

SPLINTERED GOODHOOD



A ONE SHOT
HORROR STORYTELLING GAME
BY CLINTON J. BOOMER



SPLINTERED GODHOOD DESIRE, POWER, AND TWISTS

a one-shot horror storytelling game by [Clinton J. Boomer](#)

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INTRODUCTION

Splintered Godhood is a one-night, improvisational cooperative horror role-playing game for 4-to-5 mature players and one storyteller. The game is different every time you play, and involves crafting a dark, strange tale of adventure, betrayal & intrigue with friends; the GM will need more than 3 players and fewer than 6. They all need to be adults.

Smart, cool, interesting adults.

The themes of the experience are **Desire**, **Power** and **Twists**. The essence of the game is exploration of strangeness -- both internal and external -- along with the discovery of high weirdness and mad truths, horror of the unknown, and transformation into something beyond merely human.

For Everyone: You'll need scratch-paper, pencils, a dozen or more six-sided dice and some type of small "chit" to represent Power -- ideally, these should be something fun to hold and to fiddle with, like dark glass beads or old keys. Good-quality, casino-ready poker chips are also an excellent choice, as are exotic coins, mismatched buttons, smooth metal knickknacks or half-inch clay tiles. The more of these chits you can pour onto the table as the game begins, the better. If you can, one hundred would be perfect.

Players begin the game with seven chits, which represent 7 points of Power, apiece. The GM will keep the rest of the Power in the center of the table. Players may spend as many of these points as they like on their starting Traits, or hold onto them as part of an ever-growing Pool of Power.

For Players: Character Creation: Think of a person. This will be your character in the tale we all tell together; this ought to be an interesting person. You just need a sketch, really, at this point: an outline of someone, like a stranger walking toward you through the sunset fog in the distance. The "when and where" don't really matter ... not just yet. Instead, visualize the basic idea of who this person might be: old, young, man, woman, tall, weak, brilliant, cruel, whatever.

Who -- or *what* -- are you glimpsing, behind your mind's eye?

You are going to assign your seven points of Power, as you see fit, to the four Traits: **Flesh**, **Voice**, **Will** and **Awareness**.

As noted above, you can hang on to some points for later; you don't have to spend your Pool of Power dry just yet.

The scores of these four Traits run from zero to infinity; two is human average and five is human maximum. Write the names of the four Traits down, with a little spot for a number next to each of them, like so:

FLESH	VOICE	WILL	AWARENESS
[]	[]	[]	[]

This number will change as the game progresses.

FLESH is strength, stamina, speed, appearance, toughness and physical prowess. It's anything that makes you impressive at the beach: your abilities at swimming, running, jumping, playing sand volleyball, drinking beers, dancing around a bonfire, looking good in a swimsuit & kicking sand in the faces of losers. It's your health, looks, physique, brawn, ability to win at a game of "punch face, go hard" and to play again the next night. Stephen Hawking has a low very Flesh -- probably zero or one -- while soldiers, mob leg-breakers, models, stuntmen and professional athletes of all types generally have four or more.

VOICE is charm, connections, fame, fortune, family and friends. It's your ability to lie; it's slick social grace, it's how much money you've got in the bank; it's your ability to tell a joke, make strangers trust you, smoothly vanish into a role or pretend to brush off an ugly, cutting insult. People with a good, strong Voice become politicians, artists, actors and alphas who write bestselling books -- even if they're total idiots -- while people with a weaker Voice tend to find themselves forever alone and unloved. Any celebrity you don't hate has a Voice of four or more.

WILL is knowledge, passion, drive, focus and raw intellect. It's the power to know (and obtain) your own desire. It's what separates you from a food-processor. The sheer bloody-minded ability to keep going, to see it through, to force your desires into reality -- for better or for worse -- are the hallmarks of high Will. It's your ability to study and recall facts as much as it is your icy determination. Most lawyers and surgeons have at least a four Will, as do honest cops, astronauts and overnight ER nurses ... as well as successful con-artists, blackmailers, drug king-pins and human-traffickers.

AWARENESS is intuition, understanding, perception, insight, instinct and sense of subtlety. Top-gun stockbrokers possess excellent Awareness, as do visionary inventors, snipers and serial killers. It's what lets you hide in the dark, and know what else is hiding. Your ability to predict the actions of others -- and to outwit them -- is an element of Awareness; it is as much stealth and subterfuge as it is detection, empathy and clinical psychology. Spies, criminologists, hunters and thieves without an Awareness of four or better usually die young. Sherlock Holmes, Nikola Tesla, James Moriarty and Thomas Edison all possess high Awareness, but each in different ways.

As noted before: *the four Traits run from zero to infinity; two is human average and five is human maximum.*

REGARDING POWER

Normal people do not have Power. It is the majestic domain of only yourself, your fellow players and certain special antagonists. Most folks are stuck with a handful of points scattered across their Traits, and possess no ability to manipulate them nor to truly alter the universe at large.

Power makes you better than other people. It defines your place above the rabble; with Power, your Traits may be warped and altered as you see fit and reality itself laid bare. As an aside: you may spend a single point of Power to gain a single success on any challenge, even if you have no dice to roll. If you have a single success on a roll, you may spend points of Power to add successes, at a one-for-one rate, before the victor is declared ... but we'll get into ROLLS here in a moment.

Let's talk about what your Trait scores represent.

-- **Zero points** in a Trait is absolute human minimum, lingering on the edge of death: Zero in Flesh means that you cannot walk or stand up -- or even breathe for extended periods of time -- without assistance. A zero Voice means that no one listens to you and you have great difficulty being understood, trusted, cared-for or believed. You are not the pack beta -- you're the omega. Maybe you're a slave, or a friendless member of an oppressed minority in a war-torn country during genocide of your people by foreigners, or in solitary confinement awaiting execution for a crime you didn't commit. A human with zero Will, likewise, is mentally exhausted -- probably in the depths of severe depression approaching catatonia, who has difficulty dressing or leaving the house. A zero Awareness generally means that you're numb and shut off, entirely blind to the world around you, both obvious and oblivious. Unable to make accurate observations or predictions or to understand why, you may be trapped in a fugue-state of mists & nightmares, unable to differentiate hallucinations from reality, quietly -- or loudly -- going mad.

Characters may, if they choose, begin play with a zero in one single Trait.

You cannot go below zero in a Trait. Well, you can't *survive* it, anyway. Taking damage to a Trait that is at zero may not kill you, necessarily, but it removes you from the game until the number increases to zero or higher once again.

-- **One point in any Trait** represents lower than normal ability: the kid picked last in gym class, the lonely wallflower, the spineless dullard with a room-temperature IQ or the hopeless, drugged-out space-cadet.

-- **Two points in any Trait** is human average, and **three points** is assumed to be professional level: beefy guys have a three Flesh, charmers have a three Voice, people with advanced degrees have a three Will, and anyone who makes a living by being perceptive or cautious has an Awareness of three.

-- **Four points in a Trait** is the result of exceptional skill and training, nearly world-class; **five points** is the literal peak of human ability. Each step up the ladder represents a truly huge increase in raw talent and focused ability. Make sure that your players **FEEL** like they're truly becoming more and more potent with every investment of Power; normal humans cower helpless and stunned in the presence of a person with double their own Trait score.

-- **Six or seven in any Trait** is truly superhuman: with a six Flesh, you are all-but bulletproof and can outperform gold medal Olympian athletes at any given physical task; you most likely do not age or require sustenance. A six Voice means that you can talk someone into just about anything, including suicide, given time; if you are not an internationally-recognized celebrity, cult-figure or political leader, it's simply because you don't wish to be. A six Will means that you can perform any number of impossible feats of focus -- including eye-surgery on yourself, a dead sprint on a broken leg, or killing an animal by making its heart stop via pure, cold mental action. A six Awareness allows you to read minds, glimpse the future, vanish from the sight and memory of others as you choose, and to literally see the cosmos as it turns by tuning yourself to other universes, dimensions, frequencies and realities.

-- **Eight, nine and higher** are the realms of inhuman things beyond the stars, ageless and immortal. They rend stone and steel with a touch or a glance, sway nations with a word, and guide the destinies of mere mortals from shadows and ancient whispers, soaring through eddies of vacuum on plasmatic wings of pure desire. They gaze -- and step -- between worlds with impunity. When these eldritch entities deign to stride the earth, they are worshiped and feared: commanding sacrifice & obedience at a whim.



ABOUT ROLLS

Rolls are rare.

Most of the time, you and the GM (and your fellow players) will simply tell a story together. You might roll dice less than a half-dozen times, all game ... and that's good. As a rule, your GM will only call for you to roll when there's a chance you'll fail and be harmed; alternatively, you may call for a roll if you think you can snatch victory from the jaws of "inevitable" defeat, dumping raw Power into your actions and humiliating those who once stood against you.

Whenever there is a roll -- *no matter the results* -- your scene ends. There's more on running scenes below, in the GM section, but the basic idea is this: you only roll dice when asked to do so by the GM, or when you insist on challenging the outcome of narration.

Don't fiddle with your dice. Fiddle with your Power.

When you are challenged by your GM or another player to make a check of your Flesh, Voice, Will or Awareness, you roll a number of dice equal to the score of the stat you're using; you are aiming for numbers equal to either the "assigned difficulty" or the opposed stat of your foe.

FOR ALL ROLLS:

Sixes on dice "explode": that is, after rolling a six, you may roll again and add the resulting number to six. In this way, characters can achieve a 7, a 13 or even higher on a die by rolling two (or three or more) sixes in a row on the same die.

It seems, then, that 6 and 7 are effectively the same difficulty for purposes of numbers on the die -- however, because *you need a number of successes equal to half the difficulty, rounded up, to accomplish a task*, it requires four successes to triumph against a challenge with an assigned difficulty of 7, rather than three successes. In the case of opposed rolls, a creature with a Flesh of 7 has more dice to roll than a creature with a Flesh of 6, and will tend to win if matched against such a lesser opponent.

As noted before, *you may spend a single point of Power to gain a single success on any challenge, even if you have no dice to roll. If you have a single success on any roll, you may spend points of Power to add successes, at a one-for-one rate, before the victor is declared.*

ASSIGNED DIFFICULTY ROLLS

Sometimes, you're looking to hit a "difficulty number," which represents the general circumstances of a dynamic challenge, and sometimes you're fighting a single opponent to the death.

This is that first one.

When your GM tells you to roll, she might give you an 'assigned difficulty' -- that's the number you're looking for (or better) on the dice when you make the check. You're going to count up how many of your dice hit that number or above, that's your 'number of successes'. *You usually need a number of successes equal to half the difficulty, rounded up, to accomplish a task*: thus, to succeed at something with a difficulty of 5, you need for three dice to roll 5 or better.

To triumph at a task of difficulty 8, you need at least four dice to roll 6 and then for four of them to roll 2 or better on the explosion re-roll.

The most standard difficulty for rolls is 3 -- you need two dice to roll 3 or better to succeed at a task with an assigned difficulty of 3.

In general, characters who have at least one point in the Trait, who thus aren't crippled -- emotionally, socially, mentally, physically or whatever the requisite roll requires -- always succeed on a difficulty of 1.

Most of the time, you also don't roll for things of difficulty 2. Most people can usually make that kind of roll, since it only requires one die to roll 2 or better. Things that are "difficulty 2" are the little challenges that occur all day, every day: jogging to catch the bus, calming down a frustrated friend, not snapping at your boss when you're both hung-over or intuiting that your lover has had a tough day.

Remember, your GM will only call for a roll when the result is important enough to make a dramatic, interesting ending to a scene.

Average difficulty for a roll is 3, as noted; high difficulty for something most humans can do is 4. If the GM is not sure what the difficulty should be but wants it to be harder than average, 4 is the default: if you automatically picture a badass human character achieving it during the middle of a movie -- something like successfully running from armed guards, talking past a security checkpoint, performing emergency medical treatment or breaking into a well-guarded room -- then it's Difficulty 4.

Normal people cannot succeed at a task with a difficulty of 5 or 6, but incredible training, impressive technology and powerful technique make it possible. Difficulties of 7 or 8 are usually possible only for world-class experts who get lucky.

Difficulty 9 or above represents things that are legendary, super-human and nigh-impossible.

Here are some additional examples of difficulties for each Trait:

ALL 1: Standing up, putting on your shoes and walking out the door when it's time.

-- These are the things that almost anybody can do. --

Flesh 3: Fighting three scrawny, malnourished meth-head kids, one of them armed with a hypodermic needle and the other two still trying to scrounge up weapons. Winning a free t-shirt in a small town bar's "best body" competition or getting a job based solely on your looks. Quickly scaling a five-foot chain-link fence or running a 7:30 minute mile.

Voice 3: Convincing your family that you haven't been cheating on your wife, when she has no proof and they want to believe you. Winning a local primary, being interviewed as an expert, or getting your picture on the front page of a small-town newspaper. Talking your way out of a speeding ticket, getting a date with someone better looking than you or convincing someone to drop a small-peanuts lawsuit.

Will 3: Finally going in, alone, and getting your cancer or HIV screening. Winning a stupid frat-party challenge or cruel bar-bet that involves stamina or pain-tolerance. Working a twelve-hour shift while sick with the flu or while badly hung-over (both would be one difficulty level higher). Finishing your degree, novel, screenplay or painting. Setting a broken nose or finger; successfully pushing yourself to quit your dead-end job.

Awareness 3: Hearing your house creak in the middle of the night and being certain that it isn't the wind. Decisively winning a casual, friends-only game of charades, chess, poker or other game of perception and insight. Intuiting that your husband is cheating on you. Accurately predicting a market-crash or the failure of a marriage from less than six months out. Sneaking up on a close friend who isn't expecting you; perceiving that a close friend is unexpectedly sneaking up on you.

-- These are the things that average folks are proud of accomplishing; these are the day-to-day success stories we tell ourselves, the topics of indie comics and small art movies. --

DIFFICULTY 4 (two or more dice showing 4 or higher)

Flesh 4: Fighting off a half-dozen untrained combatants in a seedy bar, or squaring up against three armed men with an average Flesh of 3. Winning \$50 in a rowdy tavern's "best body" competition or getting a enjoyable, high-paying job based solely on your looks over a more qualified applicant. Scaling a ten-foot chain-link fence, running a 6:15 minute mile.

Voice 4: Convincing a hostile crowd to let you walk away instead of executing you. Winning a local election, being called to testify in court as an expert, or getting your picture on the front page of a big-city newspaper. Talking your way out of a drunk-driving ticket, getting a date with someone significantly better looking and more famous than you or convincing someone to drop a large, lucrative lawsuit.

Will 4: Performing minor surgery on yourself, like stitching up a wound; enduring short-term physical or emotional trauma (like brief torture) without breaking. Winning an "unwinnable" frat-party challenge or bar-bet that involves stamina or pain-tolerance. Working an eighteen-hour shift while desperately sick with the flu or so badly hung-over that you can barely see or hear.

Awareness 4: Quietly following the tracks of someone who was in your house a day ago. Winning 90+% of all amateur-level charades, chess, poker or other casual games of perception and insight. Intuiting that your husband is cheating on you, and figuring out how to prove it, without his knowledge. Accurately predicting a market-crash or the failure of a marriage from more than a year out. Sneaking up on an enemy who is expecting you; knowing when an enemy's gaze is upon you.

-- These are the things that truly exceptional people do to show us their superiority; these are the topics of blockbuster movies, sensationalist tabloids and bold, exciting fiction. --

DIFFICULTY 5 (three or more dice showing 5 or higher)

Flesh 5: Fighting off twenty poorly-trained peasants, or a half-dozen armed professional-security personnel with an average Flesh of 4. Winning \$1,000 in a big-city nightclub's "best body" competition or being paid over a million a year just for your looks and sheer physical prowess. Scaling a fifteen-foot chain-link fence at speed, running more than one 5:00 minute mile in a row.

Voice 5: Convincing a hostile crowd that you are their rightful king. Winning a state-wide election, being interviewed on prime-time cable as a renowned expert, or getting your picture on the front page of a national magazine. Talking your way out of an arrest for murder, getting a marriage proposal from someone significantly better looking and wealthier than you, or convincing someone to go to jail for you.

Will 5: Performing major surgery on yourself, like amputating a limb or applying trepanation; surviving long-term emotional or physical trauma (weeks worth of torture) without breaking. Casually winning a series of "unwinnable" frat-party challenges and bar-bets that involve stamina and pain-tolerance without the smile ever leaving your face. Working a 24-hour shift, and covering for another employee, while you should be on complete bed-rest with the flu, pneumonia, cancer or radiation poisoning.

Awareness 5: Silently hunting your quarry through the foreign woods of their homeland, a week behind. Winning 80+% of all professional-level chess, poker and other games of perception and insight. Intuiting that an acquaintance's husband is cheating on them based only on body language, and figuring out how to prove it without either of their knowledge. Predicting a market-crash or the failure of a marriage from a half-decade out. Sneaking up on an armed, paranoid enemy in their home and pickpocketing them; getting a prickle on the back of your neck when someone says your name.



-- These are the things that almost no one can do, moments of defining triumph even for a figure that is already larger than life and beyond the merely mundane. --

DIFFICULTY 9 (five or more dice showing 6; five or more show 3 when re-rolled)

Flesh 9: Fighting any arbitrary number of puny mortals armed with bricks and clubs, or a dozen well-armed and armored warriors with an average Flesh of 5 or more. Being recognized as the most beautiful and most physically perfect human in the world. Scaling a thirty-foot chain-link fence or a fifteen-foot smooth cement wall at the speed of a sprint; running a dozen or more 4:00 minute miles in a row.

Voice 9: Convincing a hostile crowd that you are the one true Messiah. Winning a fifth straight Presidential election, or being known as the world's foremost expert on any of several topics. Talking your way out of a being taken into custody for genocide, or convincing a stranger to gladly die for you.

Will 9: Performing invasive surgery on yourself, like removing your own appendix; surviving the most terrible of all possible long-term emotional or physical traumas (decades worth of torture) without breaking. Casually enduring nearly-lethal trauma up to and including crucifixion. Working multiple straight 24-hour shifts, covering for a full staff, while dying of total organ failure.

Awareness 9: Invisibly hunting your quarry, a month behind, across wind-blown tundra ... after a snowstorm. Intuiting that a complete stranger's husband is cheating on them based only on tone of voice or facial-cues, and instantly knowing how to prove it. Predicting a market-crash or the failure of a marriage from two decades out. Sneaking up on a small army of armed,

paranoid enemies in their fortified base, assassinating their leader and leaving unnoticed; knowing that someone is standing in your old house.

-- These are the things that only super-humans can do; they are the once-in-a-lifetime successes of epic main characters and truly diabolical villains. --

DIFFICULTY 11 (six or more dice showing 6; six or more show 5 when re-rolled)

Flesh 11: Killing an entire country with your bare heads, or fighting a hundred well-armed Flesh 5 humans at once. Being recognized as the most beautiful and most physically perfect human who has ever lived; your name synonymous with Hercules or Helen of Troy. Scaling any arbitrary surface at the speed of a sprint, running multiple hundreds of 30-second miles in a row.

Voice 11: Convincing a hostile crowd to commit seppuku in your name, to fuel your Power. Being named Eternal God-Emperor of your species. Talking your way out of damnation itself. Having multiple parties duel to the death for the right to go to Hell in your place.

Will 11: Performing open-heart surgery on yourself; surviving unimaginable trauma -- such as centuries worth of torture or the end of your universe -- without breaking. Willing yourself to simply not die, no matter the totality of your illness and injury.

Awareness 11: Intuiting every minor psychological quirk of someone you've never met, from a vague description, and locating them alone, helpless and at their most vulnerable. Predicting a market-crash or the failure of a marriage from over a century out.

-- These are the things that only living gods can do. --

OPPOSED ROLLS

Sometimes, you're fighting to the death, directly against an opponent. This is how *that* works.

If two people are violently brawling, running a foot-race, arm-wrestling or comparing raw physical beauty, each one rolls a number of dice equal to their Flesh, looking for numbers that are equal to or higher than their opponent's Flesh score; rolls which are high enough are counted as successes.

If two people are playing a deadly game of cat-&-mouse in a dim-lit abandoned warehouse, they both roll a number of dice equal to their Awareness, looking for a difficulty number equal to the Awareness score of their opponent. Shooting a fleeing opponent in the back is likewise probably a contest of Awareness, as is a poker-match or a riddling competition. Rolls that are high enough, as before, are counted as successes. The character with the greater number of successes wins, allowing them -- in such an instance -- to ambush their opponent, humiliate them or to flee undetected.

In the same way, two characters might attempt a contest of Wills or a campaign of opposed Voices.

If one character has twice as many dice to roll as the other, then it's probably going to be a curb-stomp and probably doesn't need to be rolled. Then again, it can be fun to dice out a curb-stomp. Go nuts.

After rolling, compare number of success; in the case of an equal number of successes for each opponent, the character with the highest single roll on any one die wins. If it's a true straight-up tie, both opponents take one level of damage and the fight continues into the next scene. If one combatant suddenly has twice as much in a Trait at the beginning of the next scene, though, the contest ends abruptly.

Once a victor is determined, damage equal to the success-margin of the winner is dealt directly to one (or more) of the Traits of the runner-up: the loser of a fistfight -- or the victim of a violent ambush -- takes Flesh damage, while the humiliated also-ran of a dirty political campaign, popularity contest or sex-scandal might lose an equal amount of both Voice and Will. It is possible, in some circumstance, to take damage in other ways: a blow to the head or a psychic assault might reduce your Will or Awareness, for example. Winners are allowed to deal damage as they see fit: it's possible to deal Voice damage to a person after beating them in a brawl, for example, by humiliating them rather than killing them; you could also deal Awareness damage to your opponent by dumping pain-overload into them.

The loser may petition the GM to take some damage in a different way: Will damage instead of Flesh damage -- for example -- by using extreme effort to dodge a speeding bus, a detonating car-bomb or a collapsing skyscraper.

CHARACTER CREATION: STRENGTH, WEAKNESS, AND DESIRE

Still got that hazy sketch of a person in your head?

Do you have your seven points divvied up yet?

The time has come to spend them.

Remember, you don't have to spend all of them. But it's true, they go *really* fast. You can't even make yourself an Average Joe with that many points: some random schmuck off the street has got a 2 in every score, and that would set you back 8 points.

Which you don't have.

A true hero might have 4 or better in every Trait.

If only you had more Power, right?

When you've got the points paid out, this is your character at the *lowest point in your life*. This might be the day you got fired from the job you loved, or the day your husband left you. It might be the day you came home from school, nose bloodied and crying, knowing that you were gonna catch hell from your step-dad for letting those big kids rip your shirt. This might be the day you lost a loved one, or found out about the tumor, or the day you woke up in the hospital after the crash. It might be the first day in prison, or the last day of your mom's life, or the two-year anniversary of the day you got kicked out of the house -- sitting, alone, in the rainy dark and biting back painful memories. It might be when you lost the lottery, and were sent to die in the arena; it might have been when the walls of the city broke and the enemy was upon you.

It was probably your most sleepless night. It might be the day you tried to kill yourself.

Or it might not be quite so dire.

You might just be in a rut: a character with Flesh 3, Voice 1, Will 2 and Awareness 1 isn't *pathetic*; that character is in better-than-average physical shape and isn't having trouble crawling out of bed in the morning. Yet. Probably not bad-looking, and doing okay financially. Maybe has a kid who doesn't give a shit about them and a boss who doesn't respect them; I'd guess single and a little lonely. Life just seems to be 'passing them by,' so to speak: they might have a lot of acquaintances but very few close friends, and nothing great and new has happened any time recently.

No true love, no life-changing experiences, nothing to write home about, no one to write *to*.

Living paycheck to paycheck, growing cold, drifting a little lower every day.

Everyone else seems to be happier than them.

Decide your low-point in your head, in broad strokes, and then write down three things:

1. What's your highest score?
2. What's your lowest?
3. What, in one sentence, do you Desire?

The answers will serve as role-playing tools, and they will define your secondary Traits.

In the case of a tie, decide which one you were *closest* to raising or lowering ... or flip a coin. All of this is just to help you rough out the sketch a little bit. But it's important to know -- just for this session, just for tonight, just for this moment -- what defines you.

Your highest score is your Strength. It's what type of creature you *are*, at heart. Over the course of the game, you can increase -- and buy from -- your Strength with greater ease. If you have a Will of four at character creation, and a Flesh of zero, it doesn't matter if your Flesh someday crests to 5, or 15, or 50 ... you're still a creature of Will, at some fundamental and basal level. It's the thing that defines you; it's what became your rock when you were cast adrift by life, it's what was solid when everything else crumbled. You would, then, jot down "Strong Willed" or "Strength of Will".

Your lowest score is your Weakness. It's the thing that holds you back, your handicap, your failure; it's what you know -- in your darkest, secret self -- is the fragile and frail thing that keeps you down and broken. Over the course of the game, it costs you more to increase -- and buy from -- your Weakness. If you begin, here and now, with a Voice of zero, it doesn't matter if it crescendos past superhuman and towards godhood as you gain Power: it was once nothing, and may, with strange aeons, become so again. You would jot down "Weak Voice" or "Weakness of Voice".

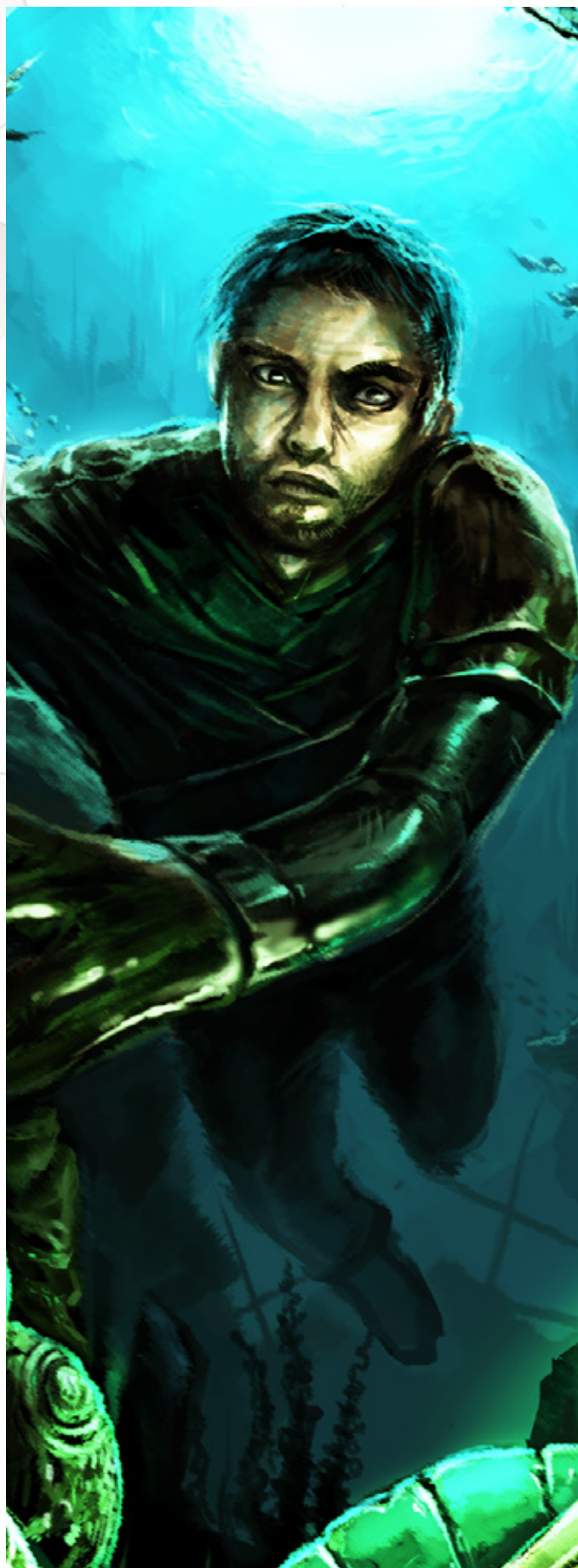
Your core Desire is what pushes you; it's where your Power is driving towards, and it's what you would Twist the universe to get. It may change, with time, but it's a good place from which to step-off into the story. Every once in a while, while other scenes occur around you, it might be useful to remind yourself what it was you once desired -- so that you can see how close you've come, or how far you've fallen, or how much beyond such petty concerns you finally are.

Next step is World-Building, and then Finishing Touches on characters, and then you're going to get more Pool of Power to your name as the game begins.

But this, right here, ends the player's section.

From here on out, it's just us GMs.

As a final aside: I think you'll have a great time playing, and I look forward to [hearing about how your game went!](#)



GM SECTION

Still with me? Okay, good. You're going to want to read through this a few times before you run your first game, but we'll try to make this as simple -- and as fun! -- as possible.

Here's what you're going to do:

World-Building is the next step. We need to know where these stories of Desire and Power take place ... and we need an outline of the multiple universes that are going to come Twisting together as the players interact and grow to dark godhood.

Take a look at the very last part of this book, near the Appendices, where it says **Some Things to Keep in Mind**.

Now, arrange your players in a semi-circle around you, if they aren't there already.

Make sure that the first player on your left is awesome -- perhaps a fellow GM, or a clever & fun player in a different game. Quite a bit is riding on this one. If that player isn't a particularly strong storyteller or is a little bit new to gaming, try to subtly rearrange the table. You do *NOT* want a first-time role-player in that position.

So, let's start building alternate realities.

On a piece of scratch paper, you're going to jot down a number of Splinters, each with a letter after it -- designating which player occupies which universe at the start of the game. If your five players are, from left to right, Kyle, Dani, Corey, Ryan and Kelsey, then it might look something like this:

- Splinter Y
- Splinter D
- Splinter C
- Splinter R
- Splinter E

Do it however feels comfortable to you; you'll be referring to this outline a lot. Start thinking about where the **Splintered Antigod** [see below] is divided up. At this time, you're also going to want to have a place in your notes where you can jot down more about each of the characters once they really start getting fleshed out.

Next, you're going to ask your first player (that's Kyle, in our scenario above) to describe to you a world. Just a few sentences should do it. This place is a Splinter: an alternate reality, a shadow-dimension branching from our own, real-world timeline, which can depart our own reality at any point during all of human history but which isn't more than about 20-50 years removed from the actual existence we know.

This should be an interesting, exciting place -- something you would read a book about, or that would make a smart, fun setting for a movie or a cult television show.

Some good examples, which you should feel free to share with the players, include:

- Any world in which the Confederacy or the Nazis won the war -- about ten years back -- for any of a million reasons including alien tech or occult super-soldiers.
- Deep space, on the icy generation-ship that's taking the last 150 humans to a new, unspoiled world where unknown and alien dangers await.
- A backwoods town in the secluded wilds, near a quiet lake on a bleak night much like tonight, as cults gather and the signs point to a forgotten god's ascension.
- The nameless, ashen desert of waste, three generations after the great, hungering dragon awoke and burned the stained-glass pyramids of the old empires.
- Some concrete, cracked-asphalt Today of traffic lights and daycares, fast-food and taxes, bad gas-station coffee and past-due child support payments; a place of drugs, traffic, radio, smoke and money.

If your first player can't think of anything, feel free to roll on the chart below. You can use a d20 or simply pick something that strikes your fancy.

1 -- Feudal Japan at the very height of Bushido/Samurai culture, ten years after steampunk mecha-technology was developed and war-machines were built.

2 -- 1960s San Francisco, six months into a viral, mind-rending apocalypse.

3 -- A chilly spring semester at a small, private college-town in the Midwest. There were unsolved murders in the fall, and strange phone-calls come at night.

4 -- A dark, totalitarian future where a small theocratic society armed with 'angelic' weapons rules over humbled, starving masses; an Inquisitional police-state roots out heretics.

5 -- A nuclear submarine a mile below the surface of the North Atlantic, as the fatal codes come in and the bombs start landing in major US cities.

6 -- The Texas/Mexico border during the Second Goldrush, coinciding with the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl and the discovery of strange, para-magnetic Aztec ruins in the south.

7 -- A grim, inner-city 1990s where Reagan is still president, crime is rampant, and all the worst predictions of RoboCop & Sin City came true.

8 -- A cheery, 1950s-esque suburb in Anytown, America,

where unspeakable things happen behind closed doors. A single family runs local politics, and violent corruption runs rampant.

9 -- Rome, in the decline of its glory, as sinister cults manipulate the ascension of an inhuman Emperor.

10 -- The modern day, but the ruins of a totally alien civilization were found at the south pole in the late 80s; only some very special people know about this, and some of them aren't human.

11 -- A neon-lit, hyperactive world '15 minutes into the future' from today, where cybernetics and cheap bio-modifications have birthed a generation of violent, socially-disconnected cannibalistic freaks.

12 -- Flapper-era Atlantic City, where fey-magic is coming back and Venus is as bright in the sky as the moon each night, ruled by two warring cabals of half-human Irish nature-spirits.

13 -- Upon the South China Sea in the early 19th century, amongst pirates and cut-throats who must band together against common enemies of both powerful governments and something ancient in the deep.

14 -- A cruel, misty and Gothic version of Victorian-era England wherein a terrible form of rabies is spread by polluted air, the footprints of ghosts and by certain deformed foreigners.

15 -- At a dive restaurant in the inner city that has become unstuck in space/time.

16 -- Back at the old house where you grew up, where a strange door you had never seen before now leads out of your parents' bedroom to something -- and somewhere -- *else*.

17 -- Among old friends at a Fraternity bonfire and kegger in the woods, celebrating and saying farewells.

18 -- On the bustling and bright-lit streets of Marrakesh, walking the scorching-hot markets in a blind fugue in search of a dark miracle.

19 -- On the open road of the Great American West, tooling along in a classic car with the radio blasting and the wind in your hair, when the darkness comes and all the electronics die.

20 -- Far below the streets of early 2000s Chicago, accidentally locked in an old theater while doing urban spelunking. You're not alone down here.

Be clear with your players that this doesn't have to be a world either of you know *everything* about -- it just has to be solid enough in both of your minds that you can tell a story there together.

Give your player some time to think about the world, but not *too* much. This is free-form cooperative storytelling, after all; let them take a minute to think about it, and then three-to-five

minutes to get the world right with you.

Once you have the broad outlines of the Splinter, ask enough questions that you feel you could run a game set in this universe, under the circumstances of another campaign. Try to get a feel for the place. Find out what the average person does all day, and what the world is like from a street-level perspective.

When you have enough notes to run the first Splinter, have your next player in line (Dani, in our example) describe another world according to the same general parameters. If you've done your job right, they've been thinking -- and will be ready and eager to fill you in.

This one will probably be weirder than the last. That's a good thing. Take three-to-five minutes, again, to get it right.

Once they're done, ask your first player (Kyle, above) to give this second universe (Splinter D, in our example) a **Twist**.

The twist makes the world *stranger*. It's a horror game, after all. Describe a few general Twists for your players, and see if anything pops up, trips their trigger or generates another idea. Setting-specific twists are cool: the Hindenburg never detonated, and so the skies are filled with zeppelins in the 1980s; a strange new party drug in the inner city allows some users to temporarily phase through matter; an unearthly, semi-organic substance found below the earth has the flexibility and translucence of plastic sheeting but is harder than steel; an unknown infection in a small town is causing heightened rates of dwarfism, hermaphroditic development or albinism in local teens.

If your first player can't think of anything, feel free to roll on the chart with a d12 (or 2d6, in a pinch):

- 1 - It hasn't stopped raining, and won't
- 2 - During an eclipse or a plague
- 3 - All the grown-ups are asleep with nightmares
- 4 - Cracked asphalt makes babies not be born
- 5 - The angels called; god is breaking up with us
- 6 - Toys and dolls come alive at night and bite people
- 7 - Knocks, calls and cries come from abandoned places
- 8 - The dead twitch, and don't keep still
- 9 - Something has turned poisonous
- 10 - The sea is misty, and bloody, and dead
- 11 - It rained needles and thorns
- 12 - Something crawls under the rotting city

These are meant to be poetic and suitable to interpretation. With a little luck, some part of this will spark an idea in the head of your leftmost player, and a subtle -- or not so subtle -- bit of specific creepiness will be injected into the second Splinter.

Proceed to your third player (Corey, in our example), and have that player describe another Splinter. When it's ready to your satisfaction, both Player 1 and Player 2 (Kyle and Dani, above) apply a Twist apiece.

Repeat this with Player 4 (and 5, if you have one), allowing each of the earlier players to apply a Twist of their own, until you have all of your Splinters ready. The final universe (Kelsey's, above) will, of course, be the most Twisted (but see below).

[Desire, Power and Twists]: Some players will hold back a portion of their Power at character creation. This generally means that they're cautious, wary or conservative players, and we should reward them; after all, the shrieking freaks who play with bloody, hell-bent abandon are going to have fun no matter what, right?

As an optional rule, if a player has a point of Power still to her name during the world-building section of the game, she may refuse any one Twist on her Splinter, or she may spend the point to undo *all* Twists on her universe. Alternatively, she may spend a point to undo a single Twist on another universe, or spend a point to switch seats with someone. As another optional rule, a truly daring player may gain a point of Power by accepting a single additional Twist on his own universe. In this way, you -- as GM -- can control how Twisted your many worlds become.

As another optional rule, don't start Twisting until player #3 goes, and only let one earlier player apply a Twist to each later universe. This works best if you've got a lot of newbies, or a big group of five super-creative types who might make it hard to keep track of the insane permutations in each Splinter. You'll rapidly get a feel for how desirous your various players are for mangled realities to call home; feel free to let the worlds range from "mundane, prime-time procedural medical/romance drama" to "medieval, radioactive sun-less planetoid of armored demons, cyborg velociraptors and shambling dead."

Wrapping Up Splinters: When you have all of the universes ready, do a brief recap of all active Splinters. Allow the players to ask questions about each universe, and make sure that all of you are on the same page. This might be a good time to take a break; I suggest a short break every hour or so during an intense storytelling game like this, which usually lasts four-to-six hours.

In a moment, we'll get to fleshing out characters ... but first, a word about the greater plot.

THE SPLINTERED ANTIGOD

At this time, figure out where the four-fold aspect of the nemesis is, and how it's divided amongst the worlds.

You see, I lied. The truth of the matter is, this isn't a cooperative storytelling game at all. This is a competitive game. A brutal one. One player is going to win, maybe, and the rest of the players are probably going to lose. And die.

There's a power out there, a 'nemesis,' a monster-force, an elder abomination cut into four pieces and trying like Hell to reform and rule a reality of screams -- it's the opposite of the players, unless you decide that *one of them is a secret Shard of the Antigod*, in which case that player can win by killing everyone else and reuniting with the other three Shards. The dismembered eldritch abomination haunts the many worlds and tries to get the players to unite it by force, deception, cults and magic.

Some of the players may become villains or antagonists to the other players, even if they are not Shards; in that case, the characters are simply tools being wielded -- poked, prodded, tempted and tricked -- into service of the greater Antigod. It is a cunning master. What it does with its toys and utensils when it achieves omnipotence once again, of course, is best left to crueler imaginations.

Each specific Shard of the Splintered Antigod is a creature of only one fundamental property: Flesh, Voice, Will or Awareness, lacking all others.

Roll randomly to see which universe each Shard of the Antigod is trapped in, or select it based on personal whim. If you have five universes, then the one without any Shards is the "safe" Splinter, and it's *not* headed for a catastrophic doomsday -- all of the others are going to be dead by the end of the game -- and that's the one the Antigod needs to be in, united, in order to ascend. If you have only four universes, decide which one the Nemesis *has* to be in, united, to win.

Decide right now, and stick to it.

The players can succeed by keeping the pieces from coming together, but they'll probably have to sacrifice their lives -- and possibly their universes -- to ensure the Shards never reunite. The lucky few will be those in the right universe at the right time; they will be lonely exiles from their dead home-dimension, perhaps, or cruel god-kings of a trembling, fresh reality ripe for the taking.

Unless you decide that one of your player is (unknowingly) one of the Shards, each part of the Antigod begins play with 13 in a single defining Trait; all others are zero. Every time the players gain Power at the end of a round, so do each of the Shards. These points of Power must be spent on Traits, and cannot be saved in a Pool, but otherwise may be applied however you see fit: increases in non-defining Traits represent the Shard being wielded by a mortal, or growing in sentience and strength on its own.

So, what *are* the Shards? They have to be thematically correct for the world they're stuck in:

THE FLESH OF THE ANTIGOD, lacking Voice, Will and Awareness, might be a beast: a leviathan, a dragon, or some other rough behemoth of vast tooth and tail. It might be a misshapen, mindless titan the size of Kansas, asleep under tons of arctic ice, or a dormant virus that will create a horde of brain-linked zombies. It might be a swarm of nano-machines, or a drug in the veins of a super-soldier; it might be adamantine power-armor, a mighty sky-rending war-machine, or an unbreakable black sword that grants the wielder iron bones and steel skin as long as wet blood drenches him.

THE VOICE OF THE ANTIGOD, lacking Flesh, Will and Awareness, might be a ghostly shape, speaking empty madness, or a haunting melody that drives listeners to kill. It might be a monster-birthing radio signal from the depths of space, or a book containing the rituals of resurrection and mastery over time and chance. It might be a creepy neurolinguistic hack that lets a user command the weak-willed. It might be a simple sound coiled, confused, in the back of a mortal mind, spurring a charismatic leader to heights of ever-greater power and depravity, never knowing what it truly seeks, or a magic ring

that tells its wearer how to behave in order to gain his sickest desires. It is a thing of whispers, full of insidious power that shapes worlds, but it can neither plan nor act of its own accord.

THE WILL OF THE ANTIGOD, lacking Flesh, Voice and Awareness, is the most dynamic of the Shards. It is the force that seeks to bring the scattered parts of itself back together and rightfully rule over a universe that was broken when power was long-ago wrenched from it. Or so it claims. It is blind now, confused and disoriented ... but rapidly regaining itself after so many millennia and so much damage. It will promise anything to the assistants it needs; it is a shadow, perhaps glimpsed only as a man who cannot be seen, touched or remembered except by the players or by certain secret societies it builds ... "for you are like me, do you understand?"

THE AWARENESS OF THE ANTIGOD, lacking Flesh, Voice and Will, is a tool of the mind. It is vision of the beyond, confusing and befuddling those who oppose it. It is the spell that lets you see between worlds; the dark lens that lets you glimpse across the gulfs dividing each consciousness. It is the book that knows future, past and present. It is the cloak of invisibility and true seeing, or the severed eye that scryes all most-secret moments. Perhaps a combat drug that grants stealth and an assassin's skill to those who take it, or an all-seeing planetary security system, or a bowl that shows hidden things in its depths when filled with ichor, or a crown and throne granting omniscience ... but no matter what, it cannot act without a force to guide and wield it.

Figure out what the four Shards are, and where they are in each universe.

Figure out how the Will of the Antigod is beginning to maneuver his prison-reality to his advantage. Come up with a name for this formless and ancient mind, like 'Nicholas' or 'Lucifer,' 'Mother of Hell' or 'The Secret Astrochymist,' and start dropping hints as to how such a being intends to reunite itself. That potent, elder demon will want its Awareness and its Voice back, soon, and then to drape itself in all-mighty Flesh. Once the Antigod has itself in place, such a proper nemesis can read minds and offer tempting rewards, like the fulfillment of Desires or rituals that can provide more Power. It will, of course, need ways to walk between the worlds to get at its keys, tools, slave-bodies and artifacts ... or it will need to arrange for someone to bring them to it.

And the Shards, as the rounds progress, can talk to one another.

Figure out what shape the United Antigod hopes to take at the end -- the Emperor with his forces unified, Grendel's mother with her children crowded 'round her hooves, Sauron with his One Ring, the White Witch with Narnia humbled, Vecna with his hand and eye -- and how the players might oppose this plan, and how the Antigod might foil this opposition



EXAMPLE OF AN ANTIGOD AND HIS SHARDS

The GM might decide that the Antigod was once a mighty warrior-king called Japheth the Unquenching Rain, a sort of mystical Genghis Khan/Vlad Tepes figure who long-ago served Lovecraftian Great Old Ones before betraying and consuming them to gain their power. The great and terrible Antigod was finally sundered by a cabal of wizard-priests, who banished each of the dark lord's four wicked pieces into alternate universes and died in doing so. The Flesh of the Antigod takes the form of Japheth's blacked right hand: any creature that bears this piece gains a 13 Flesh; his Voice is trapped in his great war-banner, his Will is a ghostly shade and his Awareness is tied to the huge lens-covered throne he sat upon in life.

Each one of the four worlds infected with a piece of Japheth's legacy has a stain upon it, and legends that have built up over the centuries around these alien and incongruous artifacts. If the GM has five players, the reality where no Shards rest is presumably where Japheth must reunite himself: his original homeworld. If the GM has four players, a decision must be made before the first scene as to which world is the only one wherein the Unquenching Rain might again rule.

At the end of the first round, the GM assigns one point of Power to each Shard. The GM might decide that the hand of Japheth gains a Voice of one, allowing it to call out blindly for willing wielders, while the Shard of Voice gains a point of Awareness, allowing the banner it to begin planning -- though still unconscious -- for the future. The Shard of Will, meanwhile, gains a point of Flesh, allowing it interact directly with the real world while trapped in a fugue of silent, wrathful madness. The Shard of Awareness gains one point of Will, awakening but remaining both immobile and quiet.

At the end of the second round, each Shard gains two more points of Power. The GM decides that the hand of Japheth gains one point apiece of Awareness and Will: it is now being wielded by a human with a single point in each Trait (except for a 13 Flesh), a homeless and pathetic vagrant suddenly gifted with the raw might to go toe-to-toe with vast armies. The banner places another point into Awareness and one into Will: it is now awake -- a potent artifact that can sway nations -- although still without a bearer, quietly reorganizing the world from the shadows. The hideous shade of Japheth places two points into Awareness, giving it a grounded sense of self and recollections of glory: with points in both Will and Awareness, it may now act directly. Without any Voice, of course, it has no



allies and is not obeyed, but it can begin to “muck” with the world. Meanwhile, the throne places two points into Voice and begins seeking a user whom it may burn-through to call its one-time master.

At the end of the third round, each Shard gains another three points of Power. The unstoppable user of the hand gains a Voice of four, rallying people to his side, while the banner increases its Awareness to three and its Will to three: it is now poised to reveal itself. The withered shade of Japheth increases his Voice to three, beginning to form a cult. The throne increases its Will to four as well, bending the minds of those who sit upon it and imparting deep visions of other worlds -- along with many delicious secrets about their own world -- with its 13 Awareness.

At the end of the forth round, each Shard gains another four points of Power. The GM decides that the hand has changed users -- being taken by an assassin who possesses a Voice of four, a Will of one and an Awareness of five -- who slew the previous bearer with a mind-altering toxin. The banner, meanwhile, increases its Awareness to seven: with a Voice of 13 and the ability to see between worlds, it calls out directly for the shade of its master to come and claim it while simultaneously rallying an entire world to breach the borders between planes and make Japheth their rightful king. The shade of the Unquenching Rain increases its own Voice and Awareness to five: though trapped in weak Flesh, he is poised to rule his planet entirely. The throne increases its Voice to six, commanding sacrifices from all those who would use it, and begins communicating directly with the banner in another dimension.

At the end of the fifth round, each Shard gains another five points of Power. The assassin-trained wielder of the hand becomes a paranoid, iron-fisted tyrant while subjugating the populace, increasing his Voice to six and his Will to four. The banner gains a Flesh of five, choosing a powerful mind-wiped champion to be the “Herald of Unquenching Rain,” while commanding a cowed, terrified populace to begin preparations for a prophesied god to ascend. The shade of Japheth increases his Flesh by one (to 2) along with raising Voice and Awareness by two apiece to seven: he is now in communication with both his ancient throne and unholy banner; his loyal subjects begin paving the way for a trip across the void of time and space to a golden reality. The throne, meanwhile, increases its Will to nine, making ready to burn a hole in the foundations of the universe in order to get home.

If the players do not oppose this ascendance, the Antigod is likely to rend swaths of realities aside as it collects itself once more; the mere gaze of Japheth's shade will stop the heart of the one foolish enough to bear his hand as a weapon, and continents will burn and die as worlds collide, fracturing. Once again the Emperor of Unquenching Rain shall sit beneath a tattered, blood-streaked banner upon a terrible throne that watches all, billions weeping at his feet.

EXAMPLES OF WORLD STACKING

The GM might decide that the worlds are actually one *real* reality and several separate computer-systems, representing an unfriendly AI trying to unbox itself and take over the universe. In each one of the synthetic worlds, simulated persons are living lives which they believe to be real: one reality is testing designs for nanites that can reanimate dead tissue, representing the Flesh of the Antigod, another houses a program that organizes email and phone-calls (the Voice) and another is a digital “demon” in an online game built to test the limits of human addiction, a sort of electronic Skinner Box. As the dark Will of the AI grows stronger, it begins testing how much damage it can do with each “limb” that links it; soon, it will assemble from illegal parts and attempt to print itself into existence in the real world.

Other options include:

The worlds represent past, present, future, a forking bubble-dimension and a new alternate past that is slowly scribbling over the original timeline. The Shards must collect themselves and move to the furthest point back along the timeline in order to prevent their own erasure.

The worlds are nested within one another: the “top” dimension houses a demi-god in a coma, within her dreamscape is a box, and within that box is another reality. In a pit in that reality lies another world, and a magical ring in that blackened place holds a gem that houses a baby universe.

The worlds are four shadows of a single real dimension, representing four events in human history that could have come to pass but did not. To unite itself, the Antigod must cause each of these events to fall back into place, like lenses fitting over a single circular window.

The worlds are the fractured, dream-state consciousness of one superhuman who has been dealt a near-mortal wound. Each one is a timeline that could have been, poetically reweighing choices long ago made, teetering between the question of forgiveness and destructive vengeance.

The worlds are four cells of an extradimensional prison; the ancient wardens are long dead, but have reincarnated as the players, their duties dusty and forgotten.

The worlds are individual branches of the great Star Tree, upon which hang a broken and crucified progenitor who once gave her life to bind-away the Anti-God.

ALTERNATE SHARDS

Feel free to skip this section if you've never run the game before.

Still here?

Okay, let's suppose for a moment that you're sick of the Shards as written; you're run each of them a dozen times or more, and are bored to tears with the way they work. That's cool: we'll reimagine what else the Antigod might be, and how else it might be ripped into four equal pieces -- each a unique horror.

How about each of the flayed monster-hunks contains a *negative*? In such a case, the Shards each have a [-1] in their respective primary score, and actively drain away the thing they lack every time they act or roll. Divide 13 points into the three other Traits:

The Shard of Anti-Flesh, possessed of Voice, Will and Awareness, is an intelligence that literally cannot touch or be touched, nor harmed by anything that harms the living. It is the primal need to cut and reshape yourself and others, wandering and beyond the idea of 'containment.' A formless shadow-being, a shrieking ghost, or an annihilating sphere of nothingness itself, the Anti-Flesh rends meat into muck and steel into a spray of rust and dust wherever it falls. It cannot move itself from where it is. Always singing and desirous of sacrifices to fall upon its altar, this Shard is the embodiment of loneliness, cold, body-horror and isolation.

The Shard of Anti-Voice, possessed of Flesh, Will and Awareness, is a creature not only without a name, but without the ability to *be named*. Where it silently passes, there is only stuttering, aphasia and glossolalia. It is not spoken of, even as it openly walks the world: only those with a low and easily ignored Voice even draw pictures of it. Tongues seize in its wake, and words utterly fail. When it approaches victims, they can neither speak nor be heard. It can be described only as 'indescribable.' It cannot make itself understood. This Shard is the embodiment of misunderstanding, incomprehension, loss-in-translation and isolation in a crowd.

The Shard of Anti-Will, possessed of Flesh, Voice and Awareness, is a crawling beast of torpor and slumber. When it cries out, those who hear the call are sapped of their desires, and numbly submit to their fate. A titanic thing of idle nightmares and coercion, this creature or object might be a hypnotic blade that draws away the need to live when it strikes, or a dragon kept in a trance only by virgin blood. Deeply asleep and unable to move without the direct action of others, it sucks away that which motivates them -- until all who surround it are mindless, starving and unable to choose otherwise. It cannot decide to do anything. This Shard is the embodiment of depression, apathetic ignorance, regret and helpless tears.

The Shard of Anti-Awareness, possessed of Flesh, Voice and Will, is a beautiful thing that blinds and confuses. A killer

holding this elegant blade might perceive only through the eyes of the victims it stalks, hunting them soundlessly as they are slowly robbed of their own sight. It might be a mask without eyeholes through which the wearer can see a dazzling, hypnotic world of only senseless joy. It might be a lovely, babbling trickster who wanders aimlessly, offering delights beyond the capacity of the human mind to endure. It cannot plan, hide or learn what to expect next. This Shard is the embodiment of foolishness, addiction, mental illness and loss of vision.

Every time the players gain Power at the end of a round, so do each of the Shards -- as per normal. You may choose to spend these points to make their "Anti-Trait" even lower, dealing more damage by simply existing.

For example, you might decide that the Shard of Anti-Awareness is a sentient mirror that calls to the weak-willed in dreams and causes them to seek it out; those who gaze into it give up their minds as they watch a life they could have had. If the mirror begins with Flesh 0, Voice 7, Will 6 and Awareness [-1], you might spend one Power at the end of the first round to give it Flesh 1; the mirror is now ambulatory, and can skitter blindly from place to place of its own accord. You might then spend two Power at the end of round two to give it Awareness [-3]; it now deals three damage (instead of one) to Awareness to a target once per round, even if it doesn't roll for it -- or rolls for something else.

What would a United Antigod with negatives in all four Traits be like? Certainly not a creature that rules over a sane universe, or anything we would recognize as pleasant; perhaps an unnamable black hole, swallowing up the very idea of minds? Or a faceless figure, cloaked in a garment that drives men blind to look upon it, riding a pale horse called 'coma' and wielding a blade that silences all?

When you finally reveal all of the Shards, and what they represent, even the most jaded and self-interested character should understand that Antigod is the enemy of all life.

Whatever you do, make it weird ... and scary.



FINISHING TOUCHES FOR CHARACTERS

When you've got all of your players reassembled, hand out six more points of Power apiece, and let them spend these as they see fit. Again, they can hold onto these -- in their Pool -- or spend them on Traits.

Neither a character's Strength nor their Weakness comes into play *just yet*; that's not important until in-play. A character's Strength does not need to be her highest Trait; likewise, a character's Weakness does not have to be his lowest Trait.

At this time, some Traits are going to go above 6, and that's a good thing. Characters with an Awareness of 6 or more are actively aware of the other characters; they dream of the other Splinters, and can see them (and the Antigod Shards within each) by concentrating, investigating or performing rituals. With a Voice of 6 or more, they can communicate across the boundaries between worlds; things they say in one reality will bleed into the Splinters of their peers as ancient prophecies, strange revelations, song lyrics and popular sayings. A player with a Will of 6 or more can, if they know where they're going -- either seeing it or being guided from across the gulf -- step between realities by spending a point of Power.

Starting at the other end of the table (player #5, Kelsey, in our example) -- and working back towards player #1 -- ask each player "So, we know your world. Who are *you*?"

Working together, take two or three minutes with the player to craft their character. It's likely that they have a pretty good idea already, but additional questions you might want to ask are:

- What do you do?
- What do you hope for?
- What's your place in the world?
- Who or what do you hate, and who or what do you love?
- What's special about you?

Some of your player choices might surprise you: a character with both an impressive Voice and Awareness score might be a world-famous astronaut, the head of a crime family, a rock-star, a dot-com billionaire, a police detective, dashing pirate, a treasure hunter, a popular scholar of occult lore, a wise-cracking teenaged peeping-tom, or a mild-mannered data-entry clerk who moonlights as an accomplished hacker.

Or something altogether much more odd, like a wandering pacifist-monk or an anti-corporate activist.

Moving back down the table, ask the same questions of the second character (player #4, Ryan, in our example above) ... and then ask your first character (Kelsey) to give their peer a **Twist**.

This twist makes the *character* stranger. It's a horror game, after all. Describe a few general Twists for your players, and see if anything pops up, trips their trigger or generates another idea. Setting-specific Twists are, as before, especially cool: the genetically-engineered super-soldier might have DNA stolen from Nazi research, while the wizard-king of a risen Atlantis

might have the fetal corpse of his conjoined twin whispering dark truths from his shoulder. A scar, a mangled limb, a missing eye or other deformity is always interesting. Making a character an orphan, of course, increases the likelihood that they'll undertake a hero's journey, while you might find that making them aberrant, deformed or physically hideous ups the odds that they'll become antiheroes or outright villains.

If your first player can't think of anything, feel free to roll on the chart with a d12 (or 2d6, in a pinch):

1. Confined to a chair
2. Only a child
3. Wearing the wrong body
4. Infected
5. Addicted
6. Monstrous family
7. Immortal
8. Can't connect
9. Allergic
10. Withered ghost of themself
11. Isn't human any more
12. Secret second life

Again, these are meant to be poetic and suitable to interpretation. With a little luck, some part of this will spark an idea in the head of your right-most player, and a subtle -- or not so subtle -- bit of specific creepiness will be injected into the second character.

Proceed to your third player (Corey, in our example above), and have that player describe their character. When it's ready to your satisfaction, both earlier characters (Ryan & Kelsey) apply a Twist apiece. Repeat this all the way back to Player #1 (Kyle, in our example above), allowing each of the earlier characters to apply a Twist of their own. The final character will, of course, be the most Twisted (but see below).

[Desire, Power and Twists]: As before, there are cool ways to reward a cautious player. As an optional rule, if a player has a point of Power still to her name, she may refuse any one Twist on her character, or she may spend the point to undo *all* Twists on her. Alternatively, she may spend a point to undo a single Twist on another character, or spend a point to switch seats with someone. As another optional rule, a daring player may gain a point of Power by accepting a single additional Twist on his own character. In this way, you can control how Twisted your player-characters become.

As another optional rule, don't start Twisting until player #3 goes, and only let one earlier player apply a Twist to each character. This, again, works best if you've got a lot of newbies. You'll rapidly get a feel for how desirous your various players are for weird characters with which to undertake their tales; feel free to let the characters range from "quiet high school math teacher" to "lab-grown, telepathic half-alien monster feasting on the wounds of a shattered world."

EXAMPLE OF PLAY: CHARACTER BUILDING

GM: “Okay, so you’re a parlor magician who has lost faith in humanity. The only thing you love is ... what? The art you practice?”

Dani: “Yep.”

GM: “Cool. What’s special about you?”

Dani: “I’m the best there is. I understand slight-of-hand and the art of misdirection better than anyone alive. I should be famous, but I’m not.”

Ryan: “What’s your Voice?”

Dani: “One. And it’s my Weakness.”

Kyle: “Ouch.”

Ryan: “Yeah. Maybe ‘stage performer’ wasn’t the best choice for a career for you. You should have been a pick-pocket, maybe.”

Dani: “My one regret.”

Corey: “That’s why she drinks. That and being trapped in zombie-plague 1800s New Orleans.”

GM: “So ... no love-life?”

Dani: “None to speak of. Kind of a loner. I own a cat.”

GM: “I like it. What’s your biggest, signature illusion ... the one that should be show-stopper, except that people are too dumb to realize that it’s earth-shattering in its brilliance?”

Dani: “Hmm. Setting myself on fire?”

Kelsey: “While surrounded by mirrors!”

GM: “I like it. How do you get to work every night?”

So.

We’re about ready to play.

Ask your players to take one final look at their Strength, their Weakness and their Desire, and ask if they want to change or clarify anything. For example, Dani could choose to lower her Flesh by one point and gain a point of Power back if she wanted to.

At this time, give another round of clarifications about the Splinters and each character. Some of the characters may have interacted with the specific Shard of the Antigod infesting their world, or might be investigating it. Give them final hints about the secrets of their world, and take a moment to listen to them talk with each other about their worlds and characters.

Feel free to take another break, if Finishing Touches have taken a while, and then go over how the game is run.



WINNING THE GAME: OVERVIEW

The game is divided into scenes and rounds. Once a player rolls, the scene ends; once every player has gotten a scene, the round ends.

Each scene should last 5-15 minutes per player in the scene; each round should last from a half-hour to an hour. Feel free to take a break at the end of each round; you want all of your players to be engaged with each scene as best you can manage -- rather than needing to run grab coffee, use their cellphone or head to the bathroom during play.

At the end of round one -- after each player has had one scene -- each player gets one point of Power. At the end of round two, each of the players gets two points of Power, and three points of Power at the end of round three. Character advancement continues in this way, gaining ever larger and larger pools, until the GM declares that this will be the final round of the game -- typically at round 6-8, when the GM is handing out truly absurd levels of Power each round, the tale is nearing a satisfactory close, and the hour is growing late.

Points of Power gained in this way can be saved in a Pool or spent on Traits; **points of Power are usually spent before or after a scene.**

By first spending a point of Power to activate the ability of apotheosis, however, characters can instead spend Power on Traits **at any time** -- such as to instantly heal themselves, achieve incredible psychic mastery, bend space-time in an unexpected way, or otherwise suddenly unlock abilities mid-scene. Thus, a character could spend a point of Power to undergo apotheosis in the middle of her scene, and then spend three Power points

(if she has them) to increase her Voice from 3 to 6 and talk her way past a guard.

Players may also buy-back their Traits by first spending a point of Power: thus, a player might spend a point of Power and then reduce her Flesh from 6 to zero in exchange for six immediate Power.

Players may also spend a point of Power to give some portion of their Power to another player.

Players can ALWAYS spend points of Power to mess with the scenes of other players.

Players may spend points of Power on the Trait of their Strength (or draw from it) for free at any time, without paying Power to activate the ability of apotheosis or buy-back. Likewise, players may not spend points on -- or draw from -- their character's Weakness Trait except between scenes.

Buying from a Trait in the middle of a scene and spending into another costs two Power on top of the exchanged points, unless one of those Traits is a character's Strength.

As an additional optional rule, you may allow characters to perform a dark ritual that doubles the Power they receive at the end of the round. This occupies their full scene, minus some minor element of role-play, and should always require both sacrifice and some discomfort to the character. The character must research how to perform this ritual, and it will usually cost them a point of Power to attempt the action, along with some element of their humanity and something they desire.

The game begins when the GM starts his first scene with the first player, and it progresses through a scene with each of the players in order. A player who is not in the scene may spend a point of Power to interrupt an ongoing scene and add a plot-point, character or other complication (subject to GM discretion). Alternatively, a player may spend a point of Power to rearrange the order of scenes and go earlier or later in the round.

After the first round, characters with sufficiently high Traits may call for scenes with other players. For example, a character with both an Awareness of 6 and a Voice of 6 (or more) could declare that he is attempting to scry upon -- and then communicate with -- another character in another world. The GM has final discretion as to the ability of the character to do so. Once this is requested, end the scene and save the encounter between the two for later in the round.





COMPETITIVE ENDGAME

One overriding theme of this storytelling experience is *immersive play of cruel, impossibly powerful and self-absorbed -- but not consciously, intentionally evil -- characters.*

How does their story end?

The beginning of game shows our characters at their weakest and most vulnerable moments. From the first scene forward, we watch them grow, as subsequent rounds of play highlight the experience of clawing their way to the top and reshaping worlds as they swell with unearned personal power; the ending of your tale together, therefore, should be about confrontation with the choices these people have made. Revenge, violent ascension, casual vindictiveness and abuse-of-power have most dire consequences, especially for self-appointed gods, and steep prices that must be paid. As the epic concludes, your duty as a storyteller is to make it clear that some of the PCs are actually the bad guys ... and that not everyone gets to "win."

But what is "success," truly? If a genocidal monster is willing to shut herself into a dying reality in order to contain the infection ravaging her world -- and thus cost the Antigod its Flesh or Voice -- her quarantine of the spread redeems her even as she falls. At the other end of the karmic spectrum, a stalwart hero-king who cannot bring himself to annihilate a broken splinter of reality (and himself along with it) is, perhaps, as selfish as any tyrant.

You should not be afraid to kill characters at this time.

In fact, you should not be afraid to crumple up entire realities and let billions suffer eternal torment as the game comes to a close. Sometimes, multiple characters will clash in epic battles; sometimes, you'll need to subtly set them against one another as worlds collapse and collide. Do not feel bad about imposing poetic and tragic limitations on your characters. Tell a player that she can choose to save her own life or to save the life of another player, but not both. Pin the fates of worlds on the decisions of your characters; balance the worth of one loved one against the fate of a billion faceless, starving peasants. If you can, make certain that every character has a meaningful final choice, dying or killing another to advance a goal. You'll be surprised at what your players decide to do.

With a little luck and some forethought, you should be able to offer at least one player a final choice between noble self-sacrifice and glorious rule over a fundamentally empty, devastated universe.

Give everyone a single, final roll against impossible odds and let them narrate the ending together. It doesn't have to have all the answers, but it does have to be satisfying.

It's a horror game, after all.

RUNNING THE GAME: EXAMPLE OF PLAY

GM: running a scene with **Kyle**: "... Still no reception on your cellphone. You hustle across the darkened campus, the rain lashing down on you, heading towards the library. The eerie lights sweeping behind the clouds have gotten thicker -- and uglier -- and you can hear the moans of those afflicted with nightmares all across the city even over the howling tornado sirens."

Kyle: "Sweet. If the goddamn cult hasn't gotten to the Antigod Codex in the sub-archives of that haunted old wreck yet, I'm burning it."

GM: "You've got gasoline with you, or are you planning on taking the tome back to your office? Maybe burning it in a sink or wastepaper basket or something?"

Kyle: "I grabbed a canister of gasoline on the way to the college. And matches. And some Zippos. We're doing this in the basement, and we're doing it tonight."

Kelsey: "Uhh, actually, I though the electricity was out across three states. That probably means the gas stations are closed."

GM: "There is that."

Kyle: "Hmm. Well, I've got an Awareness of 6. I probably stashed a gasoline canister and some strike-anywhere matches in the trunk of my car a month ago without even thinking about it."

Dani: "You're keeping your matches in the truck with your gasoline?"

Kyle: "Did I say trunk? And some strike-anywhere matches in my glove box. With my flare-gun."

GM: "I like that; I'll allow it."

Ryan: "And rocket-launcher."

GM: "No. You trudge through the rain as fast as you can, wiping the cold, stinging muck from your eyes as you rush across the slick, muddy grass. What's your Flesh?"

Kyle: "Three, now. Bought it up last round."

GM: "Good. Your heart is pounding and your breath is coming in ragged gasps, but there's no pain in your side like there would have been only a few weeks ago. You're getting younger and stronger, it seems like."

Ryan: "Yeah, just in time for the end of the world. Great. What if the cult is waiting for you at the library, professor?"

Kyle: "I'll burn the library down, with them in it. And I'll shoot anyone who comes out."

Corey: "And if the cult has already taken the book?"

Kyle: "If they already have the Antigod Codex, I will scream 'unacceptable!' at the top of my lungs and I'll burn the library down anyway. Then I'm hunting these dogs to their homes and knifing them all in their sleep, and I will force their children to dance for my amusement."

GM: "An admirable plan. [checks the time, sees that this scene should be wrapping-up; knows that he wants to begin the confrontation with the cult on top of the library in a later round] As you cross the final street to the library, thunder cracks through the sky and something huge and black whips around the corner. Coming right at you. There's going to be a roll."

Kyle: "Crap. What am I looking at?"

Corey: "Probably the devil, out for a late-night pleasure-spin in his Hell-semi. Actually, can that be it?"

GM: "Give me a point of Power for it [Corey does so]. The headlights of the hulking thing are off at it hauls through the torrential black night with a roar; you can see the taut, grinning face of the Stuttering-Bone Man behind the wheel as he careens around the corner."

Ryan: "Damn. I thought I killed that guy."

Dani: "Technically, you killed him and rendered his body into ash and then had your ten-thousand servants ride for three weeks in different directions to every edge of your kingdom before casting the debris of his corpse into ten-thousand sanctified pits. Guess he got better when you got deposed."

GM: "He's dead in *your* universe, last you checked. In this Splinter he's ghostly, but he's there. The semi appears to be local-manufacture; he's careening right at you, and laughing -- soundlessly."

Kyle: "Damn him. So, what, a Flesh roll to dodge?"

GM: "Yep. Unless you can think of a way to Will yourself out of the way or something."

Kyle: "God. He's gonna run my ass over. I refuse to die like a chump."

Kelsey: "I actually feel bad because I mentioned the fact that the gas stations are closed."

GM: "It was good role-play and good storytelling."

Kelsey: "So ... can I spend a point of Power to make it an Awareness roll for him instead? I'll, like, appear for a single second, in the nick of time and whisper 'look behind you' from across the void of worlds, so he can dodge?"

Kyle: "Apology accepted! Can we do that?"

GM: "I can dig it. Hand me that Power, Kelsey; Kyle, go ahead and give me the roll. You're probably going to make it, because his Awareness is relatively weak in this universe."

Kyle: "Oh, is it, now?"

GM: "Difficulty 3. Still better than human average, I should note."

Kyle: [rolls 6 dice, looking for 3s or better; GM rolls 3 dice, looking for 6s] "Five successes!"

GM: "Zero. The ghostly image of a beautiful young woman appears and tells you to look behind you, just in the nick of time; you dodge out of the way with preternatural foresight. With his terrible die-roll, the Stuttering-Bone Man takes a significant amount of damage as he swerves to hit you, too late, and the semi crashes; it tags a streetlight, flips over an embankment and lands upside-down in the student parking lot at the bottom of the hill. With your roll, you catch a glimpse of The Stuttering-Bone Man's spirit departing the machine as it crunches to a halt. He wisps away like he was never there, something black leaking from what he has instead of eyes. It looks like he was animating the entire truck; his Flesh score is incredibly high in this Splinter of reality, simply taking over an object and wearing it like a cloak."

Ryan: "You almost just died, I think."

Kyle: "And yet I won! He was a fool to face me. Next stop: burning haunted library. I walk through the rain, a man with a plan -- and a gasoline can."

GM: "Okay, good scene. We'll move on to Dani. So: you've entered the dread Cathedral of Grey-White Glass at the top of the world, and the temple guardians are dead at your feet."

Ryan: "It was clever to get them to chase you into the Labyrinth of Wet Razors. I'd like to reiterate that."

Dani: "Like I said: fighting is Flesh, running is Flesh, jumping and kung-fu is Flesh ... and that's bad. Hiding and ninja-stuff? That's all Awareness, and I'm queen of that."

GM: "Well played. So what are you doing?"

Dani: "I've finally got my Voice up to 6 this round. I drop into lotus position, meditate on my prayer-beads and try to contact Kelsey's character, the Weeping Princess from the prophecy. She's the only one with the knowledge of how to finally quench the Fires of the Outer Gods."

GM: "You got it. We'll run your scene together in a moment. Kelsey, your cellphone rings with a strange number; are you still at the costume shop?"

Kelsey: "I figure I'm at home by now, probably in the middle of the night a week later. Doesn't my reality run, like, *way* faster?"

GM: "Not necessarily, but kinda. Your world is different, mundane as it may seem; we'll leave it at that. So, Kelsey: where do you *want* to be?"

Kelsey: "Probably at home. I bought up my Will by 3 at the end of the last round, and I figured it's taken some time to come into effect. At this point I have, like, telekinesis, right?"

GM: "Pretty much. It's more subtle than that; your desires and

fears basically twist reality into your likeness. Or the likeness of your thoughts, more accurately."

Ryan: "She can make light-bulbs burn out by looking at them, right?"

Dani: "Well, we know that she can make people dream about her by thinking about them real hard, so that's pretty cool. And she made the radio in her boyfriend's car start only playing songs with her name in them. I would be surprised if the lights *don't* flicker when she gets pissed-off."

Kyle: "I want to see her fling mind-bullets."

Kelsey: "I'm working up to that, so you know. If my step-dad is any more of an asshole, you'll see it happen."

GM: "Hmm. [jots down a note] Yes, having a high Will is awesome. Okay, we'll run the scene with Dani & Kelsey here in a moment; Kelsey, we'll assume that you're in bed at home; it's probably the middle of the night. Corey, when last we left you ..."

Corey: "I had just been shot in the stomach by my assistant, and he started babbling like one of the infected. The apocalypse is now inside the walls; my city is burning."

Kyle: "And the moon is on fire. Don't forget that. And your wife is sleeping with your gardener."

GM: "Right. You were at zero Flesh; your assistant is twitching, stalking towards you with the gun leveled, peeling his own face off with his other hand between shrieks. He keeps babbling, his eyes rolling and blinking bloody tears; behind you the sounds of New York in chaos are coming in through the shattered-out window of your vast skyscraper."

Kyle: "Can I spend a point of Power so that his wife is sleeping with the gardener? Oh, wait -- I don't have any. Never mind."

GM: "Your move, my friend. You can try talking him down, your Voice versus his. Or fighting him, I guess: your Flesh versus his."

Dani: "If you had a high enough Will, you could try over-riding his mind and stopping his heart instead. That's what I did to the mad prophet guy who had a six Flesh and a one Will. But it wasn't easy."

GM: [nods, noting that the figure she killed was the bearer of the Shard of the Antigod's Voice; that Shard has since been obtained by another low-Will NPC and now has a Flesh of eight.]

Ryan: "Fighting is probably a losing move."

Corey: "Or is it? I'm spending a point of Power to do buy-back and drop my Voice down to 1; my empire is crumbled anyway. That nets me 8 points of Power, which I'm putting into my Flesh before the beginning of the scene."

GM: "You can spend all those points for free, without paying for apotheosis, since it's the beginning of your scene and ... wait, is Voice your Strength?"

Corey: "Nope; I have Strength of Will, actually."

GM: "Just checking. The buy-back would have been free otherwise. Please continue."

Corey: "Cool. I buy my Flesh to 8, then I hop up and rip my assistant in half. I fling his broken body through the open window and into the city, and then I'm marching down there to join the chaos."

Dani: "Woah."

GM: "Well, okay then. Your whole body seethes as the majestic Power of your immortal blood rushes through you, and you are revealed for the creature you truly are. Your withered old husk falls away, rent aside, as easily as your ten-thousand dollar suit."

Ryan: "Wait, *what* are you?"

Corey: "I'm a vampire Nyarlathotep. I rule this universe. And I'm done screwing around."

Kyle: "And you're on our side?"

Corey: "I never said that."

GM: "Okay, give me a roll to kill your assistant. Actually, you're gonna make that; give me a roll to kill the two dozen infected security personnel who've come rushing in after him. I'm going to give the whole crew a total Flesh of seven, since killing them all is something most people certainly couldn't do. Not even really impressive people."

Corey: "So ... I'm rolling eight six-sided dice and looking for sevens?"

GM: "Yes, and they're rolling seven dice and looking for eights; that means they have to roll sixes and then re-roll for two or higher. [both roll]"

Corey: "One success."

GM: "One success. Do you spend a point of Power to add a success?"

Corey: "Ooof. I'm out."

Dani: "Well, not *technically*."

Ryan: "How's that?"

Corey: "Eh?"

GM: "Well, Corey, you said that Will is your Strength. You can buy back from *that* for free."

Corey: "Ah, yes. I nearly forgot. Buying that down, spending a point."

GM: "You wrench two of the infected in half, almost simultaneously, kicking one aside without thinking and flinging the messy spray of another out the window behind you; the other twenty stand mindlessly, emptying rounds into you, which you shrug off easily. You take no Flesh damage; you storm past the screeching survivors, headed for the elevators, pulling some of them apart as you go. With your new body, you can just leap down the shaft a few floors at a time."

Corey: "I like it."

GM: "Real quick, what's your Awareness and your Will?"

Corey: [checks sheet] "Will 5, Awareness 4. Well, actually Will 4 now."

GM: "Some part of you hears a whisper, saying 'The book. It is us. It tells us who we are. Come, heart of my heart. Come home.' If your Awareness goes above 5 next turn, you should be able to pinpoint where the book is, and Will yourself to it. You'll need a six Will for that, too."

Kyle: "Oh, you son of a ... it's you, isn't it?"

Corey: "Maybe. Maybe I'm just awesome."

GM: "Okay, end of that scene; that was quick. Just as Corey goes thundering down the hallway towards the doors of the elevator, with a horde of infected flapping behind him, Ryan ... you hear some kind of thunder from above the Spire of First Magic."

Dani: "From inside your prison cell."

GM: "Yes, from there. The sky seethes above the Golden City. It has been months since the usurper locked you away; with your Voice reduced to zero after the overthrow, his defeat of you was total. You've had no visitors, no word."

Ryan: "Hell with it. I'm fine here. I have an Awareness of 7 now. Is there a connection between the towers, or the wasteland? Like, do they link the worlds?"

GM: "With an Awareness over 6, you can feel that there's something ... *wrong* with the world. The atmosphere is like something inside a deep cave, leaking out into space. You reach out with your mind from the prison cell, and you feel that the skyscraper with screaming beasts inside it -- and a dark library in the rain -- are linked with the Cathedral of Grey-White Glass in the Shadow-World, and with the Spire of First Magic here. All four of them 'overlap,' so to speak, with an old wooden music box on the desk in a little girl's room. Kelsey's room."

Kyle: "Wait -- the library in *my* reality? You son of a bitch!"

GM: "Yep. All of you are inside that box. All of your realities. Stacked on one another, vibrating together like wires in a piano."

Ryan: "Okay, I'm getting out of here."

Kyle: "How? You gonna punch your way out, like monster-mash over here?"

Corey: "That was a perfectly legitimate and valid use of my dark powers."

Ryan: "Actually, I was thinking of talking my way out. So, it's been months: can I buy down my Flesh a little bit and increase my Voice back up? It's my Strength."

GM: "I accept this. How high do you want to buy it up?"

Ryan: "If I can get it above six, I can talk the guards into letting me leave without a roll, right?"

GM: "Absolutely. I don't feel that the scene has properly started yet; spend a point to buy down your Flesh, but I'll let you increase your Voice without paying for apotheosis."

Ryan: "What about my Will? Can I buy that down, too, for the same cost?"

GM: "I'm fine with that. You can draw points from both Flesh and Will for the single buy-back cost. But you can only increase your Voice for free, since it's your Strength."

Ryan: "Good. I buy it to seven, and talk them into killing each other after they let me out. Then I arm-up, disguise myself as a guard, and leave the prison."

GM: "Your Voice is strong. You stride from the prison, the long months of deprivation leaving both your body and your mind reeling and hollow -- but the nobility of your blood unsullied by the lies of a usurper. Are you riding out toward the Spire?"

Ryan: "Damn right."

GM: "The sky is strange, as you ride; also, I assume you stole a horse. Probably just by telling someone you were taking it. And then telling them to swallow their own tongue."

Ryan: "Yes. I do that. I begin to call out the names of the spirits who serve my family as I ride toward the Spire. How strange does the sky look?"

GM: "Very, which I'll get to in a moment. Real quick: Kelsey, before your cellphone rings, you are awoken by the tinkling of faint music from your grandmother's music-box on your desk. It's playing the song that used to give you nightmares. As your eyes adjust in the gloom, you can see that faint jade-colored light is coming from inside it, although it's locked."

Kyle: "You were having a sexy dream about a good-looking college professor who almost got hit by a truck. In the rain."

GM: "It was a sexy yet existentially-terrifying dream. It seemed very real; you reached out and almost touched him, and spoke the words 'look behind you'; it felt like you had known him for years. Alright, Ryan, about that sky above the Golden City -- there are spirals of dark, emerald clouds above the Spire ..."



SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Neither the characters nor the Shards of the Antigod can be truly destroyed, but they *can* be defeated, opposed, hampered, scarred, scattered and harmed. The *threat* of death is scary, but actual death is both boring and beyond the scope of this game.

- If a character (or a Shard with a zero or higher Flesh score) is taken to below zero in Flesh, it is only reincorporated: it reforms the next turn after spending a point of Power to return to zero Flesh. For players, this might involve crawling out of their own grave a century later, awakening that very night on an autopsy slab, or being resurrected by a cult in a far-future millennium. If a player has truly bungled the death of their entire world, feel free to let them awake in the Splinter of another player, or in a dark, new Splinter that mirrors theirs in some way. Dying and coming back should be deeply unpleasant and personally horrifying; players should *not* begin play knowing that they are effectively immortal.

- This is a game about aberrant psychology, mystery and dark needs, as much Fight Club, Moulin Rouge and American Beauty as Beyond the Black Rainbow, The Southern Reach Trilogy and True Detective. It's also about multiple universes overlapping, about not knowing which is the dream and which is the truth. *Splintered Godhood* can be equal parts Fables, Buffy/Angel, His Dark Materials, Heavy Metal, Inception, Ravenloft,

Chronicles of Amber, Planescape: Torment, Silent Hill, Alice in Wonderland, The Matrix, Hellraiser, Fringe, Labyrinth, Pan's Labyrinth, Spirited Away, eXistenZ, Wizard of Oz, Brazil, the works of Stephen King (The Dark Tower, Insomnia, Hearts in Atlantis, Desperation/The Regulators), Neil Gaiman (Sandman, American Gods, Neverwhere, Coraline, Marvel's 1602), China Mieville (Un Lun Dun, Looking For Jake and Other Stories), Warren Ellis (Planetary, The Authority) and any number of additional tales -- dark, mysterious or whimsical, each -- in which multiple realities are layered and nested. There are a lot of ways to get yourself and your players inspired!

- Remember that the themes of this game are Desire, Power and Twists: power always flows towards desire, and it twists along the way. The essence of the game, as stated before, is strangeness, discovery of high weirdness and mad insight, horror of the unknown, and transformation into something beyond merely human. It is a story about confrontation of the alien and insane, both without and within. Part of the terror of this game should be the idea of 'becoming the Mythos,' from a Lovecraftian perspective; the players take on the role of elder gods as they quarrel, boiling up as nightmares in multiple worlds at once.

- The design goal is simple: ... *immersive play of cruel, impossibly powerful and self-absorbed -- but not consciously, intentionally evil -- characters*

APPENDIX ONE

Storyteller's Quick-Reference for Order of Play

-- *Initial Character Creation:* Each player spends up to seven points of Power, detailing their character at the lowest point in their life. Explain the ratings and values of each Trait to all players, giving examples as you see fit. Determine each character's starting Strength, Weakness and Desire.

-- *World-Building:* Beginning on your left and moving right, ask each player to describe a Splinter: an alternate reality or timeline which plays host to his or her character's tale. After each player has elaborated a sufficiently complex, flavorful and fully-realized world -- one which it could be used as he setting for an interesting game or story -- each previous player applies one Twist, as appropriate.

-- *Fleshing out Character:* Beginning on your right and moving back to the left, ask each player to describe their character in greater detail. You will ask each player some variation of the following questions, all with the goal of learning the answer to the grand mystery: "Who are you?"

- What do you do?
- What do you hope for?
- What's your place in the world?
- Who or what do you hate, and who or what do you love?
- What's special about you?

After each player has elaborated a sufficiently complex, flavorful and fully-realized character, each previous player applies one Twist as appropriate. Each player also receives 6 more points of Power at this time, for a total of 13 points of Power.

-- *Dividing the Antigod Shards:* You will divvy up and place the four pieces of the Nemesis into their respective Splinters. You will also determine wherein the United Antigod must find itself to 'win' the game at the end of the tale.

-- *Beginning the Game:* Starting, once more, on your left, you will run an introductory scene with the first player; this scene should last 5-15 minutes. Once you or the player calls for a roll, the scene ends. You will then run one scene, in order, with each of the other players.

-- *Ending Round One:* After each of your players has had a scene, you will give one point of Power to each player; they may spend these immediately or hold onto them. Let your players know that from this point forward, they may call for scenes with other players if they desire.

-- *Flow of the Scenes:* Err on the side of awesome. Be willing to say 'yes, and ...' to any and every proposed action, rather than negating. Let your players try things that are impossible

in other games. Mix and match settings and genres; Victorian horror is stranger when it meets Post-Apocalyptic horror. Let the players luxuriate in the feeling of super-humanity; after being so weak in a universe so twisted, most will delight at the chance to be the abuser rather than the abused.

-- *Make it Memorable:* Use of recurring motifs and themes -- certain colors, smells, sounds, symbols and names -- can become iconic. Thunderstorms, dolls, blurry photographs, biblical names, cheap one-story motels, faces seen in static, the sound of laughter from empty places, chiming bells, dusty wooden trinkets, sterile burn-wards, dead cellphones, seedy bars, spinning tops, corrupt authority figures with a lazy eye, unwholesome insects, cold water dripping, upscale foreign restaurants, exposed rebar under cracked concrete, shadows seen in reflection, colorful animal masks, rotting seafood, children's shoes ... these are just a few examples to get your mind going.

-- *Growing Power:* You will divvy out another two points of Power at the end of round two, three points of Power at the end of round three, and larger pools of power after each subsequent round. Play is entirely cooperative, and subject to your discretion. Let your players feel like they are becoming greater than human, always one step away from comprehending the madness around them. If you think a player could accomplish something -- or should try something -- always feel free to suggest it!

-- *End Game:* You may end the game at any time; if the story seems to be coming to a satisfactory and climactic point, be ready to stop the tale with a final and conclusive bang either during this round or during the very next. You will want to position all the characters to make a final, cosmic choice between power and morality, between their desires and what once made them human.

-- *Final Showdown:* If you want to run a curb-stomp battle, pit the last of the players against the United Antigod: it should have 13 -- or more, equal to the highest total Trait of any player or the largest pool of Power -- in every Trait. In addition, the United Antigod should be willing to offer piecemeal booby prizes to any character willing to bow out of this ultimate confrontation; good examples include the remains of a blasted bubble-world, the fulfillment of a single wish or the reanimation of a dead loved-one. At this time, rolls end actions but don't end the scene.

-- *Scare yourself:* it's a horror game, after all.

APPENDIX TWO:

If you get stuck, have something -- anything! -- happen next. Don't have your player roll Awareness to detect the craziness; have them roll Will to keep their composure and take one simple action in response as the scene comes to a close:

-- a gunfight or knife-fight erupts, crashing in through a door, window or wall

-- a phone rings; the voice on the other end is long-dead and strangely familiar

-- a slip of paper found in a pocket give the address to "The House of Raw Desire"

-- whispering, chattering or glass suddenly breaking is heard in another room

-- a peal of thunder splits the sky and black rain begins to fall from the torn heavens

-- the smell of smoke precedes a flaming body crashing through the ceiling

-- a murderous clown in a plastic animal mask rushes in, wielding a blunt, blood-slick object

-- the earth shakes and writhes as the pale, thorny blossoms of a fungal forest breaches the surface

-- all the mirrors simultaneously explode as another universe punches into this reality

APPENDIX THREE:

Sample NPCs

A smattering of useful pre-generated background figures are presented here; you should feel free to mess with these as you see fit, but they represent a fine baseline (9 to 11 points) from which to draw characters.

-- Cop/Leg-Breaking Thug: Flesh 3, Voice 2, Will 2, Awareness 3

-- Clever Criminal/Detective: Flesh 2, Voice 3, Will 2, Awareness 3

-- Doctor/Scientist: Flesh 1, Voice 2, Will 4, Awareness 3

-- Lethal Animal/Machine: Flesh 5, Voice 0, Will 1, Awareness 4

-- Wandering Hero/Monster: Flesh 4, Voice 1, Will 3, Awareness 3

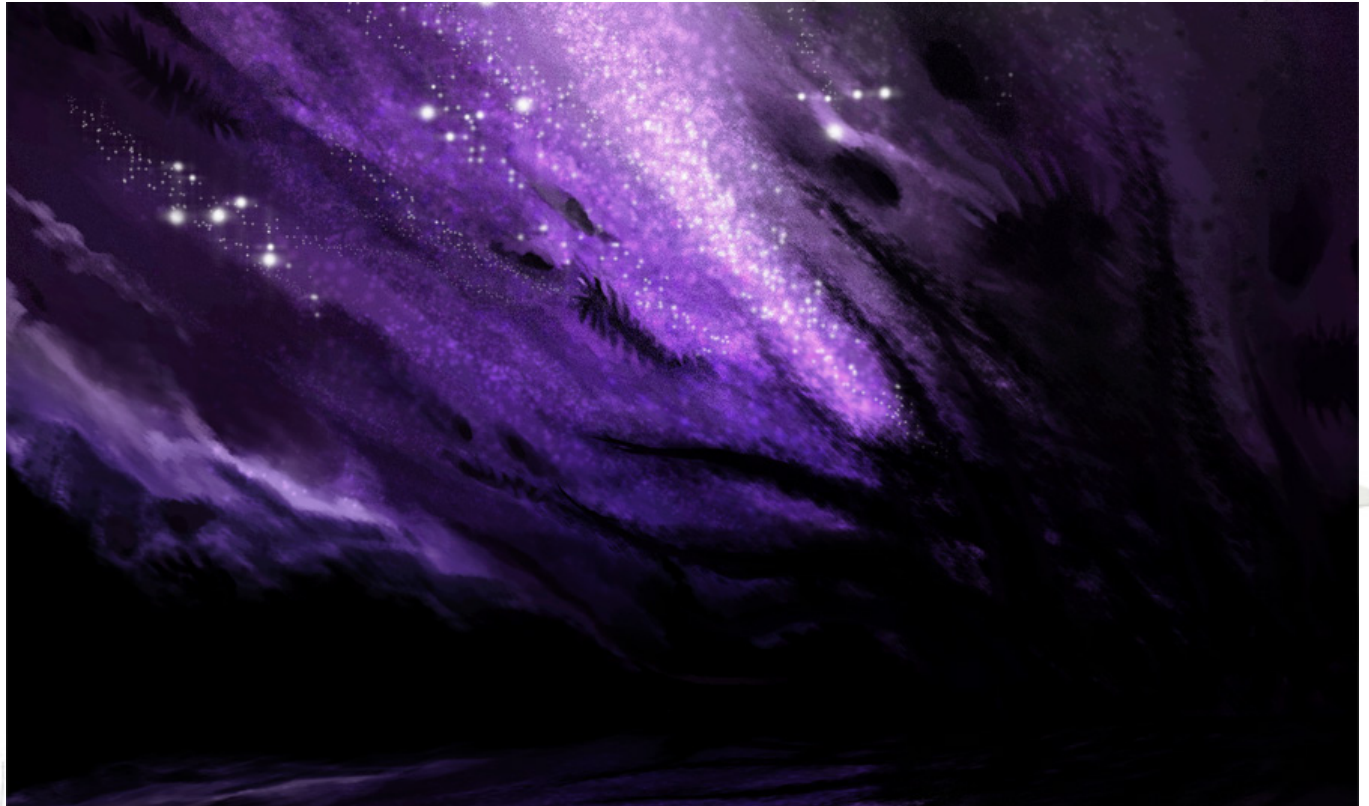
-- Charismatic Leader: Flesh 1, Voice 4, Will 3, Awareness 2

-- Skilled Assassin: Flesh 2, Voice 3, Will 2, Awareness 4

-- Crippled Mystic: Flesh 0, Voice 1, Will 4, Awareness 5

-- Ranting Lunatic: Flesh 3, Voice 3, Will 3, Awareness 1

-- Average Person: Flesh 2, Voice 2, Will 2, Awareness 2 (add one point, as desired, to differentiate focus)



APPENDIX FOUR:

Running the Game: [Example of Endgame]

GM, finishing a scene with **Kelsey**: "... the car swerves off the road at high speed. You fling your mother to safety with the pure might of your mind, and your step-father dies -- impaled on a jutting tree branch which spikes with a creak through the windshield -- just as everything goes dark. You lose consciousness as you impact something hard and wet with the sound of crunching metal. Okay, looks like that wraps up the round. Everyone gets 9 points of Power at this time."

Corey: "Except for me. I drained the oceans, burned the sky and finished the dark ritual that I saw in the Stuttering-Bone Mirror."

GM: "Correct. You gain 18 Power."

Dani: "Holy crap."

Corey: "Damn right."

GM: "I'd like to take a quick break, and then we'll do one more scene with everybody. This is probably going to be the last round of the game, so everyone get prepared to finish out their story. I'll be back in a moment; feel free to talk, grab a drink, whatever."

Dani: "Huh. I kinda thought that the last round was the end. At least for me."

GM: "Oh, no. You are wounded, your people are wiped out and the fires of the Outer Gods still burn, but your tale isn't over ... not just yet." [leaves, taking his notes]

Ryan: "He has altered the deal. Pray he does not alter it any further."

[after a quick break]

GM, returning: "Okay, so, Kyle ..."

Kyle: "Yeah, I think I'm mostly dead. Mostly."

Dani: "Not all dead."

GM: "Correct. You're a negative Flesh, sure, but that doesn't mean you're out of the game."

Kyle: "The bastards set me on fire!"

Corey: "And crucified you, upside down. In their defense, you *are* the one who ran out of Power at a bad time ... and who brought gasoline and Zippos to a gun fight."

Kyle: "What kind of stupid cult uses shotguns, anyway?"

Ryan: "The kind with a respectable appreciation for the subtle and elegant beauty of Oscar Frederick Mossberg's flawless design?"

Kelsey: "I'm not sure I know what that means, but I'm pretty sure it was creepy."

Ryan: "Forget it."

Kyle: "Look, I assumed they would have knives or something. *Maybe* a sword."

GM: "Live and learn. You're at negative five Flesh; are you spending points before the scene to buy that up?"

Kyle: "Hell yes."

GM: "How many?"

Kyle: "How about all nine?"

GM: "That'll certainly do it. I'll go ahead and set you back at negative one before you spend your points, too. You're now at eight Flesh. What do you look like when you regenerate? Do you spring, fully-formed, out of the ash-strewn ruins of your old body? Are you still you, but with a perfect physique, or are you even human-looking anymore?"

Kyle: "I'm a golden, glowing avatar of perfect, sculpted muscle; I'm what all the guys from *Magic Mike* wish in their secret hearts they truly were. I'm look like what Dennis Reynolds thinks he is. I shine like the sun. And I'm here to kick some ass."

GM: "Okay, you got it. With a shrug and a flex, you effortlessly shatter the cross upon which you were spiked and immolated, stepping free of the ruin as ash flakes from you. Your vision returns as you grow new eyes: around you, the cultists quail with terror ... but the skies above you are still consolidated into a swirling abyss rimmed with dark jade flame, an inverse hurricane piercing the stratosphere."

Ryan: "Wait. Is it the same green as the fire above the Spire of First Magic?"

GM: "The same. Rain pours from heavy, leaden heavens, and the final words of the cult leader echo; far above you, you can see the streets of a burning city hanging in the sky, perceived as if you looking up from the bottom of a deep well sunk into the city's glass roots. The stars are gone. The shrieks of those in your own town affected with nightmares begin to reach a crescendo."

Kyle: "I kill the cultists."

GM: "They die, the last of their panicked gunshots streaking, glancing off you without leaving so much as a mark. You bat the head of the cult-leader from his shoulders with a casual backhand; the Antigod Codex falls from his grasp and clatters to the ground at his feet as his lifeless body slumps to the pebbled, creaking stone of the rooftop. The ritual they had enacted is still building, though; it feels like an earthquake."

Kyle: "Okay, I have an Awareness of 7. What am I looking at? Is that Corey's world up there?"

GM: "Yep. As you gaze up, you can see that you are part of a pillar of emerald fire that links other worlds; the skies above his city look up into a desert, and beyond that is a mountain-top Cathedral, and above that is darkness. Everything around you shakes as the library begins to wrench free of the earth."

Dani: "I don't like this. This is bad. We're all gonna die."

Corey: "Everyone except me."

Kyle: "How far can I see, straight up?"

GM: "Beyond infinities. The library begins to fall upwards. Kelsey, you awake in a hospital room, tubes in your arms: the music box is sitting on the floor chiming that horrible tune,

and the jade light pouring out is as bright and sick as you've ever seen it."

Dani: "Do something! The Stuttering-Bone Man has possessed the haunted building, and he's stepping between worlds!"

Kyle: "Oh, is that what's going on?"

Ryan: "So, the shadow-world above mine is the last step before the top of the music-box?"

Corey: "Yeah. I just figured out that Dani's character is the ghost of Kelsey's grandmother, too. I think I represent her abusive great-grandfather. But I think that Kyle is actually in a different time-line, where the most dangerous part of the Antigod was trapped. Flung the furthest, if you will."

GM: "With your Awareness, Kyle, you can make a guess about that. But it'll be a roll, which would end your scene."

Kyle: "Well, I'm not happy about any of that. What are my options?"

GM: "Dani was right: the spirit of the Stuttering-Bone Man is trying to climb out of the pit that is your reality and up the ladder; it was hardest to do in your world, but he's finally got the connection made and stabilized. You can fight him straight up, or you can try to shut the portal, or you can ride this out as he animates the haunted library and heads across the border between worlds ... and, while you do, make another Awareness roll to see the bigger picture."

Kyle: "Huh. If I shut the portal, will I be trapping myself in with him?"

GM: "Yeah. And it'll be a Will roll against his. Not a lot of good options."

Corey: "Fight him!"

Ryan: "We've already established that his Flesh is incredibly strong in your reality, Kyle. I think you'll die if you face him outright. Even with your new power."

Kyle: "Probably. And I don't think I have the Will -- or the Power -- to close the portal."

GM: "Maybe not. You could buy back from your Strength, and then spend Power to buy from all of your other Traits until you have a large enough Pool. One last noble sacrifice to trap a dark god, burning out your mind and soul as you do ... or you could live, and understand what has been going on all along."

Kyle: "I like that second one. I'll surf the behemoth to Corey's dead reality and make an Awareness roll as I pass between the borders."

Dani: "No! Come on!"

Kyle: "You can make a noble sacrifice to save your *own* reality. But he's probably going to offer you the chance to come back to life in Kelsey's body. I think that *you're* the thing that's trapped in the box, and the rest of us are just your nightmares."

GM: "Give me a roll." [secretly prepares to check this roll against the static Awareness of the Antigod shards in Splinter Y and in Splinter C, as well as Corey's character's Awareness; if he succeeds at the required difficulties, Kyle will go unnoticed by some or all parties]

Dani: [as Kyle rolls] "So ... wait, somebody is going to stop this, right?"

Corey: "Nope. I'm looking forward to ruling Kelsey's universe. Mine's pretty much spent."

Ryan: "You'll have to get past me first."

Corey: "I'm looking forward to that, too. The question you have to ask yourself is: what would you do if you could climb out of that music box, with your powers, into her defenseless world?"

Kelsey: "I would hardly call my world defenseless. In fact I'd like to spend a point of Power to take my turn now: I want to open the box."

GM: "You stand on wobbly legs, but you stand; you walk from the hospital bed, pulling wires behind you. Light cascades out as you hold the music-box. You can see all the secret places you've dreamed of, sitting there stacked one on top of another. Do you want to step inside, down from the storm to the Spire in Dani's world? It's the one floating closest to the surface."

Kelsey: "Yes. I step inside. And I'm spending the rest of my Power on increasing my Will. The goddess has arrived."

GM: "You feel your body slump to the floor as your mind enters the box; time slows in your realm, and the beep of the hospital monitors becomes a single howl. Everyone with an Awareness of six or higher becomes acutely aware of one fact -- no roll necessary -- as she enters: there is no physical passage-way between the realms in the box and the top-most reality."

Kyle: "It's ... what? Psychic-connection only?"

GM: "Correct. And only into the body of the one who opens the box; only very special people can open the box, as well."

Ryan: "Well, Kelsey ... *somebody* is waking up in your body, it looks like. Hope it's me, actually."

GM: "Correct. [checks notes] Okay, so you're in the box, Kelsey, and standing in front of Dani's character. Beneath you shudder a stack of bleeding realities: you can hear the howl of a broken cosmos as the Stuttering-Bone Man's stony Flesh comes careening up from the pit to join with his Will. Dani & Kelsey, I'll let the two of you role-play as soon as I've run the scene with Corey."

Corey: "How much Power will it take to step to Ryan's world?"

GM: "Only one, but you can spend as many as you like to add successes. Ryan, you can spend Power to try to keep him out; this will be a contest of Wills."

Kyle: "If you lock me down here with these monsters, I will be very upset."

Ryan: "Any other options?"

GM: "You can let him in and fight him. Maybe try to collapse your reality on his head, killing you both. Or you spend a point of Power to flee 'upwards' to the reality above yours: the one where Kelsey and Dani now are." [makes a note; he intends to let everyone fight out one last final bout if in Dani's world ... unless either Ryan or Dani makes the final choice to let their PC die to contain the Antigod]

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