highly unlikely to be able to locate the artefact that has causing the curses on the village and the volcano's activity. With Tornmantra dead, it's going to be almost too easy for the chaos cultists to convert the villagers to Ataba-worship. The Del Marco sisters will not be pleased – perhaps going as far as to maroon the PCs.

Aspects for this scene include: A Temple to a Dying God and Lost Glories.

## ACT FOUR: THE SEA CAVES

### SCENE ONE: FINDING THE CAVES

If Tan-Tan is still alive, the return journey to the village will be uneventful. If he isn't with the PCs, they will have to make a Good Survival roll to navigate or a series of three Good Investigation rolls to find the trail through the jungle.

The villagers will be waiting with nervous excitement for the PCs return. As they approach, children will run ahead to alert the rest of the village. Everyone will want to know what happened, what Tornmantra is like and if the curse has been lifted.

As soon as Pan Lang is mentioned, his acolytes will attempt to slip away without anyone noticing. The stats for Tolliva, the Pan Lang's lover and the rest of the cultists can be found on page 73. If challenged, Tolliva will fight until taken out and then will need to be taken out in social combat before she reveals any information. She knows the location of the sea cave where the cultists are based, the basic layout of the cave complex and the nature of the Tear of Telos.

Aspects for this scene include: Hail the Conquering Heroes and Hidden Agendas.



## SCENE TWO: A SHORT BOAT TRIP

Due to tides, the cave is only accessible at night or for a couple of hours around dawn or dusk. If one of the PCs is a sailor, they will need to make a Great Sail check to successfully pilot a small boat to the cave entrance. If they fail, then the boat will smash against the rocks, spilling the party into the water. Treat the swim to the cave as a Good physical attack resisted by Athletics. Alternatively, they some of the sailors from the Pride of Del Marco can transport them in the ship's long boat. If this happens, then a wreck is inevitable. The surviving sailors will refuse to accompany the PCs into the cave

If the PCs are short of fighters and Tan-Tan is still alive, he will accompany them. If not, Contacting, Rapport, Leadership or just good role-play will rustle up another ally.

As they approach the cave, they will be noticed by a chaos cultist minion, who will run to warn its lieutenant. The lookout post is well concealed, so the PCs will have to make a Fair Alertness check to spot the mutant. It's quite possible that the PCs come up with a clever way of sneaking up on the cave. If so, treat the mutant look-out as having a Fair Alertness.

If the chaos cultists are alerted, they will attack PCs as they are attempting to land – possibly with surprise unless the PCs make that Alertness check. If the PCs manage to sneak up, they might be able to ambush the chaos cultists in a filthy guard-room just inside the cave entrance. Use the stats of the chaos cult lieutenant and his minions on page 73. The lieutenant's Alertness will be augmented by their minions, so the PCs will have to beat an effective Alertness of Good to gain surprise. The cultists will fight until taken out.

Aspects for this scene include: Slippery Underfoot, Cruel Sea, Nasty Jagged Rocks

## SCENE THREE: INSIDE THE CAVES

There's a short, rough passageway beyond the guard room, then it opens up into a large cave, lit by a hole – far above – from partially collapsed roof. It's home to a throng of chaos cultists – use one chaos cult lieutenant and supporting minions for every two PCs. The cave is a mess: trash, gnawed bones (animal, but there are a couple that just might be human), disturbing images scrawled on the wall and a couple of crude shrines.

If the PCs didn't manage to ambush the cultists in the previous scene then they will be prepared in this one – taking cover behind rocks and in their improvised huts, ready to pepper them with arrows, spears and crossbow bolts. If the alarm hasn't been raised, then the PCs will have to beat an effective Alertness of Fair to gain surprise (they aren't expecting trouble). The cultists will fight until taken out; if one is captured he'll need to be taken out again in social combat before giving up any information (they know about the temple in the next scene, that One Thousand Beautiful Things has fire powers, what the Tear of Telos looks like and its basic powers, etc.). As soon as a fight begins, one minion will flee up a lava tube at the far side of cave. The PCs will need to act fast if they want to stop him.

Aspects for this scene include: Slippery Underfoot, Rough Rock Walls, Dark and Dingy

## SCENE FOUR: THE FINAL CONFLICT

A lava tube is a hollow volcanic formation, formed by molten rock passing at a different rate beneath the surface of a lava flow. They are smooth-walled and usually have a roughly circular cross-section. A lava tube leads from the far side of the cave, uphill, towards the centre of the volcano. It's just under six-foot in diameter, so the PCs will have to move in single file; Melinpelonians and tall humans will have to crouch.

After about a mile, the air in the tube will start to become hot and the PCs will see a flickering, orange-yellow light coming from up ahead. The heat, cramped conditions and steep incline will take its toll on the players. This should be treated as a Good physical attack, resisted by Endurance.

The cultists know that the PCs are coming and will begin firing on the PCs with crossbows when the PCs are two zones away. The cultists are led by One Thousand Beautiful Things, a priestess of the fire goddess Cyradis. If Pan Lang or Tolliva are still alive then they will also be here. Add chaos cult lieutenants and minions (see page 73) until there is one NPC character per PC (not counting minions).

The lava tube leads into the crater at the heart of the volcano. The rock wall has been molded by magic (Fair Mysteries, Good Engineering, Great Academics or Great Science check to confirm) into a temple that hangs out over a seething, smoking red-hot pool of lava. Despite the temple being dedicated to Ataba, the



operation is under the control of a priestess of Cyradis who calls herself One Thousand Beautiful Things. Ataba will owe her and her goddess a huge favour if they are successful and he is restored as the object of worship for the people living on this island.

One Thousand Beautiful Things is dressed from head to foot in red, orange and yellow strips of silk, decorated with amber, rubies and yellow diamonds giving her appearance of living flame. Underneath the clothing and the elaborately painted mask, her skin is completely covered in burn scars. During combat, her body will be sheathed in magical flames.

The main altar of the temple is in the open air, overlooking the lava pool. In an ornate silver reliquary on this altar is a fist-sized crystal teardrop – the Tear of Telos. Anyone with the slightest mystical inclination (Mysteries skill) will realise that this is a powerful artefact.

The cultists will fight until taken out – even going as far as leaping into the volcano to avoid capture. Aspects for this scene include: Smooth Rock Walls, Heart of the Volcano, Flickering Orangey Light, The Smoke Gets In Your Eyes, Temple of Ataba.

## ACT FIVE: THE AFTERMATH

### SCENE ONE: DISPOSING OF THE TEAR OF TELOS

Assuming that the characters examine the Tear, two skills will be useful – Mysteries and Academics. Each shift on a Fair Mysteries roll generates gains another piece of information from the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	The energies surrounding the artefact are confused and chaotic, but you can see it's extremely powerful
2	It seems to be in two parts. The silver cage channels and controls the power in the crystal tear

3	The tear is dedicated to balance and creation, but the cage twists its energies until they are chaotic and destructive. It's dangerous to be in its vicinity for any length of time without mystical protection (the spin generated on this roll can be used on a subsequent Academics ritual to investigate the artefact or on a Mysteries roll to create a protective ritual or to safely remove the tear from its cage)
4	It's the source of the curse on the island and was used to create the eruptions (and to protect the temple during them). Removing it from the temple would remove the curse and restore the volcano to stability
5	The crystal teardrop is dedicated to Telos, the cage to Cyradis

Each shift on a Fair Academics roll generates gains another piece of information from the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	According to the Melinpelonians, Telos cried at the barrenness of the Known World when he saw it during the first dawn. They claim that their race sprang from these crystal tears. It's likely that the teardrop at the centre of this artefact is intended to represent this
2	The symbols on the cage dedicate it to Cyradis, goddess of chaos, destruction, change and fire. The runes are channel and bind the mystical power source within
3	The silver work on the cage is much newer than the tear. It looks like it was created around two hundred years ago, specifically to surround the teardrop. The age of the crystal is impossible to calculate. The spin on this roll can be used on any subsequent Mysteries roll involving the artefact
4	The central teardrop matches the description of an artefact that was stolen from Temple Island around over two hundred years ago. The Monks would be extremely grateful for any information about it

If spin is gained on either roll, it can be used on the other – even if the rolls are made by different people.

The PCs have a number of options:

- If they decide to do nothing with the Tear, then the



curse will continue. Tornmantra will send them, or another party, back into the volcano to solve the problem

- Throw the Tear into the volcano, hoping that the lava will absorb the energies (the Frodo solution). The artefact will be destroyed, but it will trigger another eruption. The PCs will have to flee as the lava rises up, destroys the temple and flows down the tube after them. As they row back to the village, any characters with a high Mysteries or any stunts on the Psychic tree will see the eruption as a conflict between Ataba and Tornmantra with massive versions of the two gods fighting on the slopes of the volcano. The lava flows won't directly threaten the village, but don't let the players know this (throw a couple more pumice bombs their way or something). When they return, the villagers are already praying for Tornmantra's victory; a Mysteries roll will allow the PCs to organise and direct their worship. Tornmantra will eventually win, but the prayers will make things easier.
- Throw it into the sea. It will eventually wash up somewhere, but if the PCs choose somewhere deep enough it won't be in their lifetimes.
- Destroy the cage surrounding the Tear. This can be done without difficulty – the problem will be surviving the backlash from the magical energies. Treat this as an explosion with an Epic force and an area of three. This physical attack is resisted by Mysteries. If the PCs attempt a ritual to absorb or redirect the energy then a single Mysteries roll is made to resist all of the damage, probably by the character with the highest skill. The rest of the PCs can assist the ritual leader. The freed Tear is much safer, but Tornmantra will still not want it on the island. It's so powerful that it will attract attention.
- Give it to someone. The monks of Temple Island or the Empire priests of Port Macond are both groups that can take care of it properly. The problem will be transporting it safely. If the silver cage is still in place around the Tear then everyone who stays within five miles of it for longer than a few hours they will gain the aspect "Curse of the Tear" until they spend a couple of days out of its range. A journey to Temple Island or Port Macond will be deeply troubled, but ultimately successful. The monks of Temple Island in particular will be incredibly grateful if it's returned.

## SCENE TWO: THE REDEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

Dottie and Lottie will insist on accompanying the villagers on the difficult journey to the temple. Lottie in particular will be very tired and short of breath by the time they arrive. A Great Science check will reveal that an enlarged heart is the least of her problems. She could die at any time. If a PC with medical skills thinks to check, Dottie isn't in much better shape.

With the support from the villagers, the Superb Mysteries check to Step Sideways shouldn't be too difficult. If necessary, you can always find an elderly priest or priestess who has kept the faith. The ritual will take all of the villagers into the Beyond. The temple door will open and a more youthful Tornmantra will stride out to greet them, Lissa's tiny hand in his.

Tornmantra will greet the villagers, accept their fealty and worship and begin to teach them about how to replant and tend for the terraces. Towards the end of his lecture, he'll catch sight of Dottie and Lottie. Due to the influence of the Beyond, they appear to be in their late teens and are startlingly beautiful. Their god will approach them, the crowd parting before him. Dottie and Lottie reflexively attempt to kneel, but Tornmantra will catch and kiss their hands, then bow. The sisters will exchange glances and then curtsy. Tornmantra will offer his arms to the sisters and then walk with them into the temple. Lissa, smiling, will close the doors and then stand firmly in front of them. The ritual is over – the Beyond will shimmer, fade and the characters will find themselves in the Known World. The bodies of Dottie and Lottie will be found on a bed of freshly-grown flowers. They died peacefully.

## SCENE THREE: THE REWARDS

Dorothy and Lotisha had very detailed wills, which, among other things, specified that they should be buried on Ataba. At the funeral, characters with the appropriate stunts will be able to see them, their new consort and their freshly adopted daughter watching from the Beyond. Their grave site will become a shrine and, by this stage, it shouldn't take Mysteries or Academics roll for the players to realise that this will embed the worship of Tornmantra and his new demi-goddesses within the everyday life of the village.

As well as Tornmantra's blessing and boon, the characters will also receive their agreed rewards from



the Del Marco Shipping Company. As Dottie and Lottie left no heirs, the ownership is now shared between the senior partners. The PCs will be offered a retainer as trouble-shooters to the company – this is intended as a lead for future adventure.

If the Tear of Telos is delivered to the authorities in Port Macond then they will receive no additional reward for delivering a dangerous artefact into a populated area. By contrast, the monks of Temple Island will be very, very grateful. While they don't have much in the way of financial resources, each of the PCs will be given a blessing; a charm (see page 26) that will add a sticky manoeuvre called Telos' Blessing to each of the characters. Each player can choose the scene when they wish the manoeuvre to be active and it will last for the whole of the scene. In addition, they can remove any curses on any of the PCs (so, at the GM's discretion, if a PC has an aspect that represents a negative magic effect, they can replace it with something Balance- or Telos-related). Also, the PCs will always have a refuge and a welcome on Temple Island.

## CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

### CHILDREN OF THE EGG (ACT ONE)

**Aspects:** Outcast Sssh-hss-ess (racial aspects: reptilian, cold-blooded, strict carnivores), Child of the Egg (religious aspects: chaos, destruction, Sssh-hss-ess), Amphibious, Chaotically Mutated

**Stunts:** Minions (six Fair physical minions), Acrobat, Slippery, One Hit to the Body, Hush

**Skills:** Weapons (+3), Athletics (+2), Fists (+2), Endurance (+1), Contacting (+1), Stealth (+1)

### PRIDE OF DEL MARCO (ACT TWO)

**Speed:** Average

**Stress Cap.:** □□□□

**Sail** (if there's no PC sailor): Good

### PRINCESS VERBENUM (ACT TWO)

**Speed:** Average

**Stress Cap.:** □□□

**Sail:** Fair

Notes: this stress rating indicates the Princess's ability to manoeuvre in a chase, not its ability to take damage (see section 8.3.8 of the SotC SRD)

### HIPPGRIFF (ACT TWO, ACT THREE)

**Aspects:** Chaos Beast, Half-Griffin/Half-Horse, Bird's Wings, Eagle's Head, Feathered

**Stunts:** Flight, Natural Melee Weapons (beak, claws – use Fists)

**Skills:** Flight (+3), Fists (+2), Endurance (+2), Resolve (+1), Survival (+1), Stealth (+1)

### Pterosaur (Act two)

**Aspects:** Chaos Beast, Reptilian, Scaly, Leathery Winged, Fragile Bones

**Stunts:** Flight, Natural Melee Weapons (beak, claws – use Fists)

**Skills:** Fists +3, Flight (+2), Survival (+1), Resolve (+1), Intimidation(+1), Endurance (+1)

### PAN LANG (ACT THREE)

**Aspects:** Phony Priest of Tornmantra, Secret Ataba Worshipper (religious aspects: chaos, destruction, fish/fishing, sea, deceit), Disgusting Old Letch, Subtle Poisoner, Duplicitous, Primitive Human (ubiquitous, cosmopolitan, strong-willed)

**Stunts:** Organised Religion (see page 33), Minions (three Good physical or social minions), Scary, Aura of Menace, Aura of Fear, Unapproachable, Beastmaster (see page 38), Psychic

**Skills:** Intimidation (+4), Deceit (+3), Sleight of Hand (+3), Mysteries (+2), Rapport (+2), Stealth (+2), Leadership (+1), Weapons (+1), Survival (+1), Contacting (+1)

### TAN-TAN (ACT THREE)

**Aspects:** One With The Forest, Irritatingly Sunny Disposition, Confused Tornmantra Worshipper (religious aspects: chaos, creation, nature), Outsider – But Still Loyal To The Village, Expert Tracker, Sickeningly Professional, Primitive Human (ubiquitous, cosmopolitan, strong-willed)

**Stunts:** Tireless, Tracker, Due North, Hush



# THOUSAND-FACED HEROES

**Skills:** Survival (+4), Weapons (+3), Endurance (+3), Alertness (+2), Stealth (+2), Athletics (+2), Fists (+1), Science (+1), Resolve (+1), Rapport (+1)

## WASSALISSA (ACT THREE)

**Aspects:** Lonely Little Girl, Betrayed By Parents, Tornmantra Worshipper (religious aspects: chaos, creation, nature, farming), Confused Temple Guardian, None Shall Pass, Scary Little Girl, Sadako/Samara Impression, Primitive Human Ghost (ubiquitous, cosmopolitan, strong-willed)

**Stunts:** Feel The Burn, Brawler, Mix it Up, Army of One, Flow Like Water, Bend like the Reed

**Skills:** Endurance (+5), Intimidation (+4), Fists (+4), Resolve (+3), Rapport (+3), Empathy (+3), Might (+2), Athletics (+2), Mysteries (+2), Alertness (+2), Contacting (+1), Academics (+1), Investigation (+1), Science (+1), Leadership (+1)

Notes: some of these skills and stunts are due to her connection to the temple and to Tornmantra

## TORNMANTRA (ACT THREE)

**Aspects:** Religious Aspect (chaos, creation, nature, farming), One With The Land, Reminds You Of Your Favourite Uncle, Primitive Human Deity (ubiquitous, cosmopolitan, strong-willed)

**Stunts:** Organised Religion (chaos, creation, nature and farming – see page 33), Deity (chaos, creation, nature, farming – see page 33), Immortal (herbicides – see page 32), Scholar (farming), Scientific Genius (farming)

**Skills:** Science (+5), Mysteries (+4), Academics (+4), Resolve (+3), Endurance (+3), Weapons (+3), Rapport (+2), Leadership (+2), Intimidation (+2), Alertness (+2), Resources (+1), Might (+1), Athletics (+1), Contacting (+1), Empathy (+1)

## TOLLIVA (ACT FOUR)

**Aspects:** Phony Priest of Tornmantra, Secret Ataba Worshipper (religious aspects: chaos, destruction, fish/fishing, sea, deceit), Slippery As A Greased Priest, Jezebel Was Weak, Primitive Human (ubiquitous, cosmopolitan, strong-willed)

**Stunts:** Organised Religion (see page 33), Minions

(three Good physical or social minions), Takes One to Know One, Popular Gal

**Skills:** Deceit (+4), Mysteries (+3), Resolve (+3), Stealth (+2), Sleight of Hand (+2), Rapport (+2), Survival (+1), Fists (+1), Leadership (+1), Resources (+1)

## CHAOS CULT LIEUTENANT (ACT FOUR)

**Aspects:** Ritual Facial Tattoos, Hideously Mutated, Ataba Worshipper (religious aspects: chaos, destruction, fish/fishing, sea, deceit), one racial aspect from: Zatonich (creative, short, tough), Melinpelonian (beautiful, delicate, nature-lover), Human (ubiquitous, cosmopolitan, strong-willed)

**Stunts:** Minions (three Good physical minions), One Hit to the Body, Thick Skinned, Man of Iron

**Skills:** Endurance (+4), Weapons (+3), Athletics (+3), Resolve (+2), Fists (+2), Survival (+2), Resources (+1), Leadership (+1), Alertness (+1), Mysteries (+1)

## ONE THOUSAND BEAUTIFUL THINGS

**Aspects:** One Thousand Beautiful Things, Priestess of Cyradis (religious aspects: chaos, destruction, change, fire), Expendable Minions, Anything for the Goddess, Everything Shall Burn, Hideously Scarred Human (ubiquitous, cosmopolitan, strong-willed)

**Stunts:** Magus (fire magic), Defensive Magic (fire), Offensive Magic – Melee (fire), Big Man (woman) in Occult, One Hit to the Body

**Skills:** Mysteries (+5), Contacting (+4), Resolve (+4), Endurance (+3), Athletics (+3), Leadership (+3), Rapport (+2), Alertness (+2), Deceit (+2), Empathy (+2), Survival (+1), Stealth (+1), Academics (+1), Fists (+1), Intimidation (+1)



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