

Beyond the labyrinth, the sun forever rises.
- The Lost One



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There is a place that is not a place, a state of existence outside of normal experience. It is the nexus of the conscious and subconscious, the merging of instinct and thought. In this hyper-reality, real and unreal are one and the same.

The Silhouette Rouge beckons.

Cipher

The Silhouette Rouge masquerades as a mansion without entrance or exit. In truth, it is something else. The Silhouette Rouge exists to initiate the base into the sublime.

The Silhouette Rouge is a puzzle box of semiosis and symbolism. Its secret language is the catalyst for enlightenment. It is the antechamber to transcendence or damnation.

Spatial dimensions are fluid. Time is an illusion. Reality is dreamlike. The Silhouette Rouge is change and evolution personified. Few things remain constant.

There are always seventy-eight rooms in the Silhouette Rouge.

Rebirth

The Sarcophagi are creatures born of mystery and devoid of past. They have been resurrected from flawed and meaningless lives into a new existence. Memory and history are lost to them; their old lives cast aside like a cocoon that has been outgrown. Once the Sarcophagi were human, but now they are something else. Their compound eyes see the world differently. Their four arms manipulate reality in new ways. A chitinous exoskeleton protects their fragile souls.

The Sarcophagi are insects that walk as men.

The Sarcophagi are explorers. They wander the Silhouette Rouge, seeking to divine its truths. Only by doing so, can they escape this place and progress to whatever destiny awaits them.

Menagerie

The Sarcophagi are not alone. Strange, wayward souls haunt the Silhouette Rouge. Known simply





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as the Others, each of these entities is unique. Some understand the mystery of the Silhouette Rouge, while some are as unknowing as the Sarcophagi.

The Others have been here for a very long time.

Transmigration

The Gate of Horn is spoken of in hushed and reverent tones. It is said to be the sole means of egress from the Silhouette Rouge. Although no such gate is known to exist within the mansion, the wisest among the Others claim differently. They allege that the gate is merely intangible and imperceptible to all but the worthiest of souls. They assert that solving the Nine Enigmas is the key to unlocking the gate.

The exact nature of the Nine Enigmas remains conjecture. Some believe they are pieces of a puzzle whose proper alignment opens the Gate of Horn. Some believe the Nine Enigmas to be metaphors, stepping-stones to enlightenment.

Perhaps they are both?

If there is anyone who knows the truth, it is probably the Lost One. He arrived from someplace else and spent his time pursuing the mysteries of the Silhouette Rouge. No room, no hallway was left unexplored. It is said that the Lost One lived here many lifetimes, constantly inventing new identities.

One day, without warning, the Lost One disappeared, never to be seen again. Legends claim that he solved the Nine Enigmas and left through the Gate of Horn. Many have tried to walk in his footsteps, to retrace his path, hoping to discover the knowledge he acquired during his explorations. None have succeeded; some still try.

On occasion, someone will claim to see the Lost One wandering the Silhouette Rouge. Has he returned? Did he ever really leave? Is this some illusion, temporal or otherwise?

The mystery of the Lost One remains.

The Game

Noumenon is a role-playing game of mystery and abstraction. In *Noumenon*, players assume the roles of Sarcophagi, mysterious creatures half human and half insect. Their single mandate is to experience the horrors and wonders of the Silhouette Rouge. By doing so, they will approach the mystery at the heart of this indefinable place. Only by discovering the secrets of the Silhouette Rouge can the Sarcophagi escape this prison.

Players define much of *Noumenon*. There is no set agenda for them to follow, no obvious path for them to walk. Goals and conflict will manifest of their own accord. By experiencing the Silhouette Rouge, patterns and recurring motifs will emerge. The symbolism will take on meaning. While players shape the game through their journeys, they will find allies to their quest and enemies as well. They will learn the secrets of the rooms. They will evolve.

Architecture

Beyond this chapter lies eight more sections, the first of which recounts the resurrection of Sarcophagi (i.e. character generation). An examination of the lower level of the Silhouette Rouge immediately

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follows. Next, the phenomenon of reality spasms is explored. The subsequent two chapters cover the upper level of the Silhouette Rouge and Nowhere. The seventh chapter discusses the Others, and the eighth explains the rules of *Noumenon*. A chapter on gamemastering rounds out the book.

Advisement

Noumenon is written for experienced gamers. A definition of role-playing and the basics of story construction are absent from *Noumenon*. The text also assumes terms such as Gamemaster, NPC, Initiative, etc. to be common knowledge to the reader.

Noumenon uses dominoes for task resolution.

Rorschach

Between the words of *Noumenon* lurks much white space. This is by design. The white enables Gamemasters to imprint what they will. However, this also means many of the questions posed throughout *Noumenon* will go unanswered. *Noumenon* is a puzzle. However, it is a puzzle that forms many different pictures depending on the individual gamer(s). No two individuals are likely to draw the exact same conclusions from *Noumenon*. The symbolism and recurring motifs exist to hint at underlying patterns. However, the patterns themselves remain elusive. To some, this approach may be frustrating. Others may be exhilarated by such freedom. Regardless, there is more than enough material within to fashion a plethora of stories. Take what you will, and ignore the rest.

Make up your own truths.





chrysalis

The Sarcophagi are mysteries stirring from their sleep.

Their past is unknown.

Their present is obfuscated.

Their future is unwritten.

Who is to say what the Sarcophagi once were? Is such a question even relevant? Does the puzzle of their past impact the present or shape the future? Is identity bred of decisions already made, or paths that have yet to be walked?

Does the past matter?

Perhaps the Sarcophagi are wayward souls, like those who wander the Silhouette Rouge, reincarnated into a new purpose? Perhaps they are the damned given a final chance at redemption? Perhaps each of the Sarcophagi is but a fragment of one soul, and many fragments come together to form a whole: the colony?

Could the colony be a single soul splintered into many shards?

Or is there another possibility, a truth not yet pondered?

The Logos, the voice of the universe, marvels at its children. From lowliest prokaryote to life of the highest order, the architecture of creation is breathtaking in its design. But the Logos is distant, separate. The artist can appreciate the beauty of the masterpiece, but it cannot know what it is to *be* the masterpiece.

The Logos longs to experience creation.

The Sarcophagi are the means to that end.

The Womb

The Womb is a place of beauty and of darkness. It is a sprawling, single-room cavern stretching infinitely into shadow. It is the axis mundi of creation, the gateway between the base and the sublime. It is a shrine of resurrection. In this place, old lives are shed like flaking skin and are forever forgotten.

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The Womb is the birthplace of the Sarcophagi.

The ceiling of the cavern rises up over three hundred meters, though the upper third is shrouded in darkness. At various points across the domed ceiling of the Womb, stalactites jut out from the darkness, dangling ominously like knives out of the shadows.



Randomly spaced around the cavern, thick draperies of black crystal adorn massive stalagmites. A series of ridged craters dot the landscape around the rocky protrusions. Within these depressions bubbles a warm fluid, bloodlike in consistency, texture, and color. This is the amniotic fluid that protects gestating Sarcophagi. It is known as the Serous Exudate. The Serous Exudate gives off a red glow, enough to illuminate the portion of the Womb around it, perhaps a few hundred meters in diameter. On occasion, these pools will begin to boil and bubble more violently than usual, spewing liquid slime into the air like a bloody geyser. These eruptions culminate with the crater spitting forth a cocoon onto the cold cavern floor. Within moments a newborn Sarcophagi will rend the cocoon from within, clawing its way to freedom.

Obsidian Truth

in•sect (in'sekt') *n.* [Lat. *insectum* < *insectus*, segmented, p.part of *insecare*, to cut up : *in-*, in + *secare*, to cut] **1.a.** Any of numerous usu. small invertebrate animals of the class Insecta or Hexapoda, with an adult stage marked by three pairs of legs, a segmented body with three major divisions, and usu. two pairs of wings. **b.** A similar invertebrate animal, as a spider, centipede, or tick. **2.** A small or contemptible person.

The first sight to greet one of the Sarcophagi is its own reflection. The smooth black rock, from which the cavern is cut, acts as a dark mirror showing the Sarcophagi its nature. Whatever life the Sarcophagi once lived — and each of the Sarcophagi was once someone or something else — is instantly forgotten. It is born anew. Tabula Rasa.



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The Sarcophagi are both insect and human, though more gestalt than hybrid. They are something wonderful and new, previously unseen in creation.

Ego Loss and Perpetual Motion

Sarcophagi take no names <flimsy trappings of base ego> Sarcophagi cannot dream <for they do not sleep> Sarcophagi need no sustenance <only the soul needs feeding> Sarcophagi exist in a state of perpetual motion <they do not fatigue>

Tabula Rasa and the Cuticle

The Sarcophagi are souls trapped in chitin.

< To protect them, perhaps? >

Their past is a mystery, even to them.

The Sarcophagi are sent into the Silhouette Rouge to gather experience. In time, the Logos will call these children home. Only then will the Logos understand what it is to exist.

As the Sarcophagi gain Understanding, so does the Logos.

Are all beings just tactile recording mechanisms, or are the Sarcophagi unique in this manner?

Is this the truth?

Carapace

Humanoid • Bipedal • Four arms • Two fingers and an opposable thumb • Ambidextrous • Segmented abdomen • Exoskeleton of reflective, black chitin • Tactile hairs on torso and antennae for Proprioception • Fused, segmented head • Multi-faceted compound eyes

These features are common to all Sarcophagi. Other features vary from one Sarcophagi to another. Collectively referred to as *Birthrights*, these features include:

- **Pulvilli:** Soft, cushion-like pads on the feet and hands of the Sarcophagi, used for clinging to walls.
- **Wings:** Two or four membranous organs that extend from the back of Sarcophagi, enabling flight.
- **Stinger:** Located on one of the forearms, this retractable barbed organ can pierce most tissue and secretes powerful venom.
- **Spinneret:** Located on one of the forearms, this tubular structure releases a glue-like web filament for ensnaring opponents.
- **Sclerites:** Plates of hardened chitin that provide additional armoring to Sarcophagi.
- **Proboscis:** A long, barbed tube extending from the mouth of the Sarcophagi, used to pierce flesh and suck out a being's life force.
- **Sensilla:** Sensory receptors on the cuticle of the Sarcophagi that heighten awareness beyond normal limitations.
- **Mandibles:** A pair of serrated mandibles protruding from the jaw of the Sarcophagi, used to rend flesh.
- **Spined Chitin:** Sharp barbs that cover the surface of the exoskeleton that make it difficult for



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enemies to grapple the Sarcophagi without injury.

Characters begin the game with one Birthright from the above list.

Like all newborns, Sarcophagi know nothing of the world around them until they experience it first hand. In *Noumenon*, Sarcophagi have nine *traits* that define their existence:

- **Awareness:** There is a world in constant motion around the Sarcophagi. *Awareness* is a character's ability to observe this world. This *trait* is the measure of a character's perception and wits, how alert it is to the surrounding environment.
- **Violence:** This *trait* governs all physical combat. It represents a character's ability to do harm to another. In combat situations, *Violence* is the character's ability to hit its target and dodge opponents' blows. It also helps determine the amount of damage done per strike.
- **Activity:** Sarcophagi have been born into this new life from another. *Activity* represents the character's ability to tap into skills and talents, from this previous life, that involve coordination or physical prowess. In *Noumenon*, this *trait* essentially represents any skills requiring athleticism or coordination, although the character has no recollection of how it knows these abilities; it simply understands that it's remembering talents from a discarded existence. *Activity* covers all physical abilities one might have learned. However, *Activity* does not enhance combat, knowledge, or social skills (these are covered under *Violence*, *Wisdom*, and *Personality* respectively). Because characters have no recollection of how they know these abilities, *Activity* is referred to as one of the *Mystery traits*.
- **Wisdom:** This *trait* is the measure of a character's intelligence. *Wisdom* also represents the character's ability to tap into skills and talents from its previous life that involve intelligence or knowledge. In *Noumenon*, this *trait* essentially represents any skills requiring intellectual prowess, deductive reasoning, or knowledge, although the character has no recollection of how it knows these abilities; it simply understands that it's remembering talents from a discarded existence. *Wisdom* covers all intellectual skills one might have learned. However, *Wisdom* does not enhance combat, physical, or social skills (these are covered under *Violence*, *Activity*, and *Personality* respectively). Because characters have no recollection of how they know these abilities, *Wisdom* is referred to as one of the *Mystery traits*.
- **Personality:** This *trait* governs all social interaction. Whether it is charisma or intimidation that is called for, *Personality* is the governing *trait*.
- **Chitin:** Sarcophagi are protected by an exoskeleton. This *trait* represents the durability of that exoskeleton.
- **Metamorphosis:** Reality is ever changing. If one does not adapt to it, one will be swept up in its currents and drowned. This fact is even more obvious in the Silhouette Rouge. At irregular intervals, the nature of reality and the geometry of the Silhouette Rouge mutates. The *Metamorphosis* *trait* represents a character's ability to navigate and cope with these changes.
- **Communion:** The universe is alive, and each being is connected to that life-force. *Communion* is the *trait* used to hear one's inner voice and thus communicate with the Logos, the voice of the universe. In *Noumenon*, this *trait* represents a character's ability to seek answers to questions it cannot possibly know the answers to. It represents intuition and higher truths. The Sarcophagi also use this *trait* to access special powers called *Principles*.
- **Rapport:** Sarcophagi always exist in colonies; Sarcophagi are never alone. This truth is reflected in the *Rapport* *trait*. With *Rapport*, Sarcophagi communicate telepathically amongst themselves



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and lend their strength to one another for healing.

All traits range from 1 to 5 — with 1 being an abysmal rating and 5 being a superb rating. Characters start the game with a rank of 1 in each of the nine traits.

Players then have 9 additional points to spend on raising trait ranks or acquiring extra Birthrights. Trait ranks or new Birthrights are purchased on a one for one basis, i.e. one point buys one more trait rank or one new Birthright.

Baptism

Existence is a series of struggles, and the first struggle is the battle to be born. The Sarcophagi claw themselves into being, casting aside the cocoon of their old lives, resurrecting their souls into new possibilities. While gestating in the Serous Exudate, the Sarcophagi forget their pasts and are reborn into a new state of purity. They are blank slates given a new chance to define themselves, for good or for ill. *Mystery*, like the ghostly echo of an umbilical cord, is the only thing that tethers them to their past.

The reflective surface of the Womb enables Sarcophagi to immediately define themselves. *This is how I look; this is who I am.* It also catches the twisted reflections of the descending Chiroptera.

The Chiroptera are born of Nowhere. How they came to reside in the Womb is a mystery.

On leather wings, the Chiroptera dive from their perches to feast on newborn Sarcophagi. These foul creatures reside in the upper darkness of the Womb, hiding amidst the stalactites. When Sarcophagi awaken, so does the hunger of the Chiroptera. Once they engage their prey, Chiroptera are merciless and unrelenting. They will fight until either they or their prey is dead.

Fortunately for newborn Sarcophagi, Chiroptera only attack in groups of two or three. The colony is *never* outnumbered. It is always this way. If the battle is won, no other Chiroptera will attack. The others will remain in the darkness, biding their time, waiting for other Sarcophagi to stir from the Serous Exudate.

Assuming the first challenges of this new life are overcome, it is time for the Sarcophagi to leave the Womb.



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Avatar

From out of Nowhere he comes, with the head of an elephant and staring with his third eye. He is the Lodestar, *Communion* made manifest, an avatar of the Logos sent to the Sarcophagi. He comes to guide newborn Sarcophagi to the Silhouette Rouge. Behind him, also appearing from Nowhere, is a golden staircase, luminous in the faint light of the Womb. The staircase ascends, thirty-three steps in all, into the upper regions of the cavern, its radiance so awesome that the Chiroptera near its summit flutter away into the darkness.

How can thirty-three steps possibly stretch to the lofty ceiling of the Womb?

As the Sarcophagi climb, the voice of the Lodestar resonates in their minds:

At the center of all is the Logos. It is the voice of the universe, the governing principle of existence. The Logos seeks understanding. To gain understanding, the Logos

created the Sarcophagi, fragile souls shielded in chitin. They are the children of the Logos. They experience, they evolve, and they will return to the Godhead, bringing with them the understanding of what it is to exist.

All living things are connected. All living things are shadows cast by the Logos. Each contains a spark of divinity. This is the Principle of Unity.

Each living thing is its own master. Each has its own heart, its own will. Though each is a shadow of the Logos, each is its own thing in and of itself. Each being has ego and identity. This is the Principle of the Heart.

Time is an illusion. There is no past or future, only the present. All times exist at once. The illusion was created so the Sarcophagi and Others might experience existence, for without existence there can be no experience. Without experience there can be no evolution, and without evolution there can be no understanding. This is the Principle of Time.

There is a fourth principle, a darker path. It is not to be spoken of.

The Principles of Creation

The Sarcophagi understand that three *Principles* govern all experience: *Time*, *Unity*, and *Heart*. The



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Sarcophagi seek to master the three *Principles* and harness their powers.

The *Principle of Time* states that all moments exist at once, that the passage of time is only an illusion. For most it is a deception that is necessary, however, in order to garner the ultimate prize of experience. Sarcophagi knowledgeable in the *Principle of Time* have learned to see the reality that lies beyond the veil of time. They can freeze moments and step between the cracks of nanoseconds. At the highest, most obscene level of power, these Sarcophagi can change the past, unmaking an event or experience.

The *Principle of Unity* states that all living things are shadows cast by the Logos. Just as a shadow can never be separated from the object that casts it, so too are all living beings profoundly linked to the Logos. Sarcophagi knowledgeable in the *Principle of Unity* can manipulate this connection. They can experience creation by seeing through another's eyes, hearing what another hears, and feeling what another feels. Sarcophagi can twist these connections in other, more vulgar ways. For example, the Sarcophagi can strike one being and make another feel the pain of the blow. Sarcophagi with the highest level of understanding of this principle could choose to sever a living being's connection from the Logos.

The *Principle of Heart* states that every being has its own mind, will, and identity — separate from one another and from the Logos. Sarcophagi knowledgeable in the *Principle of Heart* can manipulate the thoughts and emotions of other living beings. They can dominate another's will, invoke any emotion, and freely spy on their target's thoughts. At the most extreme level of power, these Sarcophagi can invert the personality of a living being, changing it into the antithesis of what it once was.

There are three levels of understanding for each Principle: Oracle, Adept, and Master. Characters begin at Oracle level in one of the three Principles.

Politics and Insects

Sarcophagi are social creatures. This truth is manifest from birth, as Sarcophagi do not enter their world alone, but rather as a group. A band of Sarcophagi is known as a colony. Over the eons, many colonies have walked the Silhouette Rouge, but only one colony can exist at any one time.

This is a lie. The Principle of Time teaches that all moments exist at once. Therefore, all colonies exist at once.

Newborn Sarcophagi are weak. The colony gives them strength.

The perils of the Silhouette Rouge are many. Facing them alone is unwise. The Logos understands this.

The colony is symbiotic existence.

As the colony experiences the Silhouette Rouge, it will evolve. Evolution leads to understanding. Should the colony falter along the way, it may tumble into ignorance <Nowhere>. If enlightenment is achieved, the colony will leave the Silhouette Rouge.

Only the Lodestar can survive in Nowhere, for he is wisest of all.

The concept of colony is an important aspect of Noumenon. Sarcophagi are deeply dependant on one another to survive and ultimately evolve. This is reflected in Salubrity. Salubrity is the collective wellbeing of the colony. In Noumenon, there are no individual health levels, hit points, etc. There is only Salubrity. When one of the Sarcophagi is hurt, all feel pain. When one Sarcophagi is strong, all are strong.

Should one Sarcophagi die, all die.



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The colony begins with 20 points of Salubrity.

Nascency

The thirty-three steps have been climbed, and atop the final landing stands an ivory door. Set into this door are nine locks. One by one, the gentleman with the elephant head produces nine keys. One by one, he opens each lock.

The Silhouette Rouge is a crucible. It burns away the unnecessary, leaving behind only that which is pure. The Silhouette Rouge is a place that is not a place. It is a catalyst for experience. Walk its hallways. Explore its rooms. Divine its truths. The seventy-eight rooms are the language of the Silhouette Rouge. To learn this language is to communicate with creation.

When the final key turns in the ninth lock, the Ivory Gate swings open. The Lodestar motions the Sarcophagi forward, and they are obliged to follow.

They are ushered into the Silhouette Rouge by the midwife avatar of the Logos. They will experience creation *<for such is the mandate of the Logos>* and gain understanding.

The Silhouette Rouge is a microcosm of creation. It is the language of symbolism given form. It is the mystery of understanding made manifest.

The Silhouette Rouge is the playground of the Sarcophagi.

The Nine Enigmas are the keys to unlocking the Silhouette Rouge. As each enigma is fit into its place, another latch will open. Only when nothing more bars the way, can the Sarcophagi pass on from this place.

The gentleman with the elephant head is the guide to the Nine Enigmas. It is he who breaks down barriers.

Walk in the footsteps of the Lost One. Trace his journey from foolishness to understanding. Learn what he has learned, for he alone has solved the Nine Enigmas.

The Silhouette Rouge beckons.





initiation

Beyond the Ivory Gate lies the Silhouette Rouge; once the threshold is crossed, there is no return. The colony is cast into creation and can never re-enter the Womb.

The Ivory Gate fades away, like a dream upon waking.

The gentleman with the elephant head returns to Nowhere.

The initiation of the colony is at hand.

The Silhouette Rouge beckons.

Prima Materia

The Prima Materia is the locus of the Silhouette Rouge and the lower of its two floors. The heart of the Prima Materia is a vast chamber called the Grand Foyer – to which the Ivory Gate always opens. Twisted monstrosities of flesh haunt this chamber, performing motions with purpose knowable only to them.

Three hallways extend out from the Grand Foyer. Immense, dark paned windows, set into ornate frames, decorate the hallways and the initial chamber. Complex locking mechanisms keep the windows forever closed. No one has ever figured out the secret to unlocking these portals, and few have attempted to do so. Most assume these windows lead to Nowhere, for Chiroptera can be heard scratching on the other side of the black panes, pining to enter the Silhouette Rouge.

No doors on the Prima Materia grant exit from the Silhouette Rouge.

The three hallways each have seven doors. No more, no less. These twenty-one rooms, along with the Grand Foyer, are the alphabet that creates the language of the Silhouette Rouge. Each room is a letter, and their combination opens the gate to enlightenment.

To master the secret tongue of the Silhouette Rouge is to know the mind of God.

Room 0: The Grand Foyer

The room – if such an immense chamber can be called a room – is large, light and airy. The first thing

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noticed is the scent, as if incense were burning somewhere amongst the many candles ensconced on every wall. It smells of roses; a strong scent, heavy enough to mask whatever other odors might be present.

The ceiling is high, arched and vaulted. There are pillars of marble arranged around the chamber, the stone columns pale and shot through with veins of red quartz. A pool of water, dark and still, marks the center of the room. The water is very black. There are statues bordering the pool and adorning the columns, all of them looking upward, as if casting unseeing stone eyes heavenward, breathing in the scent of roses. Three archways, passages leading to other rooms, are set into the far wall.

Is this an atrium of sorts?

The chamber is not empty. Figures move and dart around the columns, back and forth, crossing the



floor. Some move with unnatural speed. Others are slow, meandering in groups or pairs. Some of them appear to float, suspended above the ground, and others are fused with the floor, drifting through it as if it were water. They are dressed in velvet, in silk, and finely tailored suits. Jewels glitter on bracelets and necklaces. Their faces are hideous, like wax masks left too long in the sun, like misshapen clay features formed by inexperienced hands.

Something brushes against the shoulder. One of the creatures has passed, moving slowly, ignoring all others. It is thin, gaunt, not too tall, the eyes hooded. Something is wrong with the mouth. Sallow flesh lies over bones that seem not to belong to the body they inhabit. It wears a suit of dark linen with a pale shoulder sash, gold braid on the suit, a faded carnelian tucked into the sash. The occupants of the room seem as oblivious to their surroundings as the upward-looking statues.

The mind remains calm, though it should be terrified of the subhuman creature. The unworldly is accepted, like





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the curious equilibrium one finds in a dream.

One of the creatures stands behind a marble-topped counter on one side of the room. A reception desk, perhaps? On the counter is a book, a great ledger bound in black leather, propped open. The counter-top is made of the same pale marble as the columns. Placing a hand on its surface, one finds it warm to the touch and feels the quartz veins deep inside it pulse, as if to the beating of a vast stone-like heart. The sensation is disturbing. Attentions will quickly return to the ledger. It appears to contain a list of names, like a visitors' record book. Those who try to read the many signatures written within find that they cannot. The words shimmer and swim beneath the gaze, no matter how hard one looks. The paper is dry and smooth to the touch, solid and whole, but the words remain unreadable.

The room often becomes colder without warning, the atmosphere heavier, and the perfumed air more cloying. A distinct sense of *unbelonging* overtakes the unwary. The colony cannot help but imagine that they are trespassing in another's daydream, walking amongst someone's or something's subconscious imaginings. A thief in the mind.

Across the chamber, more of the creatures have entered from somewhere, congregating around the dark pool. Their mouths move but no words are heard, though they react to each other's apparent conversations. Some of the creatures drool during their semblance of speech, brackish ichor and dark red mucus staining their finery. Often they laugh in paroxysms of noiseless mirth, the awful faces thrown back, the eyes shining. The thing standing behind the desk has altered its pose to stare at its fellows. Gazing at the throng, it lazily allows its mouth to slide open, gaping wide. There is no throat, no dark gullet or tongue. There is only a mouthful of jagged, blackened teeth, each set being ringed by another in an ugly, continuous spiral.

The pool has grown... and with it the room. As more creatures enter, the chamber should become crowded. Instead, the monstrosities are more spaced out than before. The ceiling is higher. The vaulted arches forming the roof are wider and more spacious. The three archways have shifted also, widening the gap between them, so that the two outer portals are now on opposite walls.

Although every being in the Grand Foyer remains unchanged, a feeling that in some way the chamber has rendered one smaller, crushing the self into nothingness through sheer force of perspective, overwhelms.

On all sides now, the strange occupants of the atrium continue their fathomless social dance.

Tall, thin windows are set around the chamber's walls. These thick glass panes provide little in the way of a view. Pressing face to glass, a glimpse of movement can be caught in the darkness outside. It could be snow, or perhaps ash, slowly falling in the distance.

The first of the three archways is tall and wide – and grows when the chamber swells. The top of the arch cannot be touched, nor can fingers brush along both sides simultaneously. Inside is shadow, the passage curving away, offering no indication of where it might lead. There is a cold breeze blowing from the opening, and a damp smell, of dead leaves and earth. It is not welcoming.

The second archway seems identical to the first, the same lofty dimensions, the same odor carried on the cool air. Inside, the hallway curves round, ending in a black wall after twenty paces or so.

The third archway breathes as if alive.

When not directly observed, the archways warp around the perimeter of the chamber. Through each arch is a hall. There are seven doors in each passage, seven possible exits, twenty-one doors to choose from. None seem locked. No barriers are placed over any of them. There is no indication of where any portal might lead, except away from this strange atrium, this awful limbo where corpse-like beings endlessly gather to exchange silent platitudes.

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Are you overcome with a vision of becoming like them, of being consigned to an oblivion of internment within the stately environs of the chamber?

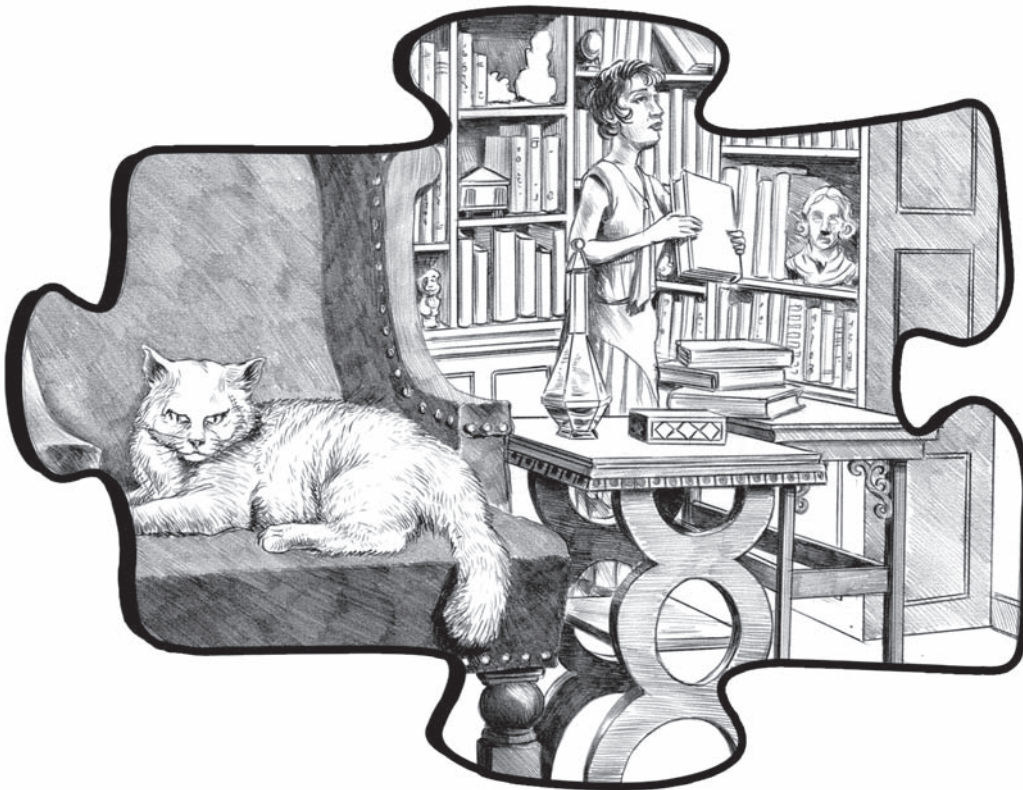
The Silhouette Rouge beckons.

Primordial Alphabet

The three hallways of the Prima Materia host twenty-one doors leading to twenty-one rooms. Each room is a piece of the puzzle, a key to unlocking the Nine Enigmas.

Room 1: The Study

Emerald green carpeting that smells of hand-rolled cigars and malt whiskey covers the study's floor. Strewn across the room are old pieces of rolled parchment and ancient scrolls held together by fanciful ribbons. One parchment opens, and bright sparks fly out of it before it crumbles away to dust. In the center of the room, a small rug sits beneath a large, leather chair, adorned with brass tacks and only the finest of stitching. Stretched on top of the chair is a large, gray cat with the most peculiar ruby-colored eyes. Beside it, two cherry-wood end tables glisten as if freshly polished with oil. The table on the left proudly displays an antique decanter that looks like it may be from an ancient temple. A fine liquor glows invitingly inside the container. The liquid smells of rare spices and fruits; it's translucent at first glance, sparkling like champagne. Something organic sits on the bottom of the decanter. Looking





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closer, the fleshy blob somewhat resembles a tongue. The table on the right offers a mosaic of dried herbs. Quill and silvery ink begs to be used on freshly pressed papyrus.

Flanking the room, behind the tables and chair, are three walls of bookshelves. A young woman, dressed in finery, is hard at work trying to sort out where to put *The Book of Etiquette: Magical Creatures Second Edition*. A bead of sweat glistens on her forehead, she looks like she's been through an ordeal. The woman pats her flyaway hair and fits the tome in between two grisly bookends. Most of the other volumes on the shelves appear heavy, old. Some, like the *Arsbath tet Nu-on*, are so ancient that to open them is to watch their pages disintegrate into nothing. Each is unique. A gilded cover graces *The Magnificent Sun: How to Harness its Energies in Ten Easy Lessons*; strange, embossed markings decorate the blackened cover of the *Tome of Zartoth*. The shelves are arranged chaotically — some books are grouped by language, others by subject, while some simply seem arranged based on the color scheme of the binding. Knickknacks and other oddities (dwarves with roving eyes, a curious shriveled thing in a jar, a plant that bites) sit between the books, watching the frazzled woman as she tries to sort out the mess around her. Heavy dust sits on top of these shelves. *Try not to sneeze*. The newer books are indecipherable, scrawled in gibberish and cannibalized from the older tomes. Bits of pages and images are stuck inside the confusing works; it's as if someone was trying to decode the past into something sane and comprehensive but failed miserably.

The fourth wall, containing the doorway, displays portraits lit by eerie candlelight. Green, blue, red and yellow candles dot the wall, their flames small and brightly burning. The First Sorcerer stares icily out at the room, his piercing amber-colored eyes know too much. Peony Upstart: Violet Lady of the Glade covers herself modestly in sheer, purple robes. Her profile, cast in a green shadow, smiles candidly at Kai-tang nim Jin-yao's portrait, located to her right. Kai-tang appears to be focused intently on something in the room; his ornate robes glisten by the light of a fiery red candle. Stephen Minnow (Heretic, Friend, Scholar, Naturalist) snorts in disapproval, his face almost covered by his wiry black hair. The Velvet Rider mounts a charge on his stately steed, a blue candle casting a watery glow over his woodcut image. The group waits patiently for something to happen; their intensity rises and even the books seem to hum in anticipation.

Room 2: Sophia

When entering this room, a hushed murmuring fills the ears, an ever-present buzz of unintelligible words, syllables, and noise. The chamber itself is of indistinguishable size. The floor is hard and cold, like cement, but swathed in darkness. Vertical banners of colored cloth drape from the inky darkness overhead. The banners are made of thin fabric and span an array of soft soothing colors. The effect is disorienting — the banners act as curtains, concealing the space around the visitors. Pulling aside one layer of curtains reveals another layer, often differently colored. This is repeated as one attempts to travel through the room.

There is no apparent light source, although the room is always caught in a soothing haze, like the hour just before dawn. Sparkling flashes of light, like reflections of finely polished jewelry, glimmer from beyond some of the curtains. When approached, however, their sources disappear behind another layer of cloth and reappear in a different location.

The number of exits leading from this room is unknowable. Climbing the banners is futile, as the thin fabric will break easily under applied stress. There appears to be no markers or pathways. As the group passes through, they may simply step beyond one layer and find themselves beyond the room; or perhaps some unlucky travelers simply walk forever, passing through curtain after curtain with no marked path of escape.

The room is not devoid of life. From time to time, visitors can witness robed beings, faces mostly hidden in a deep hood, quietly walking to some indeterminable place. The creatures carry candles,

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clasped between their palms. Some individuals are quietly singing. Others are simply silent in their gentle pacing. The most distinguishable feature of these strange beings is that they are Cyclops – they have a single eye set squarely into the center of the brow.

These silent worshippers are lost in deep meditation and will not respond to questions or conversation. If one was to forcibly detain a worshiper, the beings reveal their amazing strength and try to break free from the grip. Prolonged annoyances will result in daggers being drawn from within their robes. Though they are peaceful while in meditation, they will fight with vengeance those who destroy the sanctity of their meditation.

For most of these beings, the candle they carry is lit, a soft spark in the haze of gauzy curtains. Occasionally, a visitor might encounter a worshipper with a candle that is unlit. It is rumored that if fire was touched to such a candle, the worshipper would allow three questions from whoever lights the wick. The answers come in the form of cryptic riddles and poetry. Once the questions have been asked and the answers given, the worshipper will disappear into the folds of the curtain, bearing the newly lit candle clasped in the palms.

Visitors may also encounter other beings and individuals, lost in the layers of silky cloth that cloak this mysterious room. These encounters usually lead to discussions of bits of lore that might turn out useful. It may be that a visitor is forced to stay as long as needed, and when one has shared or gained a bit of knowledge, the exit will appear.

Spiritual individuals, or those seeking to unlock deep truths, may find this room fascinating, refreshing, and revealing. The curtains are believed to contain faint writings of ancient knowledge and mythic teaching. If one can apply the correct light at a perfect angle, the golden lettering impossibly woven into the curtains will appear, offering secrets that few dare to comprehend.

Room 3: The Mother's Son

The place looks ordinary enough when first entered. It's a room approximately the size of a two-car garage, with dark red carpeting and a tiled ceiling; the walls are lined with black metal bookshelves, in front of fake wooden paneling. The only light in the room comes from a fluorescent panel embedded in the ceiling.

Anyone spending time in this room will be drawn to the photo albums on the bookshelves, though they are nothing special to look at. Each of the albums covers a particular series of events in a family's life – graduations, weddings, deaths, vacations, and the like. The pictures seem to have nothing to do with the visitors; none of the faces or locales are familiar in any way. There's nothing to catch the interest...

...until one discovers the series of newspaper clippings toward the end of one of the albums. The clippings describe the disappearance of a teenage boy and the discovery of his body two months later. One of the articles describes the culprit – a friend of the deceased boy, who apparently murdered him with the stated intent of "finding my mother." The boy charged with the killing has no proper name; he is referred to only as the Lost One.

The last clipping details the Lost One's sudden disappearance from an asylum. The only things left behind were the body of an orderly and the diagram of a building scrawled on the wall – a sketch of the Silhouette Rouge.

Amidst the clippings is a written confession. In it, the Lost One describes the murder as a way to open the door between his world and the place where his parents had gone, a place he calls the Silhouette Rouge.





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All visitors to this room will feel an unexplainable kinship to the Lost One, as if the boy was their own child.

Perhaps he was.

Room 4: Keep Off the Grass

The stone tablet dominated my view as I stumbled through the door. At least eight feet tall, and half that in width, the words **THOU SHALL NOT** blazed upon it, searing themselves straight into my brain. Other words were displayed beneath, changing their letters before I had time to read their meaning. My mouth agape, my eyes still watering, I was pushed forward by an unseen hand.

Staggering like a punch-drunk pugilist, my uneven gait nearly tipped me down the steps headfirst. They were meticulously sized and spaced: each half again the length of my foot, with that exact same distance being the height from one to the next. They were made of a gray stone, marbled through with contrasting streaks of black and white. I managed to catch my balance on the twelfth and final step, and took a moment to catch my breath. As the sight before me registered I became certain I must have in fact fallen, and my brains were even then discoloring the floor.

The strange stone that made up the steps spread out for perhaps two feet from the bottom, and then stopped. I could see no line of demarcation – the stone floor simply found itself replaced by a lovingly maintained lawn. I had never seen grass so vibrant, like someone had distilled the essence of green and captured it there.

I was still struggling with the existence of the lawn when a flash of moving color caught my eye, pulling my gaze upward. All across this grand expanse were figures; what seemed to be adult males, always accompanied by one or more male children. Beneath a cerulean sky, bathed in buttery light, these people were laughing and playing. The games were strangely self-contained. No one strayed beyond certain boundaries, and the players of one game never spilled into another.

Dazed, I stepped out onto the lawn. I tried to take it all in, my eyes opening so wide I felt the universe threatened to fall into my gaping skull. I was screwing up my courage to ask one of the men about this strange place, when my heart nearly stopped.

A table sat in a quiescent pool of green, a scattering of brightly colored boxes and gray plastic pieces across its surface. Sitting there, looking up from the model he was diligently assembling was my father. My father: a man who had died over a decade ago. Yet there he sat, waving for me to join him, already handing me the instruction sheet for another model.

Feeling detached from my body, I joined him, and was instantly taken back to the days of my youth. Sitting at our knife-scarred table as we built models together, the bitter smell of glue warring with the earthy smell of pipe smoke that eternally surrounded my father.

Though my mind drifted, the rest of me knew what to do. It had been long since I had touched a model kit, but I scanned the sheet with practiced ease; all the while my hands began painstakingly assembling the parts in their proper order. As the kit began to take shape, all thoughts of incredulity faded. I wanted only to impress my father, to make him proud of me. I pushed the instructions aside, and started putting the model together in a manner both more efficient and efficacious than the one described.

I had only been at it for a few moments when I felt the air grow warm, and heard a shriek of pure rage. My chair disappeared from beneath me, depositing me on a floor that was not soft grass, but cool gray stone. While the transformation was still sinking in, I was hauled to my feet by a pair of skeletal hands that radiated a cold so intense it burned.

Before me rose a wooden wall, which seemed determined to pierce the sky. A harsh banging came from it, and my father's visage, or what was left of it, stared down at me. His face, his whole head, looked like it was caving in, going all black and rotten. A powdered wig crowned him, and a black sleeve covered the arm that reached down to wave a sheet of instructions in my face.

That accusing hand withdrew, and once more the gavel boomed – this time to sound my fate. A heavy iron plate appeared about

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my neck, the words **THOU SHALL NOT** blazing from it. My arms burned with cold, and I looked down, horrified to see the flesh shattering away like hammer-struck ice.

Now I work ceaselessly, providing the lawn with the most exquisite of care, and tasked to punish any of those whom fail to obey the laws handed down by *him*.

– The Lost One

Room 5: The Rest Stop

I could sense the war going on outside. I don't know what war, I just knew a war was going on outside. Not that I had any evidence of a war; no sound, no sight, nothing outside these walls. Just... a focus, a center here where there wasn't before. I'd seen enough conflict, enough rage, and enough violence to know that this place was as far away from conflict, rage, and violence as Hell was from Heaven.

I liked it; it was a break.

Even though all my training screamed at me ambush, I ignored it. I took off my shoes; the sign, plainly written next to the door, said "please remove your shoes and socks." The shoe rack, up against the teakwood wall, already had several pairs of shoes tucked away in its shelves. Steel-toed boots, lady's 4-inch heels, even a pair of toddler's footwear sat in the little cubicles. The toddler pair was on the highest shelf, though, just out of reach of a toddler's arm. This confused me until I stepped on the floor in bare feet.

It was so soft here – like stepping on the pound cake in an MRE, endless brickwork of pastry that didn't stick to your feet. I gave a little hop just for the sheer hell of it. It took about ten seconds for me to realize that I had not yet touched the ground, that I was floating. I came quickly down. I thought, and thought some more, and then tried again. I envisioned my best friend, and how she and I would lay in bed together when it rained outside, not quite boyfriend and girlfriend but having the best you could hope for in this world.

I stayed in the air.

The room was not big, maybe 9 meters on a side. It was a blend of a temple and a dorm room, with prayer wheels done up in burnished metal and backlit with neon. A bed was up against one of the walls, with a tiny 'room' made by the back wall of the entertainment center and a sofa. A bookshelf sat along the wall, filled with titles that I had never seen before. "How You Get Better Every Day". "She Was Not The Love You Wanted But Was The Love You Needed". "So What If Your Mother Hates You?"

Really specific books.

I floated over, slinging my rifle so I could pull a title. They were dead on the mark, talking about the things wrong in my life from another perspective. Not judging, not assuming, simply discussing what had happened and how it had not broken me as much as I thought. I drifted over to the leather sofa, planning on sitting for a bit of a read. And then I saw I wasn't alone here. My training overcame the peace of the place, as I touched the ground and looked at the two-year old boy balled up on the sofa, buried in cushions and breathing lightly. I couldn't distinguish his race, nothing stood out enough to label him. He was an indefinable brown; from genetic code or the tan of outdoor play, I couldn't really tell.

I did a standard sweep of the rest of the room, all the remaining 13 meters of it. I wanted to make sure there were no more babies hidden under the bed. The toddler woke up, tugging at his blue overalls and cocking his head at me. He looked at the gun, frowned and floated over to the tiny refrigerator next to the bed. He came out with some milk and Animal Crackers, which he ate gently. He offered me one: a rhino. He giggled when I bit the head off first.

I took some time to read my books on the shelves, clicking the safety on my rifle. I was going to put it out of reach of the dark-haired boy, but he could fly so it would have been pointless. Anyway, he didn't seem at all interested. He had his own book to





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look at, with pictures. It was very sad; the only character was a boy who had lost his parents and was all-alone, but would find a world where people were generally good. The message seemed to be to keep an eye out and realize that we all have problems we can help each other overcome. It seemed a complicated book for a little boy.

With my rifle to the side, safety on, I took the child into my lap and read his book to him. He seemed to understand, and he seemed to understand when I talked about my own family and my friends and all the things I'd lost. He didn't tell me I was crazy, or needed meds, or that I had to get over it. He just listened. And he hugged me when he thought I needed a hug.

– The Lost One

Room 6: Gemini

The thick fog cleared as the Lost One walked deeper into the massive room, seeing it clearly for the first time. The space was dark and dank, and it did not smell all too pleasant. It seemed more like a cave than a room. Light lanced in from small cracks in the ceiling and the wall to the left. There was mold, barely green in the twilight of the room, on the rough-hewn rock walls. The Lost One estimated that the ceiling was at least ten times his height. Thick fog obscured the door from which he had entered the room. Before him were only large strips of white cloth, hanging down from the concealing darkness of the ceiling to the floor. They swayed in a light breeze, but he couldn't see beyond them.

The Lost One heard a sound to his back, and spun around. There was a young woman in a black outfit, peering at him from a mess of tousled dark hair. She had materialized out of the thick mist between him and the invisible wall. His police training made him reach for his sidearm. *Idiot. You're not a cop anymore.*

"Who are you?" the Lost One asked warily. The motionless woman peered at him with sullen eyes. She had a knife in each hand and snarled his question back, "Who are *you*?"

The Lost One carefully raised his hands, palms forward. He said, "I'm the Lost One. I thought I was alone here."

"I'm a butterfly dreaming," she said, looking suspicious. "Why are you here?"

"I... I," he stammered. Suddenly a cold wind blew, making the Lost One's trench coat flap fiercely. The fog behind them billowed.

"You are both finally here!" a voice exclaimed from the direction of the cloth flaps. The Lost One turned. The woman stepped beside him, brandishing her blades.

A few yards away there was an Asian man in a silk shirt, holding a clipboard. He said, "My name is Kong Len Wei. Welcome to The Chamber of Duality. Lost One and Lilith, you are both expected. Each of you has misplaced something dear to you in the past. You can recover these things here in this room... if you can find them."

Lilith pounced on Kong before the Lost One could react, her blade to his throat. Kong did not even flinch. She barked, "We're not going anywhere without answers."

A moment later, Kong was a blur that ended up three feet from where he had been held, and Lilith was on the floor grasping at nothingness. Calmly, he said, "To finish this, you will have to defeat your opponents beyond the Veil and reach the exit."

"Or," the Lost One said, "we die?"

Kong smiled and gestured politely to the strips of cloth, the Veil, before them. The Lost One offered Lilith his hand to pull her up, but she merely scowled and leapt to her feet alone. Brushing past him, she muttered, "Don't ever help me."

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The Lost One saw Kong waving cheerfully at him as he caught up with Lilith. The Lost One found himself waving back.

He called out to Lilith, "Wait up! Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why shouldn't I help you?"

She glared at him. "Why? Because everyone who's ever offered me help either ran out on me or sold me out. The last person who was "helpful" ratted me out to the cops. It took two months for me to find him and break his ankles."

"A tough girl, eh?" the Lost One smiled. The woman started for the Veil again. "Is this a bad time to tell you I'm a cop? Well, I *was* a cop."

"Whatever," she said. They both stepped through the Veil. The strips of cloth flapped behind them, and a thick tropical forest obstructed their journey. The Lost One pointed at light coming from an open doorway high up on the wall. "There's our exit."

They would need to climb one of the many large trees between them and the wall; it looked like the exit could only be reached from a thick branch. The Lost One pushed through some dense underbrush to reach the nearest tree trunk. The woman followed, flitting through the vegetation with quiet concentration. There were ficus roots

snaking down and constricting the tree like wooden anacondas. He tried to catch a glimpse of the jungle canopy, but it was still too dark above him. They started climbing. The Lost One felt his hand touch something wet and sticky. It was a strand of spider web, but thicker and tougher than any he'd ever seen before. He called to Lilith, who was climbing just beneath him, "Look at this."

The Lost One saw his companion's jaws going slack and her eyes widening. He followed her gaze and looked above.

There was a spider, the size of a small elephant, crawling down the tree trunk toward them. Unblinking eyes glowed dimly, its belly swollen and hairy. Sharp mandibles glistened with secretion. And then he realized — there was more than one. Dozens of the mammoth arachnids were crawling down from the trees, trying to surround the climbers. The lead spider leapt down at them. The Lost One yelled to the dreaming butterfly, "Jump!"

It was good advice, but he didn't follow his own command. His body had gone rigid with fear, muscles unresponsive to his mental screams. *No, not again!* The





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spider descended with frightening speed, but ignored him and skittered past. For some reason the arachnid had determined that the woman was its prey. Lilith stood her ground on a thick branch and had a blade in her hand. Regaining his wits, the Lost One yelled again, "Look out!"

The spider pounced, and Lilith jumped into open space away from the tree trunk. The foul creature, twisting to follow her, fell shrieking into the misty darkness below.

Lilith had managed to grasp a thick, leafy vine and now she swung back to the truck. She pointed up beyond the Lost One shouting, "Watch your head!"

The next spider was almost upon him. He thought: *I can't freeze up. It got me fired before, but it'll get me killed now.* And suddenly he was falling. In his fear, he had loosened his grip on the branches and the ficus roots. He thought: *Is this it? I deserved to be fired. I deserve to die.*

His flailing hand grasped a vine that hung freely from the darkness above. It halted his fall, swinging him painfully into a neighboring tree. The blow against the solid trunk momentarily knocked him out, and the sensation of falling was overcome by the blackness and vertigo of the impact. Seconds later, shaking a dizzy head, he realized he had dropped into a tangle of white, sticky strands. He quickly realized it was a giant spider web, snugly spun between trees. Grimacing at the rotting human corpses grotesquely cocooned beside him, he assessed the situation. Above him a pair of spiders were climbing down the tree, presumably to create another cocooned corpse. *I can't freeze up again.*

The body to his left wore the chain mail armor of a medieval knight – the webbing had dried and patches of glinting metal could be seen between the strands. *How did he get here?* There was a sword in the web, just several feet away. The Lost One stretched to reach it, but the webbing held him fast. The sticky mesh was entangling him further, and the spiders were getting closer. The dead guy to his right also seemed to be a soldier, though the bits of torn clothes appeared more modern, perhaps camouflage. His helmet <not to mention his entire head> was missing. *Where is Lilith?*

The Lost One reached for the decapitated corpse and grabbed on to it. Fumbling for the dead soldier's sidearm, he noticed that two more spiders were climbing up toward him. Thick webbing prevented him from removing the weapon. In desperation, he ripped open the flap of the military-issue backpack. *I have to save her.*

The Lost One felt cold metal under his fingers, and curled his grasping hand around an assault rifle. Hope flared. The dripping fangs of the nearest spider were almost upon him. He discovered that the weapon still worked by putting three rounds into the creature's bulbous head. It shrieked, falling past him. As he fired and blew open the abdomen of the second spider, he finally saw Lilith. She was on the back of a third arachnid, stabbing at it with her blade. Seconds later, she jumped safely onto a branch as it listed and fell.

The Lost One turned his automatic weapon downwards to dispatch the two spiders climbing up. He discovered a short-bladed knife in the corpse's hand, used it to free himself from the web, and jumped onto the nearest branch. He shot at another spider about to pounce from above, and then turned to Lilith. A few good jumps and he could get to her..

At that moment, he noticed that dozens of smaller, fist-sized spiders, purple and bloated, were working near the branches that led to the exit door, spinning a more intricate web that would eventually cut off their escape. *We have to reach those branches!* He caught Lilith's attention and gestured toward the exit.

Lilith nodded at the Lost One as she sliced, fury etched on her face, at the last colossal spider in her path. The Lost One could see she needed no help. But as the monster fell to its death, its mandibles caught hold of a dark boot, and Lilith went tumbling down with it.

She was pinned under the bulk of the dead spider's abdomen. The Lost One had to save her, but found himself once again impotent with terror. He could not figure out what to do next or where to go. *I can't do this. When I went*

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in to help Wanda, not only did she die in the explosion... but three civilians died as well. I can't be a hero anymore. I was never a hero anyway.

He could climb for the exit, but that would doom Lilith. If he went after her, they would both be trapped by the rapidly forming web. Finally, with resolve, he concluded: *At least together we'd have a chance to fight our way out of here! And besides, my surviving isn't enough anymore.*

Three more spiders were climbing down toward their helpless prey. The Lost One grabbed at a vine and swung across the divide between himself and Lilith; his gun quickly dispatched the three arachnids, but he could tell the clip was almost empty. At least he was beside her. She was uninjured, but her legs were trapped under the dead spider.

"Forget about me, dimwit," Lilith spat. "Go for the exit."

"Not without you," the Lost One muttered. "You have no idea what it took for me to come and save you." He fired carefully at several approaching spiders, before attempting to push the carcass off the woman.

"No!" she screamed at him. "Don't be an idiot. Get out of here. If you save me we'll both die."

"I say we leave together!"

"You're a fool!"

"You don't want to be rescued? Is that it? You'd rather die?"

"Just leave!"

The Lost One felt his fear give way to fury. "What happened that made you turn out like this?"

She didn't answer; but suddenly, the Lost One was flooded with his own memories — the grief at his former partner Wanda's death, his inability to act or function after it had happened, and his wallowing in self-pity at a desk job that finally got him fired. Here was a woman his total opposite, yet he found strength in her. Could she find the same in him? He looked deep into Lilith's eyes and said, "I promise I will not leave you."

She still said nothing, but there were newborn tears in Lilith's eyes. With renewed strength, the Lost One finally pushed the carcass clear. It tumbled into the darkness below. Lilith took his hand, and he pulled her to her feet. He smiled and quipped, "Plus, if we get out of this alive, you owe me a date."

The dreaming butterfly discovered that she was smiling too.

And then together they ran, jumped, climbed the branches, and cut their way through the web barrier.

The little spiders scattered away.

The Lost One and Lilith did not look back as they disappeared out the exit.

The monstrous arachnids stopped their pursuit. They descended to the jungle floor, where Kong Len Wei awaited them. Kong said wistfully, "More satisfied customers. He found his resolve. She recovered her trust. They were opposites. They came together as a pair and completed themselves. I'd expect more than just a date to come out of this."

A spider squeaked at him.

"Rejuvenate the fallen ones. A group of six is coming in thirty minutes. Enough with the spiders. What about dinosaurs?"



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It squeaked again, dissatisfied.

“Right. We did dinosaurs last week. Killer robots?”

The spider twittered in agreement and went about its work.

Room 7: Spider Mountain

Skittering noises and a chill wind greet visitors. The room is a wide and long passage, sloping steadily upwards. It looks as if a side of a mountain has been transplanted within the space. Giant boulders, sharp jagged rocks, and pockets of mud meander up to the far side, where a visitor can just make out the exit — a darkened cave opening at the top.

Visitors always enter this room from the bottom. Those who have already accomplished the climb, and now are looking to return the way they came, must still scale its steep, dangerous slope to gain exit. This effect will be disorienting and frustrating for those forced to traverse it more than once.

The mountainside is treacherous for an unprepared traveler. The stony rocks are covered with an orange moss that is slick and prevents easy handholds. At points in the climb, visitors must scale vertical faces of rock, while in other areas they must wade through waist-deep mud.

All along the journey, diverse challenges present themselves. Dark, furry spiders make their homes in slimy pockets in the cliff face. They are curious of any who attempt to make the climb, and when first spotted will merely be watching. Their red eyes and metallic fangs sparkle from earthen cubby-holes; but when a moment presents itself, the creatures will attempt to pick off any isolated or slow travelers. If bitten, the victim is overcome with paralysis, and more spiders will emerge to swarm and rend with their sharp claws.

Bizarre ravens, with razor beaks, also swarm any unsuspecting travelers. Their attack is rather unconventional. They swoop down and pick at those who are traversing the treacherous terrain. The ravens seem to know each traveler’s past and secrets, and with each peck from their poisonous beak, bring horrible, buried memories to the mind’s surface. Many visitors lose their sanity, as the pain, sadness, and terror overwhelm their tired bodies.

Defeating these creatures requires perseverance and resolve. Many travelers painstakingly band together to deter the spiders. Others build small fires and light torches to frighten away the ravens. However, as the climb nears its end, a deep wind begins to howl against the rocks, and snow swirls between the climbers. It is as if each traveler must finish the journey on his own.

The journey is ever upward. If a traveler risks waiting or resting, the climb seems to get more treacherous. The longer it takes, the more difficult it can become. A misstep might result in one slipping back downwards, forcing a restart to this arduous journey.

The ascending path is never easy.

Along the way, numerous temptations confront even the wariest traveler. The bodies and belongings of those who did not make it are scattered across the mountainside. While some may contain interesting items, it is dangerous to stop and pick through the remains. The spiders and ravens use the bodies as traps and bait for their attacks. In the end, any item, gained off of these decaying victims of the mountain, turns out to be useless.



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Room 8: The Room of You

At first glance, the Room of You looks like a carnival. The exhibits lining the walls are painted in bright colors, edged with neon, and have oversized pictures that aren't quite identifiable at first glance. Once approached, the exhibits seem to resolve into a specific celebration of some aspect of the viewer's personality. For instance, a tough guy will see portraits of himself, in every fight that he's ever been in, taken at the moment when he was definitively winning the fight. Smart types will be presented with those many occasions when their intellect proved crucial to their success. These histories don't necessarily represent the truth verbatim, but they do provide a convincing, if generic, portrait of an individual.

The portrayals are designed to flatter the self-image, almost to the point where they become parody. Instead of fighting one opponent to a standstill, the viewer is fighting six, winning against them all, tossing out quips all the while. Instead of completing a graduate thesis, the visitor revolutionizes science with an innovation. At first, this is an immense boost to a viewer's self-confidence. However, the exhibits also expose the dark side of a viewer's self-image. For instance, the tough guy's exhibit shows the aftermath of his fights – his bloodied opponent stumbling away, collapsing, and dying of a brain aneurysm caused by one of the stronger punches. The intellectual sacrifices so much of his personal life that he winds up missing the death of his own father to complete a particularly important project. The social butterfly leaves a trail of people whom she's used and discarded, all of whom are worse off for knowing her. The subject of the exhibit is forced to question whether or not their accomplishments were really worth it.

The viewer will come to realize that personal strengths have been pushed to the point where they're almost unrecognizable. The ideal self-image has pared away everything else – instead of being a dynamic, three-dimensional character, the person has become a cliché. The viewer will either understand that self-image can go beyond personal strengths, or will recoil, utterly nauseated at the parody.

The exhibits remain frozen after they've been approached, so viewers can look at the displays of others as well. The effect can be brutally honest – the pictures are never truly faked, they are just more potent than watered down reality. They serve as truthful, though potentially painful, commentary on those who view them.

Room 9: The Cloister

The answer must be somewhere on this page.

Ideas, knowledge, truth, *here*, on *this* page, subtle, hidden, inchoate. I find them and draw them out, coaxing them forth into fruition, tender green shoots from the earth. Without me, potential without direction, useless – blind annelids writhing under the press of earth.

I am alone. My cloister is a bare one — a chair, a table, a stack of volumes, spines weathered and cracked, splitting, bursting now from the tangles of roots and creepers twisting forth and grasping and crawling, endlessly, motionlessly, from within the binding, across the floor to the chair to the uncovered humble feet of me, the old man, the ancient one, sinking into the liver-spotted yellow skin, bringing new life. The sweet sap leached into dusty veins, a recycled draught of lifeblood eternal.

I am an old man, but I have found a second flowering. I have always pursued knowledge in hopes of finding the answer to the damnable question represented by mortal life, and pursue it still. Issues of doubt are irrelevant; the pursuit is now the key. My early studies showed me the fallacies of the accepted norms. That which I had formerly considered sacrosanct was errant, faulty, created, after all, by men, and subject to the failings of men. Doubt leaked into my heart for the first time; there was a short, sharp tearing, and a





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small green bud under my thumbnail uncurled into a small green leaf, mottled black and brown.

I learned of the practice of refutation, of rejecting that which had come before; all must be destroyed, the old wood hacked away so that the new might grow. Only by burning away all that had been could one



make room for that which was to *be*. A sudden dizziness gripped me, and, when it passed, I was aware of an acute, pressing pain near my right temple, just behind the eye.

The old, diseased flesh was torn away, and new flesh swelled to fill the gap. The universe was full of dizzying possibilities, of countless ideas. Each one had equal merit, and I seized and devoured them all. The stack of volumes grew and grew, and ropy green-black vines pushed, like inquisitive fingers, from the corners of my mouth and my left ear. Auditory nerve *fecund*, *bursting* with life, winding through the cochlea, prodding the Eustachian tube ever so gently, entwining the *malleus*, *incus*, *stapes*, and, with a certain steady pressure – *poof* – through the tympanic membrane, sloughing down the canal, out, free, and stretching up to the light. The pain behind my right eye pitched higher and higher.

Then the ultimate revelation at which any scholar will always arrive, drawn inevitably. As all birds must come to earth, as all men must come to the grave, so must all who would *learn* arrive at the conclusion that the knowledge itself is worthless; the *pursuit* is the thing, and the thing consumes the scholar, and the scholar consumes the thing. Some find this damning, some liberating. The heavy cold nugget of pain near my temple bloomed in a cascade of agony and ecstasy, and there was a fleshy sound as it grew along the trellis of the optic nerve, dipped through the gentle bowl of the fovea, screwed through the retina and, scratching, scratching, through the lens and pupil, and, with a small splash of corneal jelly, blossomed wetly in the socket, a miniature black-spotted *rafflesia arnoldi*, perfuming my cloister pungently. The new wood grew, directionless, aimless, but so robust! Let the old wood wither and die; the useless fruits dry and shrivel on the vines that plunge and creep and crawl with infinite tendrils through the cloister,

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grasping, feeling without feeling, running one over the other, layering in deep, fleshy tangles, swarming, suffocating.

But the page remains, and the answer must be somewhere on this page.

– The Eremite

Room 10: Junk and the Single Road

It was driving him mad, hearing the voice narrating things he was going to do. He came here to get away from it; he'd thought the padding on the wall would muffle the noise. It didn't help. Later, he turned up his television,



first listening through two speakers, then six speakers, then through the forty-seven speakers he had positioned all throughout the room. Hanging from ceilings, set up as end tables to the ripped and duct-taped couch, positioned on the floor at intricate Feng Shui angles just like the book told him to.

It still didn't help. He went over to his chem. lab, the half of the room not taken up by the sofa and the television. The walk took about two seconds. He mixed and cooked, watching the sublimation of the crystals that would perhaps at last silence the voice.

You have a destiny, boy – best get to it!

Walk it off, jackass! Big things ahead of you!

Stop cooking your thrill-pills and get to work on something important! I know you can do it!

He flailed his arms, catching one of the small bottles of hydrochloric acid with his hand. It skittered off the table, bouncing into the side of a speaker and toward him again.





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He caught the bottle.

That's what I'm talking about! Look at those reflexes! A surgeon, a sports star, it's all in you!

He cursed the voice and put the bottle farther into the table. He drank another cherry soda, feeling the sweet liquid wash over his rotting teeth. He waited, and waited, and waited for the process to end. He took one of the crystals and chomped on it.

And he was rolling and rolling. No voices...

Oh no you don't.

Damn. No matter what he did, no matter how he tried to walk his own path, he always followed the same road — drug there by the voice.

That's right.

When he came to, he found half his chem lab broken. Pipettes and flasks shattered; his latest batch crushed in the glass. He tried a snort, but it cut up his nose and he had to rinse his nostrils; he must have put the acid over the crystals when he blacked out.

He hated it when he lost it. He always did the wrong types of things. He wrote a love letter, one he had mailed; he only knew this because he left a note for himself for when he woke up. He designed a new type of artificial hip, which is now helping thousands. He scribbled equations and diagrams on the wall, or worse yet mailed them to newspapers and college professors. And he never knew how long it was. Days? Years?

And when I finally win, you tweaked-out dusthead, I'm going to cure cancer. Again.

Yeah. That had been a close one. The voice had almost got that molecular string sent out, but he had stopped it. But what did he do this time?

Hehehe...

Stop it!

He screamed at the voice. "I don't want any responsibility! I don't want to do great things! I just want to..."

What? Sit around and cook Meth? You're better than that! I know you are. And you will see your wide horizon — even if I have to Ludovico technique you.

He went to his one stash, the one he knew the voice did not know about, bumped a line... and felt nothing.

Except cold.

How's that for your first snort in the new world? Lots of other people don't feel it either; you made the cure to Meth.

He kept on telling himself he had no choice, it wasn't his fault...

I'm proud of you.

He cried, lying on the floor, wondering what other blessing to mankind he would create when he lost control again.

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Room 11: The Hall

A veiled woman sits just inside the Hall's entryway at a table filled with carefully drawn tarot cards and a large, crystal ball. A handwritten sign affixed to the front of her table reads, "*Lover astray? Find out if he's telling you the truth for only 10 Libras.*" A cash box aside her table overflows with coppery-gold coins etched with measuring scales. She gestures behind her; rotting prisoners hang from the hall's rafters in heavy chains. One of the prisoners looks up in admiration at a large mural; intricately painted is a blindfolded woman, sitting in a tall oak chair. In one hand she holds a large feather, in the other she holds a staff. The staff points downward to a small, two-person arena where a black-masked man is preparing to exchange fists with the Lost One. Behind the arena is a raised, half-circle of mahogany chairs, desks, and small jugs of pungent wine. A man with the head of a bull sits at the circle's center. To his left is a graceful lady with light blue skin; to his right is a peacock holding a gavel in one hand and a leather-bound bible in the other. Scrawled on a banner in front of the creatures is the phrase "*In Vino Veritas.*"

Gracing the walls behind the spectacle are rows upon rows of booths. A gong sounds, and the two combatants in the arena start to circle. Jackals, birds of prey, mer-children, lions, turtles, crabs, griffins, werewolves, and every other fantastical creature imaginable cheer and hoot, screeching encouragement and jeers. A fox whisks in-between the onlookers, taking their bets as they prophesize who will win. Libras are thrown about; their metallic shapes clink like the tinkling of dull bells.

The crowd roars, squawks, and bays as the bull-headed man orders that the Lost One be given a large, glinting sword. He can barely brandish it; the sharp metal thing is bigger than he is. Some of the bystanders start to rub their coins for luck, hoping it will sway the grueling battle.

The black-masked man lunges with his meaty fists. The smaller Lost One dodges clumsily and heaves the mighty sword, swinging it wildly. A slight woman dashes through the scene, clawing toward the Lost One, drawing his attention. The black-masked man takes the opportunity and tries to topple his opponent, just as the Lost One frantically reaches for his lover. The black-masked man slips, and catches the bottom of his naked foot on the sword's edge. He howls in pain. The Lost One looks back at his opponent in alarm — realizing the sword has saved his life — and grabs the weapon with both hands. He tries to lift the heavy blade again, and this time it feels as light as a feather. The Lost One swooshes the sword in a wide arc and halts the blade just before it reaches the other man's neck — he looks up at the bull-headed man, who roars in approval.

Libras clink and clank on the sandy mat in front of the Lost One. Someone else throws an apple. He picks it up, polishes it off, and chomps down hard. The crowd is on their feet, drinking heavily and celebrating the just victory. The bull roars above the crowd to his brightly colored peacock, "*Bring in the next case.*" The gavel reverberates around the room and two women emerge from nowhere, fighting over a small, newborn child.

The fox deftly moves between the crowd's excited onlookers.

"Place your bets. Bets taken, bets paid. Will Our Lady Justice be served? You be the Judge."

Room 12: The Tomb

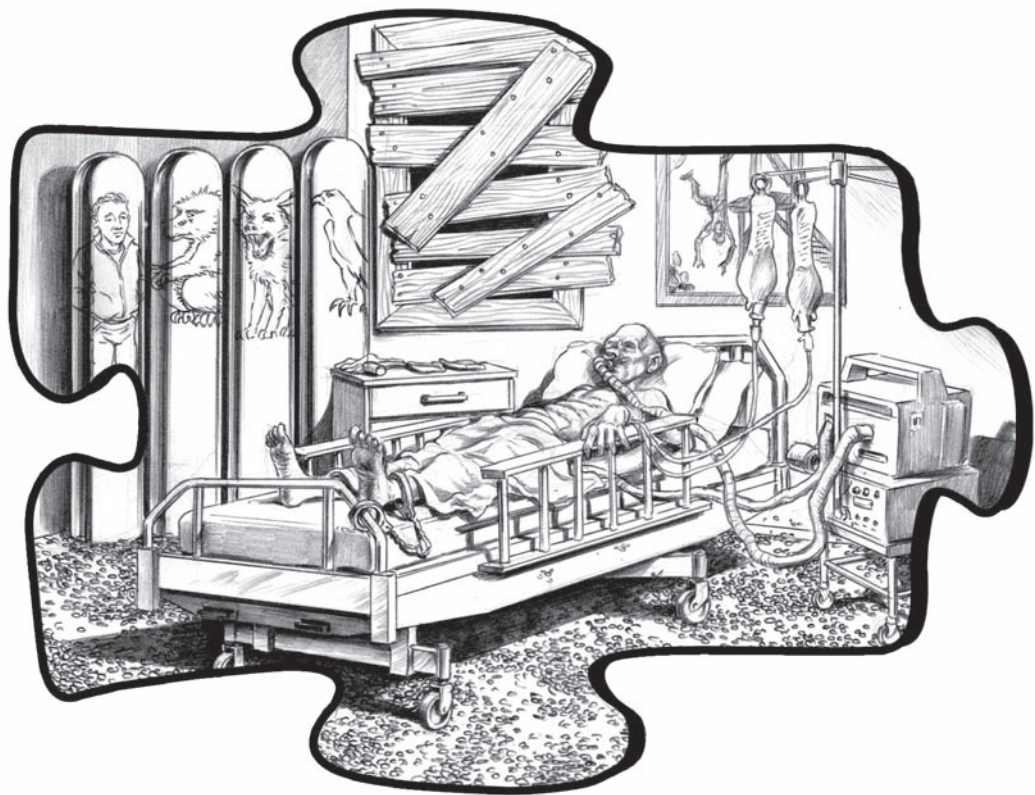
Saline, glucose, and a cocktail of chemicals descend via plastic tubes from the bag to the Martyr's withered arm, pumping new life into his shattered frame. A series of catheters and tangled hoses efficiently pump away waste. More tubes ensure that he breathes properly. They splay from his body like crystalline spaghetti. He is merely a link in this conduit of distilled life. A handcuff secures his left ankle to the bed frame. Four scars crisscross his abdomen.

His breaths come infrequently, sepulchral rattling, chains thrown down stairs. The entire room reeks antiseptically, but beneath is a note of slow, creeping death, confirmed by the puckered face, the tight





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drawn lips, and the fleshless skull. The feet are swollen blue-black, giving the impression that he has been squeezed like a tube of toothpaste.

Heavy rough boards, probably scavenged from a packing crate or pallet, have been nailed across the only window. Four tall shiny cylinders stand like sentries along the wall. Figures etched on each steel face, with laser precision, from left to right: a human, a baboon, a jackal, and a falcon. On the counter next to them, on a dried rust-red stain – a scalpel, forceps, a lancet, curette, specula, a mallet, and a chipped, worn osteotome. A discarded pair of rubber gloves.

On a shelf, the skeleton of a *felis silvestris catus*, caught in repose, paws curled coyly, perpetually bared fangs giving it a savage appearance, offset by the dust thickly coating the bones. It was here long before the Martyr ever arrived. It is mounted on a cheap plastic composite colored to look like wood. A bronze plaque gives its name.

A painting hangs on the wall — a man hanging by an ankle from the gallows.

Fluorescent lights cast pale flickering shadows.

The beep of the EKG traces a geometric life across the screen. Here, systolic – there, diastolic. Peaks and valleys.

And below, a carpet of insects: thousands upon thousands of beetles, scurrying across the floor, chittering, the sound like a million dry husks rattling in the wind, rising and falling like a gale. They scramble one over the over to no end, thousands of tiny jaws working mindlessly at nothing. A deeper buzz as wings take them aloft for short pointless flights, then back down to earth, six legs wheeling independently. But none alight on the figure in the bed or the four steel sentries.

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The constant shift of life on the floor boggles the eye, distorting perception and creating the impression of the figure being awash in a lifeboat at sea. He hangs, on a knife-edge between worlds. No one sees him. No one knows.

Love brings no fruition; life brings no death. Martyrdom brings no honor. Anonymous, bleached, emptying eternally into plastic tubes – life in, life out.

He remembers nothing from before the time he boarded up the window and handcuffed himself to the bed.

Room 13: Scorpio

On entrance, this room appears to be a nightclub of some sort. A flashing neon light gives away the name, “Scorpio”, and the throngs of people scattered across the room are dancing to a pulsing bass beat. There are tables along the edges of the dancefloor, where a variety of individuals sit, drink, and



watch. A couple of man-like creatures, with spiraling horns, patrol the crowd; they seem ready to rough up troublemakers who disturb the festivities.

Most of the dancers in the crowd are faceless — they have no eyes, mouth, or nose. Yet, they still dance in reckless abandon. A scattering of others have one feature remaining, and there are a handful of dancers who still look somewhat normal — though it appears as if they too are beginning some transformation.

Conversation is easy to start with any of the dancers. Provided they have mouths. The newest arrivals still have their facial features, and they rave about the music and drinks. There is an excitement and





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energy in the air, and if any visitors join in on the dancing, they find themselves caught up in the thrill of the party. It becomes harder and harder to quit, the longer they dance. The dance itself has an orgiastic zeal – women and men bound together, moving in primal passion.

The far edges of the dancefloor open up to a black void. If a traveler steps too far out, he falls into darkness and disappears. It is as if the dancehall is suspended over a void. If one is particularly observant, the entire platform appears to be moving in a slow circle of some sort.

A variety of interesting people populate the dancehall. There are scientists, artists, poets, and more. They are enthralled by the atmosphere, waiting for their opportunity to dance. For those already in their groove, it will take a very convincing reason to remove them from the throng. Every few minutes, a new song starts, and more watchers are enticed from the surrounding tables to enter the crowd and participate.

If visitors are observant, they may notice a pattern. As the dancing kicks into high gear, the platform spins, and a number of the faceless dancers fall into the void below. At that time, new individuals arrive to join the party. If this room is visited often, the visitors may even come to know some of the dancers, and a cycle will become apparent. After joining the dancing, a newcomer's features are slowly lost, and they are eventually cast off the edge of the platform. Then, they return, faces fully formed, to start dancing again.

If the visitors raise any sort of ruckus, the horned men will attempt to quietly eliminate them. They are vicious warriors, using natural protruding claws from their fingertips to deadly effect. However, if any of the dancers are slain, the music will stop, and the crowd will dissipate. The horned men will disappear as well. Most of the crowd will be curious as to where the horned security has gone off to, and will slowly begin filtering out from the dancehall's solitary exit.

Upon returning to this room, the dancehall will be in full swing again. The horned men will recognize the visitors and may attempt to deal with them before they can disrupt the strange festivities.

Room 14: The Lepidopterarium

The monarch flutters like a dying flame in the jar, beating its life out with every spasm. Finally it lays still. Perfect. A perfect specimen of *danaus plexippus*. The wings a flame-red orange laced with intricate black veins – a pheromone spot in the center of the hindwings indicating its sex.

Regal.

Proud.

Butterflies in the wild had always annoyed him. They were perpetually moving, flitting to and fro, drinking nectar or laying eggs and the like, never assuming the static poses that they held in his nature books. Never humoring his desire to study them closely, to revel in their delicate perfection. On the board, though, they were his; etherized, spread, and stiff, they were his completely.

Carefully, with rubber-tipped forceps, he removes the monarch from the jar and places it on the spreading board. He plunges pins through the thorax and the forewings, just behind the heavy black veins, taking care not to tear the fragile membrane, then spreads the hindwings in a similar fashion. He pins strips of paper over the wings to hold them in place, then removes the pins he had originally set. *There*. He checks the humidistat to verify that the room is properly dry – it is – and leans back with a smile of satisfaction to contemplate his collection.

His collection is his pride in life. When he was ten, his first catch – a common *peris rappa*, the cabbage white – was a novelty. He watched it flounder in his homemade killing jar, and, as life left the frail lacy wings, he felt a hitherto

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unknown satisfaction grip him. In following years, he found that the degree of satisfaction was commensurate with the degree of beauty stifled; he found considerably more joy in the curvaceous symmetry of the monarch or the voluptuous hues of the blue morpho than in the somewhat kitschy art deco appeal of the green-veined white.

On a trip to collect his blue morpho, he met a girl of fifteen or so — almost certainly a prostitute, he realized later — on some nameless street. Her symmetry of form, lightness of motion, and delicate features reminded him of the *agraulis vanillae*. She flashed and fluttered in his periphery, and for the first time he was keenly aware that the grace found in Lepidoptera could be found in other species. Smitten, he took her to his hotel, but he only had his field kit, which lacked sufficient ether to do the job properly. Very carefully, very gently, he held a pillow down until the fluttering stopped, and she was *perfect*.

Three walls in the room are covered in pinning boards, and the pinning boards are covered with species exotic and surpassingly rare. Each was a jewel, crystalline wings beaming natural perfection forever and ever. *Thousands* of insects, floor to ceiling, representing a life's passion. They give him a stillness and quietude he could never find elsewhere.

He sits on the leather armchair (the only furniture in the room other than the preparation table) and regards his collection. He looks at each, recalling when and where he had obtained them, and how exactly they had beat desperately in the killing jar as *their* lives, the sensations and behaviors that made them *them*, left the creatures to become his forever. That was the most delicious thing of all.

And — his crowning beauty! A physically perfect specimen, beautiful, still preserved after all these years, she occupied the fourth wall entirely — splayed out by the thick pins (he had to use a hammer, he recalled, to drive them in, and had been fearful of damaging the specimen), glassy eyes, mouth agape, naked, *his*, the memories and experiences that comprised *her* were his, known to none other. And yet no one has said a word!

Room 15: The Room of Revenge

The room looks like it should be the drop to a sleazy Super-8 stag reel. It's a dimly lit room, vaguely reminiscent of a basement; the walls are wood-paneled, the floor is covered with a thin gray carpet the color of particularly energetic mold, and the ceiling consists of acoustic tiles. The lights don't really illuminate; they just push the darkness into the corners of the room. There's a smell of concrete and must in the background.

The room contains a series of machines, similar in shape to a cash register, resting on plain wooden tables arranged along the walls. Each has a single button at its center — just a little piece of plastic mounted on a steel stalk, the same beige color as the rest of the machine. Above the button, there's a piece of paper covered with neat, spidery writing, detailing a humiliating experience and the motivation of the individual who inflicted it. Visitors will see themselves reflected in the experiences, whether real or imagined, and they are always the victims. The motivations of the individual committing the injury always paint him or her in the worst possible light — desiring to humiliate out of spite, rather than as a reaction to some trespass or affront. Additionally, visitors will know (or sense) that the wrong in question went unpunished, which will begin to dig at them as time passes, even after they have left the room.

There's a little sign on a metal bracket underneath the button. It reads **PUNISH**. All visitors instinctively know that hitting the button will do something severe to the individual who committed the offence — but they won't know exactly what. All that they have to do is to hit the button, and they'll get their vengeance. And they also understand, though they don't know how, that there will be no more information forthcoming after they've hit that button.

Pushing the button is a moral choice, it will change nothing in the room.





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Of course, there are a number of problems that occur whenever someone hits one of those buttons. The most obvious, is that pushing the button doesn't offer any further information on what just happened.

How badly did you punish the people who hurt you? Were they sorry for what they did, before you reached into their lives and touched them? Would they have been people that you might have been friends with, if you hadn't — well, did what you just did? Did it just give them a bad day? Did it kill them?

The other irritation is — for visitors of a more vengeful bent — that they just let something else do the punishing for them. It's an entirely mechanical event, stripped of the context and resonance that makes vengeance worthwhile to an individual. The one who wronged them doesn't know who just reached out and hurt them; to them, it's an arbitrary and baffling event.

The idea of the Revenge partition is a moral challenge, and one that doesn't have an easy answer. Ignoring the buttons and moving on is perhaps the wisest choice, but it's moving on with the knowledge that the guilty will go unpunished — perhaps forever.

Pushing the button is not the wrong choice per se. For some, it is a necessary step for them to take, an answer to the question "What kind of person am I?"

Press the button. Or not.

Room 16: The Sorting Room

The Sorting Room doesn't have a roof, just the open sky above, a swirling red nebula. There are no walls to mark the Sorting Room as a room — just an endless series of tables and chairs, broken up with wooden dividers, as far as the eye can see.

The Sorting Room is the place where the last few artifacts of society are being organized before their final destruction. Every table has a scattering of human-made objects, sorted by category — for instance, one table has a selection of women's wristwatches with an orange plastic casing. There's always one or two objects separated from the pile, which look as if somebody went to extraordinary lengths to completely destroy. The smashed objects have been broken so thoroughly that it's almost impossible to recognize them.

Wandering around, visitors will be struck by just how much stuff there is within the room. There's nothing particularly useful in the Sorting Room, just a variety of mundane items such as nail trimmers or sprinkler heads. However, if visitors check around a little more carefully, they can find broken bits of more interesting items — the snapped hammer from a revolver, a broken chip of glass from a computer monitor — but they're just tantalizing hints of what might have been.

In the room, gray-skinned and pallid creatures are feebly smashing away at their work assignment. They'll be pathetically happy to accompany any visitors if asked, but eventually disappear when no one is looking (and they won't be seen again, either.)

There are other occupants. The stilt men look like mannequins made from the same substance as the cheap vinyl floor tiles seen in old buildings. Their faces are concentric spirals on a blank surface; their hearing and sight are preternaturally sharp. They stride about on stilts, which project from their shoulders just like a pair of extra-long arms. The stilts end in broad, flat plastic pads that grip the ground as if they were cemented. Without overwhelming force, it is impossible to push over a stilt man. On a straightaway, they can top fifty miles an hour. Instead of legs, they have a series of six spindly appendages projecting from their waists, long enough to reach the ground and strong enough to immobilize a single man.

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The job of the stilt men is to put visitors to work smashing their own possessions. They will chase any and all visitors to exhaustion, then grab them by the shoulders and drag them — at dizzying speed — until they're staring at a table covered with everything that they ever owned. The stilt men can be killed with enough force, but they arrive in unlimited numbers and never stop until everyone is gainfully employed. The best visitors can hope for is to kill a few of them before they are grabbed and wrestled to a table.

Once at the counter, the stilt men's prisoners have two choices: smash their own stuff — including some prized possessions that they forgot that they owned — or try to escape to the door that they came in through. The stilt men do not chase down escapees with the same fervor that they put into catching new arrivals, and they cannot follow their prey beyond the boundaries of the Sorting Room.

The smashing of prized possessions is something prisoners can't just shrug off. In a sense, they're being asked to destroy their own identities. The items being destroyed are fundamental aspects of an individual's personality. At the same time, smashing the items brings on a certain sense of liberation, which grows as the prisoner destroys more and more.

If a visitor can succeed in destroying everything that the stilt men bring forth, that individual experiences a moment of potent satori — a feeling of unutterable bliss and confidence. No matter how much the stilt men destroy, they cannot erase the prisoner from history. From this moment on, the stilt men will flee from the individual, seemingly terrified; this makes the rescue of others very easy. Successfully going through a test of destruction allows one to better navigate the trials and tribulations of the Silhouette Rouge. No matter how askew things might get, that individual still has a sense of self.

Room 17: Tech's Solution

What may have passed before, I do not know. All I know now is blackness, and tightness, and cold. I am pressed upon from all sides, and it is a miracle I can breathe at all. A moment of panic seizes me when I realize my lungs are not moving, but passes as I continue to exist regardless. I try to struggle against whatever walls push upon me, but my body refuses any response. It is the worst kind of helplessness, a





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despair that should be the greatest I have ever felt; yet somehow I know there have been greater moments in my past.

The darkness, the pressure; it is so complete, so blanketing that I could almost forget that I am.

Inside my mind I sense a great spirit of welcome; solid at its base, tall, opening with life near the top. There are others of my kind there; cousins. I want so much to be there, with them. It is a memory, or a hope, and I yearn for it. But I am alone.

I try to surge against my prison, but feel nothing.

The great spirit of welcome is gone, and instead there is a sense of emptiness. No. Not emptiness... loss. After a time, it turns to one of... steadiness? Strength?

Resolve.

My thoughts or memories halt; something else is happening. The coldness is retreating. The darkness is... peeling away. Wait! I moved! I thought, and then I moved my... arm? Yes, my *arms* are moving, pushing against something that yields! I feel joy and anxiety at once as I work at pushing off the cloying walls.

And then I am knifed with a warmth and brightness so intense it halts me. The illumination floods my prison as my arms begin working again of their own accord, answering a desire to be free buried so deep it does not require thought to motivate them. The warmth and light become bearable and suddenly I am free from confinement. I feel the pull of a great spirit, perhaps the greatest spirit, yet I do not fall toward it; my limbs seem to know to hang on to my prison a moment longer. The light begins to separate before me, grouping into areas defined by color and shape and dimension, things I seem to accept and understand without knowing (or caring) why.

Right before me are the remains of the bondage that held me, the place where I grew. Just beyond that, the green smoothness of a flower stem, to which my former prison is attached. The heady scent of the blossom nearly overwhelms me, yet I look even further beyond and see what should be alien but instead is deeply familiar. Rich, heavy, dark wooden beams form lines overhead, far away. As I turn and look around I see that great spirit of welcome, a halo of green with bright spots of white, and a cloud of others nearly like myself. The halo is supported by a supple, slender pillar of wood, alike to those beams overhead, but alive. I so want to be there, but I am not fully awake enough to make the journey.

My point of view continues to rotate as my limbs move me around again, and now I begin to face the pull of the greatest spirit, the spirit of Earth. Beyond the... tree, where my cousins flock, and indeed seeming to form a greater chamber, are thin, delicate panels framed by more of the dark wood from above; screens that make walls on all sides. Warmth and light shine through the thin panels, and I try to bow my head in acknowledgement of the warmth that strengthened me enough to escape my chamber. My head does not seem to work as I think it should, but no matter; there is much more to see.

My inspection is interrupted by a great stretching sensation, and the sense of freedom wells within me at the same moment. My back limbs want to move, and they do, opening and displaying their own thin, delicate panels of color and pattern. *Wings*. They are my wings! They flutter once and they are dry, twice and I am free forever from my prison, spinning in space dizzily before I succumb to the pull of the earth and drop to a solid surface, exhilarated but exhausted from my first flight. This surface is different from that of my chamber, and somehow makes me think of wood. It has a smell that is so familiar. *Paper. Ink. Books*. For some reason these words and ideas fill me with the same exhilaration and sense of freedom I felt a moment ago in flight.

I try another flutter with my wings (*I have wings!*) and take flight. Tilting forward I look toward the book that gave me such a thrill, and see myself twice on the paper. No, not myself, but one like me; a cousin.

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But why does the other figure make me think of a cousin, when it is so unlike one? Large, no wings, straight like the tree but with no halo, and only two arms. A... human. It holds an image of a book in one hand, and it is robed in colors like that of the wings of the fluttering cousins. Strange, but familiar. That feeling of resolve from earlier comes to me; this book, these pictures are significant somehow. Something important about them is tied into my prison and my earlier thoughts.

The tree and my cousins now pull me more than the great spirit Earth. I begin to labor across space up and toward them. The book glides away underneath me, as does the smooth, wood surface it lay upon. A steep drop and there is a floor made of stone.

An eddy of air pushes me a bit, and my point of view shifts as I steady myself. I see that not all the walls of this great chamber are made from the panels of thin paper, but some are shelves (the words to describe my world come easier to me now) filled with more books. Many more books, in row upon row from the stone floor to the wood beams of this chamber. It is all familiar; it all feels like home, but not so much as the crown of the tree which now comes nearer.

Another eddy pushes me, and a flash of something puts me for a moment back in the darkness with walls that stick and close in around me. A human, but not the one in the book; this human rages forward and reeks of lightning and a heat that is unpleasant. Something urges me to escape, to seek refuge in the sacred space of the tree.

I feel as well as hear a shout from the human, but do not turn. I can hear and mostly understand his words, but I only have eyes for the safety of the cherry tree, my father's gift to me in this, my favorite room.

"No!" shouted the man. "She cannot deny me! She is mine; the pact was sealed, blood and jade were exchanged! This is treachery!"

I hear and feel, instead of see, the table that held the book overturn and break. I am among my cousins now; they touch me with their wings and welcome me to the dance. I turn, almost against my will, to see what the man will do. He approaches the tree, all sharp wood and hard muscle, cruel and aflame. Another human moves between the man and the tree. The second human speaks, and her voice, while quieter, is stronger than the man's.

"She has done what she has done. You cannot harm this house, lest you forfeit your own life. Take your loss with honor instead of rage, and save what you can of your name."

Both humans are lost to my view under a sudden shower of cherry blossoms. A number of cousins had lifted from a branch above me, and set the petals free. I feel laughter, and weariness, and I turn to join the dance of my kin, and worry no more.

– The Ninth Enigma

Room 18: The Ballroom

Large, stone archways strive to meet a crystal chandelier high above a burnished wood floor. Beneath the lit display, a tiered fountain bubbles and frolics, trying to kiss the ornate lamp's light touch. Coppery fish jump and quiver in the pools of clear water. Miniscule children wearing silk nightgowns skip around, trying to catch the slippery swimmers. A slightly taller child clutches an oddly sewn ladybug made of flower petals and spider web strands. He looks around for their nanny and smiles. He spots her on the other side of the room, standing next to the dandelion wine punch bowl and three stubby gnomes. The nanny sits with her mouth agape, furious at the display of velvet, silk, and satin whirling about the ballroom floor with no sense of order or proper decorum.

Curious, slight creatures with pointed ears, dressed in brightly colored gowns and three-piece suits, flit about the



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polished wood floor in time to throbbing, rhythmic music. One such being, named Spin, dressed in vermillion and silver, tries to hold herself still against the flow of her dancing partners. She feels her feet aching to move or tap or float along with the swishing of satins and silks and the beating of tiny hearts and gossamer wings. The musicians pound their drums, tout their horns, and strike their violins on a stage at the back of the room. Above them, a giant clock ticks faster and faster — its time speeds up the music.

The dancers frenzy.

Spin arches to meet another dancer. She doesn't know his name, and she doesn't care. The dance is all that matters. She grabs his hand, he grabs her waist, and they twirl about, every which way.

Suddenly, the music softens to a lulling hum. A squad of knights escorts a soft man with a pointed crown and a beautiful woman across the stage. The woman wears a royal silver circlet. It's the Queen. As she takes each purposeful step, her mouth opens wide and words pour musically from her lips, droning out all sensible thought.

*color blue I hear your call
key of G play me, too
Summer's day eclipse my needs
acorn tree, grow my feet
till arms reach endless night
and Falcon's graces
blanket my frail shoulders.*

The words are the magic of sleep, and all around the room the dancers drop to the hardwood floor as she repeats the awful poem. Spin fights against the spell; she doesn't want to sleep. *No... not now. This is my time. After all, I am one of the princesses.* The Queen blows a glittery pollen or dust or magician's brew over the sleeping crowd. Their eyes glaze over. Some snore, some dream, some will prophesize when they awake. Carefully, the Queen steps among her subjects, arranging them this way and that. She stages her court to her liking; her enemies are where she can see them, her friends are in her adversaries' line of sight. She looks up, twirling about to see if the flowers are still watching her. Pointing, she laughs at Lily, Iris, and Daffodil who are placed ever so carefully in sconces adorning the walls. They were wrong; this will remain *her* court and *hers alone*.

Spin thrashes about in her sleep. In her mind's eye, she watches the Queen — her mother — prepare a poisonous



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draught. The Queen waits until the dancing stops, and stands over her child's head. Spin kicks up hard and leaps into a low hover. Her mind is closed and she cannot see, but she dances anyway — *Danse Somnus Eterna*. Her mother laughs and pulls a long arrow from the quiver affixed to her back.

The violins die. Spin wakes up.

Room 19: The Operating Theatre

No, no — don't worry. You have *no idea* how much you are going to help me. By helping me, you help mankind. No — hush, hush.

My students; the brain! A few pounds of meaty slush, a collection of neurons and nerves firing randomly, electric currents jolting to and fro, an anonymous mass, defying all but the most superficial explorations.

We might say, *this* section produces *that* endorphin or fires *that* neuron, producing this sensation or enabling that process. But what is the whole? A wad of folded tissue with the consistency of thick jelly performs calculations far more quickly than the most powerful transistors, without ever realizing it. The complex geometry and physics required for seemingly simple motions are still out of the grasp of machines — coordinating the dozens of organs, hundreds of bones, thousands of muscles necessary to catch a flying ball or perform a ballet. This undulating fleshy gray mass does it with ease.

We know the pituitary gland — located right *here* — can release endorphins, little neural inhibitors, blocking pain, opening dopamine pathways, producing physical ecstasy — the placebo effect — the result of your brain ignoring physical reality, giving you relief when you should feel pain. Astounding.

When depressed, you are feeling the results of chemical imbalances. We can rectify the depression by rectifying the imbalances; emotions, you see, are not a spiritual thing. They are simple results of changes in chemical levels in the encephalon. Forget juvenile mind-body dichotomy. There is the body, and the mind, a product thereof, just another appendage. The secrets are locked in *here*, in a physical space. As our understanding of the natural laws increases, so the truths of the brain will be laid bare. Herein, we will find no such archaic notions as a *soul* or *spirit*. This is — hamburger! Amazing, yes, but nothing mystical at all. There is a physical root to all things: ecstasy, agony, despair, depression, lust, longing, melancholia, passion, and inspiration. We will find it.

Hypothesis: if we know the corporeal seat of physical relief —happiness — it should be a simple thing to find the corporeal seat of emotional relief — *joy*.

Behold my operating theatre. Not so grand as I would like, but current circumstances have forced me to diminished prospects. We have — the table, on which you currently recline. The operating tray, here, on which we have: saw, forceps, and scalpel. I regret that I can offer you no anesthesia today, for as you see — our intravenous pump is in poor repair.

Beyond that, the theatre is bare. I'm sure the bright lights directly above your face hamper your view; past the lights, the Plexiglas ceiling, past which sit my students, all quite absorbed, I'm sure. You must pardon the mess; the janitorial staff has recently departed, but I can assure you that this fine slurry of bone chips and cranial fluid on the floor poses *no* health threat to you whatsoever.

And now we begin. Lie back. Calm yourself; there, there. My students! I begin with the *saw*...

Room 20: Amniocentesis

Beyond the door lies a stairway. No one can avoid the stairway. Some try, but in the end it doesn't matter; no one can avoid the stairway. The walnut banister has been worn smooth by the passing of





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countless hands, and as the stairs wind their way up an ever-tightening spiral depressions can be felt where other climbers have placed their feet time and time again. The length of the trip takes more than a moment, and less than a lifetime; at first it seems that you will never reach the top, when suddenly you surprise yourself by arriving.

There's nowhere to go except forward, pushing through the strands that hang in the doorway; each sinewy string hung with what looks and feels suspiciously like bone, the rough edges scraping at the skin. Nothing can be seen through the curtain, and upon passing, nothing can be seen of the entranceway.

The strange chamber in a chamber, that the stairs inexorably lead up to, is the inside of a polygon — the exact number of sides seems dependent on the person who stands within. Every surface is a mirror, each facet reflecting the others. Those who look into the mirrors see a single moment of time, always from that person's past; all one's shames and sins displayed, with all artifice and self-deception stripped away. Pull your eyes away from one, and they will simply meet another.

Even two people standing side by side and simultaneously looking at the same surface would not see the same thing; each man or woman's sins are played for him or her alone. Some are in the chamber minutes, others days; a few enter and never leave. Each watches until reaching some place inside their heart; some walk quietly to the center of the room, some weep and try to tear their eyes from their sockets; at the proper time, they all begin to sink into the floor.

It draws at them like a thing alive. Most experience this sinking as a clinging warmth, like being suffocated in wet wool. As each is consumed in turn, they pass from the viewing chamber into a transitional place. It is in this chamber where those whom never return meet whatever fate awaits them.

Those who will pass on, find themselves floating within a warm fluid, surrounded by red-tinted light. A soft thrum can be heard and felt in the distance, comforting them as they wait. All too soon the peace is gone, replaced by motion and chaos.

A large shape of reddish-brown stone dominates the chamber. Most of the features have been worn away by time; leaving only an unevenly rounded form resting atop an inverted Y. As the fluid rushes downward, the lowest portion of the shape opens; it is from here that the people are deposited — splashing into a shallow basin in a rush of fluids.

The liquid gradually drains away, though its means of exit is a mystery; it simply seems to sink through the stone floor itself. The air in the room is chill, which soon drives the still-damp individual toward the rim of the basin where waits warm towels — along with those things she entered with in the chamber above. Usually. More than once has someone found things missing, or something added to their belongings, with no discernible pattern to the taking or giving.

Beneath each towel is a small mirror, and it is here that those who take the time to look often receive their greatest surprise. Not all of those who come out, return the same as they went in. Sometimes the change is as small as the removal of a scar, or the altering of the color of hair or eyes. More rarely the changes are of an extreme nature; years gained or lost during the process, and at least once a man has passed through the chamber only to find upon exit he was no longer a he.

Room 21: Tattva

A simple, unmarked door, carved from an Ash tree, separates the chamber from the rest of creation. Resilient and elastic, the wood of the door grants visions when touched. It speaks to the soul of every being, begging it to put aside its burdens. With contact, some fall to their knees and weep. Others are driven to dance, their involuntary contortions revealing the heartbeat of the universe, the underlying

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rhythm of existence.

The chamber is simple and sparse, no larger than a prison cell. Small stone blocks, tightly mortared, keep out all unwanted influence. A single light bulb dangles from a chain set into the ceiling. The bulb is aglow, though no electricity runs to the room. A meager cot of metal springs and wood is overturned and lying in one corner.

Padmasana sits the aged man, wrinkled skin and snow-white beard. His material form is failing him, but his soul is not; cataract vision is giving way to clarity. He is lost within himself. A perfect ring of lotus flowers encircles the seer. Before him floats a well-worn book bound in elephant hide. Its brittle pages turn of their own accord.

The Book of Stories is reading itself, telling tales to the aged man. One by one its parchment pages turn, and with each turning, a new reality is born. Those who draw close will experience the tales in the landscape of their minds, as if they were living the stories themselves.

The petals of the lotus flowers begin breaking away, rising into the air. Clockwise they spin, in tornado-like motion, around the aged man. If he senses their dance, he gives no sign of it. He is lost within himself.

The aged man breathes deep, inhaling the many lotus petals. As the last of them disappears into his mouth, the plants that encircle him begin budding anew.

The Book of Stories closes tight.

The audience smiles.

The aged man, no longer lost within himself, rediscovers the sun.

Reality Spasms

On occasion, and without notice, the nature of reality can shift on the Prima Materia. This is a pronounced and violent upheaval. The senses lie, temporal distortions confuse, the geometry of the Prima Materia mutates, colors blur and subdivide in kaleidoscopic patterns. These reality spasms are short lived, but disorienting. When a spasm occurs, the entirety of the Prima Materia is affected.

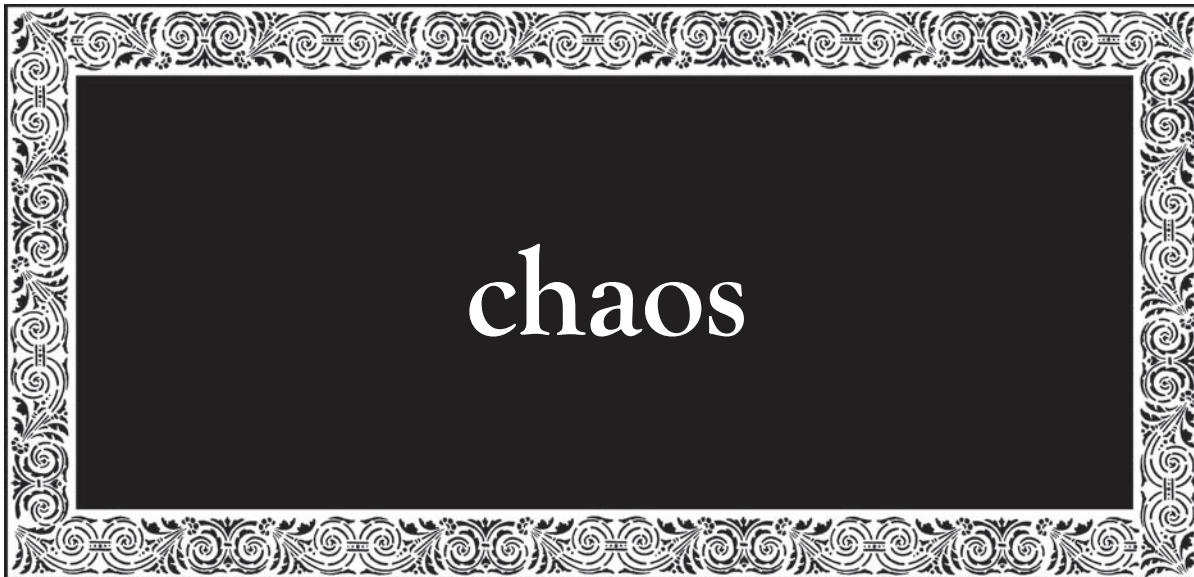
Reality spasms are a phenomenon known only to the Prima Materia. There has never been a spasm on the upper floor of the Silhouette Rouge.



The Conch

At the end of the hallway that *breathes* is a spiral staircase. Known as the Conch for its spiral design, this structure is the only means of accessing the upper floor of the Silhouette Rouge. It is primarily alabaster in color and composition, with specks of gold and black becoming visible to those who closely approach. Time is fluid on the conch. The climb to the upper floor can take as little as a few seconds or as long as hours. When surmounting the Conch, a reddish fog engulfs the climber. The fog appears as soon as the first step is undertaken, and it completely obscures the Prima Materia as the climber ascends. Faint whispers emanate from within the red haze, though the language is unintelligible. Once the pinnacle of the staircase has been reached, the fog fades, and climbers find themselves on the second floor of the Silhouette Rouge.





The Prima Materia is a reality apart from base existence. Although it lies beyond the borders of conventional experience, it is an internally constant reality. There are always twenty-two rooms and three hallways, and each room is always consistent within itself.

The Prima Materia is a thing of order and meticulous design, even if the underlying pattern is obfuscated.

Reality spasms, the intrusion of an alien reality, are disruptions to the consistency of the Prima Materia. The esoteric energies released during these chaotic deluges temporarily reshapes the landscape of the Prima Materia, warping and twisting it in strange ways. Gravity might function differently. Colors previously unknown might come into being. The inner ramblings of the subconscious mind might become tangible. Anything is possible during a reality spasm.

Reality spasms are always short-lived, lasting anywhere from a few seconds to a few hours. When they pass, reality returns to normal. There is no way to sense an impending spasm, as they inevitably strike without warning.

The origin of reality spasms remains a mystery, although theories abound.

Esoteric energies are tendrils of force released during a reality spasm. They are the power that temporarily reshapes the Prima Materia. Though the effects of these energies are perceptible by all, the energies themselves are invisible. Only Sarcophagi can see the tendrils spiraling across the Prima Materia, and only Sarcophagi can adapt to the gross changes in reality brought on by the spasms. With this in mind, the Gamemaster can use reality spasms to tilt the odds in the colony's favor when it is outmatched. Additionally, the Gamemaster can enhance mundane encounters with the sudden onset of a reality spasm.

Reality spasms simultaneously strike the entirety of the Prima Materia; no room or hallway is spared its onslaught. For reasons unknown, reality spasms do not strike the upper floor of the Silhouette Rouge.

The actual effects of reality spasms vary. Multiple effects will often manifest simultaneously. When designing reality spasms, the Gamemaster should let creativity run amok.

A sampling of effects:

- **Silence is Madness:** The entire Prima Materia is shrouded in perfect silence. No matter how much noise an action would typically make, no sound is produced. No matter how much one

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- strains to speak, no sound emanates forth. Though Sarcophagi can hear one another speak, no one else can hear them, and they can hear no other voices.
- **Candyland:** All inorganic solids become candy-like and sticky to the touch. All liquids turn to thick syrup. A sugary sweet odor permeates the Prima Materia.
 - **Doppelgangers:** An exact twin for every being on the Prima Materia materializes into existence; even the colony has look-alikes. The doppelgangers act exactly like the beings they are modeled after: the same mannerisms, the same abilities, the same beliefs, etc. The doppelgangers remain in existence until the reality spasm has run its course.
 - **Quagmire:** The floor of every room and every hallway turns to quicksand, ensnaring those who cannot get airborne. The more a being struggles to free itself, the quicker it sinks.
 - **Mirrorworld:** Every floor, every ceiling, and every wall turns to mirror. These mirrors can be smashed, but layers of unbroken mirror will be all that is found behind the shards.
 - **Storms:** Vicious weather ravages the Prima Materia. Snowstorms, hurricanes, tornados, and more, materialize indoors. Visibility is significantly reduced. Temperatures might drop to subzero. High winds toss beings and objects about with ease.
 - **Tilting:** The Prima Materia tilts and rocks back and forth like a ship caught at sea during a tumultuous storm.
 - **Gravity Unhinged:** Gravity inverts; up is down and down is up. Only objects originally bolted to the floor will remain on the new "ceiling."
 - **Temporal Distortions:** Time slows to a crawl, or speeds forward with phenomenal speed. These time variations might differ from room to room, or effect only certain beings.
 - **Chasm:** Large sections of flooring fall away, exposing a bottomless abyss. Only tiny, floating platforms of flooring provide escape from the chasm's grasp. Those who fall into the chasm are never heard from again.
 - **Cacophony:** The ringing of a thousand bells, each at a different pitch, drowns out all sound on the Prima Materia. For some beings, the cacophony brings permanent damage in the form of shattered eardrums.
 - **Vibrant Colors:** Certain colors become more vibrant than normal. The hues become so bright that some beings see spots before their eyes, an effect that lasts for hours after the reality spasm subsides. In rare instances, the colors are so brilliant that some beings are left permanently blind.
 - **Small World:** The Prima Materia, and all non-living objects within it, expands in size one hundred fold. In comparison to the environment, everyone on the Prima Materia is now Lilliputian in stature. Navigating a reality one hundred sizes too big will prove to be adventurous, to say the least.
 - **Feedback Loop:** Events previously played out repeat themselves over and over again. Discerning between past and present events is difficult at first, but becomes easier as history repeats itself over and over.
 - **Chatter:** The thoughts of every being on the Prima Materia become audible, including the ramblings of the subconscious mind. Secrets may come to light, true feelings may become known, and some may be driven mad by the endless chatter emanating from all directions.
 - **Blurred Vision:** The vision of every being, except the Sarcophagi, turns blurry. These creatures might stumble about, or wish to reach out and feel the shapes of those beings or objects that are nearby.
 - **Hideous Geometry:** The geometry of the Prima Materia mutates in non-Euclidian ways. Four or more perpendicular lines meet at every corner, as additional spatial dimensions come into being. Strange cross-sections of matter seem to materialize out of thin air, and distances stretch on forever. Most entities of the Prima Materia exist in three dimensions and are thoroughly disoriented by the shifting geometry.

The above are merely suggestions to stir the imagination. Gamemasters are encouraged to invent their own unique effects.

Sarcophagi feel the effects of reality spasms; they are simply able to navigate them easier than everyone

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else. Reality spasms are so disorienting to the Others that their *Awareness*, *Violence*, and *Personality* ranks all become 1 for the length of the reality spasm (no matter what their normal ranks might have been).

Virus

When reality spasms wash over the Prima Materia, the Surgineers slink in from their alien reality. They are never seen to come from anywhere; the common theory is that they simply materialize when no one is looking. Their place of origin is a mystery, though it clearly lies beyond the borders of the Silhouette Rouge. Some believe they are the creators of the reality spasms. Others assume reality spasms occur independent of the Surgineers, who merely use them to gain access to the Prima Materia. Whatever the truth might be, they inevitably appear.

Surgineers are lanky creatures dressed in hospital whites. Strange, unidentifiable bits of gore and splashes of blood mar the pristine white of their gowns. Surgical masks, scrub caps, and aviator goggles



obscure their facial features. Long, pointed ears peek out from beneath their caps, and their eyes glow a faint red, though this is somewhat difficult to discern beneath their tinted goggles. Surgineers walk with an uneven gait, as if they are about to fall over at any moment. Where their fingers should be are various tools; some are mechanical, most are medical. Syringes, forceps, scissors, pliers and more can be found attached to the pale white knuckles of the Surgineers. Healed scars along the hands imply someone or something attached these artificial appendages.

Although many aspects of the Surgineers are shrouded in mystery, their purpose for entering the Prima Materia is not. The Surgineers are abductors. They come in search of Sarcophagi and Hollow Men, listless beings whose connection to the Logos has been permanently severed. They show no interest in anyone else. After subduing their prey, the Surgineers await the passing of the reality spasm. As the





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spasm fades, so do they. No one knows what fate befalls the abductees. It is said that the Surgineers perform bizarre operations on Sarcophagi and Hollow Men, reshaping them into new forms of life. Some even whisper that the Sarcophagi and the Others are Surgineer experiments.

Could the Sarcophagi have once been Hollow Men? Could their new lives be the result of Surgineer experimentation?

Among those who wander the Silhouette Rouge, there are some who believe that the Sarcophagi created the Hollow Men. They claim that the Sarcophagi have abused the *Principle of Unity* and have used it to sever connections between the living and the Logos. They also allege that the Surgineers are agents of the Logos, hunting Sarcophagi to mete out justice and abducting Hollow Men to undo the damage done by the Sarcophagi.

The Surgineers created the Sarcophagi from Hollow Men, who themselves were created by the Sarcophagi. How is this possible? This cannot be the truth.



The upper level of the Silhouette Rouge is only accessible via the Conch. This spiral staircase twists up into a mirror image of the Grand Foyer. However, this is not truly a room but a ghostly shadow cast from the Prima Materia; it is no more real than a reflection, albeit one given substantiality.

In most ways, this shadow accurately reflects the Grand Foyer. However, there are differences.

The Burial of the Dead

The most notable contrast between the Grand Foyer and its shadow is the lack of noticeable inhabitation. The creatures who haunt the Grand Foyer are not found here; as a whole, the Others avoid this floor for reasons unspoken, though the odd wayfarer or two will occasionally make their way here. The lighting is sparse at the top of the Conch, and the Grand Foyer's shadow appears decrepit — as if abandoned and rotting away. For these reasons, the entire upper floor is referred to as the Waste Land.

Scattered across the Shadow of the Grand Foyer, like its Prima Materia counterpart, are multiple statues of exquisite craftsmanship. However, the statues on this floor bear the likenesses of the Others. The exact number of statues varies with each visit. A series of gray chains links one statue to another, creating a massive spider web design.

No doors on the Waste Land grant exit from the Silhouette Rouge.

Grigori

The cyclopean red eyes of security cameras, nine in all, slowly pan across the Grand Foyer's shadow. No one knows who is watching, or why, or if anyone is even monitoring what the cameras record. Some hypothesize that it is the Logos keeping a curious eye on the Waste Land.

Apertures

Familiar windows line the walls of The Shadow of the Grand Foyer. Unlike the ones on the lower level, the frames on these windows have long rotted away, and the locks have been broken. These portals lead to Nowhere. Piercing winds, emanating from beyond the frames, whip around the chamber.

The colony must be careful when walking about, for horrors hide in the shadows cast by the garden of statues. Chiroptera, who have entered through the decrepit windows of this level, lie in wait for



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unsuspecting Sarcophagi. They will pounce on the colony when it is not looking. Luckily, Chiroptera always attack in small groups. If the Chiroptera is bested or forced to flee back to Nowhere, the others of its kind will not attack.

Tetragrammaton

While three hallways extend from the Grand Foyer, there are four that do so from its shadow: the Walk of Swords, the Grail Passage, the Rite of Pentacles, and the Hall of Torches.

The Walk of Swords

The following is an excerpt from the Ninth Odyssey of the Tarkiensan Cycle. Translation by Sol Invictus.

Tarkiensan walked down the great hallway, savoring the victory he was already claiming. He had slit many throats and paid twice his weight in gold for the privilege to be where he was now, and Tarkiensan was a man who knew how to enjoy his objectives when he reached them. His military training had conditioned him to take in his surroundings, and he was not unaware of potential danger. The end of the hallway was cast in shadow, and he did not know what awaited him there. Nevertheless, the Mounted Terror, commander of the most feared army in nine realities, was confident in his ability to handle mere danger.

The hallway was four strides across from wall to wall, giving even the broad soldier plenty of room. His spurs scraped across a floor of white canvas. The pristine surface picked up the light from the wall lanterns and produced an ambient glow. He slowed as he came to the first door, which was on his left. The door was massive; two men could enter through it at once, or one mounted rider, and still have clearance. It was made of dark gray, wooden timbers that reminded him of those used in the building of ships. There was an iron ring set therein, and an iron latch indicating the need for a key – or substantial brute force. Next to the door was a weapons rack, custom made to hold six weapons of similar type. Five western broad swords in scabbards filled all but one of the slots. His eyes appraised and then dismissed their quality. Of more interest was the painting set into the wall above the door. It depicted a bare-footed and bare-chested man in loose, white breeches — commoner's clothing — wielding a weapon such as the rack held below. The man's face was hard, and his hair long and white. Tarkiensan could tell from the swordsman's stance, the way he held his sword, and the look on his face, that he was looking upon a fellow blade master. The weapon was different, but Tarkiensan knew he appeared much the same wielding his long, curved scimitar, one he had spent a lifetime mastering. Something about the painting looked familiar. Ah! It was set in a land Tarkiensan knew well, one of the first to fall beneath the bloody hooves of his cavalry.

He looked back at the door and considered. Behind it, if all he heard were true, would be the accumulated knowledge of every master who had wielded this type of blade. Access to such knowledge would surely make him unstoppable. Tarkiensan turned his head and observed the long corridor and subsequent doorways. Behind each would be the same knowledge for different instruments of war. Unstoppable, indeed.

Despite his urge to enter the room behind the locked portal, he was too good at his craft to leave his back unprotected; he must go to the end of the hall, determine the threat level, and then decide a course of action. He strode on.

After ten paces another door appeared, this time on his right. The wall, covered in interlocking tiles of lacquered and shiny wood, had continued unbroken until it came to this doorframe, and continued on beyond it as well. This second entrance seemed identical to the first, with a rack of weapons and a painting nearby. This time, five short-shafted pole-arms, topped with broad bladed swords, were



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arranged in the rack that had been built for six. The blades were wrapped in what appeared to be red silk, decorated with threads of glinting silver. The painting depicted the pole-sword in a different land. Tarkiansan nodded his head. He had guessed it from the weapons; he had crushed many a peasant wielding those. Leaning in closer to the painting, he verified that it did indeed appear to be the same gaunt swordsman. The man wielded his painted pole-arm with the same level of mastery as he had shown before. No matter the cleverness of the artist, that kind of focus could surely not be faked. Tarkiansan was impressed; this man had mastered two blades. Tarkiansan was an expert with uncountable weapons, but could only claim mastery of one.

He moved on. Ten more paces and a new door, on his left once again. The doorway seemed identical to the previous two, and once more there was the rack and the painting. Five short-handled swords stuck out from scabbards that undulated like a snake in motion; some of Tarkiansan's toughest battles had come from fighting jungle-men who carried blades such as these, and indeed the painting showed a jungle landscape. But what was this? No jungle-man was shown wielding the snake-swords; it was the same bare-foot master! Tarkiansan shook his head and revised his opinion. This must be the work of the greatest artist in the world, because no man could master three such different weapons in one lifetime!

And so he made his way down the long, semi-lit hall, stopping to examine the custom made racks of exotic swords, and growing more doubtful and unsettled with each scene depicting the expertise of the blade master. Here were crossed daggers, then swords with curved hooks on the end, then the flexible whip-like blades that had taught him new defensive maneuvers; each from a reality that had fallen under the churning machine that Tarkiansan himself had built. After he had passed a dozen such, he sensed he was nearing the end of the hall, and excitement warred with a strange unease within him.

The thirteenth door, on his left, was flanked by a weapons rack that was nearly as large as Tarkiansan himself. The five swords in their scabbards seemed an artisan's fancy, as they were far too long and broad to be wielded by a man. Yet the painting showed the master deftly holding the blade, nearly twice as long as he was tall, next to a ridiculously oversized hearthstone. Here Tarkiansan had to chuckle, and he felt his tensions ease; this proved once and for all that the artist was the master here! Who else but a genius with brush and pigment could make the legendary Valley of the Giants seem so real? Tarkiansan had eviscerated a small team of scouts just six weeks ago for fanciful claims that they had come across this valley, and for actually suggesting he make it his next objective!

But now a new worry entered Tarkiansan's mind. If these oversized swords and this painting were fakery, then what lay behind this door? Instead of the martial teachings of blade masters, would he find mad ramblings and wife's tales? If that were the case here, then what of the others?

Tarkiansan moved quickly toward what seemed to be the last doorway, as beyond he could see that the shadows were lightening and could make out an obstruction of some kind. He barely paused at the last weapons rack, noting quickly that it contained oddly thick scabbards for normal hilts. The painting showed why, as the hilt ended in what seemed to be three jutting blades. More nonsense! It was time to end this journey and discover if he had wasted his time and gold and the lives of those who had stood in his way.

As he strode down the middle of the canvas floor, his hands were clear of the hilt of his sword but his mind gripped it tightly. The barrier he had seen in the distance turned out to be the first step of what looked like a dais. It was a platform of some kind, but not a large or ornate one. As the shadows retreated, he saw the first thing that caused him to falter — a pair of bare feet. They were in front of the legs of a stool, and under a pair of loose, white, common trousers. Tarkiansan took a few steps closer, and the shadows were gone completely. There, seated casually on a stool, on a dais at the end of this walk of swords, was a bare-footed, bare-chested man with long, white hair and a very hard face. The man's hands rested lightly on his knees, and a low bench lay behind him, upon which were arrayed one of each type of blade that Tarkiansan, the Mounted Terror, had walked passed.





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Tarkiensan spoke, and to his credit, his voice did not shake.

"Are you the keeper of the keys, then? Must I defeat you to gain entry into these rooms of martial knowledge? I do not believe you are the master you pretend to be, but I may hire your artisan!"

The man on the dais spoke in turn.

"You are the one called the Mounted Terror. You are Tarkiensan, commander of the greatest army history has known, the conqueror of a dozen realities, the man who has killed more men than he has seen sunsets."

Tarkiensan, whose hand had finally gripped the hilt of his sword, drew free his blade.

"You name me well, oh master of swords, but yours is not the knowledge of the spirits. My reputation



is well earned and well known, and it is no trick for you to recite it back to me. Are you some elaborate trap constructed by my enemies, desperate enough to bait me with secret knowledge? These doorways better hide an army of your own, because your fakery with the paintings has not shaken my sword hand! See! I hold it steady enough to take your head from where you sit. Now, if there must be a fight before I discover if this place is the fulfillment of promise or simply a sham, pick your choice of weapons and let us begin."

When the man on the stool did not move or reply, Tarkiensan took a step closer. Despite the overwhelming urge to run at him and kill him quickly, Tarkiensan had not survived this long by being reckless. He could not, however, hold back his shout of frustration.

"Come, spirit or demon or fraud, be what you may! You know my reputation. You know I hold but

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lightly to formality in combat. Draw your weapon or I declare your life forfeit at once!”

Just before Tarkiensan abandoned his thin veneer of civility to savage at the still seated man, something caused in him a feeling of alarm. Decades of life in battle had honed Tarkiensan’s sense of his environment, and more than once it had saved him from a knife in the dark. Also, too, decades of murder and standing alone over the bodies of men — with nothing but rewards as a consequence — had left him with a sense of delayed karma. It was both of these aspects that triggered his inner defenses now.

He turned to where the sensation was greatest. At his back. Before him was the expanse of the hallway he had traveled, and it seemed as full now as it had been empty before. There, in the ambient glow from the white canvas floor, was a legion of bodies, standing as still and disciplined as his finest troops. He knew them all. There, in the front, he saw jungle-men holding their twisting swords. Scattered nearby were peasants from his own reality, carrying the pole-hafted blades and looking upon him with an utter lack of life in their eyes. Everywhere, crowding the hall with impossible numbers, were the people of the realities he had conquered. Dotted here and there were overwhelmingly large, shadowy figures holding swords nearly twice as long as he was tall; and he knew, somehow, he was facing not only the shades of his past sword strokes, but the victims of his future as well.

Tarkiensan had seen the dead, had lived with the dead and had even eaten the dead when life turned dire; dead bodies held no terror for him. But these were more than enemy soldiers, more than corpses somehow animated to mock life. There was a spirit there, among the masses, and without knowing how he knew, Tarkiensan understood it meant him ill.

The man on the dais finally spoke, but it did not break the mantle of fear that had settled heavily around Tarkiensan’s shoulders or keep his sword hand from shaking; rather, it brought on a finality and a hopelessness that Tarkiensan had never before known.

“Yes, Tarkiensan, this place is real. The knowledge behind these doors is real. And yes, said the master from the paintings, “you will have to fight to gain access to them.” As he spoke he stood and walked passed the shaken Tarkiensan. He stopped and glanced over his shoulder, “But,” he said, before melting into the assembly, “Your fight is not with me.”

The Grail Passage

This hallway appears to be more of a storm tunnel, with a low ceiling lit by a combination of burning torches and fluorescent lights on rusted chains. Pipes run in and out of the walls, leading to destinations unknown. While some pipes leak water, others seem to leak blood. This blood is scalding to the touch and has the amazing property of curing any illness or injury; even if a person were to be boiled to death by sudden immersion in the steaming blood, that individual would immediately come back to life. Bottling the blood has a far lesser effect, healing some wounds but not to the degree that it would fresh from the pipe.

The floor is occasionally damp with blood and water, yellow caution signs marking particularly wet areas. Tiles of ivory and ebony cover the floor of this tunnel, twisted into strange patterns of cups, bloody lances, heads on plates, and crippled kings. Occasionally, a thumping sound comes from the various pipes, shaking them tremendously. The passageway branches off in many directions, twisting and turning in on itself and often ascending and descending over long stretches. Finding one’s way around is easier than it might seem, since many of the pipes are numbered and there are small maps attached to the walls.

After some wandering, visitors will hear scuffling and the roaring of creatures. If they approach the noise, they will arrive at the end of a fight between several reptilian creatures and a man in dirty



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coveralls. He will notice the visitors just as he brains the last of the scaled attackers with a pipe wrench. He'll introduce himself as the Arimathean, the same name as is printed on his coveralls. He'll offer to walk visitors around if they have somewhere in particular to go, warning about the "servants of the Adversary" who wander through the passages.

Along the way, a number of doors and doorways will become evident:

- Door 1: Merely touching this stone door results in passing through to the other side. Upon crossing, A feeling of euphoria and faith will flood over the individual; over time the strange sense of awe will fade.
- Door 2: Written in graffiti on this door is the phrase, "Check your head." No amount of pushing or pounding will budge the portal, and no handle or latch is to be found. Only if those trying to open the door check the top of their heads, will they find a simple brass key. The last individual to have touched the doorway will be the keyholder, and all will now see that the door suddenly has a lock, which can be easily opened.
- Door 3: The corridor turns suddenly to end in an area where all the furniture is triple its normal size. Everything here is to this new scale, from the rug to the torches to the tapestries depicting a classic Grail Procession (a parade displaying a bloody lance, a broken sword, and the Grail itself). The centerpiece of the room is a silver dish filled with blood, upon which rests a humanoid head three times its normal size. Touching the blood causes an individual to lose their balance and fall in, passing through the doorway.
- Door 4: A bas-relief of a crippled man's back, buckled over, adorns the door. The reason for his position is evident: a metal blade protrudes from his upper back, still slick with wet, glistening blood. Opening this door requires that an individual take the blade in both hands and pull it free, cutting both hands while doing so. The flesh of the hands will always end up getting sliced, no matter what precautions are taken. When the blade comes free, it is clearly one half of a sword, with the hilt and a section of blade still missing (see Door 12).
- Door 5: This door is not visible at first, being covered by a tapestry advertising, "Castle of the Maidens." Scandalous pictures adorn the vibrant material. The Arimathean insists that the Hawk of May probably spends his whole paycheck there.
- Door 6: This doorway, actually a set of double metal panels, is preceded by a foyer that appears to be a workshop and boiler room. A time clock is mounted next to the doorjamb; to open the simple doors, each person has to fill out a timecard and "punch in." The Arimathean will not volunteer this information, but he'll demonstrate the process by punching in, saying that he earlier "forgot." Notable elements here include a forge and welding setup, two steam boilers, one for water and the other for the blood of the Martyr, a small break area with a pantry (where mixed in with a bag of apples is a stone apple, the key to Door 9) and a schedule listing other "employees" and their shifts. A small office with information about the area (including notes regarding some of the doors and the code to open Door 14: 33AD) can be found near the back.
- Door 7: This door appears to be made of stained glass, showing a man in a fedora with a bullwhip holding a cup. Men in dark uniforms are pursuing him. A halo surrounds his head, while angelic beings float near the doorway's top. This door opens with a simple push.
- Door 8: Visitors approaching this door will recall the worst setback of their lives. If the Arimathean is present, he will be very wary of approaching this door saying, "Failures either let us know how alone we are in the world or how loved we are." Those who continue on, regardless of their emotional turmoil, discover the door's handle turns with ease.
- Door 9: A comic strip covers this door, showing Stephen Minnow having a revelation about gravity. The last panel depicts an indentation where the apple that fell on his head should be. The Arimathean knows that the apple is the key to the door, but doesn't know where it is. He suggests that the group quest for the fruit, since it would "really help him out".
- Door 10: This door opens easily enough, but only appears to lead to another part of the hallway. If present, the Arimathean stays remarkably silent here, offering no information. This door is a test; visitors have not actually passed to the next room. On the walls, they will notice graffiti

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challenging their beliefs. If they press on, they will find more and more “proof” that what they hold dearest is not true, and they will even hear voices whispering convincing arguments in their heads. Simply pressing on will only find them more of the same, and lead them nowhere. To defeat this test, individuals must make a positive act of their faith evident. For example, painting over the graffiti or finding a flaw in the “reasoning” of the voices will be enough to reveal a rusty door around the next corner.

- Door 11: Approaching this door causes an undefinable nervousness. At first, the gateway appears to be a plane glass door, painted in a multitude of hues. Closer inspection will show that the color actually comes from miniature depictions of atrocities done in the name of faith; each scene moves as if alive, acting itself out in shocking detail on the door. If the Arimathean is present, he'll say something along the lines of “Think before you drink.”
- Door 12: This door is a bas-relief of a crippled man being stabbed in the chest with what appears to be a real metal sword. The door seems to be held shut by the sword; pulling at the weapon's hilt will dislodge it from the carving and reveal that it is broken about 8 inches above the hilt. Although not intact, it is still incredibly sharp and especially effective against the reptilian creatures. If someone finds the missing blade (see Door 4), and repairs the sword (in the workshop, for example), the individual will not only have a potent weapon but will also receive a flash of enlightenment.
- Door 13: A plain wooden door has a note tacked to it: “I think the Little Emperor has been breaking in and stealing the keys. Best teach him a thing or two should you encounter him. The First Sorcerer.” The Arimathean will hastily pull the note away, if he is present, and put it into a pocket that seems full of such notes. Return visits to this door will result in the discovery of more notes, from prophetic poetry to requests to stop annoying habits; some messages seem clearly aimed at the visitors.
- Door 14: This door appears to be a vault, with a traditional push-button panel controlling the lock. Inscribed on the door is the following:

TO LITTLE LANNIE CARMICHAEL
FOR ALL HIS WORK...P.S.247
CHRISTMAS PAGEANT 1932

Only one code, properly typed into the panel, will unlock the vault. The Arimathean doesn't know what it might be, but will suggest looking around since things tend to pop up all the time.

Coming at different times will result in possibly meeting other custodians, including the Hawk of May (who constantly gets calls on a cell phone from past and present lovers), Bors (who is diligent about taking notes on everything) and the Knight of the Cart (who complains about having to work overtime and the annoying management).

Servants of the Adversary

These reptilian creatures are a constant bane to the Arimathean and his work. Often found trying to damage the pipes, the beasts vary greatly in appearance — except for their everpresent scaly skin and sharp claws. They range in power from very weak to overwhelmingly robust, and often display abilities related to despair, deception, and the forsaking of beliefs. They wander freely, but always avoid the area around Door 5. The Arimathean claims it's because of “union rules.”

The Boiler at Door 6

Someone might get the idea to try to drink blood straight from the boiler. This is a dangerous proposition, as the blood is under approximately 200 pounds of pressure per square inch. While the



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healing properties of the blood will restore any fool attempting a drink, the flash of gaseous blood will make a mess and anger whoever is on duty to no end. A better solution is to find the blow down valve (used to safely put liquid from the boiler into the sewer system) and tap blood from there. While still hot, it won't be as dangerous. Pouring the blood into a cup will sap its potency; for full effect it has to be drunk straight from the boiler.

The effects of drinking from the Boiler of the Martyr will vary based on the individual and their beliefs. At the very least, the drinker will be cured of all illnesses and infirmities. The Arimathean won't volunteer information regarding drinking from the boiler, since it makes a big mess.

The Rite of Pentacles

The air in the hallway is warm and heavy, though it is kept fresh by a constant flow, drawn first one way and then the other, back and forth in some set pattern. Each breeze carries a heavy richness with it, the smell of damp loam filling the nostrils. The light has the same heavy quality, seeming to fall over objects, mounding them in shadows like wet clay.

Seven and seven again, the doorways break the rough black surface of one wall. The first of these portals is open, or it would be were it not blocked by the contents of the room that lies beyond. Gold coins. Stack upon stack of gold coins, rising from the floor to (presumably) ceiling height; the ridged edges of the coins glowing faintly in the light. Each stack has been carefully assembled – not a coin is out of place by so much as a fraction of an inch, and the stacks are pressed so close together that no casual touch has the slightest effect. Even if there is only this single layer of gold, for nothing past the gold wall is visible, the treasure is still worth a small fortune in and of itself.

Several feet to the right lies the second door. A fleshy membrane that yields to the touch, but does not



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break, covers the entrance. Warmth rises from it, and every few moments it pulses to an internal beat. Moans of pleasure can be heard from within; countless voices lost in ecstatic cries that rise to a fevered pitch, before starting again with murmured gasps. Some light does spill out from within the room, not enough to make out details, but enough so that from time to time red-tinted silhouettes can be seen shifting and writhing within the chamber.

The third door yields its secrets easily, as if hungry to be opened. Unfortunately, as if following some perverse logic, this portal leads to a much less interesting location. The room stretches off into infinity, and is filled with nothing but mud. Here and there the surface ripples, but this is likely nothing more than rising air bubbles; nothing ever seems to emerge from the clinging, brown depths.

Only a heavy cloth guards the fourth entrance. It is easily pushed aside, and with the slightest opening clouds of sweet scented smoke billow into the corridor. Plump cushions wait within the opulent chamber, arrayed around low tables upon which sit an assortment of strange hookahs – none of which are currently in use. The room is unoccupied, though incense rises from elaborate brass bowls that are scattered throughout the hazy room.

The fifth doorway lies seemingly unprotected. Within the portal, and possibly in the room beyond, shrieks a dust storm. Even while standing safely outside its reach, the wind still tugs at clothes and deposits grit.

Secured by heavy locks, it takes great skill or strength to see what lies beyond the sixth portal. A dank breeze wafts from within, the smells of stagnation and algae rising from the water that covers the floor. Mosquitoes flit about, ready to fall on anyone who comes within reach. From the center of the room rises a rough stone pillar, upon which sits a chalice of silvery metal; the tantalizing wink of gems is noticeable at the object's lip and base.

Halfway down the length of the hall, the seventh door casually yields its secrets. Inside the room, though the term room applies only loosely, is a teeming mass of insects. They skitter and crawl, their carapaces giving rise to a dry rubbing sound as their chitinous bodies scrape in the press. All of the creatures seem to be focused on a common goal: trying to reach the center of the room. At first it seems that they are headed for the grisly center piece of a severed head; until the old man trapped beneath the weight of insects opens his madly rolling eyes, and his thin, piteous mewls reach your ears.

Past the horror show of number seven, the eighth room is a picture of stark beauty. It opens onto a sandy vista, a garden lovingly sculpted by the wind, ever changing as the air currents play beneath the blazing sun.

A clammy fog creeps from the cracks of the ninth door. It chills the skin of those who pass, leaving the faint scent of corruption on everything it touches. Opening the door releases a great cloud of the clinging, stinking stuff, which takes several minutes to clear, even with the constant breeze in the corridor. The source of the fog is a coffin that lies at a 45-degree angle in the center of the room, placed there as if its occupant waits to greet any visitors. The lid of the box is shut, though not tight enough to keep the mist from creeping through the edges.

Those daring the tenth door are confronted simply with themselves. From floor to ceiling, the entryway is filled with an undulating quicksilver surface — which casts back the distorted reflection of all those gazing upon it. It is cold to the touch, and clings hungrily to exposed skin, sucking and drawing at anyone touching it. Even those with long reach have failed to find an end to the strange substance, and pushing in too deep might result in the strange mirror pulling a person entirely into its embrace.

Bars of sturdy metal close off the eleventh room. They prevent entry, but do not entirely block vision. Inside the room are what appear to be men and women. Beautiful beyond mortal reckoning, they sit naked upon a cold stone floor – prevented from much movement by the chains that run from the floor





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to collars about the neck. A few of the figures strain at their bonds, but most sit listlessly... eyes wide and staring at the bars of their cage.

Inside the twelfth room is an occupant seemingly deserving of its imprisonment. Mystical symbols, painted in what looks to be dried blood, cover the floor. In the center of these symbols is bound an inhuman creature. Its skin is a sickly green, and its body ripples with grossly bulging muscles. Wings

flare from its back, the barbed spurs at the tips of them brushing both floor and ceiling. It faces away from the door, straining within its intangible prison. The creature snarls and screams profanity in a strange language, as it tries to get to the far side of the room, where waits a small child. Eyes wide with terror, the fragile little girl huddles just outside the demon's reach. There seems to be no way to step inside the room without also stepping within the confines of the painted symbols.



While thirteen is unlucky for some, it is a boon to others. Within the well-lit chamber is a long wooden table, benches running along the two sides. Food, freshly made, of every possible description is heaped upon the table. The mingling smells of the feast drift throughout the room and into the hall.

Given the wondrous and terrible vistas each door displays, the fourteenth door

seems somewhat disappointing. Difficult to open, it finally yields — to reveal only nothingness. Beyond the portal is a blackness through which nothing can be seen or heard. Reaching into the darkness reveals a breeze, and a sense of great space can be felt; but it is impossible to tell what might lie beyond, without first plunging into the great emptiness.

The Hall of Torches

Gentle hands light musky, oily torches all along a dim hallway. Dark purple, flowery patterns press into a gold and crimson rug, covering icy cold bricks. The bricks that remain visible seem to scatter, zig-zagging down the narrow corridor dotted with small, round tables and crimson brocade chairs. The torches' fiery gleam illuminates a cramped, shadowy path that ends somewhere in the distance. Small dots of fire burn at the end of the hallway; an elderly hand lights dripping, wax candles. Overlapping

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voices flicker in the darkness, a loud shriek pierces their mystery.

"You old fool. That's what you is and you are, you old coot." A woman's voice rises to meet the cobbled ceiling. A candle lights her round face. She's dressed in layers and layers of quilted rags and bits of material — a napkin, a piece of drapery, a page from a gilded book all make up her faded dress. She clutches to her ample bosom some black, sooty rags and a pile of inky-blue feathers that shimmer beautifully in the candlelight.

"Right you are my large, blubbering wonder of the ancient world. Got to light these candles, you know." The 'old coot' gingerly lights another wooden wand and touches a long, spindly wick. The wick kisses the flame, sparks, and then hisses in disgust.

"By the gravestones of Hemnegeu," a tinny voice yells, "are you trying to burn us down?"

"Oh, quiet you," the wife reprimands, "Yes, you are quiet and be *shushed*."

"Now see here, annoying hag. If anyone's going to be tellin' the doors and their knockers to shut up, it'd be me."

"Oh, of course, you wrinkled prune you are, my husband. How could I forget? Aren't you the smart Keeper then? Not that I be havin' no rank, I t'aint. Not anymore."

A door spits and sputters. "Twelve here. And I say you all should just keep quiet."

The old man snorts, while lighting another wooden stick, and whispers under his breath, "I'm working on it; I just can't find me key."

"Well, I never did ask you — never, I did — how many doors are in this drafty place? My rotten, miserable husband with crusty ole' bread for brains."

"Fourteen," the old man stands up, adjusting his emerald green vest and maize-colored fedora. "But it don't do me no good, you devil-woman, if I can't find the Master Key." The man offers his hand to his wife, "Where is it?"

Metallic voices clamor over one another, yelling out commands, begging to be heard.

"Eleven."

"ONE, as in THE FIRST DOOR."

"Three. Open me!"

"Why are you asking *me* where *your* key is?" The man's wife pats down her skirts, buttons and pieces of glass tinkle to the floor. "Sure enough I can straighten out me fine dress I can, but I think I would've 'membered if the Master Key was hiding in one of my pockets. I never lost it when I had it."

"You don't know what you're talking about, Seven's the better door. Why behind me there's —"

"Two. Ignore me at your own peril."

"Oh take pity on a frail, old man. Nym-da-un! If I cannot find that key, they'll never SHUT UP."

A candle gleams to life by an unseen hand. It throws a brownish-yellow cast onto a tall, rectangular box sitting precociously on a stone ledge.

"What's this, then?" The ornery imp creature posing as a doorknocker on Number Fourteen is not amused. "Is this some kind of joke?"





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The man and his wife step back into a gray shadow, where it's safe.

"No one's going to find *that* key using *that* contraption, anyway, Mr. Knocker," the old man states, his voice disgusted and flat.

The imp goes on, "I don't think you or that tottering old witch of yours understands how bad this is. You lose the key, the doors wake up, you invoke *someone* or *something*, the box appears..."

"... that means I really did lose the key," the old man snuffles.

Small, round nostrils flare; the imp grins a wide, toothless grin. "Yep, it's just like when I lost my great, big, brass ring. Now, if you look carefully, Number Five's got it."

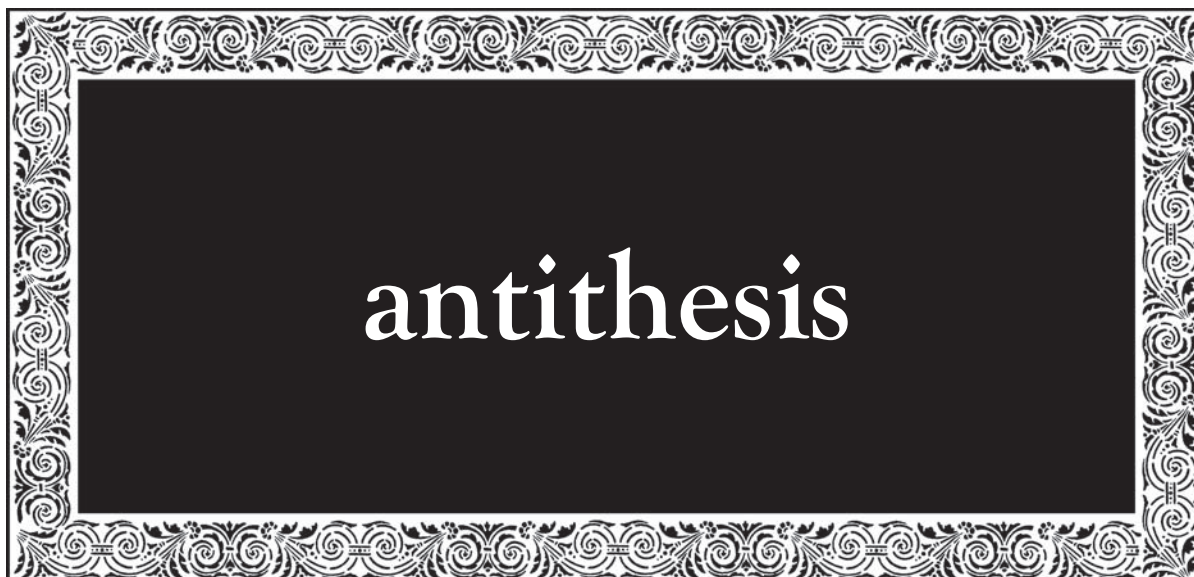
"What? You lost the key you crabby, old mollusk?" the wife's voice shrills to the ceiling. "But I already had it, so that means—"

"— someone else must find it." The three chime in unison.

The imp's black ears twitch in glee. "Hope whoever it is will open me."

"Or me," another door echoes.

"Or me."



Nowhere lies beyond the broken window frames of the Waste Land. It is a place of solitude and nothingness. Only the Lodestar and the Chiroptera reside here; though on occasion, Sarcophagi will come to clear their minds and meditate on the Nine Enigmas. Their stay in this place is always brief. To wallow in the absence of creation for too long is to surrender to madness.

Nowhere

Stepping beyond, the cold wind like a sharp knife, freezing air rolling across the pale surface. The knife brings numbness, entering the flesh like a poison painted on the blade.

Snow everywhere. Still white, nothing for miles. The sky the color of dead metal, not day, not night. But darkening. Breathing out, warmth evaporates into the air, a fragile mist floating away into nothing. Ahead, the path ends, buried in a drift. Next to it, tire tracks, thick ruts in the snow, leading away.

Following the tracks, the frozen landscape stretches out on either side, blank and wide. Ahead, only the horizon, no waypoint to gauge distance. Behind, the snow fading into flatness. The drifts passing on either side, frozen dunes in a desert of ice. With enough distance covered, enough steps taken through the snow, some warmth returns. Moving faster, the tire tracks on the ground continuing through the snow, crisp and fresh, no sign of ending. Glancing back, looking to the ground, the footprints more than a few paces behind have vanished. The snow falls in on itself, smoothing away the evidence of passage. Only the tire tracks remain, leading away into the cold darkness.

In the distance, something shines. A light that does not flicker or waver, but blinks slowly off and on. The light is red and low over the ground. Struggling forward now, fighting against the grasping cold, moving toward the light. Breathing out, breath coming in short rasps, tiny clouds of fog dancing in the air. Closer to the light and there is a sound, hissing and crackling, without rhythm or tone. The light takes shape, small and round, staining the snow around it a deep red. Behind it, something bigger.

The light is a tail light, the larger shape a van, white like the snow; an ambulance. The other taillight obscured by the rear door, left hanging open. The sound coming from inside, clearer now. Radio static, formless white noise, electronic snow leaking out through the open door.

Stopping, swallowing. The cold causing the throat to constrict, making it painful. The vehicle is still, silent. No sign of a driver or crew, no noise but the static. The empty ambulance quiet and waiting, patient. Opening the rear door further, peering round, finding the back devoid of passengers, the bed of the stretcher barren of life. Medical equipment hanging on hooks, clipped to brackets, stowed on



NOWHERE

shelves and in compartments. All fresh, unused, but at the same time old, expired. Arranged carefully and left, pristine and sterile.

Climbing into the back, closing the doors. Breathing out, condensation beads on the glass of the rear window. The static filling the cabin, a distant roar like the illusion of the sea heard in the shell of a dead creature. The driver side door open. A map left on the seat, faded and old, the names impossible to read in the half-light, turned to a page with no towns, no cities marked. Lines drawn upon the map, going nowhere, curling and crossing each other. The radio on the dashboard, a small light shining, the tuning dial next to the speaker where the hissing, popping static pours forth.

Playing with the dial, turning it this way, that way. No voices, no music. Only degrees of white noise. No broadcast here, the entire spectrum caught between stations. No signal to receive. Lost somewhere in the snow.

Looking up from the radio, it is lighter outside. The sky now paler, grayer than the snow, but perceptibly less dark. Clearer now, the light breaking across the sky, a slow dawn heralded by the static.

There are dark shapes out there, across the snow. They are not small.

Opening the driver side door, looking to the nearest looming shape. Coming closer. Low, half submerged in a snow drift. Another vehicle. Wiping snow away with frozen fingers, uncovering the body of a police cruiser, abandoned under the ice. Like the ambulance, the door open. Inside, the interior light burning. Breathing out, the breath misting, tiny water particles catching the light. Empty. A smell of old smoke and leather polish, that locker-room stench of sweat. The sense of something well-used, then cast away.

The radio, on the dash, the dial big and round, left on standby. Thumbing the button, the radio coming to life.

Nothing but static, and outside, the snow.

It has not lightened more, but pulling back out of the cruiser, the other shapes in the snow, stand out as other vehicles. There, another car, a sedan. A pick-up, its headlights just visible under a drift. In the distance, what looks like a bus, long and wide, almost completely buried.

All lost, cast adrift. The drivers gone, each vehicle like a gravestone. Left together, sharing nothing but the silent air and the frozen land. Nothing on the airwaves but the static, a dead signal wandering through the remains of a blizzard.

Silence between the vehicles. Silence inside them, nothing hiding within the metal shells. Moving from one car to the next, footprints disappearing in the snow. This place does not record activity, does not register movement. Walk in the snow, but never leave so much as a footprint. Search a radio band and find only the howl of white noise. All that remains here is that which is abandoned, used and discarded. This place is the end of the journey, the end of movement. It is entropy. Here there is nothing, here is Nowhere.

All around, the snow lies, spreading over the submerged forms of the abandoned machines, driven together and buried apart, drifting on the frozen waves, floating on the white noise between stations.

Tilak

The Lodestar is the avatar of the Logos, the voice of *Communion* given form. In this place, he meditates and sees himself reflected in the emptiness. He contemplates paths not taken and the infinite possibilities

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born of freewill. He is the conduit between Nowhere and experience, tabula rasa and evolution.

Predation

The Chiroptera glide the empty currents of Nowhere. Rarely will they openly step forth from their rotted window frames. Chiroptera prefer to lie in wait for unsuspecting prey, pulling them into the nothingness. Most souls plucked by the Chiroptera are driven mad by the emptiness of Nowhere, with few returning to the Silhouette Rouge.

Prolonged exposure to Nowhere has robbed the Chiroptera of their vision; their other senses, however, are keen enough to compensate. Chiroptera are incredibly strong, though their emaciated appearance belies this truth. These creatures born of Nowhere are incapable of speech, instead screeching and wailing at their prey and at each other. Chiroptera are primal instinct devoid of higher thought.





marionettes

The Others are as curious and diverse as the rooms of the Prima Materia. Some are monstrous in appearance; some wear human form. Deep thinkers and shallow minds alike are found amongst their number. Some are sociable and eager to aid one another, while some are strict isolationists or apathetic to needs not their own (*or the human condition is simply too alien for them to understand*). In short, the whole gamut of human thought and emotion can be found amongst these beings, as well as experiences extrinsic to anything a human could fathom.

Many of the Others move about with purpose, though some wander directionless, arching and craning their heads about as if trying to define their environment or get their bearings. Most sense that there is a grand design at work, that their presence in the Silhouette Rouge serves a greater calling, even if they cannot see or understand that calling for themselves.

The Others are often devoid of memory and past. Many are not even sure if they ever existed outside of this place. However, there are some who recollect, albeit distantly, the paths they have trod. Those gifted with histories predating their arrival to the Silhouette Rouge often speak of the past in cold and distant terms, more like recorded images in their minds rather than memories rich in emotional resonance.

Although the Others may freely travel the whole of the Silhouette Rouge, most keep to the Prima Materia. They wander the trinity of passages and gather in the Grand Foyer, although they are always careful not to disturb the twisted grotesqueries that haunt the chamber. The twenty-one rooms typically hold little interest for the Others, though some will cross their thresholds.

Though many of these entities are omnipresent in the Silhouette Rouge, a few seem to come and go, disappearing for periods of time or never returning.

Perhaps some leave the Silhouette Rouge, having solved the Nine Enigmas? Perhaps they are simply residing in the rooms and hallways of the Prima Materia, away from prying eyes? Perhaps those who never return have fallen victim to dark destinies? Perhaps the Others can simply come and go as they please – but go where?

Those who reside in the Silhouette Rouge are as deep a mystery as the Silhouette Rouge itself.

Circumscription

The entities who wander the Silhouette Rouge are different from the colony in many ways. While the Sarcophagi have limitless possibilities open to them, the Others are often fixed into certain actions,

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instincts, or modes of thinking, as if preprogrammed to respond in set ways. These beings are usually true to their natures, while Sarcophagi evolve and change their worldviews.

Sarcophagi are three-dimensional, dynamic characters. The Others are flat and static, locked into an eternal holding pattern.

Sarcophagi are defined by nine traits. Only three traits define the Others: Awareness, Violence, and Personality.

The Others have specific, defined abilities to draw upon; they do not have Mystery traits.

The Others do not have protective exoskeletons; they do not have Chitin.

The Others often fall victim to the wrath of reality spasms; they do not have Metamorphosis.

The Others cannot communicate with the Logos or manipulate the Principles of Creation; they do not have Communion.

The Others do not exist as colonies; they do not have Rapport.

The Others do not have Salubrity; they have Strength.

The Others do not have Birthrights.

Oddities

Although the Others do not have *Mystery traits* or *Birthrights*, they do have special abilities called *Oddities*. *Oddities* are skills, knowledge, powers, or abilities unique to each being.

Strength

The Others are not symbiotically linked as the Sarcophagi are. They do not have shared health points like the colony's *Salubrity*; each entity suffers and heals its own damage. *Strength* is the measure of how much injury an Other can sustain and how easily the individual heals. There are two different numbers assigned to *Strength*: the maximum rank and the current amount. The maximum rank is the starting *Strength* as well as the upper amount of damage the specific Other can sustain. The current amount of *Strength* reflects the amount of damage the Other has already suffered and has yet to recover.

The Others do not have *Chitin*, so they cannot absorb damage; thusly, they always sustain the maximum amount of damage from an attack.

The Others can endure damage equal to their *Strength* rank before they are rendered unconscious. Any damage beyond this point leads to death.

The Others heal a number of *Strength* points per gaming session equal to their maximum *Strength* rank.

Missing Sequences

Dozens, if not hundreds, of Others walk the Silhouette Rouge. Presented below is a small sampling of possibilities. *Oddities*, *trait* ranks, and maximum *Strength* for most of these Others can be found in the **Appendix**.



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The Machinery of Virtue

The Divine Tesseract. The Eater of Sins. The Impossible Apparatus. The Machinery of Virtue has many appellations. It can usually be found in the Grand Foyer, though sometimes it will wander into one of the hallways of the Prima Materia. On some occasions, it will appear in two places at the same time.

The Machinery of Virtue is a series of nine spinning rings set about a single axis. Each ring rotates at incredible speed, out of synch with the others. A series of interlocking gears grind away within the Machinery, suspended by an unseen force. Dozens of taught filaments stretch out from the axis like spokes on a wheel, tethering the nine rings. Blue electricity crackles along these filaments and induces vertigo in those too close to the Machinery. A faint hum, like a thousand souls chanting as one, emanates from the heart of the construct.

The Machinery of Virtue occupies four spatial dimensions. This enables the object to perform gyrations otherwise impossible. When the Divine Tesseract is rotating across the Prima Materia, it will sometimes leave behind a ghostly afterimage, a trail marking its passage. The Others call this the Wake of the Nine Rings.

The Precession is a mystery cult that worships the Impossible Apparatus. They march behind it, cloaked in black robes with hoods, heads bowed. Each carries a candle, clasped between the palms. Some sing, while others do not. The Precession believes the Machinery is the gateway to transcendence, an escape from the Silhouette Rouge, which they see as a prison for their souls. The Precession meditates on every motion of the Apparatus, seeing these gyrations as holding the key to freedom. When one of the Precession deems himself enlightened enough, he will jump into the Eater of Sins. The spinning rings and razor-toothed gears grind the individual into countless bits, the remains spewing about the Grand Foyer in a gory shower. A hint of smoke wafts from the construct, the byproduct of electricity searing flesh. The Precession believes this act of destruction cleanses the soul and severs it from base flesh; those who remain rejoice at the good fortune of the one who has just been so violently freed.

As long as anyone can remember, the Machinery Of Virtue has existed in the Silhouette Rouge. It has long been a topic of conjecture amongst the Others. While few doubt the sentience of the Machinery, most ascribe it no spiritual or cognitive abilities.

The Minotaur

The Silhouette Rouge is the dark profile of the Logos cast against the sun. It is all paths and all destinations, all possibilities and all outcomes. The landscape of all our choices is a labyrinth, and all labyrinths are echoes of the Silhouette Rouge.

- Sol Invictus to the Lost One

In existence, there are paths walked and roads not taken. Both are haunted by the Minotaur.

The beast slouches its way through the labyrinth, sniffing and snarling at the air. Its eyes burn like twin embers; its hot breath reeks of sulfur. The Minotaur moves with a purpose.

It hunts Sarcophagi.

The Silhouette Rouge is a labyrinth, invented by the Logos, to cage the Minotaur. The beast knows this and seeks vengeance on the children of its captor. The Minotaur spends every moment searching, hunting, yearning for prey. It wanders up and down the Conch, across each level, stalking Sarcophagi. Once it has the scent of its quarry, it thunders like a juggernaut through the labyrinth, allowing nothing



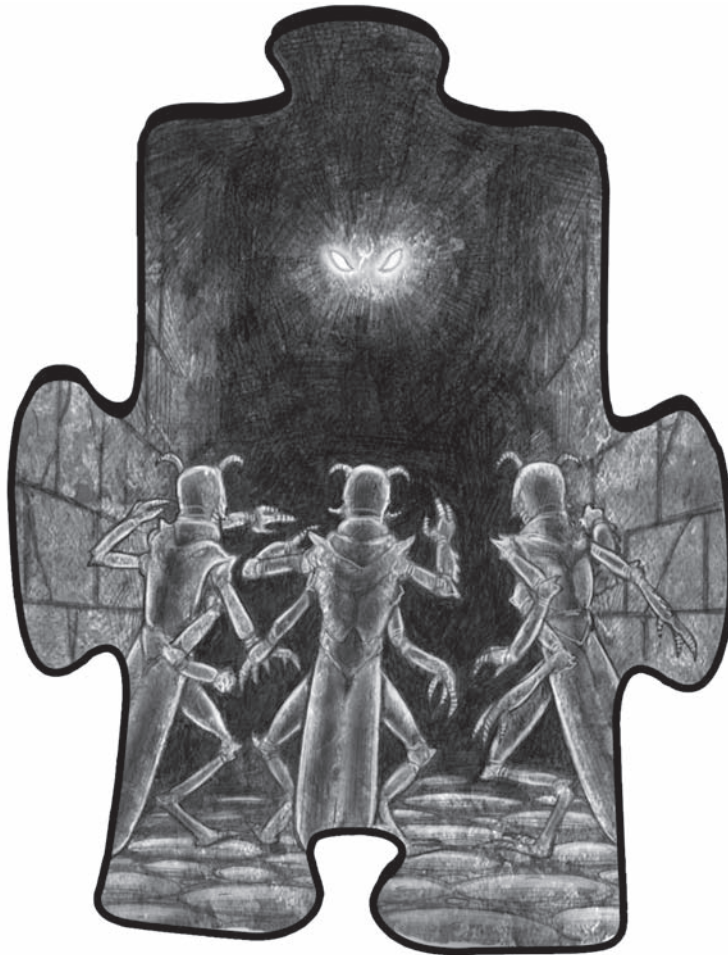
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to stay its course. The Minotaur is a force of nature. It will never surrender. The Minotaur fights until either it or its prey are vanquished.

The Minotaur is awesome in stature, towering over four meters. In battle, the beast prefers to pin with its horns then bludgeon with its fists. Though its powerful legs and hooves can trample Sarcophagi with ease, the Minotaur seldom attacks in this fashion.

The Minotaur is forever. Should the beast be killed, its form will collapse into wisps of red smoke and dissipate into nothingness. However, it will only be gone for a time. Inevitably, the Minotaur returns, angrier than ever.

To the beast of the labyrinth, all Others are nonexistent. There is only itself and the Sarcophagi. The Minotaur is so narrowly focused on the hunt that all Others cease to exist in its eyes. The beast lives only for vengeance.



Widow-Heart

There once was a beautiful butterfly who dreamed it was a woman. In her flights of fancy, the butterfly traveled across creation, experiencing many wondrous things. The universe was full of infinite possibility, and it was hers to cherish. The butterfly was overcome with bliss, so much so that she decided to never awake from her dream world.

In time, things changed. The dream of the butterfly turned into a nightmare. Though creation was filled with joy and light, it was also filled with sorrow and darkness. This was something the butterfly never expected. *What did she know? She was only a butterfly dreaming to be a woman.* She came to learn of bitterness and mistrust, becoming intimate with both. Disillusioned, she decided to awake from this dream turned sour. Unfortunately, so much time had passed that the butterfly forgot how to wake up. Horrified, she fell into alternating states of anger and depression.

In nature, all things cycle and change, and butterflies understand this better than most. *After all, were they not something else before casting aside their cocoons?* Sadly, this truism was forgotten by the butterfly, for her mind had become clouded with mistrust and her heart hardened by sorrow. The butterfly was so overcome with darkness that she could not see even the faintest sliver of light.

With time, however, the darkness fell away — and this time the light was blinding. The butterfly met the one to whom she was destined, her soul mate, and again she knew joy. Though her lover was different from her in so many ways (after all, she was a butterfly only dreaming to be a woman) he completed her, making her whole.





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Her long nightmare metamorphosed back into a beautiful dream.

Then, one day, her soul mate was gone. There was no goodbye, no fond farewell. He was simply gone. For a time, she waited for him to return. For even longer, she searched creation for any trace of his presence.

Nothing.

The butterfly is still dreaming that she is a woman, but the dreams have again turned dark. Her black mourning gown displays her sorrow for all to see. However, she will allow no creature, great or small, to see her weep; black veils conceal her tears.

The butterfly mourns the passing of innocence and joy.

The Speaker of Secrets

Secrets have power. This is clear to all who possess them. There is a palpable thrill to be had from knowledge unspoken, from information kept from those who would possess it.

But there is a danger to keeping secrets – beyond the mundane envy and threats of those who desire such knowledge for themselves. Secrets fall under the demesne of language, and it is the nature of language to be communicated, to be spread by the lips and tongues of a multitude. A secret opposes this natural order, for it is a snatch of language that is restrained, imprisoned for its value.

The universe abhors imbalance, and at the moment that the first creature made a conscious decision to withhold information for its own benefit, an opposing force came into being. Initially a negligible thing, it has grown with the number of secrets kept, becoming a significant being in its own right.

The Others call this force the Speaker of Secrets. It goes where it wishes, paying no heed to doors, locks, and wards. None can predict its passage.

Indeed, no sage or scientist has proven able to determine how the Speaker chooses its victims. Those who conceal nothing are safe, that much is certain, and evidence suggests the entity more often than not chooses those who make secrets their life's work. However, this is not always so. A youth who conceals nothing more than knowledge of a present he has purchased for a loved one will sometimes be taken, while spymasters and traders in knowledge still walk untouched.

Once the Speaker of Secrets has selected its prey, it is relentless in its pursuit. Fleeing or hiding may buy some small period of grace, but in the end the Speaker of Secrets cannot be eluded. There is only one escape from this entity: to voluntarily surrender all the secrets bound in the heart. Furthermore, the secrets cannot simply be expunged into the empty air – there must be an audience, for whom the

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secrets have meaning, to ensure that the knowledge is truly disbursed. In truth, few are able to avail themselves of this path. Rare is the being who has knowledge enough to identify the Speaker of Secrets, and rarer still are those who know what action must be taken.

There are some who are so enamored or empowered by the secret lore they have stored up that they will futilely attempt to evade the Speaker, doubting the stories they have heard and convincing themselves they can succeed where all Others have failed. Some manage to elude the Speaker for a while, but eventually no being escapes its pursuit.

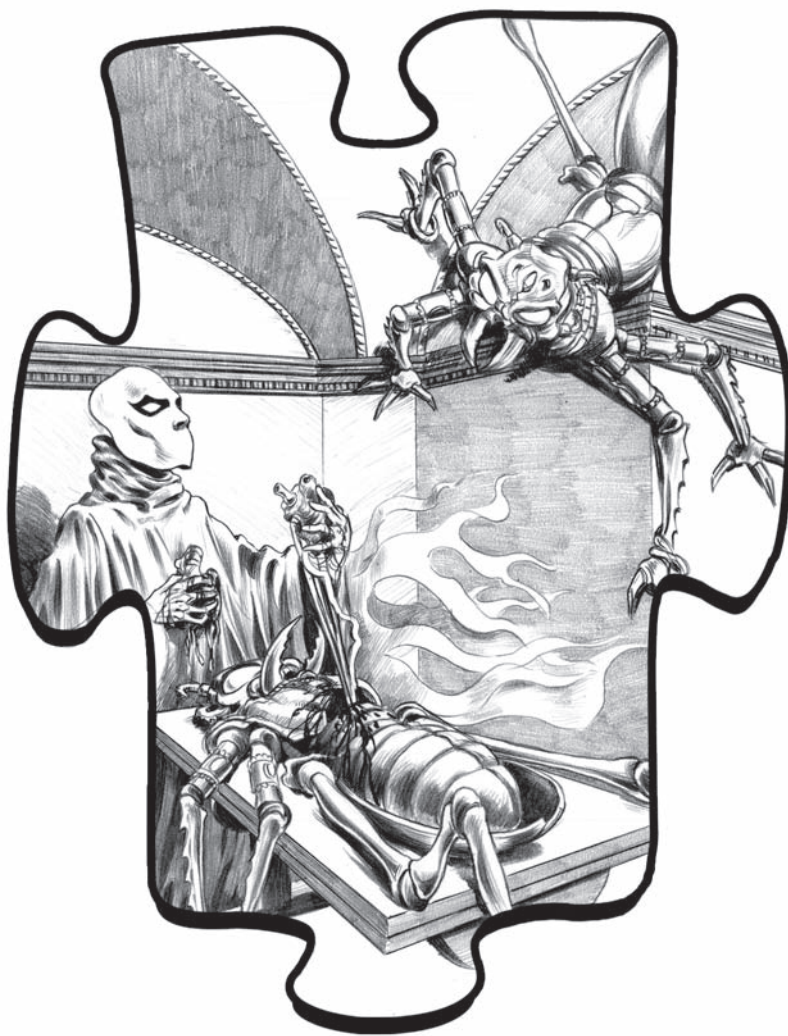
For those who possess arcane learning, the Speaker of Secrets is easy to identify. Most notable is the mask it wears for a face. Alabaster white, it is inlaid with black enamel, dark as obsidian, which serves to outline its features. The black tracings depict, in exquisite detail, a calm face upon the mask, closed eyes and a delicate nose. The lower part of the face is blank, a barren expanse of gently curving whiteness where the mouth should be.

The rest of the Speaker's form is swathed in robes that always blow and flutter, even in the stillest of air. From within the robes emerges a gentle clinking, the sound of metal tapping against metal. This is the only sound the Speaker of Secrets makes during its pursuit, for it has no mouth and stands mute.

Those who flee find the Speaker of Secrets drifts slowly but inexorably after them, its rags trailing on the ground, clinking all the while. Those foolhardy enough to attempt to fight discover that they can find no purchase within its robes, which billow aside and reveal that there is no form to attack. Striking the mask has no effect; even the most forceful blow cannot mar the perfect whiteness of its form.

Whether they choose to flee or to fight, no one can struggle for long against the Speaker of Secrets. Beneath the robes, chains are concealed that coil and writhe with a will of their own, twisting about their target and binding tight. At first, the tug of the chains is almost gentle, as they lift the poor soul from the ground and bring the secret-keeper face to face with the Speaker's expressionless visage. It is at that moment that the chains begin to squeeze, binding tighter and tighter.

After a few minutes, the bloody ruin that was once a living being is dropped unceremoniously to the



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floor, the dripping chains whirling under the now-stained robes, disappearing from sight. Finally, the Speaker of Secrets dips a finger into the victim's blood and scrawls a simple mouth-shape, barely more than a circle, on the flawless lower section of its mask.

With this, the Speaker finds its voice. Without moving from over the slowly cooling corpse of its victim, it begins to utter the secrets that were previously locked in the mind of its prey. Those nearby hear the secrets spoken in a sibilant whisper that seems to emanate from any and every source of light that falls upon them; even the faintest of candle flames will temporarily have a voice.

With its duty discharged, the Speaker turns and fades into the nearest shadow. The only sign of its passing is the faint rattling of chains and the crushed form of its victim.

Justin St. Just

Justin St. Just walks as a man, though he is certainly not one. He is an abstraction, a concept given flesh. He is the embodiment of mystery. His facial features are smooth, nearly effeminate. His gentleman's suit is as white as snow, his necktie as red as blood. His black shoes are always shined to the point of reflection, and his gold cufflinks sparkle when the lighting is just right. Justin St. Just takes pride in his appearance.

Justin St. Just has no eyes, yet still he sees.

He is a solitary man, preferring to walk alone. He does not discourage accompaniment, but he will never seek it. Unlike many Others, Justin St. Just spends a fair amount of time on the upper level of the Silhouette Rouge, most often walking the Shadow of the Grand Foyer. He has a particular interest in the statue of Sol Invictus.

Justin St. Just is usually pensive, rarely speaking. When he does, his speech is steeped in allegory and metaphor. His voice rarely rises above a whisper. Pregnant pauses punctuate every few words.

I reside in all the attics of creation. As we are speaking, I am in your attic.

Justin St. Just is fond of these words, but never elaborates upon them beyond a sly grin.

The Silhouette Rouge has no attic.

Sol Invictus

The black of his suit reflects infinity. Where his head should be, resides a sun as brilliant as any in the heavens.

Sol Invictus keeps his own counsel. He wanders the Grand Foyer and hallways of the Prima Materia, often pausing at the Operating Theatre. He never knocks on this door. He never attempts entry. He merely stops and stares off into infinity.

How can one with no head stare?

During these meditations, Sol Invictus never speaks. Otherwise, he is approachable.

Sol Invictus and Justin St. Just are similar in many ways. However, Sol Invictus is far less reticent than Justin St. Just, and far less enigmatic. The words of Sol Invictus, while poetic, are comprehensible at first listen. Justin St. Just speaks entirely in riddles. There is a connection, a kinship of sorts, between



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these two entities. Neither will speak of it, but it is obvious to most who have had dealings with the two.

Sol Invictus sympathizes with the colony, and will do anything he can to help them. Mostly, this aid comes in the form of advice, though he is not unwilling to assist in other ways. There is little Sol Invictus does not know about the Others who walk the Prima Materia. If asked, he is all too willing to share this information with the colony.

Hollow Men

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw.
Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade
without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us – if at all – not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

The Dark

There is power in sacrifice.

Tales told and retold call it by a multitude of names: the Crawler in Shadow, the Formless Lord, the Meet of Shadows. However, the name that rings truest is simply the Dark.

In truth, the entity has no name or identity of its own, and therein lays its tragedy and its terror.





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The Dark was once a being of flesh and thought, but it surrendered form and ego in exchange for power. Three sacrifices were made, and with each offering the Dark's power grew. The first sacrifice was the physical self, the second forfeiture was memory, and the third to be given was identity. With these three willing sacrifices, the Dark forever lost its place in the universe. The last offering accounts for the varied stories of the Dark's origin; without identity, the being's true history and past are snuffed out, leaving it a pointless nothing existing in an endless present.

There are those who believe that no being can survive without identity, but this is false. The Dark is proof that existence stretches beyond identity. As formless and lacking thought as it is, the Dark has garnered too much power at too great a cost for it to vanish completely.

The memory the Others hold of its existence prevents it from dwindling away.

And so it remains, its formless black shape shifting and flowing like syrup as it drifts aimlessly through the Silhouette Rouge. At times it intersects with the Others, provoking more stories. On rare occasions, it mindlessly destroys those unable to avoid it or those foolish enough to attack or impede its purposeless progress.

For the most part it simply serves as a curiosity and lesson, a reminder of the dangers and cost of sacrificing one's self in return for power or knowledge. The Dark may have acquired more of both these things than all but a handful of beings, but it cannot understand or utilize the fruits of its sacrifice.

The lesson of the Dark is simple: Do not seek power overmuch, or you may find yourself unable to regret it.



Q'wtz'tryql

Scarabs dripped from crimson storm clouds. The cracks in the concrete were bleeding apathy, but the pig-child didn't seem to mind. We could see the old man emerging from those ghostly woods, dressed for a funeral, reeking of bile and bubblegum. Things were quickly turning dark. Our attentions shifted to the glass cradle – empty yet swaying to the music of an invisible symphony. It mocked our thoughts in a melodic voice, knowing that the Martyr was still missing. Our hearts went numb. We knew winter was coming.

Q'wtz'tryql is a sentient dream given physical form.

Q'wtz'tryql glides the hallways of the Prima Materia at a slow and deliberate pace. The scent of jasmine and sour milk presages its coming, making Q'wtz'tryql easy to avoid, which most choose to do. However, there are those who deliberately seek out this entity. They step into its prismatic haze, hoping to tumble into a never-ending dream of eternal bliss.

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Those who fall into Q'wtz'tryql find themselves lost in an abstract environment. Symbolism, nonsense, and the absurd abound. They are all within Q'wtz'tryql, who is endless within itself.

Q'wtz'tryql is as vast as any dream.

Q'wtz'tryql has a darker side, as all dreams do. When this aspect is in ascendance, Q'wtz'tryql is a nightmare made manifest. The darkest fears and most frightening traumas imaginable are all reflected within Q'wtz'tryql.

Some who enter Q'wtz'tryql are deposited elsewhere on the Prima Materia after a few moments. Some go missing for years. Some who enter, never return. Everyone who experiences Q'wtz'tryql is profoundly changed: some for the better, some for the worse.

Q'wtz'tryql longs to share its wisdom. It speaks in the secret tongue of the Silhouette Rouge, but few understand its message. Q'wtz'tryql whispers and shouts to those trapped within its boundaries, but communication with other entities is eternally difficult; Q'wtz'tryql's thoughts manifest only as symbolic iconography, and his wisdom is merely the stuff of dreams.

The Nihilist

Complex locking mechanisms keep the windows of the Prima Materia sealed at all times.

The Nihilist ponders the mystery of the locks.

He is unkempt, dressing the part of the tatterdemalion.

His thoughts are of things other than material existence.

When no one is else is around, the Nihilist gently sobs to himself.

He is always at one of the windows.

The Nihilist ponders the mystery of the locks.

Kai-tang Nim Jin-Yao

The master Kai-tang nim Jin-yao walks the Shadow of the Grand Foyer and listens. The winds howl around him, whipping his robes in its fury. The robes are ornate, thick with embroidered gold against the purple field – a sweeping panorama of symbols and esoteric figures. Despite the fact that he has never removed them, they maintain their immaculate state.

Heavy purple veins, crawling worm-like just below his skin, mar Kai-tang's face. He has veins where no one else does; one sags under his left eye, one creeps across the bridge of his nose. They form a fleshy spider's web on his scalp.

Despite his deformity, Kai-tang smiles. He has a smile for everyone, at all times. It is a thin, tight smile, and it looks rather like it was cut in his face with a razor.

His eyes, two burning coals, are the focusing point where untold years of contempt and austerity and self-denial have literally burned holes in his face. It is as if a powerful lantern was blazing behind a cloth that had two holes punched in it.



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The gauntness of his skeletal hands forms a startling contrast to the thick pulpiness of the veins that snake across them. The veins run from the violently purple fingernails all the way up the arms, where they vanish under his voluminous robes. No one has ever seen Kai-tang without these robes, and the state of the body underneath is unknown. There are rumors that his body is that of a voluptuous woman, or furry — with six teats — like a dog, or simply a mass of writhing purple tentacles. These rumors remain unsubstantiated.

The wind howls.

Kai-tang nim Jin-yao smiles.

Hemnegeu's Maw

Lurching forward, Hemnegeu's Maw crawls its way through the Silhouette Rouge. Its body is nearly nine meters in length and resembles an incredibly large slug. The forward third of the body arches upward above the ground, ending with a misshapen head, vaguely human yet reminiscent of spoiled fruit that has rotted and collapsed in on itself. The beast has no eyes and no mouth. Where the ears should be, long bony arms, each with two elbow joints, extend to the floor. The creature uses the bony appendages to drag itself across the Silhouette Rouge. As it makes its way about, Hemnegeu's Maw leaves a trail of faint red slime that only fades after some time.

Hemnegeu's Maw is the custodian of the Silhouette Rouge. When debris litters any place on the two floors, Hemnegeu's Maw is there. When the grisly remains of Precession suicides stain the Silhouette Rouge, or a crushed secret keeper lies rotting on the floor, Hemnegeu's Maw will come along to clean up the mess. The beast moves slowly, taking considerable time to travel. The slime of Hemnegeu's Maw dissolves whatever filth it contacts.

Though it appears to possess density, Hemnegeu's Maw is insubstantial to the touch. So too is the creature's slime. Since the beast and its trail are ghosts, Hemnegeu's Maw cannot be harmed, and the creature's slime will only erase inanimate matter.

If Hemnegeu's Maw can think or speak, it gives no sign. Silently it crawls across the Silhouette Rouge, tending to its task. Hemnegeu's Maw is a creature of instinct, a force of nature, which fulfills its mission with single-minded determination.





In *Noumenon*, there are multiple obstacles to hinder Sarcophagi. These challenges take many forms: from mysteries, to antagonists, to unimaginable environments. There is literally no end to the diversity of situations the player characters might face. When confronted with an obstacle, when the outcome of an action is in doubt, the game mechanics come into play.

Noumenon uses dominoes to determine the success or failure of an action. The game's mechanics require a standard *double six set* of dominoes. A *double six set* consists of 28 dominoes, and both ends of each domino are marked with a number of pips ranging from zero (blank) to six.

Fundamentals

Noumenon uses the same basic mechanic to resolve all actions in the game. Below is a brief overview of the process:

1. The player declares what his or her character is attempting to do, and the governing *trait* is determined.
2. The Gamemaster sets a *difficulty* level for the action. *Difficulty* levels range from 1 to 9.
3. The Gamemaster randomly draws one domino from the pool and lays it down. This is called the *lead*.
4. The player randomly draws a number of dominoes equal to the rank of the governing *trait* of the character. This is referred to as the *draw*. In the case of group actions, the character with the highest rank, called the *trump*, determines the draw, and the remaining participants each draw one domino.
5. The player connects his or her dominoes to the Gamemaster's *lead* by matching the end of any drawn dominoes to the ends of the *lead*. In the case of a group action, all the players attempt to connect their *draws* to the Gamemaster's. Players *are* allowed to connect their *draws* to one another, but at least one of the group's dominoes must connect to the Gamemaster's *lead*. *Draws* may be connected vertically or horizontally to the *lead* or to one another. A collection of connected dominoes is called a *chain*.
6. Every domino that is connected to the *lead* is called a *victory*. If the number of *victories* equals or exceeds the *difficulty* level, the action is a success. Otherwise, the action has failed.

For example: A PC is attempting to sway a jury's opinion, so *Personality* is the governing trait. This jury is already inclined to believe the character, so the Gamemaster sets a difficulty level of 1. The Gamemaster draws the lead domino. The lead is a 5:6 (a five on one end of the domino and a six on the other). The PC has a *Personality* of 3, so he is allowed to draw three dominoes. He draws a 1:2, a 2:3, and a 2:4. Although the player can connect





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all three of his dominoes to one another, he cannot connect any of them to the Gamemaster's 5:6 lead. The action has failed.

For example: Three PCs are attempting to sway a jury's opinion, so *Personality* is the governing trait. Since the jury is already inclined to believe the characters, the Gamemaster sets a difficulty level of 1. The Gamemaster draws the lead domino. The lead is a 1:6. Two characters have a *Personality* of 3, and the other one has a *Personality* of 2. One of the characters with a *Personality* of 3 is the trump and draws three dominoes. His draw is a 1:2, a 2:5, and a 0:0. The other two players draw one domino each. One draws a 3:6 and the other a 0:4. The trump connects his 1:2 to the Gamemaster's lead (1:6) for one victory. He also connects his 2:5 to the 1:2 he previously laid down. He is unable to connect his 0:0. The second player is able to connect her 3:6 draw, but the third player is unable to connect his draw (0:4) to anything laid down. The action has yielded three victories (the 1:2, the 2:5, and the 3:6), which exceeds the difficulty level (1). The action is a success.

For example: A PC is attempting to strike an opponent, so *Violence* is the governing trait. The difficulty level to land the blow is 2. The Gamemaster draws the lead, which is a 1:2. The character has a *Violence* of 2, so the player draws two dominoes. She draws a 1:3 and a 1:4. The player is able to connect the 1:3 and the 1:4 to the Gamemaster's lead. Since she connected two dominoes, she has achieved two victories. Since this meets the difficulty number (2), the action is a success.

For example: Three PCs are attacking an opponent, so *Violence* is the governing trait. The difficulty level is 2. The Gamemaster draws the lead, which is a 1:2. One character has a *Violence* of 2, and the other characters each have a *Violence* of 1. The character with the highest rank (2) is the trump and draws two dominoes (a 1:3 and a 1:4). The other two players draw one domino each (a 4:6 and a 6:6 respectively). The trump can connect both of his dominoes to the lead (1:2), and the other two can connect their draws as well (the 4:6 connects to the trump's 1:4, and the 6:6 connects to the 4:6). The group has achieved four victories, more than enough to beat the difficulty level (2). While in this instance the colony was victorious, it should be noted that a more effective method of handling group combat — especially against a single opponent — would be to utilize the *swarm* technique; *swarm* is described in detail later in this chapter.

There are a few important elements to keep in mind when creating a *chain*:

- With group actions, the *trump* does not have to connect to the lead. It can connect to the other draw(s) or need not connect at all. As long as the group as a whole connects a number of dominoes equal to or greater than the difficulty level, the action will succeed; it doesn't matter who connects to the *chain*.
- Solo victories are hard to come by, especially for fledgling characters. The colony will have far more success if it works together. The more participants, the greater the chance of success.
- The pool of dominoes drawn from, called the *boneyard*, refreshes after every action (i.e. all draws are returned to the *boneyard* after each action).
- If the lead is a *doublet*, i.e. both ends are identical (1:1, 2:2, 3:3, etc.), it is much harder to connect to, especially during solo actions. Bad luck might sometimes befall the colony.
- If two characters have the same rank in a *trait*, one must be designated the *trump*. In these instances, determining the *trump* is left to the discretion of the Gamemaster and players (with the GM having final say in the matter).

The mechanics of *Noumenon* were designed to reinforce the concept of colony. Succeeding alone is a very difficult proposition. Sarcophagi who go it alone quickly find themselves overmatched. To survive, the colony will have to work together.

Definition and Form

Each *trait* has value, and each is used to accomplish different objectives. The specific mechanical

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functions of each *trait* are defined below:

Awareness

This *trait* is the measure of a character's perception and wits. *Awareness* is used as follows:

- To absorb the details of what is occurring in the surrounding environment.
- To notice subtle changes to the surrounding environment.
- To find or discover things concealed.
- To react suddenly to surprises and ambushes.
- To act quickly (first) in combat situations.

Generally, any actions that involve thinking on one's feet or perception of the surrounding environment use Awareness.

During combat, Awareness helps determine initiative (the order in which all combatants attack).

Violence

This *trait* is the measure of a character's ability to do harm to another. *Violence* is used as follows:

- To attack another.
- To dodge another's attack.
- To inflict damage on another.
- To inflict damage on the surrounding environment.

Generally, all combat actions are governed by Violence. A character's Violence rank represents that character's prowess in combat. This includes the character's ability to successfully strike an opponent, dodge or parry an opponent's attack(s), and how much damage is done with each attack. Non-combat related acts of dexterity are covered by the Activity trait, not Violence.

Activity

This *trait* is the measure of any and all physical skills a character may want at any given moment, although the character may have no knowledge of how it knows these abilities. *Activity* is used as follows:

- To perform any skilled action not related to combat, intelligence, or personality.
- To handle all acts of hand-eye coordination (dexterity) and physical prowess not related to combat.

Sample actions: lock picking, climbing, shadowing, sprinting, acrobatics, jumping, throwing

Generally, any abilities of a physical nature are governed by Activity. A character does not have any limitations with this trait; the character can access any skill it wants, provided the action falls under the umbrella of this trait. If a character wants to pick a lock, the character uses Activity. If a character wants to climb a surface, Activity is used. Activity is one of the two Mystery traits – so named because characters do not know how they possess their seemingly random collection of abilities; they are leftover, half remembered talents from a previous life.

Intelligence based skills (such as politics and science) fall under the Wisdom trait. All combat related skills (using various weapons, fisticuffs, parrying, etc.) are covered by Violence. Social skills (persuasion, intimidation, etc.) are covered by Personality.



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Wisdom

This *trait* is the measure of a character's intelligence and covers all actions requiring complex thought. *Wisdom* is used as follows:

- To comprehend and remember information.
- To perform all mental based skills.

Sample actions: researching, use and repair of technology, puzzle solving, scientific analysis

Generally, if a skilled action involves any learned ability or knowledge of a cognitive nature, Wisdom is the governing trait. Knowledge and skills such as science and research would fall under Wisdom. A character does not have any limitations with this trait; the character can access any skill it wants, provided the action falls under the umbrella of this trait. Wisdom is one of the two Mystery traits – so named because characters do not know how they possess their seemingly random collection of abilities; they are leftover, half remembered talents from a previous life.

Skills based on coordination or physical abilities (non-combat related) fall under the Activity trait. All combat related skills are covered by Violence. Social skills (persuasion, intimidation, etc.) are covered by Personality.

Personality

This *trait* is the measure of a character's social skills, its ability to interact with others. *Personality* is used as follows:

- To persuade.
- To intimidate.
- To maintain composure and dignity in hostile social situations.
- To successfully lie.

Sample actions: counseling, lying, oration, intimidation, persuasion, interrogation, fast-talking, socializing

Generally, all actions involving charisma, intimidation, social etiquette, and subterfuge are governed by Personality.

Skills based on coordination or physical abilities (non-combat related) fall under the Activity trait. All combat related skills are covered by Violence. Intelligence based skills fall under Wisdom.

Chitin

This *trait* is the measure of a character's brawn and its ability to resist physical damage. *Chitin* is used as follows:

- To lift or move heavy objects.
- To absorb (lessen) damage from physical attacks.

Generally, Chitin represents the armored shell that protects a character's body. It does not govern how much physical damage a character can take before dying (that is represented by the colony's Salubrity); rather, it indicates how resistant the character is to taking physical damage. It is also used for brawn-based actions not related to combat.

Chitin does not represent stamina. Sarcophagi do not fatigue.



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Metamorphosis

This *trait* is the measure of a character's ability to cope with reality spasms in the Silhouette Rouge. *Metamorphosis* is used as follows:

- To perform actions governed by *Awareness*, *Violence*, and *Activity* during reality spasms.
- To perceive and manipulate the esoteric energies that accompany reality spasms.

Metamorphosis substitutes for Awareness, Violence, and Activity whenever reality spasms are occurring. During these times, it overrides all three traits. All other traits function normally during reality spasms.

Esoteric energies are the term given to the forces released during reality spasms. While a reality spasm is underway, spiniferous tendrils of energy spiral and twist in all directions. These energies are only visible with the Metamorphosis trait and can be redirected (channeled) by Sarcophagi skilled in Metamorphosis.

Communion

This *trait* is the measure of a character's intuition, mastery of the three *Principles*, and the ability to seek answers to questions it cannot possibly know the answers to. *Communion* is used as follows:

- To successfully utilize the three *Principles* (Unity, Heart, and Time).
- To guess correctly when multiple options present themselves.
- To ask for guidance from the Logos.

When a character employs the three Principles, Communion is the governing trait.

When a character is faced with an especially difficult choice, or the game is becoming bogged down because the players genuinely do not know how to proceed, Communion comes into play. By using this trait, the characters can ask the Logos for advice. During Communion, the Logos always manifests as the Lodestar, the gentleman with the elephant head, though only the colony can perceive him.

Rapport

This *trait* is the measure of connectivity between characters, manifesting as telepathy and shared strength within the colony. *Rapport* is used as follows:

- To heal the colony's lost *Salubrity*.
- To communicate telepathically with other members of the colony.

The colony's collective health, Salubrity, will fluctuate over the course of play. The Rapport trait is used to regain Salubrity lost through combat or other physical struggles. When a character is attempting to restore lost Salubrity to the colony, it can undertake no other action(s).

Although Sarcophagi can speak (and must do so, in order to interact with the inhabitants of the Silhouette Rouge) they often do not verbalize amongst each other, instead relying on telepathic contact. Rapport is the governing trait for this mental speech. Conversations become more difficult with increased distance between communicating Sarcophagi.

Common Actions

There are some events that will reoccur often during the course of play. The following section details these common actions, including advice on setting *difficulty* levels.



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Perception

To solve the Nine Enigmas and leave the Silhouette Rouge, Sarcophagi must be alert; enemies, puzzles, and traps abound. Sarcophagi use the *Awareness trait* for all actions involving perception or observation.

- *Difficulty of 1:* Average for one Sarcophagi; easy for a colony
- *Difficulty of 2 or 3:* Challenging for one Sarcophagi; easy for a colony
- *Difficulty of 4 or 5:* Very difficult for one Sarcophagi; average for a colony
- *Difficulty of 6 or 7:* Impossible for one Sarcophagi; challenging for a colony
- *Difficulty of 8 or 9:* Impossible for one Sarcophagi; Very difficult for a colony

The Gamemaster sets the *difficulty* level according to the nature of the action, the needs of the game, and the role-playing of the players. A player who cleverly describes his or her character's actions, or intelligently reasons through a situation, should face lower *difficulty* levels than players who give bland descriptions and allow their characters' *traits* to think for them. The Gamemaster should also weigh the magnitude of the unfolding scene or action. Higher *difficulties* are appropriate for important moments with far-reaching repercussions.

Combat

There are three basic steps to handling combat in *Noumenon*:

1. **Establish *initiative* (the attacking order)**
2. **Determine success or failure**
3. **Calculate damage**

Here is an in-depth breakdown of each step:

Step One: Initiative

The Gamemaster must determine who attacks first, who attacks second, who attacks third, and so on. To determine *initiative*, all combatants (PC and NPC) draw one domino apiece. The total number of pips on both sides of the domino is added to a character's *Awareness* rank, yielding a total. The character with the highest total acts first, the second highest acts next, and so on and so forth. In the event of a tie, those characters' actions occur simultaneously.

For example: A servant of the Adversary attacks two Sarcophagi, and the Gamemaster must determine initiative for all those involved. The first Sarcophagi has an Awareness of 3 and draws a 1:6, giving it the initiative score of 10 (3+1+6=10). The second Sarcophagi has an Awareness rank of 2 and draws a 0:6, giving it an 8 (2+0+6=8). The servant of the Adversary also has an Awareness rank of 2, and the Gamemaster draws a 3:4, giving it an initiative score of 9 (2+3+4=9). Based on these results the attacking order is: the first Sarcophagi (10), the servant of the Adversary (9), and then the second Sarcophagi (8).

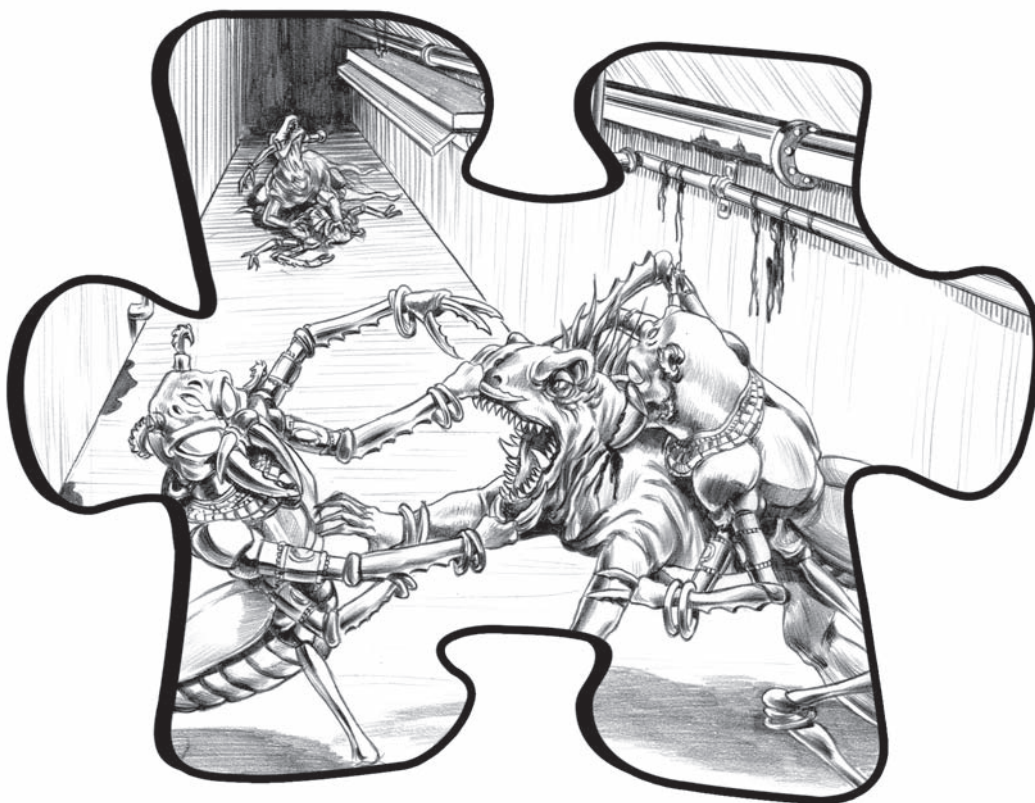
Step Two: Determining Success or Failure

The Gamemaster draws the *lead*.

The attacker (the player character or the NPC) draws a number of dominoes equal to its *Violence* rank.

The *difficulty* level for the attack is the defender's *Violence* rank. This means the attacker must connect a

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number of dominoes equal to or greater than the *Violence* rank of the defender, in order to successfully land a strike.

For example: One of the Sarcophagi swipes at another creature. Since the defender's Violence rank is 2, the player character needs to score at least two victories to land the blow. The lead is a 2:5. The player draws three dominoes because his character's Violence rank is 3. The player's draw is a 0:1, a 2:3, and a 2:4. The player is able to connect two of his three dominoes (the 2:3 and the 2:4) to the GM's lead (2:5), so he scores two victories. Since the number of victories meets the difficulty level (the defender's Violence rank), the attack is a success.

A *swarm* is a coordinated, simultaneous attack by multiple Sarcophagi against a single defender. Not every member of the colony needs to participate in the *swarm* action. Those Sarcophagi who choose to attack in a *swarm* all take their action simultaneously; the *initiative* for a *swarm* action is determined by the highest *Awareness* rank of the colony.

During a *swarm*, each player draws dominoes equal to the *Violence* rank of his or her character. All the *draws* may be connected to the *lead* to form a *chain*. This makes *swarms* far likelier to succeed than solo attacks.

For example: Three Sarcophagi attack. Since the defender's Violence rank is 2, the player characters need to score at least two victories to land their attack. The lead is a 1:5. One PC has a Violence of 1, and the others each have a Violence rank of 2. The first player's draw is a 0:1. The second player draws a 0:2 and a 2:4. The third player draws a 3:3 and a 4:6. The first player is able to connect her draw (0:1) to the lead (1:5), and the second player is able to connect his entire draw (both dominoes) to the chain. The third player is able to connect his 4:6 to the chain but not his 3:3. This means the swarm achieved four victories. Since the total number of victories (four) exceeds the difficulty level (the defender's Violence rank of 2), the attack is a success.

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A *called shot* is when a particular hit location is aimed for. When a *called shot* is declared, the *difficulty* level is adjusted upward. This increase is one level for large target areas, two levels for a medium sized zone, and three levels for small targets. Of course, these adjustments are added to the normal *difficulty* of the shot.

The Gamemaster is also encouraged to lower or raise *difficulties* by one level to reflect unusual combat conditions.

For example: Reduced visibility, a moving target, or a slippery surface might raise the difficulty level.

For example: A stationary target, taking extra time to aim, or the target being surprised might lower the difficulty.

Step Three: Calculating Damage

The amount of damage done by an attack is equal to the number of *victories* achieved.

For example: Three Sarcophagi have achieved four victories with their attack. This means the defender has sustained four points of damage.

Weapons and certain *Birthrights* can increase the amount of damage done.

Sustaining Damage

While the colony has a collective health score (*Salubrity*), NPCs have individual health scores (*Strength*). Sarcophagi can sustain a number of damage points equal to their *Salubrity*, and NPCs can sustain a number of damage points equal to their *Strength*.

For example: The defender has a Strength of 10. Since the colony scored four victories, the defender sustained four points of damage. The defender's Strength is now 6 (10-4=6).

For example: An attack on the colony scores five victories, meaning the colony sustains 5 points of damage. The colony's Salubrity of 20 is now reduced to 15 (20-5=15).

Chitin

Sarcophagi are protected by an exoskeleton, which lessens the damage done by any attack. Every rank of *Chitin* decreases the amount of damage done by 1 point. However, **attacks always do at least one point of damage, regardless of Chitin rank.**

For example: A Chiroptera scores three victories against one of the colony. Since the Sarcophagi has a Chitin of 1, the Colony suffers 2 points of damage instead of 3.

For example: A Chiroptera scores three victories against one of the colony. The Sarcophagi has a Chitin of 3. The colony suffers 1 point of damage (even though the Sarcophagi has enough Chitin to absorb 3 points of damage, an attack always does at least 1 point of damage).

The Others do not have *Chitin*, so they cannot absorb damage in this manner. They always sustain the maximum amount of damage from an attack.

Repetition

After the first character's attack is made and damage is calculated (provided the attack was a

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success), the next character in the attacking order gets to act. After all characters (PCs and NPCs) have had their turn, the attacking order begins again. It should be noted that should the colony be attacking a single target, utilizing the *swarm* technique is far more effective than single combat.

Birthrights

There are nine different *Birthrights*. Each provides unique advantages.

Pulvilli are soft, cushion-like pads on the hands and feet of the Sarcophagi. They enable Sarcophagi to cling to walls and ceilings.

Wings enable Sarcophagi to fly. In combat situations, if there is enough room, winged Sarcophagi can fly out of the reach of hand-to-hand attacks. In cases where opponents can fly as well, or possess ranged attack(s), airborne Sarcophagi are more difficult to hit because they have a greater range of motion. The *difficulty* for opponents to strike airborne Sarcophagi is 1 level higher than the Sarcophagi's *Violence* rank.

For example: A Chiroptera is attacking a Sarcophagi, who has a Violence of 3. Normally, the Chiroptera would need 3 victories to hit the Sarcophagi, but since its prey is airborne, the difficulty is 4 (one higher than the character's Violence rank).

Stingers and **Mandibles** are used in combat. Each inflicts one additional point of damage.

For example: A Sarcophagi attacks a Chiroptera and scores three victories. Normally, the Sarcophagi would do three points of damage, but since the strike was done with its stinger, it does 4 points of damage.

Characters possessing both of these *Birthrights* add two points of damage to successful attacks.

For example: A Sarcophagi attacks a Chiroptera and scores three victories. Normally, the Sarcophagi would do three points of damage, but since the character has a stinger and serrated mandibles, it does 5 points of damage.

During *swarm* attacks, one additional point of damage is done for every participant attacking with a **Stinger** or **Mandibles**.

For example: A colony scores 7 victories during a swarm attack. Normally, 7 points of damage would be inflicted. However, two of the colony attacked with Stingers, so an additional 2 points of damage are added, bringing the total to 9.

A **Spinneret** is a tubular structure found on the forearm of some Sarcophagi. It secretes a sticky, web like filament used for scaling sheer surfaces and ensnaring opponents. The filament will stick to any surface and supports the weight of one Sarcophagi at a time. Casting a web works as a standard combat action. Once ensnared, it will take the victim a little time and effort to break free. Rending a Sarcophagi web takes a number of actions equal to the caster's *Violence* rank, and the victim can take no other action until it is free. Of course, while the combatant is ensnared, it is susceptible to additional attacks. Attacks against an ensnared opponent *always* have a *difficulty* level of 1.

For example: A Sarcophagi with a Violence of 3 ensnares a Chiroptera. To free itself, the Chiroptera must rip through the webbing. Since the Sarcophagi's Violence is 3, it will take the Chiroptera three actions to break free. While it is doing so, the colony initiates multiple swarm attacks, each with a difficulty of 1.



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Sclerites provide Sarcophagi with additional armoring, beyond that given by the character's *Chitin*. Characters with this *Birthright* absorb 1 extra point of damage from all attacks. However, all attacks on Sarcophagi still do at least 1 point of damage, regardless of the amount of damage absorbed.

For example: An attack on one of the colony scores 4 victories. Since the victim has a Chitin of 2, it would normally sustain 2 points of damage. However, the Sarcophagi has the Sclerites birthright, so the damage done is lowered by one additional point. The colony only loses 1 point of Salubrity from the attack.

A **Proboscis** is a long barbed tube extending from the mouth of some Sarcophagi. It is used to suck the life force from a victim. A successful attack with this *Birthright* can never do more than 1 point of damage. However, the opponent's maximum *Strength* is permanently reduced by 1.

For example: A Proboscis attack scores 4 victories against an opponent, whose maximum Strength is 10. The attack only does 1 point of damage, but the victim's maximum Strength is permanently reduced to 9.

Sensilla are extrasensory receptors possessed by some Sarcophagi. Characters with this *Birthright* draw one extra domino for all actions governed by *Awareness*, including *initiative* determination. For purposes of initiative, the character keeps the higher of the two dominoes (the dominoes are not added together).

For example: A Sarcophagi with Sensilla draws two dominoes for initiative. The draw is 1:2 (for a result of 3) and 2:5 (for a result of 7). The player keeps the higher of the two (7) and adds it to her character's Awareness rank to get an initiative score.

For example: A Sarcophagi with an Awareness of 3 would normally draw 3 dominoes for actions related to perception. However, since the character has the Sensilla birthright, the player draws 4 dominoes for such actions.

Grappling attacks against Sarcophagi with **Spined Chitin** automatically do 1 point of damage to the attacker. Sarcophagi who charge at opponents inflict an additional point of damage with this *Birthright*.

Mystery Actions

Any skill the Sarcophagi will ever need is at their disposal. If a particular skill is called for, the character simply declares the action. *Wisdom* is used for intelligence and knowledge based skills, and *Activity* is used for skills involving coordination and other physical actions.

Difficulty levels for actions governed by *Activity* or *Wisdom* should be set with the following guidelines in mind:

- *Difficulty of 1:* Average for one Sarcophagi; easy for a colony
- *Difficulty of 2 or 3:* Challenging for one Sarcophagi; easy for a colony
- *Difficulty of 4 or 5:* Very difficult for one Sarcophagi; average for a colony
- *Difficulty of 6 or 7:* Impossible for one Sarcophagi; challenging for a colony
- *Difficulty of 8 or 9:* Impossible for one Sarcophagi; Very difficult for a colony

The Gamemaster sets the *difficulty* level according to the nature of the action, the needs of the game, and the role-playing of the players. A player who cleverly describes his or her character's actions or intelligently reasons through a situation, should face lower *difficulty* levels than players who give bland

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descriptions and allow their characters' traits to think for them. The Gamemaster should also weigh the magnitude of the unfolding scene or action. Higher *difficulties* are appropriate for important moments with far-reaching repercussions.

Any actions involving social interaction or combat prowess are covered by *Personality* or *Violence* respectively. *Social skills and combat skills cannot be accessed with Activity and Wisdom.*

Manipulation

There are instances when Sarcophagi need to threaten, intimidate, cajole, or persuade other beings. Such situations are governed by *Personality*. The *difficulty* level for these actions is equal to the *Personality* rank of the individual the Sarcophagi wishes to manipulate.

For example: A Sarcophagi is trying to intimidate a Chiroptera, to scare it away. Since the Chiroptera has a Personality of 1, the difficulty level is 1. The Sarcophagi only needs 1 victory to frighten off the Chiroptera.

This is a general rule of thumb regarding setting *difficulty* levels for acts of manipulation. However, there are times when GMs may need to modify the *difficulty* level to better reflect the scenario. This is generally done when the victim of a manipulative action is more or less likely to be swayed based on personal beliefs, or the victim already has a positive or negative opinion/relationship with the Sarcophagi. The Gamemaster has fiat to raise or lower the *difficulty* as is appropriate, but the *difficulty* level cannot exceed 9.

For example: A player character is trying to intimidate a Chiroptera, to scare it away. Since the Chiroptera has a Personality of 1, the difficulty level would normally be 1. However, Chiroptera have no fear of Sarcophagi, so the Gamemaster raises the difficulty level to 9. The Sarcophagi will need 9 victories to frighten off the Chiroptera, which is impossible.

A mob is more threatening than a solitary voice, and peer pressure more effectively persuades. Sarcophagi can manipulate others as a colony to increase their chance of success. This group action is handled like all other group actions, i.e. every participant may draw a number of dominoes equal to his or her character's *Personality* rank, and all the *draws* may be connected to the *lead* and to one another.

For example: A colony of five is trying to intimidate a Chiroptera, to scare it away. Since the Chiroptera has a Personality of 1, the difficulty level would normally be 1. However, Chiroptera are the sworn hunters of the Sarcophagi, so the Gamemaster raises the difficulty level to 9. Each Sarcophagi has a Personality of 2, so each player draws 2 dominoes for a total of 10 dominoes. The players now have 10 dominoes to potentially connect to the Gamemaster's lead. However, the colony will need 9 victories to frighten off the Chiroptera — possible, though very difficult.

If characters attempt to sway a crowd (more than one individual), the *Personality* ranks of everyone in the crowd are added together to determine the *difficulty* level. However, the *difficulty* cannot go above 9.

For example: The colony is trying to persuade a crowd of three. One of the three has a Personality of 2, and the two others have a Personality of 1 each. The difficulty level for this act of persuasion is 4 (2+1+1=4).

For example: The colony is trying to persuade a crowd of ten. One of the ten has a Personality of 3, three of them have a Personality of 2, and the other six have a Personality of 1 each. The sum of their Personality ranks is 15. Since difficulty levels max out at 9, the difficulty for this act of persuasion is 9.





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When influencing a crowd, the Gamemaster should modify *difficulty* levels as they would with single individuals. However, the maximum *difficulty* level (as always) is 9.

For example: The colony is trying to persuade a crowd of three. One of the three has a Personality of 2, and the others have a Personality of 1 each. The difficulty level for this act of persuasion would normally be 4 (2+1+1=4), but one of the crowd has worked with the colony before and trusts them. With this in mind, the Gamemaster lowers the difficulty level from 4 to 2.

Reality Spasms

When a reality spasm strikes, the world of the Prima Materia becomes unhinged. The landscape morphs into a nightmare terrain, gravity acts in peculiar ways, time accelerates and decelerates back and forth in herky-jerky motion, afterimages of events previously played out manifest for all to see. The Others are often debilitated by reality spasms, and for good cause. This is not the case for the Sarcophagi, however. With the *Metamorphosis* trait, they can navigate the chaos.

During reality spasms, a player character's *Metamorphosis* is used in place of the *Awareness*, *Violence*, and *Activity* traits.

Reality spasms are so disorienting to the Others that their *Awareness*, *Violence*, and *Personality* ranks all become 1 for the length of the reality spasm (no matter what their ranks normally are).

Esoteric energies are waves of force released during a reality spasm. These energies manifest as flailing tendrils, like severed power cables writhing on the ground; tendrils of force seem to radiate from everywhere and spiral and twist in all directions. These energies are only visible with the *Metamorphosis* trait. With *Metamorphosis*, the Sarcophagi are able to harness esoteric energies and bend them to their will. Manipulations of esoteric energies can be done as solo or group actions. The mechanics for actions governed by *Metamorphosis* are handled like all other actions in *Noumenon*.

There are nine ways the esoteric energies can be manipulated, and each carries a different *difficulty* level:

- *Difficulty of 1: Esoteric Vision.* Before Sarcophagi can manipulate the esoteric energies in more complex ways, they must first be able to perceive them. *Esoteric Vision* does this. Once the energies are visible to the Sarcophagi, their clarity of sight continues for the remainder of the reality spasm; no other use of *Esoteric Vision* is required.
- *Difficulty of 2: Chaos Lightning.* Sarcophagi can command the esoteric energies to lash out at an enemy. The energies remain invisible to the target, but the victim feels the force and trauma of the attack. The amount of damage done is equal to the amount of *victories* scored on the attack.
- *Difficulty of 3: Tentacle.* Characters can direct a single tendril to ensnare and bind a target or object. Once ensnared, the Sarcophagi can draw the target to itself or have the tendril throw the target. If thrown, the target suffers damage equal to the Sarcophagi's *Metamorphosis* rank. Breaking free of the tendril takes a number of actions equal to the controller's *Metamorphosis* rank, and the victim can take no other action until it is free. Of course, while the victim is ensnared, it is susceptible to additional attacks. Attacks against an ensnared opponent *always* have a *difficulty* level of 1.
- *Difficulty of 4: Ghost.* Sarcophagi can bend the esoteric energies to make themselves completely undetectable. They become invisible, inaudible, scentless, and insubstantial to everyone except the colony. The effect lasts as long as the character desires (up to the conclusion of the reality spasm) but the Sarcophagi cannot act on the physical world.
- *Difficulty of 5: Chain Lightning.* Sarcophagi can command the esoteric energies to lash out at multiple targets in the same room or hallway. There is no limit to how many targets may be

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simultaneously struck, but all must be in the same location. The amount of damage done to each victim is equal to the amount of *victories* scored on the attack.

- *Difficulty of 6: Chaos Web.* Characters can direct multiple tendrils to ensnare and bind a roomful of targets. There is no limit to how many targets may be simultaneously ensnared, but all must be in the same room or hallway. Once ensnared, the Sarcophagi can draw the targets to itself or have the tendrils throw the targets. If thrown, each target suffers damage equal to the Sarcophagi's *Metamorphosis* rank. Breaking free of the tendril takes a number of actions equal to the controller's *Metamorphosis* rank, and victims can take no other action until they are free. Of course, while the victims are ensnared, they are susceptible to additional attacks. Attacks against ensnared opponents *always* have a *difficulty* level of 1.
- *Difficulty of 7: Esoteric Fury.* Sarcophagi can command the esoteric energies to lash out at multiple targets across the Prima Materia or at a single target located elsewhere on the Prima Materia. Manipulating the esoteric energies in this manner means Sarcophagi can attack every being on the Prima Materia simultaneously, or attack a single opponent who may be many rooms away. Knowledge of the exact location of the opponent(s) is not necessary. The amount of damage done to each victim is equal to the amount of *victories* scored on the attack.
- *Difficulty of 8: Spider God.* Characters can direct multiple tendrils to ensnare and bind a single target in another location on the Prima Materia or every being on the Prima Materia at once. Once ensnared, the Sarcophagi can draw the targets to itself or have the tendrils throw the targets. If thrown, each target suffers damage equal to the Sarcophagi's *Metamorphosis* rank. Breaking free of the tendril takes a number of actions equal to the controller's *Metamorphosis* rank, and victims can take no other action until they are free. Of course, while the victims are ensnared, they are susceptible to additional attacks. Attacks against ensnared opponents *always* have a *difficulty* level of 1.
- *Difficulty of 9: Chaos Unbound.* Sarcophagi have mastery over the Prima Materia during reality spasms. They can invert gravity, create doorways where there are none, make surfaces burn to the touch, blind everyone on the Prima Materia for the length of the spasm, etc. The exact effects possible are up to the players' imaginations, but the Gamemaster has final approval.

Sarcophagi must be careful not to abuse the power of esoteric energies. Reality spasms are finite manifestations of chaos, and once they have passed, reality returns to normal. Sarcophagi who attack Others with reckless abandon during reality spasms could find themselves faced with an army of enemies when reality reasserts itself.

Principles in Motion

Communion enables Sarcophagi to access the *Principles of Creation: Unity, Heart, and Time*. Each *Principle* has three levels of understanding (*Oracle, Adept, and Master*).

Communion is the governing *trait* for all actions involving the *Principles*.

Using the three *Principles* is a freeform affair, limited only by player creativity and Gamemaster fiat. With that said, some guidelines for using the three *Principles* follow:

Unity: All living beings are connected to one another and the Logos. Sarcophagi manipulate these connections with Unity.

- *Oracle:* At this level, Sarcophagi can experience creation through the senses of another being (known as the conduit). Sarcophagi can see through the conduit's eyes, hear what the conduit hears, taste what the conduit tastes, etc. Any being in the Silhouette Rouge can serve as a conduit, and distance from the Sarcophagi has no bearing; the player simply declares who will serve as the conduit. The *difficulty* level for the action is the *Personality* rank of the potential conduit. While perceiving the environment through another's senses, the Sarcophagi is



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oblivious to what is transpiring in its own surroundings.

- **Adept:** At this level, Sarcophagi can make one living being experience what is happening to another creature. If an individual is full of rage, this rage can be shared with another. If one being is suicidal, this feeling can be shared with someone else. Emotional states can be manipulated for positive purposes as well. For example, Sarcophagi can share the serenity of one being with another who is consumed by hate. Damage can also be shared in this fashion. In battle, Sarcophagi can strike one opponent and share that damage with a second target — so both suffer. Beings can also be healed with *Unity*; the *Strength* of a healthy being can be shared with an injured one. The amount of damage that can be shared or healed with *Unity* is equal to the *Communion* rank of the Sarcophagi. When sharing or healing damage, the total damage is not split between the two beings; both feel the effects equally. For example, if a Sarcophagi scores 2 *victories* on an attack and follows it up with a *Unity* action, both opponents take 2 points of damage. The *difficulty* for all *Adept* level actions is the *Personality* rank of the being whose experience is being shared with another.
- **Master:** At this level, Sarcophagi can sever an individual's connection to the Logos. This leaves the being a listless shell of its former self. Those who have been severed from the Logos are called Hollow Men. The *difficulty* to create a Hollow Man is the *Personality* rank of the victim.

Heart: Although each and every being is connected to one another and the Logos, each has its own thoughts and feelings. By manipulating the *Principle of Heart*, Sarcophagi know the thoughts and feelings of another and can twist them if desired.

- **Oracle:** At this level, Sarcophagi can read the thoughts and emotional states of other beings. The *difficulty* for such actions is equal to the target's *Personality* rank.
- **Adept:** At this level, Sarcophagi can control the mind of another being, forcing it to comply with the Sarcophagi's wishes. Sarcophagi can also invoke any emotional state in any individual. The effects of mental and emotional manipulation via the *Principle of Heart* will only last a few moments. The *difficulty* for *Adept* level actions is the *Personality* rank of the victim.
- **Master:** At this level, Sarcophagi can invert the personality and identity of any individual, making it into the antithesis of what it once was. For example, a pacifist can be made into a warmonger, and an extrovert can be made into an introvert. The *difficulty* for such actions is the *Personality* rank of the victim.

Time: Sarcophagi understand that time is an illusion created by the Logos. With this *Principle*, Sarcophagi manipulate the tides of time.

- **Oracle:** At this level, Sarcophagi can peer into the future or past. However, freewill means the future may not always unfold as seen by the Sarcophagi. The *difficulty* level for precognition or postcognition is entirely up to the Gamemaster, but should be based on how far into the future or past the Sarcophagi is gazing. Looking mere moments into the past may carry a *difficulty* level of 1, while looking a century past may carry a *difficulty* of 9.
- **Adept:** At this level, multiple temporal manipulations are possible. Sarcophagi can freeze time and move about normally, giving them the appearance of teleporting. In combat, they can slow time around themselves, so they seemingly attack twice during one action. These examples are only two of many ways Sarcophagi might manipulate time. The Gamemaster determines the *difficulty* level for these manipulations. Simple manipulations should carry a *difficulty* level of 1 to 3, while more complex or far-reaching manipulations should have much higher *difficulty* levels.
- **Master:** At this level, Sarcophagi can rewind time. This is typically done so that poor choices, mistakes, or failures can be undone, and different paths can be walked. The *difficulty* level for such manipulations depends on the magnitude of the event being undone. For example, if the event being rewound is only of minor consequence, the *difficulty* level should be 1 to 3. In instances where rewinding time dramatically changes the status quo, the *difficulty* level should be much higher. Additionally, the farther back Sarcophagi travel, the more difficult it is to do

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so. Characters should ideally rewind events within a few hours or days of them occurring to keep the *difficulty* level more manageable. Determining the exact level of *difficulty* for these actions is the Gamemaster's discretion.

Intuition and Guidance

There are times when the Sarcophagi are uncertain how to proceed or need answers to difficult questions. *Communion* is the *trait* used for these purposes. With *Communion*, Sarcophagi can speak to the Logos and pose their queries.

Guidelines for setting *difficulties*:

- *Difficulty of 1*: Minor questions with only two possible answers
- *Difficulty of 2 or 3*: Minor questions with multiple answers or open-ended advice regarding matters of minor importance
- *Difficulty of 4 or 5*: Major questions with only two possible answers
- *Difficulty of 6 or 7*: Major questions with multiple answers or open-ended advice regarding matters of major importance
- *Difficulty of 8 or 9*: Questions regarding fundamental truths of *Noumenon*

Examples of minor questions with only two possible answers:

- *Are they friend or foe?*
- *Do we need to take the left door or the right?*
- *Are there Chiroptera hiding in the Shadow of the Grand Foyer?*

Examples of minor questions with multiple answers:

- *Which room is the one we seek?*
- *How many Chiroptera are hiding in the shadow of the Grand Foyer?*
- *How many of them should we count as enemies?*

Examples of questions regarding the fundamental truths of *Noumenon*:

- *What is the true nature of the Sarcophagi?*
- *Has the Logos always existed?*
- *Is the Logos the Creator of the universe?*

Any questions that are not minor in nature, and do not regard fundamental truths of Noumenon, can be assumed to be major ones. Determining whether a question is major or minor is the Gamemaster's discretion.

Questions regarding fundamental truths are likely to reveal secrets of *Noumenon* to the players. There is nothing wrong with this; it is the point of *Communion*. However, the Gamemaster may need to improvise some answers since few are provided in this book. The easiest way for the GM to respond is to phrase the Lodestar's answers enigmatically. By doing so, the Gamemaster can garner some time to fully flesh out the answer. However, there must be a seed of truth in any veiled statements. Players *must* ultimately be given the answers to their questions, or the *Communion* trait becomes hollow. *Communion* is an excellent means for the Gamemaster to reveal the otherwise shrouded mysteries of *Noumenon*, although these revelations may lead to other questions.

Communion is also an excellent means for the Gamemaster to get the game back on track when players have lost their way or missed important clues.





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There are three types of questions the Lodestar will not answer: those involving the future actions of the Sarcophagi, those involving the true nature of the Silhouette Rouge, and those asking about the Nine Enigmas (including how to leave the Silhouette Rouge).

Acts of *Communion* may be performed as solo actions or group actions. Seeking guidance from the Lodestar requires total concentration via a meditative state. This means Sarcophagi cannot undertake any other actions during *Communion*.

If Sarcophagi fail to communicate with the Logos, the colony suffers *Salubrity* loss.

- Minor questions that go unanswered carry a loss of 1 *Salubrity*.
- Major questions that go unanswered carry a loss of 5 *Salubrity*.
- Unanswered questions regarding fundamental truths carry a loss of 10 *Salubrity*.

A question may be posed only once to the Lodestar; it may never be asked again. This includes questions that go unanswered as well as those the Lodestar replies to.

Healing

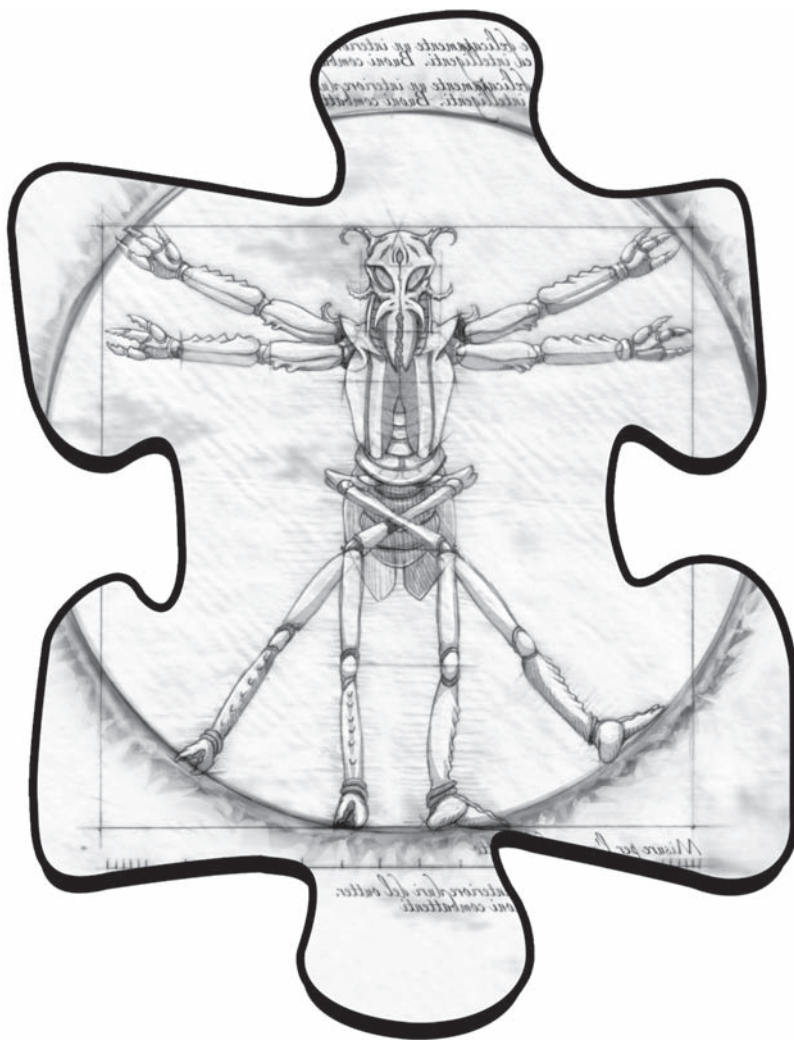
With *Rapport*, Sarcophagi can heal the colony's lost *Salubrity*.

The *difficulty* level to do so is equal to the amount of *Salubrity* the PC wants to restore; the player sets his or her own *difficulty* by deciding how much *Salubrity* recovery to attempt. Player characters do not have to heal all of the colony's lost *Salubrity* in one action.

For example: The colony has sustained 3 points of damage, but the player decides to try to heal only one of the lost points. She will only need to score one victory with her draw.

For example: The colony has sustained 3 points of damage, and the player decides to try to heal all three points. She will need to score three victories with her draw.

For healing, a player draws a number of dominoes equal to the *Rapport* rank of his or her character.



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When one of the Sarcophagi is attempting to heal the colony, it can take no other action.

There are no ill effects from a failed healing *draw*.

Multiple Sarcophagi can heal the colony at the same time. This action works like any normal group action: each player draws a number of dominoes equal to his or her character's *Rapport* rank, and all the participating players attempt to combine their *draws* to the Gamemaster's *lead*. Every character participating in the healing attempt can take no other action while doing so.

For example: The colony has sustained 2 points of damage, and three players decide to heal the colony. The Gamemaster draws a 3:5 lead. Each character has a Rapport of 1, so each player draws one domino. The collective draw for the three players is 1:3, 1:4, and 6:6. Since two of the dominoes (1:3 and 1:4) can be connected to the lead (3:5), the players score two victories. Their attempt is a success, and the colony recovers two points of Salubrity.

If players achieve some *victories*, but not enough to meet or exceed the *difficulty* level they set, they heal nothing.

For example: The colony has sustained 3 points of damage. Three players decide to heal all the damage at once, making the difficulty level a 3. The Gamemaster draws a 3:5 lead. Each character has a Rapport of 1, so each player draws one domino. The collective draw for the three players is 3:3, 2:4, and 6:6. Since only one of the dominoes (3:3) can be connected to the lead (3:5), the players score only 1 victory. Their attempt is a failure, and the colony recovers no lost Salubrity, not even 1 point for the one victory.

In *Noumenon*, damage to player characters *does not* heal with time; only the use of *Rapport* heals damage.

NPCs heal damage according to their *Strength* trait. Per session, NPCs heal a number of points equal to their maximum *Strength* rank.

Telepathy

With *Rapport*, Sarcophagi can telepathically speak to one another across the Silhouette Rouge. Sarcophagi can only exchange one hundred or so words at a time, making lengthy conversations impossible. Once a connection has been established between two or more Sarcophagi, they can extend this communication to others in the colony. When two or more Sarcophagi are linked and sending a message, telepathy becomes a group action. Otherwise, these communications are treated as solo actions.

For example: One of the Sarcophagi is attempting to send a message to another in the colony. Since this is a solo action, a number of dominoes equal to the character's Rapport Rank are drawn.

For example: Two Sarcophagi have established a telepathic connection and wish to extend their communication to a third. Since the two Sarcophagi are already linked, they can perform this action as a group; both players draw a number of dominoes equal to his or her character's Rapport rank, and both draws can be connected to the lead.

Once a telepathic connection is established, back and forth communication is possible until one hundred or so words have been spoken between the participants. Gamemasters are encouraged to use their best judgment in determining the length of telepathic communications, rather than taking the time to tally every word. However, the GM is free to keep an exact count if desired.

Player characters can opt to send messages to more than one recipient at a time. However, since group





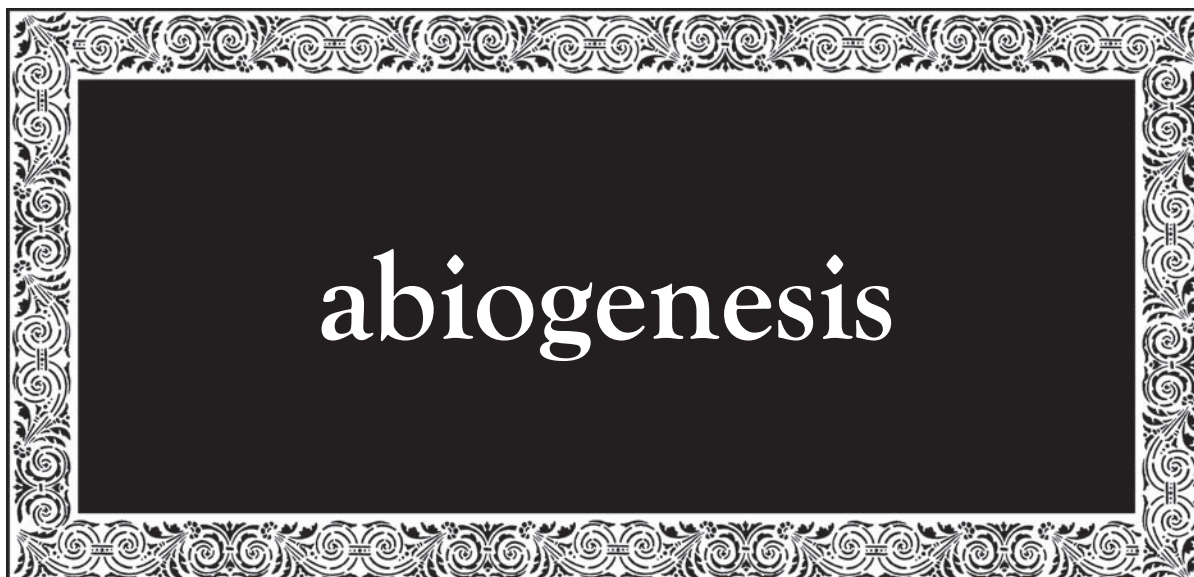
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actions are easier to perform, it is wiser to connect to only one of the colony, then have the two characters connect to a third, and so on and so forth.

Guidelines for setting difficulty levels are as follows:

- *Difficulty of 1:* Communication with one other Sarcophagi in the same room.
- *Difficulty of 2 or 3:* Communication with one other Sarcophagi on the same floor of the Silhouette Rouge; communication with multiple Sarcophagi in the same room.
- *Difficulty of 4 or 5:* Communication with one other Sarcophagi on a different floor of the Silhouette Rouge; communication with multiple Sarcophagi on the same floor of the Silhouette Rouge.
- *Difficulty of 6 or 7:* Communication with multiple Sarcophagi on a different floor of the Silhouette Rouge.
- *Difficulty of 8:* Communication with multiple Sarcophagi spread across both levels.
- *Difficulty of 9:* Communication to and from Nowhere.

Rapport can only be used for intra-colony telepathy. Sarcophagi cannot speak to others in this manner.



Noumenon is like a dream. Substance can be found, but it's obscured by surrealism and nonsense. Any underlying meaning is hidden beneath layers of symbolism and imagery. Like a dream, much of *Noumenon* is open to interpretation. The true nature of the Silhouette Rouge remains a mystery throughout, and many questions posed in the game go unanswered. *Noumenon* is a Rorschach test.

What do you see in the ink?

Is the Silhouette Rouge a shared dreamscape? A limbo for those awaiting final judgment? The last delusional moments before death? Another dimension apart from normal, consensual reality? A state of mind? Something else? All of the above?

Whatever the true nature of the Silhouette Rouge, it is an isolated pocket of existence shared by the player characters and the NPCs. Only by experiencing its wonders can anyone hope to fathom the mystery at its heart. Only by solving the mystery can the Silhouette Rouge be escaped.

According to the Lodestar, the PCs are here to gather experience and bring their collected data back to the Logos, the voice of creation. But what is the Logos? If the Logos is God, does that mean God is not omniscient? If the Logos is not God, what is it? An unseen warden keeping a watchful eye on its prisoners? A curious scientist watching its rats scurry back and forth in a maze? And if the Silhouette Rouge is a maze, is it a physical labyrinth or merely a mental construct existing in the minds of the unsuspecting rats?

Perhaps the existence of the Logos is a lie. After all, the colony only has the word of the Lodestar to go by, and what if he's lying? Many Others claim to know of the Logos. Have they been duped as well, or are they in on the masquerade?

What do you see in the ink?

In *Noumenon*, the true nature of things is not revealed. Gamemasters will need to invent their own truths, their own reality.

Identity

In *Noumenon*, player characters begin the game as blank slates. They have no names, no memories, and no history. However, as the story progresses, PCs should develop personalities; their desires, dislikes, morals, and opinions should form over the course of play. Though they begin as static ciphers, they will



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evolve into dynamic, three-dimensional characters. This approach makes *Noumenon* easy to dive right into. Character generation is quick and simple, no detailed backgrounds are required, and players do not need to know anything about the game setting. Discovering the new world they've been cast into and exploring the wonders and horrors of the Silhouette Rouge are made all the more exciting when players have no idea what they are in for. This makes achieving a true sense of mystery, a central theme of *Noumenon*, much easier.

As noted, the personalities of the Sarcophagi are expected to form over the course of play. But how can identity develop over such a short period of time? Is it possible that Sarcophagi' personalities are not only shaped by current experiences in the Silhouette Rouge? Do echoes of their past still ripple into the present? Is the Tabula Rasa state imperfect? If so, the purposes of many of the rooms take on new meaning.

Chambers such as **The Room of You**, **The Room of Revenge**, and others rely heavily on past experiences, morality, and personality to be properly utilized. Though they have moved beyond their original histories, the Sarcophagi must still learn the lessons of these rooms in order to evolve. The GM can use such places to help players develop their characters' personalities. Additionally, these rooms taunt the players with glimpses of who their characters once were. With the truth of their past lives lost to them, such glimpses add to the sense of unexplained mystery that pervades *Noumenon*.

At a practical level, there are numerous methods a GM can utilize when PCs enter a location that requires extensive character histories. One possibility is to create complete character backgrounds, unknown to the players, and then hand out snippets of information as the PCs choose to enter an applicable room. It can be especially interesting to switch character histories between the PCs, as they locate different locations within the Silhouette Rouge. In this manner, it is impossible for players to extrapolate clear past lives for their characters. Switching these histories, at various points during the game, can also create the sense that the colony is *all* of these remembered individuals and experiences. Another method to increase the impact of these past-based locales, is to require that the characters momentarily lose their Sarcophagi identities for the period of time they are within the chamber; upon returning to the hallway, the colony will remember their experiences, but any past-life memories will seem distant and dream-like. PCs should be able to fully experience the pain and poignancy of a lifetime of experience, while simultaneously living the mystery of their new life.

Dreaming

Noumenon is intended to feel like a dream, disjointed and meaningful with an abundance of unexplainable elements. But achieving a dreamlike atmosphere requires a unique approach to gamemastering.

Subplots and ongoing plotlines are anathema to *Noumenon*. Instead, gameplay should be episodic. Just as sleepers lurch from one dream to another with little continuity, so should the characters move from one adventure to the next. However, there can *and should* be recurring symbolism, motifs, and NPCs. Though dreams do not connect to form a sequential story, they often repeat the same settings, characters, themes, and symbols. This fact should be remembered and utilized when gamemastering *Noumenon*.

Recurring characters and symbolism, the Silhouette Rouge itself, and the repeating of themes and motifs provide unity and continuity to multiple sessions of *Noumenon*. Storylines should be self-contained, resolving themselves in a few sessions at most. Ideally, a single storyline should be completed in a single session, though this is often difficult to accomplish. An adventurous GM might even do away with the concept of coherent storylines altogether, instead having the player characters move from one encounter to the next with nothing linking the scenes together. However, some players might abhor such a lack of cohesion, and the Gamemaster should take this approach with caution. After all, it's the players who make the game, and their tastes and interests should be taken into consideration.

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Others

Although the player characters begin *Noumenon* as blank slates, they will inevitably evolve and develop. This *should not* be the case for most NPCs. While it likely will become necessary for some NPCs, particularly those closest to the PCs, to become more detailed and even change their views, they should be a minority. Ideally, most of the NPCs should remain flat, static characters. As the game progresses, this lack of freewill and personal growth will make the Others seem more alien, adding a subtler degree of surrealism and mystery to *Noumenon*.

NPCs exist to provide allies and foils for player characters. They can possess clues to a mystery or serve as an obstacle. They can help move a storyline forward or be the impetus for an adventure or investigation. The Others are also there for social interaction; games become boring if PCs frantically move from one encounter to the next with no pause in-between. The Others punctuate the story.

To make things really off kilter, the Gamemaster can have recurring NPCs forget their previous dealings with the player characters after each new session or storyline. Of course, the PCs will remember their encounters with the Others. Conversely, the GM can have NPCs remember and cite conversations with the player characters that never occurred during the game. This will *really* lend an aura of mystery and strangeness to the characters' experiences.

Jung

Symbolism is the language of dreams. In *Noumenon*, it adds richness and resonance to extended gameplay. While individual storylines may be unrelated, the use of recurring symbolism can tie the fragments together. Symbolism hints at an underlying pattern, which in turn increases the sense of mystery in *Noumenon*. Players may not ever discover or understand the underlying pattern, but the implication that it is there will likely drive them to investigation; this yields roleplaying opportunities. Recurring symbolism, once detected, will hopefully get the players thinking and ultimately urge them to create their own theories about what is really going on. In this way, players (not just their characters) are tackling the mystery of the Silhouette Rouge. The Gamemaster can opt to run with the player characters' version of reality, contradict it, or refuse comment. Regardless of the GM's decision, satisfying roleplaying is likely to arise.

What do you see in the ink?

The choice of symbols is entirely up to the individual Gamemaster. The GM should choose whatever speaks to him and is likely to intrigue the players. Although a handful of recurring symbols are already sprinkled throughout the text of *Noumenon*, the Gamemaster should invent more of his own. Some recurring symbols scattered throughout the previous chapters include:

- Insects (beetles and butterflies in particular)
- Books
- Blood
- Spiders
- Portraits and Paintings
- Doors
- Locks and Keys
- Illumination (candles, lanterns, torches, Sol Invictus, etc.)
- The Number Nine

No clear explanations are given, or will be given, for the preceding symbols. The Gamemaster should invent meanings that are important to his stories and serve his style. However, interpretations for some





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(or all) of the above symbols will be obvious to most GMs and players, as many of these icons have been used in other media for millennia. Ascribing significance to these symbols shouldn't be difficult.

What do you see in the ink?

Illumination

The Nine Enigmas are the Holy Grail of *Noumenon* and the only means of escaping the Silhouette Rouge. Gamemasters who choose to make the quest for the Enigmas an important theme or motif, will have to determine the exact nature of the Nine. Are they a metaphor? Are they actual riddles in need of solving? Are they artifacts that, when properly arranged, open the Gate of Horn, granting exit from



the Silhouette Rouge? Are they something else entirely, or are they pieces from all of the above? As with many things in *Noumenon*, the truth is unspoken. Hints and possibilities lie scattered throughout the previous chapters, but no definitive answer is given. The only truth is in the mind of the Gamemaster.

What do you see in the ink?

The Lost One is the sole being who has solved the Nine Enigmas. As the Lodestar suggests, following his path may be the key to unlocking the mystery of the Nine. But is this path a spiritual one or is it a journey that takes place in the material plane? Could it be both? Again, the truth (or possible truth) is hinted at throughout *Noumenon*, but never clearly made manifest. However, four rooms on the Prima Materia plainly reference the Lost One. Collectively known as the **Lost One Quartet**, they include **The Mother's Son**, **Keep Off the Grass**, **The Rest Stop**, and **Gemini**. If player characters go in search of the Lost One or attempt to retrace his footsteps, these rooms are the logical point at which to begin.

Many of the Others have direct or indirect knowledge of the Lost One and his journeys. Speaking with them may grant insight.

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Though his presence in other rooms is not explicitly indicated in *Noumenon*, it is quite likely that many (if not all) of the chambers of the Silhouette Rouge played a role in the Lost One's resolution of the Nine Enigmas.

The Mother's Son implies that the Lost One entered the Silhouette Rouge in search of his missing parents. Is this truth, metaphor, or something else?

What do you see in the ink?

Disorder

Without warning, a reality spasm can sweep the Prima Materia. The Gamemaster can use these unheralded waves of chaos in many ways. Firstly, the onset of a reality spasm can make an overly familiar location completely alien to the PCs. Secondly, the Gamemaster can spice up even the most mundane of encounters by having a reality spasm unexpectedly strike. Thirdly, the GM can use the disruption to tip the odds in the players' favor — as the *Awareness*, *Violence*, and *Personality* ranks of all NPCs are 1 for the duration of the reality spasm (regardless of their normal rankings). Finally, the Gamemaster can use reality spasms to introduce a new foe and mystery: the Surgineers.

The Surgineers are yet another intriguing mystery in *Noumenon*. Where do they come from? Why do they enter the Prima Materia with the onset of a reality spasm? Why do they depart with the ending of the disruption? Why do they only hunt Hollow Men and Sarcophagi? What fate befalls their prey? Again, the Gamemaster will need to invent the answers and define what is truth.

What do you see in the ink?

While reality spasms are a valuable tool, the Gamemaster should use them sparingly. Unhinging reality for a spell is all well and good, but repeatedly doing so can be unfair and frustrating to the players.

Chains

The game mechanics should only come into play when the result of an action is in doubt. In other words, mundane actions require no task resolution. If the result of an action *is* in doubt, *Noumenon* resolves the conflict with dominoes.

In *Noumenon*, player cooperation is paramount. The statistics for many potential foes (presented in the **Appendix**) makes facing them one-on-one an impossible task. Additionally, starting ranks for player characters are very low, and they will need to support one another just to initially survive. Even the *Salubrity trait* reflects this idea of cooperative play; when one player character sustains injury, all player characters are damaged.

The formation of a *chain* is a clear-cut visualization of this cooperation. Once the *lead* is laid down, players make their *draws* and attempt to connect their dominoes to the *lead*. The more PCs who are participating in an action, the longer the *chain*; the longer the *chain*, the greater the chance of success. Players witness their collective effort visually laid before them in the *chain*.

Adversity

Setting *difficulty* levels is entirely at the Gamemaster's discretion; few guidelines are provided (beyond the NPC statistics in the **Appendix**). When utilizing the rooms and hallways, Gamemasters should set *difficulties* according to their perception of the text and how they see the drama unfolding. Of course,





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this is highly subjective, but that's the point.

What do you see in the ink?

Exploration

The rooms and hallways of the Silhouette Rouge serve two purposes. First and foremost, they provide roleplaying opportunities and hooks for a plethora of adventures. Secondly, they hint at the true nature of the Silhouette Rouge and the mystery it conceals. **Initiation** provides no *difficulty* levels, no ranks for NPCs, and no definitive guidelines on how to use the physical layout of the setting. The text is entirely devoid of gamespeak, enabling Gamemasters to interpret the environment as they see fit. The GM should treat each room and hallway as a mini-adventure, giving each one importance and meaning. Many of the locations have tremendous replay value, while some are best used as one-time encounters. Quite a few areas are home to beings who might become potential allies or sources of information. As is par for the course in *Noumenon*, the Gamemaster has carte blanche to control and develop the landscape of the Silhouette Rouge.

Evolution

While player characters explore the Silhouette Rouge, they gain experience. This is reflected in *Enlightenment* points. As PCs gain *Enlightenment*, they may spend these points to better their characters. *Trait* ranks may be increased, new *Birthrights* may be purchased (Sarcophagi simply grow these new *Birthrights* as their physical bodies adapt to their environment), and higher levels of *Principles* may be learned (through direct instruction by the Lodestar during *Communion*).

Gamemasters are free to reward *Enlightenment* points as they see fit, but the following guidelines should be kept in mind:

- For every individual battle won (including battles of wits, physical confrontations, mysteries solved, major obstacles overcome, etc.), the player character receives 1 *Enlightenment* point.
- For every battle won (including battles of wits, physical confrontations, mysteries solved, major obstacles overcome, etc.) with teamwork, participating PCs receive 2 *Enlightenment* points.

Cooperative play is rewarded. Players who work well together will find their characters progressing faster than those who do not.

At the end of each session or storyline, the Gamemaster should ask the players what they learned about the nature of the Silhouette Rouge; what meanings were buried in their adventuring, what secret messages were the rooms and hallways trying to reveal? The point is to get the players to contemplate what they have seen and experienced. There is no right or wrong answer. The GM should award 1 *Enlightenment* point to everyone who participates in the roundtable. With the conclusion of a session or storyline, the Gamemaster can reflect on the players' interpretations of events, NPCs, and locations — and shape future stories accordingly. In this way, the experience of the players directly guides the mystery of the Silhouette Rouge. Of course, the GM should not let players know that they are dictating the nature of their characters' reality, as discovery of the unknown is only exciting if it is outside of one's control.

The evolution of a player character is determined by the following:

- By spending 20 points of *Enlightenment*, a *trait* may be raised by one rank.
- By spending 20 points of *Enlightenment*, a new *Birthright* may be purchased.
- By spending 20 points of *Enlightenment*, a new *Principle* may be purchased at *Oracle* level.

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- By spending 25 points of *Enlightenment*, an *Oracle* level *Principle* may be raised to *Adept* level.
- By spending 50 points of *Enlightenment*, an *Adept* level *Principle* may be raised to *Master* level.

The Others are static characters locked into their routines, habits, modes of thinking, etc. They cannot evolve like the Sarcophagi do. Therefore, the Others do not accrue *Enlightenment* points.

Last Words

How much of the Silhouette Rouge is real and how much is unreal?

How much of *Noumenon* is material reality and how much is merely metaphor?

Who were the Sarcophagi and where did they come from?

What are the Nine Enigmas?

Who was the Lost One and where did he go?

What do you see in the ink?





appendix

Dozens of strange beings occupy the Silhouette Rouge. This appendix provides *trait* ranks and *Oddities* for many of the creatures and individuals mentioned throughout *Noumenon*. However, not every being is represented in the following text; GMs will need to assign *trait* ranks and *Oddities* to those absent from this appendix. Additionally, GMs should alter the ranks and/or *Oddities* of any of the following beings if such changes better suit their games.

chiroptera

Awareness: 3

Violence: 7

Personality: 1

Strength: 20

Flight: The *difficulty* to hit an airborne Chiroptera is 8.

Claws: A Chiroptera uses its claws to cling to vertical surfaces and ceilings. The *difficulty* to pry a Chiroptera loose is equal to the creature's *Violence* rank (7). In combat, the claws do an additional 2 points of damage.

Echolocation: Chiroptera are blind and rely on other senses to navigate their surroundings. Chiroptera suffer no penalties from situations involving distorted vision or blindness.

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hollow men

Awareness: 1
Violence: 1
Personality: 1
Strength: 5

the Minotaur

Awareness: 9
Violence: 9
Personality: 0
Strength: 40

Undying: The Minotaur *cannot* be permanently killed and with each rebirth, the creature is stronger than before. After each death, the Minotaur returns fully healed (but with 5 more points of *Strength*). For example: after its first death, the beast will return with a *Strength* of 45 and after the second, it will return with a *Strength* of 50.





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surgineers

Awareness: 9
Violence: 5
Personality: 1
Strength: 20

Tools: The exact function of the Surgineers' tools is up to the Gamemaster. They can inflict additional damage, cut through any material, pick any lock, or whatever else the Gamemaster desires them to do.

kai-tang nim jin-yao

Awareness: 8
Violence: 8
Personality: 4
Strength: 10

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sol invictus

Awareness: 9
Violence: 4
Personality: 5
Strength: 30

Knowledge: Sol Invictus can divine the secrets, nature, and powers of any of the Others. The governing *trait* for this action is *Awareness* and the *difficulty* is based on how enigmatic the subject is. For example, knowing the details of the servants of the Adversary might carry a *difficulty* of 2, while knowing the hidden truths of Justin St. Just might carry a 9.

spiders

Awareness: 2
Violence: 3
Personality: 0
Strength: 10

Bite: Biting attacks do an extra 2 points of damage.

Venom: The venom secreted by during a biting attack induces paralysis. The *difficulty* to overcome this paralysis is 5 (the governing *trait* is *Chitin*). If the venom is not overcome, the paralysis last five rounds.

Webs: The *difficulty* to break free of a spider's web is 3.

Pulvilli: These pads enable spiders to climb vertical surfaces.





HOLMENON

stilt men

Awareness: 4

Violence: 3

Personality: 1

Strength: 15

Heightened Senses: The hearing and sight of Stilt Men are preternaturally sharp. *Awareness*-based actions involving these senses are 7, though all other *Awareness* actions are performed at the normal rank (4).

Grip: Once a Stilt Man ensnares its prey, the victim seldom escapes. The *difficulty* to break free of a Stilt Man's grasp is 9.

Grounded: Stilt Men can never be toppled; they always stand erect.

Locomotive: On a straightaway, Stilt Men can achieve running speeds in excess of 50 miles per hour.

speaker of secrets

Awareness: 9

Violence: 6

Personality: 1

Strength: Limitless

Freedom: No lock, door, or ward can bar Speaker of Secrets. All such impedances seek to function in its presence.

Chains: These unusual weapons do an additional 3 points of damage, and the *difficulty* to break free of their grasp is 9.

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the precession

Awareness: 7
Violence: 2
Personality: 3
Strength: 10

Brawn: When provoked, the robed ones are inhumanly strong. There is nothing they cannot lift, and punching attacks do an extra 3 points of damage.

Dagger: These weapons inflict 2 extra points of damage per attack (in addition to the 3 points done by the *Brawn Oddity*).

Candle: If one of the Precession's unlit candles is touched by flame, three questions may be asked and three answers are given, though the answers are veiled in cryptic verbiage.

the horned men (of scorpio)

Awareness: 5
Violence: 5
Personality: 5
Strength: 15



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servants

Awareness: 3

Violence: Variable (1 to 7)

Personality: 2 (6)

Strength: 20

Claws and Bite: Servant attacks do an additional 2 points of damage

Negativity: The servants of the Adversary invoke feelings of despair in nearby Sarcophagi. The *difficulty* to overcome these feelings is 5 (*Rapport* is the governing *trait* since Sarcophagi must draw strength from one another to overcome this attack).

Deception: The servants are masters of deception. They cast illusions that are real to the senses, can invoke confusion in their victims' minds, and can persuade their victims to believe otherwise ridiculous claims or outright lies. The *difficulty* to see through these illusions is 6, and persuasion attempts by the servants carry a rank of 6 rather than the normal *Personality* rank of 3.

the eremite

Awareness: 5

Violence: 2

Personality: 2

Strength: 5

Lore: The lore contained in the Eremite's tomes can answer many obscure questions. The *difficulty* to locate information in the books depends on how obscure the information is. However, questions regarding the Silhouette Rouge and the Others are beyond the scope of the Eremite's volumes.

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widow-heart

Awareness: 6
Violence: 3
Personality: 6
Strength: 10

kong len wei

Awareness: 8
Violence: 7
Personality: 6
Strength: 10

Chamber of Duality: Kong is the master of the Chamber of Duality. In the room, he decrees the nature of reality.





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character creation

- Choose a *Birthright*
- Assign a rank of 1 to all *traits*
- Spend nine points to raise *traits* and/or buy new *Birthright(s)*
- Choose a *Principle* at Oracle level

mechanics

- The governing *trait* is determined, and the GM sets a *difficulty* level.
- The Gamemaster randomly draws one domino from the pool and lays it down. This is called the *lead*.
- The player randomly draws a number of dominoes equal to the rank of the governing *trait* of the character.
- The player connects his or her dominoes to the GM's *lead* by matching the end of any drawn dominoes to the ends of the *lead*. Players are allowed to connect their *draws* to one another, but at least one of the group's dominoes must connect to the Gamemaster's *lead*. *Draws* may be connected vertically or horizontally to the *lead* or to one another.
- Every domino that is connected to the *lead* is called a *victory*. If the number of *victories* equals or exceeds the *difficulty* level, the action is a success.

ENLIGHTENMENT



PRINCIPLES



Master:

Master: 

Master:

Esoteric Vision (1)

Chaos Lightning (2)

Tentacle (3)

Ghost (4)

Chain Lightning (5)

Chaos Web (6)

Esoteric Fury (7)

Spider God (8)

Chaos Unbound (9)



concept by darwin leary

written by josh benton, nick bousfield,
thomas eliot, lee foster, robert hansen,
nathan hill, khairul hisham, darwin leary,
darren maclellan, jens rushing, monica
valentinelli, caias ward, and chris welsh

edited by anita hager

illustrated by cliff kurowski, eric lofgren,
annelisa ochoa, and jennifer rodgers

cover by jennifer rodgers

character sheet by edward wedig