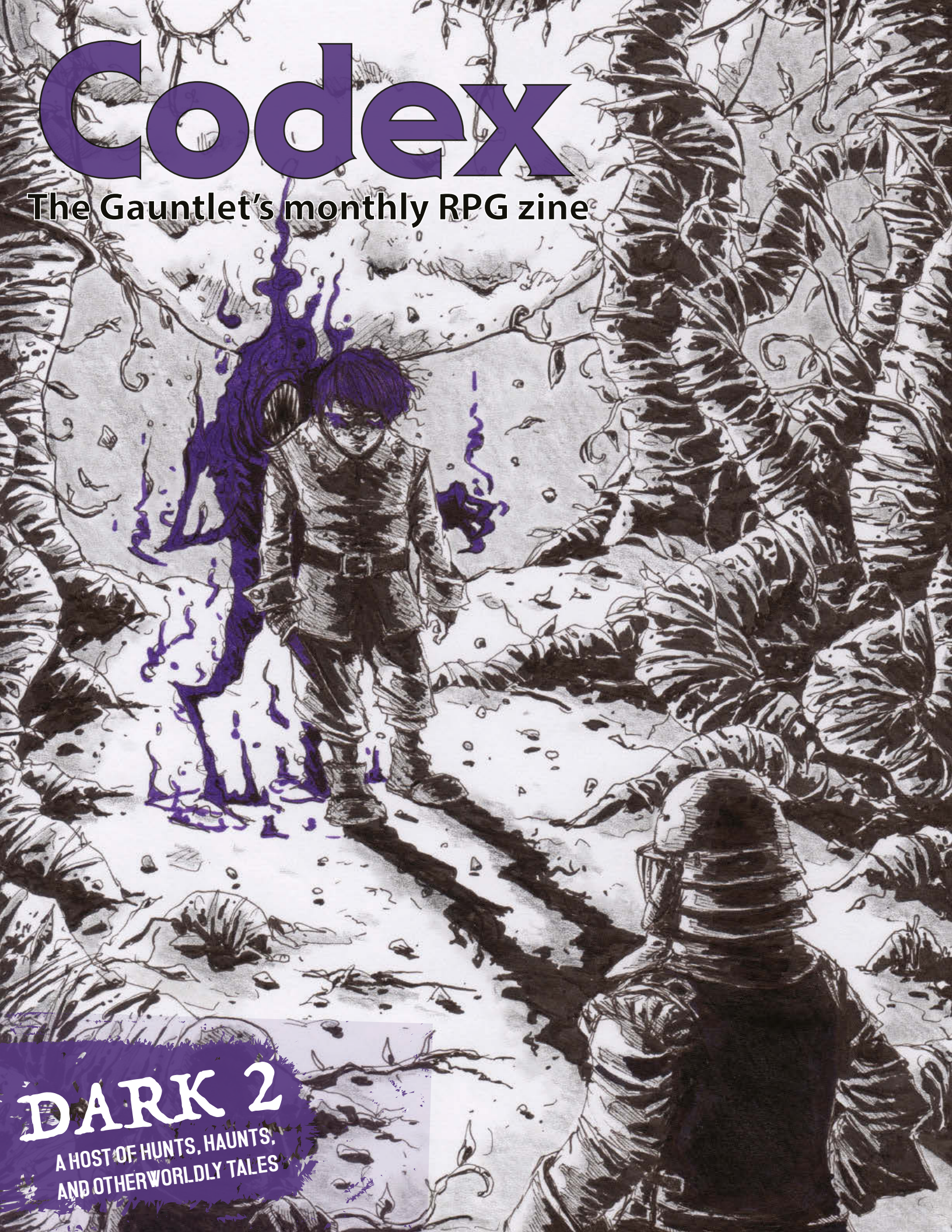


Codex

The Gauntlet's monthly RPG zine



DARK 2

A HOST OF HUNTS, HAUNTS,
AND OTHERWORLDLY TALES

GHOST DRUMS

A GAME BY GERRIT REININGHAUS,
KEEPER OF THE SILENT VOICE OF THE EMPEROR
BASED ON A TALE TOLD BY SALVADOR AJTZIP



CULTURAL CONSULTANCY & SPANISH TRANSLATION BY DANIEL SOJUEL
TZ'UTUJIL TRANSLATION BY CONCEPCIÓN PABLO LACÁN
ILLUSTRATION BY ISMAEL SOSOF

THE TALE

(A Tz'utujil tale from Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala)

Those who drown in Lake Atitlán often blame the living for their death. They come back to town to tease them into damnation. Fortunately, the good spirits of the lake force them to carry and play drums when they come. That way the living can hear the ghost drums and escape to safe places the ghosts can't enter. But one day, a visitor from the States found a way to steal the drums from the drowned and added them to his collection. Since then, there is no warning anymore from the ghosts and they have become dangerous. People disappear or go suddenly mad. Maybe one day the ghost drums will return and Santiago Atitlan will be safe again from the Drowned.

THE STORY IN TZ'UTUJIL:

J-ee' aj xeya' nke'ok pa pe
tnamet k'moy kxin jlee chik wnaq;
k'j-ee' utzlaj taq dyosil rxin ya',
nkeктаqchij che nkek'am pa je' ktambor taq
nke'ok pa pe tnamet, rmal k'ara' j-ee' wnaq taq
nekk'axaj ktambor aj xeya' nkeba ela alnaq ptaq kuchooch je
natan Ajaw chpam, rmal ra' j-ee' aj xeya' majo'n nkekwin ta
nke'oka ptaq jay kxin wnaq je ek'asa. K'ola jun q'ij, jun wnaq je penaq
Estados Unidos xetqij naq nuban numaj ktambor aj xeya'. Kara' xuban, taq
xekwina xumaj ktambor aj xeya' xuyik ajni' rebnoon tzra jle' chik achnaq
je ruwloon je'a. Kamik j-ee' aj xeya' majo'n nkek'am pexta je' ktambor,
rmal ra' qas k'aloj ri rwech taq nke'ok pchik pe tnamet, rmal majo'n
nkek'axax xchik. K'j-ee' wnaq qas nsacha kewa' taq nke'ok pa j-ee' aj
xeya'. K'o tara jun q'ij, xtmelox pta ktabor j-ee' aj xeya', che utz k'ara'
j-ee' wnaq majo'n nban ta lowlo' chka kmal aj xeya'.

BEFORE YOU PLAY

This is a short story game in which we re-imagine the above tale. There won't be any dice or other resolution mechanics. The game is highly ritualised with phrases you need to read, drums to play, and generally has a theatrical tone. This is a horror game with the horror on the subtle side of the genre. Keep it serious and dark. Take your time while playing the game. There is no reason to hurry.

As in many tales, the people and the village in your story stay abstract. It's modern day, but it shouldn't matter much where in the world the story happens. Names, traditions, skin color, etc., can be a mix from all over the world. The tale hits colonialist trauma sufficiently through the set-up.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY:

- 20 minutes per player
- 2 to 5 players
- A room for yourself without distractions where you can dim the light (if not possible: play anyway)
- A glass of water in the middle (if not available: play without)
- Old newspaper you can waste, best with mystery reports (if not available: any paper with faces does it)
- A pen
- A ghost drum per player (if not available: anything you can drum on)

**For online play, each player needs the requisites individually.*

PREPARATION (5 MIN)

Each player, except one, plays a Ghost—a person from the lake who once died in the lake. The other player plays a Visitor to town from the North.

At the beginning of the game, each Ghost has a drum. Create one from empty plastic bottles, actual drums, whatever suits you. Put a glass of water in the middle of the table.

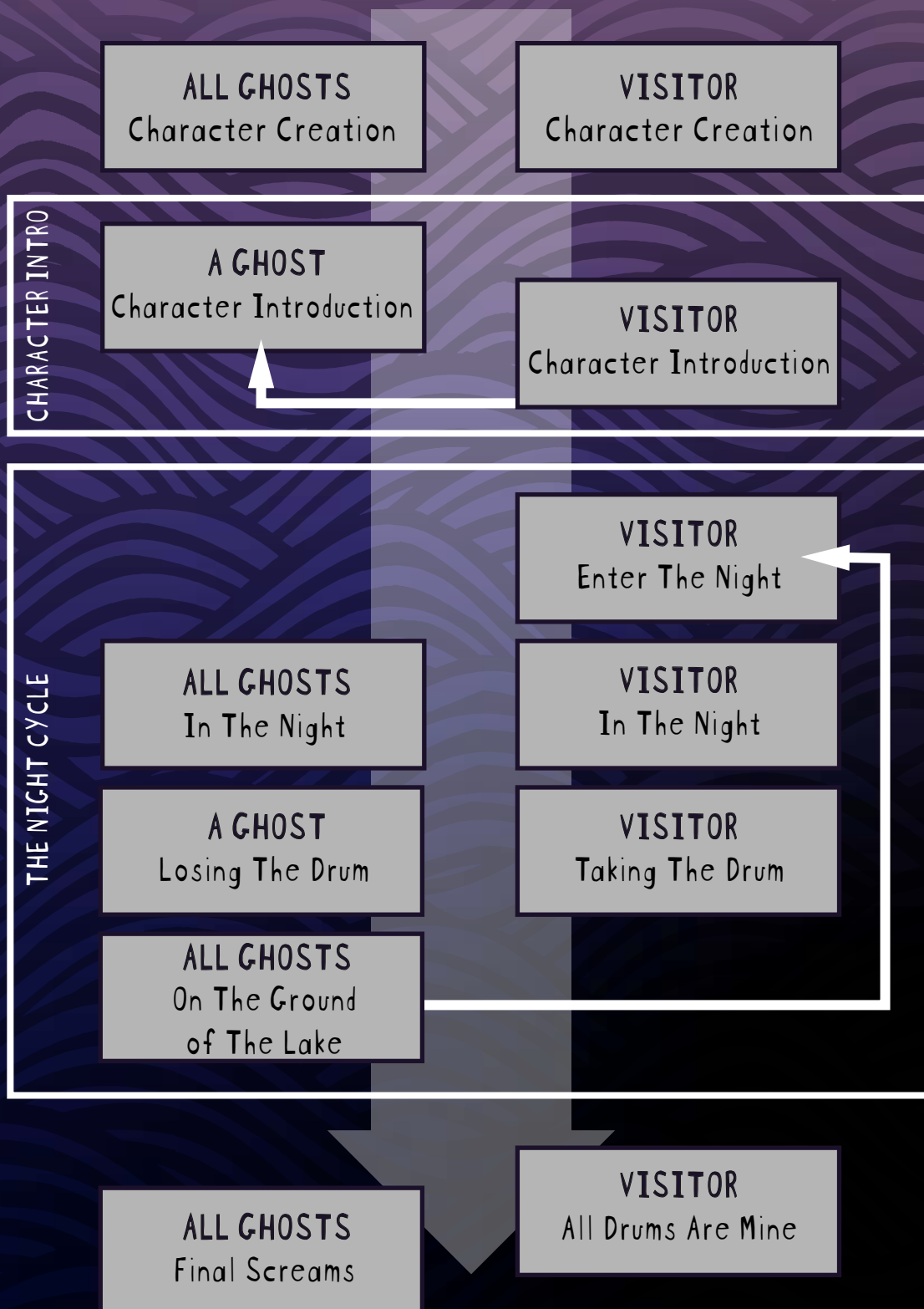
TALK ABOUT SAFETY (5 MIN)

Talk about subject matter you prefer to exclude from your game. This is a story about horror and cruel death; consider what would take the fun out of it for you and mention that. The X-card and other safety tools can be used to exclude content without further explanation while the game is going, but you might want to exclude some topics (such as graphic violence or suicide) at the beginning.

In this game, you use darkness, drums, and your voice to intensify emotions. If these elements become too much for you, put your hands up with your palms facing the other players or say “Largo.” This safety tool signals to other players when they need to bring the intensity of play down.. Practice this now by making the respective gesture.

PLAYING

The game is separated into text for the Ghosts and for the Visitor. Each section says for whom it is. You don't need to read the text of the other role and you don't need to read everything beforehand. But take your time to read through the current section before you begin.



CHARACTER CREATION

GHOSTS: CHARACTER CREATION (5 MIN.)

Create a backstory from the time when your ghost was alive, how you died, and what grudge you still have with the living. Cut or rip out a face from the newspaper representing your character. Summarise your grief in a word or a short phrase.

Whenever you are out to scare the living to death, you will whisper this phrase (e.g. "Betrayal," "I was telling the truth," "I cried for help but nobody came"). Write the phrase on a piece of paper. Write your character's name on the piece of paper with your character's face.

WAIT FOR EVERYBODY TO FINISH THEIR STORY.

VISITOR: CHARACTER CREATION (5 MIN.)

AT THE SAME TIME AS THE GHOSTS

While the Ghost players create their story, answer the following questions to yourself and write at least a few keywords down:

- How did you learn that ghosts can't do you any harm? *(You are wrong about this.)*
- How did you learn you are superior to the people in town? *(You are wrong about this.)*
- What happened to you that makes you fear water so much? *(Unfortunately, you have good reason, as you will learn.)*

Grab the newspaper and cut or rip out a face for your character. Ask the Ghost players to tell you when they are ready.

WHEN EVERYBODY IS READY, THE VISITOR PICKS A GHOST AND TELLS THEM TO START WITH CHARACTER INTRODUCTION.

CHARACTER INTRODUCTION

GHOSTS: CHARACTER INTRODUCTION (5 MIN. PER PLAYER)

Introduce your Ghost by telling the other players your story. Start by saying:

"Those who drown in the lake sometimes return to the living. When the wind is blowing from the underworld through the streets of the town where they once lived, they are with us. This is the story of one of them."

Tell it in third person ("he, she, they") and as if it was an old folk tale. Keep it to 5 minutes maximum. End with a silence of around 10 seconds (that's a long time!). Let the piece of paper with your character's name (!) sink into the glass of water and watch the writing dissolve.

Then say:

"That person was me. Now I'm just the sorrow of that person. I now live at the bottom of the lake. But by night I come back to show the living what they have done to me. When you hear my drum, run. Or you will be drawn into what happened to me."

Then whisper your phrase twice.

LET THE PLAYER OF THE VISITOR
RESPOND TO YOUR STORY.

VISITOR: AFTER EVERY GHOST INTRODUCTION

(2 MIN. PER GHOST)

Every time a Ghost tells you their story, respond to it in the following way:

Tell them:

"I don't fear you. Actually, I don't fear ghosts at all."

Then tell them how you learned ghosts can't harm you. You can change this slightly each time if you like. Then say:

"I know people here in town fear you. But I'm not as pitiful as they are."

Then tell them what makes you superior to the people in town. You can change this each time if you like, but only slightly.

Don't yet tell them why you fear water so much.

PICK ANOTHER GHOST PLAYER TO
NOW INTRODUCE THEMSELVES. IF
NONE ARE LEFT, CONTINUE ON THE
NEXT SECTION.

THE NIGHT

VISITOR: ENTER THE NIGHT (1 MIN.)

When you have heard and responded to the last Ghost's story, say:

"I can't wait for the night to begin. The drums of the drowned would make a great trophy when I return North."

Dim the lights or turn them off except one. If you play online, ask the Ghost players to do so, too.

GHOSTS: IN THE NIGHT (1 MIN.)

The Ghosts approach the town drumming — yes, that's you as players. They are whispering their phrase. Stop when the Visitor shouts "Stop!"

The Ghost player chosen by the Visitor begins whispering their phrase again until the Visitor tells them to stop.

VISITOR: IN THE NIGHT (5 MIN. PER GHOST)

After listening to the concert of the (remaining) drums for a while, shout: "Stop!" Pick one Ghost who still has their drum by pointing at them or saying a spoofed version of their phrase. Tell them:

"I don't fear you."

Let them whisper their phrase continuously. Enjoy it. Shout "Stop!" again to make them calm. Then say:

"This is all long gone. You are dead. If I were to believe in you, though, here is something that would scare me."

Then tell them what scares you, and how the revenge of the Ghost might incorporate it (for example: "Your mourning could cause the young mother to end her life," or "The truth you died for would cause more deaths when revealed").

Then say:

"I like this drum. It's mine now, and you are just a drum-less ghost."

Take away the Ghost's drum. Make fun of the Ghost and its drum (imitating their whispering, mocking their drum play). In an online game, use your own drum and pretend it's from the Ghost.

Tell the Ghost players they can now gather on the ground of the lake (next section).

Wait for the Ghosts to start whispering again. Then enter the next night (section above). If all drums are yours by then, continue with the "All drums are yours" section on the final page.

THE NIGHT (CONTINUED)

GHOSTS: ON THE GROUND OF THE LAKE (5 MIN. PER GHOST)

Between the nights, the Ghosts of the drowned gather at the lake bottom. The Ghost player who just lost their drum says:

"I lost my drum. The living can't escape me any longer."

Then tell the other Ghost players how you finally took revenge on the villagers. Pick up on what the Visitor said would scare them. But make it worse. Tell the story in third person from the perspective of the living who died a terrible death, went mad, or disappeared mysteriously just last night. It might look like an accident, it might look like a murder case, or even supernatural.

For example:

"Marta came home late. It was quiet. Too quiet. Wind came through the open window. When she went to close it, she saw them: three bodies shattered on the cliffs. After she found the beds of her children empty, Marta climbed through the window herself. While falling, Marta heard a whisper: 'Why did you leave me?' Then all was calm."

Now put your phrase into the water and let the phrase dissolve. This story is solved. But your sorrow only grows.

Write a new phrase on a piece of paper which describes your growing sorrow after this cruelty or sadness you brought to town. You will continue to hunt the town. This is a new phrase you can whisper together with older words.

The other Ghosts weigh in by whispering their phrases. If what happened to your fellow Ghost makes you want to change your phrase, write a new one and put the old one into the water.

**LET THE VISITOR THEN ENTER
THE NEXT NIGHT (FIRST
SECTION ON PREVIOUS PAGE)**

THE END

VISITOR: ALL DRUMS ARE YOURS (5 MIN.)

When you take away the last Ghost player's drum, say:

"Tonight, I feel the need to show the people in town that these are all coincidences. There is nothing to fear. I will row out onto the lake."

Now tell the Ghost players what happened to make you fear water. Tell them in a melancholy manner. You somehow already know but won't yet admit that this is your end.

AWAIT THE GHOSTS NOW. WHEN THEY ARE THERE, TAKE THE CUT-OUT PICTURE AND DROWN IT IN THE GLASS OF WATER.

WHEN ALL OF THEM ARE JUST SCREAMING, CLAP LOUDLY INTO YOUR HANDS. THE GAME IS OVER.

GHOSTS: THE FINAL SCREAMS (1 MIN.)

When the Visitor has told you why they fear water, start whispering:

- *your phrases*
- *what cruel destiny you expect for the Visitor*
- *what will make the Visitor regret what they have done.*

Show them how you hate them.

GET LOUDER AND LOUDER AS IF YOU MOVE ONTO THE VISITOR PLAYER'S BOAT. WHEN EVERYBODY IS JUST SCREAMING THE VISITOR WILL CLAP THEIR HANDS. THE GAME IS OVER.





OF GLUM MOMENTS

by Andrew Hauge

*Written for use in Epidiah Ravachol's
Swords Without Master, as ideas for Thunders,
Feats Heroic, or even a simple roll. Also
useful for inspiring fantastical tales of sorcery
and mystery.*

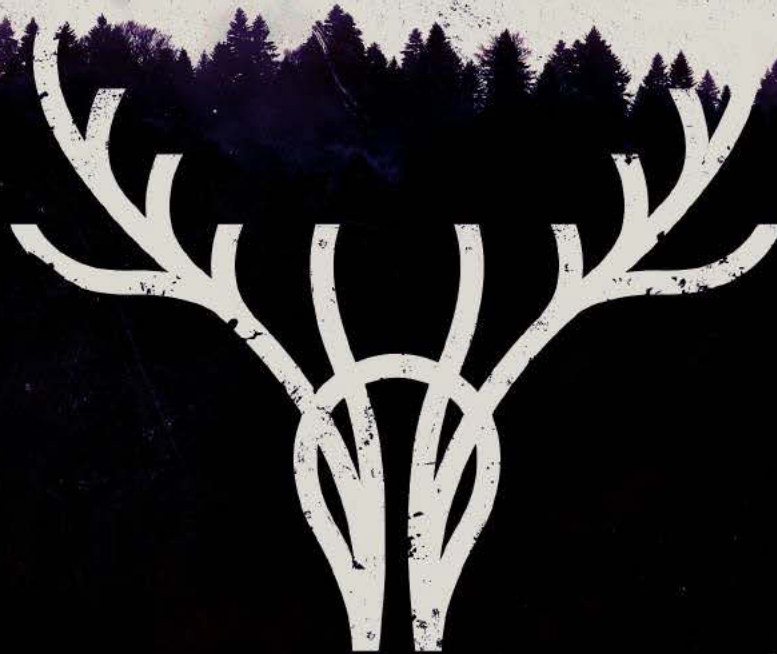
- ⊗ **A LINGERING NOTE** scrapes free from the strings of a zither in the midst of the silent twilight, and the cries of wolves rise to meet it.
- ⊗ **AS YOU CREEP BENEATH THE WIZARD'S TOWER**, the rolling hush of nightfall surrounds your ears, settling around you and sapping your will.
- ⊗ **LITHE FINGERS CURL ACROSS YOUR LIPS** with sinuous temptation and intoxicating promise, drawing you closer in the moments before your realization.
- ⊗ **HAIRS RAISE ACROSS YOUR BODY**, foretelling the fell wail which entangles itself into your heart, whispering a forbidden name.
- ⊗ **A STRANGE INSECT FLUTTERS AROUND YOU**, cool air floating off its wings, moonlight glinting off its many-segmented body.
- ⊗ **DRUMS ECHO IN THE DEEP**, each sound reverberating with immensity through the shadow of night.
- ⊗ **QUMOE'S THRALLS APPROACH** with halting steps and eyes filled with a milky white; a hollow laugh rings in unison from their throats.
- ⊗ **PALE EMERALD ICHOR DRIPS** across the stone, and the creature's life bleeds out across the cliff with no witnesses.
- ⊗ **YOU LOOK DOWN AND SEE THE SECRET SMILE** of your lover, shrouded in shadows, an unknown promise springing to his lips.
- ⊗ **A SINUOUS MAP IS CARVED** into chill obsidian, marked with ancient, long-forgotten runes that weave a tale of blood and corruption.
- ⊗ **IN THE BACK OF THE SEER'S HUT**, amidst yellow wisps of smoke, carved bones tinkle in uncomfortable tones.
- ⊗ **A COLD BLUE PHOSPHORESCENCE** rises from your skin when you call upon the tale of days remembered by sages.
- ⊗ **YOU WHISPER WORDS THAT SLIDE FROM YOUR MOUTH** and coil around your limbs, binding your intellect and deepening your thoughts.
- ⊗ **A SILENT KISS UPON YOUR BROW** and searching fingers tangled through your hair; in the moment of stillness, you behold them.
- ⊗ **IN THE FURTHEST DARK CORNER** of the cave of Omasco, on the twelfth night of the fifth month, you can hear a gentle weeping that will eternally haunt your dreams.
- ⊗ **A BONE-WHITE BASILISK STARES AHEAD**, unblinking, unmoving as it has stood for centuries, and your spine shivers as you see the night within its eyes.
- ⊗ **WORDS LAY UNSPOKEN** yet understood in the midst of the deepest intimacy.
- ⊗ **SHE HOLDS HER HAND OVER A SAPPHIRE GEM**, her fingers drifting and crooked, commanded by another force.
- ⊗ **THE MIDNIGHT DRAKE STIRS**, a billow of cloud surrounding its icy scales, the shadow blotting out stars and the moon as it rises.
- ⊗ **FADED LIGHT DRIFTS THINLY** through the wooded tangle of trees, revealing the twisted paths beneath your feet.
- ⊗ **THE GUARDIAN LOOMS**, a solitary figure whose stature makes us appear like vermin before it.

When winding vine chokes chiseled stone,
These woods will claim a trophy of their own.

When graven gods are overgrown,
These woods will claim a trophy of their own.

When thorn bursts forth from living bone,
These woods will claim a trophy of their own.

When vengeful seeds are finally sown,
These woods will claim a trophy of their own.



TROPHY

JESSE ROSS

OVERVIEW

Trophy is a collaborative storytelling game about a group of treasure-hunters on a doomed expedition into a forest that doesn't want them there. It requires one game master (GM) to moderate the game and portray the dangers of the world, and one or more players to portray the treasure-hunters. A game of Trophy takes about 3–4 hours.

The game tells the story of the physical and mental descent of the treasure-hunters as they move deeper and deeper into the dangerous forest. Their journey will ultimately bring them to ancient ruins that hold the treasure they seek, and the monstrous entities which now dwell there. This is not, however, a hopeful story of brave and daring adventurers slaying dragons and dragging bags of gold with them back to town. This is a horror story of entitled pillagers meeting tragic ends. It is very likely that all the treasure-hunters will die or—at best—be permanently scarred and haunted by their expedition.

Trophy is adapted from *Cthulhu Dark* with permission of Graham Walmsley. Trophy is also based on *Blades in the Dark* (found at [HTTP://WWW.BLADESINTHEDARK.COM/](http://www.bladesinthedark.com/)), product of One Seven Design, developed and authored by John Harper, and licensed for use under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license ([HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY/3.0/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)).

Special thanks to all my playtesters: Agatha Cheng, Ary Ramsey, Chris Thompson, Christian Svalander, Fraser Simons, Gerrit Reininghaus, Harry Morris, Jim Crocker, Mathias Belger, Oli Jeffery, Paul Edson, Phillip Wessels, River Williamson, Sam Zeitlin and Shane Liebling.

The map was off. The eastward bend in the Naveh River came up more quickly than documented, leading to a dispute that pushed well past sunset. It was Amar—our ranger—who saw the ruins first. Even by torchlight, the crumbling stone face of some vaguely human effigy was apparent through the hanging vines and foliage.

The forest had already reclaimed so much. Once proud pillars lay flat against the ground, as though victim to the unholy tantrum of a primordial child. Copper basins had tarnished to that familiar shade of sickly green. The weather-beaten slab that once served as a roof had fully collapsed in, providing only one obvious—and perilous—entry point to the temple's inner sanctum.

Sheets of cobweb crisscrossed the roughly carved passageways, though they were easily dispatched by Amar's torch and Lineta's saber. Lineta was well regarded for her skill with a blade, both in her surgery

practice and when negotiating with thugs. Her healing talents had already served us well during our journey through the razor-root grove. I would have lost more than the three fingers had she not amputated and sutured as swiftly as she did. It was a shame I couldn't return the favor.

Amar, again, was first to see what the temple had kept hidden all these centuries. Four black clay urns stood unmolested at the center of the circular room that terminated the main hall. Wordlessly though with much exertion, Amar slid off their covers one by one, allowing Lineta and me to our own discoveries. Four desiccated human husks each hung to a single golden metal stonefruit.

Any doubts we had about the treasures of ancient Kalduhr were dashed the instant we saw those stonefruits. Using my good hand, I pried one from its mummified cradle and inspected it further. Inscriptions in the style of the mage-scribes of King Argiol Seo wound around the golden fruit. I could scarcely read it, but running my finger along the indentations opened something in the recesses of my mind. I saw the empire burning as four nobles were embalmed and placed in black clay urns. I lingered on the funereal process—on every word and ritual and prayer and plea—for what seemed like days. I watched it play over and over and over in my mind, slowly pulling apart the meaning behind the words the death priests spoke. All the while, flames licked at the temple building as the kingdom of Argiol Seo burned.

When my mind pulled back, a fire raged in the circular room. I know not what happened, but one of Amar's arms lay severed on the ground, cleaved by Lineta's deft hand. He had backed her into a corner with nothing but his torch, which had already left horrible burns upon her face.

I ran.

I ran past my two travel mates. I ran through the corridors of the temple. I ran through the night, following the river as best as I could.

I made my way back here to Fort Duhrin, the birthplace of all bad ideas involving a journey into the forest. At least you can start out with a map better than the one I was given. I would go myself, but my second encounter with the razor-root didn't benefit from the presence of Lineta, and a hunter with one foot and seven fingers isn't long for those woods. Four golden stonefruits sit, protected by nothing but six corpses and my discretion. Three of those are all yours, as long as you bring one back for me.

So I ask: are you ready to claim your trophy?

HOW TO PLAY

RISK ROLL

When you attempt a risky task, say what you hope will happen and ask the GM and the other players what could possibly go wrong. Then gather 6-sided dice.



Take one light-colored die if the task is something you are skilled at because of either your occupation or your background.



Take another light die for accepting a Devil's Bargain from another player or the GM. Devil's Bargains are described in the following section.



Add a dark-colored die if you are willing to risk your mind or body in order to succeed. You must include this die whenever you perform a ritual.

Roll the dice. If your **highest** die is a:

1-3 You fail, and things get worse. The GM describes how. The GM may also allow you to succeed, but things will get worse in some other way.

4-5 You succeed, but there's some kind of complication. The GM describes the complication, then you describe how you succeed.

6 You succeed. Describe how.

If you included a dark die and it rolled **equal to or higher** than your highest light die, it counts as a Ruin Roll as described under RUIN ROLL.



If you are unhappy with your roll, you may add an additional dark die to your dice and re-roll. You can keep adding more dark dice and re-rolling. You cannot re-roll when a dark die is the highest die in your roll.

If you use a Risk Roll to try to defeat any of the forest's monstrosities by fighting them in hand-to-hand combat, you will die. Instead, roll to hide, roll to escape or roll to use a ritual against them. If you fight something that is not monstrous or if you fight a monstrosity but not to defeat it (for example, to fight your way past it), be clear about what you want from the fight, then roll normally.

HOW TO PLAY

DEVIL'S BARGAINS

The forest is dangerous, and treasure-hunters take risks fueled by the folly of their pride. To reflect this, the GM or any other player can offer you a bonus light die if you accept a Devil's Bargain. Common Devil's Bargains include:

Causing collateral damage or unintended harm.

Getting lost or separated from your companions.

Sacrificing an item or piece of treasure.

Betraying a fellow treasure-hunter.

Attracting the attention of wild animals, forest spirits or monstrosities.

The Devil's Bargain occurs regardless of the outcome of the roll. You make the deal, pay the price, and get the bonus die.

The Devil's Bargain is always a free choice. If you don't like one, just reject it (or suggest how to alter it so you might consider taking it). You can always just risk your mind or body and take a dark die instead.

If it's ever needed, the GM has final say over which Devil's Bargains are valid.

RUIN ROLL

Your Ruin shows how much the forest has dug its claws into you, including the physical and mental harm you've suffered. It starts at 1.



When you witness or undergo something disturbing, make a Ruin Roll by rolling one dark die. If you've made a Risk Roll which includes a dark die, and that die is equal to or higher than your highest light die in that roll, your dark die is automatically considered a Ruin Roll.


If your dark die rolled **higher** than your current Ruin, add 1 to your Ruin and work with the GM to describe how the forest is warping your mind and body.

HOW TO PLAY

REDUCTION ROLL

The forest wants revenge. Humans have stolen its secrets and its gifts and given nothing in return.

When your Ruin reaches 5, you may now reduce it by acting in the interests of the forest: destroying treasure, preventing the use of rituals or sabotaging your fellow treasure-hunters' exit from the forest. You should do these acts in a way that does not draw attention to yourself. The more it looks like an accident or simple bad luck, the better.

Each time you do this, roll one light die. If you get **less than** your current  Ruin, you succeed at your task and decrease your Ruin by 1. You may continue reducing your Ruin in this way when your Ruin drops below 5.

BECOMING THE FOREST

When your Ruin reaches 6, you lose yourself to the wilds that have been growing inside you and you become a twisted monstrosity in service to the forest. This is an important moment: Everyone focuses on your last flashes of lucidity before you either run screaming into the forest's depths, or turn violently against your fellow treasure-hunters.

Hand your character over to the GM to control, and either create a new character or exit the game.

CREATING YOUR TREASURE-HUNTER

On the following page you'll find sample character sheets. Choose the name, occupation, background, rituals and drive of your treasure-hunter.

All occupations can learn and use rituals. Increase your starting Ruin by 1 for each ritual you know. You can choose up to 3 rituals.

Future Trophy supplements will provide additional occupations, backgrounds, rituals and drives. You can also work with the GM to create your own.

Choose the name, occupation, background, rituals and drive of your treasure-hunter.

NAME

- ◇ Alina
- ◇ Baso
- ◇ Daian
- ◇ Elisio
- ◇ Fion
- ◇ Kasien
- ◇ Mahera
- ◇ Nima
- ◇ Orlen
- ◇ Sibil
- ◇ Teodan
- ◇ Vero
- ◇ _____



OCCUPATION

- ◇ Leech (*skilled in forensics, herbs, surgery*)
- ◇ Ranger (*skilled in beasts, hunting, traps*)
- ◇ Sellsword (*skilled in athletics, defense, weapons*)
- ◇ Sorcerer (*skilled in alchemy, rituals, symbols*)
- ◇ _____

RITUALS

Choose up to 3 of the following rituals. Increase your starting Ruin by 1 for each ritual you know.

- ◇ Bind (*hold a person or animal in place*)
- ◇ Channel (*allow a spirit to act through you*)
- ◇ Hollow (*push a spirit from its own body*)
- ◇ Inhabit (*possess a person or animal*)
- ◇ Project (*observe a remote location in spirit form*)
- ◇ Summon (*draw a known spirit or person to you*)
- ◇ _____

BACKGROUND

- ◇ Defrocked Priest (*skilled in omens*)
- ◇ Disinherited Noble (*skilled in appraisal*)
- ◇ Escaped Cultist (*skilled in deception*)
- ◇ Expelled Apprentice (*skilled in lore*)
- ◇ Reformed Thug (*skilled in intimidation*)
- ◇ Retired Soldier (*skilled in tactics*)
- ◇ _____

DRIVE

- ◇ Buy your brother's freedom from Barsul Prison
- ◇ Earn the respect of the Governor of Fort Duhren
- ◇ Establish an estate in the Levasti countryside
- ◇ Publish your discoveries from ancient Kalduhr
- ◇ Retire in comfort in the Rose District of Ambaret
- ◇ Win the heart of the heir apparent of Naganeh
- ◇ _____

RUIN

| |
|---|
| 1 |
| 2 |
| 3 |
| 4 |
| 5 |
| 6 |

-TROPHY

TROPHYRPG.COM

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- ◇ Retired Soldier (*skilled in tactics*)
- ◇ _____

DRIVE

- ◇ Buy your brother's freedom from Barsul Prison
- ◇ Earn the respect of the Governor of Fort Duhren
- ◇ Establish an estate in the Levasti countryside
- ◇ Publish your discoveries from ancient Kalduhr
- ◇ Retire in comfort in the Rose District of Ambaret
- ◇ Win the heart of the heir apparent of Naganeh
- ◇ _____

RUIN

| |
|---|
| 1 |
| 2 |
| 3 |
| 4 |
| 5 |
| 6 |

-TROPHY

TROPHYRPG.COM

GAME MASTER'S GUIDE

HOW TO RUN TROPHY

Trophy is, at its heart, a game about hubris. Desperation and greed might be what initially drive the treasure-hunters into the forest, but pride is what keeps them there, pushes them deeper and eventually does them in. Early victories on the outer edges of the forest should give them a false feeling of mastery over nature. Their increasing Ruin represents the erosion of their entitlement and self-determination and should lead to the realization that in this tale of predator and prey, they are the stag rather than the hunter.

At the start of the game, tell your players the following:

In the end, the forest claims everyone who enters. Most never return. Those that do come back with their minds and bodies broken. Fight to survive, but know that you will be marked. You will be claimed. You will be the forest's trophy.

CREATING AN INCURSION

In addition to the usual themes, each session of Trophy should be built around a theme designed by you, the GM. This gives focus to the game and ties the monstrosities, treasures and setting together into a cohesive and satisfying whole.

Theme

First, decide on a theme. This should be a single evocative word, such as Sleep, Water or Masks.

Moments

Next, come up with a list of moments. Moments are short descriptive scene fragments that reinforce the theme. For example, if you're using the theme of Sleep, a moment might be "thousands of dragonflies in torpor, attached to trees and tents", or for Water, you might write "pools fill in your footprints as you lift your boots from the thick, gray mud." Aim to develop at least ten different moments, which you'll pepper into your narration during the game.

Moments are good opportunities to reveal the fates of previous adventurers bound for the same treasure. For example, a game with the theme of Water

GAME MASTER'S GUIDE

might have the moment “three bloated bodies float face down amongst the mangroves.”

Conditions

Now, make a list of conditions. Conditions are the ways the forest manifests in your players' characters when they increase their Ruin. For Sleep, that could be things like “your dominant arm is plagued by a constant feeling of pins and needles” or “you find written words illegible, as if in a dream.” You'll want between 3 and 5 conditions for each player in the game.

The Journey

As the treasure-hunters go deeper and deeper into the forest, they move through five different rings, starting at Ring 1. Each ring contains terrors which seek to drive them away, as well as temptations that pull them further in. The characters cannot move to the next ring until they've encountered at least one terror and one temptation from the current ring.

RING 1

The terrors in Ring 1 exist to make the players and their characters feel confident. There should be clear signs of the terrors' lethality, but the treasure-hunters should overcome them with relative ease and a minimal increase in Ruin.

EXAMPLE TERRORS: A wounded bear or other large mundane predator; A band of rival treasure-hunters; Members of the kingsguard patrolling the edge of the forest for unlicensed treasure-hunters

The temptations in Ring 1 should be ephemeral: rumors and whispers and glimmers of hope. Connect them to broad promises of wealth and fame.

EXAMPLE TEMPTATIONS: A hermit who knows the way; A familiar location on your roughly scrawled map; A fearful goblin offering help if his life is spared

RING 2

The terrors in Ring 2 are environmental. They make travel difficult and separate people from one another. Their role is to show the fury of nature.

GAME MASTER'S GUIDE

EXAMPLE TERRORS: *Torrential rain and mudslides; Noxious clouds of psychotropic spores; Carnivorous trees, choking vines or other malicious plant-life*

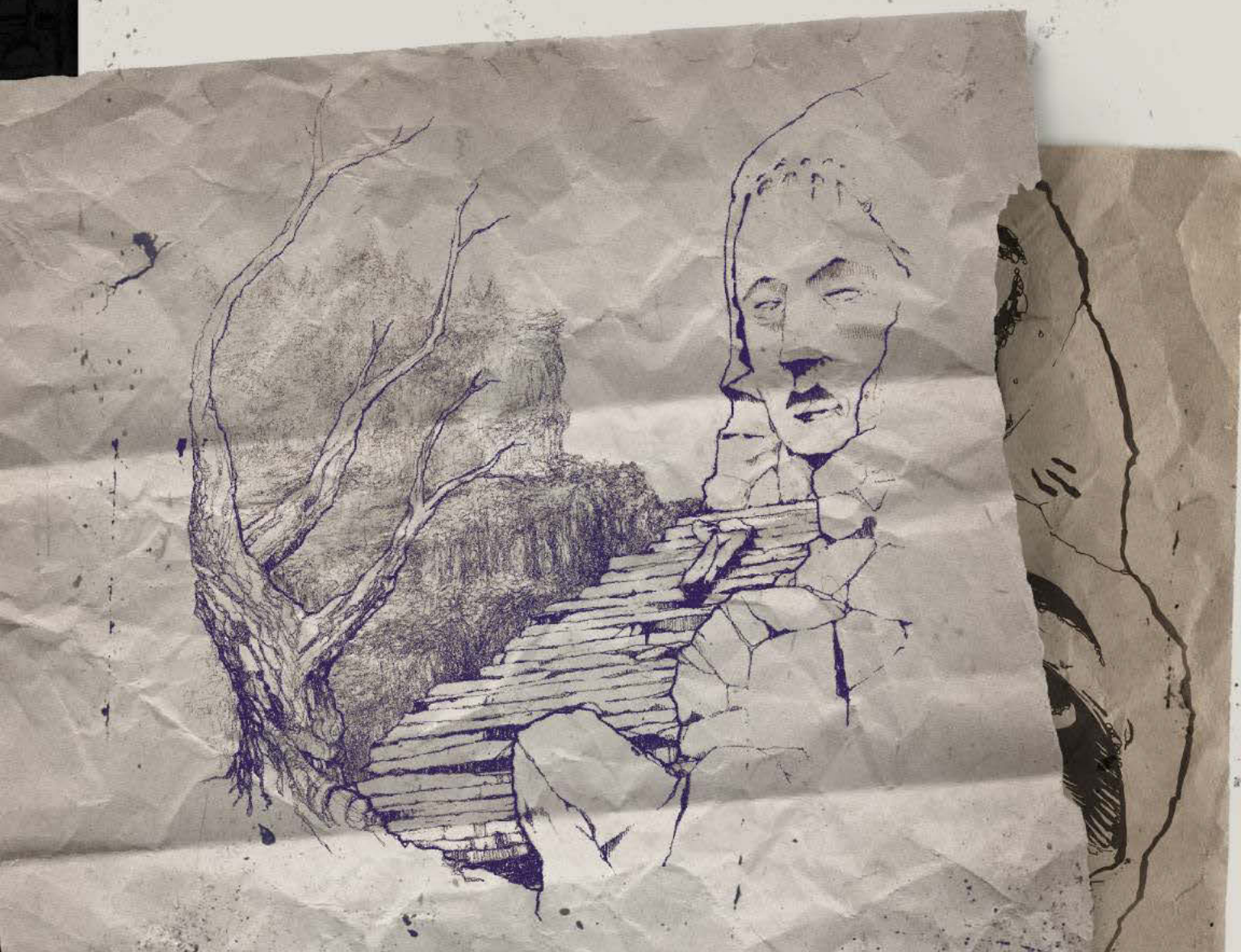
The temptations of Ring 2 take the form of overwhelming evidence. They exist to show the treasure hunters that they are on the right path.

EXAMPLE TEMPTATIONS: *Temple ruins; A rough stone pathway; Ancient, weather-beaten statues*

RING 3

The terrors in Ring 3 exist to create suspicion. They should make the characters question the motives of their companions.

EXAMPLE TERRORS: *Dreams of impending betrayal; Your items discovered in another's pack; The realization that you've been walking in circles*



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The temptations in Ring 3 are personal, evoking the drives of the characters.

EXAMPLE TEMPTATIONS: *A reminder of your drive; Food or songs from home; A taste of creature comforts*

RING 4

The terrors in Ring 4 are monstrous. Their role is to pursue the treasure-hunters and drive them into the final ring.

EXAMPLE TERRORS: *A mass of undefined flesh covered in hungry mouths; Shadowy claws that are only visible in your periphery; Children that appear to be carved of granite approach with blood-speckled mining tools*

The temptations in Ring 4 are just out of reach. They're right there, on the table, waiting to be grabbed. All the treasure-hunters need to do is push a little bit further. They exist to beckon to the characters, to drive them to desperate and foolish action.

EXAMPLE TEMPTATIONS: *Golden bracelets and necklaces woven with precision into a massive web; A vast, untouched library accessible only through a tight crawl space; Piles of gemstones glimmering at the bottom of a still pool*

RING 5

The terrors in Ring 5 are psychological. They exist to pit characters against one another and make them relent to their eventual fate.

EXAMPLE TERRORS: *Monstrous promises in exchange for attacking your fellow treasure-hunters; Isolation and abandonment; Doppelgangers*

The temptations in Ring 5 are always things that other characters possess, or are perceived to be in possession of. If there is something one character desperately wants, it should fall into the hands of another.

EXAMPLE TEMPTATIONS: *Manifestations of important figures from your drive; The thing you always wanted, held by a fellow treasure-hunter; A ritual to grant your wishes, requiring just a sacrifice or two*

A sample incursion is provided on the following pages.

INCURSION: TOMB OF 10,000 DREAMS

The forest is old and full of nightmares. But you know the path. Through the maze of brush and crushing darkness, you know where temples erected to long-forgotten god-kings still lie untouched. All that rests within them is yours for the taking. Will you tread carefully, and leave with riches and renown beyond your wildest dreams? Or will you learn—far, far too late—that the forest has awoken from its fitful slumber?

THEME

Sleep

MOMENTS

These moments can be used to provide texture to the world and reinforce the theme. Pepper them in at any point along the journey.

- ◇ Thousands of dragonflies in torpor, attached to trees and tents
- ◇ A gentle humming sound, like a lullaby
- ◇ A sudden warm breeze that smothers like a blanket
- ◇ The cries of night animals (owls, frogs) during daylight hours
- ◇ A bear in hibernation, unwakeable
- ◇ A garden of stone statues, nothing in common but their closed eyes
- ◇ A hole dug for a grave, left empty
- ◇ A slow breathing, emanating from the earth itself
- ◇ A fluttering form passes at the edge of your peripheral vision
- ◇ Cricket chirps happen at increasingly greater intervals
- ◇ Memorable trees and stones appear in the wrong location
- ◇ Boots become heavy and walking slows, though the ground is not muddy
- ◇ The moon appears through the forest canopy, though it should be daytime
- ◇ A marker stone is discovered, covered with symbols evoking sleep
- ◇ Stones used as head rests during camp are later identified as gravestones

CONDITIONS

These are conditions that your treasure-hunters might be affected by when their Ruin increases. They don't need to be permanent, but should show that the forest is starting to have its way with them.

- ◇ Blurry vision
- ◇ A desire to lie down
- ◇ Inability to read

INCURSION: TOMB OF 10,000 DREAMS

- ◇ Vertigo induced by a feeling of falling
- ◇ Things from your dreams manifesting around you
- ◇ Sudden time jumps
- ◇ Every shadow seems to show a night sky full of stars
- ◇ A feeling of pins and needles in one of your limbs
- ◇ Temporary paralysis or unresponsive limbs
- ◇ Weapons or other tools appear as strange objects

RING 1

TERRORS: A rival band of treasure-hunters have followed the party, willing to threaten and injure them to get information about the tomb. They should feel familiar, appearing similar to the party itself in a few oddly specific ways. Ask the players what kinds of things are familiar about them. This can be an opportunity to describe features and mannerisms of their own characters by contrasting them against a third party. The rivals are easily overpowered and dispatched. The manner in which they're dispatched will show you the party's propensity for violence.

TEMPTATIONS: The rival treasure-hunters should drop a rumor or leave something behind that speaks very specifically to the riches held in the tomb. "The stuff of dreams" is a good phrase to drop in. During this ring, ask questions which get the party talking about what they would do with their earnings, in order to learn about their drives.

RING 2

TERRORS: Night comes more quickly than anticipated, forcing the party to either set up camp or travel in the darkness. Someone should fall or almost fall. The use of a stretcher or other horizontal travel might make an appearance here, as that provides foreshadowing for the horizontal movement that will appear in Ring 4. During this ring, ask questions about their fears and how the forest seems to be actively working against them.

TEMPTATIONS: The party discovers a garden of stone statues or an unmapped graveyard, with plaques or headstones listing the names of the advisors of the king held in the final tomb. Ask the party what myths their culture still tells about the king or how the old civilization met its end. Try to reincorporate these ideas in later rings.

INCURSION: TOMB OF 10,000 DREAMS

RING 3

TERRORS: The party should feel forced to make camp. At least one party member dreams of another member of the party betraying them.

TEMPTATIONS: During camp, someone finds rations they didn't pack, but that remind them of home or of their drives. Aim to get them talking about their drives, and specifically ask them "what is your dream?" During this ring, ask them what has kept them from achieving their drives so far. Look for opportunities to connect their backstories together, especially if you can show how one character has held another back or kept them from their goals.

RING 4

TERRORS: The forest begins to wake. Things that should be asleep or long dead start to rise. The stone statues from the garden hunt the party. Vengeful spirits try to include the party members in reenactments of the spirits' nightmares. The party seeks refuge in the mouth of the tomb. Never describe the monstrosities in shorthand. There are no *golems* or *ghosts* here. These are *relentless chimeras bound in stone* and *violent winds that gnash at you like teeth*.

TEMPTATIONS: The treasures of the tomb are visible, but very hard to reach. To get to them, the party will have to make a tight horizontal crawl through cold earth or descend a dangerous vertical drop. There is a very real risk of getting suffocated or of falling. Give them only bad choices.

RING 5

TERRORS: The party members begin having visions of their fellow treasure-hunters raiding the tomb and then leaving them behind. Anything a character has mentioned dreaming about will manifest here, though twisted into a nightmarish form or with dangerous demands of the treasure-hunter. Show them awful things and keep asking for Ruin Rolls.

TEMPTATIONS: Portals which reflect the drives of the treasure-hunters begin appearing, but passage is always blocked (inadvertently or purposefully) by another treasure-hunter. Describe the things they desire in exquisite detail, but make the real world confusing. Promise them comfort and happiness and see how far they're willing to go to get them. Make everything tragic.



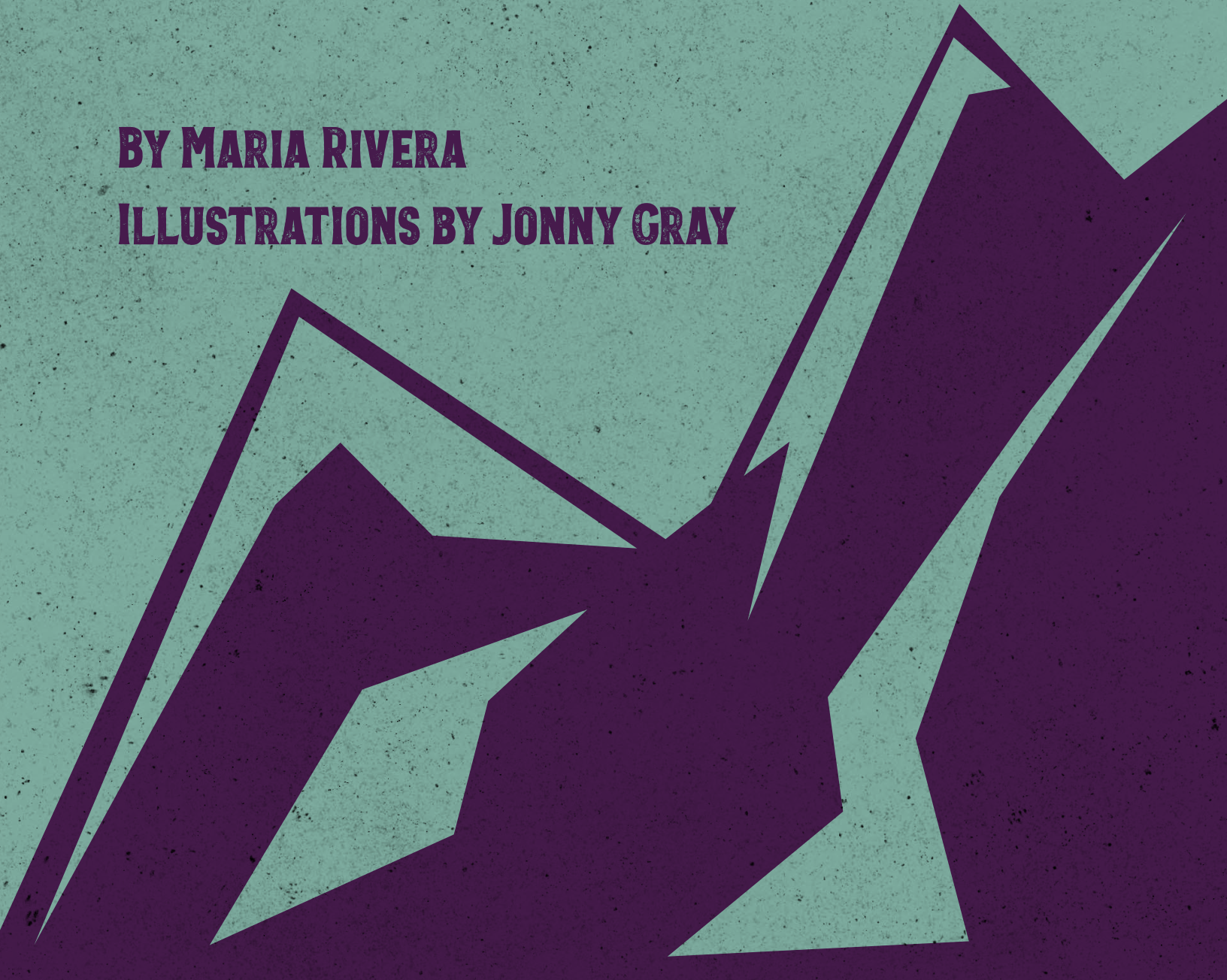
ORCHESTRA OF OBLIVION



New Bloodlines for Rhapsody of Blood by Jay Iles

BY MARIA RIVERA

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JONNY GRAY



THE GUARDIANS OF NATURE

MAKING YOUR GUARDIAN

STATS

Pick One:

- ☐ **Chalices 1 Swords -1 Coins 0 Wands 1** if you focus on caring for people while the **castle** corrupts the outskirts.
- ☐ **Chalices 0 Swords 1 Coins -1 Wands 0** if you focus on fighting the corruption at the source, caring little for material gain.
- ☐ **Chalices -1 Swords 1 Coins 0 Wands 1** if you focus on defending your territory at the cost of personal relations.

TRADITIONS

Pick one from each or write one of your own:

Style: Rustic clothing; furs and pelts; barely any clothing.

Lore: Secret meetings; whispers of nature; hidden enclaves.

Name: A sacred tree or animal; the name the whispers give you; no given name.

HISTORY

One bloodline taught you how to fit in with the rest of society. Set your pact with them to 1. You say what social expectation they taught you. They say how it has changed since.

PACT: THE WAY OF GREEN

You prize the natural order. At the end of each session, pick the explorer who went out of their way to destroy the **castle**, and raise their pact with your bloodline by 1.

While at one of your camps, members of other bloodlines can spend 1-pact to gain an animal companion. While the animal is alive, they share one of your explorer's moves.

SHELTER MOVE

When your explorer finds **Shelter** in the **castle**, they cleanse the area of the **castle's** evil. Each explorer may clear their **contamination** track. Their Blood remains the same.

☐ MEDICINAL HERBS

When you have access to natural herbs and poultices, choose one more option from Rest and Relaxation, even on a miss.

☐ NATURAL VIGOR

Your explorers can mark a second Minor Wound.

☐ PANACEA

When you claim a Forward Base, you may mark **contamination** to reduce the Regent's Clock by 1.

CONTEXT

Each generation, pick or invent one from each:

Refuge

A great tree, untouched by the **castle's** corruption.
The forest closest to the **castle**.

A place the civilized dare not enter.

Drive

The dying wildlife in the local area.
A great beast turned evil by the Regent.
The encroaching industry of the **castle**.

Breach

The worn pelt of a beast of the **castle**.
A growing branch tearing through a wall.
The wind which carries you to the roof.

BLOODLINE MOVES

Pick Two:

☐ PHASES OF THE MOON

You can tell what is wrong with the world by looking at the moon. At the beginning of a generation, the GM will tell you if there are any Acolytes that speed the world's blight, what blight they bring, and on what ticks.

☐ PLANT WHISPERER

You can communicate with trees and other flora. When you seek Shelter near a tree, you may treat it as a contact of your choice.



THE ARCHDRUID

FOUNDER OF THE GUARDIANS OF NATURE

You've left the comfort of the wilds to find the source of all evil. Now that you have found it, it's time to destroy it, for the good of the natural order.

IRON

0

GLASS

+1

SULPHUR

+2

MERCURY

-1

BLOOD

☿

WEAPON Choose One:

- ☐ Shillelagh (tags: stun, brace)
- ☐ A rudimentary spear (tags: piercing, fragile)

HISTORY

One of the other founders took part in one of your rituals of communion with nature. Give their bloodline 2-pact on you. You say what the ritual was for. They say what was strange about it.

Looks: *Old but fit; young but wise; feral demeanor (and nature.)*

Name: *Usher, Amergin, Tlachtga, Bodhmall, Cathbad, Nameless*

HARM



THE FATE DEALERS

MAKING YOUR DEALER

STATS

Pick One:

- ☐ **Chalices 1 Swords -1 Coins 0 Wands 1** if you advise people against the coming harm but lack the military strength to save them alone.
- ☐ **Chalices -1 Swords 0 Coins 1 Wands 1** if you defy Fate by gathering as many resources as possible at the expense of others.
- ☐ **Chalices -1 Swords 1 Coins 0 Wands 1** if you stare death in the face, everything else be damned.

TRADITIONS

Pick one from each or write one of your own:

Style: Ostentatious clothing; simple robes; unrecognizable from common folk

Lore: Cartomancy; astrology; runecasting

Name: A mystical name; a defiant name; Keepers of _____

HISTORY

One bloodline goes to you for prophecies and omens.

Raise your pact with them by 1. They say what fate you saved them from. You say what ill fortune you haven't told them about yet.

PACT: THE WAY OF VIOLET

You prize the struggle against Fate. At the end of each session, pick the explorer who had the worst luck and yet prevailed against it, and raise their pact with your bloodline by 1.

While at one of your camps, other bloodlines can spend 1-pact on you to get a glimpse of what might kill them. They hold 1. They may spend that hold to declare that this is the vision that they saw, and gain advantage on the roll. On a miss, they cannot avoid the noose: they die. *(With thanks to Jason Cordova for the Visions of Death move, upon which this is based.)*

SHELTER MOVE

When your explorer finds **Shelter** in the **castle**, they may conduct some divination. They gain a glimpse of an Acolyte's activities in the **castle**, and thus, their role.

☐ GOOD MEASURE

When you claim a Rest and Relax, you may spend 1 Relic to gain an additional option from the list.

☐ SOOTHSAYERS FOR HIRE

When you sell your fortune-telling services while calling for Reinforcements, you always get 1 Relic in addition to any other choice.

CONTEXT

Each generation, pick or invent one from each:

Refuge

A souvenir shop of trinkets and accessories.
The local fortune-teller's tent.
Your house, strangely untouched by evil.

Drive

Ill omens through your readings.
Strange happenings in your local neighborhood.
A traveller from the most-likely future.

Breach

Hidden away in a caravan transporting goods.
A false pact with an Acolyte.
The right place at the right time.

BLOODLINE MOVES

Pick Two:

☐ GRIM PORTENTS

When you Resist Doom, you add the following option to the list: You learn of what the world's blight will be. All Acolytes that speed the world's blight will act on the tick after they're initially supposed to.

☐ SWITCHEROO

When an explorer passes their misfortune unto you, they mark **contamination**. When your explorer forces their misfortune unto someone else, mark **contamination**.

☐ TWO-FACED COIN

When your explorer rolls a miss, hold 1. Spend that hold to gain advantage on a roll.

THE ESCAPIST

FOUNDER OF THE FATE DEALERS

You may not be lucky, per se, but you work with what you get. Whatever hand Fate deals you, you manage to get what you want, and then some. This evil threatens to give more than just a few lemons, though...



IRON

-1

GLASS

+2

SULPHUR

0

MERCURY

1

BLOOD



WEAPON Choose One:

- ☐ Thrown Tarot Cards (tags: ranged, grazing)
- ☐ A Hook and Chain (tags: tether, brace)

HISTORY

One of the other founders helped you escape a terrible fate. Give their bloodline 2-pact on you. You say what would have happened if they weren't there. They say how they arrived there.

Looks: *Sly smile and shady eyes; sad smile and worn eyes; knowing smile and hard eyes.*

Name: *Iris, Arsène, Carmen, Erik, Diego, William, Robin*

HARM



THE DEFENDERS OF TOMORROW

MAKING YOUR DEFENDER

STATS

Pick One:

- ☐ **Chalices -1 Swords 1 Coins 1 Wands 0** if your military might is unparalleled, but you stick out like a sore thumb.
- ☐ **Chalices 1 Swords 1 Coins -1 Wands 0** if you're stranded in this world with no resources to get back.
- ☐ **Chalices 0 Swords 1 Coins 1 Wands -1** if your knowledge of technology is vast, but know next to nothing about the supernatural.

TRADITIONS

Pick one from each or write one of your own:

Style: Flowing robes; skin-tight suits; trench coats

Lore: Notes on the other Bloodlines; technology of a time to be; scraps of knowledge

Name: The name of a future organization; a numeric designation; an unknown name

HISTORY

One bloodline told you about current events... to them. Raise your pact with them by 1. They say how this event is significant now. You say why it doesn't matter in the future.

PACT: THE WAY OF CHROME

You prize the preservation of the future. At the end of each session, pick the explorer who was most interested in events to come and raise their pact with your bloodline by 1.

While at one of your camps, members of other bloodlines can spend 1-pact to gain a strange, yet useful device. They hold 2. They may spend hold 1-for-1 to ask any question in the **See Clear** list.

SHELTER MOVE

When your explorer finds **Shelter** in the **castle**, they send scouts ahead. Gain 1 hold to **Travel the Labyrinth**.

CONTEXT

Each generation, pick or invent one from each:

Refuge

An orbital satellite.

The machine with which you came here.

The ruins of an ancient civilization.

Drive

The future, lost to the **castle**.

An individual that must survive until the end.

Knowledge of historical events.

Breach

Beaming technology.

A time machine.

An anomaly in the space-time continuum.

BLOODLINE MOVES

Pick Two:

COMMUNICATION DEVICES

You have effective means of long-distance communication. Your explorer and their allies can communicate with each other through great distances without having to **Summon Aid**.

DEATH RAY

Exactly once, when **Darkness Falls**, you may declare that you have a final solution. Negate the effects of **Darkness Falling**, but it will cost you a fragment of your souls. Your future characters start at Blood 1, as if you had left the **castle** without claiming the grail and with Blood 4+.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

When you call for **Reinforcements**, add the following to the list: You hear about otherworldly friends trapped in the **castle**. Free them, and they will aid you for the rest of this generation.

SCIENCE!

When you **Resist Doom** by replacing occult resources and ceremonial paraphernalia with technological baubles and devices, roll **+Swords** instead of **+Wands**.

ELECTRIC EYE

When you claim a **Forward Base**, you may spend 1 Relic to install hidden cameras that will warn you when the base is about to come under attack.



THE VISITOR

FOUNDER OF THE DEFENDERS OF TOMORROW

You came here to stop the greatest threat ever known to the universe. You've gotten this far with the help of the locals, and you will aid them with your knowledge. Failure is not an option.

IRON

0

GLASS

+2

SULPHUR

-1

MERCURY

+1

BLOOD



WEAPON Choose One:

- ☐ Ray Gun (tags: ranged, ammo)
- ☐ Beam Sword (tags: piercing, heirloom)

HISTORY

One of the other founders found you and gave you a place to stay. Give their bloodline 2-pact on you. You say how you managed to fit in. They say how you stood out regardless.

Looks: *Strange wardrobe; odd haircut; alien.*

Name: *Agent 42, X, The Wanderer, John, Starblaze*

HARM



THREE DOZEN CONSTELLATIONS

The background of the image is a deep purple gradient, transitioning from a lighter shade at the top to a darker shade at the bottom. It is filled with a network of white and light purple lines and dots, representing a constellation map. The dots vary in size, with larger dots indicating brighter stars. The lines connect the dots to form various geometric shapes, including triangles, quadrilaterals, and more complex polygons, which represent the constellations. The overall effect is a dense, intricate pattern of celestial connections.

GALMORAN WAS A GREAT HERO ONCE, BUT HIS WOUNDS LEFT HIM HELPLESS. He spent the remainder of his days asking for food or coin under a grand sycamore. As a reminder to a people who would send their sons to war and then turn their backs on them, the Goddess Eluartha swept Galmoran and his tree into the stars. Ten stars spread over the southern sky to form The Beggar's Tree.

IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT THE CERBERUS CONSTELLATION, as described by Johannes Hevelius in the 17th century, is no longer recognized by the International Astronomical Union, and is instead considered a part of the Hercules constellation. Less well known is the number of Herculean cultists within the IAU.

ONE OF THE CONSTELLATIONS OBSERVED BY THE MONKS OF THE ORDER OF THE SILVER GLOW is called The Sailing Seeds. Every few years, the monks update their records of the many stars, but they've failed to realize the Seeds keep getting bigger. They are coming.

ON THE LAST NEW MOON OF THE YEAR, the constellation of Secata, The Owl Mother, hangs in the sky directly above her mountain shrine. At the height of her alignment, her docents cast pellets gathered that year into the pool and read the floating bones for guidance.

LARNA'S ARROW: THE OTHER GODS WILL SAY that Larna has not won the archery contest as her arrow has not reached the end of its flight. Larna ignores their feeble protests and continues her hunt.

FOLLOW THE SIGN OF THE FROGSTAR, my lovelies. Follow it down the long swampy road. Come to the town of Duskfork, my pretties. Come to our town and kiss the black toad. (Southern folk song, ca. 1861)

UZANKA, THE KINGMAKER, is fully visible on the hottest night of the year, when the heir apparent of Irigabe is traditionally crowned. Uzanka's stars can appear in two configurations: horns up and the heir is accepted, horns down and the priesthood reject the candidate. If there's a trick to why every heir hostile to the priesthood has been rejected, no one outside the priesthood knows it.

ONE BY ONE, THE STARS ARE DISAPPEARING FROM THE SKY. Swallowing an infinite amount of stars is a long process, and we watch for years and decades as they disappear. Goodbye, Big Dipper, goodbye, Orion. We continue on with our lives, hiding the horror that one day, the star that disappears will be our own.

THE SIGN OF RUFUS, THE BEGGAR, foretells a blessing and a curse; while your destiny is never to achieve great things, you will constantly be witness to those who destiny calls. Many famous biographers have been born under this sign, and many more have lied about it.

DURING THE THIRD EVENING HOUR on the third day of the third month, if you whistle to the stars, they whisper their words. Not to your ears, but to your soul.

THE SCORNE LOVER WAS FORMED FROM A HEARTBROKEN SIGH. The chill of their heart froze the anguish breath, and the heat of their anger carried it to the heavens. A bad omen for honeymooning couples.

EVERY WINTER FOR MANY YEARS, THEY FOUND ORION IN THE NIGHT SKY. Every year, they kissed. Every year except one, when ocean and desert separated them—but they did not know this yet, so they still leaned in.



FREHZURA, THE ENTANGLED GRYPHONS, entwine beak and claw in eternal struggle. Even lore has forgotten the source of their strife, and it's told that staring into the sky's great melee has been the impetus for many rulers to break peace.

IT IS SAID THAT WHEN ST. PATRICK CAME TO IRELAND, he cast out all the snakes. What is not said is that St. Patrick made a deal with Ophiochus, the Snake-bearer in Heaven, to take all those snakes. What is not known is what will happen when the terms of the deal are up...

EVERY CHILD IMAGINES SHAPES IN THE CLOUDS, but few dare to draw shapes in the stars. The druids warn us that copying a constellation of another world will open a bridge there.

THE STORY GOES THAT WHEN SEMIAS THE INSATIABLE FOUND NOTHING LEFT TO CONQUER, he knotted a ladder out of every kind of grass and rush, tied it to an arrow, and aimed his bow at the moon. On clear nights you can see Semias' Ladder marked out in the stars, and Semias himself as the brightest star among them, still climbing.

EAT SAND AND LIGHT THE BONFIRES for Zekubrox, The Plague Bearer, has risen in the northern sky. Soon all will be nauseous and red boils will cover their lips. The crow roosts upside down until the scourge passes. Light lamps! Eat sand!

EVERY SPRING, WHEN ARTAX IS IN THE HOUSE OF GRIOVAER, the children of the village wander to moonwell and gather the holywater from it. The legend says that if one year the children don't get the water, the demon Hastrufaal will rise and destroy the village and enslave the people.

OVER MILLENNIA, THE PEOPLE OF ARMUN BUILT RELIGIOUS SHRINES ACROSS THE LAND. These sites were chosen as they provided the vistas most favorable to viewing the constellation of Vestarta, the Mother of Peace, at specific times during the year. Only recently did they realize that these shrines and the connecting lines formed by pilgrimage routes had traced across the land a frightening pattern—the constellation of Pallungong, the Father of Destruction.

IF YOU GO FAR ENOUGH INTO THE PINEY WOODS and look for Jim's Shack of Mysteries, there's a door inside that leads into a pitch black room. Inside are all the constellations, outlined with old Christmas lights. They say you can add your own if you offer him a hand full of silver coins, and it'll appear in the sky. For a handful of gold coins, you can take it down again.

THE FOREMOST POETS AND OPERA SINGERS are immortalised in the stars of The Muses. They burn as bright as their stellar namesakes, yet all die before their time.

AETHERE'S SHIELD: Nine yellow stars around a bright green nebula. Aethere set them there to hold Kery the Destroyer in place for a thousand and four years. The nebula boils with fury.

THE FACTORY PRODUCES CONSTELLATIONS AT A RATE OF ONE PER WEEK. Forged in the sun's light, the stars are launched into the sky at the weekly Festival of Filling. The children sing of the day when the sky will be glutted with sun-smelted fragments, and there will be nothing more to fear from the night.

IN THE SAME WAY THE OCEAN'S TIDE is based on the moon's movement, constellations' gravitational tide is based on the movements of unsensible entities. The gravitational tide is coming in fast.



THE NIGHT THEY REALIZED THEIR NAVIGATOR HAD SET COURSE for the left hand of Gustave the Bone Mariner was a fraught one. Every sailor knows that celestial skeleton's bleached-bone fist crushes all vessels that steer or drift its course. Yet the captain stood by the direction. "After battles wreaked our bow and bounties marked our heads, we're doomed anyhow... Might as well find what solace the old man might hide."

CHILDREN BORN BENEATH THE SIGN OF THE BLEEDING SOW are said to have a way with animals, good health, and poor eyesight. Such superstitious beliefs will get you laughed at in the cities, but journey outside them and it's hard to find a shepherd tending a flock not born at the end of fall. All of them are healthy, happy, and squinting towards the horizon.

A RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGHT'S ORCHESTRA, the Pale Rider is made not of stars, but a dozen Armathian warships traveling in rigid formation to usher in this planet's final movement. Scientists calculate the "constellation" will not arrive for several hundred years, so it largely carries on its way unheeded.

THE PEOPLE OF VORDUNGSTAHL EAGERLY AWAIT THE FAINT CONSTELLATION rising over the eastern peaks on the winter's solstice. On that evening, the astrologers convene to reconnect the glimmering stars into some new, creative shape, and it is believed that this discovered form will guide the city's destiny in the coming year. Every time, the constellation is christened with a different name according to the freshly figured pattern that the astrologers have discovered in those glimmering stars.

THERE ARE NO STARS, just holes where the god-vandals have scrawled their names too hard.

THE PROPHECY CLEARLY STATES a child born at the exact moment the baleful blue light of the eye of the Leviathan first breaks over the horizon after winter will become the God-King, yet after thousands of such births (engineered by a brisk trade in vitosal, an extract allowing timed induction), no such individual has yet arisen.



THE BALLOONIST WAS KIND, GENEROUS, AND BELOVED BY HIS FRIENDS; but he was devoted only to the sky. He was always eager to get back in his balloon, always venturing higher and farther from home until one day he didn't return. No sign of his bright yellow balloon was ever found. See those five stars, all yellow? They appeared when he disappeared. The sky loved him back, and the sky is a jealous lover.

STIR THE SEA WITH YOUR OARS! Clash the bow into the mighty sea king's waves! Beat the drum until your arms fail you! We sail to fertile shores! Hugarth the Wayfinder points our way with his astral hand!

THE PRANCING CAT BURNS BRIGHTEST AT THE NEW MOON. They say its light falls on all but thieves and strays.

"OUTSIDE THE ABBEY WALLS, far away from where the torches blind your vision of the heavens, Brother Thomas told me that we could see the Crown of It'Amatsu in the sky. Did I ever tell you about It'Amatsu? His spring blade? His winter blade? How he was imprisoned in the sky by the emperor for refusing to fight the wind, his lover? We should go see the Crown, I can tell you the stories as we walk."

THE WANDERING SHEPHERD has only one eye, since the Sorcerer King plucked the other from the sky to present to his lover. A thousand years later, his kingdom still burns.

HE WOULD MAKE THEM THE STARS, said the god-king. Xyele was foolish and in love and did not think to ask for specifics.

CODEX KEEPERS

A Thousand Faces of Adventure, Keeper of the Drunken
Pirate's Forgotten Wish

Aaron, Keeper of the Child Upon Whom We Dare Not
Look

Jesse Abelman, Keeper of the Moon's First Memory

Rob Abrazado, Keeper of the Purple Falsehood

Quentin Acord, Keeper of the Word that Binds and
Blinds

Joaquin Aguirrezabalaga, Keeper of the Blood of Lursiss

Vendevogel Alain, Keeper of the Omegatherion of Fasar

Alan, Keeper of the Wanting Widows of Thon the
Promiscuous

Jason Alejo, Keeper of the Titan's Heart

John Alexander, Keeper of the Child Whose Face is a
Mirror

Zach Alexander, Keeper of the Weeping Cells

Brendan Allison, Keeper of the Child Who Creeps and
Crawls

Brian Allred, Keeper of the Spear Eldfuglinn, Which
Burns with the Terrifying Light of the Sun

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Joe Amon, Keeper of the Astral Blades

Erik Amundsen, Keeper of Pages Touched but Unread

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Dreaming

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BansheeGames, Keeper of the Lost Child's Breadcrumbs

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Wails and Stings

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the Unseen

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Grievances of the Thousand Heretics

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Sphinx

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Mathias Belger, Keeper of the Spectral Hounds

Del Benjamin, Keeper of the Thunderstorm Chariot

Aljoscha Beyer, Keeper of the Orichalcum Engine

Al Billings, Keeper of the Dun Spirit of Disobedience

Sam Birnbaum, Keeper of the Last Light of St. Lannen
the Pure

Sarah Bolling, Keeper of the Last Lantern Before the
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Boni, Keeper of the Thirteen Principles of Volmun

Jason Boucher, Keeper of the Feathers of the Molting
Godling

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Patrick Brannick, Keeper of the True Name of Abbadon

David Bresson, Keeper of the Tortoise Who Mends the
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Jeffery Collyer, Keeper of the Oneirophrenic Chords
Edouard Contesse, Keeper of the Gifted One's Jade Carvings
Alex Context, Keeper of Our Shared Phantasmagoria
Barry Cook, Keeper of the Galactic Sextant
Robert Corr, Keeper of the Ram That Whispers Lies
Malcolm Coull, Keeper of the Golden Nimbus
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Jason Cox, Keeper of the Vessel of the Devil's Own Whiskey
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Yoshi Creelman, Keeper of the Triton's Blessing
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Nicholas Hopkins, Keeper of the Space-Borne Memory that Creeps into Our Dreams
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Logan Howard, Keeper of the Broken Blade
Stephen Humphreys, Keeper of the Puppeteer's Shadow
Sid Icarus, Keeper of the Box Into Which We Dare Not Reach
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Rose-Whisperer
Ben Kramer, Keeper of the Book of False Rituals
Mischa Krilov, Keeper of the Emerald Voice
Tamás Krisztin, Keeper of the Five Hundred Years Stolen
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Eike Kronshage, Keeper of the Chained Wolf, Herald of
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Chris Krueger, Keeper of the Four Mysteries of the
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Swordsman
Brian Kurtz, Keeper of the Law Library of Maedrovel
Urosh
Eli Kurtz, Keeper of the Blade of the One-Armed
Swordsman
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Marcy L, Keeper of the One-Way Door
Taylor LaBresh, Keeper of the Prismatic River
David LaFreniere, Keeper of the Six Questions
Ric Lanciotti, Keeper of the Sapphire Temple

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Chris Lutes, Keeper of the Blighted Egg
Ryan Macklin, Keeper of the God Sarcophagi
Rory MacLeod, Srorrim Ni Nees Eb Ylno Nac Hcihw Taht
Fo Repeek
Mad Hatter, Keeper of the Vein-Seeking Tongue
magnesium, Keeper of the Spider Tombs
Kira Magrann, Keeper of the Singing Serpent's Nest
Jeremy Mahr, Keeper of the Almanac of Leng
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Malex, Keeper of the Temple of the Golden Sky
Eric Maloof, Keeper of the Child Who is a Nest for Spiders
Rudy Mangual, Keeper of the Orphan's Kiss
Josh Mannon, Keeper of the Twisted Teeth of Garthuul
Manu, Keeper of the Little Box with a Tongue and Mirror
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Manu Marron, Keeper of the Automata Philosophica
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Darren Miguez, Keeper of the Boxes that Once Held Innocence
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Jason Mills, Keeper of the Nameless Guilt of House Castafiel
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Blaine Moore, Keeper of the Ancient Ungulate
Jim Morris, Keeper of the Darkstar Instruments
Harry Morris, Keeper of the Sebayt of Silver Dreaming
Jim Morrison, Keeper of the First Starlight
David Morrison, Keeper of the Tears of Lost Children

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Alex Murphy, Keeper of the Sympathetic Stiletto, Sticky with Eye Juices
Dude Mysterio, Keeper of the Eyes of the First Pirate
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Tiphane Neely, Keeper of the Phantom Penitents
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