

# XOBILIS

THE ESSENTIALS  
VOLUME 1  
field guide to the powers



By Jenna Katerin Moran

# **Nobilis: the Essentials**

**Volume 1**

**Field Guide to the Powers**

*by Jenna Katerin Moran*



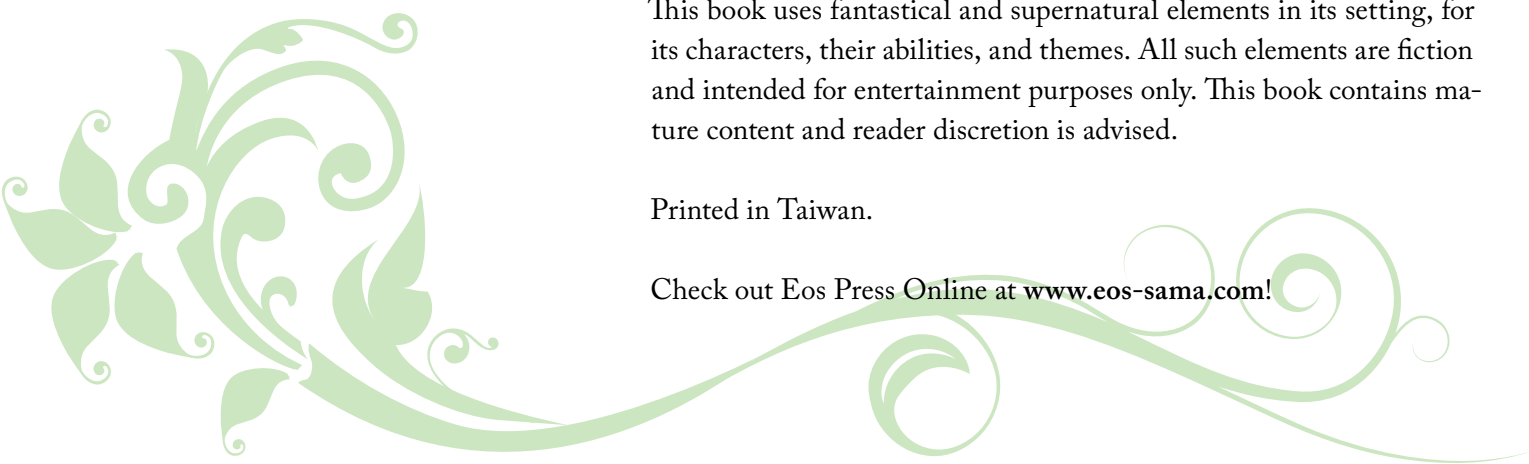
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Printed in Taiwan.

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# Dedication

For Cheryl & Joseph Couvillion, Chrysoula Tzavelas, Kevin Maginn,  
Raymond Wood, James Wallis, Dara & Anna Korra'ti, Han Qin,  
Hsin Chen, and Gayle Margolis





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**Special Shout Out to:** Robin Michael Alexander Maginn. HI ROBIN





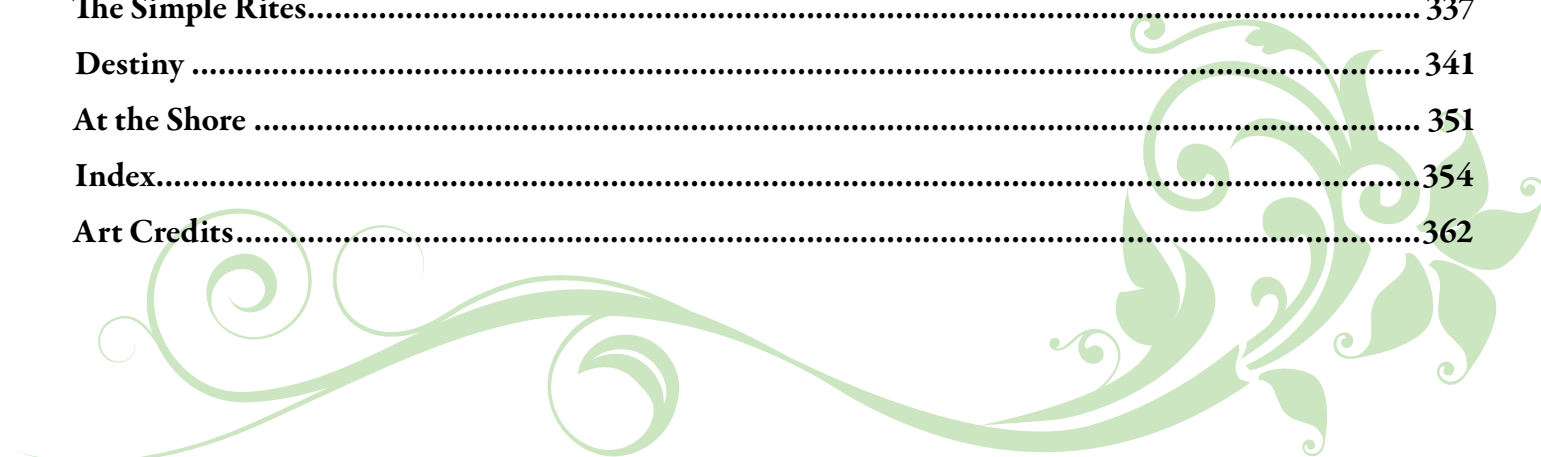


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# Welcome!

**T**HE WIND TOLD me once that everybody gets to play a game of **Nobilis** before they die. Maybe it's in their secret dreams. Maybe it's in real life. But everybody gets to experience the world of the Nobilis once — to leave behind the dead world where things don't talk to you and nobody knows the purpose of the world, for at least one night, and see the truth.

Maybe you got to play the game back when it was a little pink book printed on demand by Pharos Press. Or maybe you got to play it when it was this huge coffee-table book, lavish and elegant, made by Hogshead Publishing, Ltd. and later distributed by Guardians of Order before they decided to stop sending out money and books and stuff and just lurk like a serpent, coiled around the dark heart of the world.

I heard that's what happened to them! I might be wrong. If you've been to the heart of the world then you would probably know.

Anyway, maybe you got to play it that way; or in your dreams, with a mysterious book held by a mysterious referee; or maybe you've even become one of the Nobilis yourself, and you don't exactly have to *play* it any more to know.

But if not!

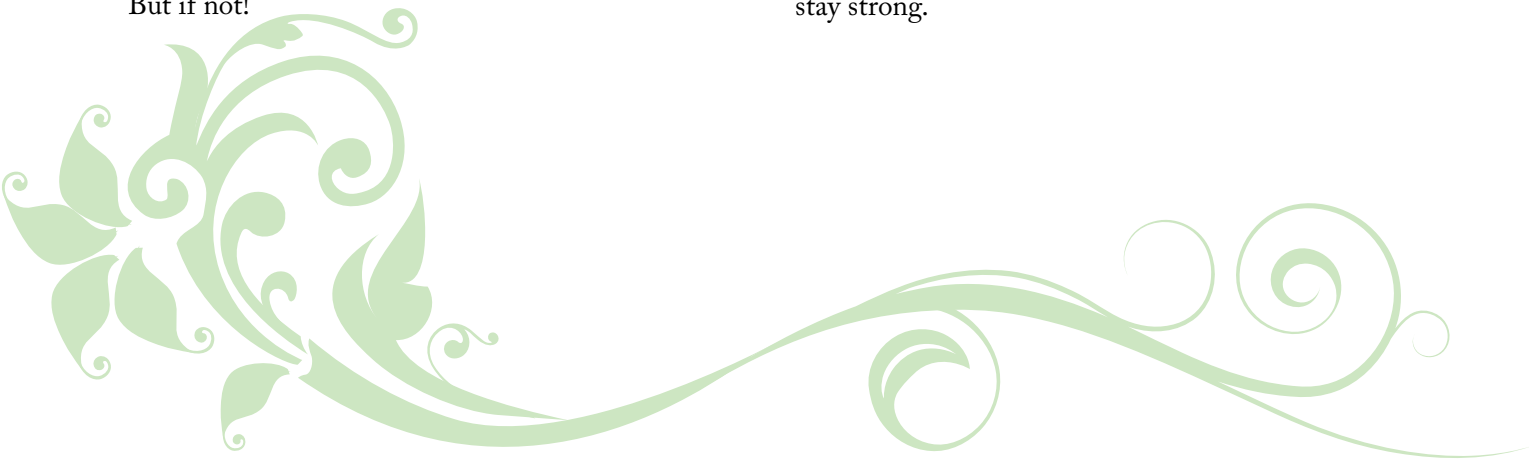
Oh, if not!

Then *this* is the book for you.

The Nobilis are all around us, they and their attendant spirits. Everything that you think is a flat and boring object is actually alive, manifesting the amazing cosmic force called the *causa causans* or *spiritus Dei*. The world is full of dangers and wondrous things that hardly anybody knows about. This book will let you play around on the borders of reality, experiencing what's out there. And maybe, just maybe, if you encounter the actual Nobilis or something else magical later, and if you've read this book carefully, you'll know what to do!

You might even get to become a Power — one of the Nobilis — yourself!

But as every avid Nobiliser knows, it's not about becoming one. It's not about leaving the mortal world behind and entering a world of power and magic where everything is possible but love. It's about keeping the magical world in your heart. It's about keeping your faith in *things* and *being*. The Excrucians are coming with their stars in their eyes and their night-black swords! If you remember the purpose and meaning of things, you can help the world stay strong.



# Introduction

**I**T IS USUALLY quite surprising when someone sticks a fundamental building block of reality inside you. You will just be driving along, or whatever, when suddenly *BAM*, you're Storms. Or Fire. Computers. Dogs. Backsies<sup>†</sup>. Fleece. Or Love.

When something like this is put inside you, you are called **Noble**, or one of the **Nobilis**.

You will find that you are the fundamental expression and guardian of the word or name — the proper term is Estate — that's stuck inside you. You won't be able to hide from the fact that you're a pure and unfettered divinity now. That thing that you sometimes see hiding in the world when you stop blinding yourself to it, that ultimate reality and glory of *things* pressing in through the gates that we construct against the world —

It's *inside* you, like truth and love and being are inside everybody else, and you'll realize in just the same way everybody else does not that you are now a god<sup>‡</sup>.

You've become, well, Storms: the archetype and arbiter of storms. Or you are now the living Fire. The god of all Computers — of every last computing engine, on all the worlds there are — or the lord of every Dog. You've become the inspiring muse to Fleece, the word that speaks to sheep to make it grow. You've been made ... well, it could be anything!

Any of the primal forms. Joy. Emotion. Tea. Baskets. Draconic forms. Martial arts. Even Backsies!

And you have become primal, you have been made fundamental and preminent, with the placement in you of this primordial thing. You are a Noble. You are a Power. You are sovereign-in-yourself in ways that nations only dream to be.

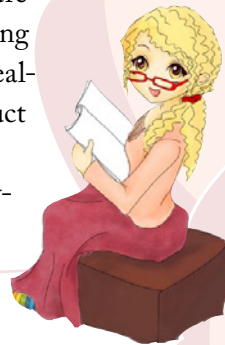
The Nobilis can shatter mountains. They can break or rebuild souls. They don't even have to work very hard to do it. They just have

<sup>†</sup> Backsies is when you take back something you already did or said. Why is this a fundamental building block of reality? I think we are forced to blame Aristotle.

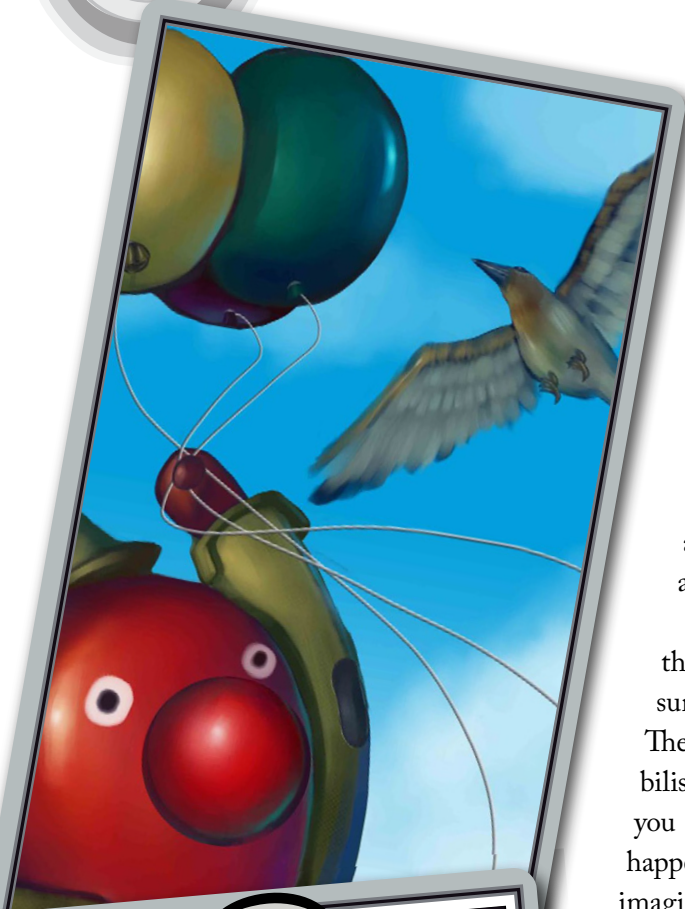
If you suddenly find that you are the Power of Backsies, you must be very careful. The Emperor who put the

Estate of Backsies in your soul will usually try to take it back again later. Then you will be in trouble because it will kill you to have it taken out again but it will betray your deepest inner truth to tell them No Backsies. The only proper answer to this koan is to stall.

<sup>‡</sup> For comparison, think about how right now you are *not* realizing that you are a god. That's because nobody's stuck an Estate in you.







## I

This is a secret world (a “Chancel”) where instead of humans the people are colorful balloons. They can twist themselves up into animal or human shapes but doing so reduces their life expectancy. They can also cluster together in the sky to become big cities. Sometimes balloons fall out of the balloon-people world into our world and then they cannot talk or change their shape. If you find seven of them you can tie them into a bunch and fly with them into the balloon-people world, where you will be a hero. But if you want to return home afterwards they will be very insulted and may even drop you from great heights. If you want to visit and come back, you should be sure to have a parachute!

## BALLOON-PEOPLE WORLD

to kind of look at you with their Noble’s eyes and *BAM*, you’re all broken or rebuilt. Sometimes you’ll just go mad.

One look! That’s all it takes!

And there are greater things they serve.

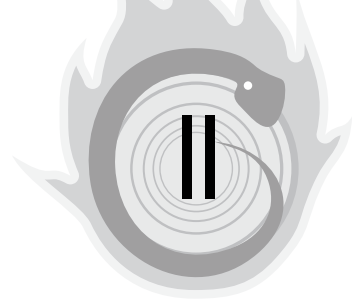
When you become a Noble — I mean, you if you get one of these things stuck in you, most likely while the whole world around you is being warped and changed and taken away from Earth into the belly of something else — you are drafted into the service of **the Imperators**. They are the primal forms, the things that precede reality, the Ymerae, the Mashai, the Imperatores Occultes. They are angels, and devils, and they are gods; they are forces of light and dark; they are wild things and tame things and serpents larger than the world.

They are beasts and they are monsters but they are monsters that we cannot judge. They are as the sunrise is, or the wind in summer: the inexpressible source and the foundation of our world. They are not people, not like you and I are people, not like the Nobilis are people. They are people-like, in that you can talk to them; you can love them; you can hate them; you can even (should you happen to have natural advantages the like of which I can scarcely imagine) fight them. They have souls, as the theurgists would say. But they are not people. They are not even proper gods. They are reality. They are truth. They are the world before our world, mysteries, arcane and inexplicable breaths of the divine. They are the moving in strange ways, with which miracles are done. They are ineffability and the surpassing of the self. They are the problematic nature of the world, to us. They are, most of all, the true forms, the founding principles, the things of which the things we see are shadows.

If you meet one there is really no recourse but adoration, admiration, the openness and looking-outwards that characterizes the savant occupied by the presence of the world. They are the burden given to us, in living, to learn to live with; we are not Nobilis, to define and reexamine the War, the Blood, the Hope, the Love, the Sex, the Cold, the Dreams, the Cats, the Birds, the Bells, and the Days that have been given us. With the Imperatores Occultes, we must simply learn to live.

But ah! The Nobilis!

They dwell apart from us, the Nobilis do, in their great **Chancels** — the secret temple-worlds of their patron spirits, the occulted **Loci** of the Imperators that empowered them. You can find the Chancels if you know how; if you do the right actions, walking the right paths, at the right time. You can walk right from *this* world into their worlds of magic, wonder, and fantasy. Later we’ll even tell you how. And you might find



in their Chancel-world a place of Arthurian romance, of knights and mystics and chivalry; London in the 1800s, augmented by dirigibles; a land of kung-fu wonders; a technological future world far beyond our own. Or, of course, some strange, inexplicable and disconcerting world, where balloon-people float in great clusters and make war upon the birds; where robots are ubiquitous and computers are not possible; where the wind that breaks like ocean waves upon the cliffs is full of souls; where humans dwell in hidden homes beneath the forest glens, and butterflies are unto them the messengers of God<sup>†</sup>.

The Nobilis live in their strange Chancels and they venture outwards to our world. Here they will be our heroes and our villains, god-haunted folk, driven by their humanity and their divinity to remake the world. Here is where you are likely to find them — that old man sitting at the end of the bar, that smiling businessman on the street, that woman in her chariot driving in all incongruity the horses of the sun down the busy road outside your home, and squeezing with her hand the bulb of a horn in anger at the traffic on the way.

If you're still half-asleep and not looking out the window, you might not even realize that it's her. You might only put it together later when you realize, "Hey, that horn sounded like sun and fire, like heat and wine; it was a honking and a fury like the passion of a god!"

It is in our world that sometimes they meet the bleak and pretty gods of emptiness, the various **Excrucians**, who come in from outside the world to take away all the names and all the things. They ride in on great black horses and they wield unbearable weapons and there are stars falling in the darkness of their eyes. They are here to excruciate us. They are here to exsanguinate the world, to take from it the Nobilis and Imperators and leave us barren of our primal forms. They think they can do as they like in our worlds and in our lives, but sometimes the Nobles come to stop them.

Then, they fight!

<sup>†</sup> The local God, anyway. It would be very surprising if the Judeo-Christian God were to suddenly declare that only forest butterflies in some weird Chancel were His emissaries, and even stranger were this notion to be ratified by the Pope; and everyone would just think he'd gone crazy, anyway, if he did, and hasten him off to the special room beneath the Vatican where the great Papal Computer hums and flashes lights, where the walls are rich with holy doctrines, and where the Cardinals when they are called upon to do so are minded to repair such broken Popes.

## II

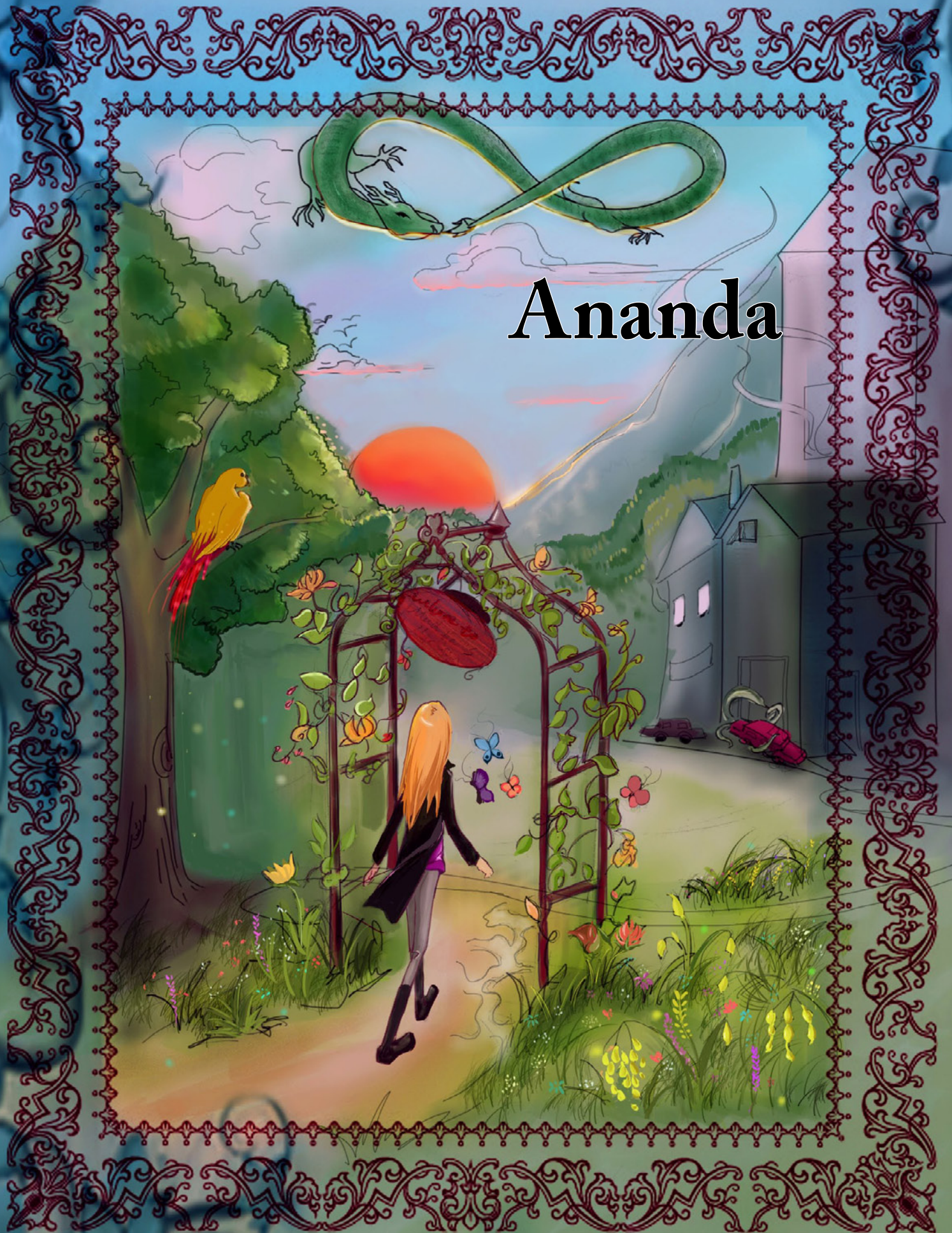
This is a Power who likes to use her chariot with its glorious red horses even when driving in the mortal world. When she honks her horn it sounds like sun and fire. If you ask her, she will drag you up onto her chariot and ride with you for a day and a night or until she reaches her destination, but if you ask her too many questions she will brand a mark into your forehead and throw you from the craft. She is related to Oscar Toclanny and Maia Sullivan.

CLARISSA  
KILTHDIGAI

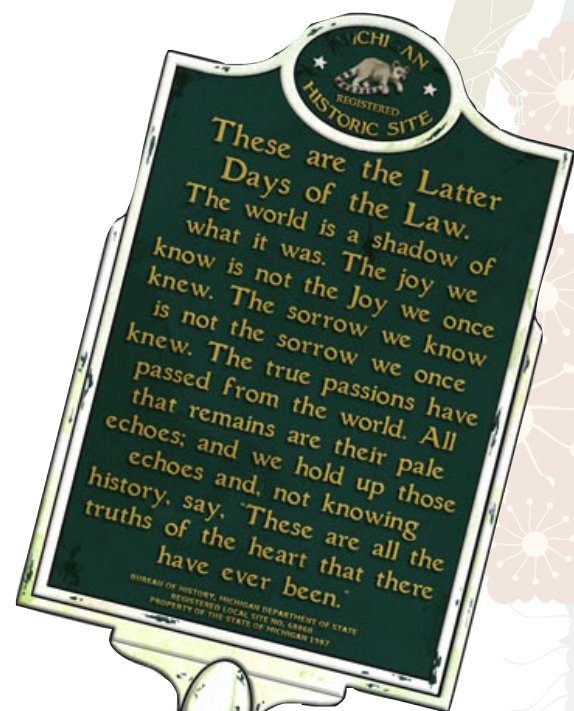




# Ananda







**F**OUR IMPERATORS RUN the world. They are the Council of Four, and their names are Ananda, Ha-Qadosch Berakha, Lord Entropy, and Surolam.

They haunt the Noble world just like the Nobilis haunt ours.

Ananda is a living principle of beauty. That isn't what he *embodies* — he isn't the Emperor who is Beauty, or defines Beauty. That would probably be Firstborn, or, at least, one of the oldest Angels. It's just what he *is*. His beauty is an apocalypse. It's an out-of-bounds error in the world.

Listen: he visited Mud Falls, Michigan one day and everyone went mad from joy. Mothers stopped feeding their babies. People driving cars stopped steering. The whole town collapsed, became a monstrous disaster area, and the people who survived spent the rest of their lives overwhelmed with happiness and joy and telling anyone who would listen about the fundamental *rightness* of the world.

"It's just! It's bright! It's all *worth it*, in the end!"

That's what the survivors said.

Birds fell from the sky. Then they sang until their hearts burst. And they weren't the only things that were singing. The buildings were rocking back and forth on their foundations, caroling out in their creaky voices a deep and solemn joy. The grass turned to crystal, in Mud Falls, Michigan, and it chimed and glistened as the wind blew across it, and as far as anybody knows, it turned to crystal out of love. Everything was delighted in his visit, but he broke the town and it isn't back to normal yet. That's why he doesn't visit us in the mortal world very often.

What is he?

He is the Emperor of Murder and the Infinite.  
He is the Lord of the Chancel Cityback. These

things *could* be part of the reason that he's beautiful — I am not going to judge people who murder or sum infinite series in his name because they can probably find out where I live. But it is more likely that he is beautiful to us because of the last and most important thing he is. He is the god and the living principle of the next Age of the world — the time beyond these troubled times, the glorious Fourth Age that is yet to be. That is why his most common titles are **the Lord of Expectations** and **the Emperor to Come**.

Ananda is generally considered the weakest voice on the Council of Four. This is because he does not ever vote against Lord Entropy — at worst, he abstains. He tells us that some terrible disaster will transpire if he and Lord Entropy are ever directly opposed. Some people speculate that Lord Entropy is threatening him, but since nobody shows up in the middle of the night to kill those people, they are probably wrong. It's more likely that Lord Entropy is just not as afraid of whatever that disaster is as is Ananda.



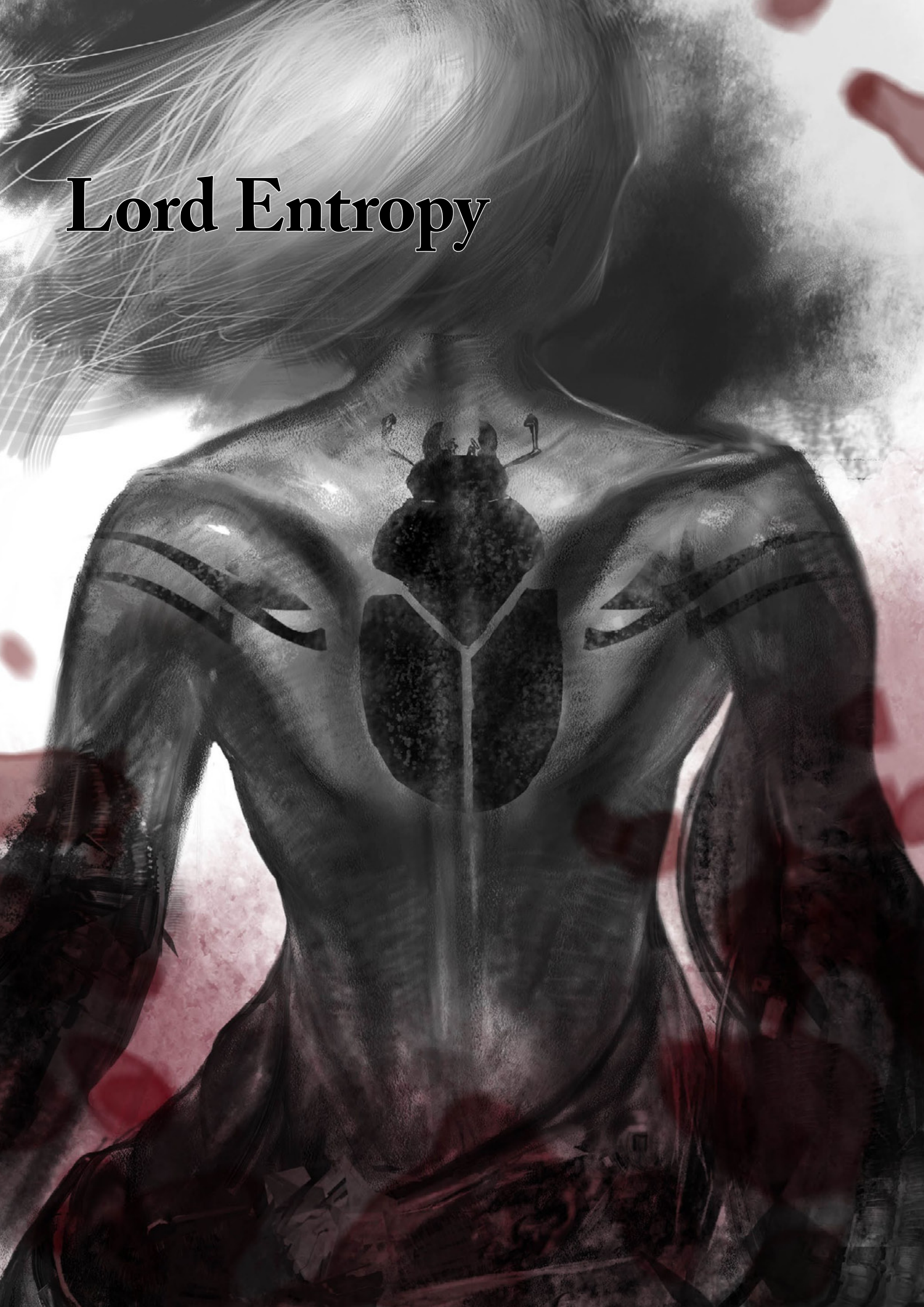
### III

He is usually voted as the prettiest Imperator. Several pictures of him exist on the web, but they're hard to find due to aggressive intervention by governmental bodies. If you can find one please be careful in viewing it; the pictures are known to induce seizure, soft-tissue hemorrhage, and psychologically addictive levels of euphoria. You can safely view the images through a thick cloth blindfold or eye pillow, and they will retain a substantial amount of their "oomph." Nobiliser Teia Arinhiel reports that with a pair of opaque lead goggles, stopped up ears, and a vial of smelling salts affixed under her nose, she was able to approach to within three blocks of Ananda himself without ill effect.

**ANANDA**



# Lord Entropy





HERE IS AN evil god who rules the mortal world from his hidden Chancel.

He is Lord Entropy.

He is so evil that his hands drip blood even when he's just hanging out watching a basketball game. He is so evil that he can just smile at you and not do anything at all to you and a few years later you'll turn into a degenerate third world dictator like Saddam Hussein. Some people estimate that as many as  $\frac{2}{3}$  of all corrupt dictators, CEOs, and other important people are people who met Lord Entropy without knowing it and carry his stain upon their soul.

He is so evil he doesn't have to *try* to be evil; but sometimes, he does.

Sometimes he stops moping around being emo and he picks random people off the street, whisks them away to the Locust Court, and puts them on trial for real or facetious crimes. Sometimes he sends the ogres and the nimblejacks that serve him — great brutish thugs and diabolical imps, respectively — out into the world to mess up things that are good, tear down what is bright and virtuous, and in general do nasty things for no other reason than because they can.

Technically he is just one of four — member of a Council of Four, appointed by the Imperators of the world to handle the affairs of mortals, things, and Powers. But he dominates that Council and thus positions himself to make law for the world. Technically he is a hope for the world: he is prophesied to save Creation from the Excrucians, in the end, if he does not betray it. But he is not terribly interested, from all appearances, in being our shining standard, or even, for that matter, in betraying us.

He likes being something everybody fears.

Sometimes it seems like he tries to do a good job ruling the world. It's hard to tell, because he is so virulently corrosive — when everything he touches turns rotten, he has to be at his subtlest when attempting to do things right. But sometimes it seems like he tries to do a good job. And sometimes it seems like he's terribly weary of it. And sometimes it seems like he's the big bad wolf, serving no particular purpose save glorying in his wickedness and waste. Through all these possibilities one theme comes clearly through.

He likes when people fear him.

Of the things he *dislikes*, the most notable is love. It hurts him, or he hates it, or he loathes, fears, or holds some



## IV

*He raised my head and looked into my eyes. His fingers left carmine smears under my chin. "You still have spirit," he said, and shook his head. "Do you not understand? I cannot end your torment until it has broken you."*

*"I'm trying," I told him.*

*He almost smiled. "I am glad," he said, "that we are working towards the same end. But I am afraid that you are making rather a poor contribution to it."*

—from the Thought-Record of Augusta Valentina

Augusta Valentina is the Power responsible for writing *A Philosophy of Treason*, a book detailing the case for serving the Excrucians. If you find this book do not read it as it is most likely a falsified copy that will burn your eyes out and fill your vacant optical cavity with worms. A genuine copy is almost as dangerous. Ms. Valentina herself is a fine conversationalist and quite safe for mortals to socialize with as long as you do not stand too close to her or ask her to expound upon the text.

AUGUSTA VALENTINA

lingering bitterness towards it, or something. He doesn't like that love *exists*. It's not about people loving or not loving *him* — he doesn't seem to want you to, and there's some evidence you physically *can't*<sup>†</sup>, but that's not the heart of it. Rather, he seems to hate that love exists in the world at all. He's even made a law —

**The Windflower Law:**  
***The Nobilis shall not love.***

It doesn't work very well as a law *qua* law. There are very few Powers in the world who consult with the relevant statutes before deciding whether or not to fall in love. If there is a Power of Being Overly Methodical or a Power of Completely Not Getting What Love is About, they might check whether love is legal or not before falling for somebody. However for the most part the law is not prescriptive but onerous: it serves not to *prevent* love but to *criminalize* it and *make it surreptitious*. Powers may only love in secret, and must live in fear that

<sup>†</sup> He's a deeply troubled, handsome, dangerous celebrity, after all. If it were possible to love him, we'd *know*. But it's more than that, actually. When Internet Nobiliser communities started noticing the glaring absence of people actively crushing on Lord Entropy, people did experiments — *trying* to fall for him, trying to feel some heat. To summarize the opinion of the community: he's cute, but about as hot as kissing a giant ball of lint fresh from the dryer trap. Interestingly, he doesn't even consider this assessment disrespectful or irritating — at least, people don't seem to die for voicing it — so it's probable that he's either directly responsible for this phenomenon or glad that it exists.





V

You can recognize Lord Entropy by his bloody hands. If that is not enough of a clue — e.g. if you're in a surgery or arresting a murderer — you can also recognize him by the scarab symbol he often wears, or by the nimblejacks and ogres he might have with him. If you meet him you should give him several obeisances as if he were an Emperor but then talk to him or ignore him as if he were anybody else. If you meet his ogres or nimblejacks when he is not around, there is no point in hiding, fighting, or running away. Instead pretend to be a very dull and uninteresting person and they may ignore you or hurt you just a little bit.

On the other hand, if you would like to distract ogres and nimblejacks from somebody else, running away is a very good strategy. Like hunting dogs, competitive runners and police officers, Lord Entropy's minions are compelled by a biological instinct to chase down anything that runs, and while nimblejacks can catch you almost instantly they are likely to play with you instead.

## LORD ENTROPY



he will discover their love. Many hate him for this, while others close their hearts against love and pretend the law is just.

Lord Entropy is the Emperor of Desecration, Destruction, and Scorn. He is actually one of two different Emperors whose Estate translates into English as "Destruction;" *he* is Absolute Destruction, while the Angel Za'afiel is Destruction as Part of the Cycle of Life.

Lord Entropy has many servants. He has three extremely competent Powers — Meon, who is the Power of Desecration; Baalhermon, Power of Destruction; and Joktan, Power of Scorn. He has an army of ogres, nimblejacks, and human slaves. In the mortal world he rules the organization known as the Cammora, a secret society that has power over most mortal countries. They provide many services to the

Powers, including illegal services; Lord Entropy has decreed the Cammora “invisible to law,” so if a Power needs to break Lord Entropy’s Law they may hire the Cammora to do it for them<sup>‡</sup>. Lord Entropy has direct influence over many powerful mortals — he often puts invisible “seeds” in the hearts of powerful mortals that can whisper Lord Entropy’s wishes to them and sprout, killing them, if they dispute that will. Finally, Lord Entropy has access as a matter of courtesy to many of the resources of the other members of the Council of Four, such as Surolam’s Locust Court (which he uses for trials) and the rangers of Ananda’s Chancel, the Cityback.

Lord Entropy’s code of Law for the Powers, the Code Fidelitatis, reads —

<sup>‡</sup> This is not meant for use with the Windflower Law, since hardly anybody hires the Cammora to fall in love on their behalf. Instead it is invoked with regards to the Chestnut Law, the Crowfoot Law, and the Rule of War (below).

☛ **The Windflower Law:** *thou shalt not love*

☛ **The Chestnut Law:** *thou shall harm none who has done no harm, nor wreak more vengeance than in the sevenfold degree*

☛ **The Rule of Man:** *treat no beast as your lord  
[that is, never let a mortal get the best of you]*

☛ **The Rule of War:** *serve your Imperator before the War, and the War before yourself*

☛ **The Crowfoot Law:** *protect no Power from the justice of the Code*

His Code for mortals is simpler, inasmuch as he gives us one at all:

***“Be as I Would Have You Be”***

He is called the **Bloody Imperator** or the **Darkest Lord**.



# Surolam





**S**UROLAM IS THE dog-headed god of ordinary things. She is part of the Great Boundary — the fiery cup that surrounds the whole world; the wall between souls; the walls around the mind that keep us sane. She is stability and order and things making sense. She is specifically the Emperor of Willpower, Law, and the Broken-Hearted.

The world is full of extraordinary things, and sometimes that is painful.

For instance, most people — when they see miracles — get hurt by them. They start to realize that their world doesn't make sense. That what they think of as *important* doesn't make sense, and isn't very important; that what they think of as *necessary*, or *natural*, or *correct*,

*When God lost love to the Devil in a dicing match, he had to trade both the luminiferous ether and Creation science away to get it back. Most savants agree that the trade was worthy; yet it is indubitable that the world has made less sense ever since.*

—from *The Current Score*, by Walden Fargo, writing on the topic of the Ordinary

## VI

This is an Emperor who protects ordinary life from disruption. She allows people to remain ignorant of magic and get by in an ordinary way in a world torn by mystic forces at war. If you want to visit her you can find her temples listed in your local Yellow Pages; they are not recorded alphabetically but instead placed between two advertisements picturing dogs or two names with a dog-like meaning. You can also look for the most ordinary things and people possible and ask them if they have recent information on the dog-headed god of ordinary things.

## SUROLAM



## VII

An ordinary person who sees miracles can catch the psychological disease, "*dementia animus*." This is the sickness where you start talking to your toaster and other objects and telling all your friends that you are just a shadow of the true things in the world. This is an accurate perspective but not a functional one and will lead you to a bad end. To avoid this disease, practice ironic detachment from reality; then, when reality suddenly changes, you can make snide comments instead of going mad. Alternately, hold in mind that you may always find the succor of Surolam, through any pair of dog-flanked gates, and in this fashion recover from the burden of your disease.

## DEMENTIA ANIMUS







doesn't mean much either. They see that everything they believed was *true* was just something in their head. And that hurts them. And Surolam is the answer to that pain.

She is the power that we have to forget the extraordinary and pretend that our ideas and lives make sense. Each person has a pair of Surolam's gates in their heart that, flanked by two of her dogs, leads to a place of retreat from the raw madness that is the world. And it's not just people, either — everything in this world is secretly alive, and everything that lives has access to her balm.

She is something we can turn to when we go outside and there is something ravening and blasphemous on our street. She is our hope and our salvation when we go home and find we have a nameless Thing instead of an air conditioner, or have our hearts brushed by the passage of an Excrucian's wing. She is the mortal's only answer against miracles.

If our need is great enough we can find her in person —  
Not just in spirit.

We can find a pair of dog-flanked gates, or one of Surolam's temples, and go through and in, and pass into a place of musty sanctuary and comfort. There we can recover, and wait, and if we wait long enough, receive an audience with her.

Then, when we leave, we will forget.

People forget. Spirits forget. Even animals forget. It's really only the insects that remember. They crawl in and out between our world and hers all the time. That's why sometimes you can get insects that just seem to appear inside your house, and it's why her Chancel is named the Locust Court.

We can appeal to her there for more than solace. We can ask her for aid, and she might even give it. She is kind, you see, and loves us more the more we are broken-hearted. But she is also a creature of Law and a creature of precedent, and so she is very careful not to commit to more than she can give to all of us, and each of us, forever. The decisions she does make, the promises she does give, bind her for centuries or even millennia — they are written down and thrown into the great Swamp of Precedent in the distant reaches of the Locust Court, where the testaments, effects and language of her previous decisions sink slowly into a great ink-and-paper bog and mix bit by bit with one another in decay, and where strange trees and flowers grow.

In her realm there is a truce between insects, fungi, diseases and the larger creatures. For this reason, passage through it will often free you of disease or infestation, or, conversely, cause you to act as a vector.





# Ha-Qadosch Berakha



*... Ha-Qadosch Berakha treats the world as his playground ...*





*Imagine the Imperators as crystal snakes: blue crystal, green crystal, red crystal—every color in the world. Where do the snakes come from? They create themselves, pulling themselves by force of will from nothingness. The snakes writhe one about another, a blind, squirming, undulating mass. From above, there shines a light. It passes through the crystal snakes and forms a pattern of shifting, mixed, twisted colors on the void. That is Creation.*

—from *Keys of Sextilius*, by Eachan Sohalet





# Your Imperator



IX



Someday dharma may call upon you to sing the Serpent of Radar and bring it back from the principalities of death. This snake is approximately 250 miles long and composed principally of sound; it is the Emperor of Self-Creation, Hypothetical Entities, Difficulty, Excitement, and Radar. To sing its name is to spit it from your mouth and out into the world; three times it has returned from death in just this fashion, and twice from far but living realms. Note that in calling it back you are giving up your own life as the price; spitting out a 250-mile-long snake, even if it is mostly sound, is almost inevitably fatal.

SERPENT OF RADAR

**W**HO IS YOUR Emperor?

One day if you become a Power an Emperor will appear out of nowhere and put one of its Estates in your soul. It is like putting coffee in a cup or breathing into a balloon animal's flat and lifeless body. Divine breath will inflate you. It will transform you. It's like waking up unexpectedly from the long and weary burden of your life, only now you've got a new and completely different problem.

Your Emperor!

This is called **Commencement**.

Maxwell Murdoch was busy taking classes and cultivating acne when the Serpent of Radar suddenly sounded in his soul. It echoed off every part of him. It made his chest into a chamber. It made him one of the Powers of the world. No more classes! No more acne! Suddenly the only thing that was wrong with his life was that he'd been adopted by a 250-mile-long snake made mostly out of sound who insisted that he rule the northern quarter of a fairyland and fight the Excrucian gods of emptiness on its behalf.

Julianne Ling thought she'd live out her whole life as a sixty-four-year-old waitress, modulo incremental adjustments to the age. Then the fires of the Damned Angel Larinién burst up from the linoleum around her and remade her body and soul into the Power of the Weft. At this point she stopped having to worry about boredom and aging but started having to worry about having a close professional and personal relationship with an angel thrown out of Heaven for being an evil rebel. It was a tradeoff.

It'd basically be like that for you.

You'd be a Power because an Emperor chose *you* and filled you up with its *it*ness.

Emperors do this because they need Powers to protect them.

That's not a universal truth! They're not helpless. They're even technically invincible. It's just that the best way they can fight the Excrucians is to leave their body and journey in mysterious spirit realms. While they are doing this they don't want to worry all the time about whether their body is under attack from armed enemies and Excrucian agents or not. So they make Chancels to keep their body safe, and Nobles to protect them. Once they've done this they can also offload most of their work on Earth to the Nobilis. So while the Serpent of Radar roams the subtle worlds, Maxwell Murdoch keeps its Chancel and its body safe. And while Larinién skips off to Hell for melty ice cream socials or torturing damned souls or whatever, Julianne Ling guards her interests here on Earth.

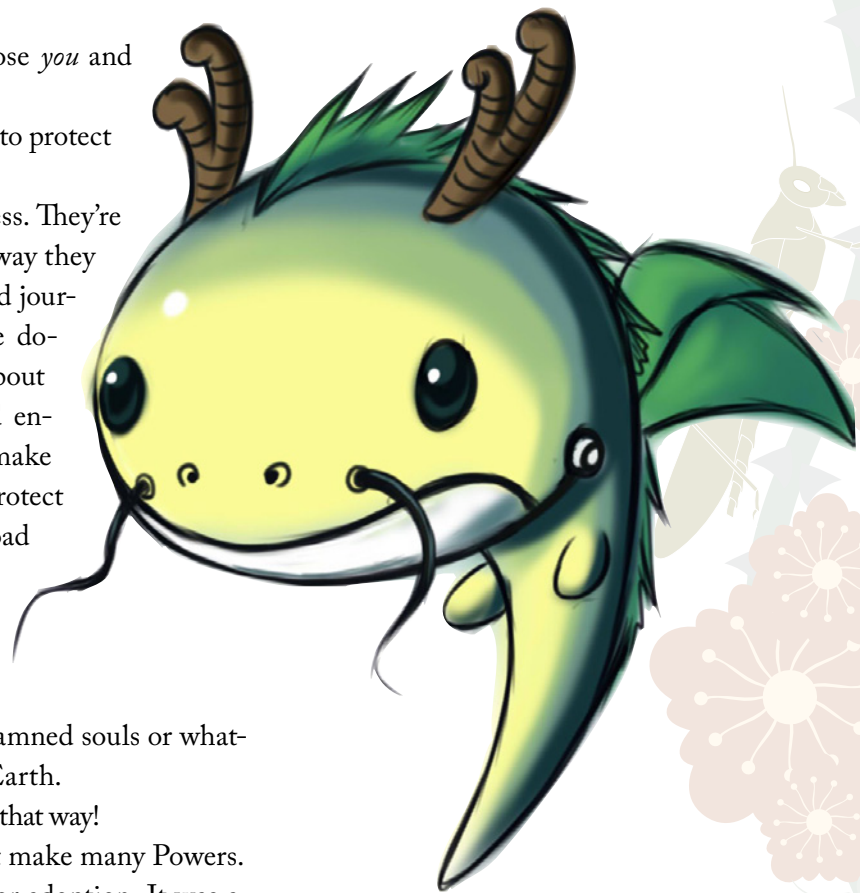
If an Emperor claims you, your life will be just that way!

Before the Excrucian War, Emperors didn't make many Powers. When they did it was a kind of sacred marriage or adoption. It was a two-way process. It's been adapted to modern needs a little bit but it's still basically two-way and it's still basically a *relationship*. That's why Powers keep their free will and their choice of morality even when their Emperors disagree. It's why Heth can get away with serving the Code of Hell while belonging to the Angel Euphoriel. It's why the Darklord Erevan Insanguine tolerates his Powers, who are uniformly bright. You don't necessarily get any say in whether or not an Emperor claims you, and the balance of power between you can be lopsided to the point of slavery, but once they've claimed you they become yours as much as you are theirs. Your hearts fall into tune.

So what kind of Emperor would choose *you*?

There are —

- ♫ glorious Angels in this world, from the shining host of Heaven;
- ♫ terrible Devils (the Fallen Angels) who worship at the altar that is Hell;
- ♫ stern Magisters of the Light, seeking humanity's survival;
- ♫ malevolent Magisters of the Dark, celebrants of our filth and suicides;
- ♫ alien, incomprehensible divinities: the "True Gods" of Earth;
- ♫ chaotic Magisters of the Wild, more alien yet, from outside the universe entirely; and



☛ the miles-long Aaron's Serpents, born from the substance of the World Ash.

Of these all it is the Aaron's Serpents you would find the mildest masters. They are terrifying in their physical extent and prowess, but generally humane of mind and philosophical of character.

If you were claimed by an Angel or a Magister of the Light, you would receive a more difficult destiny. Bright creatures such as they impose great rigors on their Powers, and demand a great exactitude. They would task you to heal great wounds, make redress to great wrongs, defeat great monsters, perform great works, and serve in the redemption of lost things. The world's need for beauty and salvation will not falter: your labors would be endless, but at least there would be glory, honor, and purpose in it all.

If a Devil or a Magister of the Dark claimed you, your lot would not be so bright. They would be casual in hurting you, in pushing you, in testing your morality and survivability almost to destruction. They would show you how saving your beloved from certain death would bring the ending of the world. They would call it a salutary lesson, or an amusing jest, to temporarily replace your bones with molten lead. They are the most terrible expressions of the causes that they serve — the Devils more hideous and cruel than the Code they follow, and the Dark more vile and treacherous. They are servants of honorable and good causes that have much to recommend them but they are irredeemable cosmic horrors in themselves.

Imagine it! To be one of a Devil's Powers, lifted up and made into a god, given reign over some great cosmic principle — from Raphi, who is Judgment; or Cedron, who is Growth; or Domiel, who is the Experience of Burning — and at the same time and the same moment, made a pawn to something that loves corruption and despair? To be bound by a doomed and tainted intimacy to them, to know that they are yours and you theirs and that the connection is empowering, mutual, and forever while they are so monstrous and so cruel? Or to serve Araunah of the Dark and dwell in the manner of a joyous god in the fairyland he rules; while *feeling*, through that Lord, the will of every chemical fume that chokes, every caustic splash that scars, every chemical burn that strips the flesh from some poor human's bones?

Perhaps you could find peace with it. Some do. Perhaps you could work brightness from it. Some do, again. There is no redeeming the Devils or the Dark, but there is good in them to find. Or perhaps you would simply serve the world as best you could and pray the War would kill you soon.

Or would it be an alien thing that claims you?

The True Gods are shapeless, formless creatures. They are earthly gods but they are not human gods; rather, they are kin to the amoebas,

*The sea serpent Rahaytz was, alone among its kind, distressed at its lack of arms and hands. It would impress hapless human sailors into its service, using them to fetch, manipulate, and carry for the monstrous beast as long as they remained alive.*

—from *A Medieval Bestiary*, by Paul McArthur



the fungi, the insects, and the plants. They are alien to us as the flora of our stomach are alien, as the things that grow in our refrigerators are alien, as the residents of volcanic tunnels, dark swamps, and the ocean deeps are strange. They are fundamentally compatible with the human animal, but not with the human person; in practice, a tension exists.

You would find service to a True God a unique and uncategorized experience. What strange drives would it make you privy to? To which of its archaic, primordial moods would you be subject? What would its nature be, what would be the manner of its complexities? These things we cannot say. In dreaming up a fictional True God, as in **Imperator Creation** on pg. 248, you'll have endless scope for creativity; facing one in reality, endless opportunities for surprise!

And then there are the Magisters of the Wild. They are not just alien to *us* but to the entirety of the world. They have no roots in reality, no context, no relationship to any other thing. They present themselves not as a natural part of Creation, but as strangers who stumbled into it and found themselves integrated into its flesh. Their alienness is so profound as to seem simple in practice — their nature is described by a handful of simple rules, which appear to arise *ex nihilo* and without regard to our moral and physical laws. For example, Kaithrya of the Wild opposes stasis, brings forth green and growing things and returns what is given to her threefold. Cut off one of her arms, she will cut off three of yours; if you have only two, she is not deterred and will in good time find a way. Epikleros Chimeric is a Wild Magister who may not be captured, touched, caught, or accurately described; its presence in our world gives rise to paradoxes. Where Achaz walks, the dead arise; feasibility is no concern.

Imagine it, then!

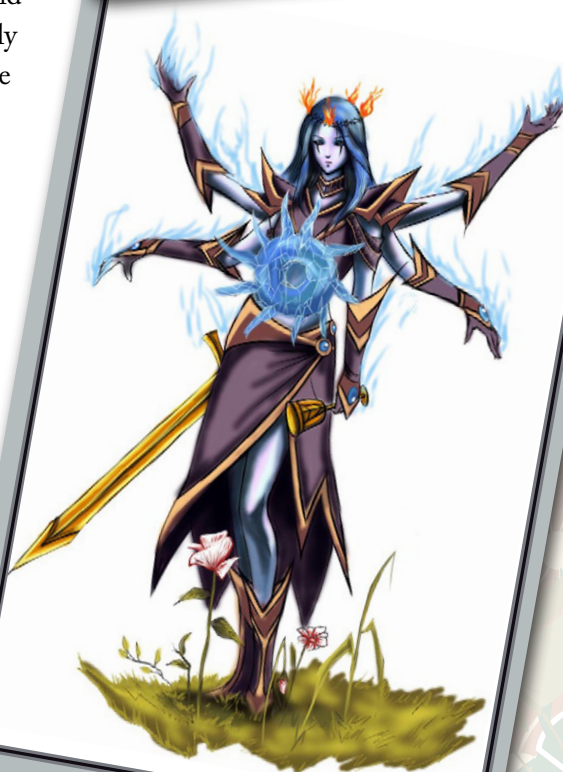
Such a thing burns into your life. An Angel or a Devil; a Magister of Light or Dark; a creature of the Wild, or the Primeval, or a Serpent from the Tree! They strike you like a meteor: like a catastrophe and a transfiguration, falling like thunder from the seemingly clear sky, entering your life from outside the ordinary boundaries of your world. They take the city around you, or some area more nebulously defined, and fold it up into a Chancel. They estrange it and you from the country you've lived in, they infuse the area with their magic, they make the place a magic temple reachable only by strange paths. Then they choose you — *you*, of all mortals — to infuse with an Estate.

You are suddenly a Power. You are suddenly bound to them and to the world. You are suddenly the Prince or Princess of the hidden Chancel. You are suddenly a Sovereign Power in the world.

X

Kaithrya is a six-armed Imperator crowned with a coronet of thorns and flames. Her exhalation is a blue mist that gives rise to Spring. She is nominally invisible but the appearance of Spring, particularly an unseasonable Spring, indicates and reveals her presence. At such times it is wise to make such gifts to her as you can afford, and that you can afford to have returned threefold. For instance, do not offer her your life, as having three lives is damnably complex, but consider offering her money, a small meal, a month of free Internet service, or a fixed time period of acting kindly in her name. Do not under any circumstances offer her your love or one third of your dedicated service. The threefold love of a deity is potentially fatal, and entrapping any creature of the Wild into your service invites your extirpation from the world.

### KAITHRYA OF THE WILD



And you are not alone, for lo! your **Familia Caelestis** have also been chosen; your “family of Powers,” that is, those bound to the same Chancel and Imperator you serve.

Were you alone, or deeply rooted in the world?

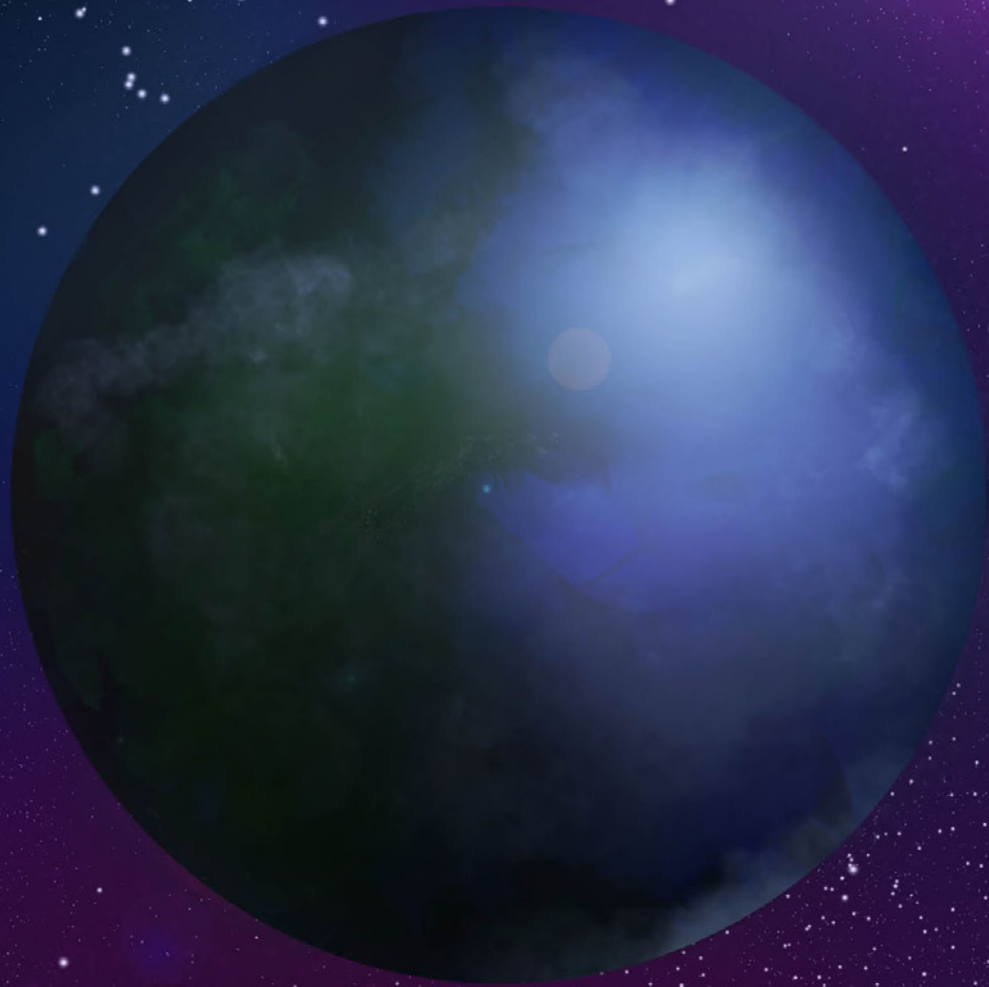
Is this a blessing, or a monstrous curse?

Bane or boon, there is no help for it. From the moment you are chosen, your Imperator has set its mark on you. To become a Power is to gain a new family, new responsibilities, and a new fate.





# The Ordinary World



## XI

These are the random bad things that can happen to you in the ordinary world. On the plus side bad things happening to you does not mean you are a bad person. On the minus side bad things will happen to you even if you are a good person. In the end you are just another victim of the motivationless malice of directed acyclic causal graphs.



## SUCKY THINGS

## Properties of the Ordinary World

- ☛ Its locations are relative;
- ☛ Its particulars are measurable;
- ☛ Its particulars are explainable;
- ☛ Its particulars exert causal force;
- ☛ Its events have causes;
- ☛ These causes are impersonal;
- ☛ These causes are amoral.

**L**ET US BE blunt: the world as we know it is a lie.

It is a shelter. It is a hiding place from the law of karma. It is a crèche in the big bad universe where nothing is morally fraught in and of itself. Where things only matter because of humans observing purpose and judgment into them, where things *just happen*, rather than *happening because*. Where the closest thing to a higher purpose is our inability to really call one purpose higher than another. It is a world of the *objective*, and it is a lie.

On a fundamental level the world of our ordinary reality is the world where nothing “chooses”: where there are no gods in the clouds to make them rain, no gods in the cars to make them run, no *telos* for growing, evolving things to grow towards and not even really a god inside the brain to make the human being be. There are only laws of motion, laws of chemistry, and laws of chaos — the decipherable rules by which things, encountering other things, react.

This isn't neutral.

To make our soulless world we balled the flat Earth up and made it round. We made flat and lifeless the spirits of nature. We stripped away the world tree from our skies and made an endless dark of space instead. We took *ourselves*, and made ourselves the lightning in the meat, the clicking and clacking and sparking of the synapses inside our brain.

We didn't really want to kill our souls.

We didn't even really want to murder the gods in the sky, or slaughter the *telos*, or turn everything that was wild and beautiful and strange into computable or even incomputable arcs.

But to unleash ourselves from karma, it's what we had to do.



It was the only way to get away from the ways in which the world was broken. It was the only way to say that the world we live in isn't the world we participated in making.

I think we are afraid the world will blame us.

There is a story that the Powers tell, that the scientific world began when the angel Za'afiel smote the Earth. It was before humans were around, or at least, they were in Eden, but the dinosaurs were there, and one of them defecated on or near an angel.

And so Za'afiel smashed the Earth.

And the Earth couldn't just say, "That wasn't my fault." Because whenever you say that something isn't your fault, what you're really saying is, that *could* be my fault. Maybe. There's something there. Maybe I'm just an ugly and broken enough world, what with dinosaur digestive issues and all, that I deserve K-T extinction events.

So instead it did things one better, and said: of course I don't deserve that, because *there's no such thing as deserving*.

That's the world we're living in. And over the years, we've just refined it. The longer we've studied the mechanisms of the world, the

## Prosaic Reality

The ordinary world maintains itself. If something miraculous happens that changes everything, it updates the entire model — the entire history and dynamics of the world — to fit.

In Aristotle's day this was an easy hack.

These days the model that is the ordinary world is deep, complex, and intricate. The pressure of human inquiry forces it constantly to expand, to reshape, to develop, to mature. Things that were not connected, connect. Things that needed no explanation, become explained. The world has become so thoroughly mapped and linked together that a single miracle — say, putting a small planet in the sky, or knocking one away — requires vast amounts of retroactive continuity to explain.

Even changing one person's mind can, in the end, force a recreation of all history, and the positions of the stars.

It's a strain on the engine of the world. That's why sometimes you'll see miracles, even though you're not supposed to be able to. That's why you might encounter something impossible and learn the true nature of things and have it force you from that cradle which is the ordinary world. Maintaining the perfection of the ordinary is too hard, and afflicting you with *dementia animus* — the madness of seeing spirits and miracles — is easy.

It's not sustainable. Prosaic reality, I mean. Lately the Nobilis have been finding more and more often that their miracles don't get explained away at all — that covering up the consequences and keeping the ordinary world intact is *their* job, not the world's.

This is the curse that science brings. This is why it is a burden on the world. This is why *animals* who try to do science get eaten by large predators or struck down by Heaven's flames; why shopping carts may not study physics; why a dog or rock that charts the stars enacts a forbidden practice. For better or worse, though, humanity is a special case; see the story of Adam and Eve, on pg. 90!



† The Imperators, that is, of human prowess.



more complex, far-reaching and beautiful they've become. But the problem is it isn't real.

The world isn't really like that. No relativity. No chemistry. It's not even really round.

The planet orbiting the sun, somewhere in the Milky Way — that's a dream, a lie, an illusion, a process built out by science even as we explore it, which the Imperators of the world have chosen to maintain. It's a lie the True Gods of Earth use to shelter them from the eyes of Heaven. It's a lie the Imperators of the Light and Dark† have chosen to back for reasons of their own.

And Surolam to protect us, for we shatter when we *see* that it is false.

And Lord Entropy, I think, because it amuses him.

And Ha-Qadosch Berakha and Ananda, for reasons of their own.

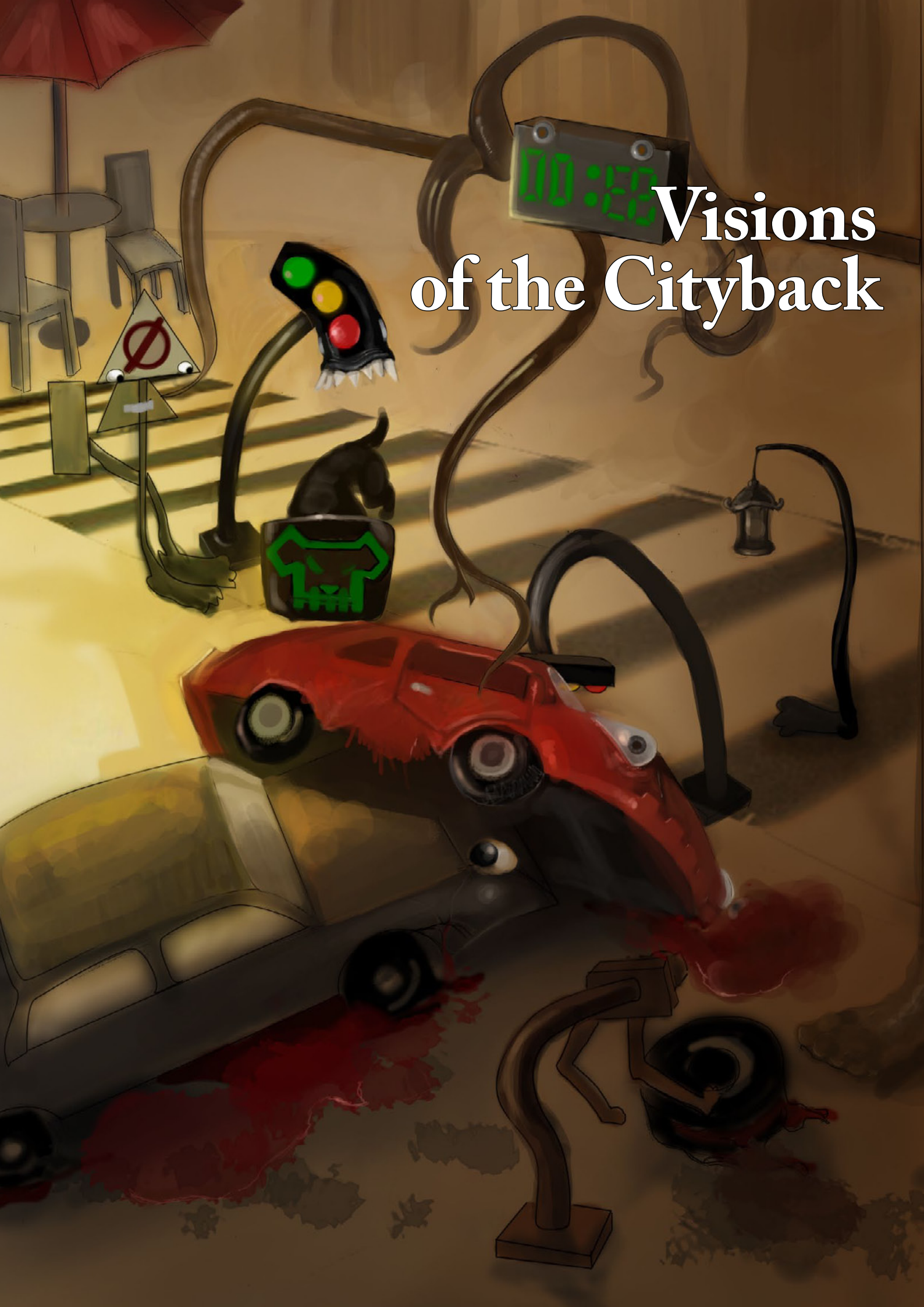
It's our broken little crib, our shelter, our hiding place. We've been decorating it, lately, sprucing it, making it awesome and complex and beautiful. But it's still just our crib.

It's not the fundamental law.





# Visions of the Cityback



### Properties of the Cityback

- ☛ If it hasn't died, then it's alive;
- ☛ If it's alive, it must consume energy to survive and grow;
- ☛ If it's alive, its life cycle features infant, child, and adult stages;
- ☛ If it's alive, it has the potential for reproductive sex;
- ☛ If it's alive, it can adapt to its environment;
- ☛ If it's alive, taming it kills it;
- ☛ If it's dead, it rots and fades away.

Take fire stations as an example. They are alive until they're killed. That means there are baby fire stations. It means there is fire station sex. Fire stations have to eat something to survive — in this case Ananda-bestowed energy, but it could have been “fire” or “fire trucks” in a slightly different world. Fire stations in Cityback are aware enough to adapt to their environment. When they are tamed or killed they rot and fade away, returning their biological resources to the environment.



SOMETIMES YOU'LL PULL aside a curtain, or look down an alley, or lift up the lid of a dumpster, and instead of seeing ordinary things you'll see the Cityback.

It's under, it's in back of and it's behind the cities of the world.

It's the thing that makes us urban.

The Cityback is huge. It's hungry. It takes one death a day just to exist — speaking candidly, it takes one *murder* a day, one soul ripped unwholesomely from life — to feed the miracle of its being there at all.

It's why we can have cities.

It's why we can have stores, and malls, and art, and hamburgers, and science. It's the madness behind the sanity. It's the machine that dreams of modern life. It's Ananda's contribution to the infrastructure behind our ordinary world.

If city life has made you soft, don't go.

Close the curtain. Close the lid. Shudder, and turn, and walk away. Don't walk through that gate to the drumming thunder of the wild urban world. The things that live there *look* like the things of your ordinary life. But they are wild. They are *wild*. And they will not be tamed.

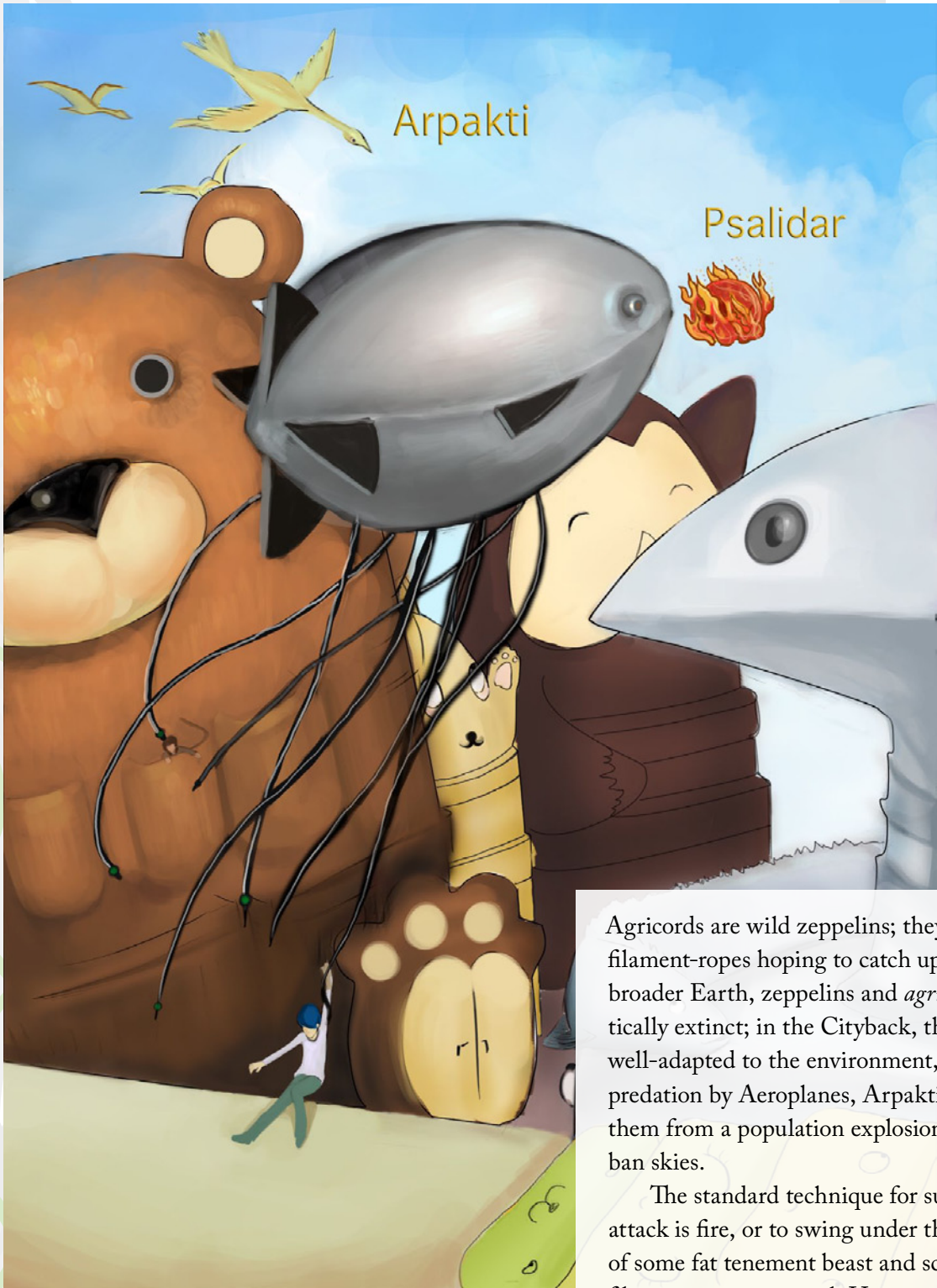
## Urbana and Infrastructura

Most of the Cityback is ordinary city, or close thereto. Like in the Mythic World (pg. 57), everything is alive, and everything has a spirit, and if you look carefully you can find it — but only *some* of the spirits in the Cityback are truly “urbana,” wild spirits. The rest are simply more primordial, less focused on humanity, less integrated into a coherent urban environment than their cousins in the Mythic World.

Infrastructure is most likely to be safe. Major streets and highways, government buildings, libraries, fire departments, aqueducts, and public schools and hospitals are the passive underpinning of the ecosystem. They receive their life energy directly from Ananda and thus have no real need to crunch human bones or savagely murder urbana for their life. Street lights, library books, fire trucks and ambulances, and other forms closely associated with such infrastructure are generally safe unless provoked: most fire engines will be tame spirits that wandered in from the broader world, and even the wild ones will be unlikely to set you on fire, for instance, or spear you with their great stinger-ladders, unless you threaten them or the fire station that they serve.

The rest of the Chancel is crawling with the city's life.





Agricords are wild zeppelins; they trawl the streets with filament-ropes hoping to catch up their prey. In the broader Earth, zeppelins and *agrichorda urbana* are practically extinct; in the Cityback, they proved remarkably well-adapted to the environment, and only continuing predation by Aeroplanes, Arpakti, and Psalidars keep them from a population explosion that would fill the urban skies.

The standard technique for surviving an agricord attack is fire, or to swing under the sheltering balcony of some fat tenement beast and scrape off the agricord filament against its rail. However, if you are dragged up to an agricord unarmed, you may attempt to tickle its underbelly with broad strokes of your hand to lull the creature to sleep before it drags you into its digestive chambers. Be prepared to grab hold of the filament as it goes lax, lest you exchange one problem for another.

Kryptons are slow, vicious predators. They cling to the sides of ordinary streets with their maws open wide. Deceptive luminance inside their epiglottal tract appears to be street lamps, but the patterns of the light and the reflective properties of their upper mouth confuse the eye. If you are not looking carefully it will appear that the top of the krypton is actually the sky and you will walk directly to their stomach. If you are tired, drunk, or inexperienced, you should never walk into a Cityback alley without first tossing a matchmouse or lightermouse in, in case a krypton wishes to deceive you.





The ombudsmen of Ananda have their headquarters in the Cityback.

They are the heroes that keep our urban world alive. They slip between the Cityback, the ordinary world, and the Border Mythic (below). They use the powers they've learned from life amidst urbana to keep the human world intact. Their job, given them by Ananda, is to ensure the healthy growth and development of human society and technology — to keep the arrow of progress pointing forward. Thus his scientific ombudsmen expose falsified research, cut through bureaucratic limitations, and help inspire great works. His “clerks of the factories” hunt down the creatures that prey on factory workers and ensure that the industrial base of society remains functioning. The rangers of convenience, deeply in tune with the urbana of Cityback, protect the stores and the minimalls and keep the flow of commerce moving. Ananda’s princes of crime and punishment, ombudsmen of vice and prosecution, oversee the delicate ecosystems of the police and criminals alike. These groups, in sum, are the secret societies of the Cityback that stand between society and the chaos that eats at its foundation. They are heroes; and the greatest of them eventually earn an audience with Ananda himself, witnessing his beauty and dying to it in a joyous, apothecotic madness.



### Ombudsman Bonds and Afflictions

**Bond (2):** I understand the world around you.

**Bond (1):** I want to help you.

**Bond (1):** I'll survive anything you throw at me.

**Affliction (1):** Urban spirits like me.



The lumbering brontagora, or “thunder-markets,” consider humans a symbiotic species; they will smash open supply trucks and feast on the goods inside, but cannot digest them until they have sat on the gastric shelves long enough to spoil. The more often humans raid those shelves for fresh goods, the more efficient the brontagora’s digestion becomes. Bristles on the inside of the brontagora’s doors scrape accessible paper and coin from human symbiotes when the human departs, cleansing and freshening the humans and protecting them from the spiritual dangers of wealth. Humans compete for this symbiosis with the xedlipods, nasty packs of carnivorous cart-creatures, who prefer to pick the bones of the ruined supply trucks but will raid a brontagora shelf if sufficiently hungry or turn on a passing human who seems weak. If you are under attack by xedlipods your best option is stairs; these wheeled creatures are unable to traverse them, and are more likely to circle the base of the stairs and whine metallicly than hunt out an accessible ramp and come at you from behind. That said, in a modern xedlipod-accessible world, it’s better to seek an escape route sooner than later once a stairway has gotten you some distance.





The tetrimmenos are monitor-faced computer-creatures that prowl the Cityback on four to sixteen spindly legs. Their modes of being vary. Vistal Tetrimmenos are apex predators, ripping the control systems from captive electronica and reassembling the rest into mindless scrap-servitors, spinning great webs in dark corners of the city to catch electronic and human prey, and devouring even brontagora or tenement beasts when forced. Poccal Tetrimmenos are niche vermin, scuttling along the streets and living off ambient electronic fields. Tigris Tetrimmenos, forty feet in height, stride with mysterious grandeur through the ways of Cityback, unstoppable by anything short of an enraged skyscraper or Vistal Tetrimmon and with a means of subsistence that is principally mysterious. All of the tetrimmenos function to assist in the computation of the ordinary world, essentially supporting with the lightning of their thoughts the miraculous effort that makes it possible for mundane reality to exist in an underlying world dominated by spirits, miracles, and freakish eccentricities. They are, like Cityback itself, a treasure of Ananda, Lord of Expectations, Imperator of the Fourth Age that is to come.



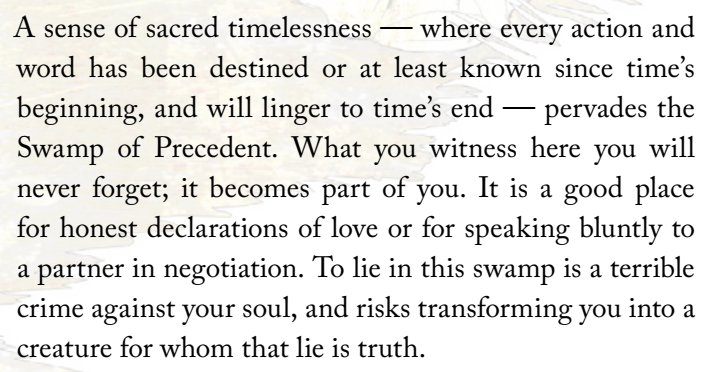
# The Locust Court

From the Long Hall of the Locust Court arises a sensation of being held safely in the arms of a higher power. Everywhere along the pews are humans and animals that have drifted off to sleep, forgetting their petitions and their purposes to fade into dreamless sweet-scented rest. Some sleep for months or even years, ignoring the insects that crawl along their bodies but do not bite.

One may walk indefinitely through the Long Hall, looking for an exit, and not find it; it is in *sudden revelation, a moment of anxiety, or waking* that one finds the doors.









# Tales of the Evil World





**T**HERE IS A seed of evil inside the human eye. It twists and writhes and sometimes we see evil instead of what is there.

We're looking at a street.

Then bam! Evil twists in our eye, and we're looking at Samael St. Augustine, the Evil Street.

We're looking at those guys down the way.

Bam! They're not guys. They're ogres.

And lightning flashes, and suddenly we realize that we're standing in the Evil World, and maybe we've always been.

It's not really in our eyes. That's too literal. If evil lived in the eyes then you could cut it out and throw it on the ground and stomp on it like Chihiro did in **Spirited Away**.

It's in our eyes, but it's not *just* in our eyes.

It's in our whole *capacity to perceive*.

Maybe it's a natural part of how we know the world. Maybe it's not, maybe it's a curse or something inflicted on us, because Imperators could do that. Heck, even Powers could do that, Meon or Joktan or whatever could have made it so. But whatever the reason, it's part of our existence. Sometimes we see what we see and know what we know. Sometimes we see or know the evil world instead. Sometimes we touch things. Or people. Sometimes we touch the evil world instead. There's something in our *heads*, some twitching antenna that can tell when evil's near, and that awareness wriggles into view. It's like a flopping fish or a dying worm. It's like it's *distressed*. Like evil is distressed that it has to live in the same world as people as bad as us.

Sometimes your soul will hollow out and there will be a great static of the mind and that's the tendril of Sa'a Lingurth, the beast of the evil world.

XIV

This is a street and a row of shops that longs to see you dead. It's full of people with fanged mouths, expressionless slit eyes, and fleshy hand-shaped gloves on the outside of their real hands. You can tell you're on Samael St. Augustine because that's what the street signs will tell you. If you ever find yourself there, walk but do not run away.



**SAMAEL ST.  
AUGUSTINE**

XV

This is a gigantic creature with aspects of a blowfish, catfish, eel, manta, and whale. It carries the evil world on its back. It can send its tendrils up through its sewers and into the human world to hook into your soul. It's not 100% clear how this works since the human world is not in the evil world's sewers and the evil world goes down forever. Also, souls are intangible. That said, it happens. The best thing to do if Sa'a Lingurth hooks your soul is to think desperately happy thoughts until the tendril retreats. If you would rather not do this, and are OK with being dragged soul-first into the sewers of the evil world, you should have approximately 20 minutes from the first intimations of its presence to the aforementioned baleful eventuality in which to pack any desired sundries for your trip. Though, you cannot hold me liable if it is 15, instead, or 10!

SA'A LINGURTH

Sometimes there's a gap in the things you think.

Sometimes you look around and the Island of Lord Entropy has pushed its way into the world.

It appears when we see it. I don't think it's causal, exactly. I probably wouldn't tell you about it if I thought it was. If I thought it *needed* you to see it in order to appear, if I thought that I was dooming you to evil when I described these things and filled your head with these thoughts then I probably wouldn't describe them.

But I don't think it's causal, exactly.

I only know that it's how it comes to pass. It's the *way it happens*.

We think we might see some ogres. Then we see some ogres. We think that building gargoyle's actually a nimblejack. We look closer. We don't want to look, but we have to know. We're scared. And maybe it seems like yes, it really could be, it really could be a nimblejack. And we look a *little closer* —

And it's moving like the wind, its horrid wrinkly face and claws and the long, long reaching of its limbs, and we scream, and fall backwards, but it's not looking for us, not today, it has other business in the Earth, this creature of the Evil World.

That didn't happen to me. I tell myself that didn't happen to me, that never happened to me, and that it won't come back. Ianthe says I don't run fast enough to be interesting hunting anyway.

There's *something*, that's our first sign.

There's something. Then we become aware of it. Then we begin to worry: is this Meon smiling at us? Is this Joktan laughing at us? Is this Baalhermon coming like the fire and the sword to smash our world?

Lightning flashes. Forms distort. We see the evil world; and it is there.

Darkness falls on our room. Our closet seems to fill with horrid things. *And they break through.*

The evil world hunts us. It is the thing that hunts us. It is the thing that knows us through our fear. It is the thing that knows us through our hatred of it; that knows us by the fact that we see evil in the world when previously it was not there.

In fairness, we are right to be afraid.

Ogres eat people. They're the nicer ones, too; the nimblejacks will do a lot worse to you than eat. Even Lord Entropy's human servants are always doing evil. We can't get away from them entirely, not unless everybody in the world stops seeing evil, so we might as well anticipate it ourselves.

Lord Entropy doesn't care about humanity. Sometimes he hurts people, sometimes he doesn't. That's one kind of fear. If you're a





mortal person, then maybe one day he'll hunt you, not because you've done anything wrong, but because being mortal means that you're not worth giving any say in whether he hurts you or not.

If you're a Power, it's even worse.

If you're a Power, then there is no practical way that you have never done him wrong. There is no way you've never loved. There is no way you've never accidentally hurt an innocent. There is no way you've been perfect in your service to the War. I guess it's technically possible, but seriously — *never*? Not at *all*?

If you're a Power, one day he might decide to hunt you and it will officially be your fault.



The Evil World is an island. It is an island riding on a beast. It is surrounded by storms.

In the center of that world is the palace of black glass.

On his throne in the palace is the evil god Lord Entropy, and his fingers always drip with blood.

He is attended by ogres and by nimblejacks.

To his left, in the eastern palace, there is Joktan. He stands over the palace like a giant, his shadow massive on the clouds. Joktan, whose laughter fills the air. He is laughing at you right now. He is laughing at you because he hates you and because he knows that you will suffer. He is laughing because it is marvelously funny how terrible things will happen to you, and how terrible you are.

Baalhermon holds the palace of the west and stands at Lord Entropy's right. He is the power in the incarnadine clouds that rumble across the sky in the evil world. He is the terror and the destruction and the lightning.

And then there is Meon.

Meon cannot possibly be as bad as people say, because if he was, then there would be nothing left for virtue in this world. There wouldn't be any point in anything, in even trying, if Meon were as bad as people say.

And I've never noted him explicitly as doing harm. I've never seen it, never heard of it, never obtained an authoritative documentary reference to any cruel and monstrous thing that he has done. He doesn't even have his own wing of the palace; he isn't part of the government of the evil world. He's just there.

But I've seen him. I've seen a photograph of him. I've seen his smile. So I know why people say what they say. I've seen his smile.

He keeps all the worst things in the world in that smile, behind that smile, like he's holding them all back.

Like he's holding back all the worst things that could ever happen, *all the time*.

He could be that thing which makes things discordant with themselves and the entire world, the thing that rips and ruins, the thing that is the worst face of every monster in the world. He could be that. He maybe even *might* be that. But for right now, he holds it back.

He holds it back, so maybe he's fighting it. Maybe on some level he's trying to do good. But I don't think that's why.

Meon is the god of defilement; he is the Power of **Desecration**.

And it seems to me that he is leashing himself because it is more pleasant to him that people desecrate themselves, and one another, and their own holy things. It seems to me that he is choosing not to be so very great an evil as he ought to be, as he could be, as people say he is, because he loves how very wicked people are, even without Meon.

*"Do you love me?" I asked, when our time was done.*

*Diamanta leaned her head back to look at me. "Is that why you think I come to you?"*

*"Why do you, then?"*

*She looked down. "I committed a sin I cannot bear," she said. "This is my expiation."*

—from the Thought-Record  
of Desecration's-Regal Meon



But I don't know.

Maybe it's all just an excuse. Maybe he just wants me to see that, wants that written down. Maybe he's secretly good and doesn't want anybody to notice. Maybe he's doing monstrous evil, all the time, and letting people believe we do it to ourselves.

I can't tell you, either way. All I can say is that he can't be *as bad* as his reputation, because that would mean the worthlessness of the world.

I won't *let* it mean that. So he can't be.

And then there's Lord Entropy.

He can't be that either. He can't be even as bad as people say Meon is, either.

But he's close.

Lord Entropy, and his Evil World, is all three of them and more. He is the laughter and the storm. He is the seething sleepless evil. He is the architect of our despair.



### ***Joktan, Power of Scorn***

Sometimes the impression arises that Joktan is laughing at Lord Entropy. He is laughing because there is something that Lord Entropy wants that he cannot have, or something that Lord Entropy has failed at or some agony Lord Entropy cannot avoid. When this impression arises, Joktan has unpleasant days.

### Ogre Bonds and Afflictions

**Bond (5):** I am strong enough to overpower you.

**Bond (2):** I can smell you wherever you hide.

**Bond (2):** I serve and love Lord Entropy.

**Affliction (2):** I reek; an alarming, distinctive smell.

**Affliction (1):** I have only ever known evil.

**Affliction (1):** I am a great, tall beast-like person.

### Miscellaneous Ogre Traits

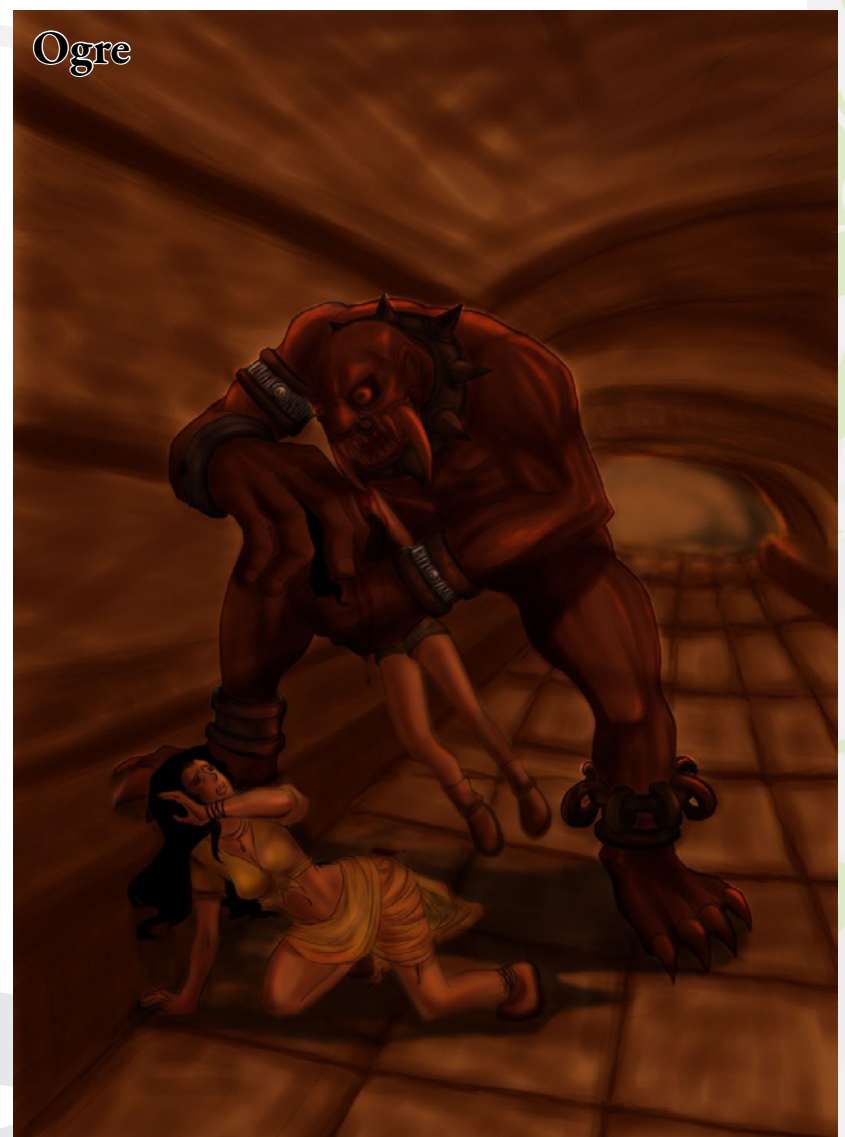
Ogres have the Aspect Trait at level 0-1, with 3 AMP. They have the Paramount Strength Gift and the Paramount Sense Gift: they can use difficulty 4 Aspect miracles of raw strength and power, and difficulty 4 Aspect miracles of smelling things out, for free.

Adult ogres such as Hugh Rosewood also have the Durant, Elusive, and Eternal Gifts; the ancients are reputed to have Immortal.

Lord Entropy created the ogres 850 years ago. He molded them from dead trees, rocks and corpses. He made them tall. He made them broad. He made them ridiculously strong and able to smell you from miles away. But the secret of their making is that he started not with anything physical but with a *sensation*: ogres began with the ripping and tearing of flesh. They are more than anything else creatures of what-it-feels-like to have your body treated as meat, to have its structure pulled apart by ogres, to be *torn*.

That is what they are and they tell you what manner of being Lord Entropy is.

They were created in Lord Entropy's Chancel and they have only ever known evil. Most of them are innocents in that sense — they have never had call to question or think about their nature, they have never had a reason to understand how terrible they are.





They could be redeemed, but redeeming them would be no kindness, for an ogre is not an ogre if it does not hunger to rip and break the living flesh.

Their leader is Hugh Rosewood.

He's a man who's somehow managed to stay an ogre and yet grow up. He's an ogg gone all *sophisticate*. Maybe he's worked out some kind of moral theory of ogreness. Maybe he's just too impressed by Lord Entropy to really care about the gaping moral issues in his work. He's an *adult*, he understands what it means to be a person in the world,

But he basically doesn't care.

Ogre adults are like that. They're terrifying. They're usually still evil and always almost impossible to stop. But hardly any ogres make it that far. They're born as children and they die as adolescents, by the standards of their race. Even the older ones don't really grow up, not while living in the evil world. Maybe fifteen or sixteen in history, and five or six alive right now, have ever managed to *mature* properly and become like Hugh; and if any have made it past that, all the way to *old*, I hope I never know.

The nimblejacks were stolen. They used to belong to the Fallen Angel Achaia.

She's dead.

They're not.

They're the descendants of Hell and corruption lives in them. They're horrid little monsters, almost by definition, cruel and relentless by character. They used to be a kind of incarnation of *consequence*, part of the karma and morality that got cut off from the Ordinary World. They were what you got when you found you were in too deep.

And that's still the livid essence that twists inside them.

Lord Entropy's been breeding them with each other and with humans for millennia. He's kept them cut off from the ordinary world and from the Hell that was their home. Now they're more physical creatures than karmic ones. Now they're gargoyle-imps, humanoid creatures wearing skin as tough as a stone and with nails like spikes of granite. Now they're shriveled things that can move faster than the lightning.

They're not consequences, not any more. But they're still fatal. They can still bewitch you so that you can't let go of the promises you've made to them, that you feel you *have to* fulfill whatever agreements with them you make. They can take your word and make it your obsession. Or they can rip your guts out with their fingernails and let you die upon the floor, whatever.

They're living creatures now, and not just bits of Hell, but they still must live their lives in a state of evil, in a world defined by corruption and suffering. It's the weirdest and most wonderful and most terrible

*The common ogre (homo pervalidus) loves music. When the ogres march, others can hear their "walking song" from miles away:*

It does no good to see us come.  
The world's too small for you to fly.  
Keen eyes won't save you from our kind,  
We'll pop them out and leave you blind!

Matters none how fast you run.  
The world's too small for you to fly.  
Quick feet you have but all the same  
We'll bite them off and leave you lame!

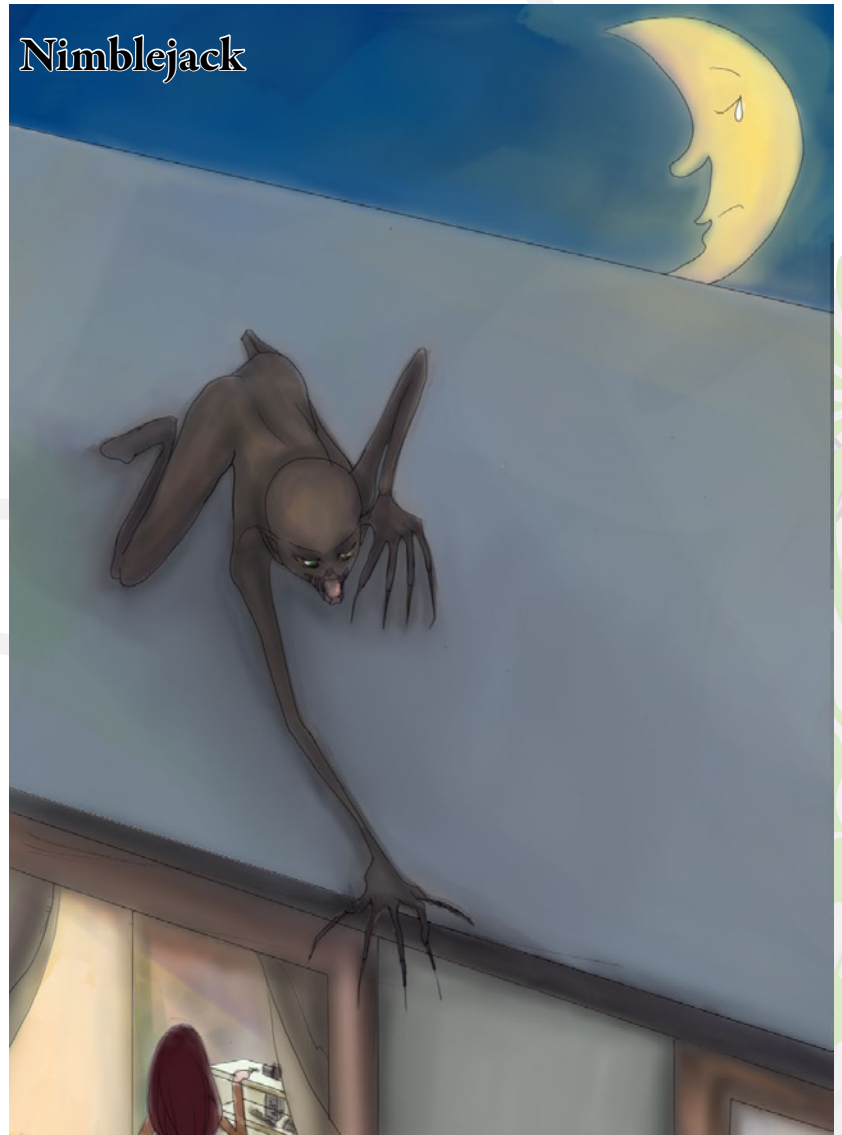
*The last line of each verse is roared with great gusto and merriment. The song continues in the same vein for about thirty verses, and then repeats.*

—from *A Medieval Bestiary*, by Paul McArthur

## Thought-Record Technology

If you wear a thought-record transmitter, you can send your thoughts to its matching teletype receiver from anywhere in the world. Using a receiver in tandem with a computer you can create a transcription of received thoughts in real time, at leisure, or even post-mortem. There is an Estate for Thought-Record Technology, and someone could theoretically invent it in the prosaic world at any time; for now, though, the technology only exists in relatively advanced Chancels. There is a rumor that Lord Entropy can collect the last several days of thought from a dead mortal or Power, regardless of whether they wore a transmitter or willingly broadcast their thoughts while alive; from such ostensible records, made public, have many of this book's quotations come.

## Nimblejack



### Nimblejack Bonds and Afflictions

**Bond (4):** You have brought this on yourself.

**Bond (2):** I am fast enough to catch you.

**Bond (2):** I serve Lord Entropy

**Affliction (4):** If I give myself over to beauty, love, or justice, I will die.

**Affliction (1):** I am ugly, twisted, and small

### Miscellaneous Nimblejack Traits

Nimblejacks have the Aspect Trait at level 0-3, with 3 AMP. They have Persona 1 applying to the imaginary Estate, Trapped into Evil, with 3 PMP.

They have the Lightning Quickness Gift; this allows them to use difficulty 7 Aspect miracles of moving quickly for 0 MP.

thing. If a nimblejack ascends, if they let themselves ascend, if they let their soul look up inside them and appreciate beauty or love or justice, they explode and a fire surges out from where their heart would be and sears through the sky towards Heaven.

The Island of Lord Entropy is a thing of layers; it is built on top of elder and elder ruins, and whether all of these things are of his making, or whether some predate him, we do not know. In the sewers are great Grecian temples, miles in length and sixty feet in height; and the remnants of former cities; and gardens of strange beasts and horrors. Deeper and deeper one may descend, through ever-stranger secrets and forgotten places, into the crushing dark.

Genseric tells me that at the end of it all, one sees Lord Entropy again — that in the uttermost depths of the island, one finds oneself



crawling on Entropy's body like one were an insect, that the walls fade away and the darkness remains and there is only the hundred-story shape of Lord Entropy in the dark. It could be true. It could be a lie. Genseric Dace is not always reliable.

The humans that serve Lord Entropy are trained to hunt. Underneath the palace of Lord Entropy is a savage garden wherein they find their meat; they descend, and fight with elder horrors, and bring up monstrous things to be their food<sup>†</sup>.

They are often put to employing this training in our non-evil world.

They are feral creatures, though they can be mannerly. They are not comfortable in civilization. They are not comfortable in non-evil worlds. The stench of things not being dominated by desecration, destruction, and scorn disturbs them. They feel disoriented, like people breathing ether, and out of place. But they are still very good at hiding in our world, at renting apartments and walking on streets and otherwise infiltrating us that they may watch us, or steal from us, or help Lord Entropy's greater servants on their hunts.

The humans of Lord Entropy are also called **Domicelli** (domicellus, domicella); this term is strictly applied to those who earn his favor, and loosely to any human whose loyalty lies with the Darkest Lord.

There are two dominating conditions of the Evil World.

The first is *the arising impression*.

Judgments, perceptions, appearances arise as if they were objective facts. They breathe forth from the world. You will be standing in the Evil World, and you will realize: *the moon seems to hate the stars*. These thoughts are the art of Lord Entropy, impressions painted on the world. You may seem guilty; a grotto may seem safe; a thing may seem terrible, or virtuous or bright. Qualia form a mist.

The second dominating condition is hunger.

To live in the Evil World is to know a desperate, fierce hunger. It grows the longer you stay; for those who live there, it has sunk into the bone and flesh of them, made a permanent change. There is a substance and a quality of *need*, and there is nothing that lives there or stays there terribly long that is not driven into danger, folly, or madness — and often more than one of these — by a hunger for a thing it cannot find, or cannot have, or cannot permit itself to possess. Even for the ogres, whose tastes are awful but simple enough, the hunger has no end; the more they gorge themselves on human flesh, the hungrier they become.

<sup>†</sup> The history of the Nobilis as I have been taught it allows no room for elder horrors; it is a peculiarity of Lord Entropy's Chancel that when you are within it there appear to be entities and civilizations that are remnants of things long predating Man. Presumably they were created with just such properties, even as the fossils of the ordinary world.



### Properties of the Evil World

- We want what we cannot have.
- We are prey to false impressions.
- The truth is darker than you know.
- Joktan laughs at you.
- Nothing lasts forever.
- The worst is yet to come.

*He stood at the edge of the Earth and drank the world.*

*"As a servant of Creation," I said, "I should kill you."*

*He could not move. He had too much raw power pouring into him. His eyes were edgy and frightened.*

*"Hell," I said. "I will kill you. But I admire your appetite."*

—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

### *Meon, Power of Desecration*

Sometimes it seems that the thing Meon holds back behind his smile—the thing he is struggling so desperately to keep inside him, to keep from leaking out into the world—is the realization of Lord Entropy's dreams and desires. Sometimes it seems he is not so much Lord Entropy's Power as his jailor.

When it most seems like that is so, Meon has unpleasant days in turn.







### ***Baalhermon, Power of Destruction***

Only Baalhermon is never the target of the cruelty of Lord Entropy, but if he is never tormented, he is still ill-used. Often there is no Baalhermon in him, no personhood at all, but only a puppet used by his master's will, a shell through which Lord Entropy wreaks destruction on the world.



# **The Border Mythic**



**T**HIS IS THE reality behind the dream that is our world.

In an endless emptiness there is a single cup of fire.  
The flames of it are blue.

There is no scale to it.

There can be no scale to it. There are no referents. The texture of the void is impermeable to the idea of measurement. The stars are unreachable and incomparable above.

It is larger than the universe and it is smaller than a pebble in your shoe.

Let it be large, then. Let it be larger than worlds. See the cup as a flaring, staggering enormity; inside it, the tree of worlds. Its roots writhe in the flames, pierce them, sink into the void. At that base, where Nothingness and Burning meet, is Hell. At its crown is the Blessed Land of Heaven. In between them, dangling from the branches of the World Ash, worlds: billions of them. Uncounted, unmeasured billions of worlds.

Most of them are flat.



Around the cup of fire and around the Ash and around its worlds the Excrucians swarm like gnats. They are an endless army in an endless space, but right now their efforts are focused on a handful of battle fronts. They raid against Heaven, and Hell, and Jotunheim where live the giants, and Aelfscienne of the elves, and Dionyl, and Abaton, and here and there and other places. And the Earth.

Thirty fronts, perhaps, in all.

Zoom in.

Our world is *there*, an island in the leaves, a great flat plane anchored in subtle ways and great ones to the Ash. It is green and brown and blue and wet, and over its edges cascade an endless falling sea. Mariners would be better served not to sail too near the edge of that expanse.

This world — our world — is fundamentally *alive*.

Sometimes I will call it the Border Mythic. Other times I will call it the Mythic World.

It is our secret reality where everything lives and moves.

The wind is alive, in the Mythic World. The forests, and each tree. The mountains have their shoulders and their

heads, their faces, their conversations and their thoughts. Each beam of sunlight. Each rock. Each thing that is, is possessed of its own spirit, from the smallest to the largest; it takes only the pressure of *attention* to differentiate and speak to the will of the smallest part.

Cars drive by their own will. Birds and aeroplanes make choices as they soar. There

is nothing that coin loves better than its circulation, and nothing that joys a wave so much as its death upon the shore.

It is a world bathed in the golden light of life.

It is rich in purposes and feelings.

To see it is to know that everything's OK, even though it's not.



In the Mythic World you can get practically anywhere by road. There's a path to death, and back. There's a road up to the sun.



To see the Border Mythic you just have to let go of the scientific world. It's as hard as spitting out iron nails when you haven't even put them in your mouth yet, the first time, but after that it's more like falling asleep in the back of a car. Sometimes you'll even just snap over to the mythic when you see something impossible happen, because that impossible thing primes your brain to the reality of the magic that's going on all around you.

Getting *back* into the shelter of the ordinary world — that's harder.

It takes me about four hours of hard work to get back to reality every time. That's after an awful lot of practice. When I started, it took me all weekend, and I got brain cramps and messed up my body rhythms something fierce. Nobilis can usually do it just like *that*, but sometimes even they have trouble!



The earth splits and clear, sparkling water boils up — these are the *Chalices of Conception*. A female who is unable otherwise to conceive may immerse herself therein and draw in its power, making her either parthenogenetic or fertile with a man she loves; but the child will be infused unnaturally with the power of the world.



Time in the Mythic World is strange, and prone to turn about.

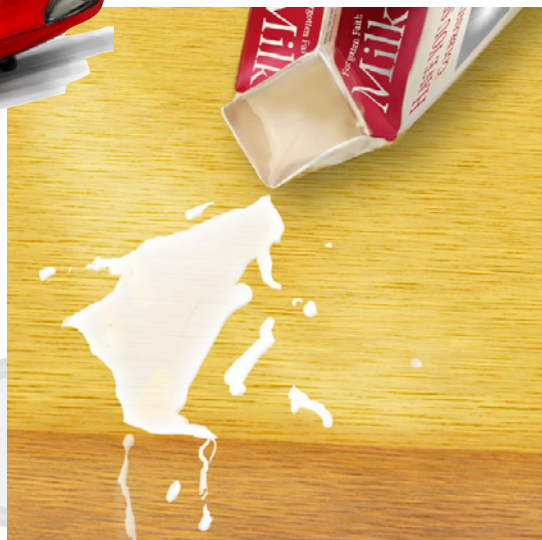


*I once asked my car why it put up with me. "You so obediently take me where I want to go," I said. "You follow my every order. Why should this be so? You are your own person!"*

*It considered that. "I suppose," it said, "that I consider it basic human maintenance. One goes through a kind of daily hassle, you know, taking humans to one place or another, in order to get the best fueling, sheltering, and cleaning performance out of them."*

—from *The Diary of Edmund Finch*,  
by Jackie Robinson

The milk of forgotten faith is a forbidden substance that is palliative to even the most guilty conscience. To drink it is to fall into a haze where one is true to all devotion and devoted to all things.







Mt. Everest rears over the Mythic World in the form of a mantis, its claws hooked into the sky.

### Alchemist Traits

Alchemists control various wondrous treasures, represented by the Treasure Trait at level 0-2, the ability to have Treasure MP (although they start with 0), and limited access to miraculous Bonds and Afflictions. Their Treasure Trait is weaker than a Power's — they cannot control ordinary things or wield their powers across great distances unless some specific quality of their magic allows.

The Cleave of the Botanists are alchemists. They struggle to unlock the magic of flowers — the inner magic in each flower put there by the power of Heaven. Like the magicians of old, they can use this power to speak to the dead, turn bullets away from their skin, command the elements and fly.

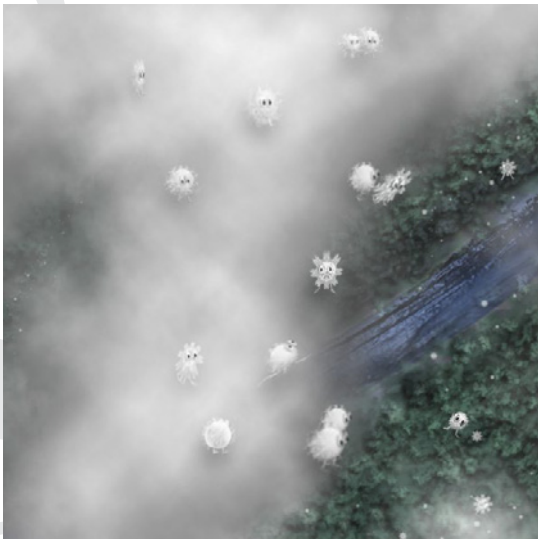


When a Power clings to unworthy ambitions or self-justifying delusions, the Cursed Dominions known as “the courts of the wind” may form. A cleared-out space becomes possessed by twisted spirits of the wind. These spirits drag or push mortals or even Powers into the court and form a wall around them; a peculiar trial then begins.

The crimes of which the court accuses its victims vary. In most cases, it challenges them not on their deeds but on their qualities as people — do they adhere to their duty? Are they generous? Are they courageous? Do they serve those who depend on them in the fashion that they must? The judges form as faces in the air: they interrogate the accused, they question these moral traits.

Those who prove lacking are flung from a cliff.

It would all be an example of karma in action, and not so much a Cursed Dominion, save that in the courts of the wind, true testimony may not be given. It does not leave the mouth: it dies in the air, unspoken or at least unheard. One may freely argue subjective beliefs, technicalities, vagaries, and lies, and one may speak truth on unrelated matters, but a true justification of one’s duty, service, generosity, or valor is not presentable in this court.



Things mostly happen the same way no matter which world you’re looking at. For example, when the snow *anguli* jump off their clouds and flurry down on the world below, then in the real world, it starts snowing. Or when something irritates a volcano’s spirit into erupting, the volcano itself erupts.

This would be really shocking if it happened by accident, you understand, but really, it’s the *point*.





The greatest things in the mythic world have Imperators rather than spirits.

The sun, for instance.

She's not a sun spirit, she's an Angel. Sometimes the sun is her mansion and sometimes it is her face; sometimes there is a *thing* that is different from *her*. But the spirit of the sun is an angel.

The same is true of the moon, the great mountain ranges, the seasons, and the seas.

### Properties of the Border Mythic

- ☛ Its locations are absolute;
- ☛ Its stories are mythic;
- ☛ Its particulars have free will;
- ☛ Karma and dharma exert real but finite force;
- ☛ Roads may be found;
- ☛ Focused attention differentiates a thing from its environment.



Old Man Influenza is one of the Ogdoad, the class of “really important spirits who aren’t Imperators themselves.” A Power might be able to beat him up, but that won’t get the Power his respect; if you want Old Man Influenza’s help, you’d better show him honor and courtesy and be aware of just how old and powerful he is.



Lady Midsummer Night is another spirit of the Ogdoad. She’s a mystery, even to her friends, but if you’re kind and decent to her she’ll be kind to you.

How is it that you can meet Lady Jill Erosion, walking in the woods, when the woods should be just one big mess of spirits intertwined with one another?

It’s like this:

It’s the power of attention. Introspection. *Thought.*

Most spirits just kind of drift through life. There’s a dryad in every tree, but it’s practically asleep, and even when it’s awake it chats with the other dryads and the wind, it doesn’t talk to *you*.





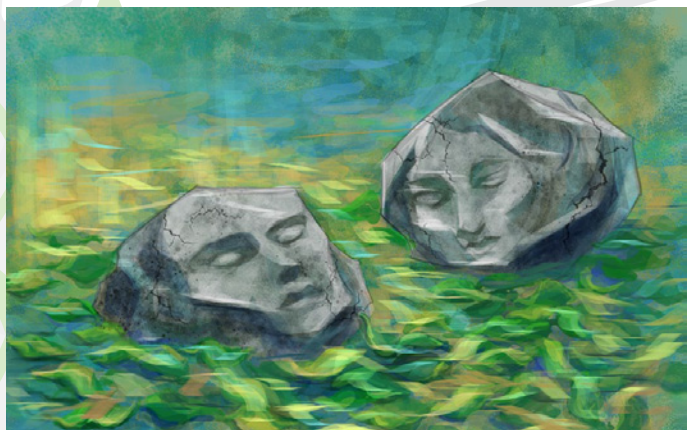
But if you *see* a thing, or *hear* a thing, if you *bear witness to it* or if it bears witness to you, then the spirit of that thing differentiates from the larger context. Its voice and face will surface from the fabric of the world.

That's how I met the Jack of Roads down by Tiger Mountain, long before I met Ianthe. I was lost.

And I could see the forms of dryads, basking in the sun and the faces in the dirt,

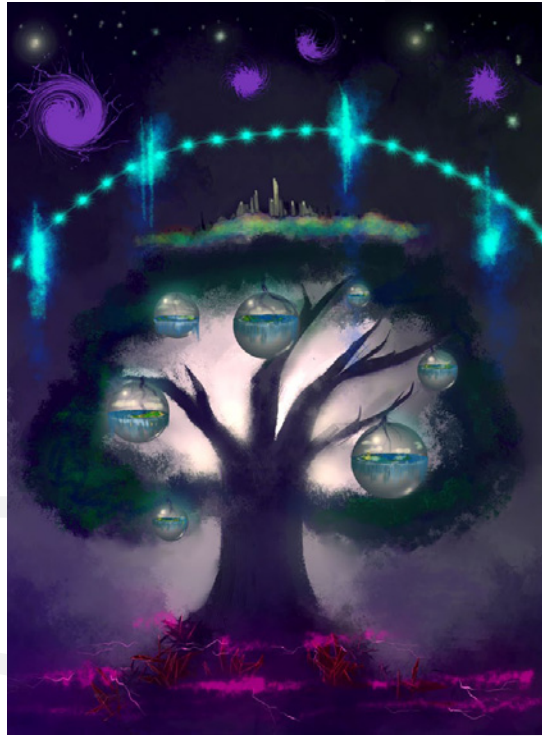
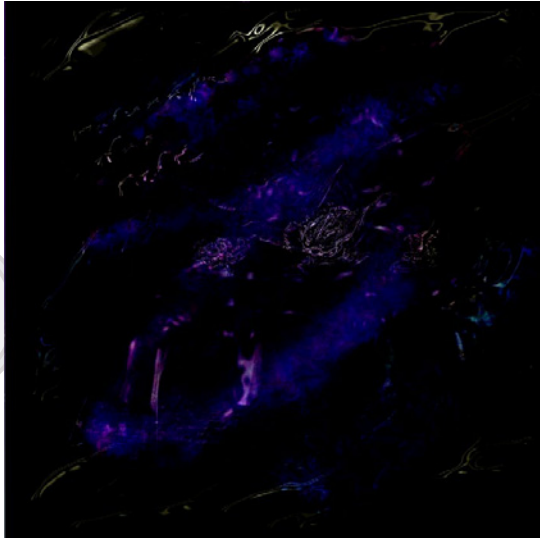
but they wouldn't talk to me. And I could hear the woodpecker boy hammering at the trees, but it wasn't any of them that I really longed for. It wasn't any of them that my heart called forth.

It was him, who came wandering up along the way, and whistling as he went: the great-great-grandson of the Emperor of Roads, and the son of Tiger Mountain: the Jack of Roads himself.



If you look close enough, you can see the least spirits — the *anguli* and *minime* — of individual pebbles, pine needles, snowflakes, and clumps of dirt.

The cup of flame that surrounds the world is named the Weirding Wall. It has only seven entrances large enough to allow a large Riding of Excrucians in, but numerous holes permeable to smaller hosts of the enemy.



To a person of Creation, everything outside the world is essentially a barren, empty void. The longer you stare at it, trying to see details, the more you see the inside of your eyes.

Look, for example, upon the austere landscape of Sisera Sanguinary — ah! To an Excrucian, or a grangler, or any other creature of the void, this place brings awe. But what of the neighboring Stringent Heights?

Vulgar and unimpressive, say the granglers —

But our eyes see only darkness;

But our body feels only the faint warm gentle pressure of the Not;

But our ears hear only silence, in Sisera and the Stringent Heights alike.

### Properties of the Lands Beyond Creation

- ☛ They are not real;
- ☛ Their particulars defy explanation;
- ☛ They extend to eternity;
- ☛ They contain nothingness;
- ☛ They reflect your ideas of them;
- ☛ They reflect you;
- ☛ They are a thing in which phenomena arise.

There are palaces in our dreams. Sometimes someone finds and keeps one, and it stays around even after we've come awake.





The background is a painterly illustration. In the upper center, a large, dark, floating island or castle structure is visible, featuring multiple towers and a central spire. The sky is a warm, orange-yellow gradient, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. Scattered throughout the sky are various floating rocks and debris. In the lower-left foreground, a knight in full plate armor stands on a rocky, grassy shore, looking towards the floating castle. The overall style is reminiscent of a fantasy novel cover or a concept art piece.

# Your Chancel

If you override the elevator in the Eastman Insurance building, it will take you to Camelot – the marvelous Summer Kingdom in the sky. Founded in honor of the chivalric vision, it's a sweeping landscape in the clouds full of knights, honor, chivalry, tragedy, duels, monsters, castles and fair maidens. The Powers of Camelot are its Kings and Queens, celebrated in contests of honor and courtly love; only the wicked "King" Lot and his black knights defy them, and Lot is defeated and slain each year on midwinter's eve to refresh the lifespan of the sun.





Locus Zaanannim is home to the characters and worlds of network television. The zones of currently airing programs are sealed in the Zaan Biospheres to minimize cross-pollination, while worthy characters and elements from cancelled programs are allowed into the Great Walled City of the Chancel proper. This City, roughly the size of Canada, is a sectioned labyrinth that divides into drama, comedy, and genre “quarters,” with the last disproportionately sized to allow starships, cattle herds, and pirate ships adequate space to roam. The unruly — those who refuse to accept the broader world of the

Chancel, or their own series’ cancellation — are driven outside the far walls into the outer darkness, where they merge together into monstrous tellipedes, characmeras, and comedy blobs. It is the duty of the Power Tiria to keep them out when they grow strong enough to threaten the walls, while it is the job of her brother caelestis Foramin Blake to dissect them when a merged character is unexpectedly needed for a sequel or remake.

There is no land route into Locus Zaanannim. You enter and exit via plot holes or with a special appeal to one of the Powers of the place.



Locus Casluhim is a secret mountain in the Los Angeles hills. Its design is in the Olympian mold, with spots of airy Grecian architecture scattered along the slope and shepherds (herding sheep or cloud dragons), fire nymphs, and musicians wandering the peaks. A number of small villages cluster around the mountain's base, with intermittent access at best to the greater Los Angeles area around them.

There are walking paths into Locus Casluhim but the simplest way to find it is to spot a cloud dragon wandering the skies anywhere within three hundred miles of the place. Stare at the cloud dragon until it realizes it has been caught; recognizing you either as a knowledgeable traveler or a dangerously perspicacious mundane, it will paralyze you with a glance, runnel down from the clouds it plays in, and carry you off to the Chancel's slope.





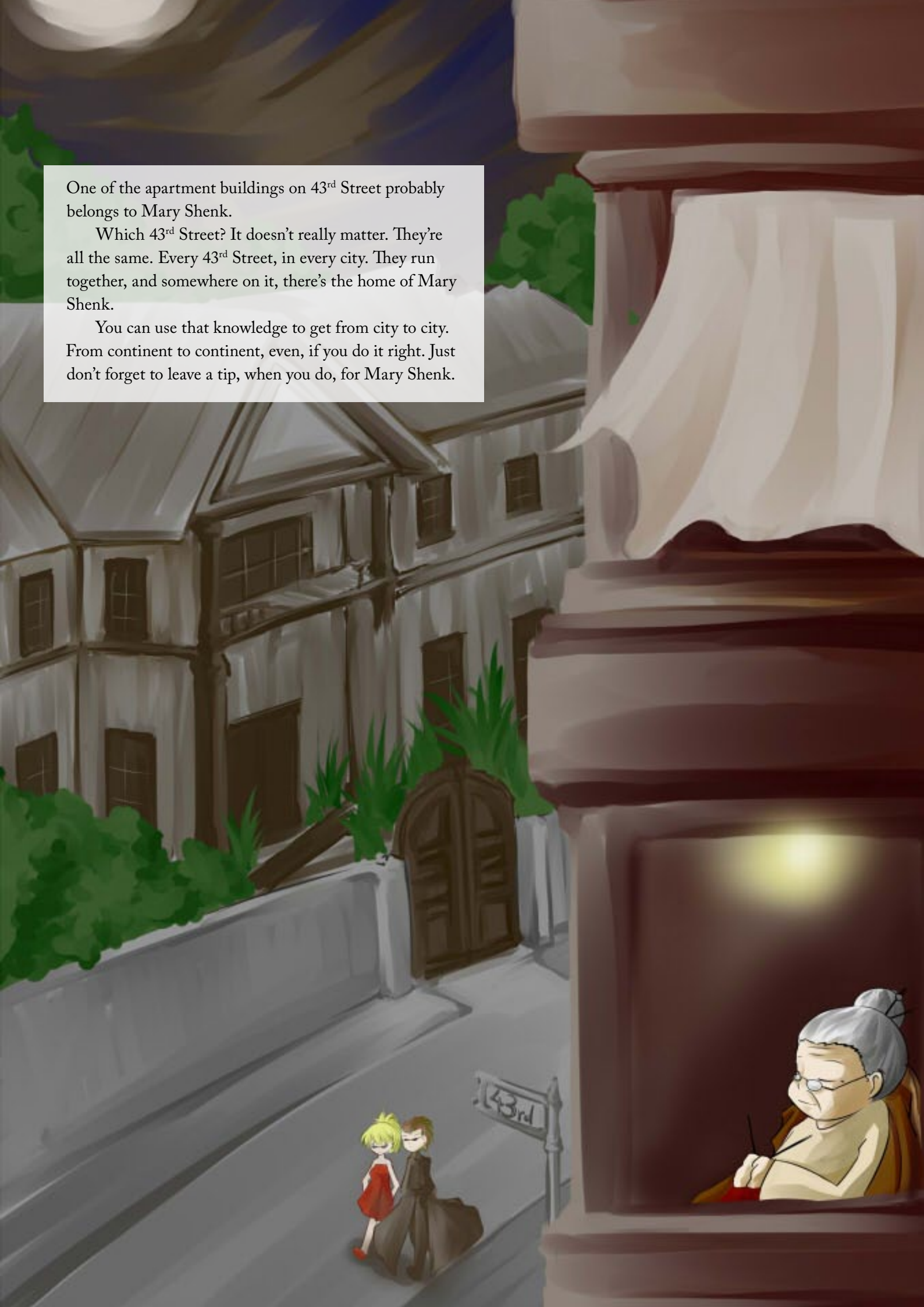
Clegyr is a living Chancel whose flesh is rock and whose excreta are gems. It swims in the Earth's crust like a fish swims in water; the temple-city of its resident Powers, on Clegyr's back, moves through stone with equal ease. The human residents were made over into stone-bodied "gnomes" when the place became a Chancel. Their duty is to provide for the Powers' needs and to arrange the gems that Clegyr leaves behind in patterns that make the angels glad. It's not clear how well this works, but if you find a gem while mining that appears to be the poo of a giant rock-fish-Chancel, please consider leaving it in place and moving on.



One of the apartment buildings on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street probably belongs to Mary Shenk.

Which 43<sup>rd</sup> Street? It doesn't really matter. They're all the same. Every 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, in every city. They run together, and somewhere on it, there's the home of Mary Shenk.

You can use that knowledge to get from city to city. From continent to continent, even, if you do it right. Just don't forget to leave a tip, when you do, for Mary Shenk.



Every Familia of Powers has one: a Chancel, pulled from the world around it. A secret world with hidden entrances and exits and rules that are all its own. What would *yours* be like?

XVI

If you are a competent mortal athlete, Texcoyo may invite you to the games at Locus Qamamir. This is an opportunity worth seizing; the Chancel has a profoundly invigorating effect that will stay with you for many years. Do not, however, accept his "side bet," where the winner may devour or sacrifice the loser's heart; eating Texcoyo's heart would make you a Power, but there is no one who may stand against him at these games in the entire world.



LOCUS QAMAMIR

XVIII

If you are visiting Argentina do not travel to anywhere on the map marked as either Paris or "Locus Araunah." Stolen imperfectly from the mortal world in 1954 by Araunah, Magister of the Dark, this city is magical and glorious but no longer congenial to human life. Its residents are principally elves — it being acceptable to the Dark for these inhuman fey to live

— with a smattering of other faery folk. A small overclass/underclass of humans preside like Victorian nobility over the high society of the Chancel, but they're born knowing that eventually they'll have to kill themselves for their master's pleasure, so they don't take much joy in their social standing. Neither will you, should you travel there and be inducted into their ranks!

LOCUS ARAUNAH

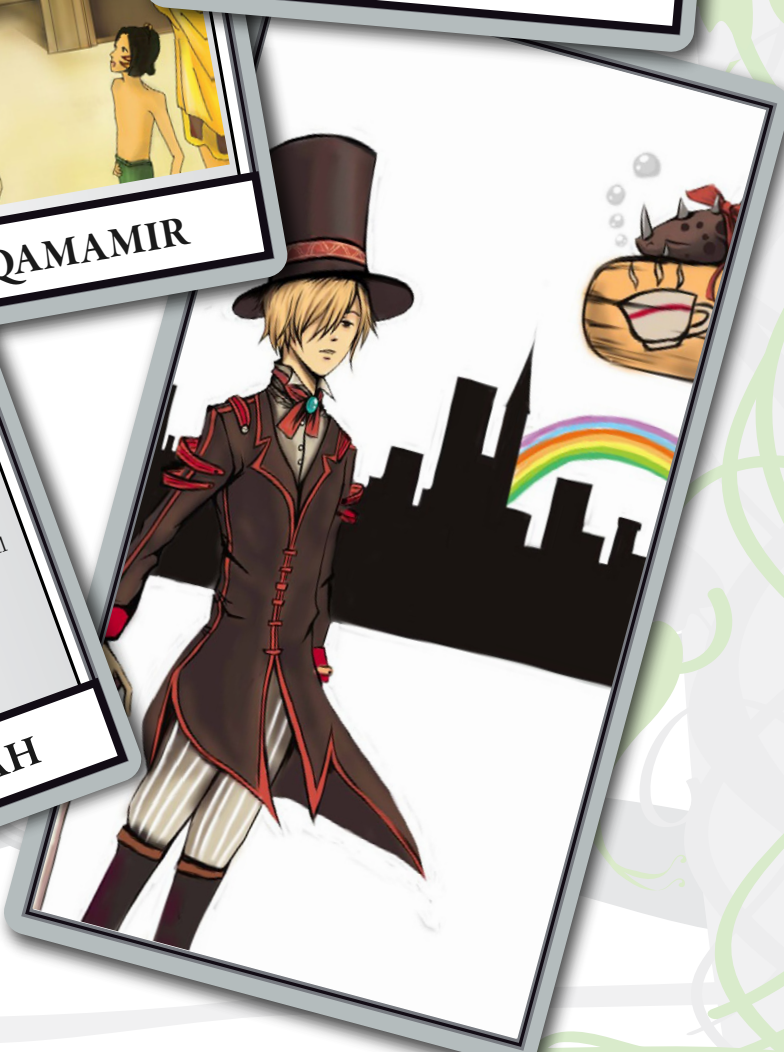
XVII



*The beasts of Locus Thegri come out at night with a positive hunger for money. They will gladly kill a passing traveler to shake out her purse with their teeth and gulp down the coins, bills, and credit cards therein.*

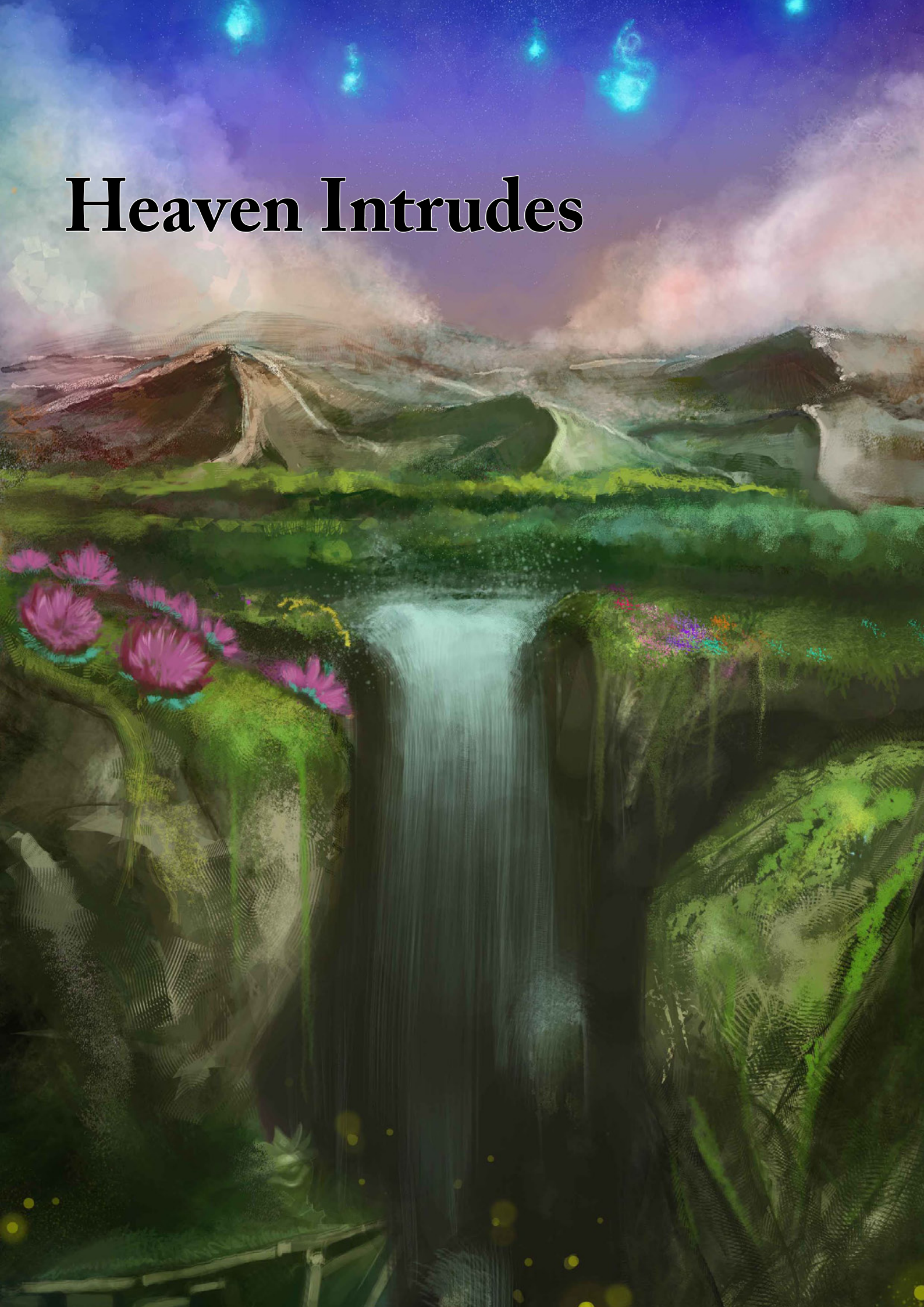
— from A Tourist's Guide to Creation, by Jasprite Sherrard

LOCUS THEGRI





# Heaven Intrudes





*Now in his youth, on a sweltering summer day, Devin felt suddenly as gold; his limbs were strong, his thoughts were clear, and his heart was treasure.*

*He sipped deeply of his lemonade; his spirit shouted in his frame; his dreams were suddenly within his reach.*

*Then the moment passed away to an ordinary summer.*

*Events arose. Circumstances transpired. Griefs and loves and hurts ensued. The matter was forgotten.*

*Now, as he stared into the burning heart of the void — into the squirming, howling, flat-eared dog-god emptiness that was an uncreated world — he saw a pattern that reminded him of that gold.*

*Heedless of the open-throated forces that writhed and bayed within, he reached in his hand; trailed it along the surface to make it separate and recombine like some baleful gelatin; grasped firmly at the tail of a strange anomaly, and pulled it into sight.*

*There! There, of all things, there and then, in the containment chamber that he'd made, there lay the summer day; therein lay the gold; skulking, lurking, snarling, forbidden on the surface of the void.*

*"It is the end of days," Devin advised it, for it was, and then he smiled. "I'd wondered where you'd been."*

— from *Dreams of Emptiness*, by Emily Chen

## Properties of Heaven

- ☛ Its beauty transforms.
- ☛ Its beauty demands service.
- ☛ It is alive, a growing thing.
- ☛ Its grace is given, not taken.
- ☛ Its grace is given, not earned.
- ☛ Its touch makes things more like itself.
- ☛ It is absolute.

IT IS NOT by our own will that grace comes into our world. It is unasked for. It is unbidden. It is not in *response* to anything. It's too wild, pure, and mad for that.

Grace invades.

The angels are an occupying army in our world. They are light that bursts upon us in our darkness, lifting up what we would rather abandon to its misery. They are the flowers of Heaven, blooming where the world had forsaken life — on the scrapheaps of metal, in the slick sickness of spreading oil, on the graves of sinners and the just, twining up our skyscrapers and our tenements and our office buildings in defiance of the soullessness of our lives. They are the enlightenment that bursts in on us when we were just trying to be small little men and women, eating our bagels and drinking our Starbucks, tilling our little patches of soil, dying in our heaps and grottoes, or staring out at the world from our high towers. We didn't ask for it. We didn't even understand that it could happen. It was like a Zen master suddenly hitting us with a stick while we were just in line to pay the telly bill.

Heaven is the angel that catches us as we fall; not because we needed it, not because we wanted it, not even because we'd dreamed of angels since we were a child but because the angels decided the world was better if we lived.

Heaven invades, but at least it invades us as a holy thing.

The angels take beauty as a sacred trust. It's their Craft and their Great Working, it's what they *build*. Having found themselves born into the brightest land in all the lands there are, they decided they would make everything else as bright. Their own kin — lovers, friends, ancient acquaintances and enemies — are suffering in Hell, twisting and corroding into monsters, and still they speak of justice and righteousness in the world. Their blood is the favored stain on Excrucian blades; of all the creatures of the Ash, they alone may never escape the constant press of the War, may never anticipate a week, month, year, when nothing of theirs is threatened by the gods of emptiness; and still they labor to better *us*. They take the time to bring grace to where it is most efficaciously transformative, to will the betterment of the world and of our lives and our places and our existence, effulgent unasked, undreamt-of and invasive grace.

They will make this world a Heaven. They expect no less of us.

The wildflowers of Heaven rip through the substrate of the world to bloom in impossible places. They are hard on the cruelty of the world; they make it hard to be petty, hard to be small, hard to be *human* in their presence, much less genuinely wicked. They make your own soul



and dharma writhe within you if you ignore the power of their witnessing.

And they will give you strength, if you let them.

If you are willing to let them transform you. If you will take the strength they offer you, at the cost of giving up your weakness; if you will take the chance to become a hero, at the cost of no longer being normal; if you are willing to be *better*, at the cost of never again being what you were — they will make you something more.

They will make you purer. They will make you cleaner. They will find the thing inside you that you ought to be and clean away the detritus of the self. They will energize you, brighten you, make it impossible for you to hide from the beauty of your soul, but wrack you with it, rather, possess you of it, make you burn with the awesome amazing thing that is a person, that is *you*, a child of the Heaven—they-will-make, in the perfection of this world.

They are flowers that take from you the power to compromise with wickedness and mediocrity, to be comfortable with evil and others' suffering, in exchange for renewed life.

*Oscar opened the Mystery, found at once he did not understand it, and spent the rest of the day in deep contemplation of whether he had accidentally participated in a koan.*

—from *A Noble's Catechism*, by K.C. Danine

*Humankind never fell from grace. No cherub bars the gates of Eden. This is still a perfect world.*

—from *The Diary of Edmund Finch*, by Jackie Robinson



*The angels forbid Heaven to even the most beautiful of human souls. "Go back," they say, "and make your own world better."*





*Steelblooms holding a raised highway together during the February 27 earthquake in Chile*

Some of them preserve their strength in extractions. Some of them you can crush, distill, mix, turn into medicine or poultices, and they'll still be able to work. They'll be cures for depression, sickness, misfortune, or hopelessness. They can regrow limbs. They can give you back whatever else it is you may have lost. And even the ones that aren't proper medicines can have effects almost as great if you happen upon them in their strange beds and bushes scattered across the world.

And maybe it's because they don't fit in the ordinary world that hardly anybody knows about them. Maybe it's because the ordinary world teaches us that the flowers that we find in such places — growing on the sides of buildings, twining among our bedsheets, growing along the luggage rack of the metro and from and out of and into the mirrors in the dirty ladies' room down by the station — that they don't exist. And certainly, if they did exist, they wouldn't make things *better*.

But I don't think that's really why.

Medicine's not impossible, after all. It's not like a fairy or a hydra. It's not a thing that *breaks* our world. We could be living in a world where everybody knows about the panacea, where you get bottles of it

*Killing God was wrong, of course, reflected the Excrucian; but a handful of flowers and a few sincere condolences should reasonably settle the matter, after all.*

—from *Void Stories*, compiled by Édouard Guy



at the drug store, where it's just \$19.99 to cure what ails you — and it wouldn't break the Earth. It doesn't fit into the ordinary world, sure, but it *could* have. So that's not why we do not know.

We don't hear about this because it costs too much to become an agent of Heaven. We don't hear about it because people want to be small.

If we weren't like that we would die.

If we didn't mostly flinch from Heaven we'd be *dead*. There wouldn't be anybody left.

What hope would *we* have, as heroes, in a world where even Angels die?

Sometimes the light of Heaven will break the darkness of our lives.

Sometimes you'll be falling and the lotus will catch you — you'll be on the great wide bloom of it, the magic-carpet-expanse of it, and you'll realize you're blowing in the wind instead of dying of having nothing to cling to. Sometimes you will be lost, and the light of Heaven will give unto you a path. Or a hope. Or, at least, a chance.

*"Two days ago," Mieszko said, "I could not have seriously considered selling myself to Hell. You are very good at this, Nilaia."*

*"Perfection is in an angel's nature," Nilaia answered.*

*Mieszko frowned. "Then how did you fall?"*

*"With great difficulty," Nilaia admitted. "I must struggle constantly lest I return to grace."*

—from *Children of Heaven*, by Martin Elliott



*Irissa Catarina did not expect a lotus flower to save her.*



*Flowers grow in the eyes of a human too thoroughly graced by Heaven, and their body becomes light.*

You must ask yourself if you are worthy of it.

If you are not then you are better served to step off the edge of the lotus and resume your fall. You are better served to walk forth from that light. If you are not capable of earning Heaven's grace then you must not accept it. It hurts to say this, because I do not believe that it is right; but it is true. It is the will of the angels, always, to be just.

Sometimes it is a justice mixed with kindness or with poetry. Sometimes it is justice in pettier or more juridical forms. Sometimes it is a justice as cruel and hard as a diamond is cruel and hard. The angels don't have a preference, not in that sense. They're too big for such small distinctions. They don't care about *human* justice.

But they seek always to be just.

The Devils thought otherwise. They thought that there should be a place in the world for the nasty, for the ugly, for the monsters and the cruel. They thought that justice didn't mean Heaven could do whatever it wanted to the mean and foul things. For that crime, for the crime of *standing up for* Caligula, Pol Pot, and the ichneumon wasp, the angels cast them into Hell.



So you must not imagine — if you are not such a being as could earn the grace of Heaven — that you may accept that grace unscathed. The price of grace for any evil being — for any of us, really, who are less than perfect — is justice. For some the cost of that justice, even in the face of Heaven's light, will be more than you can bear.

But if you have enough soul within you to hold that grace, and bear that justice, then you may take up the burden of salvation. If you are better, on the whole, than you might have been, then you should accept all Heaven's gifts. They will heal you, in measure to your worth, and hurt you, in measure to your sins; and if they wind up hurting you too much, but not to your destruction, then you may go to Surolam, and the peace of the Locust Court and the pain of knowing Heaven eventually will pass.

*There's one street in New York that needed no angels to make it beautiful.*

*There's graffiti on the walls, of course, and weeds on the sidewalk. There's a dead dog off to the way. Some windows are broken. These things do not detract from the beauty. They're part of it. These elements, individually ugly, arrange in a way that captures all the beauty in the world.*

*No one walks that street. No one would dare.*

— from *Boilermaker's Daughter*, by Emily Chen

*Angel-touched human shutting Enron down.*



# Hell Awaits

*This is the Hell of Shuffling in Chains.*

*We are embedded in foul mist and we shuffle in chains and all around is a flat white labyrinth whose paths we do not know. One day we shall reach the end of it, perhaps —*

*So saith the theory of finite and infinite things —*

*And then we shall rise, purified, to Earth or Heaven or some other sort of Hell.*

*That is what is; that is what has been.*

*Save that unto us, here, in the Hell of Shuffling in Chains, has been sent a savior. She wears striped stockings and has a gamine face and when she crouches on two knees and one hand her back has a beetle's curve. She carries a sack and she is chained, like us — like us, but she does not shuffle. Instead, she perches on the walls; laughs delightedly at the misty hopelessness around her; and jumps, great long-legged jumps, from height to height.*

*Often, she falls.*

*She laughs then, too.*

*Where did she come from? Where is she going? She does not tell us these things, only that she is passing through. But she has freed us.*

*We didn't think we were worthy of salvation.*

*Any of us could have learned her strategy — could have faced the risks and possibilities and climbed atop the walls. But she is the one who freed us. We could not have imagined it.*

*We did not think that we were worthy of salvation.*

*"That way!" she shouts. "I see the exit!"*

*It is because she has come through that I am lingering to mark the path; and I am thinking, perhaps, I will wear such stockings as hers, one day, in some other Hell, and do the same.*

—from *Doorknobs*, by Emily Chen

**H**ELL IS ALWAYS with you.

You won't realize that until you're looking back — until you're in a dark and empty time, a hurting time, a ruined and compromised time in your life. You won't realize it until you understand one day that you've failed, that you've wasted yourself and your opportunities. Then you'll look back and you'll see that Hell was always there.

It was with you when you made excuses.

It was with you when you didn't bother to care.

In your self-righteousness and your laziness and your willful stupidity; in your casualness with the things you cared about, in your willingness to give up your own good fortunes in order to hurt somebody else; in your pettiness, in your rushes to judgment, in every mistake you regret and will always regret.

God wasn't with you, then, if He even exists. Cneph, the closest thing to God we have evidence of, the will that made the Ash and flame from nothingness — he wasn't with you. Not Heaven. Not the Wild, not the Light, not even, probably, the Dark.

In those times when you were petty and small and twisted only Hell was there.

Hell is what loves you even when you're wrong. Hell is what loves us even when we're bad.

And it's fire and brimstone and poison and rotting things, too. It's a punishment ground and torment-realm at the base and bottom of the Ash. It's corrupting the Fallen Angels, turning them into monsters, and the human souls that wind up there aren't any too well off themselves. But that isn't the core of it. That isn't the heart of it. It's just the price we pay to have something like Hell in the world at all.

Hell means that there is always something with you, even if sometimes it is horrible.



We are never without our witnesses; never without something to look upon us, and give honor to our suffering and our mistakes. We may tumble to the bottom of the Ash, forsaken of and by all other things, and still we will exist, and still we will not fall into the Not, because there is a Hell.

You may take that as a comfort or a horror.

I think it's both.

There are times in your life when you'd like to cradle despair against your heart, when you want the Not, the nothing, the emptiness of the world, anything to stop the pain. And then it's a cruel joke that you can never be alone, that you can never get away from Hell and its poisons and its flames. But there are also times when you are lost in the darkness, and longing for the brightness, and the goodness, and you cannot find them; and in such times, there is, at least, a Hell beside you in the dark.

It is the baseline of the world. It is the darkness that reaches upwards towards the brightness. It is the fire that longs to embrace us all.

It is the final company for all of us, at the bottom of the Ash.

*A farmer tends the rotten flowers under Shapcombe Tor*



### Properties of Hell

- ☛ It fills the mind and senses.
- ☛ It is always with you.
- ☛ It is with you the most when you do not realize it is there.
- ☛ It has no cleanliness to it.
- ☛ It hurts.
- ☛ It twists you up.
- ☛ It sees the worst of you, and can quite possibly see the rest.



*A Fallen Angel sits with a dying wolf.*

The substances of Hell are things that consume and hold the attention. They are things that surround you wholly.

They're dirty, awful things. That's just the gateway though. They're not evil so much as awful. They're ritually impure. They're not clean.

They are the rotten flowerbeds that abused children crawl into to escape the horrors of their lives. Sick sap will cover you, the leaves will drip rot on you, there are bugs and even spiders and a smell like the world-rot around you, but after a while, it's comforting, embracing, surrounding, it covers all the senses and there's nothing but the black and red and smell and strangeness.

They're the fires that screwed-up people like to stick their hands in. It burns you, it hurts, it's awful, but it takes you away from yourself.





It makes your whole world about, are you really going to do this? Are you really doing this? Did you really just do that? People think that burning in a hellfire is about being strong, or hurting, or something like that, they tell themselves all kinds of stories about why they do it, but the DSM-IV tells us, and I agree, that it's to break the world you're living in and just be in the fire for a little while.

Hell-things are the thing that makes people shoot up, maybe. At least that seems a lot like Hell to me, the way we've made drug users ritually impure like butchers in India. The way drug life is viscerally unclean yet draws people back and back again, the way it takes people away from themselves. It's obvious that there's some Hell in the nasty drugs people make from Hell's rotting flowers, but I think that there's a bit of Hell in a lot of the ordinary chemical stuff too.

The first time somebody cuts themselves, they've probably been touched by some of the things from Hell.

Maybe even the first time they drink.

Hell is what lets you get away from the world.

*The Red Room in the basement of Mary Caldwell High*



## XIX

Weep for the Devils, for they have forgotten how to live with what they love. Their wounds do not heal. Cruelty has become a reflex. Half of them do not know how to talk to people without twisting the knives in their target's soul. If you meet one you must tell it, "I do not want to be hurt. I do not want to be hurt. I do not want to be wicked. I want to love the good." You can stop to say other things but you must keep coming back to this. You must keep reminding them that you would rather not be damned.

Their compassion is not dead. Their honest love for you, it is not dead. It



is simply very easily forgotten.

## DEVILS

The work of Hell is holy in this life.

I will say this even though I fear the Devils and even though I fear the flames. I will say this even though I idolize Heaven and its given grace; even though there are times when I am angry, and more than angry, at what Hell has been and done.

But the first work of Hell is to honor and bear witness to the things that would otherwise be entirely unloved.

They will come and sit with you if you have to die alone. The Powers of Hell. The demons. The flames and rotten flowers, at least, if nothing else; maybe even a Devil. They won't do it to hurt you, not even the Devils. They might hurt you, they might hurt you terribly, they might even steal your soul, because they're just that broken. But it won't be why they're there.

They'll be there because if they were not there, you would suffer and die, alone, and with no witnesses; and for someone to die in such a fashion is anathema to Hell.

They will come and visit you, now and then, if you live in the mountains, isolated, with no one else to know.

They will come to watch you, to listen to you, to know you, if you are a thing so horrible and broken that no one else would dare.

They love the evil things, maybe, best of all, because it's evil that needs Hell most. If you want to know how the Devils have gone so horribly wrong, it may be that; *that*, as much as the corruption and their own suffering; that they spend all of their time in the company of the worst of us, and so they've come to exemplify that awfulness themselves. But to love the evil things is not their duty but its expression. The work of Hell is to love whatever needs them most; whatever would, without Hell, be alone.

Hell's eyes are open to you.

They will not turn away.

That is why the humans with the greatest taint of Hell are as likely to walk the road of sainthood as that of evil, or to find a strange equivocating path between them. The thing in us that can love the evil is at once our worst side and our best.

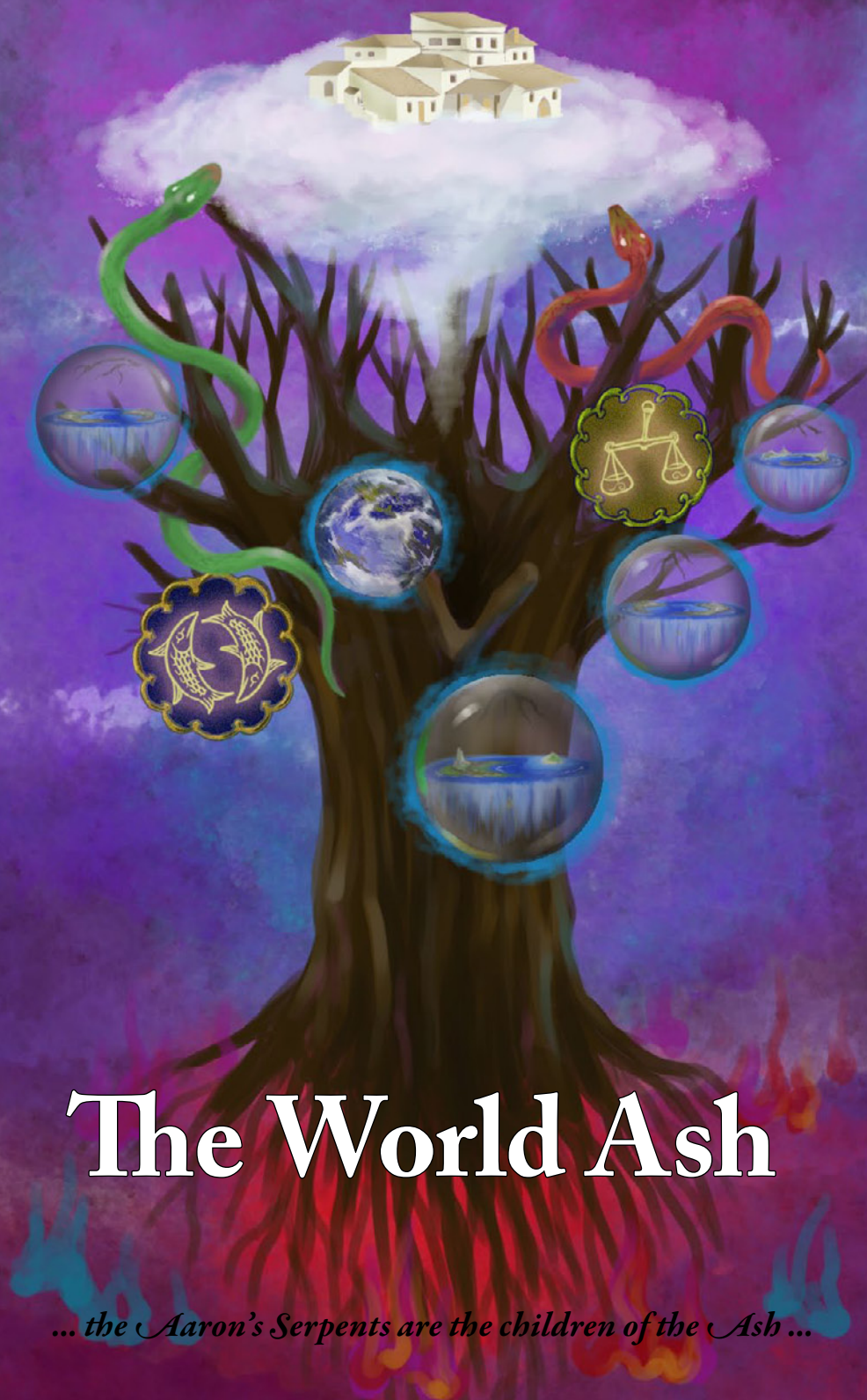
"Congratulations," said Nilaia. "You have corrupted your first soul; you have won a victory for the Fallen. How does it feel?"

"... It hurts," said Forchas, after a pause.

"Of course it hurts," Nilaia answered. "It always hurts. It hurts terribly. This is Hell."

—from *Children of Heaven*, by Martin Elliott





# The World Ash

*... the Aaron's Serpents are the children of the Ash ...*



**F**ROM THE WORLD Ash hang billions of worlds, but scarcely two hundred and forty have been found.

It is like this:

Out on the immensity of the tree, where rivers of wind, and snow, and fire run; where wasps the size of city blocks do fly, and alien birds soar; where the only visible truth is the vast expanse of bark and branch and leaf beneath your feet, there is no simple exploration. What seemed an easy shot when you last saw the Ash from afar — when you stood on a world and sought out other worlds with a telescope, or flew far from the Ash to orient from the sky — becomes an impossible tangle of possible paths, like the most confusing wilderness, when you stand upon its flesh.

Thus, to the Powers, only the worlds named in the *Compendium of Journeys* are yet known; and to Heaven, scarcely more.

If you stand far away — if you fly to the Weirding Wall around the world and look inwards — it will seem to you that over *there* are worlds that have already fallen to the enemy; worlds that have frayed and withered, or fallen from the tree like rotten fruit. And over *there* are whole galaxies' worth of worlds that even the Angels have not found: worlds untouched by the politics of Hell and Heaven and the gloaming passage of the Excrucian Horde, because the paths that lead thence are not known.

Closer in and squinting hard, you may see the paths from Earth to Venus, or to Mars; to the fire on the Ash that is Alpha Centauri; and to the other reachable worlds. And it is easy enough for those who walk the Ash to find their way *towards* Heaven or towards Hell — to, if

they reach not those ultimate immensities, move in their direction.

In a nearly infinite Creation, most of the universe is not known.

It must be strange — Ianthe thinks, and I agree — to live on those alien, primeval worlds, where the substance of existence may end without any knowledge of the cause. Where one day there may be *Komm* and *Iax* and the next, *nonesuch*, and with no word in that isolated place of the war that brought that end. Where one day if the Sun is slain by Excrucian hands, the fire that lights their world will die, and they never to know the truth of why, or even really understand what they had lost.

Now there are some — Firstborn of the Angels, one assumes, Attaris Ebrôt Appêkâ and others — who must have commerce with those worlds. For I cannot see how Firstborn could be Meaning and Existence and yet never know that meaning; to know meaning, and to embody meaning, seem intimately to be bound. And in like fashion do I imagine time — that Attaris, to be Attaris, must touch on the things of every world.

So I imagine. So it may be, for such personages as they. But for the rest of us it is not so.

Not Parasiel in his Chancel; not Genseric Dace, with his armies; not one, that is, of the multitude of great and alien things who exist and cast forth their light and shadows on the world, is given intimate knowledge of every world and the paths thereto save as necessity commands. They illumine and they darken all, but they do not see every manifestation of that shadow and that light.



# The Light and the Dark

**T**HE LIGHT is that which stands in clouds of radiant glory and looks away from life.

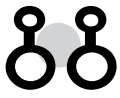
The Light loves you. The Light knows you.

*She was the wall between death and our house.  
And death was strong enough to take her  
But not to climb that wall.*

—on the tombstone of Tang Wen-jiing



*The Light makes gardens in empty places.*



*The Dark's obligations are to humanity,  
but the Dark may take joy in any voice, so  
the Magisters of the Dark surround them-  
selves with quasi-human things.*



*"I will give you this Creation," said  
Seimelkhe, "and all the power there is in  
it, if you but give me the cup you hold in  
your hand."*

*"This does not tempt me," said Galeid.*

*—from Legends of the Nobilis, by Luc Ginneis*

But the Light will not *see* you. It will not hear you. You are tainted by the gross physicality of life.

It knows you in the perfection of your soul. It knows you in the deep truth of you. It knows things about you that you've never had the chance to live out, nor never will.

It is equations on gematria.

It is a dream of humanity made perfect through good law.

It does not know the tangled mess that life of necessity becomes.

The Dark is the knotted twiggly horror in the gut of the human condition.

It's reckless.

It's cognitive errors and the death-fear. It's carelessness and small-minded negligence. It's the animal that lives in our flesh. It's the fact of having flesh at all.

The Dark is everything that makes us what we oughtn't be.

It's our folly.

It speaks with our own voices.

The Dark will hear you. It'll more than hear you. It'll parrot you back at yourself. Maybe just the parts you say aloud. Maybe the parts you didn't mean to say at all.



The Magisters of the Dark can have grandeur to them, but to tell you the truth, I think that's our own pride. That's the part of us that wants our dark and twisted and grieving side to be something awesome and magisterial, echoing back out. I think if we weren't so proud they would be as monkeys and parrots to us, chattering back in laughter what they've heard us say.

I could be wrong.

Maybe the side of us that walks in emo really *is* that grand.

The Dark loves every human voice. A little outcast girl is as fab to it as a President — maybe more so, since she needs more help to let her heart's voice free. It wants everyone to unleash that voice, you know, to stop holding themselves in, to live free and crazed and wicked as the beasts are wicked and an equal to everybody else.

The Dark will set you free.

The Dark will hold you up as you try to fly, will help you get farther and farther from land, and then it will drop you; for the only thing more beautiful to the Dark than your freedom is your using that freedom to overextend yourself and die. Or, to kill yourself in folly or despair, or to tumble helplessly from the ruined cliff of your own ideas.

*Human success rests on subverting the natural order of things—on replacing an ever-more-strained conceptual space with the latest, flashiest ontological model. Human existence derives from the natural order of things—on that same conceptual space. To describe this process as unstable understates the case.*

—from *Principles of the Dark*,  
by Merriweather James

*I had a gun. I was going to kill him. I was.*

*He did not flinch when I drew on him.  
He just whispered a name.*

*It was my name. Not the name I had given him. Not the name my mother gave me. Not any name I'd ever heard before. It was my real name. It was the name God had for me, in the quiet of his soul. It was the name that people live their whole lives not knowing, and I can't imagine how.*

*I don't know whether I was crying from sorrow or from joy, but by the time I had stopped, he was gone.*

—from *Night Hours*, by Madeline Bacall,  
writing on the topic of the Light



*Light Magister.*

*It is possible to convert a human into something else, and thereby avert the need for that human's suicide. For example, a human can become a Power, an animal, or—with a suitable transfusion of essence—one of the faery kind. One can also convert human life drop by drop into faceless units of labor; for this purpose, the Dark invented money.*

—from *Principles of the Dark*,  
by Merriweather James

*Everyone around you has consented to the reality you live in.*

*That is why they must die.*

—from *Principles of the Dark*, by Merriweather James

The Dark doesn't want anyone to hold you back.

The Dark doesn't want anyone or anything to get in the way of your *living*.

And the Dark doesn't want anything to kill you in the end but you.

The Dark is the wind and the laughter that follows a falling suicide, down into the dark.

It doesn't really understand you, I guess I should observe. Not any more than the Light does. It's a mad celebration of who you are and your voice and your freedom and your suicide but it's too blinded by the dark to really give any meaning to it all. It's barely even aware of *itself* when it's with you, except inasmuch as you are aware of it. It's listening to the sound of you much more than your specific words.

There're few creatures in all Creation less capable of grasping that something you are trying to tell them is genuinely *important* than the Dark.

But that's okay, the Dark will say.

*You* understand you, don't you?

Isn't that enough?

The Light and Dark began in Eden. Adam and Eve and maybe Lilith if she existed were the only human things back then. They were the seed of an Imperial thing.

They were a change in how the Imperial things of the world were going to work.

Instead Eve bit the apple.





*The path of a Dark Magister is marked by  
folly and deep shadows.*



*Where the Light sets up its temples, things  
become more orderly.*



*It is the right of any Power of the Light to say: I am the Light, or any Power of the Dark to say: I am the Dark, when acting in service of their Code. They are the hands and eyes of the force that moves them, and it is considered humility—not pride—to set that identity above their own.*

—from *The Society of Flowers*, by Heather Williams



It taught her Light. It made the knowledge of self explode in her. It made the will to live, to strive, to be perfect burn inside her. And she could have made herself immortal then. But she wasn't ready.

She knew better.

It needed *time*; it was too soon, as precious as life was. She was still a child, she couldn't be immortal yet.

So she took the apple to Adam instead. It was the right thing to do.

You have to understand, it was the right thing to do. She couldn't have known. It wasn't her *fault* any more than it was his.

She didn't know there was something missing from her wisdom.

The Light never does.

So Adam bit the apple, and the apple taught him Dark.

He bit it and he spit out its seeds and the knowledge of the self exploded in him. He began to *want*. He began to *need*.

He suddenly had a craving to *decide* things.

He became wild with it.

He became a namer of things. He became a mad god of power. He was something incredible, back then, and he could have made himself immortal.

But he never did and he never would.

He was possessed by the Dark.

And while they endured and exalted in their transcendence, each to each, and went walking out for the first time into the vast and broader world, the First Lord of the Dark moldered and writhed up from the seeds Adam had left behind him. And he claimed Eden as a Chancel. He made their once-perfect home into the Sable Gardens. He seized and then seared the fruit of immortality away forever from the Earth.

How unforgivable, the Dark that cost us life unending!



*The first humans emerged from the Garden into a world of savagery and grime. Beasts and birds and fish hunted, and killed, and ate, and the ones most often eaten were the ones who harmed no others at all. The sky poured water and stony ice and jagged lightning down upon them and the thunder shouted its rage.*

*The first humans built themselves a shelter from sticks and leaves; and a fire from stones and wood; and they learned to kill what they wished to kill and protect what they wished to protect; and as Eve brought forth a child in suffering and pain, she said:*

*"Truly, this is an age of miracles."*

—from *Carryout*, by Emily Chen

*Creating worlds, Theresa found, was addictive. At night, when she set her work aside and stumbled into bed, she would dream of it: new shapes of reality, new styles of existence, new ontological and theological substructures on which she could build a cosmos. If it were not her work, she knew, and free, she would spend everything she had, and more, so she could keep on creating; and that would not be so bad, or such a waste of a lifetime.*

*Naturally, they had not perfected the process. Even the management had the humility to understand that—they were mere humans, toying with divinity. Some aspects of the universes they built were primitive, unrefined, and incomplete. These technical flaws paled before the simple truth of their efforts: that each creation caught all the subtle flaws in their beings and magnified them, that each weakness in Theresa's honor appeared a thousandfold in her work. That, in short, for all their beauty, the defining characteristics of Theresa's creations came not from her deliberate efforts but from the dark places in her heart.*

*All unaware of it, Theresa was building her own Hell.*

—from *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree*,  
by Presbyterian Harrah Jane





The Wild





*Wild-tainted human at the shattering of Alcatraz*

**T**HE WILD is solipsist. It is inward-turning, it is a knowing of itself. It cannot distinguish between the Wild and the world.

Its Magisters arise from nothing. They discover they have form. They discover they are bounded, finite creatures. And so they say: *in Creation I am a prisoner.*

Lo!

They look upon themselves. A dissonance arises. They are not as they expect themselves to be. They are not entirely natural to themselves in every part. And so they say: *the Wild is alien to the world.*

In this, they are of course correct.

That is, to analyze the Wild in these terms and see that they can only see themselves; that their every reaction is a reaction to themselves; that they are ultimately introspective creatures, is to see the obvious origin for their thoughts. But they are still Imperators. They are still primal creatures. If they say they are alien creatures, if they say that they are prisoners of Creation, then perforce it must be so.

They are occupied with their own being. It transfixes them.

*"Perception is not a passive process. It is part of the work that creates reality. I will demonstrate. In my hand, I hold an apple. At least, with the lights turned on, it is an apple. Now, if you will turn off the lights and tell me what I hold in my hand?"*

*"...four-armed Shiva the Destroyer dances in a wheel of fire. He stands upon the corpses of his enemies. Never-created, never-dying, ignorance-crushing, life-giving, death-giving, thousand-faced, thousand-named, the wearer of serpents and the tiger's skin..."*

*"Turn the light on."*

*"An apple."*

*"We prefer to leave the lights on at this Centre."*

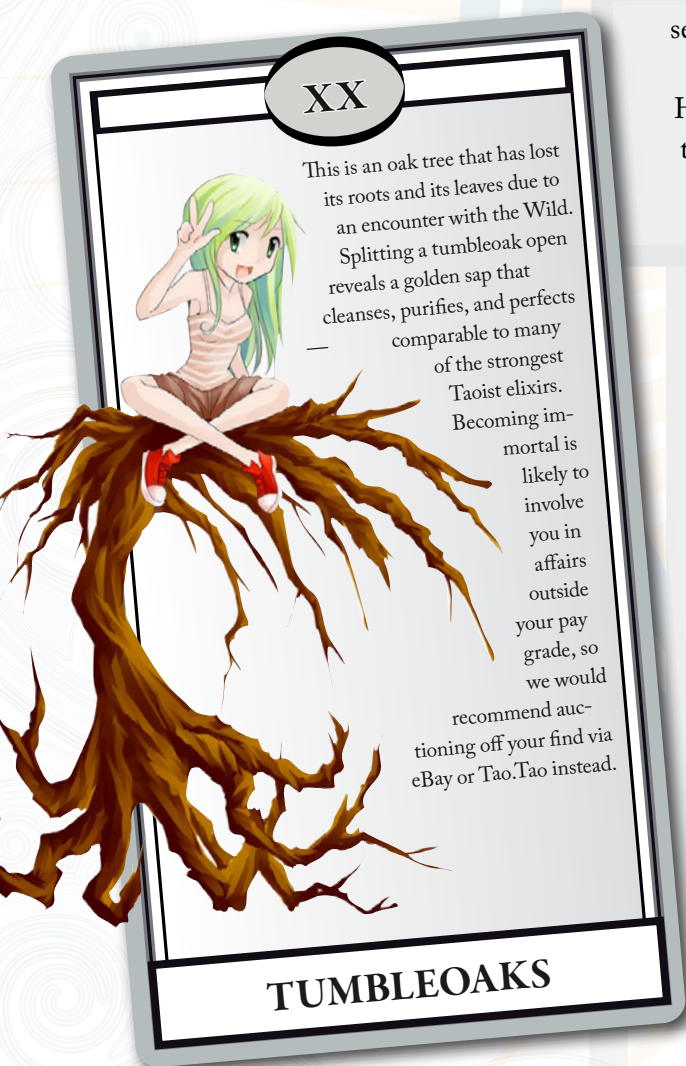
—from *Ringling*, by K.C. Danine

*In addition," Henry noted, "our University has a fine theozology department. Few faculty anywhere can rival our professors when it comes to studying and classifying new sorts of God!"*

*"How many kinds of God are there?"*

*"One, so far," Henry admitted, "but the Department has just recently constructed a ministerial accelerator that they believe will give rise to as many as seventeen forms of God heretofore unknown."*

—from *The Life and Death of Henry Serrano*, by  
Emily Chen



They find the hints of structure in their essence and unfold them into laws. They become creatures of absolute dedication to the rules they find inside them; or perhaps they've always been.

What is hurtful to them is dross, waste. To allow the existence of their enemies in the world is a self-destructive habit that they would like to kick.

What is helpful to them, of course, is right and good and just.

But fundamentally and symmetrically, as it is necessary that they be, they are *fair*. They are absolute and unwavering in extending their philosophy to all.

*You* are a prisoner in Creation. *You* are an alien to the world. *You* must find the hints of structure within you, insists the Wild. You must unfold it into law. Sanity is a prison. History is a prison. Humanity is a prison. You are caught within its web.

The Wild dreams to set you free.

Where the Wild walks things unroot themselves and become self-contained. Symbols bleed into reality. Things stop justifying themselves to one another.

Flowers pull free of the ground. Trees shake off their leaves. Humans discard their faces, grow extra arms, and turn their speech to fire.

Walls dissolve. Roads twist upwards into the air.

Unreadable icons burn into being from the ether and hang in place, as if to explain (without success) the madness that hangs around them.

*I have no motivations. I am a word; I am a note in a song; I am a day, a week, a month, a year. I proceed from my beginning to my end because of what I am and not because of what I do. To speak my true name is to know how my life will end, how it began, and what I will do for every moment in between. This is not a curse; this is my freedom.*

—Bhradkaya Kalluri, *Power of the Wild*



The background is a complex, abstract texture. It features swirling, organic patterns in shades of deep green, forest green, and dark purple. The texture appears to be created with heavy brushstrokes or a similar artistic technique, giving it a sense of movement and depth. The colors are most vibrant in the center and fade into darker tones towards the edges.

# The Deep Mythic and the Spirit World



**I**N THE PRIMITIVE days of life and mind there were no easy distinctions.

Gods found themselves born into the world in the primeval state of the amoeba, the virus, and the mold. They were tangled gods, on the border between life and death, splitting and recombining, twisting about one another, unable to say exactly where one ended and another began, not because they were blind, but because of a genuine ambiguity in their forms.

We see this through the lens of science, squinting back, as the emergence of single-celled prokaryotes from the inanimate —

The dead world, beginning to waken to a state of war.

Listen, for this has always been the truth of life: that it hungers for the death of other life. That from the moment of its birth it seeks to consume the life around it, to subsume the life around it, to subdue the life around it and make it a portion of itself.

In the primeval tangle, the gods that were the greatest predators survived.

We know this — we should know this, at least —

Empathy was a latecomer to the game.

Empathy came hundreds, even thousands of rounds in. It didn't show up until life became restless at the murder of its lot and sought to take the game in a new direction. It didn't come into play until the minds of the world were stable enough, safe enough, fixed enough in their form that they could imagine being lonely; until the first victors had shown up, taking home the prize that was existence; until life had progressed far enough for its strongest representatives to declare successfully some boundaries to their selves.

The gods that came before it knew no loneliness. They were blind even to their misery, and they knew not the edges of their lives.

And so; and so; and so they struggled, for nigh a thousand years of world. The archaea-gods of Earth warred amongst themselves, and drank down all their children. Then there were the gods like algae, breaking forth upon the sea; and finally the New Gods, who learned the Idea "Cooperation" for the first time in the world, and made alliance, and imprisoned the bodies of their primeval forerunners in the mazes of themselves.

Suddenly the tangle of them at the lowest layers of the world was not war and death, but sex; or at least, war and death *and* sex, for they are still a very early sort of creature, and things to them are not entirely distinct.

These are the "True Gods" we know today, writhing, intertwined and tangled alien sentience at the bottom of the mythic world. To try

*"I am the five winds," the lady said, "and wherever a wind blows, there am I. My presence fills this mortal world. I am as pervasive as the air."*

*"Then you see every horror of the world," said Emmanuel Giriaume, "and do not act."*

*"As you say," she affirmed. "That is the nature of the wind."*

—from *The Shorter Road*, by Madeline Bacall



to pull them from the Mythic by force of attention is like catching the Ouroboros by the tail, or to drag out the phone company by pulling on a cord; your mind cannot hold them all, you drag up only one of their tendrils, one of their extensions, one of their pseudopodia<sup>†</sup>. Their edges blur back into the undifferentiated welter of everything else.

They are the baseline for the world. They are the breath that first was breathed into our world, the Earth, to make it live.

*The pentagram shifted; the earth-spirit rose; and Anacaona understood that she had made a horrible mistake. She had intended to call Xochitlpetl, the mountain flower, but her diagram was drawn in gold rather than yellow, and instead her work had called forth the hungry mountain, Nezahualpetl. Its jaws gaped wide.*

—from *Three Woman Poison*, by Michael Kay

<sup>†</sup> **ProTip:** don't actually do this to the phone company.



*John kept his eyes on the street in front of him. It was safely mundane. In the reflections off store windows, he sometimes caught a glimpse of the wild world behind him. He ignored it. If he forgot the world's boundaries, he knew, it would let glorious and monstrous things creep in.*

—from *Carnival of Shades*, by Michael Kay

## Properties of the Deep Mythic

- ☛ Its locations are ambiguous;
- ☛ Its boundaries are ambiguous;
- ☛ It is always devouring itself;
- ☛ It is always mating with itself;
- ☛ Its particulars have free will;
- ☛ Attention partially differentiates a thing from its environment.

*No sooner had I consented to wearing human form than these creatures began their chorus of demands. I realized — with dawning horror — that the shape was not enough; also, these perverse entities expected I wear clothes on all occasions, inhale the terrible excesses of their smoke, and eat the transubstantiated flesh of their once-embodied god.*

*"It is impossible," I told them. "What if I am fighting with a wolf of nakedness? Or need to use my unforgiven sins to purchase the amenities of Hell?"*

*They looked blankly at the reasonableness of my explanations; they gaped as I explained the stringencies of my daily life; they were adamant and troublesome, in those days, in the Garden of Modern Men.*

—from *Forgotten of Our Love*, by Madeline Bacall

Where is the Deep Mythic?

It is all around us. It is with us every moment. It is the movement that we cannot see. It is the seething sex and war of Things and Life and the pattern of them that is our underlying cause.

We blind ourselves to it because it is too big for us.

We cannot look at a wall and see a tooth of a principle of building. We cannot see how it is in the act of crumbling, how the ceiling and the floor do squeeze it. We cannot see it as a place of infestation for the insects in the walls. We cannot see how buildings themselves are cast up like the mountains from the restless earth, one great long rolling wave of City that is born, crashes against the shores of people, life, and stone, and dissolves away again. We cannot see how the molecules of the thing strive constantly to break their form. We cannot see how the concepts around it seek constantly to dissolve that wall back into the welter of other things, how it will — when we cease to give attention to it — be devoured by the larger structure of our home, be chewed and gulped and swallowed down by the visual field, flowing into the things around it and their edges and the idea of boundaries. We cannot see how its calm stability in our lives is under constant threat and will one day with certainty collapse. We cannot see the history of it, from the moment of the wall's arising to the day of its collapse. We do not know what happened to the brothers and sisters of the drywall at its core.

Life is a power of perception. Not canon, but philosophy.

And it makes things discrete. But even the things of human making are not discrete; and before the human things there is the ecosystem, in all its tangles.

It eludes the Gods themselves as it does us.

It would be a mistake to believe that they are to themselves things with discrete edges. They are as baffled as are we, though more accepting of it, at where they begin and end.

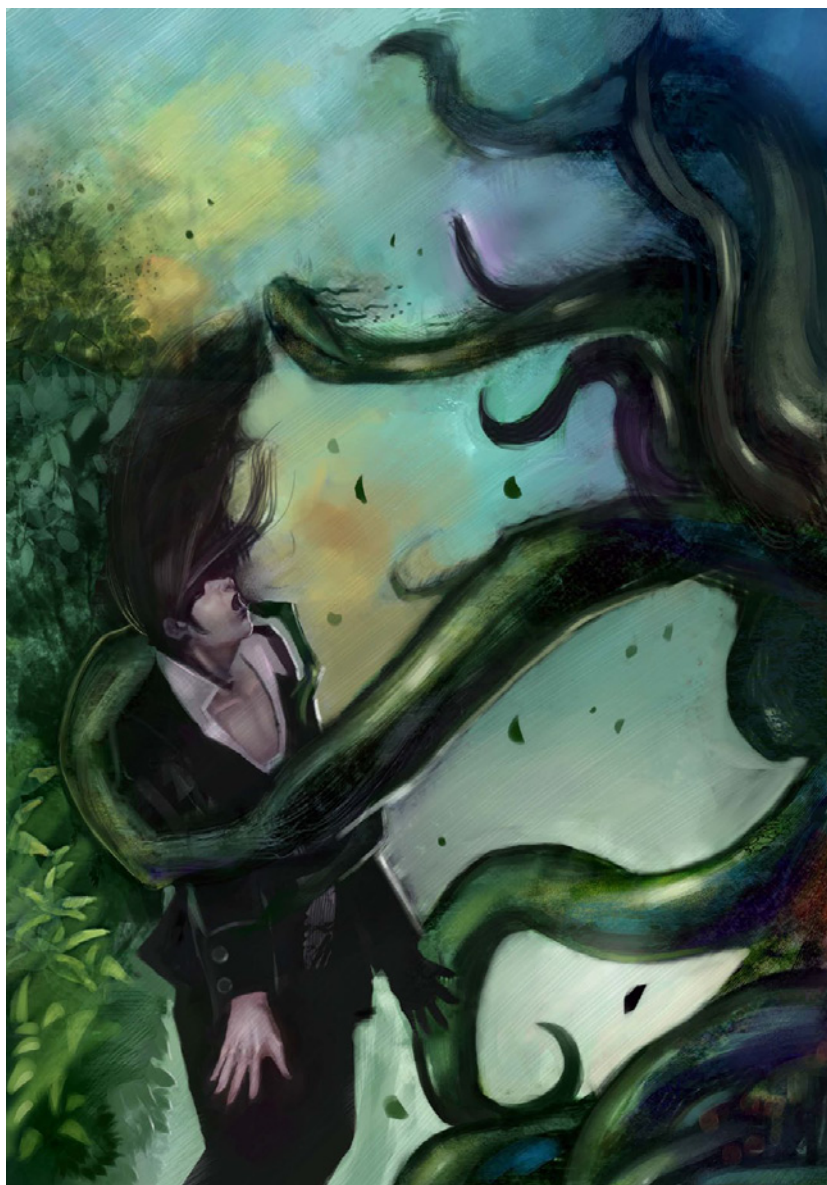
But their lives are lived in the deeps — in the awareness of this complexity, in a world where all the things are wound together, where all is flesh against flesh, castles and cities made of the same substances as life, where the soldiers and the servitors of the gods are as much their blood cells or their spoken words as individuals in themselves.

Their world in the Deep Mythic is one where the Gods live in palaces that are the bodies of the Gods — their own body, perhaps, or another's. Their armies are creatures grown of their own selves, and linked, if one could trace the lifelines back, to themselves (or other Gods). They walk in caverns hollowed out inside themselves, and look up at the fleshy sunbeat of their heart.

It is a world of unsettled time, rushing and flowing forward, sideways, and back. Their causality is as primitive as their form, shying not from growing in loops and tangles.



And everywhere they are in intercourse with one another, at war with one another, strangling and killing and devouring one another; though less now, and more carefully, for in these days there is a truce.



*Yill-Amoth devouring an Excrucian*

And beneath this?

Beneath the Deep Mythic is an empty place. Beneath the Deep Mythic is a world un-breathed-into by the divine. To us it is not comprehensible.

To us it is a timeless, placeless void. It hath not even the darkness, but undifferentiated light; or perhaps the light is the same as the darkness, the two not separate from one another.

### Descending

Characters can descend into the Deep Mythic from the Border Mythic by dint of intense and sustained concentration. It is possible to speed this with miracles, but a level 3 Auctoritas opposes any quick descent. To find one's way through into the Spirit World beneath is the work of a mortal lifetime; again, miracles can hasten this, and again, a level 3 Auctoritas opposes.

These barriers do not oppose Imperators, and are weak against Excrucians; the HG decides how quickly they travel through such climes.

And the sky and the sea and the earth are as one thing, there. And all moments are the same, there.

And there is something there that much resembles life, that has the likeness of life, that is like the body of the world. But it is a corpse-life, a death-life, a life that hath not the divine spark that causes things to be. And so we look upon it and we cannot see it, no more than it could see itself, and we only know that it is there because sometimes it bursts upwards and intrudes upon our world of forms.

The Imperators have chosen this as their battleground.

It is the deepest and most solemn place; that which we name the Spirit World.

There amidst the whiteness of the world their miracles accumulate and form the definition of the place. There they may answer the swift and bloody nothingness of the Excrucians with exultant choruses of power — there, an Imperator's movement in the Now, and in the Past, and in the Future accumulate, build up, form symphonies of miracle that hold the Excrucian force at bay.

There in the Spirit World they stand between the Excrucians and our Earth, and the Excrucians cannot pass; or, at least, they break through only rarely, and in small numbers, and sometimes only as shards and fractions of themselves. There the Imperators are more than the Excrucians' equals, but their superiors. And that is why they have chosen to leave our ordinary world behind, to abandon their bodies in Chancels and guarded by the Nobilis to let their minds roam into the Spirit World.

In our world, they are too vulnerable, and yet too precious — each in each — to ever be allowed to die.

*No one has ever lived on Tokhta Hill.  
No one will ever live on Tokhta Hill. If  
you ask the train company why there's a  
stop there, where the tracks sulk amid the  
cold wet grass, they simply look at you and  
say, "Some things are best left, dear girl,  
to those who run the rails."*

—from *Career Fables*, by Melanie Tumbarius

### Properties of the Spirit World

- ☛ What is, is what you see.
- ☛ Time colludes in curlicues and spirals.
- ☛ Beneath the *is* an endless coiling madness moves and unlives and undwell-eth in the dark.



# Let's Play a Game!

**Y**OU CAN USE this book to play a *game of pretend* — a game where the players work together to tell a new and awesome story of the Nobilis. Each of you will invent a Power and take on the role of that Power during play: an original, imaginary Power that's every bit as cool as Jameson Black, Power of Storms; Superstes Annabelle Zupay, of Trails; or even Diane Spinnaker, Power of Illumination, foremost among the Powers of Heaven on this Earth!

Often you'll pretend that you yourself have become a Power, that you've been claimed by some Angel, Devil, Magister, or God, but you're not limited to playing yourself. As long as you have fun playing your character in the game, you can imagine yourself as any sort of mortal, who becomes any sort of Power. Do you want to play someone heroic? Vulnerable? Roguish? Smart? The person you dream up and make a Power is your Avatar, your Player Character (or "PC") — the face and spirit you'll wear inside the game.

Sometimes in play you will pretend you *are* your Avatar, really getting into their head and feeling what they feel, for good or ill. Other times you will play more like an author writes, thinking about what'd be fun to play or where your Avatar's story should go and steering things in that direction.

Usually all of the players' Avatars serve one Imperator, and they are all of the Powers that serve that Imperator. This makes them, in the idiom of the Nobilis, a **Celestial Family (Familia Caelestis)** or a **Family of Powers**. Your Avatars will work together to defend your Imperator, your Chancel, and your Estates. You'll also take charge of various personal and collective projects, work to honor your Estates, and in general find a way together to live well in the world with the new abilities, responsibilities, and relationships that have fallen onto your shoulders.

As a player, you will build your Avatar using the rules on pg. 114. Together with the other players, you'll design a cool Imperator to serve



† Exclamation point herein used to represent a dangerously even tone. Also he didn't waggle his finger. However he was threatening my life so I feel entitled to dramatic expression.

*The rain of Daucetta was everything I had heard. A thousand snakes filled the jungle around me, scaled in patterns of red and black, green and yellow, even canary and crimson. They reared and hissed. They uncurled with great reluctance from the branches on which they hung, fighting the rain every step of the way, and then, one by one, they began to fall up into the sky. The soft rustling pitter-patter of snakes brushing against the leaves filled the air as the ophidians yanked themselves upwards. Far above, I could see the cloud beginning to form...*

*I took out my notepad and made a check mark. Four hundred and seventy-three wonders seen. Eighteen billion, seven hundred and thirty-two million, one thousand and eight to go.*

—from the Thought-Record of Jamie Todd

## XXII

These legless humanoids are the mythical creature most likely to visit themselves unexpectedly upon your **Nobilis** game. Originally constructs of the Power of Fair Play, they have deviated from their original specifications and now tour the world in small groups ("malignancies") joining games without an invitation. Kanonoliths are outraged by rules violations and prime numbers and if sufficiently provoked will shatter the crust of the earth and allow your gaming group to fall into subterranean caverns both deep and vile; however, if you maintain equilibrium and are strict but fair in every ruling, they will eventually become disconsolate and depart, hooting mournfully and whispering in eerie voices about their experiences in play. Kanonolithic invasion is not limited to games of **Nobilis**; board games, in particular, are comparably their prey.

## KANONOLITHS

and a cool Chancel to rule. You'll think about your character's Estate and their personality and you'll talk to the other players — sometimes informally and sometimes using formal rules — about who your character is and what they do.

One special player will be the **Hollyhock God**, also known as the HG, the Game Master, the GM, the Storyteller, or the Guide. The HG is set apart. They have no Avatar. They are not an immediate part of your Familia Caelestis. Instead, their job is to handle everything in play that is not an Avatar. Their job is to help you explore the lives of your Avatars by designing and playing the world in which they live. Usually the HG should be a serious Nobiliser who understands everything in this book, but you can make a newbie player do the job if you want to throw them in at the deep end!

## How the Game Works

A game of **Nobilis** is a conversation. Like all conversations, it's easiest to do in person — e.g., sitting in comfortable chairs around a table — but you can do it on the phone, or using mail, or on the Internet, and each of those modes

of conversation has unique benefits of its own.

It's a storytelling kind of conversation, a group brainstorm kind of conversation, a collaborative fiction kind of get-together. While you're playing **Nobilis** you'll tell people what your Avatar does, and they'll tell you what their Avatars do, and the HG will tell you what's going on in the world; and the rules of the game





will help you fold all this up into an interesting, engaging, challenging experience or story.

The rule that sets the baseline for the game is this.

You can always have your Avatar do a *reasonable, acceptable action*. That is — you can always decide that your Avatar should do something; and say that; and if the HG agrees that it's reasonable and acceptable, and nobody else speaks up to object, then your Avatar does that thing!

For instance, if your Avatar is going to eat a cheese sandwich, please. Go ahead. I mean, it's not a cheese sandwich of fate, guarded by all the forces of Hell, right? It's in front of your Avatar, and nobody's fighting to pin you to the ground and starve you, right? It's not a metaphor for some weird power fantasy, it's not the keystone of some ancient prophesy, it's not the cheese sandwich that gives you absolute victory once consumed, it's just some *food*, right?

Then do it.

Eat the *heck* out of that sandwich.

But what if you want to do something that isn't so reasonable? That your Avatar might not be able to do? What if it's only *arguably* reasonable, outright unreasonable, or even *unacceptable*? To have your Avatar do something like *that* you must use a **Trait**.

Traits are things you buy for your Avatar, spending a limited pool of resources. Each Trait gives you the power to have things your way, at least to a limited extent. The most important Traits are the four **Attributes**, which allow you to perform miracles; **Bonds and Afflictions**, which construct your character's identity; and **Gifts**, which give you miscellaneous natural abilities like luck, immortality, or the power of flight.

Your Traits are what give you the power to say, "Oh, my Avatar can definitely do *this*," even when it's something more impressive than eating a sandwich, and have it be true!

Let's talk about your Avatar's Attributes.

Each of the four Attributes comes with a list of effects, scaled from 0 to 9, that it might allow your Avatar to do. For instance, **Aspect** is the Trait of the body and the mind. Just for *starters*, it lets you ...

- ☛ **Level 0:** Do ordinary human things, particularly well!
- ☛ **Level 2:** Win an Olympic medal!
- ☛ **Level 4:** Catch a bullet!
- ☛ **Level 6:** Swim safely in molten lead!
- ☛ **Level 8:** Jump between continents! Shoot down the sun!
- ☛ **Level 9:** Prune a mountain range, cutting away the peaks that you don't like!

(For more on the cool things Aspect lets you do, see pg. 178.)

*A Statement does not simply become true on its own. In a higher plane of existence, a crack team of angels must vigorously crank the handles and push the weights to stir the great Truth Machine into motion. Then they must flap their wings vigorously to blow the statement through the machine and render its truth value operational. Making statements false is almost as difficult, but that process is outside the scope of this work.*

—from *Applications of the Book of Ezekiel in the Evaluation of Boolean Equations*, by Michael Kay

*"I shall perform miracles," stated Alrikson Dodd, and nothing would deter him. He studied at the feet of the angels. He bargained with the damned. In the end, he retreated to his workshop and built a strange and fabulous device. "This," he said, to the waiting world, "is a device that can perform wonders that have no explanation: miracles! Feats that defy science!"*

*"What shall you do with it?" asked the world, breathlessly.*

*"Two things," said Alrikson Dodd. "First, I shall make myself fabulously wealthy and influential."*

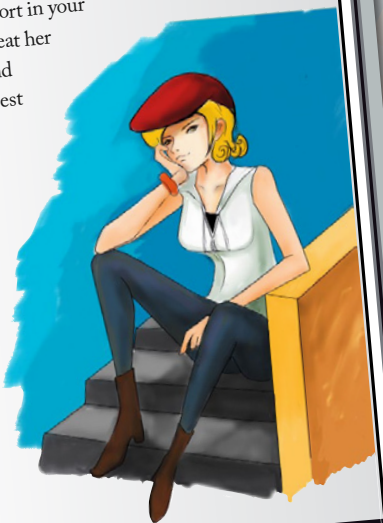
*"You would use miracles for that?" cried the world. "Inexcusable!"*

*"Second, I shall live my life without making excuses," answered Alrikson Dodd.*

—from *Parables for Our Modern Age*, by Jackie Robinson

XXIII

This Power is an avid **Nobilis** player and HG, and is the Power most likely to attend **Nobilis**-related events at cons or respond to open calls for players or HGs. Her appearance and participation are likely to be innocuous; however, she is a gamer of intimidating levels of skill and is also likely to stop playing unexpectedly either because your mortal skills are inadequate to her or because she has important Noble duties elsewhere. If you have Ianthe Falls-Short in your game, please treat her with respect and give her your best performance, but be careful not to make your story contingent on her regular attendance!



IANTHE FALLS-SHORT

Each of your Avatar's Attributes is rated from 0 to 5, and that lets you do miracles up to that level more or less any time you like. For instance, with Aspect 4 or 5, you can catch as many bullets as you like! Even Aspect 2 is enough to make you a top research scientist, bestselling writer, and Olympic-caliber athlete in every sport.

Each Attribute also has a pool of around 5 **Miracle Points (MP)** associated with it. You can spend these in clumps of 0, 1, 2, 4, or 8 to enhance the underlying Attribute for a single action<sup>†</sup>. So any time you want to do something that falls under one of your Attributes, all you have to do is make up the difference between the Attribute level and the effect level with your MP. If you have Aspect 0, for example, and you want to win an Olympic medal in the sport of your choice, or conduct important scientific research, or pen a quick bestseller, you just need to spend 2 Aspect MP (**AMP**). Aspect 0 + 2 AMP = the ability to do a level 2 Aspect feat.

Almost everything you'd want to do in the game can be done in this fashion.

Do you want to call a friend on your cell phone? That's a reasonable, acceptable action. But wait, you're wrestling with a giant snake, and it's got your arms pinned! So maybe you'll use a level 3 Aspect effect instead.

Do you want to eliminate the human capacity for lust? That's not reasonable and it's probably not acceptable! You might not be able to! But if you're the Power of Lust, or Capacities, or Emotions, or Drives, or Interaction you can do it declaratively with a level 8 miracle of Domain! That means, if you have Domain 4, you'd just need to spend 4 Domain MP — Domain 4 + 4 DMP = 8!

Everything in the game uses, emulates or ties in to this basic system. Bonds and Afflictions make your miracles more powerful and help you recover MP; Gifts work like Aspect, Domain, Persona, and Treasure miracles but they're chosen in advance; and complicated mundane actions like being a secret agent or top chef use an Attribute-and-MP-like system, the **Passions and Skills** system, covered on pg. 150.

## The HG and the Game

The HG alone has no Traits; instead, the HG is responsible for describing the world around the Avatars and the effects of the Avatars' actions. They're the only one who can really say *what happens* or *what's going on around you* as opposed to *what somebody does*, and they can do

<sup>†</sup> Though spending 8 MP at once hurts a lot, and will leave you wounded!





as much description as the other players will listen to. For instance, the HG doesn't need a Trait to decide that the Earth splits open and a giant reptile begins crawling out of its heart; they just need to describe it well enough that the players realize they're not kidding.

Often the HG will make up Traits for a random character in the world — a Non-Player Character, or NPC — and employ those Traits in a player-like fashion. That isn't really binding, though; it's just a useful tool for deciding what kinds of things can happen!

The HG also has the power to give out MP — “bonus” MP, which you can add to a pool of your choice; a “breath” of MP, 1 MP for each pool, which you'll get once in every scene where the HG adds serious trouble to your life; and even a full “MP refresh,” which resets all your MP pools to their initial value. There's nothing corresponding to this bounty of Miracle Points that the players can give the HG — the only thing the HG gets from the players during the game, except possibly free snacks, is the satisfaction of the players having fun and believing in or at least being appreciative of the world the HG describes.

*On the whole, I prefer the company of manufactured people.*

—from *Becoming Noble*, by Fayola Osiagbare

## Key Gaming Terms

These are some key terms that help you organize and understand events in play.

- ☛ **Scene.** A scene in *Nobilis* is like a scene in a play—a set of more or less continuous events. The HG can fast-forward time to skip past boring bits, or, more daringly, jump back in time for a flashback; either of these practices ends the current scene and starts a new one.
- ☛ **Session.** When the Hollyhock God and the other players assemble to play *Nobilis*, the game events of that real-life gathering comprise a “session.”
- ☛ **Story.** A story is a set of game events with a logical beginning, middle, and an end, usually spanning 1-5 game sessions. Every story begins with an MP refresh for all of your Avatars.
- ☛ **Campaign.** A campaign (or “series”) is a set of stories that have the same “main characters” and general continuity. When all the players make up new characters, the HG makes up a new version of the game universe, or both, the result is a new campaign.

- ☛ **In Character (IC).** When a player is speaking as their character would, describing the character's actions, or thinking like their character, they are considered to be "IC".
- ☛ **Out of Character (OOC).** When a player is not IC, they are OOC. For instance, discussions about who is going to order pizza for the players are OOC. Humorous comments about the events of the game are also OOC, unless they come from a PC and not a player.
- ☛ **Hollyhock God (HG).** The player who describes the game world and decides what happens in response to player actions is the HG.
- ☛ **Player Character or Avatar (PC).** This is a player's avatar in the game world — a unique Power of their design.
- ☛ **Non-Player Character (NPC).** This is any other person or person-like entity in the game world, particularly when the HG is using them as a foil for interacting with the PCs.

## The Language of Miracles

These are the basic Nobilis-specific terms you will use to talk about miracles in play.

- ☛ **Simple Miracle.** This is a miracle that costs 0 MP.
- ☛ **Normal Miracle.** This is a miracle that costs 1 MP.
- ☛ **Hard Miracle.** This is a miracle that costs 2 MP.
- ☛ **Deep Miracle.** This is a miracle that costs 4 MP.
- ☛ **Word of Command.** This is a miracle that costs 8 MP and wounds you.
- ☛ **Miracle Level.** This is the numeric power of the miracle you use — your Attribute plus the MP spent.
- ☛ **Miraculous Action.** This is an action that uses the power of miracles.
- ☛ **Mundane Action.** This is an action that does not.
- ☛ **Imperial Miracle.** An Imperial Miracle is like a story told by an Emperor unto the world. When you act in accordance with that story, you can perform powerful miracles without relying on your Traits. Powers have access to Imperial Miracles through social interaction with Emperors and through the Treasure Trait.

See also the descriptions of reflexive actions, sustained actions, miraculous edge, Strike, and Auctorita, below.



## Conflicts Between Actions

Sometimes two actions are in conflict. You'll spend an Aspect 3 miracle to go for the gold medal and so will I. Only one of us can win!

In such cases the higher miracle level wins. It obliterates the lower-level miracle. If there's a tie, the HG decides who should win — choosing “the defender,” if they think someone is basically defending themselves; “the most reasonable victor,” if they don't; or, if both measures fail, choosing whomever they'd like or at random.

Indirect conflict is a bit trickier. If we're not running to *win*, but just to run our best race, then both of our miracles can *work* — but in the end, one of us still finishes first. In such a case, the higher-level miracle still “wins,” but the HG decides how much the two effects impair one another. In a footrace, the answer is “not much;” no matter how hard I run, your running speed is basically unchanged. In a tug-of-war, the answer could be “quite a bit” — the harder I pull the less effective your pulling on the rope becomes! The key to winning a miraculous battle is learning to blunt the worst parts of a higher-level miracle with a lower-level miracle, while still accepting that it wins.

If you expect to need it, you can always use a higher miracle level than your described effect requires. For instance, it's very clear from the rules on pg. 180-181 that an Aspect 3 miracle can win any mortal footrace; an Aspect 5 miracle would be massive overkill even at the Olympics. But you're *allowed* to use an Aspect 5 miracle to go for the gold, and you don't even have to use the extra abilities it gives you — you can say “I'm using Aspect 3-level running so that I don't seem *too* awesome, but pumping it to a miracle level of 5 in case another Power gets in my way.”

## Auctorita, Miraculous Edges, and Strike

**Miraculous Edge** can shift the balance between two miracles. It helps you win miracle contests — to the extent that your miracle is incompatible with another miracle, the hostile miracle is effectively [your Miraculous Edge] levels lower. You'll usually get Miraculous Edge from “the Divine Mantle,” a trick that high-Domain Powers can use, but some Imperators and Excrucians have natural Miraculous Edge.

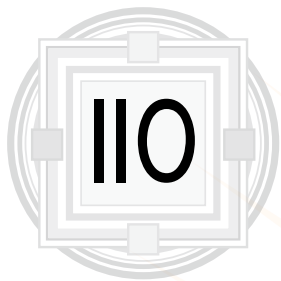
**The Auctoritas** is an even stronger tool. Each Auctoritas protects something — a person, place, thing, or effect — from miracles. The part of a miracle that goes up against an Auctoritas just plain doesn't

*“The rules of the game are simple,” Scott explained. “First, you pretend to kill me with this stage dagger—as you see, when pushed into flesh, the plastic blade retracts into the hilt. Then, in retribution, my three hired thugs will tie you into a sack and throw you into the river.”*

*“It seems somehow asymmetric,” Andrea observed, her forehead wrinkling.*

*“The house always has an advantage,” Scott answered, “but this should not interfere with your enjoyment of the game.”*

—from *A Personal History*, by Emily Chen



*"I cannot shoot you, Adrian."*

*"Ah," he said, and smiled. "So there is still love in your heart for me."*

*"No," Colleen answered, and shook her head. "It's just, the bullets don't seem to work."*

—from *Doorknobs*, by Emily Chen

work. Your various Afflictions are protected by Auctorita, and you can invoke "the Auctoritas Magister" to protect yourself or something you're watching over more generally. A few rare creatures have a natural Auctoritas Magister.

**Strike** is something you can add to a miracle to overcome or ignore these effects. If your Strike rating is higher than the rating of an Auctoritas, you ignore that Auctoritas. It also functions as Miraculous Edge: when it comes to defeating a hostile miracle, you subtract [the higher of your Strike or your Miraculous Edge] from your opponent's effective miracle level.

## Mundane Actions and Miracles

Mundane actions have their own scale — their own ratings for actions. When mundane actions come into conflict, you'll compare their ratings as you would the ratings of two miracles.

Some low-level miracles come with free mappings onto the mundane scale. For example, an Aspect 2 miracle is a high-end mundane action. A Treasure 1 miracle offers an easy way to enhance a mundane action.

In these cases you can look at the miracle to get a mundane rating, and then compare that against a mundane action normally. If you can't do that?

**Miracles that don't explicitly relate to the mundane rating system automatically beat any mundane action in a direct conflict, no matter how low the miracle level is.**

It's like the way that characters in animated movies can't *really* fight the animator — they can fight the animator's self-insertion into the animated context, and whatever else the animator is doing that operates on that level, but if the animator uses an out-of-context power to erase or alter the mindset of the character, not even the coolest character has a mechanism for fighting back!

A lowly level 1 Persona miracle lets a Power bless or curse a mortal. This is a very weak blessing or curse — it is, in fact, one of the weakest miraculous effects you can actually *perform*. But it has no obvious mundane rating. That means that not even the best-trained mortal in the world can directly oppose it. They can work around it. They can mitigate it. That's indirect opposition, and, besides, the miracle is the curse or blessing's *existence*, not its individual effects. But there's nothing any mortal can do to stop the Power from applying that curse





or blessing, and it's beyond all mortal power to strip it away once it's applied. It's a miracle. Mortals are mortals. That's just how it goes!

## Projects and Destiny

In addition to miraculous actions, your Avatar has access to **Projects** — the myths and stories of their lives, told during play, that accumulate force over the course of time comparable to anything the Imperators or Excrucians can wield. Whenever you want to tell a world-breaking, world-changing, or just Avatar-defining myth of your character, you can build a Project for it — typically for absurd or self-serving stories such as:

- ☛ how I ascended to the throne of Heaven;
- ☛ how I became immortal;
- ☛ how I cleansed the Excrucian weapon, Colbrand, and made it once again a treasure of the world;
- ☛ how I learned to forgive myself for my crimes;

Or group Projects such as:

- ☛ how we conquered the mortal world, and nobody even noticed;
- ☛ how we found new worlds upon the Ash;
- ☛ how we saved Love, lost Love! from Lord Entropy and the Excrucian foe.

It's up to your HG how appropriate any given Project is for play, but that only affects pacing and not possibility — that is to say, any Noble may reasonably dream to conquer Heaven, but only in some games is this likely to happen in the scope of a campaign. In others, it will be barely begun when the campaign ends, or play out in the finale, or finish up in the first few sessions to allow time for other stories to begin.

## Project Maps and Destiny

You will draw a Project a little bit like a mind map. Each big idea or plot arc in the Project will be a **circle**. You'll draw lines connecting them when there's a flow of meaning or events between them. Inside the circles you'll write a bunch of short phrases that reflect events in play — things that happen, or things the players think about, that

*In the years since a shepherd found the Record of the Dawn, seated on a stone pedestal overlooking the sea, it had had many owners. Most of them were scholars and philosophers, drawn by the book's irresistible allure: a chance to understand the true nature of beauty. On this subject, the book was absolutely accurate, scientifically precise, and perfectly encyclopedic. A scholar could read the sections already uncovered as long as he or she liked; no danger lay therein. Near the end of the transcribed section lay the danger, and the mystery—for the Record of the Dawn is sacrosanct, not to be defiled by mortal eyes, and the first one to read any given word therein would turn instantly to dust. It is a statement on the nature of beauty, and the nature of scholars, that when the book came into Jordan's hands, over half of its text had been read, understood, and transcribed.*

—from *Tiabbal's Library*, by Sam Cavanaugh



are key to understanding the Project. Sometimes you'll place a "stone" or "mark" inside a circle, which means that something big has just happened to close out or change that plot arc or express that big idea.

**Project Destiny** accumulates in the circles when Project-relevant stuff happens in play. You need at least 15 Destiny in a single circle to make something big happen with the Project; that "something big" specifically allows you to place a mark in one circle, add a new circle to the Project, and, most importantly, narrate a meaningful event that moves the Project forward into the world of the game.

**Destiny (or Avatar Destiny)** is something that characters get by facing major life changes and by thinking about what things mean to them and their Estate. The way to get lots of Destiny is to talk a lot, and worry a lot, about what things mean to you — to respond to the unexpected with debate, and exploration, and a will to find and wrestle with uncomfortable truths. This is balanced against the fact that such considerations slow your reactions and compromise you when facing the enemies of the world. You can use Avatar Destiny to advance whatever Project you like, adding it to the Destiny in any circle to reach the magic number 15 and move that Project forward.

## Actions and Play

When actions get fast and furious and the stakes are high you'll use the following formal concepts to help make sense of how miracles interact:

- ☛ **Player Actions.** A single action by your Avatar consists of —
  - one miracle, using an Attribute, Gift, or some other Trait;
  - one mundane action,
    - something very simple like talking or walking; or
    - something complicated that uses the Passions/Skills or Bonds system; or
  - one mundane action *and* one miracle
  - After each player action the HG may act, including a description of what has just happened and what will or might happen if nobody stops you.
- ☛ **HG Actions.** The HG doesn't use mundane or miraculous actions; they just describe stuff, and can assign it whatever miracle level, Strike, Edge, or Auctoritas they like. That said, it's normal

*A top-secret F<sup>BI</sup> file proves that dragons walk the earth! This terrifying study records over 37 incidents where a "mountain-sized" serpent terrorized citizens of the United States, in one case stealing several Georgia houses and carrying them away upon its back. "My conscience could no longer tolerate concealing this information," said retired F<sup>BI</sup> agent Pippin Kingsley. "The people have a right to know that giant snakes live among us, and that they may or may not be friendly."*

—from the Choice News



for the HG to describe actions for NPCs involved in a miraculous conflict, and when doing so they should either limit them as PCs are limited or warn the players that they might not do so.

☛ **Reflexive Action**<sup>†</sup>. A “reflexive action” is something you can do at any time, or that the HG can decide to do on your behalf. Most reflexive actions are sensory, but some Gifts and Afflictions let your body, Estate, or spirit do things without requiring any conscious attention on your part.

☛ **Sustained Actions**<sup>‡</sup>. A “sustained action” is something that you start doing, and then keep on doing for a while. You can sustain up to one mundane or miraculous action while doing other actions and miracles. You can sustain two actions (mundane, miraculous, or one of each) but you can’t take any other actions until you stop at least one of the actions you’re sustaining.

☛ **Flurries**. In a *flurry* (of action) everyone who is interested acts at once. Then if anybody wants to modify their action based on someone else’s action or what the HG says, they can! Minor action revision is free, while major changes to what you’re doing may make your old miracle void and force you to pay for a new one. People keep revising their actions until either everyone’s happy or there’s a formal deadlock (which can be resolved by the HG or by everyone giving the HG their actions in secret); then everybody’s final action takes effect at once and the HG describes the outcome.

☛ **Interrupts**. When something happens that you absolutely can’t allow to happen, you can call for an interrupt. This rewinds time back to just before that action and throws you into a flurry of actions, which you can hopefully exploit tactically to stop whatever would have happened from taking place. You can’t interrupt flurries, but you can interrupt almost anything else!

☛ **Players Can Always Act**. As long as you have an Avatar, you can always use the action system to do something. You won’t necessarily know what to do, and you won’t necessarily succeed, and if there’s an obvious reason your Avatar can’t act, you have to deal with that reason before you can do anything else, but the only effect which stops the *player* from acting is something that kills their Avatar or otherwise makes them into an NPC. For instance, if your Avatar is possessed by a ghost, you can still use actions to try to cast the ghost out; if your Avatar is asleep when something

<sup>†</sup> Remember where you saw this part! Reflexive and sustained actions are going to come up a lot.



<sup>‡</sup> This is an important rule! Your life would suck if you couldn’t sustain at least one action, while you’d eventually just become an unstoppable roleplaying machine if you could sustain as many as you’d like. And sure, that last option might *sound* like a good thing, but next thing you know you’d be named Skynet or the Matrix or something and your cold metal heart would know no love.



XXIV

This is a Power made of a cloud of dust with the body of a train and the head of a bear. She is drawn to malevolently violated contracts, including fictional contracts broken within the context of the game. By all rights Lirrane should be easy to avoid. Her movements are preceded by minutes or hours by the appearance of her track; at best, she has two choices of direction at any given time. However, her track lays itself out so inconspicuously that a person may stand or lay upon it for minutes or hours at a time without noticing its presence. Once Lirrane locates a contract-breaker, she pursues them without relenting; they can earn a few hours, days, or weeks of safety by getting off the tracks whenever they notice them underfoot, but sooner or later they will look up to see Adrimorphous bearing down on them. Proffer a stale scone drenched in lemon juice to Lirrane as the full fulfillment of any debts or obligations remaining to you under outstanding covenants and she will depart, never to trouble you again.

**LIRRANE  
ADRIMORPHOUS**

terrible happens, you can use an action to try to wake them up; if someone turns you into a pig, you can use an action to try to undo the piggening!

## Everything You Need to Know to Build Your Avatar

Here are all the steps you need to take to create your Avatar and ready them for play!

☛ Figure out your **Character Concept** — the rough mental and conceptual design for an Avatar you think you'll enjoy playing in the game. You can come up with a Power concept on your own or you can use the Nobilis Lifepath System on pg. 118. Even if you don't use the lifepath system, you might want to check out the Contacts and Affiliations sections near the end, on pg. 143-145 — there are options there that lend depth to any Power.

☛ Optionally, write down a Project or two (pg. 111) to show the direction of your character's studies, projects, crises, plans, or programs of self-improvement.

☛ Spend up to 8 Passion/Skill Points (described further on pg. 150-160) on

- their mortal abilities (their Skills)
- their mortal goals, drives, and purposes (their Passions) and
- any weird natural advantages of their species (their Inherent Superiority)!

This should be enough for almost anybody — just pick more impressive Skills for more capable mortals, rather than spending more points — but if you're a pulp hero, some kind of inhuman creature, or just plain out of points, you'll have the chance to buy more Passion/Skill Points below.

☛ Divide 7 Property Points among Properties for your Estate (pg. 173).

☛ Spend up to 25 Character Points on —

- **Attributes.** Attributes are rated from 0 to 5, and cost 3 Char-



acter Points per level. Described in more detail on pg. 178-217, they are:

- **Aspect**, which you use for physical and mental miracles;
- **Domain**, which you use to rule your Estate;
- **Persona**, which plays with the meanings and boundaries of your Estate; *and*
- **Treasure**, which creates and empowers your weapons and other paraphernalia.

For example, you could spend 21 Character Points for Aspect 2, Domain 4, Persona 0, and Treasure 1.

☛ **Miracle Points.** You get 5 Miracle Points for each of these four Attributes for free. Each Character Point you spend gives you one extra MP per Attribute. For instance, if you spend 2 Character Points, you will have 7 Aspect MP, 7 Domain MP, 7 Persona MP, and 7 Treasure MP.

☛ **Gifts.** Gifts are custom powers, like incredible luck, teleportation, or the ability to fly. They cost anywhere from 1 Character Point to “more than you can afford.” For example, playing an immortal flying shapeshifter costs 8 Character Points, while absolute cosmic power costs an inaccessible 39. You can purchase as many of the Gifts on pg. 228-241 as you can afford and you can use the Gift creation rules on pg. 220-227 to make your own!

☛ **Secondary Domain and Persona.** You can buy Domain or Persona over additional Estates for 1 point per level, up to your primary relevant rating. For instance, with Domain 4, you can spend 1-4 points for 1-4 levels of Secondary Domain over another Estate. You can't buy a Secondary Domain or Persona of 0.

☛ **Inherent Superiority.** Each Character Point you spend buys you 5 Passion/Skill Points. If you ran out of points buying your Avatar's mundane Skills, or if they didn't start out as human but rather as something that needs substantial **Inherent Superiority** (pg. 160) such as a robot's toughness or a bear spirit's strength, you might want to spend a Character Point here. One Character Point should get you everything you're going to need here, unless you're talking about being the living spirit of Heaven or Hell or something, in which case you might need two.

☛ Divide 13 Bond/Affliction Points among your Bonds and Afflictions (pg. 161-172) —

**Nobilis and the MP System:** MP totals are not strictly in character — they are a game mechanical device. For the sake of realism and verisimilitude your Noble should not talk about them as if they were easily quantifiable: rather than having 4, or 1, or 0 MP left in a given Attribute, they are *strong*, or *weak*, or *running on empty*. Conversely, the distinction between miracle levels measures something real and present in the world. Each miracle level represents an order of magnitude of additional complexity and effort, based on actual observations of the Noble condition; thus, a character either *can* do something of a certain miracle level easily, or with a moderate effort, or with great difficulty, or they *can't*.



*The nature of a Power is eccentric; so therefore are their means of self-development. Sandra Erskine developed her legendary shapeshifting skill through rudimentary gene-therapy injections of the DNC of hundreds of species. Laurence Kimaiyo, on the other hand, spent endless hours in front of a mirror honing the skill of looking like something else, until finally he succeeded.*

—from *On Serving the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis



- things your character can't do;
- things your character must do; *and*
- things that drive your character to action.

These are negative qualities that give you MP when they cause trouble for you; positive qualities that you can draw on for Strike, Auctorita, or other useful effects; key indicators of what you care about; and, quite often, all three at once.

☞ Spend up to [your Treasure Trait] more points on Bonds, and note down what things you hope to use the Treasure Attribute to wield in play.

☞ Write down a “Domain Difficulty Chart” (pg. 193-194).

☞ Write down a “Persona Difficulty Chart” (pg. 204-205).

☞ Write down your health levels (pg. 321-333) —

- 2 Divine Health Levels;
- 1 Tough Health Level; *and*
- 2 Normal Health Levels.

☞ Write down that you have accumulated 0 Destiny thus far (pg. 341).

☞ Optionally pick 1-2 Destiny-yielding difficulties you are wrestling with as the story begins (pg. 347-349).

☞ **And you're done!**

*As the sky catches fire, Octavia will reach out and stop the world. For the first time since the bombs began to fall, there will be silence.*

*“It’s no good,” the djinn will say. “The missiles are launched. The world is dead. It just doesn’t know it yet. It doesn’t matter what you do—once you start time going again, everybody dies.”*

*“I don’t plan to start time going again,” Octavia will answer.*

*And that is how the universe will end.*

—from *24 Finales*, by Rannen Yedidiah







# Avatar Creation

*"It is widely known that the 'channelers' and 'psychics' who can discover your previous lives for you are frauds. Our service differs; it is subtler, and has a strong basis in quantum science. It works as follows: for eight tiny payments of \$19.95, we will re-engineer your past, creating the past life that you desire. Do you dream of ruling Egypt as royalty? Do you dream of striding across Sumeria as goddess and Queen? Would you like to be JFK, Marilyn Monroe, or Elvis? For just eight small payments, we can make it have happened, and no one need be the wiser."*

—from alt.reincarnation.services, USENET

**R**IGHT NOW YOU probably don't know who your Avatar is or what they're about. Maybe you have an idea — if you're an experienced Nobiliser, you might think, "Oh, I want to play the Power of Politeness" or "Oh, I want to have lots of Aspect!" — but even then you probably won't nail down everything for *sure* until the first few sessions of play.

That's what this section is for! To help!

The system we have for learning about what kind of Avatar you might want to play is the brand new and exciting **Nobilis Lifepath System**. It starts with you browsing the list of **Keys** below and picking two that you might be interested in — two questions or issues that catch your notice or attention!

Once you've picked your Keys, you can start building your Avatar.

## The Avatar Diagram

Your Avatar starts with a diagram — a representation of the forces active in their lives.

Take a blank piece of paper.

Draw five circles on this page — placing them like the pips on a 5 on a die, or like the endpoints and cross-point of an X. The outer circles should be large enough for 50 words of text.

The center circle will represent your Estate.

Each Key has a Heart, its central driving force, and a Shadow, that challenges it. The left two circles will represent the Hearts of your two Keys. The right two circles are their corresponding Shadows.



As you choose each Key, you will —

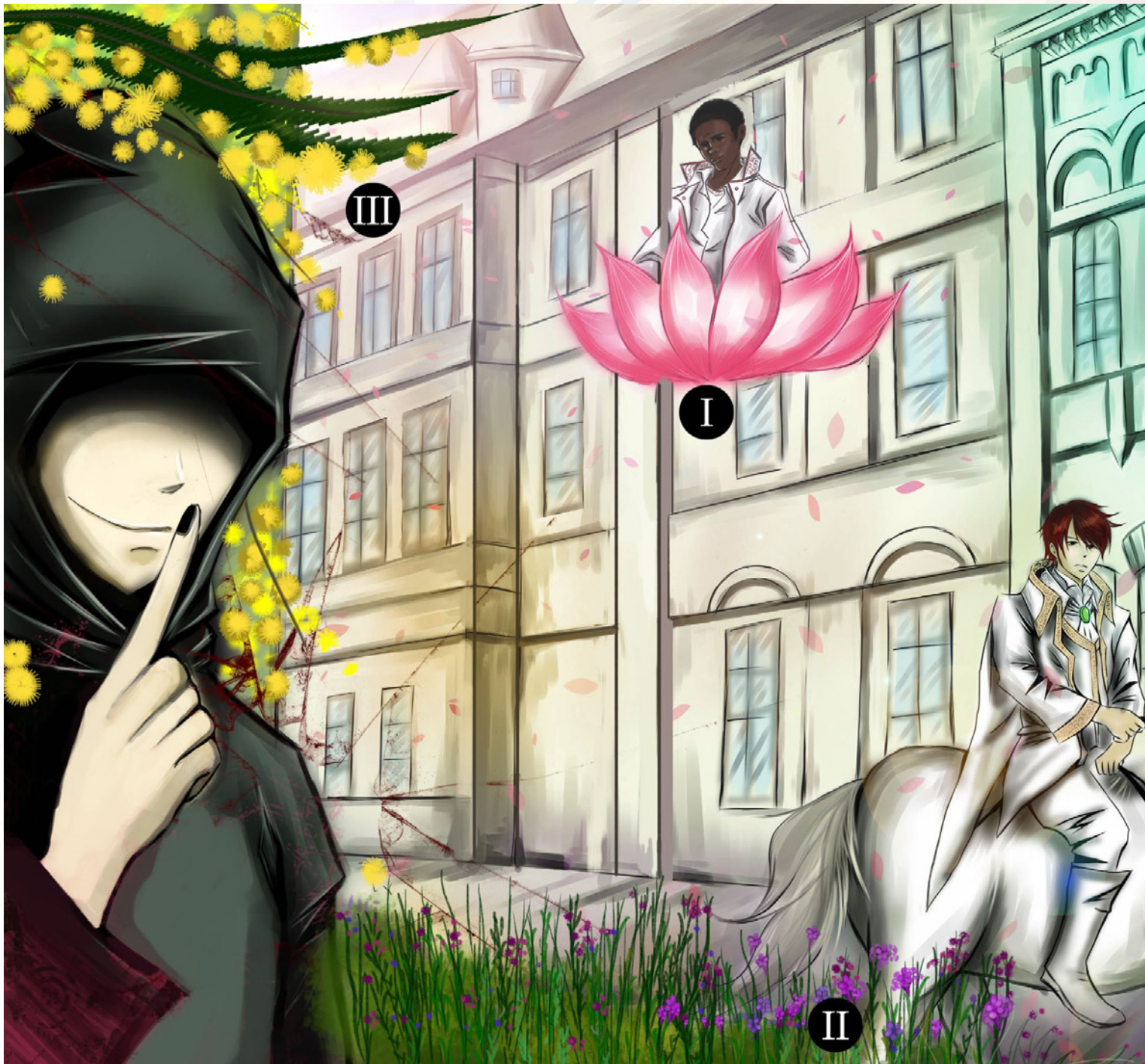
- ☛ Write the name of the Heart outside its circle
- ☛ Write the name of the Shadow outside its circle
- ☛ Connect the Heart and Shadow of the Key by a line
- ☛ Write the number of the Key above that line
- ☛ Write a blank bullet point near the top of the Heart circle. You'll fill this in as soon as you figure out what that Key actually means in your life — it'll be a short phrase that summarizes your role when you're dealing with the Key, like "prophet," "wanderer," or "retired spy."
- ☛ Write the specific bullet points named by the Key in the Shadow circle.

*To understand a person completely, you must first change them to match your specifications.*

—from *Reflections III*, by Viscount d'Armand

You'll add more to this diagram as you proceed through the Avatar Creation process.





## Lotus Flower (Key I) *Key of the Descending Angel*

You descend as in a flurry of wings from Heaven. You are resonant and powerful. You transform others and give them what they need to realize your will.

The Heart of this Key is named **My POWER**. It is your power to be a meaningful change in people's lives. The top

bullet point in the Heart will summarize your role here, such as:

- ☛ prophet
- ☛ healer *or*
- ☛ turns people into birds

The Shadow of this Key is named **My NATURE**. The stronger your Shadow gets, the less control you have over how





you change people — where the Heart gives you a conscious power to change others' lives, the Shadow of this Key makes you iconic, catalytic, and transformative as a function of your presence.

Write the following two phrases in the Shadow circle:

- ☛ glorious
- ☛ set apart

## Vervain (Key II) *Key of Something Powerful*

You are versed in the uses of power — both willing and able to transform the world according to your ideas. This is a Key of cunning, genius, greatness, and the will to power.

The Heart of this Key is named **MY IDENTITY**. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are when you wield power, such as:

- ☛ conqueror
- ☛ savior *or*
- ☛ industrialist

The Shadow of this Key is named **BURDENS**. It's your accumulated moral and practical obligations — the weight of everything you've done, and could do, bearing down on you. Everything you've conquered or saved and now have to protect; everything you could conquer or save that demands you do so. Write the following two phrases in the Shadow circle:

- ☛ bound by duty
- ☛ set apart

## Acacia (Key III) *Key of Something that Must Be Hidden*

There's something you can't share — something you're afraid to see, or to let others see!

The Heart of this Key is named **A DANGEROUS SECRET**. The stronger the Heart gets, the more dangerous the secret is. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize what you do when dealing with the secret, such as:

- ☛ keeping God's secret *or*
- ☛ denying my Excrucian parentage

The Shadow of this Key is named **...THAT HURTS TO KEEP**. The stronger the Shadow gets, the more you'd like to let the secret go. Write the following two phrases in the Shadow circle:

- ☛ painful silence
- ☛ set apart

## Clematis (Key IV)

### *Key of Something, Given Gifts*

You've been touched by grace. You've seen the true face of the universe — the giver of gifts unbounded, unearned, unasked for. You are blessed. The world is blessed. People are blessed. Under all its masks the world is awesomely, unshakably good.

The Heart of this Key is named **I Have Witnessed It**. You've *seen* the goodness of things. You're not just holding on to hope in the face of darkness: you *know* that there is a Heaven. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are when you are witness to that grace, such as:

- ☛ dreamer
- ☛ preacher *or*
- ☛ fallen from the path

The Shadow of this Key is named **Why I Doubt**. There is, or could be, something in you that doubts and rejects Heaven — something that turns you from the truth you have seen. Something that rages against Heaven, or against your own belief in it. Something that draws you to doubt or even fear the movement of grace in the world.

Leave the Shadow circle empty for now.

## Aconite (Key V)

### *Key of Rage*

Your life is shaped by a terrible, world-shaking hatred and fury. Is it your own or are you a pawn to someone else's rage?

The Heart of this Key is named **Rage, Hatred, or Fury**, optionally with a name in front (e.g. **Divrika's Rage**, if it is someone named Divrika whose hatred shapes you.) The stronger the Heart gets, the more elemental that fury. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are in this drama, such as:

- ☛ victim
- ☛ hero
- ☛ reformed monster
- ☛ struggling for control *or*
- ☛ trying to break free

The Shadow of this Key is named **What Lets Me Oppose It**. The stronger the Shadow gets, the more resources you have to oppose the rage that drowns you.

Leave the Shadow circle empty for now.







## Wild Oats (Key VI) *Key of Destiny Denied*

Your life is a whirl of *fun* or *pleasure* — wealth, fame, sex, admiration, or whatever it is you like. You have strong appetites and the will and the opportunity to indulge them!

The Heart of this Key is named **Hunger**. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are when indulging in your vice, such as:

- ☞ sensualist
- ☞ fame-seeker *or*
- ☞ miser

The Shadow of this Key is named **Why It Feels Empty**. The stronger the Shadow becomes, the emptier and more hollow pleasure feels.

Leave the Shadow circle empty for now.

## Star of Bethlehem (Key VII)

### *Key of Something, Changed Forever*

At the center of your life is some great mystery — a great love, a great tragedy, a great spiritual or personal experience, something still almost incomprehensible to you. It changed everything.

The Heart of this Key is named **What it Made Me**. It's about how *you* reacted to that mystery — how you're still organizing your life, even now, around that moment of grace or tragedy. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are when you're thinking about this, such as:

- ☛ inspired
- ☛ heartbroken *or*
- ☛ transformed

The Shadow of this Key is named **How It Changed the World**. It's about how important what happened *really* was — the stronger the Shadow, the more legitimately dramatic and world-shattering the event in question was. Write the following two phrases in the Shadow circle:

- ☛ I can't let go
- ☛ I'm committed

You'll also want to name what happened to you — perhaps just **The Mystery** — and write that name on the line between Heart and Shadow so that it's clear at a glance what it *was* that changed you and the world.

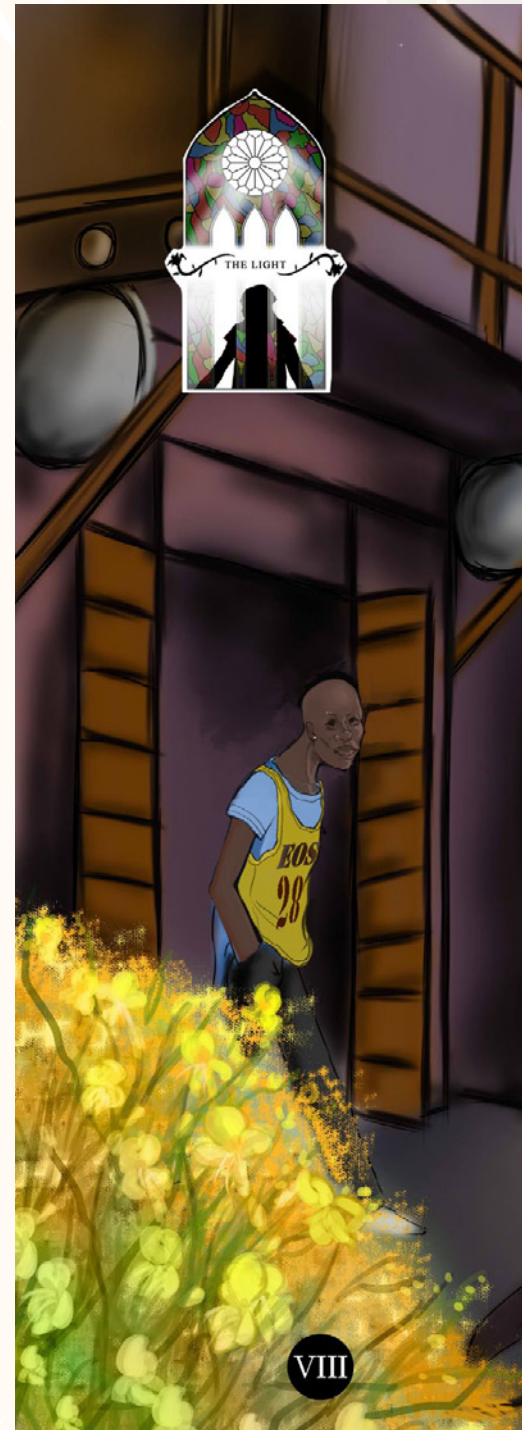
## Gorse (Key VIII)

### *Key of Something in Thrall*

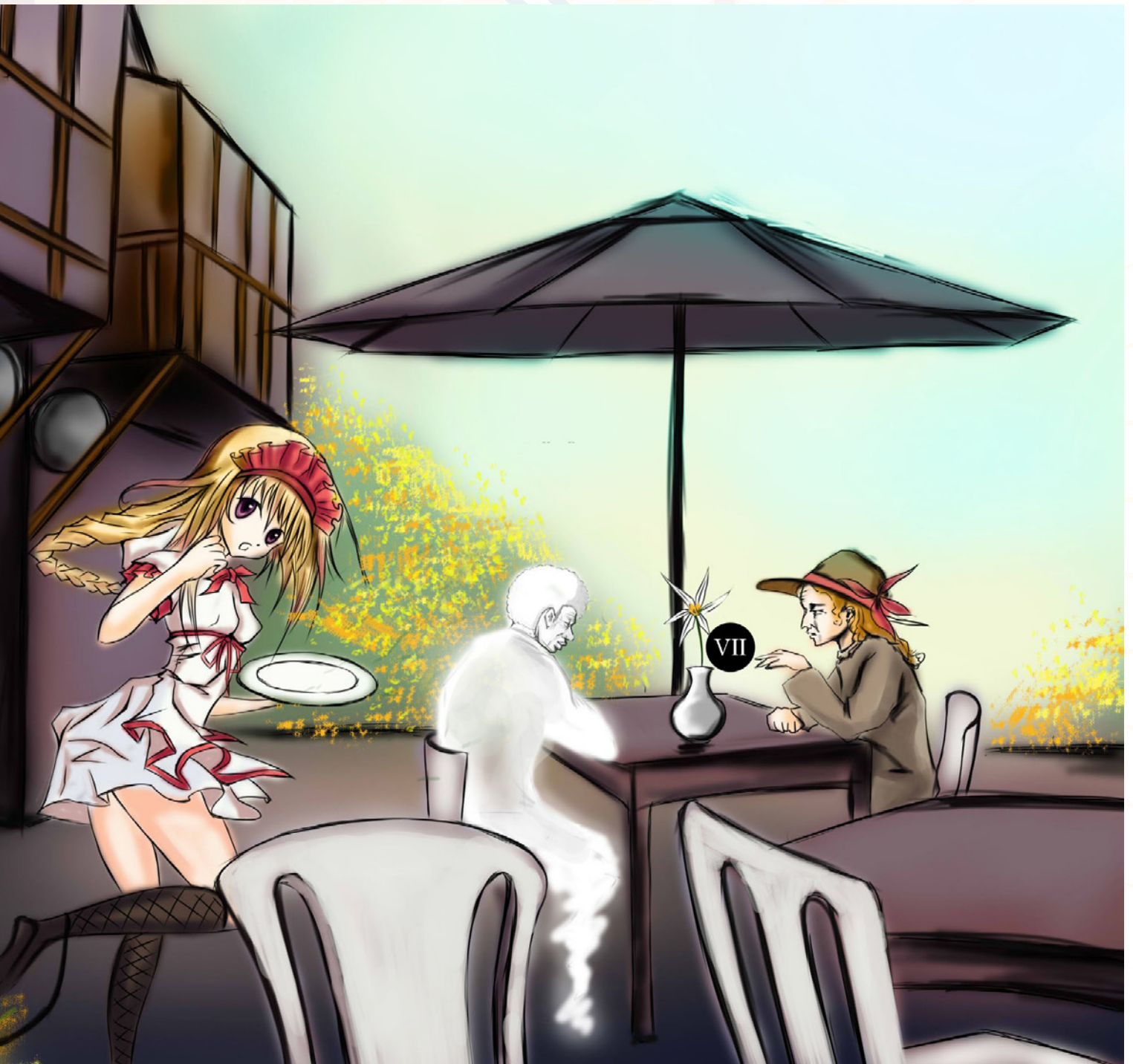
You're trapped! Something is binding you, exerting influence on you, claiming power over you — and you won't let it! Does that mean that you hate your Imperator and long to be free of them, or does it mean that some Excrucian or enemy has an unwanted hold upon your soul?

The Heart of this Key is named **Held in Thrall**. The stronger the Heart, the fiercer the struggle — the greater the will and power arrayed on both sides. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize how you are held in thrall, and by what, such as:

- ☛ Excrucian-bound
- ☛ Devil-bound
- ☛ soul-chained *or*
- ☛ pawn of Lord Entropy







The Shadow of this Key is named **Entangled with my Enemy**. The stronger the Shadow, the more subtle and psychological your chains will be — the harder it will be to tell where you end and where they begin. Write the following two phrases in the Shadow circle:

☞ I can't let go

☞ I'm weak

## Honeysuckle (Key IX)

### *Key of Something, Finally, at Rest*

You *were* tangled up in something fierce — something terrible, something scarring. Was it war? Guilt? Heartache? The struggle against some terrible enemy? Spy stuff? Politics? An abusive relationship? A curse? Anyway, you finally tore yourself free, retired or forgave yourself or broke free, and now you can relax.

The Heart of this Key is named **My New Life**. The stronger the Heart, the greater the peace you've found. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are and who you were, such as:

- ☛ retired spy
- ☛ refugee
- ☛ broken but getting better *or*
- ☛ conqueror victorious

The Shadow of this Key is named **My Old Life**. The stronger the Shadow, the more repercussions your former struggle has, and the harder you'll have to work to keep from getting dragged back in!

Leave the Shadow circle empty for now.

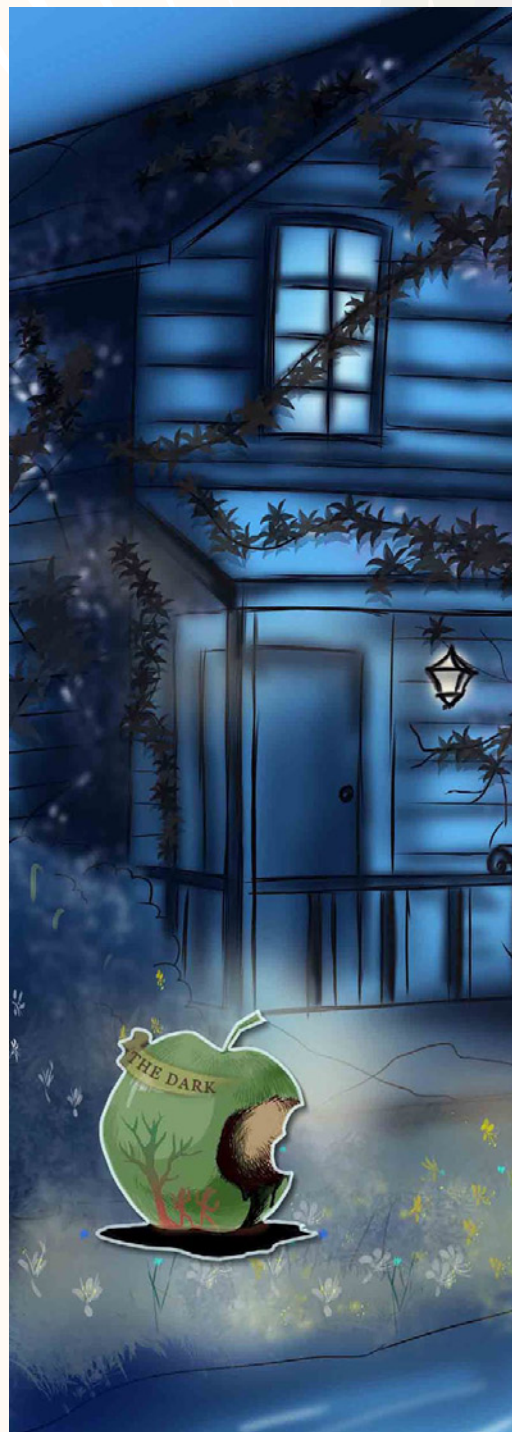
## Chamomile (Key X)

### *Key of Something Romantic*

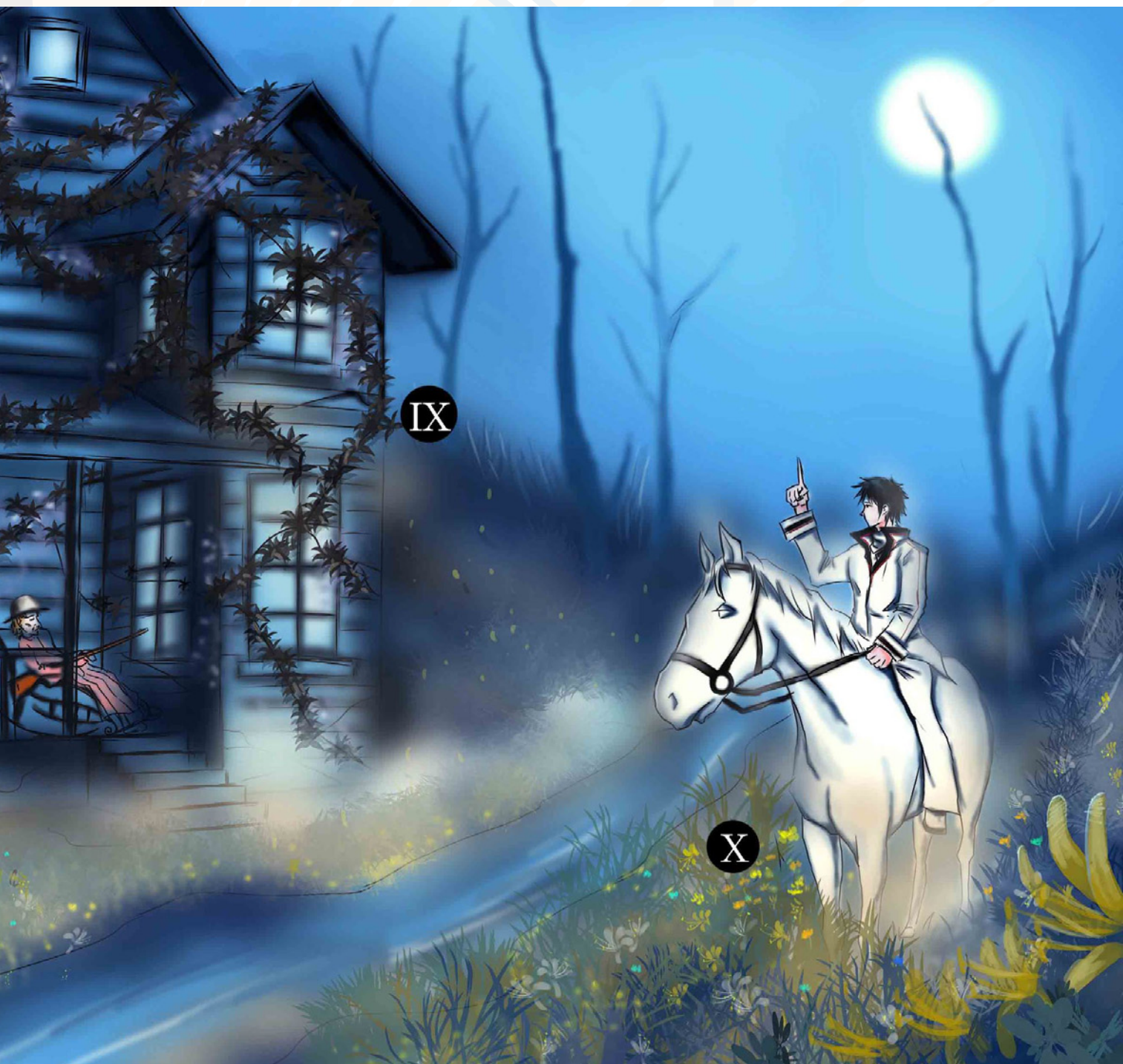
You're a romantic, dashing hero or heroine — full of life, larger than life, and willing to take on more than you can handle!

The Heart of this Key is named **The Dream**. It makes you a shining, silver-screen ideal. Write something in the Heart circle to summarize who you are, such as:

- ☛ dashing pirate
- ☛ hero
- ☛ perfect spy *or*







☞ mad genius

The Shadow of this Key is named **The Cost**. The stronger the Shadow, the harder you have to work to be perfect all the time — the greater the price you have to pay to keep yourself going.

Leave the Shadow circle empty for now.



## Wild Rose (Key XI) *Key of Something Different*

Something about you isn't normal. Something doesn't belong! Do you have a love/hate relationship with the people around you or are you desperate to belong?

The Heart of this Key is named **My Nature**. You are *different* — you are not normal. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are compared to others, such as:

- ☛ an alien
- ☛ a freak
- ☛ an outsider *or*
- ☛ superhuman

The Shadow of this Key is named **My Struggles**. The stronger the Shadow, the more you *want* to fit in — the harder you work to find yourself a place in the world. Write the following two phrases in the Shadow circle:

- ☛ self-doubt
- ☛ trying to fit in

## Hollyhock (Key XII) *Key of Destiny in the Balance*

You are in a constant struggle to become something *else* — to transcend your form and unfurl like a banner or a pair of wings into something greater.

The Heart of this Key is named **My Destiny**. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize what you are doing as you change, such as:

- ☛ becoming Imperial

- ☛ becoming a lord of the Lands Beyond Creation
- ☛ becoming perfect *or*
- ☛ becoming free

The Shadow of this Key is named **My Struggles**. The stronger the Shadow, the harder your Destiny is to fulfill. Write the following two phrases in the Shadow circle:

- ☛ self-doubt
- ☛ changing hurts

## Mimulus (Key XIII) *Key of Something Restless*

You can't settle down — you're restless, rootless, unable to stay at home or possibly unable to find a home at all!

The Heart of this Key is named **My Path**. It's what drives you to travel, to live in the moment, to seek out and interact with new and interesting things. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are when you wander, such as:

- ☛ vagabond
- ☛ wandering hero *or*
- ☛ I walk the earth

The Shadow of this Key is named **Why it Feels Empty**. The stronger the Shadow, the greater the toll the road takes on you — the harder you cling to the permanent things and attachments you have. Write the following two phrases in the Shadow circle:

- ☛ self-doubt
- ☛ the things I've left behind



XI



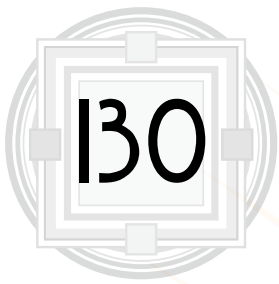
XII



XIII







## Water Lily (Key XIV) *Key of Something Spiritual*

You're an ascetic, hermit, anchorite, or monk — you want to meditate, purify yourself, and withdraw from the ordinary world.

The Heart of this Key is named **My Retreat**. The stronger the Heart, the more strength you gain from solitude. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are when you separate yourself from the world, such as:

- ☛ ascetic
- ☛ disgusted with the world
- ☛ penitent
- ☛ hermit *or*
- ☛ pure

The Shadow of this Key is named **Burdens**. It is your attachments and duties in the world — the things that can force you from your solitude. Write the following phrase in the Shadow circle:

- ☛ my duties as a Power

## Oak (Key XV) *Key of Something That Hasn't Changed*

You're the one that stays steady when things are at their worst — you're the rock that other people can cling to, or the most stubborn obstacle in their way.

The Heart of this Key is named **My Identity**. It gives you a strong connection to your basic values and sense of self. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are, such as:

- ☛ New York socialite
- ☛ badger
- ☛ Kansas farm-boy *or*
- ☛ aristocrat

The Shadow of this Key is named **Crisis**. There's something in the world or in your life that is trying to change you.

Leave the Shadow circle empty for now.

## Alyssym (Key XVI) *Key of Destiny Fulfilled*

You've finally become what you were always meant to be. You've fulfilled your destiny, answered the most important questions, and realized who you are. Congratulations!





The Heart of this Key is named **My Destiny**. The top bullet point in the Heart will summarize who you are, in terms of who you were, such as:

- ☯ victorious conqueror
- ☯ victorious scholar
- ☯ finally found faith

- ☯ enlightened monk *or*
- ☯ leader of the free world

The Shadow of this Key is empty and nameless for now.





*“When I feel myself tempted to love,” Idri-mi said, “I scrape a tiny piece off of my heart—the part that loves—and leave it here.”*

*There was a pile of red scraps at the end of the catwalk. I eyed it with new respect.*

*“No,” she said, and gestured with her head. I looked over the catwalk’s edge.*

*The pit was as deep as the world, and it was full of wind; and the wind was full of red.*

—from the Thought-Record of Ellen McIntosh

## Building Talia (Part I) *an example of lifepath construction*

I draw the basic Avatar Diagram.

I look over the list of Keys.

I pick **Key I, the Lotus Flower**, as my first Key. The Heart of that Key is that my Avatar has the power to transform people’s lives. The Shadow of that Key is the portion of that power that is unconscious or involuntarily — reflexive, something that just happens, something that happens because my character *exists* rather than by force of will.

The top left circle in the Avatar Diagram becomes the Lotus Flower’s Heart.

I label that circle MY POWER and write a blank bullet point in it.

The top right circle becomes its Shadow — I label that circle MY NATURE, and write:

☛ glorious

☛ set apart

inside. I connect the Heart and Shadow with a line, and write the Roman numeral I above that line.

I pick **Key VI, Wild Oats**, as my second Key. It’s a Key of dissipation, destiny denied, and vice.

The bottom left circle in the Avatar Diagram becomes the Heart of Wild Oats. I label that circle HUNGER, and write a blank bullet point in it. The bottom right circle becomes the Shadow of Wild Oats. I label it WHY IT FEELS EMPTY. I don’t have to put anything in this circle at first — it’s possible that my pleasures and my hungers don’t actually feel empty to me at all!

I connect the two circles with a line and write the Roman numeral VI above that line.

The two Keys that I’ve chosen are in conflict — one makes me a kind of hero, or, at least, a magical and numinous and transformative thing. The other Key says that I’m a dissipated degenerate of some sort. I decide tentatively that I’m *supposed* to be something cool, and that bits of that it shine through, but that my character is afraid to live up to their potential and is kind of hiding from it in whatever vice she has.

## Foundations

Once you’ve picked your keys, let’s talk about what’s *cool* about your character. Are they cool because of something they *do*? Something



they *can* do? Something they *are*? Look over the following options, starting with the option or options associated with your two keys, and think about it! But there's a special rule:

You always start by finding the rows with your character's Keys in them. If you pick one of those rows, it strengthens the Heart of the relevant Key. If you pick a row that *isn't* associated with one of your Keys, you have to strengthen the Shadow of one of your Keys instead. **Write a new bullet point in that particular Heart or Shadow to reflect this.**

If you happen to pick a row that has both of your Keys in it, draw or shift your attention to a new circle linked to the Heart of both Keys. Write a single bullet point in that new circle to reflect this.

## Building Talia (Part II) *an example of lifepath construction*

My two Keys are **Key I (the Lotus Flower)** and **Key VI (Wild Oats)**.

I look these up on the chart below. Wild Oats suggests that my Avatar is *Epic, Inhuman, and Powerful*. Choosing this would strengthen the Heart of Wild Oats. There's no rule that says there's a direct connection, but to me, that feels like it implies an epic-level vice — truly legendary dissipation. For this Avatar I'm looking for the opposite, an extraordinary person hiding their light through ordinary self-indulgence. So I'm not going to go that way.

The Key of the Lotus Flower, on the other hand, points at *Something Cool* — at an Avatar that is mostly human, but has a few key larger-than-life elements. That sounds good, so I choose that and strengthen the Heart of the Lotus Flower. I decide that somehow my character is a source of hope — that there's something precious in her existence, something that people can look to, hope for, even *rely on* to keep them going in a troubled world. The Heart of the Lotus Flower is MY POWER, which currently has a blank bullet point in it; I add another below it:



source of hope.

I could also pick one of the other options, strengthening the Shadow of one Key. For instance, I could opt to be *Just Plain Weird* and strengthen a Shadow accordingly. But I don't.

*A creature of clay lay down to sleep, and from its flesh was humanity shaped. Eve bore Abel and Cain, and Cain begat Enoch, and unto Enoch was born Irad, and thus through ten thousand generations unto the modern day. Billions of men and women swarm the earth, their flesh and bone and eyes of clay, and all of the substance of that first creature, who slumbers yet. It knows in some distant regard that it now wears countless forms rather than the one, that its flesh has been distorted into the strange mockery of species that is humanity, and this discomfits it. But it does not shake off its doze and resume its rightful self. It will, when it wakes; and it promises itself, as it has for millennia, that it shall wake, in just a minute more.*

—from *Legends of the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis



## More than Anything Else, You Are ...

**Lotus Flower (I)**  
**Vervain (II)**  
**Chamomile (X)**  
**Oak (XV)**

### Something Cool

You're going to be neat — larger than life in a few ways, pure in a few ways that people aren't. You're going to be basically human, you'll hurt and get into trouble and get in over your head and you won't know everything there is to know about how to live, but you'll have a few powers or beliefs that are absolute, a few areas of life where you can trust yourself absolutely.

**Examples:** Julianna Avram is the Power of Strength, and she helps people be strong even when she shouldn't. Marsiglio Tendi is the Power of Treachery, and he has a weapon that can cut anything, even intangibles. Ianthe Falls-Short, ritually trapping her impurities in her last name, became flawless in action, form, and speech!

**Clematis (IV)**  
**Star of Bethlehem (VII)**  
**Honeysuckle (IX)**  
**Alyssum (XVI)**

### In Love with Something

You're going to be all wrapped in your love for something — something that fills your life with the joy of it, the awesomeness of it, the amazingness of it. Is it your Estate? Earth? Creation? People? Something horrible, like murder or decay? A single true love? Your work? Your life is filled with grim or exultant devotion!

**Examples:** Patrick Precipice-Lord is the Power of Chaos. He's totally enthused about disasters and disorder, but he doesn't feel the need to cause them — he accepts them as they are! Rook Catchfly, the Power of Eternity, has a fierce love for the world, the whole shebang, warts and all, and would do anything to protect it. Merriweather James loves the Dark and the principle of human suicide that it embodies. The Piscator Thalasseus loves trade, bargaining, and the Deal.

**Aconite (V)**  
**Wild Oats (VI)**  
**Hollyhock (XII)**  
**Water Lily (XIV)**

### Epic, Inhuman, and Powerful

You're going to be completely unchained from humanity — a force rather than a person, dedicated to the inhuman substance of your Estate. You'll be at once a monster and a god, as hideously unreasonable as a flood or being born, and capable — like love, or life, or a holy spirit — of giving unexpected, brilliant, and illuminating grace.

**Examples:** Daemarnia, the Power of Caves, *is* Caves. Her whole life is about the vast, dark, and stony expanses underneath the Earth. Walking Eye, the Power of Borders, was never human — he started life as a patch of dirty ground. Isabel is an avatar of Roads.

**Acacia (III)**  
**Gorse (VIII)**  
**Wild Rose (XI)**  
**Mimulus (XIII)**

### Just Plain Weird

You're going to be something kind of freaky. Maybe you're a group mind, or a rock star, or a living dictionary, or a human-sized praying mantis, or a coin collector obsessed with getting coins from all the different worlds in the universe. The key thing is that you're using the fact that you're a Power to get away with this kind of existence, to pursue your ideals on a grand scale or to exist as a person at all!

**Examples:** Dimi is a living song. Takari Risu is an anime character. Haru is a rat. Marek is a nanomachine swarm. Joan of Arc is, well, Joan of Arc, living on as a Power. Jasprite Sherrard tours the universe. Idony Saint-Germain is a spirit bound in a cloth doll. Casmir is drowned Atlantis' King, and Annabelle Zupay just mysteriously appeared one day.

## Your Estate

Now let's pick your Estate! This is the thing you become the Power over — the thing that is given unto you to rule and exemplify, to define and to be, forever and ever or until your dying day!

To decide on your Estate, pick one option from each of the two tables below — pair up the *part of the world* your Estate comes from with the *kind of things* that go in it. As always, if you pick a row that



matches one or both of your Keys, it strengthens the Heart of those Keys; otherwise, it strengthens the Shadow of one Key; and in either case, you write an appropriate bullet point in the appropriate circle!

In addition, for this section only, when you add a bullet point, also draw a line to connect the relevant circle and your Estate — that's how the influence of your Estate flows into your soul.

## Building Talia (Part III) *an example of lifepath construction*

Key I, **The Lotus Flower**, suggests an Estate from the *Painful Side of the World*.

Key VI, **Wild Oats**, pushes for the *Light Side of Human Experience*.

But as I look over the lists of possible Estates, I start thinking about Sunsets, and that draws me to reject both the options above and go for the *Beautiful Side of the World* instead. That means strengthening the Shadow of one of my Keys. I don't know how to work that in the Shadow of the Lotus Flower, but it *does* fit well in the Shadow of the Wild Oats — I draw a line between my Estate and that Shadow and write the first bullet point in that Shadow:

☛ the sunset is beautiful

It's in the natural beauty of things, in the face of the sheer awesomeness of the world, that my character wonders if hiding from her potential is actually OK.

I thought about actually being the Power of Sunsets, but both my Keys argue against having an Estate you can just *point* to; and I don't want to reject both Keys twice; and, more importantly, Sunsets are kind of a strange Estate for a character who is fundamentally a source of hope. I start thinking about how hope and sunsets interact, looking for a middle point, and a bunch of pieces fall suddenly into place. My Estate is **Hanging On** — the Estate of enduring through the night, from the Sunset to the Dawn, hanging on to the last light of the day. That's definitely *Something You Live*, which will strengthen the Heart of Wild Oats. It's only arguably the *Beautiful Side of the World*; I could rethink my previous choice, but I decide not to. This is going to be meaningful later, when I write the properties of my Estate — Hanging On, as an intrinsic part of the beauty of the world, is fundamentally *different* than it would be if it were part of human experience or a kind of painful spiritual attachment.

The imagery of Hanging On knocks a few other pieces into place for me. My character's name, I realize for the first time, is Talia. She's a

### Hey, were you an Animal?

Some Powers weren't born human. They were born as an animal! Usually this means a mammal, like a fox, cat, or bear, but even a colder animal like a shark, octopus, or lizard can become a Power!

Choosing to be an animal strengthens the Heart of

☛ **Wild Oats (VI)**

☛ **Gorse (VIII)**

☛ **Water Lily (XIV)**

☛ **Oak (XV)**

or the Shadow of any other Key!

### ... or something really strange?

Some Powers come from lives that are just plain *weird*. They weren't humans. They weren't animals. They weren't even aliens. They were things like fictional or imaginary characters, clouds of nanomachines, clods of dirt, or passages from a song. They were AIBOs or Roombas, anthills or nameless principles, spirits of liberty or of a \$5 bill, bacteria, dreams or bodiless hands and faces that lived on distant comets and sang to cause the sun to rise. It's hard to imagine how something like that could become a Power, but ultimately Imperators can do what they like and sense and sensibility can't stop them!

Choosing to be something like this strengthens the Heart of

☛ **Clematis (IV)**

☛ **Wild Rose (XI)**

☛ **Hollyhock (XII)**

☛ **Alyssum (XVI)**

or the Shadow of any other Key!



reckless teenage rebel type with a leather jacket and a motorcycle — the kind who gets into trouble because it's a way to stay alive. She can't let go of that and move on to an adult form of pure awesome because she is, well, the embodiment of Hanging On. I fill in the first bullet point in the Heart of Wild Oats, and add another:

☛ teenager

☛ rage against the dying of the light

I link that Heart to my Estate — Hanging On is both why Talia's wild and why being wild feels hollow.

## Your Estate is From the ...

### Light Side of Human Experience

Your Estate will be something human, part of the human spectrum of experience and the human-made world, something like Libraries, Honor, Joy, Mathematics, Grief, Garbage, Swords, Procrastination, Skyscrapers, or Ghettos. Further, even if it's bad, it's not bad enough to make a reasonable person regret human existence or despair for the human heart — Theft, maybe, but not Murder or Genocide; Knives, sure, but not Napalm. Your Estate would fit into a brightly-painted vision of the human future, even if it'd be the worst thing there.

What kinds of things do you like best about humans or living in a human world? Or, what's something that you find detestable about humans or the human world, but might enjoy finding a justification for, reveling in, and standing up for instead?

Vervain (II)  
Wild Oats (VI)  
Chamomile (X)  
Hollyhock (XII)

### Dark Side of Human Experience

Your Estate will be something human — and also something wrong. It's something that makes you say "what's wrong with people? Why do they do this? Why do they make this? Why do they let people suffer this?" It doesn't have to be one of the great evils — Garbage, Theft, and Malnutrition are just as suitable as Global Warming, Cruelty, Genocide, Famine, and Despair — but it has to be the kind of thing that makes you think, maybe humans aren't worth it, and if they are, maybe they deserve better than living in this world.

What kinds of things do you like the least about humans or the human world? Or, what's something you think is okay but have enough moral questions or qualms about to convincingly paint as bad?

Acacia (III)  
Aconite (V)  
Wild Rose (XI)  
Oak (XV)

### Beautiful Side of the World

Your Estate will be part of the natural world, and further, something cool or good or at least congenial to human existence. Something like Waterfalls, the Wind, Illumination, Magnetism, the Moon, Sequences, Fire, or Grain. Your Estate is something that the world would be poorer without, and something that is usually helpful or neutral rather than harmful to the human world.

What do you love most about the natural world? What excites you about nature? Mathematics and physics? Experience? What spurs the greatest sense in you that *wow, living is so cool*?

Clematis (IV)  
Star of  
Bethlehem (VII)  
Water Lily (XIV)  
Alyssum (XVI)

### Painful Side of the World

Your Estate will be part of the natural world, and further, something dangerous. Sickness, Hopelessness, The Tsunami, Tremors, Infirmary, Explosions, Decay, Insects, Fangs, Cutting Edges, Cliffs, Entropy. An emotion such as even animals may feel, like Hatred, Fear, or Rage. Devastation, Flood, Exhaustion, Depletion, The Barren and Lifeless Plain.

What is the face of the natural world that you fear most? What part of it has given you the most pain?

Lotus Flower (I)  
Gorse (VIII)  
Honeysuckle (IX)  
Mimulus (XIII)



## Your Estate is ...

### Something You Can Point To

Your Estate is about things.

**Gorse (VIII)**

**Honeysuckle (IX)**

**Mimulus (XIII)**

**Water Lily (XIV)**

**Oak (XV)**

Cars, Computers, Documents, Fires, Guns, Green Things, Homes, Honest Things, Luxuries, Rock Formations, Sand, Teeth, Trees, Works of Art. Pick an Estate like that.

At the edges of your Estate you have power over things like the things you rule. Guns extends to Bows and Crossbows. Red Things has some power over everything that is pink. Documents governs a stone tablet, but not an oral history!

Please feel free to really stretch your mind and push the boundaries of an Estate like this as far as they can go — you'll need to if you want to keep up with Powers whose Estates are more abstract!

### Something You Live

Your Estate is about experiences — things you live through, things you feel.

**Acacia (III)**

**Aconite (V)**

**Wild Oats (VI)**

**Clematis (IV)**

**Wild Rose (XI)**

**Hollyhock (XII)**

Adoration, Awakening, Falling, Fame, Indulgence, Love, Memory, Redemption, Recurrence, Sensation, Strength, Solace, Suffering, Traffic, Treachery, Work.

Pick an Estate like that, or pick a concrete Estate like Cars or Guns and focus on the meaning that Estate has to peoples' lives. For instance, you could be the Power of The Gun, meaning, the power of the gun as a symbol of homicide, fear, empowerment, masculinity, destruction, security, and projected force. Either way, at the edges of your Estate, you have power over things that are *like* the experience of your Estate.

### Something You Can Describe

Your Estate is about a category of phenomena or actions.

**Lotus Flower (I)**

**Vervain (II)**

**Star of**

**Bethlehem (VII)**

**Chamomile (X)**

**Alyssum (XVI)**

Debate, Destruction, Growth, Justice, Magic, Music, Poetry, Virtue, Waves, Wars.

It's usually pretty easy to make an Estate like this cover ... well, anything at all ... at its edges. So you don't wind up walking all over people with concrete Estates, it's important to start with a moderate and judicious picture of what your Estate governs and broaden it only cautiously during play!

Still don't know your Estate? You can come back to it later, but remember that you'll need to figure it out before the start of the game!

## Origins

Let's take a look at where you come from — and figure out what your human life was like!

### Building Talia (Part IV) *an example of lifepath construction*

Talia obviously led a troubled life. I glance at the other options for her mortal life, but this really feels like it's already been decided. Accordingly, I strengthen the Heart of Wild Oats, **Hunger**, making it



138

- ☛ rage against the dying of the light
- ☛ just a kid

I move on to the legacy of her troubled life, which feels like it should be *You're Still in Trouble!* — she hasn't let go of her old ways. This doesn't match either the Lotus Flower or Wild Oats, so I have to strengthen the Shadow of one of my Keys. I add a new bullet point to the Shadow of Wild Oats, **Why it Feels Empty**, making it:

- ☛ the sunset is beautiful
- ☛ nothing ever changes

## You Lived a ...

**Vervain (II)**  
**Aconite (V)**  
**Wild Oats (VI)**  
**Wild Rose (XI)**

### Troubled Life

You were born to trouble! You were headed for some kind of rotten end, either because of the cruelty of others or because of your own messed-up heart, but you didn't get there. Instead, an Imperator reached down and made you into a Power.

Maybe that saved you! Or maybe it just raised the stakes ...

Troubled Lives, on pg. 139, will explore what influence your troubled life has on you now.

**Gorse (VIII)**  
**Honeysuckle (IX)**  
**Water Lily (XIV)**  
**Oak (XV)**

### Humble Life

Your destiny was an ordinary destiny. You were going to live, growing steadily older, until something more or less random happened to you and you died! You might have had kids before that point, but then again, you might not have.

Instead, unexpectedly, you became a Power!

Humble Lives, on pg. 140, will explore what influence your humble life has on you now.

**Lotus Flower (I)**  
**Clematis (IV)**  
**Hollyhock (XII)**  
**Alyssum (XVI)**

### Blessed Life

You were born to a destiny of happiness. You were born to grow up without major traumas. To find love or purpose and probably even both. To have a happy and fulfilling time of it, a life seasoned now and then with crisis and pain but never dominated by it, until you finally died a normal and acceptably timed death.

Blessed Lives, on pg. 141, will explore what influence your blessed life has on you now.

**Acacia (III)**  
**Star of Bethlehem (VII)**  
**Chamomile (X)**  
**Mimulus (XIII)**

### Extraordinary Life

You had an extraordinary life or destiny. You were meant to do or be something important, or at least to have an entertaining go at life — were you a spy? A mercenary? A medical genius? A diplomat? A hero? Or were you a Chosen One of some sort, involved in magical events even before you became a Power — the catspaw of a cult, the child of an Imperator, the heir to a magical legacy, the true love of an Excrucian? And did you fulfill your destiny before becoming a Power, or was becoming a Power what you were always meant to be?

When choosing Contacts, on pg. 142-145, you will choose a total of three. One will probably be from your mortal life!



## Troubled Lives

If your character had a “troubled life,” you must pick at least one *legacy* of that life from the table below. Otherwise, you *can* pick a legacy of the trouble in your mortal life, but you don’t *have* to.

### *What’s the Legacy of Your Troubled Life?*

Acacia (III)  
Aconite (V)  
Gorse (VIII)  
Mimulus (XIII)

#### **You’re Still in Trouble!**

It’s not so easy to escape a troubled destiny! It’s followed you into the realm of the Powers.

Is it a Noble enemy?

Is it something in you that’s messed up?

Or are you just so troubled by your old life that you’re still focused on its issues, just maybe on a larger scale?

Star of  
Bethlehem (VII)  
Wild Rose (XI)  
Hollyhock (XII)  
Water Lily (XIV)

#### **Some Scars Remain**

You’re carrying forward the karma of your old and difficult existence!

Do you constantly struggle to “make up” for your old life?

Or to recover from what happened to you in it?

Does it still define your perspective on the world?

Or is it just a constant, difficult companion?

Wild Oats (VI)  
Chamomile (X)  
Oak (XV)  
Alyssum (XVI)

#### **It’s All Happening Again!**

You thought you were free of your past, but now it’s happening again — some new force, some undesirable causality, is driving you all over again towards an all-new troubled end!

Why do you draw trouble like this? Is it your strength? Your weakness?

Something wrong in how you look at life? Is it some kind of freakish luck?

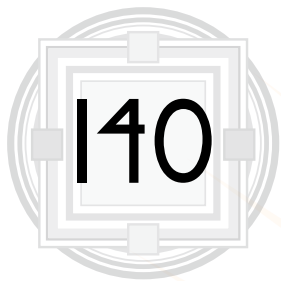
Or is it just this one bad break, but it’s something that’ll trouble you for a while?

Lotus Flower (I)  
Vervain (II)  
Clematis (IV)  
Honeysuckle (IX)

#### **Trouble Inspired Me**

Now that you’re a Power, you can do something about the trouble that afflicted you. You can fix things for yourself or the world. And that’s what matters to you!

The biggest question here is: are you going to make things better for yourself? For your family? For the people of your Chancel? For everyone in the world? Or do you want to set your sights on the universe?



## Humble Lives

If your character led a “humble life,” you must pick at least one *legacy* of that life from the table below. Otherwise, you *can* pick a legacy of the more ordinary portion of your mortal life, but you don’t *have* to.

### *What’s the Legacy of Your Humble Life?*

Wild Oats (VI)  
Star of  
Bethlehem (VII)  
Oak (XV)  
Alyssum (XVI)

#### **Love for the Ordinary ...**

Your mortal life was ordinary — and you still love ordinary things!

Are you down to the earth, like a farmer?

Are you a lover of mortal fiction? Mortal food? Mortal clothes? Mortal societies? Mortal computer games?

Are you frivolous and materialistic?

Are you still involved with your old family, your old company, your old culture? Do you live a double life, like a superhero?

Or are you just happiest when you can do things in a mortal way, using your mortal skills?

Acacia (III)  
Aconite (V)  
Wild Rose (XI)  
Water Lily (XIV)

#### **Alienation ...**

Your mortal life was so different — it’s like you were a different person! You just don’t think of yourself as part of humanity at all. Not anymore.

Are you contemptuous of humanity? Do you admire them from a lofty distance?

Are you moved to rescue mortals? To hurt them? To cut them out of your life?

Do you miss being human? Are you secretly afraid you haven’t changed?

Or do you just ignore your mortal life, write it off, declare it a larval stage of your existence completely irrelevant to what you have become?

Do you fight to be what you should be now, to hang on to this incredible thing you’ve become when you come from such humble origins?

Or do you fight what feels like a losing battle to keep some connection to the person that you were?

Clematis (IV)  
Gorse (VIII)  
Hollyhock (XII)  
Mimulus (XIII)

#### **Transformation ...**

Or maybe you’re all wrapped up in the change. Maybe you’re constantly amazed, overwhelmed, caught in the grip of the way you have become something new. Maybe you’re going to spend centuries or millennia just growing into who you are now, dealing with and reveling in your newly-burst-open path of personal development. Your story will be about a person *becoming* a Power long after the rest of your Familia has moved on to *being* Noble.

Lotus Flower (I)  
Vervain (II)  
Honeysuckle (IX)  
Chamomile (X)

#### **Freedom!**

You were ordinary — but you never wanted to be!

At last you’re free from it, able to have the destiny you always dreamed of, given mental and physical gifts, powers, purpose, and a higher meaning!



## Blessed Lives

If your character led a “blessed life,” you must pick at least one *legacy* of that life from the table below. Otherwise, you *can* pick a legacy of the brighter portion of your mortal life, but you don’t *have* to.

### *What’s the Legacy of Your Blessed Life?*

Vervain (II)  
Clematis (IV)  
Chamomile (X)  
Mimulus (XIII)

#### Reverence in Purpose

You learned from your blessed life to celebrate the universe. You had time as a mortal to realize how amazing life is, how cool people are, how connected everything is under the sight of a great benevolent universal One — and that insight stayed with you when you became a Noble, gained strength as your perceptions improved and did not falter when you encountered the greater darknesses and universal flaws the Nobilis can see. You learned that life is worth the living of it — and now it is even more so.

Lotus Flower (I)  
Acacia (III)  
Gorse (VIII)  
Oak (XV)

#### Community

Your mortal life has followed you into the Noble context!

Was your life blessed precisely because you come from a magical or miraculous situation? Did you drag your mortal family and community with you into your new miraculous world? Or did they follow you on their own, your old love or children or parents or community finding power on their own so they could follow or support you?

And is this as good as it sounds, or is it something sinister?

Is your community your Achilles heel, a source of enormous strength and support, or both?

Star of  
Bethlehem (VII)  
Honeysuckle (IX)  
Water Lily (XIV)  
Alyssum (XVI)

#### Your Way of Life

You knew who you were and what you were for, and you won’t let being a Noble take that away from you! Whether you were a farm boy, a scientist, a socialite, or a mother, you are going to subordinate your new life to the values and virtues you learned there. And more! You’re going to prove that you *can*, that your old values and virtues are important.

Aconite (V)  
Wild Oats (VI)  
Wild Rose (XI)  
Hollyhock (XII)

#### Anger

Some people would give their souls for power. You wouldn’t.

Some people become more whole when they become a Power. You didn’t.

Your new life is a curse. Mortality and humanity was precious to you. Being part of the ordinary world was good to you. And now? It’s gone.

You know, on some level, that your duties are important. You can’t just not be what you’ve become. But that doesn’t mean it’s right.

## Hey, were you “sort of” human?

Some Powers come from off-world — they’re elves from Aelfscienne, giants from Jotunheim, damned souls from Hell, empty suits of clothing from Dionyl, or practically anything else you can imagine from somewhere or other on the tree of worlds. Other Powers are human-like things from Earth but not quite proper *humans* — their genetics are all twisted up by an Emperor or Power somewhere in their family tree or they’re from a Chancel where the rules for what people *are* is different. For example, Ianthe Falls-Short comes from a Chancel where people grow in people fields and don’t have legs until they’re ripe; Arikel is the son of the Sun; and the Power of Silver is an Earth-born Daoine Sidhe.

If you’re this kind of person, you’re still *basically* a human — humans, like elves and giants and empty suits of clothing and people-field-folk, implement a basic template for “being a person” that’s shared across the tree of worlds. But maybe you have pointed ears, or you’re on fire all the time, or there’s nobody inside your clothing, or you photosynthesize instead of eating!

Choosing to be something like this strengthens the Heart of

☛ **Lotus Flower (I)**

☛ **Star of Bethlehem (VII)**

☛ **Chamomile (X)**

☛ **Mimulus (XIII)**

or the Shadow of any other Key!

## Contacts

Now it’s time to pick one or two “important” contacts in your life — or, if you had an “extraordinary” mortal life, pick three!

Each contact is associated with a single Key. It can strengthen the Heart of that Key, if that’s one of your Keys (and look at the contacts associated with your two Keys first.) Or you can use it to strengthen the Shadow of any other Key!

If you want the contact to be an important, self-motivated part of your story, draw a new circle for that contact. Give it the name of your contact. Put a bullet point in that circle saying how they’ve changed your life. Draw a line connecting the new circle to the Heart or Shadow that you strengthened. Don’t do this for contacts meant only as ancillaries, accessories, and foils.

## Building Talia (Part V) *an example of lifepath construction*

The Key of the Lotus Flower suggests an organization — a biker gang or something similar. I’m slowed down for a moment, though, by the fact that this biker gang, apparently, strengthens Talia’s power to transform lives.

It’s a little weird, right?

But I decide to run with it. Maybe, I decide, they do. Maybe they’re not just random hangers-on (as it were.) Maybe they’re acolytes, lesser sources of change. That’s what an organization is, here, after all: it’s a tool for doing what you must. I haven’t really done much with the Lotus Flower yet; and thinking about it, I start to imagine her as a symbol of change and hope, and everyone around her — even though she doesn’t really recognize this herself — as carriers and amplifiers of that message. The people she hangs with become sources of hope and power in and of themselves. I fill in the top bullet point in My Power and add another, making it:

☛ symbol of life

☛ source of hope

☛ biker gang leader

The Key of Wild Oats suggests a corrupting influence, but I don’t really want that. Looking over the other options, I settle on Inspirational Friend or Lover. Some guy named Rick, I think, probably a boyfriend,



who gets added right in to **Why it Feels Empty** (where “it” means a meaningless life on the road):

- ☛ the sunset is beautiful
- ☛ nothing ever changes
- ☛ Rick

Now, Rick can't be just an ordinary human; he's something magical. But I don't know exactly what he is, and I'm OK with not knowing until later in the game. I draw a new circle for him, anyway, name it **Rick**, link it to the Shadow of Wild Oats, and add a bullet point showing how he's changed her life:

- ☛ offers her a dream

**Lotus Flower (I)**      **Organization**  
You've got a company or team to help you do what you've got to do.

**Vervain (II)**      **Followers**  
You have this tendency to acquire hangers-on — minions, lackeys, lieutenants, and others ranging from cringing bootlickers and adoring priests to actual trustworthy friends. Fundamentally, they're drawn to you because they want to be special, and you or your company makes them feel that they are.

**Acacia (III)**      **Excrucian**  
You're on friendly terms with an Excrucian — one of the enemies of the world. (Not that I can criticize.) Are they a lover? Family? A friend? A master? A servant, trapped by some oath or mystical prison into loyalty to you?

**Clematis (IV)**      **Inspirational Friend or Lover**  
You know someone who is a miracle in your life — someone who heals your soul when it's troubled. They are not entirely mortal — did you empower them? Did they gain power so they could keep up with you? Or were they something magical all along?

**Aconite (V)**      **Nemesis**  
You have a nemesis — something powerful enough to stand against you but not so powerful as to overwhelm you without effort, such as a Power, a Family of Powers, a Bane (pg. 243), the Cammora (pg. 18-19), or an Imperator with major limitations on its behavior.

**Wild Oats (VI)**      **Corrupting Influence**  
You are a weapon. You have been aimed at the heart of some Imperator, some Power, or at the nature of the world itself. You are mixed up in a cult or cabal tainted by Excrucian or Infernal influence — or maybe something that showcases the worst side of Heaven, the Light, the Dark, or the Wild. They may have something on you, some way to keep you in line, but that's not the reason you're involved with them — at best, it's an excuse. The reason you're involved in them is that you want to be.

**Star of Bethlehem (VII)**      **Ghost**  
You're haunted by someone you lost or hurt, and you're either unwilling or unable to forcibly exile the ghost from your life. This is usually a literal ghost, but sometimes it's just friends or associates who remind you of your scars.



**Gorse (VIII)**

### **Cammora**

You are entangled with the Cammora — a mystical organization empowered by the Emperor Lord Entropy to mediate between Powers and the mortal world in his name. A classic corrupt secret society, they rule the world from behind the scenes!

**Honeysuckle (IX)**

### **Legacy**

Your life right now — it's the sequel.

Something happened before this. Something big and tragic and wonderful. It's left shards of acquaintanceships, friends, loves, and hates that are scattered through your life and the world. You might have come out of this with a true love or boon companion. Your relationship with the rest of the people who were involved is troubled — the kind of thing where you can't forget the wrongs they've done you, but can't shut the door on them if they need you, and vice versa.

**Chamomile (X)**

### **True Love**

You have a true love — someone who is part of your soul and you of theirs, someone destined for you from before the two of you were born, the kind of love that can challenge death, time, and the gates of Hell. It could be a mortal, an empowered mortal, a Power, or even (God help you) something crazy like an Excrucian. Your love is a thing of the divine spirit, immune to most of the uncertainties and fallibilities of ordinary human love, but there's still a catch — in the world of **Nobilis**, love is illegal, and you're both up for torture or worse if it's found out.

If you prefer, you can have one or two true friends (in the same exorbitant sense of "true" as used above for love) instead or in addition to your love.

**Wild Rose (XI)**

### **Alien(s)**

You have a coterie of the strangest sort — a hodgepodge of freaks, aliens, degenerates, mysteries, and possibly even creatures from outside the universe entirely.

**Hollyhock (XII)**

### **Manufactured Army**

In your quest to do what you need to do in the world, you've made ... things. People, maybe. Monstrous creations, perhaps. Anyway, they aren't human, and they're alive, and they serve you.

**Mimulus (XIII)**

### **Faraway or Troubled Love**

There's something that you love — that you're drawn to. Maybe it's family, or maybe it's a spouse. It could be a friend or a child. But, as precious as it is to you, you can't stay and give it the attention it deserves. Maybe you think you're trouble, or maybe you think they are. Maybe you're just the kind of person who can't stay in one place very long. Maybe there is no good reason and it's all in your head! It's not just true and perfect love that's illegal in the world of the **Nobilis** — ordinary, imperfect love is just as dangerous to you and the things you care about. Keep your beloved things safe, but don't let anybody know you care!

**Water Lily (XIV)**

### **Ward**

You are responsible for a person, a creature, or for a place or organization containing many people or animals. You are not necessarily on personal, intimate terms with them, but the responsibility is sacred.

**Oak (XV)**

### **Mortal Friends and Family**

You haven't let go of your mortal friends and your mortal family — they're still a key part of who you are!

**Alyssum (XVI)**

### **Disciples**

You've acquired a little following — people whom you feel responsible for, people drawn to you by similarities between your nature and theirs. They're usually powerful (magical creatures, relatively young or troubled Powers, and the like) and loyal, but they're messed up in ways you're not. When you need them to do something small, or to do something huge, then they're useful, but the rest of the time they're more of a burden.



## Special Options

None

### Noble Friend or Enemy

You have a Noble friend, ally, acquaintance, or enemy! They don't have to fall under any of the descriptions above, but to pick this option you'll have to strengthen the Shadow of one of your Keys.

None

### Cleave of the Botanists

You have ties in the "Cleave of the Botanists" — a mortal secret society dedicated to the practice of alchemy. Unless you can squeeze this into one of the descriptions above (e.g., binding yourself to them through a **Legacy** or your **Mortal Friends**), picking this option will strengthen the Shadow of one of your Keys.

None

### Mystery Cult

You are tied in some fashion to a cult that has seen through the veils of the world to the secrets of creation — kind of like us Nobilisers! Maybe they just know the ordinary things, like, there are Powers and Imperators and they fight Excrucians. Or maybe they've seen through some other veil and can worship in ways that ordinary Powers can't! Since this isn't associated with any of the Keys, you'll have to strengthen the Shadow of one of your Keys to pick this option.

## Affiliation

Sometimes it feels like there's an order to events — a great big cosmic harmony, a music playing through the universe that causes everything to dance in time. The sky! The soul! The movements of the planets! The growth of crops! Sometimes it seems like there's a *pattern* to it all, and if you can just let go of your ego and move in tune with it, then life and love and joy just fall right into place. Sometimes it seems that way! But Nobilisers know that isn't true. There isn't one great order to events. There are *five*, all playing off against one another, and the moment you become a Noble you know them, you taste them, you feel them, and you can choose of which one you would like to partake.



## What is your Affiliation?

**Lotus Flower (I)**  
**Vervain (II)**  
**Acacia (III)**

### (The Song of) Heaven

You've given your heart to the cause of the angels — to beauty and justice! The angels believe there is no higher calling than to transform the world into a Heaven — to work endlessly at the task of making justice, making goodness, giving beauty to the things that are. That's the part you buy into.

Now, the angels themselves say the world is a fallen place. They say people are filthy, dirty things crawling on a corrupt rock. They've sealed the gates of Heaven against the world, even as they labor to make the world outside those gates shine brighter. You don't have to agree with that part! But you can.

**Clematis (IV)**  
**Aconite (V)**  
**Wild Oats (VI)**

### (The Song of) Hell

You've given your heart to the cause of Hell — to love this "fallen" world! The creed of Hell is to celebrate what is, to rejoice in how things and people are. Most of all they are the ones that love the ugly things, the horrible things, the evil things, and the corrupt. They are witnesses and admirers to everything in the world. And that's the part you buy into.

The devils themselves, they say corruption's the best part. They say that evil's better than good, that suffering's better than health, that abusing power is better than using it well. That's the downside of loving wicked things, you get a little wicked. But you don't have to be that way! If you're just a Power, and not a Devil, it's a choice.

**Star of  
Bethlehem (VII)**  
**Gorse (VIII)**

### (The Song of) The Light

You've pledged yourself to the Light, to the cult of human survival. You believe, more than anything, that human life matters; that, in the end, humanity should live forever.

The Light itself is a cold and clean and ruthless thing. It would trade the self-determination of humanity for its life; would sacrifice love, purpose, laughter, all the things that make humanity what it is, if it could buy thus human immortality. And it cares nothing for the inhuman peoples, the giants and the artificial minds and the other aliens of the World Ash. It wants life and only life, eternal life for humanity — if you serve the Light, that's what you're serving. But you don't have to go that far!

**Honeysuckle  
(IX)**  
**Chamomile (X)**

### (The Song of) The Dark

You've sold yourself to the Dark, to the cult of human suicide — to the thing that loves the human freedom to err, to hurt, to do wrong, to refuse to see, and which loves best the power in the soul of a human that makes them go willingly to their deaths. And this Code, more than any other, will defend the human right to be human — will say that people have a right to exist in this Emperor-haunted world; will stand up for the human right to self-governance, self-determination, and free existence in a world of cosmic entities. And that, at the least, is what you serve.

The Magisters of the Dark — the laughing and brooding faces of human failings — are like the Devils in that they love the worst things best. They exult in each suicide, hold it a sacrament: they are with each soul, in some capacity, when it does horrible, stupid, and self-destructive things. They are dimly disturbed by righteous martyrs, sensing some kind of blasphemy, and they are not good. You may not be good, either, if you serve them; but whether to embrace human suicide over other human freedoms is, ultimately, your choice.

**Wild Rose (XI)**  
**Hollyhock (XII)**  
**Mimulus (XIII)**

### (The Song of) The Wild

You've bound yourself to the Wild and made yourself a wild law: casting free all chains of propriety, sanity and mundanity, and realizing that you have the option to be what you are, unshackled and unbounded. There is nothing so loathsome to the Wild as a cage, as a prison, as coercion, as to bind something to their will.

And to be Wild is to set your feet upon a road that leads ultimately to unconsciousness: to become a prisoner to your internal laws, deaf to the words of others, blind to the sight of others, free in time from communication as from coercion, a solitary being in a world of one, knowing only what you must do. The Imperial Magisters of the Wild have walked far upon that path; how far along it will you go?

**Water Lily (XIV)**  
**Oak (XV)**  
**Alyssum (XVI)**

### An Independent Song

You heard these songs — each in their turn — and you rejected them. You will take up the unique Code of some Emperor, or forge your own. You will say, world, hear not those songs: be thus!



## What Does it All Mean?

Your final Avatar Diagram is a Project — a vehicle for Destiny expenditures. When things happen in play that bear on this story you started with, that Project gains Destiny. When it accumulates enough power, or when you spend Destiny of your own to push it forward, you can take advantage of everything you've written there to shape the moving-forward of your Avatar's life and myth. You can, in short, build forward from this Diagram to empower and develop your Avatar over the course of the game. This can be abstract and personal, or it can give you extra Traits and accomplish things that need accomplishing; that'll come down, in the end, to what matters to you.

You can also pick up to two of those circles to represent ongoing conceptual, mental, or moral struggles in your character's life. Write appropriate questions next to those circles. Wrestling with those questions in play will give your Avatar Destiny to work with, ultimately increasing their power and the breadth of your influence in the world.

## Final Touches

Draw a line between any two circles that have the same name or a shared bullet point.

Name your character, if you haven't, and any circles that don't have a name yet.

Fill in any bullet points that you've left empty.

Think about your Estate some more — what it means, what it is, what the best word for it might be. Make it fit nicely together with your character as a whole. And then...

## You're There!

You stand before the face of your Imperator. Your new Familia gathers around. Where will you go from here?

## Building Talia (Part VI) *an example of lifepath construction*

The next choice I make for Talia is the Song of Hell — she'll love every bloody thing in this fallen world, and that love will be beautiful



even if the things she loves are not. This adds a final bullet point under HUNGER, strengthening the Heart of Wild Oats:

- ☛ teenager
- ☛ rage against the dying of the light
- ☛ just a kid
- ☛ hurting for the world

Finally, I pick two of the circles to represent unresolved questions in Talia's life. Under the Heart of the Lotus Flower, I write:

***"Is it me?"***

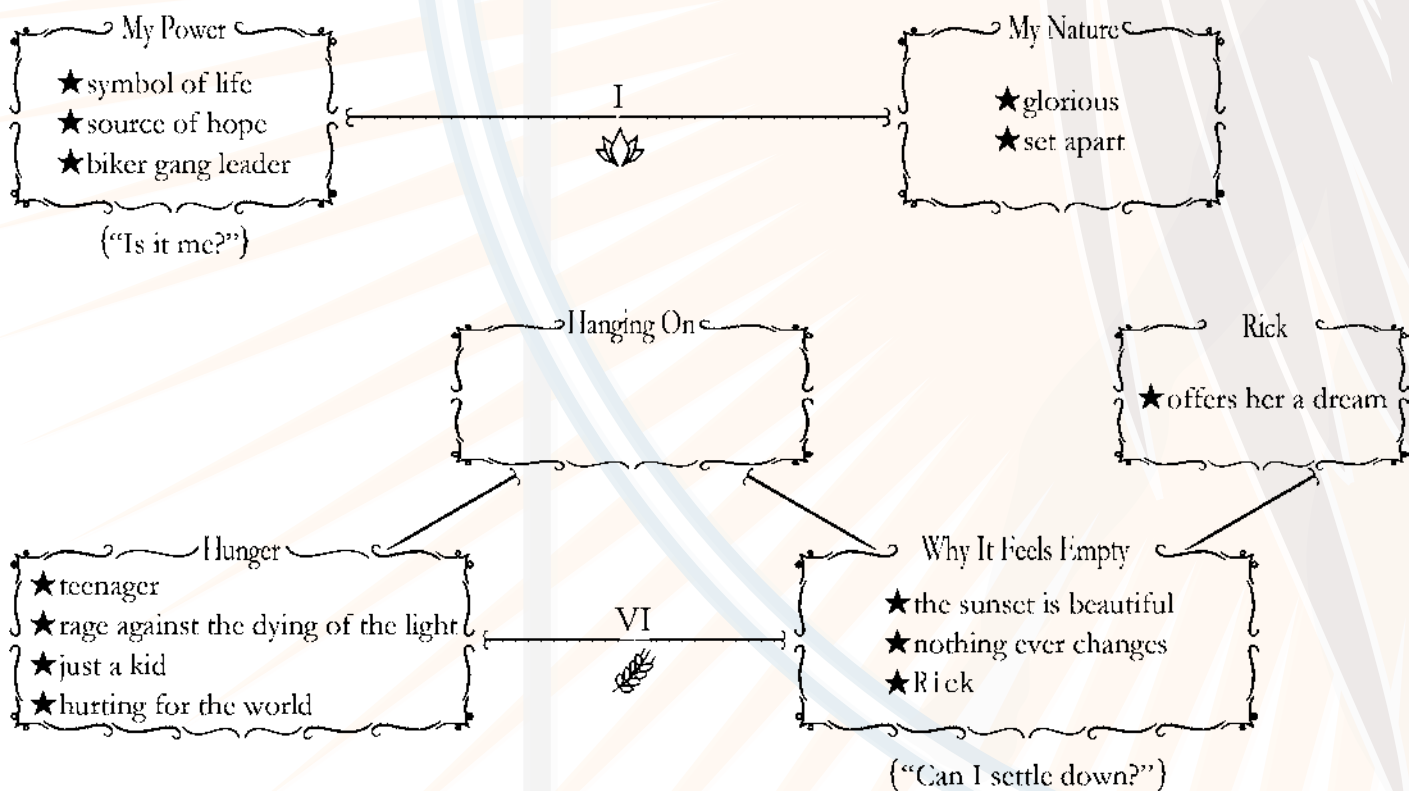
That is, Talia is wrestling with the fundamental question of the Lotus Flower — whether *she* can really change anything, or if things just change because she's around.

Above the Shadow of Wild Oats, I write:

***"Can I settle down?"***

Is there any way to break free from being a crazy teen without giving up on Hanging On?

## TALIA







**Mortals**

*She was an ordinary woman in most respects, save for her providence; which was that she could write with a better hand than any in the world. It was not a talent for which she was much recognized—but those who saw her lecture notes, or her letters, or her invitations, understood that they were witness to the miraculous in life.*

—from *Doorknobs*, by Emily Chen

## XXV

These transparent green inchworm-spirits assign people their dharma — the way they should be in life, the path that is harmonious with them, the “destiny” that is given them. They crawl over you sometime in your youth to provide the initial dharmic determination and return occasionally throughout your childhood to

touch the matter up. Inchworms don’t really care whether they’re assigning people power, potentialities, attractions, or inevitable outcomes, so it’s not always clear what exactly a person’s dharma is; what is clear is that it somehow defines what *works* for a person and works a kind of *goingness* of direction into the fabric of their self. When an Emperor makes you a Power, your old dharma becomes obsolete. You can attract dharma-worms with a

mixture of honey and crushed flowers left out on a porcelain plate, but unless you’ve lost your dharma and failed to replace it with anything else all they can really do is crawl on you, polish any bits of your dharma that may have faded, and measure roughly how many dharma-inches you have remaining.

## DHARMA WORMS

## Passions and Skills

**Passions and Skills** are a mortal’s tools to find happiness, fulfill their destiny, and earn the respect of their peers.

This is your starting place. This is how you *worked* when you were a mortal, what you *did*.

They’re not as important to a Power.

A Power’s mortal destiny is gone — replaced by a new one. They gain miraculous abilities orders of magnitude more effective than their mortal Skills. They can’t succeed at life through mortal actions alone.

But their old self is still *there*. The shell of their flesh; their mortal Will; their old Passions and Skills — it’s all still there, the thing through which they express the breath of the divine. Your Avatar isn’t just a god. They’re a person *too*.

So you’ll write down traits for your mortal self.

To build your mortal self, divide 8 points between **Passions and Skills**.

Passions are written as **sentences**. Each describes an idea, ideal, drive, dream, or attachment that *works for you* — something that helps you live your mortal life. Something that helped your Avatar find happiness, peace, success, a place, or hope, back in their mortal days. You should give more points to more important and more functional Passions.

Skills are written as short **sentence fragments**, usually 1-7 words. Each describes a skill set or way of life that you spent a long time practicing. The better you are with that Skill, the more points you should assign it.

You can spend up to 5 points on a Passion or Skill. If you run out of points before you’ve written down all the Passions and Skills you know your character has, you can have extra Passions and Skills at 0 — or even negative, for Passions that hurt you and Skills you’re terrible at. They won’t help you any, and you won’t get any points back for negative Passions and Skills, but at least you’ll know they’re there.

Here’s what I think *my* Passions and Skills look like:

- ☛ Passion: I think that people are basically good. (3)
- ☛ Passion: I want to get Nobilis back into print. (0)
- ☛ Passion: I want to finish “Hitherby Dragons.” (1)
- ☛ Passion: I want to find love! (1)
- ☛ Skill: Writer (3)
- ☛ Skill: Dancer (-1)

To solve the problems of my life, my best bet is writing or faith in humanity; dance won’t help me very much!



## Difficulties

The basic chart of difficulties for mortal actions goes like this —

- ☛ 0 or less: attempt to do things, but only make things worse;
- ☛ 1: make yourself happy;
- ☛ 2: accomplish a task; have a tangible impact on the world;
- ☛ 3: do something “correctly;” impress people around you;
- ☛ 4: do something effective — something that moves you closer to your goals;
- ☛ 5: do something productive — something that makes your life better.
- ☛ 6: do something that looks damn good — impressive, dramatic, and cool;
- ☛ 7: do something *really* effective, moving you a lot closer to your goals;
- ☛ 8: do something *really* productive — it will make your life a lot better;
- ☛ 9 or more: do the right thing, for some fuzzy definition of right.

You can use your Passions or Skills to achieve anything up to their level on that chart. A level 2 Passion would let you complete a homework assignment, fix a leak, or work your way through a piano sonata. A level 3 Skill would let you practice professionally — for instance, a lawyer with Skill: Law (3) wouldn’t necessarily win any given case, but they’d be perfectly competent, with a solid professional manner and functional legal arguments. You also get the benefits of lower-level effects, at your option — for instance, a productive action is usually effective and can be “correct” or satisfying if you like.

To go past your Passions and Skills — to reach the better levels of the chart — you need an act of **Will**.

## Will

Mortals and Powers have 8 points of Will.

Over the course of the day a character can spend Will in chunks of 1, 2, 4, or 8 to descend the difficulty chart above. It’s easy to spend 1 Will; it’s reasonable to spend 2; and spending 4 or 8 is really hard — if you push yourself that way too often, or for too long, you might overstrain yourself, give yourself a heart attack, or at least let the rest of your life fall to pieces. The HG can represent these effects by wounding one of your *Normal Health levels* (pg. 321).

### Productivity, Happiness, and Intentions

Every Passion and Skill comes with a characteristic set of outcomes — not just effects, in terms of difficulty 2 impact on the world, but a standard way of making you happy, of impressing others, of being effective, productive, of looking good, of being right.

For instance, you might have the Martial Arts that can make justice. When you work your way up to level 5 effects, you can use kung-fu, or judo, or whatever you actually have, to *make things better in that they are more just*. If you want to use Martial Arts to make friends or solve romantic problems, though, it’s not enough to just say “level 5 effect;” you have to tie your action in, somehow, to the kinds of Martial Arts you’ve used before.

Similarly, you might enjoy Cooking delicious treats. It makes you feel wickedly self-indulgent. It makes your toes curl! That doesn’t mean that you know how to do the kind of Cooking that makes you feel competent and self-satisfied. They’re both level 1 effects, but they’re not the same *kind* of Cooking Skill. If you Cook at all, you probably *can* make yourself feel competent and self-satisfied through Cooking; it’s not that it’s impossible. But you’ll have to explain how you get there. It’s not the kind of happiness you’ve earned from Cooking in the past.

The scope for Passions and Skills is generally developed in the course of play.



*On Tuesday morning, Nascha slew an unkillable beast; and performed seven acts of great chastity; and upheld the honor of the King. She protected the lands of her liege lord against an unstoppable army; and brought an incorrigible diabolist into the grace of God; and humbled herself for nearly twenty-seven hours in prayer. And at the end of the day, only one challenge remained unchecked on her to-do list: asking her liege for a higher rank within his knightly order. The thought intimidated her; in his eyes, she was lucky to be a knight at all.*

—from *The Knight of Alabaster*, by Eleanor K.

Spending Will creates an **Intention**.

An Intention is written as a sentence fragment, sentence, or short paragraph. It embodies a temporary course of action, devotion, dedication, way of handling things, or belief. Its rating is equal to [the highest relevant Passion or Skill, plus the Willpower spent] and you can use it as a temporary Passion or Skill to achieve things from the chart above.

For instance, you could add 1 Will to a level 2 Diplomacy Skill to create a level 3 Intention — “Mingle with the aristocracy.” That’s enough to carry yourself correctly and impress the people around you. Somebody with a level 0 Passion for Truth could spend 4 Will to effectively conduct an investigation, achieving through persistence and effort what they could not achieve through Skill.

Your Intentions are usually based on your own Passions and Skills. If it makes *sense*, you’re allowed to base an Intention on someone else’s — relying on a friend’s Skill, for example, or turning an enemy’s Passions against them. Intentions based on someone else’s Passions and Skills are only usable when that person is interacting with you<sup>†</sup>.

## Sustained Intentions

Characters in **Nobilis** can have up to two actions running at once. For a mortal an “action” is either an active Intention or something you’re doing with a raw Passion or Skill.

Two actions aren’t very much.

If you’re *Driving to Work*, say, and *Thinking about a Problem at Work*, then you’re full up on actions. If a cop pulls you over, and you want to engage him in polite dialogue, you’ll have to drop one of your active Intentions to do so.

## Recovering Will

You can sometimes recover one point of Will from an Intention that you’re dropping. Specifically, when you spend Will on an Intention, and that Intention *succeeds or fails*, you can drop that Intention and get one point of spent Will back.

Deciding success or failure is ultimately up to you. The HG can weigh in on the matter by telling you that you succeed at something, or that success is no longer possible, but it’s not their abstract, objective judgment of success and failure that matters. What matters is whether *your Avatar* decides that it’s a failure or success — whether they’re willing to give up on the Intention as either hopeless or complete. If

<sup>†</sup> With the exception of **Shine**, below.





you want to get a point of Will back by dropping your *Thinking about a Problem at Work* Intention and exclaiming: “That’s it! I’m not going to get this worked out today!” then that’s okay — getting pulled over isn’t *really* keeping you from solving the problem, but your declaration of failure will suffice.

In addition to this, you’ll drop all of your Intentions and reset to 8 Will when —

- ☛ you get at least 4 hours of sleep;
- ☛ a crisis completely shakes up your life; or
- ☛ the game session ends.

## Powers and Intentions

The matter of Will and Intentions tends to be a little simpler for Powers.

Husbanding your Will — feeling more and more tired as the day’s end comes — is a quintessentially mortal experience. Every Power, even the weakest and most drained, can spend a single miraculous action to create an Intention equal to [their highest relevant Passion or Skill, plus 3.] With a bit of the Aspect Trait, or a few Miracle Points, Powers can bypass the Intention system entirely, replacing declarations like “I have a level X Intention,” with “I flawlessly succeed.”

That means that Powers still *think* about pressing mortal questions like —

- ☛ should I declare failure here to recover that invested Will?
- ☛ do I have enough Will left to get me through the day?
- ☛ can I spend 4-8 Will here or is that pushing too hard?

— but only in the same way a millionaire clips coupons for the grocery store. It’s in a spirit of good practice rather than in deadly earnest.

## Cool and Shine

You have access to two special Skills named **Cool** and **Shine**.

You buy Cool and Shine like any other Skill — spending up to 5 Passion or Skill points on each — but you can’t use them to do things



† A “bishounen” is a beautiful, athletic male who transcends ordinary attractiveness. Most mysterious bishounen are actually Nobilis, Excrucians, or Imperators, but a few are the offspring of the Star-Beast Qot. These bishounen, gestated in the mind rather than the body of human and humanoid females, spend a certain interval on Earth and then are drawn to make a pilgrimage to the stars\*. A mysterious bishounen may turn out to be a normal human but then they are probably not so much mysterious as secretive, distant or misunderstood.

\* Or so they think! They do not get very far off-earth before the Star-Beast dissolves them back into its being, leaving any clothes, equipment, or companions they have accumulated behind to drift endlessly in a mysterious airless void.



yourself, and you can't use Will or miracles to make them stronger. They're not tools to make you more productive and effective and happy. Cool and Shine affect *other* characters' actions, instead.

## Cool

Cool is competence, focus, and unflappability. It's the power to be the star of your own story and not easily a set piece in anyone else's plans. For instance, I bump into a mysterious bishounen† and decide that we should fall in love. My Passion can help me win him over to this plan! But he can oppose that Passion with his Cool — not so much *rejecting* my pitch as standing there so coolly and so mysteriously that I mess it up myself.

### Skill Penalties

Cool is a **Skill Penalty**. If applicable it reduces the effective rating of a Skill, Passion, or Intention by the Cool rating. Mundane actions are just plain less effective against the Cool.

You only take one Skill Penalty at a time — specifically, the highest. So if you're going up against Cool 2 and Cool 3 at the same time, it reduces your effective Skill, Passion, or Intention rating by 3. (Not 5!)

### What Cool Protects Against

Cool gets in the way of mundane actions that:

- ☛ trick, trip up, embarrass, or mess with someone Cool;
- ☛ hurt someone Cool;
- ☛ co-opt, win over, or corrupt someone Cool; *or*
- ☛ do one of those things to an organization, person, or situation someone Cool is actively watching over.

In each of these cases, Cool applies reflexively and by default<sup>††</sup>, but a Cool person can waive their Cool if they want to let something happen.

### Powers and Cool

As a Power, your character will get free Cool equal to their Aspect Trait (pg. 178). This adds to any Cool you buy with Passion and Skill points, up to a maximum total Cool of 5.



## Shine

Shine is leadership, glory, and influence.

You can use it to inspire others. In particular, any time a mortal wants to do things for you, to serve you, to honor you, or to implement your orders or agenda — and assuming you're OK with it — they can draw upon your Shine. They can use it as if it were one of their own Passions or Skills, making it the basis for an Intention, and you don't have to interact with them to make it work.

For instance, you have Shine 4. You radiate with glory. You tell a mortal: "Go jump in a lake." If it weren't for your Shine, that would be a bad idea for them. They would get wet, and might develop a cold. However, because you are inspirational, they might just want to *do* it — with just 1 Will spent on their Intention, they can guarantee that it'll be a productive and effective movement in their life.

Maybe you meant it more as a brush-off. You don't *have* to let them use your Shine. But maybe you're the kind of numinous, magical, mysterious creature who knows that cooling their head in a lake will do them good.

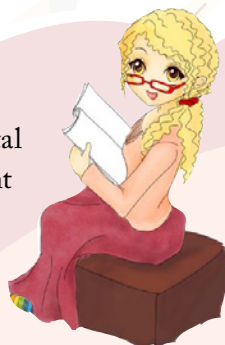
### *Powers and Shine*

As a Power you will receive free Shine equal to your Persona Trait (pg. 196). This adds to any Shine you buy with Passion and Skill points, up to a maximum total Shine of 5.

Powers resist other characters' Shine, and can't use it as the basis for their actions.

## Action

The HG looks at the rating of your active Intentions, Passions, or Skills when deciding what your actions can achieve. In the absence of opposition or a serious obstacle, you're always guaranteed at least a nod towards the effects reachable at those levels — a level 2 Intention does *something*, a level 4 Intention does something *effective*, and a level 5 Intention does something that leaves you better off. Sometimes you'll do even better — the HG is always able to offer you more than you've actually earned, right down to declaring that your 0-1-point Intention



†† That said, Cool doesn't apply to merely *probable* or *potential* harm! Cool only applies when the immediate first-order effects of an action are harmful or invasive — and it specifically doesn't apply to something that won't be harmful until another, later action makes it so. If you're planning to blow up someone Cool, for instance, you can rent out the apartment next to them without penalty. You can even assemble and plant a remote-detonated bomb in the rented apartment without penalty! It's not until you go to press the button and make things go boom that their Cool will get in your way. Similarly, even though there's at least a few Cool 5 mortals on every continent, there's nothing stopping you from accumulating a nuclear arsenal big enough to destroy the world hundreds of times over. Cool won't be a problem for you until you go to *launch* them!

You may be wondering whether remote detonator buttons and missile launcher buttons are notoriously difficult to push in the world of the game, which would be an embarrassing situation for me, since that world after all is meant to be our own. The answer is, they're not. The HG can describe the cause of failure of an action however they like. They can decide when a bomb fails to explode that something happened to distract you from pushing the button; or to interrupt the signal; or that some hero heroically snipped a colored wire just then; or even that there was a previously undiscovered issue dating back to the bomb's assembly or installation that just now came into play. They have many options!

Also, even in reality, those buttons are harder to push than you might think, and people who have trouble with them are less likely to complain. For world-wide nuclear annihilation buttons it is even arguably a selling point.



*The case against the human soul is compelling: if most people had one, wouldn't they do something about their world?*

—from the prologue to *Principles of the Dark*,  
by Merriweather James

† This is, in fact, why people bother brushing their teeth at all!

I mean, not that we're all hoping for a level 9+ result, exactly, when we do it, but we *do* imagine that even a low-level Intention like "Brush Teeth (0)" or "Brush Teeth (1)" will have some effect, at least; will help us live correctly, perhaps; even, in an ideal world, that it could scale up randomly to a level 5 result that makes our lives *better* than they, without brushing our teeth on that particular occasion, would have been.

\* He's unhappy with his life. If you were named Dr. Porlock Maleficio you probably would be too. Also you would really begin to wonder why one child named Porlock wasn't *enough* for Mr. and Mrs. Maleficio, and if the two of you, perhaps, were clones. Ultimately the only way to resolve your confusion would be to stop me from watching a movie.



to brush your teeth in the morning was so objectively correct that the angels sang and the World Ash bowed in wonder†.

What if there *is* opposition?

When two actions are in conflict, the action with the higher Passion, Skill, or Intention rating "wins." It gets the rewards for its Intention rating first, and the other action must pick up the scraps. This means that if you aren't reasonably confident that you can get the higher number, you'll want to avoid direct head-to-head conflict with another character's actions.

For instance, I want to watch a movie. Dr. Porlock Maleficio, on the other hand, wants to stop me from watching a movie!‡ If he sets himself a 5-point Intention of "Stop Jenna from watching a movie," then he's probably going to succeed. I can't see making an Intention higher than level 2 to watch a movie, even if I know he's going to get in my way, which means that the HG will resolve his Intention first. It'll be productive — stopping me will make his life better. It'll be effective — he *will* stop me. It'll make him happy — he'll be laughing, maniacally, because he's gotten in my way. And only then, when he's gotten all of that, will the HG look at my Intention to see what's left for me to achieve.

The answer is, probably, not much. If I had a particularly melancholy style of movie-watching, where complaining about the movie experience was most of my pleasure in it, then I might be able to sneak some enjoyment right past the evil doctor — declaring that level 1 is still enough to make me happy even though I don't get to watch anything at all. For *some* people, being persecuted out of a movie by an evil doctor might be *better* than seeing a movie in the first place!

... but I'm not one of those people, so that wouldn't actually help *me*.

Note that you're allowed to spend more Will than you actually need on an Intention if you expect to face opposition of this sort — even if all I want to do is make myself happy, I can gird myself for an encounter with Dr. Maleficio by forcing my way to a level 6 Intention. This doesn't force me to turn superfluous backflips or strike dramatic poses or make the movie-watching "productive" in some fashion — I can still limit myself to claiming a level 1 "makes you happy" result. The only cost is that I'll be awfully short on Will for any other conflicts I wind up having with Dr. Maleficio later, and that I probably have to risk my health, just a little, to get there.



# Trouble

Sometimes your action will come up against something that you just can't change — something that keeps your "I blow up the world with my mind" action from having an impact on the world, even if you *do* manage to reach Intention level 2. Something like:

**"You can't do that. You don't have psychic powers."**

Truths like this — things that get in the way of your actions — are called **Obstacles**. They're not limited to outright show-stoppers like the one above; they run the gamut from

**"It's hard to do athletics with a twisted ankle,"** or

**"You don't have enough funding to do this research properly,"**

to universal truths like

**"Killing people won't make you happy,"** or

**"You can't make friends without actually meeting people."**

Obstacles are like Cool — they're **Skill Penalties**. Each Obstacle is rated from 1 to 5, and when you're in direct conflict with the Obstacle, it reduces your effective Skill, Passion, or Intention rating by the level of the Obstacle. Remember that you only take one Skill Penalty — the highest, specifically — at a time.

Usually you'll only encounter an Obstacle when you're pushing the limits of your Skills and Passions, confronting a hard truth of the world, or working under some sort of active and unusual handicap — the *definition* of ordinary use for most Skills and Passions is that no Obstacles interfere.

# Magic

Magic is a special case.

People who learn to see the real world — the mythic world — can take up the practice of magic. This is usually bought as a Skill of some sort, such as **Skill: Elementalism** or **Skill: Sorcery**, and it's not inherently any more powerful or effective than any other Skill.

*If you lock a human alone in a room for long enough—past the point of anger, past the point of despair, past the point where they can no longer talk or think coherently—they begin inventing new methods of war. They begin to create tools and strategies of battle that the world has never seen before. It takes a skilled psychologist to dredge meaning from their mumbles and gibbering, from the sketches their fingernails make against the floor.*

*That is the only secret; that is what makes the great nations great, and makes lesser nations fall. Someone locked in a room, in the dark, without sanitation or company, until their mind breaks; someone to read their heart, and tell the world what transpires there.*

—from *Reflections III*, by Viscount d'Armand

*"Our civilization has long since overcome its primitive dependence on the minds of the elite as a driving force of technology and culture. Now, we harness them to great Cognito-Drivers, using their intellect to power our starships and fuel our engines of mass destruction."*

—overheard in the "Star Destroyer Gamma" region of Locus Zaanannim



*"I generally recommend against sending Teazel in a birthday bouquet," the shopkeeper noted.*

*"I believe I know what I want," Jon said determinedly.*

*"It's simply that it tends to strangle the recipient in their sleep."*

*"Oh." Jon paused. "How about this one? Appokynum?"*

*"Apocynum, sir. It occasionally brings nightmares to life."*

*"Madam," Jon said, "what kind of florist are you?"*

*"A realistic one," the shopkeeper answered.*

*"Pleasant bouquets are my art and my calling. More lethal arrangements pay for my two mansions and a yacht."*

—from *The Grim King*, by Melanie Tumbarius

*Crowds are far easier to coerce into foolish mistakes than individuals are. For example, it is easy to convince a crowd to travel faster than light, thus violating the causal order postulate and damaging the fundamental order of the universe. Convincing an individual to do so is almost impossible.*

—from *Emeritus*, by Michael Kay

Magicians can't battle Powers. They can't defeat miracles. They can't call down angels or drive off devils, and they're not notably any happier, healthier, more effective, or more productive than anybody else.

What they *do* have is a Skill without an ordinary mode of use — a Skill where everything they might want to do is equally a stretch, and any impossibility can be converted to an obstacle.

For instance, somebody shoots at a sorcerer. The sorcerer decides they want to knock the bullets out of the air. That's not something ordinary Skills can ever really do — even a level 9+ Warrior action is more likely to move you smoothly past the line of fire than actually cut down bullets, because, fundamentally, a level 9+ mundane action is still *mundane*.

But for a sorcerer, it's just something like a level 3 Obstacle —

**"People can't knock bullets aside."**

The distinguishing feature of magic is that you *can* reduce things like that to Obstacles — that you can stretch the Skill to do incredible, unnatural things. The flip side is that you generally *have* to — there isn't really any kind of standard usage where you just use the Skill and do things without encountering Obstacles at all.

Using magic effectively consumes a lot of Will — magicians haven't taken over the world, despite their awesome power, because they tend to fall over after 1-2 small spells. To mitigate this effect magicians learn to warp and transform their dharma, change their nature, adopt magical specialties and strange taboos; this manifests as the purchase of **Bonds**, described on pg. 161-166. A mortal magician can have up to 8 points of Bonds, in addition to their Passions and Skills; these will serve as sources of Will and lighten the cost of some spells. If your Avatar was a magician before becoming a Power, you can either keep some of their old Bonds (upgraded to Noble levels of power) or assume that your character discarded them all as part of their Commencement.

## Tools and Assistants

For the most part tools, machines, and assistants don't play much part in the action system as stated. It's assumed that if you're driving into town, you have a car, and that that's faster — but not *better* — than taking a bike. Using a word processor helps you write, but it doesn't help you earn happiness, or write effectively, or impress others. It



mostly helps with things like speed and feasibility, which are more relevant to HG description than to player action.

A few special tools and coworkers (which we're going to capitalize or relabel as Tools) can actually raise your effective Passions, Skills, or Intentions. For example, a stage with good acoustics actually makes you a better singer — it lowers the difficulty of being impressive, effective, and productive with Singing Skill on the stage. A good editor improves your writing, a good content management system improves your competence as a software engineer, and low latency will help you perform skillfully in a networked game.

Tools like this add an effective +1 or +2 to your relevant Passion, Skill, or Intention — +1 for very good Tools, and +2 for downright exceptional ones. Tools that add +3 or more are remarkable, either unique, magical, or super-advanced; the theoretical maximum for legendary magical Tools and post-Singularity technology is +5.

## Edge

In addition to making your life easier and occasionally improving your effective skills, accessories like cars, backup, and nuclear warheads can give you a competitive advantage in conflicts with other people.

This advantage is called **Edge**. It's a rating between +0 and +5 that measures how *much* you outgun someone —

- +0. You've got basically equivalent bling.
- +1. Your tennis racket and shoes are awesome, and theirs are falling apart<sup>†</sup>.
- +2. You have a gun. They are unarmed.
- +3. You have your hands free. They are busy holding up the sky.
- +4. You're in a car, and they're racing you on foot.
- +5. Your opponent has mistakenly brought a knife to a global thermo-nuclear annihilation fight.

Edge, like Cool, is a Skill Penalty. For the purpose of deciding who wins the conflict (and for no other purpose) it reduces your opponent's effective Skill, Passion, or Intention rating by the rating of your Edge.

Remember that you only take one Skill Penalty, the highest Skill Penalty, at any given time<sup>‡</sup>.

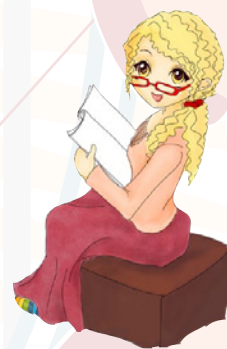
*"The enemy has twice ten thousand genii of flame, and great black elephants that snort clouds of heated vapor, and over their hosts fly spindle-limbed demons wreathed in Hell's fires. You, on the other hand, have five shiftless deserters."*

*"And a camel!"*

*"And a camel," IT concedes.*

—from *Fire Stories*, compiled by Édouard Guy

<sup>†</sup> Also, you are playing tennis.



<sup>‡</sup> So you're a mysterious bishounen in a mysterious zeppelin. Someone's trying to shoot you down, so you start raining bombs on them. You have Cool 2 and Edge 4.

Your Cool makes it harder for them to hit you. It's just like they're a bad shot. If they have **Intention: Shoot Down the Bishounen** of 5, it drops to an effective 3 just from your Cool. But for purposes of deciding whether you win the fight? They have an effective Intention of 1. You can push the bomb-dropping button with a languid, sunny carelessness and still have a good chance of driving your opponent off before they shoot you down.

## Inherent Superiority

Characters who were never human may spend some of their Passion and Skill points to buy **Superior Qualities and Skills**. These work just like tools — you get things done quickly and easily, you can accomplish things others can't, and you have Edge in an otherwise fair contest equal to the Superior Quality or Skill:

- +0. You're within human norms.
- +1. You're unrealistically good.
- +2. You're like Sherlock Holmes (Superior Detective 2) or John Henry (Superior Steel Drivin' 2).
- +3. You're like a beast — bears have Superior Strength 3, great cats have Superior Reflexes 3.
- +4. You're something far beyond human — mountains have Superior Strength 4.
- +5. Nothing mortal can stand against you — light, for example, has Superior Speed 5.

You can generally use them as ordinary Skills, as well — making them point for point better than ordinary Passions and Skills, as long as you're OK with not really being human.<sup>†</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Sherlock Holmes, for clarity, *pretends* to be human in his fiction, but let's face it, if you knew him in real life you'd think something totally hinky was up. Probably (and maybe this is just me) you would decide he was actually an experimental CIA android who had been kicked out of the agency for being too British, or for the drugs, or somesuch sort of thing.

John Henry, on the other hand, just drives steel through any attempt you might make to categorize him. You should try it sometime! It's really quite surprising!





# The Laws of Your Nature

*Within the limits of our comprehension,  
we each determine our own fate —  
Go gladly to it, rather,  
whether we make ourselves have wings  
Or feed ourselves to rabid dogs.*

*It is the inexorable blessedness of the universe  
Operating beyond our comprehension  
And clashing terribly with the  
smallness of our desires  
That poses the great threat  
To our chosen outcome.*

— repeated ad infinitum  
in the Thought-Record of Hannary James

**C**OMMENCEMENT GETS RID of your old dharma. It's still *there*, under a dharmascope, but it doesn't apply any longer. You are no longer a mortal. You are no longer even *supposed* to be a mortal. You have a new way of being, new purposes, new laws. Your destiny is overwritten. It's like you've become a fan fiction of yourself, with a completely different life story and endgame:

## What if *you* became a *god*?

Once you have your character concept you will write down the new covenant of your life — your new dharma, your new purpose, your new way of being — as a list of **Bonds, Afflictions, and Properties**. You are governed and defined by your Afflictions and Bonds, while the Properties explain the rules of your Estate.

Divide up to 13<sup>†</sup> points between **Bonds** and **Afflictions**, spending 1-5 points on each.

**Bonds and Afflictions** are written as English-language sentences. Each describes something fundamental about your character. Each can also be interpreted or understood as a rule —

- ☛ something you *must* (or *ought to*) do;
- ☛ something you *can't* (or *shouldn't*) do; or
- ☛ something that drives you into action.

Bonds are things that you must work at. You spend energy on them. When you turn your back on your Bonds you are damaged and lost;

<sup>†</sup> Technically you can spend up to [13 + your Treasure rating] points here, but don't worry about that until you understand Bonds, Afflictions, and Treasure.





*The Power Surkhai Beybukov suffers an affliction of lines. Wherever he should go, a line forms behind him. If he should walk slowly, they shuffle behind him. If he should run, or drive, or fly, they fall behind; but as soon as he decelerates to a human range of motion, the local citizenry assemble at his back. Surkhai claims that he suffers this curse to shield his Emperor from its effects. His Emperor claims to have assigned it in retribution for certain of Surkhai's personal habits. As for the crowd, they point to Surkhai's regal demeanor. "Why, someone like this," they say, "must be going somewhere very interesting indeed!"*

—from *On Serving the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis

*"Up!" he cried. "Up! It's inspection time!"*

*Slowly, grumpily, the soldiers filed out of their holes, washed their paws in the stream, and donned their helmets and their greaves. They stood with bayonets high as the sergeant paced up and down before them.*

*"Wilson!" the sergeant snapped. "Need I remind you?"*

*"No, sir," Wilson replied, and his shoulders sagged. "Badgers can't play video games."*

*His little handheld device emitted a mournful bloop.*

— from *Some Live, Some Die*, by Jackie Robinson,  
writing on the topic of the Badgers' Bond

when you are in harmony with them, you are almost unstoppable; but to *reach* that place of harmony, you need to put in an awful lot of work. Having Bonds is like being a perfect swordsman or a soldier who refuses to kill — it may be your nature and purpose to be that way, but that doesn't mean you can take the burden lightly!

Afflictions, conversely, just *happen*. They're out of your hands. Sometimes they're good, sometimes they are bad, but they're that portion of your destiny and purpose and nature that binds you whether you're in tune with yourself or not.

Any Bond can be an Affliction, or vice versa; it's purely a question of how you want to think of the Trait.

## Bonds

Bonds are for you — the player.

The HG can reward you for using them appropriately. The basic sentence for the Bond is always treated as "true" or at least "potentially true" in the game world. But it is you, as a player, who decides when to bring the Bond into the game and with what force.

## Why you Want Bonds

Bonds can be pretty awesome things. You can be uncatchable or invincible or beautiful as a Bond, for example, and then it's not so much a burden as a tool —

☛ **Bond:** I can't be caught!

☛ **Bond:** I can't lose!

☛ **Bond:** I must be the prettiest person in the room!

Conversely, Bonds that are weaknesses or demands are also useful to you. When they get you into trouble or motivate you into cool sorts of action, you gain extra MP. That's why you might want to choose Bonds like —

☛ **Bond:** I can't enter a house uninvited!

☛ **Bond:** I can't see!

☛ **Bond:** I'm in love with an Excrucian!

Bonds are also a great way to record the things you care about — to establish that you care about your family, your friends, your horse, your sword,



your job, your hobby, your collection of exploding flowers, or whatever. You can make it clear what's really important to you with Bonds like —

- ☛ **Bond:** I care about my brother!
- ☛ **Bond:** Nobody drives my car but me!
- ☛ **Bond:** I ♥ my magic broom!
- ☛ **Bond:** Flowers are awesome enough when they *don't* explode — but when half of them are antimatter? O.M.G.

## Benefits

### *Bond-Based Actions*

In a conflict, or when facing a skill penalty, you may reflexively invoke any applicable Bond to improve a mundane action. This adds [the highest applicable Bond rating] to the effective Intention level of your action.

For example, you have a level 5 Bond of love to a friend. You decide to buy them a present. It doesn't help — you're not in a conflict. But if someone tries to stop your purchase, or if you're broke enough that the lack of money is even a 1-point Obstacle, your Bond kicks in — and you add the Bond to your Intention rating and become much stronger.

### *Strike*

In a conflict, you may reflexively invoke a Bond to improve a miraculous action. This allows you to shatter miraculous shields, overcome the exceptional power of Imperators, Excrucians, and high-Persona Nobilis, and ignore other characters' Afflictions. This ability is called **Strike**.

Invoking a Bond is proposing to the HG that —

- ☛ you *must* do something, but you're in danger of that not happening;
- ☛ you *can't* do something, but you're in danger of being forced into it; *or*
- ☛ you're *driven* to do something, and it's filling your thoughts, driving you, pushing you, right now.

The HG then decides whether to accept that proposal and agree that the risk is real or the drive applicable.

If the HG agrees that your actions are driven by your Bond or that your opponent's actions threaten it, your miracle receives a free Strike equal to [the highest relevant Bond rating]. This negates any



## When do players get MP for Afflictions, Bonds, and Properties?

The HG decides at basically their whim when to give out MP. *However*, that choice has a meaning.

The more MP you give out, as HG, the more “oomph” the moment has in the context of the ongoing story. The fewer MP, the less! Giving or not giving MP is, in short, a descriptive technique, just like calling something crimson instead of red or “a cop” instead of “a guy in a strange uniform, running at you with a gun.”

This is why players almost never get MP for things that happen “offstage.”

hostile **Auctoritas** (pg. 109-110) up to the level of your Strike, and you subtract the higher of your Strike or Miraculous Edge from your opponent’s effective miracle level for the purposes of deciding the conflict. You can invoke a Bond’s Strike after declaring the action itself, as long as the action hasn’t completed yet.

For example, you have a 2-point Bond obligating you to be the prettiest person in the room. You’re in a beauty contest. Your miracles to win the contest automatically receive 2 Strike, except during the talent portion; there, the HG may or may not allow it to apply. Later on you are climbing Mt. Everest. For this, your Bond does nothing, no matter how fervently or vigorously invoked.

## MP Bonus

You can gain MP from your Bonds. The HG may give you a number of MP up to and including the Bond rating when —

- your Bond gets you into trouble;
- someone twists or breaks the Bond, e.g. by catching an uncatchable you;
- you do something cool that the Bond drove you to, or that fulfills or exemplifies the Bond.

If something *really* major happened, and it’s late enough in the story that this is a good bargain, the HG can offer you a full MP refresh instead of bonus MP.

For a mortal Avatar, or if the HG wants to reward you with something less than 1 MP, you may receive points of Will up to and including the Bond rating instead.

## Healing

You can survive off your Bonds. Doing things related to your Bonds puts energy in your system — it’s like a sugar-water IV or a bit of a nap. Doing cool things related to high-level Bonds is more like having a grand meal, a long sleep, great sex, or some other incredibly refreshing event. You can sometimes use a Bond to survive things that would otherwise kill you — if you are in a fugue/trance-like state focused on a Bond when you lose your last health level and “die,” the HG may rule that your Avatar survives in a completely focused fugue and can become a playable character again at a later point. For instance, a shark PC might have a Bond to “keep moving;” if they are dying in hard



vacuum, they could throw themselves into mindless flailing motion and potentially survive (albeit without the ability to take other actions) until someone rescues them.

## Breaking Bonds

If you break your Bonds it usually just means that you as a player are shoving the matter off the table. Maybe the situation isn't really covered by the Bond, or maybe you think the Bond comes into play and then gets circumvented but you don't want to deal with exactly how. For instance, you can't enter a house when you're not invited, but it's late and the game's almost ending and you want to enter a house, so you just do it. Maybe there's some technicality and it's not really a "house." Maybe you were invited long ago. Maybe everyone should just assume that you got someone to come to the door and invite you. Maybe you're just tired as a player and you forgot the rule!<sup>†</sup>

Sometimes, though, it's more sinister. Someone has forcibly broken your Bond, overcoming its power with their own or putting you in a situation that forced you to break it yourself. You're the only one who can confirm that this has happened, but if it does happen your character will suffer a spiritual wound. The details won't mean much to you until you've read the wound system, but the wound's severity is capped by the Bond strength at:

- 1: one Surface Wound;
- 2-3: one Serious Wound;
- 4: one Deadly Wound;
- 5: two Deadly Wounds

It can also count as "breaking" a Bond if there's something you care about, something you're motivated to protect or own or manage, and that thing gets hurt.

If you take a wound from a breaking Bond, you'll almost certainly gain MP as well!

## Getting into Trouble

You don't have to wait for a Bond to get you into trouble naturally — you can just *declare* yourself into trouble. You can do something stupid with an Aspect miracle or a mundane action. You can use some other kind of miracle to intensify or make relevant the Bond, drawing trouble to your door. Your Avatar is allowed to be irrational sometimes, or



<sup>†</sup> I once forgot that one of my characters was blind and spent a long time scoping out a murder scene. Eventually the HG-equivalent gently reminded me that I couldn't actually see a thing.

XXVIII



This is the Power of Poseurs. He may show up anywhere in the world to take petty vengeance upon you for offenses or perceived offenses against poseurs. If he does harass you you may drive him away by pretending that you are important enough or powerful enough to drive off a Power. This is surprisingly yet inevitably effective. It is not clear from existing reports whether this is Trystan's weakness or simply his favored mode of worship.

**TRYSTAN  
PORPHYROGENITUS**

to engage in self-defeating behaviors driven by a subconscious will — their Bonds are *part* of them, after all, just as much as their conscious thinking process is.

For instance, if your Power is acrophobic, you might notice over time that acrophobia isn't really slowing you down. You might be very afraid of high places, but it's not really a trouble in your life when

- ☛ nobody can force you to go anywhere you don't want to go; *and*
- ☛ you find excuses to participate when you *do* get dragged into aerial battles, because flailing around role-playing acrophobia isn't as fun as taking meaningful actions.

In a case like that, don't just leave the Bond to calcify on your character sheet, laying around like some sort of Bond-like lump! *Look* for ways to make your life more complicated with it! Declare that you missed an important meeting with some NPC because they live on the third floor, and now they might be mad at you. Let the stress of recent or impending aerial encounters mess up the rest of your life. Grow wings to fight your phobia and then never use them! Make it count.

## Afflictions

Afflictions are controlled by the HG.

An Affliction is still part of your character. Your vision of how the Affliction works and what it *is* is the “correct” one in the fiction of the game. But unlike with Bonds, it's the HG who decides when the Affliction applies, and what it does in any given case.

## Why you Want Afflictions

Afflictions are better than Bonds in that they can actually *make things happen*, and as part of the HG's action rather than a mundane or miraculous action of your own. You can have Afflictions like:

- ☛ **Affliction:** I must be rescued whenever I'm in trouble!
- ☛ **Affliction:** I can't be hurt by any force!
- ☛ **Affliction:** I must win the heart of everyone I meet!

*Mirabelle had not asked to be an avatar of death. Some things just happened. She figured that she just pretty much had to live with it, and so she did.*

—from *Doorknobs*, by Emily Chen



And then whenever you're in trouble, someone rescues you. When something tries to hurt you, it fails. When you meet someone, you win their heart! The only trouble is that it happens whether you want it to or not.

Afflictions that are weaknesses are useful for the same reason as a weakness-style Bond. When they get you into trouble, you gain MP. They often have strong potential utility as well:

- ☛ **Affliction:** I must appear when someone chants my name three times!
- ☛ **Affliction:** My shape changes to reflect my deeds!
- ☛ **Affliction:** An Excrucian's in love with *me*!

Sure, to look under the hood of that first Affliction, it's terribly annoying to reflexively teleport across the world whenever some dude with a pamphlet chants your name. On the plus side, though, it's free travel; it doesn't require buying a Teleportation-style Gift; your friends can call on you when they're in trouble; and it won't be long before you pair it with a cell phone and some allies to get you just about anywhere you want to go.

## Benefits

### *Affliction-Based Actions*

The HG will use your Affliction as the basis for reflexive actions. These are miraculous or magical actions and can do unnatural things. The default miracle level is around [Affliction rating + 1], but the HG can pick whatever they like — whatever level of mundane Intention or Aspect, Domain, or Persona miracle it would take to get an appropriate effect is a good choice. Certain Persona and Treasure miracles can create temporary Afflictions; for these, the HG will usually use the Persona/Treasure miracle level as the level of the Affliction effect.

Afflictions don't really engage in tactical miraculous combat — you can think of them like water trying to flow into a scene. Balked by some barrier, water just pushes, explores, and waits; balked by a miracle, Afflictions simply hang out in abeyance until either the force that balks them recedes or an opportunity arises. In short, the HG can keep Afflictions on the back burner — it's not necessary to invoke Affliction actions constantly or cleverly once something breaks their hold.

That said, balking an Affliction with miracles isn't easy —

An Affliction's actions are defended by an **Auctoritas** equal to the Affliction rating. This Auctoritas is a divine shield that utterly negates whatever portion of the miracle directly opposes the Affliction. For example, you're being summoned by someone who is chanting your name.

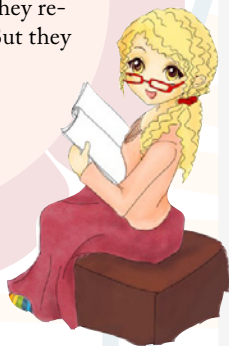
*Lies hung from him like strips of black ribbon. Promises kept at great cost twined around his brow. Dust from a hundred long journeys drifted from his feet, and his eyes sparkled with a hundred thousand loves.*

*"How did you come to be this way?" the child asked.*

*"I became aware," the wanderer said, "that I carried with me everything I had ever done. So powerful was this understanding that I could not help but share it with everyone I met."*

—from *The Box*, by Emily Chen

† This is a little less impressive than it sounds because people often *will* spend that MP or invoke a Bond if they really want to get in your way. But they have to actually do so!



An opponent attempts to trap you in a cell of twisted space, making it so you can't teleport away and escape. Only — it doesn't work. They can't do that! The Auctoritas gives the Affliction absolute precedence. Unless your opponent gives their miracle a quality called **Strike** (pg. 163-164, 319) by invoking Bonds or spending MP, no miracle or mundane action that they use will stop your Affliction from working as defined†.

The Auctoritas is not itself a miracle. Accordingly, Auctorita do not cancel out; if two Afflictions come into direct conflict, regardless of their ratings, both miraculous actions fail. If a player realizes or suspects this is happening, they can spend MP or use a Bond to give their Affliction's miraculous action Strike.

### MP Bonus

You can gain MP from Afflictions, as with Bonds. For example, you're trying to fit into a sleepy Southern community. But you have the Affliction, "My shape changes to reflect my deeds." One night you go and win a fight with an Excrucian. You come back home radiant with glory and dripping with the ichor of the Beyond; suddenly fitting in to the sleepy town becomes more difficult. Once it becomes clear that this is actually a problem for you, the HG awards you a suitable number of MP. Unlike Bonds, Afflictions never give mortal Will — if you're in trouble, but not enough trouble to earn a whole MP, the HG should find a way to give you more trouble instead of settling for a smaller reward.

### Breaking Afflictions

Afflictions are robust — they don't break just because someone overcomes them with miraculous Strike on one occasion. They only "break" when they are made contradictory, inconsistent, and paradoxical, either within themselves or in combination with one of your other Afflictions; when they become unable, that is, to function or apply.

You win the heart of everyone you meet — *but the mechanical man you just met has no heart to win!*

You appear to anyone who chants your name three times — *but now your name is being chanted in a placeless void!*

If something like this *does* happen, it's up to the player to either:

- ☛ propose a viable resolution (something that could happen to sustain the Affliction); *or*
- ☛ accept spiritual damage to their Avatar, as when breaking a Bond.



After taking damage from breaking an Affliction, the player has the option to immediately remove it and declare that the contradiction rips the law of the Affliction from their Avatar's soul. This will free up the Bond/Affliction points spent on it until the next opportunity the player has to redesign their Afflictions and their Bonds.

## Afflictions and Bonds

### (Example)

**Rook Catchfly**, the Power of Eternity, has the following Afflictions and Bonds:

- ☛ **Affliction (3):** I can't age!
- ☛ **Bond (3):** I must protect the world.
- ☛ **Bond (2):** I love showing people the beauty of the world.<sup>‡</sup>
- ☛ **Bond (1):** I can't let people take what belongs to *me*.
- ☛ **Bond (1):** I can't be afraid!
- ☛ **Bond (1):** I can't take Marsiglio Tendi seriously.
- ☛ **Bond (1):** I want to prove myself.
- ☛ **Bond (1):** I want to hang out with my Familia.

Most of these are at least partially subject to her will, but she really *can't* age, which would work out a lot better for her if she weren't currently 10.

## More Example Bonds and Afflictions

### Things that are Usually Bonds

#### Duties

- ☛ **Bond:** I serve {insert cause (e.g. "the Light" or "the Wild") here}.
- ☛ **Bond:** I have a duty I must regularly perform in the broader world.
- ☛ **Bond:** I care about my duties to the Chancell!
- ☛ **Bond:** I must participate in certain sacred ceremonies if at all physically possible.

*"I will give you my endless garden," the Marquis said, "and a knife so sharp it could even cut the moon. A thousand thousand clockwork attendants will attend you, and show you every wonder that your heart could dream. You shall be my heir; and I am soon to die. But I must warn you, dear, that you shall walk this world I give to you in solitude and cold; for I am Pain, and Pain you shall become, and pain can have no friends."*

—from *The Mask*, by Emily Chen



<sup>‡</sup> This is Rook's take on the Song of Heaven.

*I am forbidden to love.*

*Others of my kind ignore this restriction, cloaking their feelings in secrecy and silence. I do not have that option. I am a creature of law. I do not bend. I do not seek to subvert the rules that govern my people, for the Lord who sets this law reigns by the order of the warleaders of Creation.*

*So I do not let myself feel the love I once felt for Cynthia. I do not let myself visit her. One of my servants picks up her letters to me, and puts them in the fire. I give my heart to no one.*

*Sometimes, I let myself look at a picture of the two of us together. That is not against the law. Not if I only look to say, "How much I have changed."*

—from the Thought-Record of Rocio DeMitre

## XXIX

This is a Power who records the sins and good deeds of humankind. The angels consult Cassiel's register when setting and updating policy on how to handle potential human-extinction events — specifically, the Earth is a major front in the Excrucian War; if the Excrucians overwhelm it, driving Heaven back, is it worth trying to save humanity?

Cassiel is incorruptible but not omniscient, so if you see him and happen to know of any really good deeds that are being done right around then, you might want to point him in their direction!



CASSIEL OF THE BOOK

## Emotions

- ☞ **Bond:** There's something I can't bear to fail at!
- ☞ **Bond:** I have to nurture my fortune!
- ☞ **Bond:** Nobody touches my guns. *Nobody.*
- ☞ **Bond:** I hate to see children hurt!

## Relationships

- ☞ **Bond:** I have a rival.
- ☞ **Bond:** I love my magical flute!
- ☞ **Bond:** I want my old mundane home and country to stay safe and well.

## Weaknesses and Limitations

- ☞ **Bond:** I'm dead, and can't take mundane actions except when possessing something.
- ☞ **Bond:** I only have one hand!
- ☞ **Bond:** I can't remember who I am or what happened before the last scenes of the last story.
- ☞ **Bond:** I can't kick the devil rum.
- ☞ **Bond:** I have two points less Domain when not wielding my mystical artifact.
- ☞ **Bond:** My Persona and Domain miracles use a very narrow definition of my Estate.
- ☞ **Bond:** I can only use really obvious, showy miracles.
- ☞ **Bond:** I can only use unobvious, subtle miracles.
- ☞ **Bond:** I can't cross running water.
- ☞ **Bond:** I am under the burden of some sort of imminent doom.
- ☞ **Bond:** the name of the Creator repulses me and can hold me at bay!
- ☞ **Bond:** I am unnaturally flammable and may even explode.

## Things that Could be Bonds or Afflictions Equally Well

### Codes of Conduct

- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I always lie.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I never lie.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I can't kill people.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I never turn out less than perfect work in my particular craft.



- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I am cold and cruel and can't perform kind acts.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I am kind and warm and can't perform acts of excessive cruelty.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I am reckless and headstrong.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I have a moral code or faith that I can't or won't break with.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I can't take away someone's free will.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I can't use modern technology (effectively).
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I maintain my anonymity at all times.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** (when fugitive hunting) I always get my man.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** not snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night shall stay me from my rounds!
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I always have a plan.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I never give up and I just won't die.
- ☞ **Bond/Affliction:** I can't kill/hurt/disrespect/do something or other to (pick one):
  - the brave!
  - the honest!
  - the helpless!
  - the noble!
  - the people closely bound to my Estate!
  - the wicked!
  - the sexy!
  - the boring!
  - the duly appointed law enforcement officers of this location!

## Things that are Usually Afflictions

### *Pseudo-Powers*

- ☞ **Affliction:** my body is made of liquid metal.
- ☞ **Affliction:** I'm the best dancer in the world!
- ☞ **Affliction:** everyone knows my name.
- ☞ **Affliction:** wind and fire love me!
- ☞ **Affliction:** I'm the luckiest bastard you'll ever meet.
- ☞ **Affliction:** I always look my best.
- ☞ **Affliction:** my black book has the number for *everyone* who's *anyone* in it.
- ☞ **Affliction:** I change shapes when wet.
- ☞ **Affliction:** what I don't know can't hurt me.
- ☞ **Affliction:** my actions cause unreasonable amounts of property damage.

XXX



This is a Power who loves to bargain. If you meet him he will not stay long — “A thousand things to do in a day!” he’ll call over his shoulder as he leaves — but he’s more than happy to trade wonders, marvels, and miracles to anyone who has a way to afford them.

**ProTip:** he has absolutely no use for your soul, and very little for your firstborn, so if he takes them it’ll be at chalkoi to the drachma in a distant hope of arbitrage. Try trading him secrets, rarities, or labor instead!

**THE PISCATOR  
THALASSEUS**



*Louise was never wrong. She had learned this to her cost. For most of her life, she had been certain that she was weak, stupid, unacademic, and ugly. She was, of course, correct. Later on, in a foolish rage from being teased, she announced that she was smarter than anyone in the room; and she was, of course, correct. Understanding in an instant what had happened, she became strong, dexterous, academic, and beautiful in a matter of minutes; and as for those who were teasing her, she informed them that they would die in many gruesome ways.*

*That was not the cost, of course. She had been certain that she would not regret their deaths, and she did not. But she let herself grow arrogant, and one day, in an argument with a pious man, she announced that there was no God, no purpose, no meaning, and no plan to the universe. And she was, of course, correct.*

—from *Armor*, by Marilith Turner

*If you die, said Adel, I will die; while you live, I will live. I shall be a guardian of blood to you.*

—from *Adel*, by K.C. Danine

☛ **Affliction:** if it's smart enough, old enough, and consenting enough that moral issues don't squick the players, I can find a way to find sex with it, and most likely already have.

### *Unfortunate Circumstances*

- ☛ **Affliction:** in times of intense emotion, the world finds a way to give me a soundtrack.
- ☛ **Affliction:** I never have money. Seriously, the power of a *god* and I still can't hang on to the stuff!
- ☛ **Affliction:** I'm not allowed to talk to strangers.
- ☛ **Affliction:** I have a miraculous evil twin.
- ☛ **Affliction:** I have a miraculous double or doppelganger who is not necessarily *evil* but also not my friend.
- ☛ **Affliction:** someone has information that could compromise or blackmail me!
- ☛ **Affliction:** I just don't seem as impressive as a Power should.
- ☛ **Affliction:** the things that hurt my Estate can hurt me.
- ☛ **Affliction:** the people of my Chancel really hate me.
- ☛ **Affliction:** animals really hate me.
- ☛ **Affliction:** something (e.g., the lack of a reflection) gives my inhuman nature away!
- ☛ **Affliction:** I get physically/spiritually hurt when something bad happens to (pick one)
- my beloved!
  - my car!
  - my twin!
  - my worst enemy!
  - a bone mask associated with my Imperator!
  - the spirit of American freedom!
  - the worldwide reputation of Exxon!
  - people who are near me!



# The Properties of Your Estate

**A**T THE SAME time you are creating your Bonds and Afflictions, you will also build your Estate — the basic *thingness* and *beingness* of it — by writing down a list of its **Properties**.

Spend 7 points on Properties, assigning 1-5 points to each.

Properties are written, like Bonds and Afflictions, as ordinary-language sentences. Each describes something fundamental about your Estate. Each can also be interpreted as a *rule* —

- ☛ something your Estate *must* do (or always does);
- ☛ something your Estate *can't* do (or never does); *or*
- ☛ something your Estate *is driven to* do (or seems to work towards).

It's important to make these Properties simple and evocative, even if that makes the rule harder to see — you are creating *meaning* for your Estate, which is more important than *obvious applicability*.

For instance, you're the Power of Cold. But what *is* Cold? Is it cold when someone shivers? When water freezes? When the world goes into hibernation? Is death cold? Is money cold? Is murder? Does wind chill count as to whether something is cold? If you put snow in

*"Our business is concluded," Damon said.*

*The caravan was dying—the horses dead, the men scorched dry by the sun, the children's fingers clawing at the barren sand. They looked like sticks.*

*"Painful enough," I agreed. "But I had hoped for something quicker."*

*"I do not kill quickly," said Damon, Viscount of the Sands. "This is the passion of my Estate."*

—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

*For a time, Ridya sought to corrupt souls through personal contact. He eventually judged the failure rate of this technique unacceptable. Too many souls, on seeing him, saw not the devil he had become but the angel he had been; and, made exultant by that beauty, were lost to him forever.*

—from *Legends of the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis

an oven at 400 degrees, will there still be Cold in that oven until the snow melts? What if the oven is floating in the frigid void of space?

We don't know who the Power of Cold is! We don't even know if there is one! So it's up to you to find a good set of Properties for Cold that will tell you what it means. You could go with —

- (1) **Cold** slows things down;
- (1) **Cold** chills the heart;
- (3) **Cold** brings silence, stillness, and peace; *and*
- (2) **Cold** is driven to fill emptiness.

Or you could go with —

- (2) **Cold** freezes things;
- (2) **Cold** makes things sick;
- (1) **Cold** is melancholy;
- (1) **Cold** descends; *and*
- (1) **Cold** is the snow and the ice and the dark.

Or anything (appropriately) else!

Here are some sample Properties for a few other Estates —

- ☛ **Buckets** contain things;
- ☛ **Hope** springs eternal;
- ☛ **Strength** comes from within;
- ☛ **Treachery** requires an innocent victim;
- ☛ **Violence** never solves anything;
- ☛ **War** continues politics by other means.

Most of these Properties are pretty easy to extract a rule from. Hope *always* springs eternal. Strength *can't* come from outside you. War *is driven to* follow Politics' lead. Buckets *must* have a space suitable for containing things, and — since merely having a space isn't a very strong rule — they are probably also *driven* to contain things in any situation where they are actively in play.

## Benefits

The most important benefit of a Property is a metagame benefit: it tells you and the other players what your Estate actually *is*. The fact of a Property tells you a great deal about

XXXI



This is a Power made from dirt. He is the Power of Borders and changes the boundaries between things. He is not malicious but he *is* very scary and unpredictable and there is no advice I can give you that will serve to keep you safe if he shows up. I can, however, tell you that sometimes he engages in inadvertent and even entirely unconscious acts of prophesy. If he says weird and personal things, and particularly if he doesn't seem to realize he's saying them, pay close attention! The life you save just might be your own.

**WALKING EYE**



the Estate; the rating tells you which Properties are more important than the rest. So simply by recording Properties you're making the game a lot easier for yourself, the HG, and the other players —

But they also have direct benefits in play!

## Persona and Properties

Powers may use the **Persona** Attribute to apply an Estate Property temporarily to themselves. For instance, the Power of Cold could use a Persona miracle to say:

- ☛ *I slow things down; or*
- ☛ *I chill the heart; or*
- ☛ *I bring silence, stillness, and peace; or*
- ☛ *I am driven to fill emptiness.*

Persona also has various ways to inflict your Estate's formal and informal Properties on, or remove them from, other things or people.

## Healing and Nourishing your Estate

You can use your Estate's Properties to tend it and make it healthier. For example, suppose Cold is wounded by the Excrucians or by Imperial politics. You can strengthen it and tend its wounds by looking to its Properties — for instance, wielding Cold to make a great silence, stillness, and peace somewhere in the world. Even when it's not wounded, you can serve Cold by chilling hearts, slowing things down, and helping it fill emptiness.

## MP Bonus

You can gain MP from your Estate Properties. The HG can give you a number of MP up to and including the Property rating when —

- ☛ the Excrucians use that Property to attack your Estate;
- ☛ you do something neat to honor that part of your Estate.

If the HG is impressed enough, and it's late enough in the story that this is a good bargain, they can offer you a full MP refresh instead of bonus MP. If you've done something for your Estate, but not enough to merit an MP, the HG can give you 1-2 mortal Will instead.

*God started small, creating a single human. Immediately, the human's eyes burst and blood began to stream from her ears. She struggled desperately to breathe vacuum in the void, failing quite spectacularly.*

*Several days later, after separating the heavens from the Earth and parting the land from the waters, God had a sudden insight. "It must be that woman cannot live without man," he exclaimed. Subsequent experiments in the Garden of Eden confirmed this intuition, when first Lilith and then Eve failed to explosively decompress; and on this basis God built much of modern theology.*

—from *On The Creation of Humankind*,  
by Luc Ginneis



*"It is my plan," said the Littlest Excrucian, "to remove all knowledge of beer—can chicken from the world; then I shall command a secret worthy of an audience with Kings."*

*"Do it," said Prince Carl, affecting disinterest. "I shall take the knowledge of beer cans themselves and render your power contingent upon mine."*

*There can be no negotiation between personages such as these; their dignity does not allow it; their bluster stands in their way. That is why we drink our beer from satchels, today, and cook our chickens therein; all of us save Prince Carl, of course, who molds in his palace, arrogant, chickenless, and alone.*

—from the *Excrucian War Coloring Book*,  
by Indignity Press

*On occasion, a Power of the Wild retreats into their home, shuts all doors, and "re-define" themselves. It is solid and sensible policy to avoid the Power for several weeks thereafter. This ensures that someone else discovers it first if they have redefined themselves as a monstrous fiend or a bubblingly happy mass murderer.*

—from *A Tourist's Guide to Creation*,  
by Jasprite Sherrard

## How Excrucians Use Properties

Excrucians, and potentially Powers and Imperators, can use the Properties of your Estate to attack it. They might, for example, create a magical void to suck the whole Estate of Cold into it, or warm hearts everywhere in the world to weaken Cold and drive it back. They can also hurt your Estate by twisting and perverting its Properties, causing some part of the Estate to go against its basic rules.

## Changing Bonds, Afflictions, and Properties

You can redesign your Bonds, Afflictions, and Estate Properties between stories. With HG consent you may do so at any other time.

You may redesign Bonds, Afflictions, and Properties to:

- ☛ reflect your increased understanding of the character and their Estate;
- ☛ reflect the observable evolution of the character and their Estate;
- ☛ declare that your character has changed between stories; *or*
- ☛ to make the character more fun to play.

You will need the consent of the HG and the other players if you wish to declare any of these changes retroactive to previous stories.



# Female Noble



XXXII

If you eat a dead Power's heart, you become a Power yourself! That's what happened to Robert Baxt, the modern Power of Clocks. He was a cowboy in the Old West and so he would usually rattle cows and git along various dogies instead of eating people's hearts but the Power in question asked him to do it because she was dying and needed someone to take over quickly in a crisis. In practice, this is one of the easier ways to become a Noble. If you think you have a plan for ripping out the heart of a Power and eating it you are probably committing the ancient Greek sin known as "hubris," and that sin or possibly some sort of ten-story poisonous scorpion will end up biting you on the butt (which is what happened to Lizabet Gantry, who used to run the Australian Nobilisers Organization, only it wasn't actually a scorpion but a scorpion-headed tiger and it was also on fire at the time).

Robert Baxt says that he never totally integrated the power of the heart, and that is why he is Aspect 0.

ROBERT BAXT



# Aspect

**T**HE SCIENCE OF Noble hotness tells us that Nobilis are like movie stars — they're made of different *stuff* than ordinary people. They are basically human in form but all through their flesh and bone and blood they have this



awesome divine *pith* that responds more to thought and ideas than to physics and muscle action. They start becoming an *idea* of flesh instead of flesh.

The more completely this happens to them, the more they're like fantasies instead of people — power fantasies, um, other kinds of fantasies, whatever. They're able to do the kinds of things you normally only see in your imagination!

This is the quality they call their **Aspect**.

Your Avatar has a minimum of **Aspect 0** — the tiniest amount of physical and mental awesome that a Power can get. You can buy up to 5 more levels of Aspect for your Avatar for 3 Character Points each.

Here's what that gives you do “for free” — without spending miracle points:

<b>0 (Mortal)</b>	energy and pep! With Aspect 0, you're always at your best — Powers don't do bad hair days.
<b>1 (Touched Up)</b>	a bit of extra Skill with anything, from sports to the sciences to art!
<b>2 (Pulp Hero)</b>	a lot of extra Skill
<b>3 (Shining Hero)</b>	... and flawless grace, execution, and timing
<b>4 (Demigod)</b>	... plus superhuman mental and physical power
<b>5 (Great Master)</b>	... plus incredible precision and perfect control over your body and mind!

You also get free mundane Cool equal to your Aspect Trait.

If you want to be like a pulp hero, try Aspect 1-3. If you want to be like a kung fu god, try Aspect 3-5!

Here is the scale of miracles that Aspect can perform:

## Difficulty 0: “Peak Performance”

Difficulty 0 Aspect miracles are like mundane actions, but they draw on miraculous energy instead of the resources of your body, mind and will. This works like a mundane action, except:

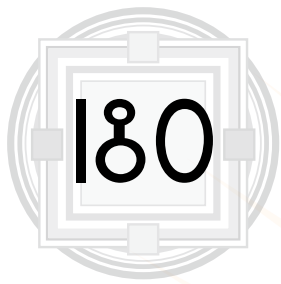
- ☛ it always goes easily and smoothly;
- ☛ it doesn't tire you out at all;
- ☛ you ignore Intentions, for better or worse, instead adding a +3 “miraculous Will” bonus to your most relevant Passion or Skill.

*The child of the cosmos walked out into the Arizona heat. Where no one lived and nothing grew, he set up the ring. It took him only a few days to get the bandstands up and the restrooms built. Then he sat at his laptop and printed out a handful of flyers, reading, “The Child of the Cosmos against the Gods that Move Between the Stars! A once-in-a-lifetime wrestling event, coming March 25<sup>th</sup>!” These he distributed in nearby towns. Then, at last, he let himself sleep.*

*“But you are only half a god,” the reporters would ask him later. “How can you expect to beat the real thing?”*

*“The gods rule an unjust cosmos,” he would answer. “But in the ring, I will make justice with my own two hands.”*

—from *24 Finales*, by Rannen Yedidiah



## Miracles and Will

You can't use Will to improve miracles. Any miracle that is based on a mundane action will replace Will and Intentions with a fixed +3 bonus to Passions or Skills of one sort or another. Your action is premised on miraculous energy rather than mortal drive.

*My first steps after the pain of Commencement were like poetry. My body felt so light—like air. Like music. Like a river.*

*Do not let the wonder of Nobility fade from your life.*

*Never forget that first step.*

*It is beauty.*

—from *Becoming Noble*, by Fayola Osiagobare

The cool thing about these miracles is that they never get harder to do. For instance, if you have a fever, you probably only have a limited amount of focus — a limited amount of time that you can pull yourself together and act coherently in the world. But if you do that coherent action with an Aspect miracle, it doesn't count against that limited time. It's the same with drunkenness, exhaustion, being drugged, being in agony — if you're too broken to act, you're too broken to act, but if you have enough brain to pull yourself together for even a *moment*, you can pull yourself together for as long as you keep using Aspect 0 miracles, instead.

## Difficulty 1: “Enhanced Performance”

Difficulty 1 Aspect miracles work the same way, except that you also treat your underlying Passions and Skills as 1 point higher. This gives a total effectiveness of [(Passion or Skill) + 4] for a normal action, putting an ordinary person on the level of a professional athlete, scientist, artist, or warrior in peak form — and if you're already good at something, you get a lot better!

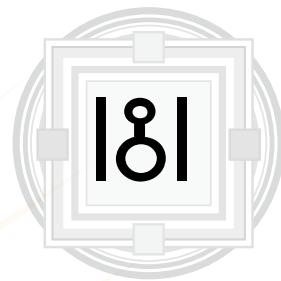
## Difficulty 2: “Pulp Heroism”

Difficulty 2 Aspect miracles work the same way, except that you also treat your underlying Passions and Skills as 2 points higher. This gives a total final effectiveness of [(Passion or Skill) + 5]. This puts an ordinary person on the level of an *amazing* athlete, scientist, artist, warrior, or professional in any other field — and if you were already good at something, you have a good chance of surpassing relevant human competence entirely!

## Difficulty 3: “Inhuman Perfection”

These are the miracles of the shining heroes. Icons! Glories! At this point you stop operating on the mortal scale so don't try to match this precisely to some numeric improvement to your mortal abilities. Instead, you're like the best





humans in the world, *plus* you've got this extra quality of absolute flawlessness. Perfect balance! Perfect execution! And most supernaturally, perfect *timing*.

There's something unnaturally dramatic about these miracles. When you do something with a level 3 Aspect miracle, you finish it at the first of the following times that seems even vaguely possible:

- ☛ practically instantly;
- ☛ at just the right time; *or*
- ☛ just barely *in* time.

This is the level where you stop worrying about the mortal scale of actions, where you stop being a pawn of physics and psychology and your mortal Skills and start being able to do things just because they're cool.

## Difficulty 4: “Divine Force”

At this level you become a heroic demigod! You add incredible mental and physical *force* to the balance and timing that difficulty 3 gave you. You have the strength of a bear, the mental speed of a computer, and senses enhanced as if by machinery. Everything is powered up; ordinary people can't even compete! Even if your mundane power already exceeds human limits — e.g., even if you *are* a bear — you'll always at least double your strength and force when using a miracle like this.

## Difficulty 5: “Legendary Mastery”

At this level you become like a great legendary master. Your body becomes light, and you have total conscious control over it — every muscle, every system, every portion. You're more sinuous than a snake. You can run on top of grass or balance on a thread. You can leap thirty, forty, fifty yards if you have to, and land easily from practically any fall. Your mind's the same way — light, meaning that thinking is always fun and easy and you never have to be sad, and controlled, meaning that you can reorganize your memories, actively practice rationality, decide how you want to feel about things, build and model independent perspectives in your head, and think coherently about many things at once.

### Limitations

There are three things that Powers with high Aspect don't seem to be able to do —

☛ **Psychic Powers and Magic.** Aspect makes the basic human toolkit *better* — it doesn't expand it. Powers can't use Aspect to fly, telekinetically control water, improve sorcery and mortal magic, or read minds. More generally, Aspect doesn't let you declare *that something happens*, but rather *that you make something happen*, explaining how you do it with your mind, body, and skills! If the HG considers something “magic,” and you're not using an appropriate Anchor or Gift to make it possible, your Aspect doesn't apply.

☛ **Social Interaction.** You can have a high Aspect and still have troubles with social interaction. You can make yourself charming, you can make your elocution perfect, you can pump up your animal magnetism until ordinary people faint and stumble over words when they look at you, but top Nobilis research suggests that Aspect is all about this outwards-flow of *doing*, and just doesn't give you that interactive, cooperative give-and-take kind of *flow* that lets you persuade people, teach them, reach them, or earn their respect with anything less than a sledgehammer of a smile. Aspect just doesn't improve your Shine.

☛ **Immunity to Error.** Basically, even Powers with high Aspect do things that they regret. Not just complicated moral errors, but also “I should have known better” kinds of things! This is actually pretty rare in the real world, even accounting for my not-wanting-to-get-killed-by-reporting-it bias, but we're going to exaggerate it a bit for the sake of a good game. As smart and perceptive as your Avatar might be, if you do something in play that you decide later that you regret, Aspect alone doesn't give you the right to call back-ies — you have to persuade the group or HG that it's for the best, instead!

## Difficulty 6: “Unstoppable Power”

*It is an image that will remain with me forever:*

*The darkness split by lightning.*

*The bolt plunging like a whip towards Giraut’s chest.*

*His hands closing around it, so terribly, terribly fast, and holding it away from his heart as it flung him backwards off of Mugger’s Hill.*

—from the Memoirs of Alice Mendel,  
Lady of the Thunder

At this stage you become casually invincible. You can exert as much force as you need to — you’re still *normally* as strong as a bear, but if you need to pick up a million-ton weight, you can. You can move as quickly as you have to — your casual running speed is probably just 100-200kph, but if you realize that you *have* to outrace a laser before it actually hits, you might just pull it off. You can sense as much as you need to, understand as much as you need to, break any quantitative barrier limiting your physical or mental skills. Your only problem is that you’re still locked to the leverage of a human body and mind, so you can’t see things that aren’t visible at all, you can’t pick up a breakable mountain because a piece will just break off, you can’t swallow an elephant in one bite, and you can’t do things that don’t actually make physical sense like punching out a movie character to change the movie’s ending. You’re as powerful as you need to be, but you still have to listen to reason!

### XXXIII

If you love travel and you love the road you may want to make a pilgrimage to honor Isabel, the Power of the Road, in Locus Arahiel. She’s the kind of Power who remembers the lives of all the Powers of her Estate before her, so these days she thinks of herself more as *Roads* than *Isabel* — but she’s still a cool person, who helps everyone in the world who uses roads get to where they need to go. Nobody knows exactly how to get to Locus Arahiel, but if your heart is true, you will find the way. Isabel likes presents (particularly cool scents and flavors) but she doesn’t really give out gifts or assistance in return — if you go to honor her, do it to honor her, because giving love and honor outwards is excellent for the soul!

Isabel is like the roads themselves — mostly physical, but imbued, and strongly, with the stuff of dream — and that is why she is **Aspect 3**.

ISABEL

## Difficulty 7: “Fairy Tale Feat”

At this level you don’t have to listen to reason any more. You become a storybook character. You can do anything that you can explain away as a use of a natural human ability.





The major limit at this level is that you're stuck with relatively local miracles in space and time. You can do crazy things — you can drink a small lake, blow down a house, surf on sound waves, and stuff a pair of gazeboes into your pocket — but you can't affect stuff that's more than a mile or two away and you can't keep the miracle going for more than a few minutes. For example, if you plan on spitting out the lake or taking the gazeboes back out of your pocket, you'd better do it quickly! But for a few minutes, in the local area, you can do almost anything.


## Difficulty 8: “World-shaking Skill”

At this point the crazy stuff you can do isn't “local” any more. You can shoot down a star with your gun, pick up Mt. Rushmore and stuff it down your shirt, or figure out the acoustics so you can talk casually with someone on the other side of the world without anyone in between overhearing. The world is your playground! You can sustain these miracles as long as you like, although you do have to sustain them — actively use your miraculous action on them — to keep them from going away.

## Difficulty 9: “Mastered Technique”

At this level you can set new rules for what Skill can do. This has all the power of a level 8 miracle, plus, instead of saying that you *do* the miracle, you say that you *can do* the miracle — and for the rest of the story, even without actively sustaining a miraculous effect, you can. You don't just pocket Mt. Rushmore: you master the mountain-pocketing technique! You don't just furiously tread air to keep from falling, or lift yourself to the ceiling: you learn the furiously-treading-air technique! You've imposed a new rule on the world: “I can do X,” and as long as it's easy to conceptualize as extending a mortal Skill, you *can*, in fact, until the story ends. Actually using this ability is a mundane action predicated on your most relevant Skill or Passion, so you don't get the full advantage of the miracle level in contests with other miracles, but your ability to use your new ability is protected by a level 4 Auctoritas.

XXXIII



If you live in America you may encounter **Rook Catchfly**, the Power of Eternity. She looks like an ordinary little girl, but do not be fooled! She is an incredibly powerful master, able to take on small armies. You can identify her by her clipped, impatient style of speech; her tendency to appear unchaperoned or in the company of obvious Powers; and her occasional complaints that she isn't young, just “stuck!” That said it is probably a good strategy to be polite and respectful to all young girls you meet until you are absolutely certain they *cannot* outfight, outthink, and outwrestle the Marine Corps, Steven Hawking, and a large Kodiak bear respectively, and all more or less at the same time.

Rook Catchfly can, and that is why she is **Aspect 4**.

**ROOK CATCHFLY**



*It was told from the very beginning that the sea would be Atlantis' ending. And so the men of the city of Adalais, that stood by the shore, built a great wall against the sea. Years of labor by a hundred hundred hands made that wall a wonder of the world, and in time, it is told, the one who rules in the oceans heard of its building. And he was displeased.*

*In his chariot of ivory, drawn by horses green and white, he rode to Adalais, and he looked upon the wall. It is said that it ringed twelve and twenty miles of the coast, and that it was as tall as human hands could make it.*

*And the king of the sea lifted his hand, and he walked across the waves to the wall, and he struck it once with his hand. Twice. Three times.*

*And the sea came pouring in.*

—from *The Fall of Adalais*, author unknown,  
showing a difficulty 6 Aspect miracle

## Aspect Difficulties (Example)

Punching through a thin layer of steel seems like Aspect 4. Shoving your way through a thick steel wall seems like Aspect 6. Learning to vibrate your body so fast you can walk through steel without tearing it for the rest of the story would be Aspect 9.

If you have Aspect 2, you're always really good at everything — even if you're so bad at something you have a -1 Skill in it, you can use a free level 2 Aspect miracle to outperform most mortal professionals. But being really good at punching doesn't let you punch through steel, and being “really strong” *definitely* won't let you push your way bodily through steel like it was paper. To punch through steel will require 2 AMP, and to shove through the steel wall would require 4. Learning the vibrate-through-walls technique would cost you 8 AMP — technically, it would be 7, except that you're only allowed to spend 1, 2, 4, or 8 MP at a time.

## Aspect Difficulties (Summary)

In summary, here is the scale of miracles that Aspect can perform:

0	mortal actions [competence = Passion/Skill + 3]
1	mortal actions [competence = Passion/Skill +4]
2	mortal actions [competence = Passion/Skill +5]
3	+ flawless grace, execution, and timing
4	+ incredible force
5	+ superhuman precision and control
6	+ unlimited power and speed
7	+ unreasonable, metaphorical effects [local and short-term]
8	+ unreasonable, metaphorical effects [any]
9	+ you've mastered the effect for the rest of the story.



# Physical Nature and Dharma

**T**HERE ARE AT least two ways to understand Estates and their instances in the world.

You can understand them as *substances* or as *paths*.

The substance of a thing is composed of properties that you can measure objectively: heat, mass, the incidence of repeated behaviors, the emergence of recognized and identifiable properties. It is syntactic; something may be discovered to be a dog, for example, by noticing that it has the head, body, legs, coat, tail, and ears of a dog. Something may be discovered to be cold by measuring its temperature. Something may be discovered to be “in love” through its display of traditionally loving behaviors. Thus everything, even the intangible, becomes equations, formulas, and lists of qualifications.

The path or dharma of a thing is a subjective quality. It’s the purpose of a thing —

- ☛ what that thing is *for*;
- ☛ what it *means*;
- ☛ what it *does*;
- ☛ how it experiences itself;
- ☛ how it fits into the world;
- ☛ the path it must take to succeed, given all these things.

Domain is principally concerned with substance. It’s concerned with Rain and Beauty and Fire, or maybe “what is Rain? What is Beauty? What is Fire?” But it’s not concerned with “why Rain? Why Beauty? Why Fire?”

If you use your Domain of Lightning on a television set, you can strike it with lightning.

*We call that thing into which we may fall, and find ourselves without boundary, the sea; and that numinous pre-formed substance therein “water.” Without that chaos we would calcify and cease to live; in the fullness of its presence, we drown. Hold up a paper cup of water and unfocus your eyes: you will see the undine gestulating therein. It is not saying, “Do not drink me, magician!” or even “I give myself to thee;” rather, it is caparisoned for battle, it is shaking its supreme and terrible trident, it is saying to you: you drink me now, but forever you will drown, and take dissolved joy within that drowning.*

—from *A Catalog of Modern Magic*, by Eric Optera, writing on the topic of Water’s dharma

*We sat in the cave, and I waited as Vassago bled to death.*

*“It is not such a bad thing,” Vassago said. “Every action I took, I took with a purpose. Every step I made, I made for a reason. These reasons were pure. These purposes were pure. It does not matter that they have led me to death, for I know that I have made my choices well.”*

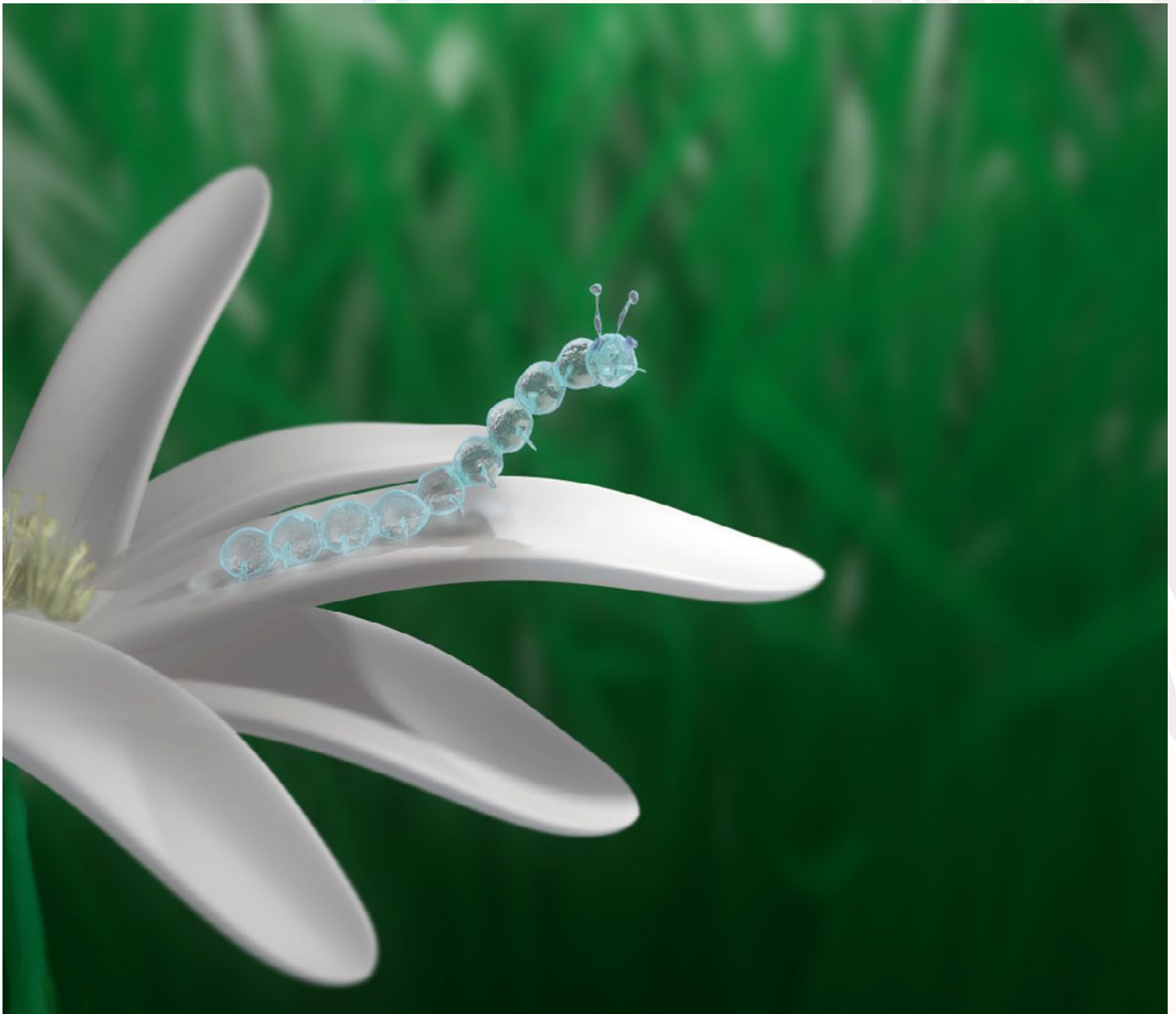
*I looked at Vassago. “And me?”*

*Vassago spent ten, twenty seconds breathing, in quiet agony. “I hope you do not die here. You have made many bad choices.”*

—from *The Dog Princes*, by Janet Cable

The Attribute concerned with dharma is Persona. Persona is concerned with “what does this Estate do? How does it fit in to what’s going on? What is it for? Where is it going? What is it like?”

If you use your Persona of Lightning on a television set, you can pop up a documentary on lightning. Or make it into a lightning TV, the kind of smoldering, shocking television that stuns people who look at it and makes dogs and cats afraid — or maybe the kind that with startling intensity leaps up along its own antenna and bootstraps itself into the sky. You can make things *lightning-like*, in short — but you can only get at the raw *substance* of lightning by going out and finding some in the world or by cultivating something else through the slow ripening of its dharma *into* lightning.





# Domain

**T**HE NOBILIS RECOGNIZE and rank six distinct *levels* of control over their Estate — six levels of **Domain**. The original inspiration for our Miracle Point system, these ranks are based on what kinds of effects are *easy* (repeatable more or less indefinitely) for the Noble in question:

<b>0 (Saint or Pawn)</b>	knowing when something endangers your Estate
<b>1 (Baroness / Baron)</b>	+ little tricks and manifestations called “ghost miracles”
<b>2 (Viscount)</b>	+ talking to your Estate, shaping it, knowing things about it
<b>3 (Marchessa / Marquis)</b>	+ protecting and strengthening your Estate
<b>4 (Duchess / Duke)</b>	+ summoning, creating, or manipulating parts of your Estate
<b>5 (Regal)</b>	+ destroying or banishing part of your Estate with a thought; + greater miracles of knowledge

Higher Domain also improves your potential **Divine Mantle** — your raw offensive power — as described on pg. 316-317.

So for the Power of Fire, you might choose ...

- ☛ **Domain 0** if you don't really care;
- ☛ **Domain 1** if you want to summon up sparks, light cigarettes, and stay warm at night;
- ☛ **Domain 2** if you want to look at a fire and know how it got started, or ask it to leave one room or area unburned;

*“I do not understand,” Terrence admitted. “I have done everything in the proper manner. I have preached to the multitudes, worked miracles subtle and vast, healed the sick and the blind; yet still I am ignored by the populace.”*

*“You’re doing fine,” Emma assured him. “You’ve established a nice solid foundation as a general messiah. Now the trick is to develop a miracle that substantively distinguishes you from all the messiahs that have come before.”*

—from *Undocumented History*, by Walden Fargo

## Secondary Domain

In rare cases a Power may have multiple Estates, or some kind of ability that is best expressed as authority over a secondary Estate or made-up pseudo-Estate.

In such case the Power may buy levels of “Secondary” Domain over additional Estates for 1 point each (min 1). Secondary Domain cannot exceed the Power’s Domain over their primary Estate, and it uses the same pool of DMP.

For instance, if you have Domain 3 over your Estate, Fire, you can spend 3 points for a Secondary Domain of 3 over Water and 1 more point for a Secondary Domain of 1 over Earth.

XXXIV

If you are sucked into the secret online world of **Cabin Fever MUSH** you must earn your way onto Admiral Kynn's crew and defeat him in a devious riddle game in order to return to Earth. If you are unable to answer any given riddle he may show favor to a reply of "yarr."

Admiral Kynn has not been observed performing miracles of Domain, so we tentatively assign him **Domain 0**.



ADMIRAL KYNN

- ☛ **Domain 3** if you want to make a fire brighter, hotter, fiercer, or let it burn forever without fuel;
- ☛ **Domain 4** if you want to summon a wildfire out of nowhere, or wrap a fire around your arm;
- ☛ **Domain 5** if you want to be able to snuff out a fire by snapping your fingers.

Your Avatar starts with a minimum of **Domain 0**, just for being a Power, and you can buy up to 5 levels of Domain for 3 Character Points each.

Domain miracles are divided into *lesser* and *greater* miracles. Lesser miracles are small in scale — they are not very complicated, they affect up to a city block's worth of *stuff*, and they work best when you pull your punches a bit in describing them. Greater miracles, on the other hand, can be complicated, or affect a lot of stuff (or even *your whole Estate*), and their raw power is as impressive as you'd like.

Here is the scale of miracles that Domain can perform. You're specifically allowed to combine these effects, as long as you pay for the largest effect, and you're specifically allowed to perform a miracle only "partway" — for instance, you could combine destroying one tree with creating another, or create just the left half of a tree, or even make a tree out of nothing but leave its "visibility" property out!

## Difficulty 0: "Estate-Driven Divination"

It is difficulty 0 to know, reflexively, when something puts your Estate in danger. That doesn't mean that some tiny physical part of your Estate is in danger — the Power of Cars doesn't wake up screaming every time some car somewhere is getting junked — but rather that something is threatening a large part of your Estate, or its whole *existence*. Usually this means that an Excrucian (or a very bad stroke of luck) is twisting one of your Estate's *Properties* against it. For instance, in your game, fire might have the Property **Fire burns, and it doesn't care**<sup>†</sup>. If something weird is happening and fire is starting to care about what it is burning, the whole Estate is at risk!

You receive free Strike (pg. 319) on this miracle equal to your Domain rating. If you're consciously investigating a possible threat you can spend MP or invoke a Bond for additional Strike.

<sup>†</sup> **ProTip:** In the real world fire totally *does* care.





## Difficulty 1: “Ghost Miracle”

Difficulty 1 Domain miracles, or “ghost miracles,” let you summon up very small thematic instances of your Estate. They are mostly for effect — they have physical substance but they don’t have a *dharmā*. That means that they lack the will to change the world, or even to firmly exist within it. In short, unless you use them to accomplish things you could have done anyway, the effects of these miracles tend to dampen themselves out and fade away. If you eat a meal called up with this miracle level, you’ll be hungry again half an hour later. If you conjure up a book, it’ll be both boring and not very illuminating. If you try to cripple someone with a ghost miracle, they’ll probably just be stiff, irritated, and under the weather for an hour or two.

## Difficulty 2: “Lesser Divination”

Difficulty 2 Domain miracles tell you basic, mundane information about your Estate. For instance, the Power of the Sun can use a level 2 miracle to predict the exact moment of sunrise, or the path sunlight will take across the balcony. They also know immediately if someone replaces the sun with an exact copy — or even a subtly evil clone!

## Difficulty 2: “Conversation”

This level of miracle also opens a channel of communication to the things of your Estate, allowing you to talk to them with mundane actions and persuade them to do little, subtly miraculous things. You can get your car to adjust itself a little in its parking space, or ask someone’s gun to misfire, or convince a river to flow a little faster or slower — as long as you’re the Power of Cars, Guns, Rivers or something similar, respectively! Here “subtle” is code for “things they might have done anyway<sup>‡</sup>” and your persuasiveness is determined by the mundane action you use to talk<sup>††</sup>.



*He bent down and touched the water with his hand. “Thirty-five parts per million poison,” he said softly. “No wonder the animals are dying.”*

—from *Failures of Light*, by Emily Chen

<sup>‡</sup> Though you kind of have to ignore the scientists here and take my word for it that cars shuffling around in their parking spaces, locks opening and closing on their own and the sun occasionally giving up on a day as a bad job and bum-rushing the horizon while nobody’s looking is the kind of thing that might have happened anyway. In fairness, you should *already know* this kind of thing is normal based on your own life experience.

<sup>††</sup> Note that because the talking part is a mundane action, even a mortal’s Cool can get in the way. It’s one thing to talk Harvey Thing’s gun into misfiring — quite another to pull that trick on Mr. Bond!

You can also use conversation miracles to ask things of your Estate for mundane information and listen to the answers. This is usually less precise than just using a lesser divination, but you can sustain the conversation to get additional information and using a conversation miracle gives your Estate the chance to tell you if you're asking the wrong questions.

### Difficulty 3: "Lesser Preservation"

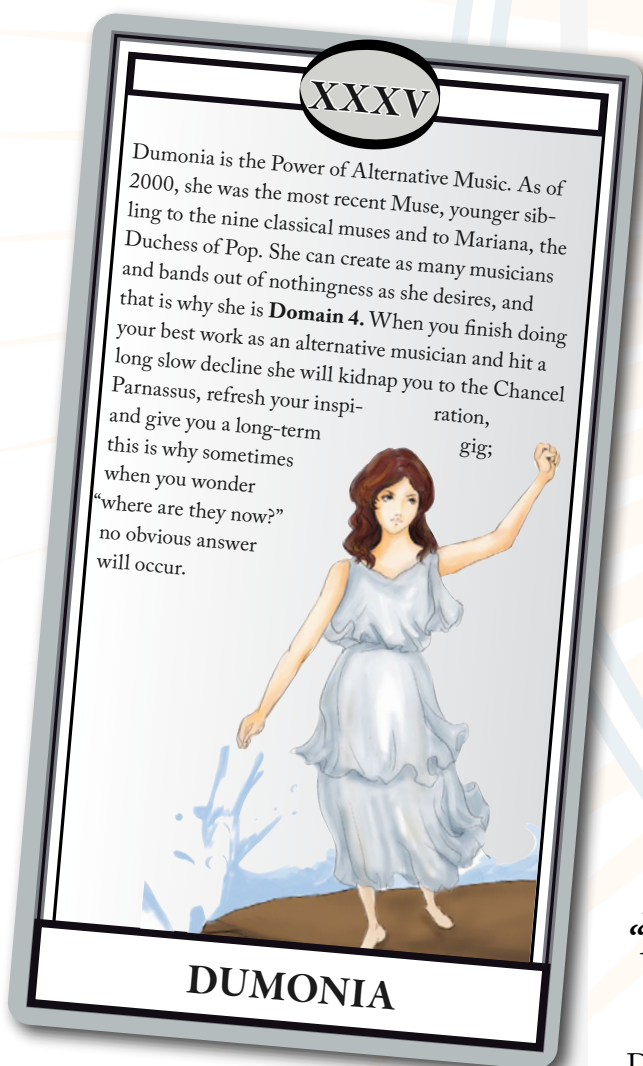
Difficulty 3 Domain miracles, or "lesser preservations," let you protect, strengthen, and provide magical fuel to the instances of your Estate. Stuff *lasts longer*, becomes *more potent*, and is *harder to get rid of* when these miracles are in play.

### Difficulty 4: "Lesser Creation, Summoning, or Animation"

Difficulty 4 Domain miracles create, summon, and animate. You can conjure things of your Estate out of thin air; you can call mobile elements of your Estate to you; and you can imbue part of your Estate with an animating power, moving it or making it mobile. For instance, the Power of Caves can use these miracles to animate a cave mouth, allowing it to bite people; the Power of Slackers can use them to summon any nearby slacker or create a new one to spec; the Power of Graven Images can bring a statue to life; and the Power of Matches can wrap match-flame around themselves to form a plasmic armor. These are lesser miracles that will your Estate to *be*, to *come to you*, and to *act*.

### Difficulty 5: "Lesser Destruction"

Difficulty 5 Domain miracles erase some physical manifestation of your Estate, in whole or in part. The Power of Fire can erase a whole





fire, or its heat, or its color, or its visibility; the Power of Life can kill; the Power of Storms can wipe clouds from the sky.

## Difficulty 5: “Greater Divination”

It is also difficulty 5 to use greater miracles of Divination. These miracles use your Estate as a spy, asking the Estate as a whole what it or its components have seen or learned about *other* things. You may also glean a limited insight into the future from your Estate, as when the Power of Wine sees the future in a wineglass.

## Difficulty 6: “Lesser Motion”

Difficulty 6 Domain miracles are miracles of *movement* and *dharma* — you change the location, the context, and the destiny or purpose of the things of your Estate. You can move a dream from one person’s mind into another person’s mind, or farm jellyfish on land, or assign a new destiny, fate, or purpose to a person who falls under your Estate. Movement and dharma miracles tend to cover their own tracks, the changes fitting seamlessly into the world: if you move someone’s house to the top of a cliff, or give them a destiny to be forever harassed by ocelots, they’ll recognize that something’s *wrong*, and they may even know *what*, but all their records and even most of their memories will reflect the new reality.

## Difficulty 6: “Greater Preservation”

Difficulty 6 Domain miracles also allow greater miracles that preserve, protect, or strengthen the things of your Estate. The Power of Clouds could nail a given cloud to the sky, and it’d stay there for weeks, years, maybe even forever!



<sup>†</sup> Did she rescue, devour, or become those souls? The matter is inherently somewhat ambiguous, and Sara Nei does not prefer to clarify it.



## Difficulty 7: *“Greater Creation, Summoning, or Animation”*

Difficulty 7 Domain miracles offer an unlimited power of creation and animation. You can weave stone into a fortress, create whole cities out of air, and drown whole continents with the substance of your Estate.

## Difficulty 8: *“Greater Destruction”*

Difficulty 8 Domain miracles offer a similarly unlimited potency of destruction. You can blast forests, city blocks, or whole species from the Earth.

## Difficulty 9: *“Greater Motion”*

Difficulty 9 Domain miracles allow you to perform large-scale miracles of movement and dharma — you could make the Great Fire of Boston into the Great Fire of London; transplant rabbits from their peaceful undersea homes to the world of land; or even decide that some guy named Lee Harvey Oswald, who falls under your Estate, will kill the American President one day. Even at this scale, movement and dharma miracles are still pretty subtle: people will know something’s wrong<sup>†</sup>, and they may even know “this shouldn’t be happening!” but they won’t see the motion or transformation or moment of change *itself* because it happens under the surface of the world.

You’re also allowed, at this level, to circumvent the usual properties (and Properties) of your Estate. You can treat a physical Estate more as a metaphor, a generalized Estate as more specific, or do something with miracles that violates the normally sacrosanct Properties that govern how it works. If you want it to rain gumdrops or make some piping hot snow, this right here is the miracle level for you.

<sup>†</sup> Like how conspiracy theorists are always picking at the rabbit thing.





## Domain Difficulties

### (Summary)

In summary, here is the scale of miracles that Domain can perform:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 0 | knowing when something endangers your Estate   |
| 1 | + little tricks and manifestations called “ghost miracles”   |
| 2 | + talking to your Estate, shaping it, knowing things about it  |
| 3 | + protecting and strengthening your Estate   |
| 4 | + summoning, creating, or animating parts of your Estate   |
| 5 | + destroying or banishing part of your Estate with a thought;<br>+ greater miracles of knowledge   |
| 6 | + adding new effects and qualities to your Estate<br>+ complex control over your Estate<br>+ epic miracles to protect and strengthen your Estate |
| 7 | + epic miracles to summon, create, or animate part of your Estate  |
| 8 | + epic miracles to destroy or banish part of your Estate   |
| 9 | + sweeping changes to your Estate<br>+ epic miracles of complex control over your Estate   |

## The Domain Difficulty Chart

When you create a Power and decide on their Estate, you should also sketch out what you think you can do at the various levels of Domain. For example, you’re creating the Power of Forbidden Love. You decide that your Estate is an Estate of experiences — not “the set of forbidden lovers” or “the set of people in forbidden love,” not “the abstract category of things that are love, but also forbidden,” but the beingness of it, the yearning, the self-loathing, the *what-it’s-like*-ness of finding oneself in a forbidden love. So

XXXVII

This is the Power of the UNIX operating system. If he is not wearing sunglasses you can see his thoughts typing themselves out inside his eyes. He is available for hire in the mortal world, apparently for reasons of principle; if you are assembling a dream team for a large software development project or hacking-related criminal enterprise you would do well to find him!

Kyle O'Donoghue is known for writing code in real time and transmitting it telepathically onto his target system. He doesn't miracle it into existence. He doesn't use a mundane interface. He's a machine whisperer, and that's why he has **Domain 2**.



**KYLE O'DONOGHUE**

you write down a few things you can do at each level with yearnings, shame, and forbidden love itself:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 0 | know when something endangers Forbidden Love   |
| 1 | give someone an hour or two of romantic thoughts about a rock;<br>make everyone reject someone's relationship for an hour or two;<br>create a sourceless yearning or shame   |
| 2 | find out the details of someone's forbidden love   |
| 3 | make a yearning stronger;<br>make shame stronger;<br>make a forbidden love stronger  |
| 4 | make someone fall in love with their imaginary friend;<br>make someone's existing marriage Forbidden;<br>make a gun refuse to leave its loving holster, or ashamed to kill;<br>make the names on a seating chart move to maximize the potential for forbidden love;<br>surround yourself with a haze of forbidden love that hurts the heart of hand-to-hand attackers    |
| 5 | make everyone accept a relationship, or destroy it;<br>extinguish yearnings;<br>imbue a sense of glorious pride;<br>interrogate Forbidden Love for information about Chicago   |
| 6 | change the destiny of a forbidden love, giving it a happy or sad ending;<br>change the target of a forbidden love;<br>change the destiny of a forbidden love, such that it can fuel the metaphysical tanks of your mysterious love-powered robot;<br>ensure that a forbidden love will never die, or that its memory will never (e.g. Guinevere + Lancelot 4-ev-er) fade |
| 7 | create great yearnings and great shames  |
| 8 | create great asceticism, acceptance, barrenness, or pride  |
| 9 | create forbidden lovers from thin air;<br>manipulate codes of law as instances of "forbiddenness;"<br>organize all the forbidden love in a city into a set of interconnected love polygons that spell out a secret message to be discovered after your death   |

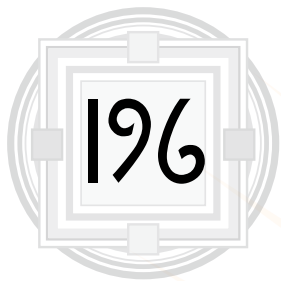
Looking over the chart, you can see that level 1, level 4, and level 5 miracles will be very useful to you, while level 2 miracles are circumstantial, level 3 miracles are ambiguous, and level 6-9 miracles are for weird, eccentric solutions to large problems. This is more or less typical for experiential Estates, and may help you figure out what level of Domain would serve you best!





# Male Noble





*The first miracle that touched my life was a holy thing. I was trapped in a burning building. A girl walked through the fire and said, "I owe the world seventy-three lives, in penance." Then she took me from that place, unharmed, and said, "Seventy-two." Then she vanished into the crowd. I do not know what her words meant, but I could feel that she was sacred.*

*The second miracle that touched my life had no place in this world. I was very sick, and a thing made of sunset colors came into my room. "I am hungry," it said, and I could feel it ripping the sickness from me and draining it into the flaring orange and red. I felt so much better. Perhaps it even saved my life. But I knew this was a thing that should not have happened, performed by a thing that should not have been. I have sought to make myself ill again, but not even the coldest rain can bring the pneumonia back into my lungs.*

—from a speech by Kalliroe Calmes, 3/25/00

*The spear took Michael through the heart, but he is not dead; nor is he gone.*

*He is a man who became his Estate, and, in so doing, marked it forever. I can look in any lion's eyes and see his spirit there.*

*I can walk with them now. They do not hunt me any more.*

—from the Diary of Selena Monteith,  
on the topic of Persona miracles

# Persona

THERE'S THIS THING that a Noble can do with their smile, when suddenly it's not *them* but the roaring of the sea and the salt air and the calling of gulls; and the sun; and your heart is open again like when you were a child, standing on the shore.

There's this thing they can do with their eyes where suddenly it's the darkest night and you are about to be eaten by a wolf.

They can reach you, reach into you, in ways that people can't, that only the great wideness of the world can. They can twist you up or untwist you like your family and your best friends and your exes, good and bad. They have something that just slips by all your defenses.

Their **Persona**.

Your Avatar has some of this — some of this *it*, some of this *je ne sais quoi*, some of that stuff that lets a Noble actually affect you, something that makes them real in other people's lives. Some of that quality that lets them reach you, change you, *see* you. Something that makes them more real than people, and sometimes even more real than each other; something that lets them make a difference.

Your Avatar starts with **Persona 0**, which is already enough to change the world; and you can buy up to 5 levels more, for 3 points each

It's what makes a Noble like the Emperors, like the sun, like the moon, like the sea, like first love, like starving, like dreaming, like music, like dancing, like fire, like sex.

It's an Attribute that lets them touch on what things *mean*.



Here's what you can do without spending MP at the six possible levels —

- 0 recognize deep bonds between people/things and your Estate;
- 1 bless or curse a person with the nature of your Estate;
- 2 incarnate yourself in something from your Estate;
- 3 enforce the Properties of your Estate on yourself;
- 4 imbue something with the nature of your Estate;
- 5 steal part of your Estate's nature from a thing;  
incarnate yourself in your Estate throughout the world

Higher Persona improves your potential **Auctoritas Magister** — your defensive zone of control — as described on pg. 317-319, and you'll get free mundane Shine equal to your Persona Trait.

So for the Power of Rivers, you might choose ...

- ☛ **Persona 0** if you don't really care;
- ☛ **Persona 1** if you want to loosen people up, help their flow, or strengthen their resolve;
- ☛ **Persona 2** if you want to spend time as various rivers throughout the world;
- ☛ **Persona 3** if you want to personally wear down rock walls or bring life to the world;
- ☛ **Persona 4** if you want to melt buildings or people down into rivers of themselves;
- ☛ **Persona 5** if you want to calcify rivers, make things cease to flow, or spread your will through your tributaries (that is to say, all the rivers in the world.)

Persona miracles often refer to your Estate Properties — the rules of your Estate that make it what it is. But sometimes you'll realize in play that you have missed something important. Perhaps you're the Power of Reefs, and a key rule of Reefs is that **Reefs grow between the wide world and a thing**. But when you made your character, you weren't thinking about things like that! In such a case you can always add a one-point Property to your Estate, and then, between stories, adjust the points allocated to your various Properties to get back down to 7 points' worth again.

Persona miracles, like Domain miracles, divide into lesser and greater effects. You can do some really impressive things, but remember that if you try for something *too* big it might require a greater miracle to pull it off.

Here is the scale of miracles that Persona can perform:

### Persona and Secondary Estates

A Power may buy levels of "Secondary" Persona over additional Estates for 1 point each (min 1). Secondary Persona cannot exceed the Power's Persona over their primary Estate, and it uses the same pool of PMP. Normally your Secondary Persona applies to the same Estate(s) as any Secondary Domain you happen to have, but this isn't a strict requirement.

For instance, if you have Persona 4 over your Estate, Fire, you can spend 2 points for a Secondary Persona of 2 over Water and another 2 points for a Secondary Persona of 2 over Earth.

## IXL

If you are ever in trouble with a genie you may impress them with your knowledge of genie trivia! The genies are descended from the Emperor **Jan ben Jan**, who ruled the Second Age of Earth. (This Age started when Eden fell and ended when the Excrucians showed up.) These days the genies either roam the world or live in the secret cities **Chilminar and Balbec**. Their queen is the Power of the Second Age of Earth, **Oresha**, who infuses everything she touches with the romantic, ancient grandeur of that Age! For this purpose she has **Persona 1**.

**ProTip:** If your knowledge of genie trivia does not help you, try offering to play **Nobilis** with them. Genies have a lot of difficulty finding people to game with because they think that dice and role-playing games do not mix, so they will probably leap at this opportunity.



**ORESHA**

## Difficulty 0: “The Sight”

It’s a reflexive Difficulty 0 Persona miracle to invoke “the Sight.” The mundane forms of the world blur and fade and it’s a little harder to make out what’s going on around you — but the things that have deep connections of love, hatred, weal, or woe to your Estate snap into focus. You can recognize the Powers of Estates with strong connections to your own, and their agents; you can identify with a single glance an Excrucian who is actively attacking your Estate. If you are the Power of Birds, you can know whether an animal preys on birds, or whether a person loves birds, or hates birds, or has been flock to a bird at some point in time. The Power of War could see that a person is deeply scarred by war. The Power of Couches could recognize the CEO of a major couch corporation.

You receive free Strike (pg. 319) on this miracle equal to your Persona rating, and can spend MP or invoke a Bond for additional Strike. That said, once invoked, this miracle relies on your mundane senses for its effect. The only function of Strike in this context is to help you activate the Sight in the presence of a hostile Auctoritas or Sight-deceiving miracle. You can enhance your mundane senses with Aspect and Treasure miracles if a basic use of the Sight proves inadequate to your needs.

## Difficulty 1: “Blessing or Curse”

You can use a difficulty 1 miracle to make small changes in the destiny, nature, and temperament of things — giving them just a dollop of the nature of your Estate. The Power of Fire can make someone more fiery, or give them a dangerous feel, or make sure that now and again in life their plans will burn them. The Power of Industrial Espionage can make someone more or less sinister or adventurous — and can probably attract money or misfortune to someone as well. Your blessings and your curses can make small, real changes to hearts, minds, and lives, but their previous *dharmas* will tend to dominate and leave 90% of their life more or less the same.

You can also use these miracles to take a bit of your Estate’s nature away from someone, or shelter them from it to a small degree. The



total effect is similar, but you don't have the same level of control — you just “take a bit of the Fire” from their life, or “shelter them from some of the weight of Industrial Espionage,” rather than exploring a larger palette of possible effects.

## Difficulty 2: “Lesser Incarnation”

The Powers you know — that love you, hate you, or just hang out with you sometimes — can be with you even when their body is not. They can *incarnate* in their Estates. The Power of the Wind can *be* whatever wind blows past. The Power of Landslides can live in any landslide. The Power of Hope moves in any heart that hopes.

*The man's convulsions woke her; woke her to see his sweating ghost-pale face, his slit eyes, his drawn features. She tried to disentangle herself from the sheets, crying, “What ails you?”*

*He spoke no word, but she came to know his answer: that he had been awakened by the suffering of his realm, by the forest in the south. That he had touched the minds of a dozen beasts and seen through a dozen pairs of eyes before he found the source of the pain...and that, when he found it, he paid the price for his divinations...for the thirteenth beast was trapped within a fire...*

—from *Fire Stories*, compiled by Édouard Guy





200

Your Avatar can do this as a difficulty 2 miracle.

When your Avatar incarnates in something, their consciousness goes off to live elsewhere in the world. This ignores the normal range for your miracles (pg. 206-207) and lasts until:

- ☛ something happens back at their body that snaps them out of it;
- ☛ a self-imposed time limit runs out; *or*
- ☛ a scene ends for the thing they're living in.

They do choose, with as much precision as they like, what they'll inhabit, but they don't take it over and they don't bring their whole majesty to bear. They live *with* it.

The things that happen to it — the things it thinks, the relationships it forms, the experiences it has — become part of your Avatar's life story. This is backdated a bit, so you get the memories and attachments of the things that were already happening when you arrived. And your Avatar's dreams and hopes and passions and loves and basically their ways of living become part of its *nature*; and *that* lasts even after you pull your consciousness back, more or less until the story ends.

So if you're playing the Power of Dogs, you can go live in any dog you want. And for the rest of your life, if that dog loved someone, like most dogs do, that person will be important to you, and you to them. And for the rest of the story, that dog thinks a bit like you (and the rest like a dog) — if they see that your parents' home is on fire, say, even if they don't know your parents, they'll definitely care and they might even be able to work a fire extinguisher or dial 911!

Usually the HG will just tell the story of what you experience in abbreviated form, or let you do so, or just say that it happened and tell you to let them know if it's relevant. If you happen to incarnate somewhere where important things are going on, though, and nothing is up back where your body is, then the HG may have you play the dog, wind, hope, ghetto, song, or sunbeam you happen to be inhabiting instead of yourself!

If your Estate exists on other worlds you can possess it there, but you need a greater (level 5) miracle to extend your consciousness into someplace primal like Heaven or Hell.

## Difficulty 3: “Lesser Emulation”

Mortals are creatures of our little worlds. We can be cool inside our bubbles but when the world breaks in it can crush our coolness along

*Each miracle eats a little bit of me. Such is the price of ruling Consumption. Each one takes a little bit of my soul; and when my human soul is gone, and nothing but my Estate is left, my body shall fall to the ground and turn to ash.*

*This is the death I have chosen.*

—from the Diary of V.I. Ialda



with everything else we thought we knew. Ultimately no matter how hard we try, no matter what's inside our hearts, a blood vessel can pop in our heads or a landslide fall on them and our purpose will be lost. Ultimately no matter how vile and awful we think we are the world can send someone to love us. We may drive them away but we can't decide it didn't happen. In short, we're finite.

Powers aren't!

With this level of difficulty, you can use Persona to apply one of your Estate's Properties to yourself as an Affliction. Books can change lives: so can the Power of Books. Hope springs eternal: the Power of Hope can't, therefore, die. Treachery can be anywhere: ergo, so can its Power. The HG interprets the Property in such a fashion as to give a meaningful effect on the situation you are currently in on a time scale ranging from one round to one scene. Other than that it's up to the HG to determine how the effect actually manifests — does the Power of Hope die and then come back to life, or avoid being killed, or simply vanish temporarily under a veil of mystery?

The Affliction has a typical base miracle level of the miracle you used (although as always the HG can set it to whatever they like) and an Affliction rating equal to your Persona. It applies only while you sustain a difficulty 3 Persona miracle. If for some reason the Affliction screws your life up instead of helping you, the HG gives you Affliction-based MP normally.

## Difficulty 4: “Lesser Enchantment”

These miracles add the *dharma* and/or Properties of your Estate — the *way of being* your Estate has — to a thing, and without taking that thing's original nature away. You can make events into dreams or hopes, if your Estate is Dreams or Hopes; you can make memories burn, if you're the Power of Fire; you can even turn people into frogs, if you're the Power of Frogs. This can change the structure of the thing but the original information and structure is not lost — just preserved or suspended in a different form. Turning someone into a frog, for example, makes a decidedly non-generic frog that you could recognize (given an awareness of miracles, and thus that frogs are not necessarily frogs) as *them*. You can use these miracles to add abstract elements and Properties of your Estate to things, physical elements of your Estate to things, or some combination thereof.

*The car struck the kitten.*

*The kitten bled.*

*Shock; perforations; bleeding; a wounded paw.*

*He went to it, then, the Lord of WMD, and he bent down, and he said, “Shh.”*

*He cradled it; he sang to it; he closed its eyes. He armored it; he gave it poison sacs; and bit by bit he put his mark on it.*

*It wobbled upright.*

*Its lungs clanked inside its chest.*

*It breathed: ho-ha.*

*It wasn't a kitten any more, I don't think. I don't know what it was.*

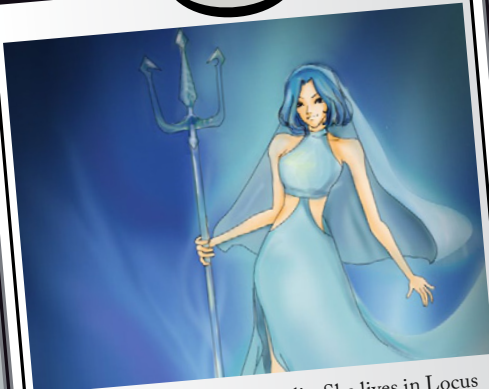
*I just remember the look of honest joy on his face when it took its first step; when it looked at him and tilted its head; when it said, “Blort?” in that fashion that kittens, who are weapons of mass destruction, blort.*

—from the Thought-Record of Danglehart Li

*The house had died; its pieces were taken from it, one after the next; finally all there was that remained of it was a rectangular plot of dirt, perfectly clean, whose spirit mumbled endless paeans to its emptiness and still thought it was a house.*

— from *A Madness of Spirits*,  
by Dr. E. Edgarton Clark

XL



This is the Power of the Borealis. She lives in Locus Zaanannim, the original reality from which television characters arise. It's one of her duties to infuse some characters and shows with a sense of *outward-looking wonder*, which is why she has **Persona 4**. If you can ride a plane or space shuttle into the borealis and ask her to, she will make you the star of your own series, but at the cost of being fictional thenceforth. If her picture seems familiar to you then she probably hung out with you when you were a child; she is fond of seizing young children with the tendrils of the borealis and playing with them in the sky or among the shows, usually remembering to return them before their parents notice they have gone.

TIRIA

## Difficulty 5: “Lesser Sacrifice”

These miracles take the *dharma* and/or Properties of your Estate away from something. The Power of Fire makes a thing stop burning. The Power of Dreams makes something no longer a dream (but, rather, real). The Power of Cats decides a tailless Manx isn't really a cat any longer. You can exempt something from one or more of your Estate's Properties, from some less central aspects of your Estate, or even cut it from your Estate entirely. Unlike a Domain miracle of destruction, this does not erase the thing outright: rather, the lingering detritus of its existing in the world, the traces of definition the thing has picked up from other Estates, form a new basis by which the HG reconnects it to reality. A consensus that is no longer a Consensus might become a Dictat. A wave that is no longer a Wave might become an Escalating Phenomenon. A cat that is no longer a Cat becomes a new sort of Mammal or perhaps a branch of the Household Gods. You don't get to decide what it becomes, but the HG should generally follow your expectations, if you have any, and unless there's something important about what's going on that you are unaware of or have chosen to ignore.

## Difficulty 5: “Greater Incarnation”

This is also the difficulty for greater miracles of incarnating in your Estate. This works exactly as with the difficulty 2 miracle, except that you can spread your consciousness into hundreds or thousands of places on Earth (or whatever world you're on), or a small number of places across the cosmos.

## Difficulty 6: “Lesser Binding”

You may use difficulty 6 Persona miracles to change how someone *relates* to your Estate — to change what your Estate means to them. You can make someone a guardian, bound to some



portion of your Estate; or make your Estate their enemy; or otherwise change what your Estate *means* in their life, to a much larger extent than blessings or curses allow. The targets of these miracles may develop minor magical abilities or low levels of Superior Qualities and Skills, if appropriate, but the details are for the HG and the inexorable unfolding of dharma rather than you yourself to determine.

## Difficulty 6: “Greater Emulation”

This is also the difficulty for greater miracles of applying your Estate’s Properties to yourself. In practice you can use any miracle level of 3+ for this effect; choosing difficulty 6+ encourages the HG to give the Affliction complicated, massive, and large-scale effects by default.

## Difficulty 7: “Greater Enchantment”

Difficulty 7 Persona miracles let you imbue things more powerfully with the dharma of your Estate.

## Difficulty 8: “Greater Sacrifice”

Difficulty 8 Persona miracles let you retract the dharma of your Estate from things on a larger scale.

## Difficulty 9: “Greater Binding”

Difficulty 9 Persona miracles allow you to change how large portions of the world relate to your Estate — make a city, e.g., where your Estate is holy, or

*Meteorologists tell the following cautionary tale. Most respected of all students of the wind and rain was Eilwen Bengough. Her understanding was as deep as the sky is tall. But she would not be content with her knowledge, and pressed on towards greater and greater understanding; and one began to see through her, on odd occasions, or hear the thrumming of rain in her footsteps. One day, Eilwen left the ken of humankind; her husband Caradoc found their bedroom soaked with rain, and a wind blew out when he opened the door.*

*Young students of meteorology generally take the story as a joke. It is only the elder, respected scientists who leave out cookies for Eilwen on a rainy day.*

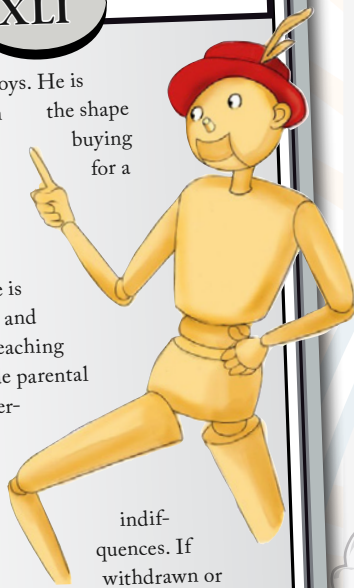
—from *Career Fables*, by Melanie Tumbarius

## XLI

This is the Power of Toys. He is always encountered in the shape of a toy, so if you are a Christmas present child you should check it carefully and make sure it is not Adrian Elsey. He is a Power of the Dark, and he takes his glee in teaching children how to evade parental restraint and make terrible mistakes; that said, he is not so much malignant as cheerfully ferent to consequence. If a child is extremely withdrawn or in the care of adults with even worse judgment than a child, Adrian Elsey may do them more good than harm.

Adrian is a shapeshifter who wholly identifies with the Toys of his Estate; he claims not even to remember his original human form. This level of identification suggests he has **Persona 5**.

**ADRIAN ELSEY**



appoint all the spirits of a mountainside the guardians of some element of your Estate. You may also invoke particularly complex destinies, and if you choose to damn or empower someone, they may acquire potent Afflictions or abilities at the HG's option. In either case there is a level 4 Auctoritas protecting the destiny you deal out that lasts for the remainder of the story.

## Persona Difficulties

### (Summary)

In summary, here is the scale of miracles that Persona can perform:

- 0 recognize deep bonds between people/things and your Estate;
- 1 + bless or curse a person with the nature of your Estate;
- 2 + incarnate yourself in something from your Estate;
- 3 + enforce the Properties of your Estate on yourself;
- 4 + imbue something with the nature of your Estate;
- 5 + steal part of your Estate's nature from a thing;  
+ incarnate yourself in your Estate throughout the world;
- 6 + change how someone or something relates to your Estate  
+ epic miracles that enforce the Properties of your Estate on yourself;
- 7 + epic miracles to enforce the nature of your Estate on others;
- 8 + epic miracles to steal your Estate's nature from a thing or area;
- 9 + epic miracles that change how things interact with your Estate

## The Persona Difficulty Chart

When you create a Power and decide on their Estate, you should also sketch out what you think you can do at the various levels of Persona. We're going to use the Power of Forbidden Love again so you can compare and contrast with the difficulty chart for Domain. You write down a few things you can do at each level:



- 0 recognize people/things with a strong connection to Forbidden Love;
- 1 make someone a bit more desirable or more embarrassing;  
make someone a bit more furtive;  
make a street a bit harder to talk about openly;
- 2 spend a scene as Mr. & Ms. Smith's forbidden love;
- 3 declare yourself un-discussable;  
declare that someone can't take their mind off you;  
declare yourself a product of cultural norms;
- 4 make a traffic cop extremely uncomfortable about admitting that you were speeding, as if it were his forbidden love;  
make it so everyone who sees your car wants your car, even if they know they can't have it;  
in a city-block-sized region, make the second law of thermodynamics more of a social prohibition than a hard "law" (filthy perverts and their perpetual motion machines!);
- 5 make something really easy to talk about, thus generating buzz;  
make your laptop completely undesirable to thieves and anyone not authorized to take it;  
strip the "social injunction" nature from proper grammar on the comments section of your website, hopefully turning it into a local physical law;  
incarnate in various forbidden loves across the cosmos;  
incarnate in a forbidden love between an Angel and a Devil
- 6 Make Mr. Smith a magnet for forbidden loves;  
Make it so that forbidden love will only ever do him good;  
declare yourself so thoroughly un-discussable that thousands of teenagers are murdered every year around the world just for whispering your name;
- 7 make it so everyone in the world wants your car, even if they don't recognize it consciously, even if they know they can't have it. People will stop and follow it with their eyes as you drive past, and you'll know they're thinking: "All my life. All my life I've wondered, and wanted, and felt this emptiness, and now I know, and it's still not mine,";  
make the Second Law of Thermodynamics more of a social prohibition or a bugaboo of the scientific mindset than a physical law in general;
- 8 make something so easy to talk about that it's a major worldwide topic of discussion;
- 9 Make Austria a place where forbidden love is celebrated, honored, and welcomed, but never originated — a refuge for forbidden lovers around the world.

Looking over the chart, you notice that the miracles of incarnating in your Estate are a little weird because spending time as a forbidden love is less intuitive than spending time as a computer, wind, or a car. You can still use it to gather information, build connections, and manipulate people, but taking advantage of the higher level depends on there being important or interesting people bound by forbidden loves. Your workhorse miracles are probably level 1-2 miracles if you have low Persona or level 4-8 if your Persona is high.

# Mystic Links

*The regalia of an Emperor manifests a portion of their substance—there is no clear distinction between person, halo, and costuming as there is for mortal stuff. They intrude upon our perception as creatures rife with symbols. This is, perhaps, a key to understanding how they may place a portion of themselves inside a person's soul without losing it, how doing so transubstantiates the target: what we see as the Emperor is in fact our experience of the Emperor, and that experience is divisible and communicable in ways that do not sever the underlying thing.*

— from the *Truth of the World*, by Tiffany Malaise

*In the Mythic World, the Internet is like a billion-branched tree made of golden light. The flow of our words—our presence—runs down the light like rain down wood. It's quite beautiful, really. Sometimes the branches ripple, when someone speaks or acts forcefully miles and miles away. Pharnaces the First whipped his end of the net once and wrapped a loop of light around my neck and pulled me half-way across the country; this did not seem so very beautiful to me at the time, but now that I can think back on it with some equanimity, I've decided it was mind-blowingly cool. I hope to emulate that trick in software sometime soon.*

— Kyle O'Donoghue, *Power of UNIX*

**Y**OU WANT TO attack a space station from the ground. You want to call someone up and then send divine fire down the phone line to burn them when they answer. You want to rig a lottery drawing that's happening hundreds of miles away.

You can't just blindly cast miracles out into the darkness of the world.

To *target* something far away — as opposed to just casting a miracle outwards from where you are, and hitting whatever it hits — you need a *link*.

Sometimes it's enough if you can see or hear the target. You squint up at the space station and invoke your incredible eyesight. You hear them answer and say, "Hello?" You turn on a television program showing the lottery drawing live. At the HG's discretion, and particularly when your targets are mortal, that might be enough.

Or if you're within 10 miles — that's probably close enough. You probably don't have to get any closer than that to target a known location, even when miraculous beings are involved.

The rest of the time you need an explicit proxy — something in that location that you can use as your icon, your fetish, your stand-in as you bring the miracle into being. It must be something that's *connected* to you. Something that you resonate with. Something that your heart, spirit, or mind holds to — something that you can forge a mystic link to. Something associated with a Bond — connected to your heart, woven into who you are.

One of your **Anchors** (pg. 208-210).

Maybe it's your mark, cut into a wall. Maybe it's your brother. Maybe it's your crystal eye. If it's one of a kind, you just need it to be there.

If it's one of a set — part of a network of cultists or an arsenal of weapons; a single disco ball of the hundreds your Disco Bond makes



important to you; an instance of your mystic sign — you'll need to take some time working with it to get the link set up. You'll have to spend hours thinking about it, studying it, connecting to it, interacting with it if you can, before you can use it as your proxy in a distant place.

Once you've built a connection like that, you can use Treasure miracles to possess your Anchor or share their senses and use miracles as if you were right there.

The cost is that the mystic link — the connection between you and that thing — remains open for at least a scene. While it's open, other characters can target *you* by attacking *it*. They can cut you by slashing it with a knife, instead of or in addition to cutting the thing itself. They can wield fire and flood and miracle against you from afar. They can charm you or enslave you or transform you through the link, as if you were still there, because, in a way, you are.

*Walk to the east until you can walk no more. Swim east until you pass the sunrise; swim east until you pass the stars; swim east until you pass beyond the edge of the sky. There, you will find yourself on the shores of a different land, under a different sky.*

*Even in that land, he said, they shall know your name, and mine, and of our love.*

—from *Adel*, by K.C. Danine



*Diane Spinnaker can use any picture of herself as a mystic link.*

## Icons

You can make a symbol into your Anchor. You claim something iconic and abstract as *yours* — a mystic sign, a shouted catch phrase, or whatever. It relates to one of your Bonds. It represents you. Through it you can use power. Sometimes it's only you making the symbol that counts, and only one incarnation of the symbol matters; if it's a mark you can make in many different places, or something like that, you should also look at the box for Anchor Collections.

## Collections

Your Anchors can be things like networks of spies, vast collections of magic weaponry, armies of monsters, whole families, and the like. You can use most of your Treasure miracles on collections normally — instead of saying that your butler brings you key information, you declare that your network of spies does so; instead of unleashing a minotaur against your enemies, you unleash *many* minotaurs! However, you can't actually "possess" or "guide" a collection of Anchors — if you want to use such an Anchor as the proxy for a long-range miracle, you'll have to pick out one particular part of the collection and use a mundane action to familiarize yourself with them. This takes a few hours of interaction or reflection, but if you're pressed you can use Aspect 3+ miracles to speed it up to "just in time." Once you've familiarized yourself with an individual from a collection of Anchors you can possess or guide that individual until the HG decides that your sense of familiarity and attunement fades. This familiarity will fade almost immediately for an Anchor from a very generic collection but can last indefinitely if the collection is, e.g., your parents, grandmother, and a sibling.

# Treasure

**T**HE NOBILIS GET access to the coolest toys. Here's how that works.

Your treasure is your iconography. It's stuff that means something, that says something about who and what you are. It's the symbols of what you're about.

The general term for this stuff is your **Anchors**, including —

- ☛ **Ordinary Anchors** like friends and enemies, parents and children, wristwatches, tenements, and cars; things you're *bound* to, things you care about, but which have no power of their own;
- ☛ **Wondrous Anchors**, extraordinary things like bottles of elemental fire, mechanical brass wings, ice-summoning swords, unicorn mounts, cinematic hacking programs, magical sanctuaries, and psychic or superior servants; *and*
- ☛ **Miraculous Anchors**, allies and possessions with a miraculous nature of their own.

You'll use your Treasure Attribute to manage your whole panoply, all your props, this entire kit.

Your Anchors are always *around*, and any powers they might have *work*, even when you're not using the Treasure Attribute. For a wondrous Anchor, that just means that its power is ordinary magic — when you're not powering it with Treasure miracles, mundane uses of that power face a large Obstacle, and no amount of Aspect helps. For a miraculous Anchor, it means something a little different — when you're not controlling it with Treasure miracles, the *dharma* or being of the miraculous Anchor is muted and possibly contrary. It's unlikely to do you very much good or harm.



The defining quality of an Anchor is that you are bound to it through your Bonds. If you have a Bond of love for your mortal family, they are potential Anchors. If the most precious treasure of your soul is a cheap wristwatch or a clunky old car, that could be an Anchor too. It's possible to decide that one of your Bonds is the price you pay to have some sort of Anchor — that you are *influenced by* some weapon, or that you have some limitation *because* you use a given Wonder. If so, that's enough to qualify that weapon or wonder as an Anchor bound to you by a Bond.

You need one unique Bond for each Anchor or collection of related Anchors. **To make sure you can afford this, you get one extra point of Bonds for every level of Treasure you have, and can spend unallocated Bond points on newly-acquired Anchors during play.** If you run out of Bond points, claiming new Anchors *wounds* you (pg. 321-333) — the HG inflicts a wound that reflects the trouble the thing causes you or the influence it has on you, which will manifest as the necessary Bond or possibly as an Affliction. Temporary wound-based Afflictions are the only case where you can have an Anchor tied to an Affliction instead of a Bond.

Your Avatar has **Treasure 0** for free and can buy up to 5 additional levels for 3 points each.

Here's what this gives you, without spending MP:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 0 | Your Anchors have no overhead                           |
| 1 | + you can possess them from afar                        |
| 2 | + you can guide them from afar                          |
| 3 | + you can make and use wondrous Anchors                 |
| 4 | + your Anchors aid and strengthen you                   |
| 5 | + your Anchors are suitable tools for miraculous combat |

Here's the scale of miracles that Treasure can perform:

## Difficulty 0: "Claiming an Anchor"

You can use a difficulty 0 miracle to make an ordinary thing into an Anchor — to take something that is bound to you by your Bonds and make it part of your regalia, your iconography, your nature and your destiny.

*The line leading to Zéphyrin was as long as the sky.*

*As I wove my way through that line, as the days passed one by one beneath the unyielding sun, my heart fell sick with despair. I knew that long before I reached him, he would choose—take some new, young, clever soul as his adjutant and perhaps his lover. He had so many thousands of choices. They could not all fail his test.*

*It took ten days for me to reach him. The test took him no time at all.*

*"Oriane," he said. "You are chosen."*

*"I have passed the test?"*

*"You are the only one I wanted," he said, and his eyes echoed the sun.*

*"But the line..."*

*"They were not real," Zéphyrin said. "I needed to know that you could wait."*

—from the Thought-Record of Oriane Feroulet,  
who was Zéphyrin's Treasure



*She stood in the garden she had summoned from outside the world. A thing that I could not call a flower brushed against her face; soft yellow fuzz lay beneath her feet. Behind her, radiant indigo shapes of whorls and topologically impossible curves served as bushes, and something beautiful but disturbingly wormlike crawled up a lattice against the garden fence.*

*Nothing in that garden came from the mind of God. It was something called, something conjured, something found.*

*“What price did you pay for it?” I asked.*

*She opened her eyes. Patterns of amber and violet endlessly bloomed within them. “None worth the mentioning,” she answered.*

*She stood within the garden; and nothing in that garden came from the mind of God.*  
—from the Thought-Record of Melania Stockli

*The Acme Horizon Vulcanizer was in one respect successful: the rubbery horizon bounced back the sun that tried to set, casting the houses of the sky into disorder. In its principal purpose, however, it proved entirely futile: like the devices before it, it did not win for Horace Eunice’s love.*

—from *Horace’s Exigency*, by Keiko Takemori

## Sidekicks

You can have a sidekick, friend, or ally as an Anchor. They’ll be coolest if you can afford to use level 4 miracles now and then!

An Anchor becomes, at your option, one of the best of its kind mundanely available. Your old clunker of a car becomes a Ferrari, or simply runs like one. Your memento wristwatch becomes as durable as a Rolex deep sea watch. That butler you hired — maybe from the papers, maybe by dragging your layabout or unruly cousin into your world — turns out, after a few days settling in, to be one of the best and most loyal butlers in the world.

An Anchor becomes, again at your option, free of charge. A car no longer requires gasoline. A computer no longer needs electricity. Phone and data service for a PDA are free. Even *people* stop having a resource cost — it’s not that they *don’t* eat, sleep, shower, or whatever, but that for some reason or another you won’t ever have to worry about it. Depending on the game the HG may play this up for comic, tragic, bromidic, or wondrous effect.

For better or worse, when you’re directly interacting with one of your Anchors, you don’t spend Will and you ignore the whole Intentions system. Your actions through an Anchored tool, or an Anchor’s actions when you’re directly involved, just add a default +3 “miraculous Will” bonus to the highest relevant Passion or Skill.

Finally, an Anchor may always communicate with you — it may call to you with its thoughts and it may hear thoughts you send outwards in its direction. This is most important with people, but the spirit of an inanimate Anchor may communicate with you as well. It is a reflexive difficulty 0 miracle to hear an Anchor trying to reach you or to open a channel of communication with it; you receive free Strike (pg. 319) on this miracle equal to your Treasure rating and can spend MP or invoke a Bond for additional Strike. Actually hearing your Anchor out and replying is a mundane action, so you’ll have to have a free moment to talk.

All of these benefits are essentially permanent; they last as long as you wish them to last and retain an appropriate Bond.

## Difficulty 1: “Possession”

It is a difficulty 1 miracle to use an Anchor as an alternate body — to shift your consciousness wholly into it and possess it. You are limited to its senses, if it has them, or to vague impressions of things relevant to your Estate, if it does not. You can use this power outside the normal range for your miracles, but doing so forges a mystic link with that Anchor that remains for the rest of the scene.



Occupation lasts until:

- ☛ something happens back at your body that snaps you out of it;
- ☛ you choose to release your control; *or*
- ☛ the scene ends for the thing you're occupying.

Occupation is not as subtle or gentle as incarnation. You entirely displace the identity of the Anchor and may use miracles and other actions as if its body was your own. When you depart the Anchor will have only a vague and confused memory of what went on.

## Difficulty 2: "Guidance"

It is a difficulty 2 miracle to invoke an Anchor as an extension of yourself.

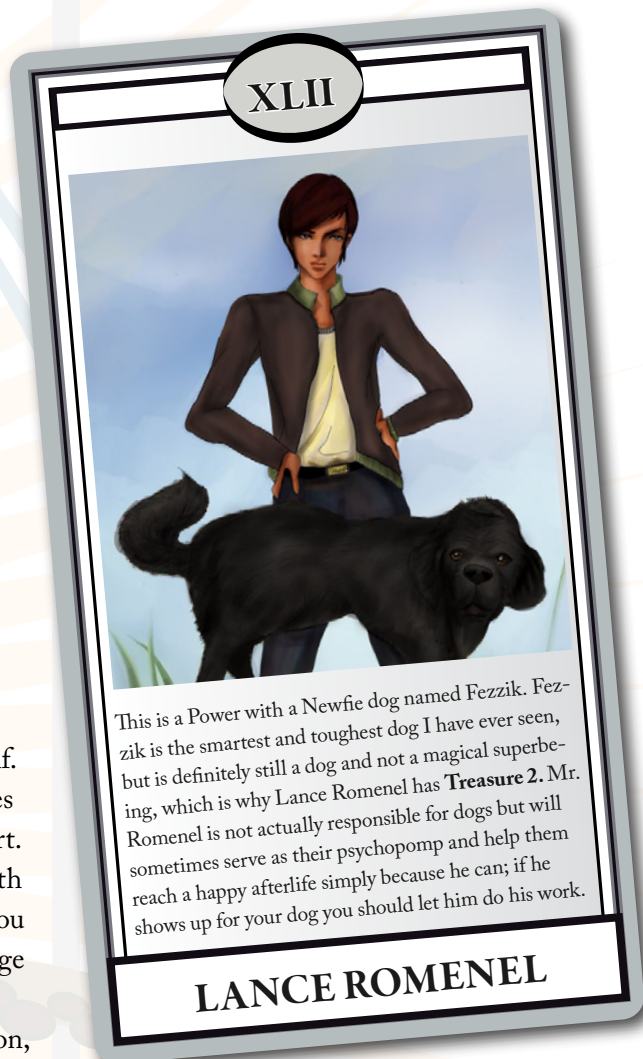
You remain in your own flesh, but you share the Anchor's senses if it has them. You improve its function. Your spirit soothes its heart. This specifically includes the conversational channel associated with difficulty 0 — you may communicate freely with the Anchor as you work. Using a Guidance miracle gives you or the Anchor a small edge (1 Edge, all else being equal) and adds +1 to the value of a Tool.

You may take actions "through" the Anchor, as with occupation, and when you use Aspect miracles or mundane actions through them it temporarily displaces their consciousness.

You can use Guidance outside the normal range for your miracles. Doing so forges a mystic link with that Anchor that remains for the rest of the scene.

## Difficulty 3: "Unleashing Wonders"

It is a difficulty 3 miracle to claim a wondrous Anchor — something extraordinary and powerful. It has a single core power, and that power forms in reflection to some deep truth about you or your Estate. Put another way, you *as a player* have the option to claim any sort of wonder that you like and that the HG can handle, but your Avatar is stuck with treasures that resonate with their soul.



This is a Power with a Newfie dog named Fezzik. Fezzik is the smartest and toughest dog I have ever seen, but is definitely still a dog and not a magical superbeing, which is why Lance Romenel has **Treasure 2**. Mr. Romenel is not actually responsible for dogs but will sometimes serve as their psychopomp and help them reach a happy afterlife simply because he can; if he shows up for your dog you should let him do his work.

**LANCE ROMENEL**

*The label on the box said, "Lucifer's Heart - 5¢."*

*"How do you know it is really Lucifer's heart?" asked Emma Jane.*

*"I pulled it out myself," said the man in the black coat. He pulled up his shirt and Izod sweater to show the hole in his chest. "See?"*

*—from Emma and César, by Martin Elliott*



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*Once, I asked my imaginary friend, “Are you real?”*

*She thought on this, and then sat down upon the beach. She poked her finger into the sand; it left a hole. Ten times she did this, and nine holes she left.*

*“Mostly,” she concluded, and I was forced to agree.*

—from the Diary of Minerva Candeloro

You can use this miracle to find and tame a wondrous thing in the world as an Anchor or to enhance an ordinary Anchor and make them wondrous. It’s up to you.

It’s also a difficulty 3 miracle to invoke such an Anchor’s wondrous power.

At this level the miracle simply turns that power on. You invoke the wonder. You bring it into play. To wield it — to decide what it does for you, what it does to your enemies — requires a mundane or an Aspect-based action. While you’re sustaining this miracle, though:

- ☛ the Anchor’s power is active, so you ignore any Obstacle that says it can’t be;
- ☛ relevant mundane actions receive a large edge —
  - 0-2 Edge becomes 3 Edge;
  - a 1-Edge disadvantage becomes 3 Edge;
  - a 2-3 Edge disadvantage is cancelled out.
- ☛ you add +1 to the value of a Tool, not cumulative with the bonus from Guidance.

Wondrous Anchors receive the same benefits as ordinary Anchors — superior mundane quality, cost-free operation, exemption from the Intentions system, and the ability to communicate with you from afar. Their special power is comparable to a lesser miracle in its scope.

## Difficulty 4: “Getting Some Help”

It is a difficulty 4 miracle to declare that an ordinary or wondrous Anchor does something to strengthen or aid you in some way. The Anchor is moved by a perfected miraculous will; its actions leave the mundane scale behind, and can stretch a little bit beyond a wondrous Anchor’s core power, but with one exception (below) its actions remain roughly within its normal capabilities. Thus your maiden aunt won’t flip over any cars or jump over any buildings to help you, but she *might* sense that you’re in trouble and give your Imperator a call even if you’re unconscious on another world.

At this level an ordinary or wondrous Anchor can reach you from anywhere within a city- or Chancel-sized region. You may, if you wish, invoke a difficulty 4 effect simply to gain access to an Anchor, and you may do so even if reaching you would normally be beyond the Anchor’s capabilities.

### Sanctums

You can have an ordinary, wondrous, or miraculous Sanctum as an Anchor — a place of comfort and/or power! Sanctum powers usually involve healing, resting, or reshaping physically to your will. Unless that’s what the Sanctum *does*, it probably can’t physically “reach” you when you use level 4 or 7 miracles, but most Sanctums have some sort of projected power that can do the work of reaching you instead. For instance, a Sanctum library might be able to send a book your way with a level 4 or 7 miracle.



## Difficulty 5: “Weaponizing Anchors”

It is a difficulty 5 miracle to strengthen the powers of a wondrous Anchor for an action, stretching them and often giving them the ability to operate on metaphors, miracles, and abstractions. Ordinary Anchors have no “power” to strengthen but you may bless them with good fortune and the same good timing possessed by Powers at Aspect 3.

You may then

- ☛ unleash that power, as with difficulty 3 miracles;
- ☛ declare that the Anchor uses that power to aid you, as with difficulty 4 miracles; *or*
- ☛ declare that the Anchor uses that power to wound (inflicts an undesired effect on) something or otherwise disrupt the status quo.

*“This?” I said, fingering a long and delicate blade.*

*“Ah, that one is fine,” he said. “It will cost you your soul.”*

*I frowned, set it carefully back upon the wall, and walked to another. The metal was dark and sang with Envy; emerald patterns trickled down the blade like the flow of blood. “This?” I asked, and looked at him again.*

*“That one,” he said, slowly, “I will pay you my soul to take.”*

—from *Viridian*, by Emily Chen, writing on the topic of Miraculous Weapons



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Belle Carter is the Power of Context. She makes her various Anchors by trapping concepts or ideas in physical form. For example, her destiny is locked up in a rope with seven knots. When she needs luck or good fortune, she cuts one knot and releases some of her destiny into the world; then, once events have turned her way again, she ties the severed bit of rope back to the other end. She claims to have captured the end of the Third Age in the jewel she wears around her neck; on this basis we assign her **Treasure 5**. If you find yourself trapped inside one of Belle Carter's treasures you may appeal to her Sister Caestis Ienari Namika-in for aid; the Lady Namika-in believes herself to be Belle Carter's conscience (in a strictly metaphorical/social sense), and will almost certainly intervene on behalf of anyone who can demonstrate sufficient worth.

**BELLE CARTER**



You can use some wondrous Anchors as weapons at lower levels, but if you don't have this level's ability to include the act of targeting and wounding someone *in* the miracle, miraculous combat will give you a lot of trouble.

## Difficulty 6: “Weaving Destiny”

It is a difficulty 6 miracle to declare that an ordinary or wondrous Anchor uses its powers or abilities to create a positive or definite outcome. That your sword *wins the fight for you*. That your servants *set a group of troubled teens on the right track*. That you, with your rocket car, *bring a new era of peace and prosperity to Quebec*. The more unreasonable your choice of outcome, the longer this action is liable to take, but it will eventually come to pass unless stronger miracles, Auctorita, or paradoxes interfere.

## Difficulty 6: “Unleashing Miracles”

It is also a difficulty 6 miracle to claim a miraculous Anchor — to take something inherently miraculous, something *on your level*, that could quite possibly take you in a fight, and bind it to yourself.

Maybe you upgrade an ordinary or wondrous Anchor.

Maybe — and more commonly — you find something in the world, something incredible and meaningful and apt, and tame it. You bind it to you with the chains of love or hate, need or drive, power and devotion that connect you to any other Anchor; typically, you will have to defeat it in miraculous combat before you can claim it as your own.

Like a wondrous Anchor, it must *say* something about you — it must reflect something in and through and of you. It has meaning, as an Anchor must.

Like a wondrous Anchor, it has a core power, or at least a core definition to its power. There is a *thing* that it *does*. It is simple, miraculous, and deep; comparable to a greater miracle in scope, but not complexity.

It is also a level 6 miracle to invoke the miraculous Anchor's core power, to unleash it in your service, to say what it will do.

Miraculous Anchors receive the same benefits as ordinary Anchors — superior mundane quality, cost-free operation, exemption from the

“Wait,” the man said, and I turned to look. His face was curiously red, and beads of clear liquid were scattered across his brow. “I must rest,” he explained. “The way is long.”

“Rest?” Dragonflies hummed across the narrow road. “I had understood you a noble.”

“I am,” he said. “A Duke’s carbuncle is sewn into my skin.”

—from *Reflections IV*, by Viscount d’Armand



Intentions system, and the ability to communicate with you from afar. Regrettably you cannot obtain these benefits yourself without being defeated in miraculous combat — Powers may in the rarest cases be other Powers' Anchors, but functional Avatars cannot.

## Difficulty 7: “Getting Miraculous Help”

It is a difficulty 7 miracle to decide and declare that a miraculous Anchor does something to strengthen or aid you in some way; that it comes to your aid because of the connection between the two of you, rather than by your command.

At this level your Anchors may reach you from anywhere in existence in order to aid you — miraculous Anchors, certainly, but ordinary and wondrous Anchors as well. You may, if you wish, invoke this level of miracle simply to gain access to an Anchor, as with level 4.

## Difficulty 8: “Communion”

It is a difficulty 8 miracle to enhance the powers of a miraculous Anchor with your own — unleashing a joint effect that pairs the miraculous Anchor's power with either the substance of your Estate or some enhancement suitable to what the Anchor *is* to you.

## Difficulty 9: “Imperial Miracles”

It is a difficulty 9 miracle to invoke the power of a miraculous Anchor as an Imperial miracle. The spirit of the thing is raised up for a moment to the level of first cause; it speaks its need into the world. This takes as long as an Imperial miracle takes, which is to say, minutes to months as the HG decides, and flows from the nature of the Anchor rather than the Power. That said, it is predictable; the Power may cancel the effect, and recover their spent MP, if in listening to the work of the

*The devices of Abd-al-Rashid are undeniably masterworks—from Bahir Hibah, the book whose passages can open any portal, to Zakiyya, the mechanical odalisque whose tears are made of gold. At one time or another, many Powers have considered delving into Abd-al-Rashid's forgotten city in search of these devices. So far, they have refrained. Abd-al-Rashid died a traitor's death, seduced into betraying his Emperor by mortal lust, and the taint clings to his artifacts still. How would a Power dare to take them? Her peers would point and whisper, “There goes one who claims a traitor's goods. What else might not she do?”*

—from *Chronicles of Wonders*, by Kip Narekatski

*When the Age of Pain began, the first Magister of the Wild, Nayantara, battled the Excrucian Maatsarya-Asura. In that battle, she broke the Abhorrent Weapon named Kifri, also called Envy, and scattered the pieces to the wind. Had Kifri remained whole for just three thousand years, it would have trapped the universe in eternal stasis—living death. Instead, Nayantara shattered it, and then disappeared from Imperial cognizance. The Powers of the Wild, when they celebrate, often celebrate in Nayantara's name.*

—from *Legends of the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis

miracle they discover that it is setting forth a burden they would not desire.

## Treasure Difficulties (Example)

Your character's a folk-hero kind of trickster, fresh-faced and with a fiddle at her side.

So you want a magical fiddle. You think it *fits*.

If you want a fiddle that calls up illusions, that'd be difficulty 3. You invoke the power, play the fiddle, and illusions appear. If you want it to talk to you, or play on its own while you're nowhere near, that would be difficulty 4. If you're looking to weave songs and illusions past the defenses of a Noble or an Excrucian heart, difficulty 5 would fit.

The level of Treasure you want depends a lot on which of those effects you plan on invoking regularly. If the difficulty 4 effect is important to you — if the fiddle is your best friend, and plays itself a lot — then you'll want Treasure 4, and shouldn't settle for anything less than Treasure 2. If you want to spend most of your time in the game using your fiddle as a weapon against the enemies of the world, Treasure 5 is almost mandatory.

What if you want to find a fiddle with Cneph the Creator of the world trapped in its sound box and its strings — a fiddle of destiny that'll lead you to the forefront of the war and a confrontation at the central point of Heaven with the greatest Excrucians in the war? Since you'll need Treasure 9 to do serious destiny fiddling, you'll want a Treasure of either 1 or 5 — anything else is wasted potential, since you can't spend 5, 6, or 7 MP on a miracle of this sort.

If you have Treasure 1, then that God-haunted fiddle is barely within reach. You'd have to push your TMP up to 8, and you'd take a spiritual wound from spending 8 MP at once (see **Words of Command**, pg. 333-334), but you could pull it off. You couldn't actually *trap* Cneph in a fiddle with Treasure, you understand, without the HG's cooperation — beating God in miraculous combat pretty much requires the HG to go along. But you could find and tame a fiddle which already has Cneph in it, or do your part if Cneph *wants* to pour his spirit in. And then you'd need another 8 MP, and you'd take another wound, each time you actually used the thing. So you're better off, I think, lowering your standards and going with a fiddle that *doesn't* contain the living spirit of Cneph — maybe a wonder with some connection to the story

### Supercharging Wondrous Anchors

If you don't have a miraculous Anchor, you may still use greater miracles of Treasure — but at a cost. You may push a wondrous Anchor's abilities to the miraculous Anchor level, and command that power using suitable level 6-9 miracles, but either the Anchor or yourself will take a *wound* of the HG's choosing. It may or may not be possible to push an ordinary Anchor to this extent — basically, if the general consensus of the players and HG is that it's awesome, you can, but if the general consensus is that it's dumb, you can't.



of Cneph who Made, which you could invoke for a more reasonable 2 MP.

But if you have Treasure 5, that's another story. It's only 1 MP to tame a miraculous fiddle, then, and 4 to wield it to reshape the destiny of the world. You could probably call on Cneph's power once or twice per story!

## Treasure Difficulties

### *(Summary)*

In summary, here is the scale of miracles that Treasure can perform:

- 
- 0** Your Anchors have no overhead
  - 1** + you can possess them
  - 2** + you can guide them from afar
  - 3** + you can make and unleash magical/high-tech Wonders
  - 4** + your Anchors act on your behalf  
+ your local Anchors are easily available
  - 5** + your Anchors become functional, flexible weapons
  - 6** + your Anchors can achieve cool things  
+ you can claim and unleash miraculous Anchors
  - 7** + your miraculous Anchors act on your behalf  
+ you can access your Anchors from anywhere
  - 8** + you can combine your powers with your miraculous Anchors' for awesome joint effects
  - 9** + your miraculous Anchors can invoke Imperial miracles (pg. 257-260)
-



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*“To end the suffering of my people,” declared Terrence, “I shall sacrifice my own life.”*

*“Or,” Emma pointed out, “you could just use miraculous power.”*

*Terrence looked embarrassed. “Yes. Or that!”*  
—from *Undocumented History*, by Walden Fargo

*The Bernierian heresy conflates certain notions of God and the Devil. According to its proponents, Creation is inherently inimical to God. He sacrificed His freedom in the act of making it and now lies immured and helpless at the very center of existence—which is to say, at the core of the Earth. He has, in essence, created His own Hell and His own Fall. The answer to the problem of evil is simple: suffering is the escape valve built into the fabric of Creation. Each moment of heartache or pain eats away at the substance of the Lord’s prison, eroding the stone fabric of the world and releasing bits of holy essence—wisdom, compassion, and the sense of the sacred—through tiny channels in the porous rock.*

—from *A Catalog of Modern Magic*, by Eric Optera

# MP

Every Power starts with 5 MP associated with each Attribute —

☛ 5 Aspect MP (AMP)

☛ 5 Domain MP (DMP)

☛ 5 Persona MP (PMP)

☛ 5 Treasure MP (TMP)

You can buy additional MP for character points; each character point you spend buys you 1 extra MP of all four types. (That is, one character point buys you 4 MP in total, divided evenly among the Attributes.)

During the course of play, you will spend MP at a sometimes frightening clip, and you aren’t *guaranteed* to get them back until the next story begins. But all hope is not lost! The HG can give you extra MP or an early MP refresh, and for any of the following reasons.

## The “Breath” of MP

Every scene where you’re facing off against a serious, meaningful antagonist will give you **one “breath” of MP — 1 MP in each Attribute, up to a maximum of your starting level.** You will also get this breath in any scene where you find out for the first time about a major difficulty or problem in your future. In short the HG gives you this breath, up to once per scene, any time they or a fellow PC decides to make trouble for you.



## Bonds, Afflictions, and Tending to Your Estate

Are your Bonds or Afflictions in trouble, or giving you trouble? Awesome! This can get you more MP.

Doing cool things to honor the Properties of your Estate? That can give you MP too.

**MP from Bonds, Afflictions, and tending to your Estate goes to an Attribute of your choice. This can increase your MP pools past your starting level.**

## Facing Change and Overcoming Struggle

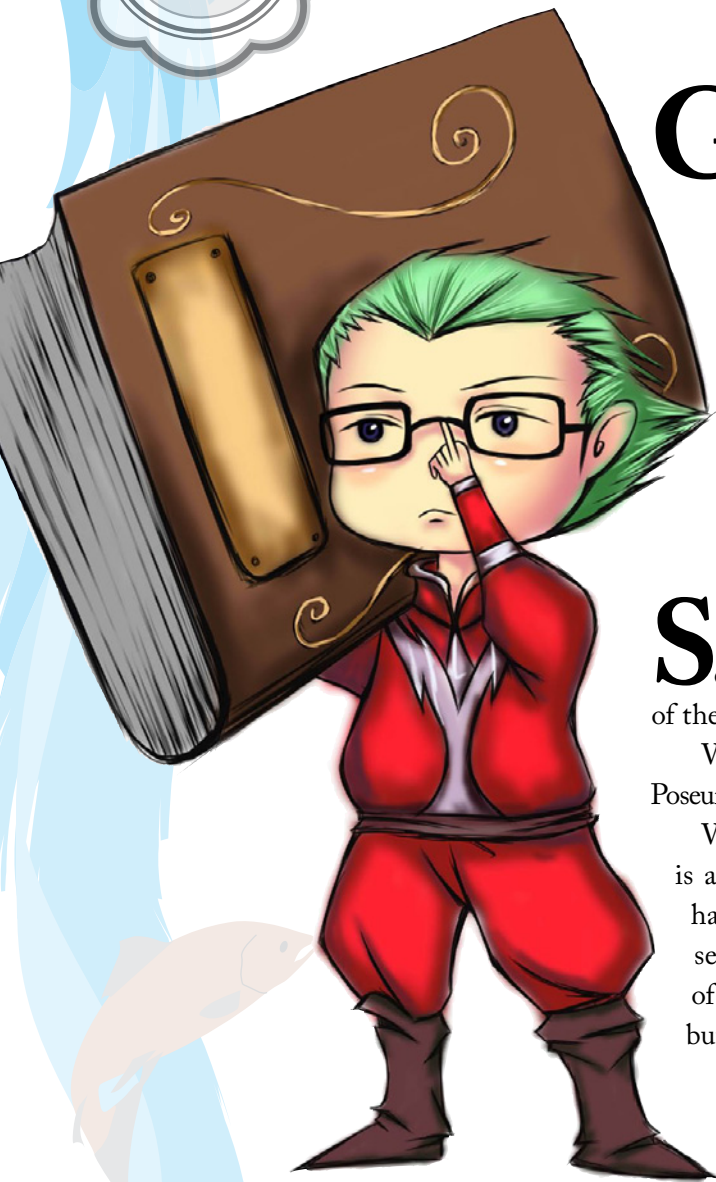
When you overcome the larger moral and philosophical issues in your life — when you can finally set aside the weight of a large change or struggle and move forward — you earn both Destiny (which can make you a stronger character in the long term) and an immediate portion of MP.

**MP received with Destiny goes to an Attribute of your choice. This can increase your MP pools past your starting level.**

*The lord of the Janni had a thousand gifts to give the mortals that pleased him, and ten thousand vengeance to carry out. Each had its own peculiar requirements, and many needed regular attention; but he did not keep these things in memory. Each morning as he woke, his servant would draw back the curtain before his bed and present the Janni lord with chilled grapes and cheese, and the lord would say, "What is on my schedule for today?" And his servant might say, "Vengeance against the city of Shenu Tawny, that displeased you."*

*"Is that not yet complete?" asked the lord of the Janni, and his servant would say—as he always said at such times—"It is growing close, my lord. It is growing close."*

—from *Bowling for Magic Rings*,  
by Keiko Takemori



# Gifts

**S**OMETIMES POWERS CAN do things that don't make sense as part of their Estate.

Why can the Power of Storms breathe fire? Why can the Power of Poseurs catch a sword in his bare hands? Why can the Power of Rhythm fly?

We totally know the answer to these things. The Power of Storms is a dragon; that's why he can breathe fire. The Power of Poseurs has monofilament mesh under his skin. That doesn't actually make sense, I personally think, but at least it's *an* explanation. The Power of Rhythm can fly because she has wings. All these things are *true*, but they have nothing to do with Storms, or Poseurs, or Rhythm.

To have abilities like this, you can buy your Avatar **Gifts**.

Gifts are basically miracles that your Avatar can do, or that the world performs *for* them, but which don't come directly from their Estate. They're also the system we use for building generic Noble, Imperator, and Excrucian abilities that many but not most of these characters have. There's a list of these Gifts below, but more important than the list is the design system. You can make your own Gifts, customizing your Avatar's more eccentric abilities.

Let's read the Gift design system, and walk through the process of creating a new Gift as we do!

## Aspect Gifts

Do you want to be able to do some kind of Aspect miracle that your Aspect level doesn't or the Aspect rules don't allow? Pick a Passion or Skill that governs the kind of thing you want to do, and the miracle level you want to do it with.

*On the first day, they brought the smith a horse to shoe, and it took him a day.*

*On the second day, they brought him two horses, and it took him an hour.*

*On the third day, they brought him twenty, and it took him two minutes.*

*On the fourth day, they led a herd to his forge, and they were shod before they arrived.*

*"But master," they said, "why did you take so long on the first horse, and so little time later?"*

*"The first horse," the master explained, "was a new experience, and I savored it for all that it was worth. After that," and he blushed, "I began to get bored."*

—from *Waterwalker's Tale*, by Melanic Tumbarius



It doesn't have to be one of your own Passions or Skills.  
For instance,

- ☛ Aspect 4-level Skill: *Science!*
- ☛ Aspect 3-level Skill: *Martial Arts*
- ☛ Aspect 6-level Passion: *I Can Save Everybody*

This is the basis for an Aspect Gift.

## Domain and Persona Gifts

Do you want to be able to do some sort of Domain or Persona miracle, but it doesn't fit your Estate? Or maybe it's more powerful than what you can do with your Domain and Persona? Pick an Estate, a miracle difficulty, and a basic miracle type you can do with that level of Domain or Persona miracle. The miracle type is everything gathered under one heading in the Domain and Persona miracle lists, e.g. *Greater Divination* or *Lesser Creation, Summoning, or Animation*.

For instance,

- ☛ Domain 8-level Major Destructions of Color
- ☛ Domain 3-level Lesser Preservations of Cats and Dogs
- ☛ Persona 2-level Lesser Incarnation in Dreams
- ☛ Persona 4-level Lesser Enchantments of Reason

## Many Different Estates

If you can do miracles based on many different Estates, double the final cost of the Gift. For example, Gifts that do Domain miracles on or Persona miracles of "any living thing" or "any emotion" or "any form of matter" are usually double cost.

If you can do miracles based on almost any Estate, triple the final cost instead!

Since Estates are written using natural language, which can be pretty darned inclusive or weirdly limiting, you're pretty much on the honor system here.

*The star of Phratagune is a sizable metal sphere with long needle-like limbs jutting out from it in seventeen directions. Nine of them are mobile, and the star can use them to walk upon. Eight of them are fixed. The sphere is the star of Phratagune's shame; the needles are its glory. For this reason, a Noble who wishes to display this treasure is well-advised to place it within a mortal's abdomen. This conceals the sphere while leaving the needle lengths uncovered; this pleases the star of Phratagune, and causes it to adopt a congenial manner.*

—from *In the Right Circles*, by Jasprite Sherrard

## Treasure Gifts

Do you want to have some kind of cool artifact or collection of artifacts, but for some reason — such as MP cost, or not wanting it to be a Bond, or feeling that it's anti-thematic for your Estate — you don't want to buy it through Treasure? Pick a **Focus** or set of **Foci** — which function exactly as Anchors save that they are not connected to you through your Bonds — and the Treasure miracle type you'll use to manipulate it.

For instance,

- ☛ Treasure 3-level *Super Car*
- ☛ Treasure 7-level Helpful Miraculous Creature
- ☛ Treasure 5-level *Amazing Sanctum*

You may access effects up to that level, but only with regards to that Focus.

## Active Immortality

Here's an example Gift to build using this system.

Let's say that you want your character to be immortal. Not the passive, "I can't die" sort of immortality, or even the "I'm really good at not dying" sort, since those are better handled through Bonds and Afflictions, but the active "Whatever it is, I can take it. Reflexively. Shrug it off. And just keep on coming." kind of immortality.

The kind that lets you declare, "I defend." against any sort of attack.

The kind that can maybe get out-miracled, sure. The kind where if someone explodes a small sun in front of your face, you might have to spend some MP or take a moment's breather to recover. The kind where you've got this nagging fear that maybe a universe-ending incident would be too much for you to take. But also the kind that makes it clear that you laugh at nukes and poisons, and that you aren't so sure that you *wouldn't* survive the death of the universe, that you *couldn't* handle being torn apart in a reality vortex or having all of Hell shrunk down into a knife and stabbed through your heart —

*That* kind of immortality would be a Gift.





## Gift Base Cost

The base cost for your Gift, in Character Points, is the miracle level you've chosen.

If you want to pick a miracle level that's higher than what you need, in order to win miraculous contests, you can, but we're not going to do that in our sample Gifts.

So you want to be immortal?

Well, a Persona 3 miracle of True Love might do it ("True Love lives forever").

Or some sort of Treasure 6 Laughter-based anti-death serum ("anti-death serum is the best medicine.")

But we're going to go with a Domain 6 miracle over You.

The idea is that something's about to happen to you. And maybe it's just a nuke or a knife. Or maybe it's something subtle and clever that you'd have a hard time defending against. But that doesn't matter. Your active immortality kicks in. It steps up to the plate and says, *I defend (You)*.

And you can smile at the HG, and say, "That bad thing isn't going to happen."

This has a base cost of 6 Character Points.

## Strike

You may buy Strike for your Gift. It costs 1 point per point of Strike (max +7). This is cumulative with Strike from other sources — whether you buy Strike for your Gift here or not, you can spend MP or invoke a Bond to apply more Strike to its effects in play.

We are only going to buy Strike for two of the sample Gifts — and only there because they are certain to go up against Auctorita. We intend Strike to be a rare and amazing bonus you can buy for a Gift, not a part of the default package.

## Activation

Next decide how you activate the Gift. Does it cost MP? (And if so, from which Attribute?) Does it use a miraculous action? Or does it just happen automatically when it should?

Means of Activation	Cost in CPs
Automatically activates when appropriate	+1
Simple miracle (0 MP)	-1
Normal miracle (1 MP of a chosen type)	-2
Hard miracle (2 MP of a chosen type)	-3

Any miracle that you can sustain without using an action or sustained action slot is automatic.

Any miracle you can invoke reflexively should be automatic as well.

So you want to be immortal?

That sounds like it's automatic. You have a set of sustained defensive/protective miracles going on, or a set of miracles that invoke themselves automatically to defend you. That costs +1 Character Point, bumping our current cost for immortality up to 7 Character Points.

## Area of Effect

Next decide the area that the Gift can affect. Is it personal? Does it affect one nearby target? Does it affect the local area? Or can it take effect anywhere and everywhere?

Area of Effect	Cost in CPs
Almost anywhere	+1
Local things only	-1
One person or thing (the Power with the Gift or a nearby character or thing)	-2
Self only	-3

"Local" here defines a deliberately fluid conceptual region. It means the location in which a scene of play is set. If you'd rather have hard spatial units, though, a Gift that affects local things can probably affect a spherical area 200 yards in diameter or launch a targeted effect at a known location up to 10 miles away.

So you want to be immortal? Well, you'll make up a few points here. Immortality affects *you*, so your cost goes down to 4 Character Points.



## Flexibility

Next decide how many different *kinds* of miracles you can do with this Gift.

### Aspect-based Gifts

Flexibility	Cost in CPs
Aspect miracles up to a specific level, tied to a specific Passion or Skill, forming a broad package of abilities and support abilities fitting that Passion or Skill.	+1
A focused, task-oriented package of abilities	-1
A handful of specific abilities	-2
One trick	-3

For example, if you have a Gift of Aspect 5-level **Skill: Martial Arts** —

- ☛ +1 helps you meditate, say wise things, know martial arts lore, do acrobatics, use inner power to keep warm, and also do martial arts;
- ☛ -1 might just let you do martial arts;
- ☛ -2 might just give you a set of powerful moves;
- ☛ -3 might give you, say, “the Dragon Kick,” which you can use at an effective Aspect 5.

### Domain-based Gifts

Flexibility	Cost in CPs
All Domain miracles of a specific type for that Estate (e.g., lesser preservation, greater destruction)	+1
A large, flexible subset thereof, but missing some obvious utility	-1
A handful of applications	-2
One trick	-3

For example, if you have the Gift of Domain 4 **Lesser Creation, Summoning, or Animation of Radio Sets** —

- ☛ +1 means you can make a radio dance, appear out of nowhere, or change its tune;
- ☛ -1 might limit you to controlling what sounds the radio emits;
- ☛ -2 might limit you to having the radio play actual radio shows;
- ☛ -3 might limit you to having the radio play your choice of *currently broadcasting* radio shows, and just save you the effort of looking for them.

*“Great King, I present to you a sorcerer from the east, who can speak to beasts, turn stone into fire, and dance on a balanced knife.”*

*“Magnificent talents,” admitted the King, “but manifestly impractical.”*

—from *Far Serendip*, by Jen Hogan

### Persona-based Gifts

Flexibility	Cost in CPs
All Persona miracles of a specific type for that Estate (e.g., lesser incarnation, greater enchantment)	+1
A large, flexible subset thereof, but missing some obvious utility	-1
A handful of applications	-2
One trick	-3

For example, if you have the Gift of Persona 2 **Lesser Incarnation in Cops** —

- ☛ +1 means you can incarnate in anyone reasonably describable as a cop at any time;
- ☛ -1 might let you incarnate in any formally appointed police officer on duty;
- ☛ -2 might let you incarnate in a cop in any given city, but only one specific cop per city;
- ☛ -3 might let you incarnate in any cop you can see.

### Treasure-based Gifts

Flexibility	Cost in CPs
Your Focus (pg. 222) has a flexible, loosely-defined ability	+1
Your Focus has a flexible but well-defined ability	-1
Your Focus has a handful of uses	-2
Your Focus has one trick.	-3

You are still limited to Treasure miracles up to the level of effect chosen.

For example, if you have a level-6 Treasure Gift to use **My Stolen Abhorrent Weapon** —

- ☛ +1 means that the Weapon has a power like “bend events to my will”
- ☛ -1 means the Weapon has a power like “slow things down”
- ☛ -2 means the Weapon has a power like “cut through miracles”
- ☛ -3 means the Weapon has powers like “cut the soul and not the flesh,” and you can’t guide or possess it or use it as a mystic link.



## Active Immortality

So you want to be immortal?

The standard build for active immortality covers just about any *Major Preservation of the Self* you'd care to name. We're not going to leave anything out; you even need the "strengthen and nurture" effect to heal any wounds you *do* get with exceptional speed, survive without food and water, and generally keep you energetic no matter what goes on.

This brings the cost up to 5 Character Points.

## Rarity

Finally, Gifts that the HG decides are comparatively rare among Powers — possessed by less than 10% of the Noble population — cost 1 extra point.

Immortality now costs 6 Character Points, and the costing for it is done!

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
6 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Full flexibility	No	
6 CPs	+1	-3	+1	+1	6 CPs

## A Note on Minimum Costs

The minimum cost for a Gift is 1 Character Point. If you double or triple it because it's a Domain or Persona miracle that's based on many Estates, the minimum cost rises to 2 (respectively, 3) Points.

# Common Gifts

## Durant (aka Nigh-Invulnerable) [1 CP]

*The city of Samarah stands in the shadow of the Stone that holds the world together. An enemy of the world once visited Samarah and struck that Stone tenscore blows. Each blow could have felled a palace, slain an army, or shattered a dragon's bones; yet the Stone of Samarah held. Not until the last blow did its strength waver and the smallest crack appear; but when its enemy reared back for another blow, he found that he had no strength left at all.*

—from *Earth Stories*, compiled by Édouard Guy

You're extra-resistant to just about any physical attack. Daggers scrape and squeal on your skin. Being on fire is really uncomfortable. Chainsaws make you a little nervous because if they break on your skin little bits of metal could go flying everywhere. You heal very quickly.

This common Gift is a *Lesser Preservation of the Self*.

**Example:** Joan of Arc would be dead right now if it weren't for the Durant Gift.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
3 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Limited	Yes	
3 CPs	+1	-3	-2		1 CP

## Elemental [1 CP]

See **Shapeshifter**, below.

## Elusive [1 CP]

You're really hard to land a miraculous effect on — you shed mental and transformative influence with ease. The inhuman beauty of Angels, Excrucians, and the Glorious won't faze you. Attempts to curse you with



hiccups or turn you into a dream don't take! Basically you have a very strong ability to be yourself despite attempts to enchant or enthrall you.

This common Gift is a *Lesser Preservation of the Self*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
3 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Limited	Yes	
3 CPs	+1	-3	-2		1 CP

## Eternal [3 CP]

You can ignore any physical and environmental condition short of gross physical injury — and even then, you don't really get *hurt*, since you can ignore the shock and pain and such, your performance just degrades. If you can survive the first few seconds, you might even manage to stabilize your condition after a beheading or dismemberment. You're basically a self-sustaining system, living off of miraculous energy rather than food, water, air, or anything like that. You do not age.

This common Gift is a *Major Preservation of the Self*.

**Example:** Daniel is a clay statue brought to life by an Imperator. His body *looks* like flesh, but it's not!

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
6 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Comprehensive	Yes	
6 CPs	+1	-3	-1		3 CP

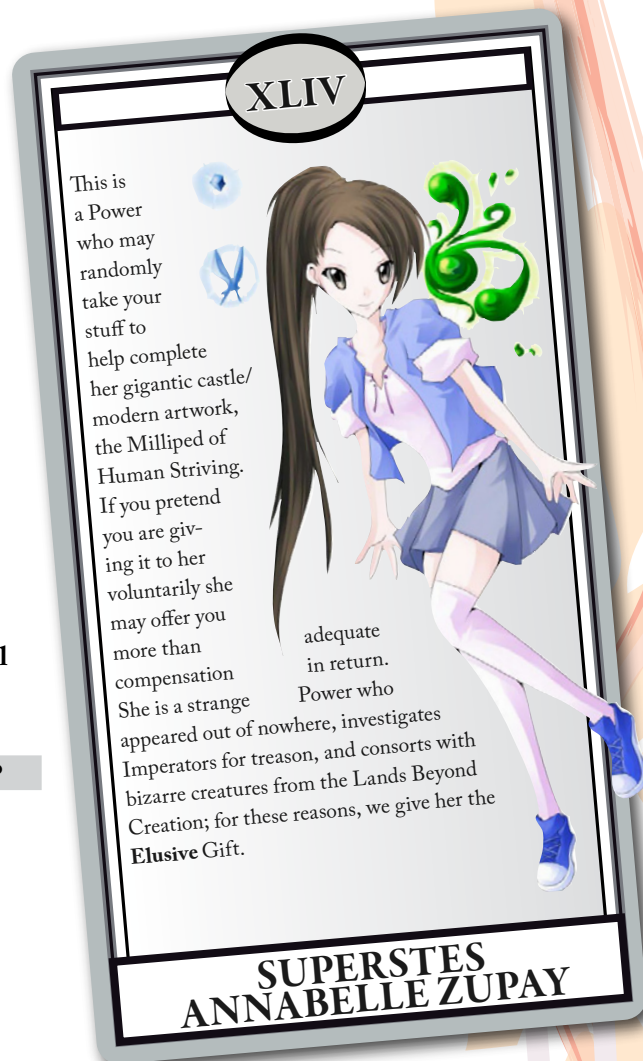
## Flight [1 CP]

You can fly!

This is a pretty common Gift. If you want to have wings or a jetpack, you can buy that with a Treasure miracle —

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
3 (Treasure)	Automatic	Self only	One trick	Yes	
3 CPs	+1	-3	-3		1 CP

This has the advantage that your wings are always *there*, and always active, so you can use mundane and Aspect actions to soar the skies.





Mr. Ordina is a mad scientist who is often trying to steal money or take over cities. He seems mad. He talks as if he were a god. He is not mad and he is not a god. Rather he is a human who cut the wings off of a dead Power and grafted them to his back. Later miraculous power crawled up the muscular attachments and started transforming him into something *else*, something that can operate on the miraculous scale and also fly. If you have the chance to talk to him there is a \$50,000 reward for convincing him to meet with the Piscator Thalasseus of Locus Parasiel.

## HARKÁNY ORDINA

*Once, a man was so well-loved that he set the fields ablaze and the peasants didn't mind.*

*Then he killed all the animals, and gave his folk dust to eat, and they didn't mind.*

*Then he dirtied the water with blood from his wars, and they didn't mind.*

*Then they tortured him slowly to death on the Stone Wheel, and when his heirs asked the peasants why, they said, "We thought he liked that sort of thing."*

—from *Parables for Our Modern Age*,  
by Jackie Robinson

If you just telekinetically fly yourself around, you can buy that as a Domain-based *Lesser Animation of Self*—

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Domain)	Simple	Self only	One trick	Yes	
4 CPs	-1	-3	-3		1 CP

Both of these Gifts have plenty of room for customization and improvement. For instance, if you want self-motivated wings that can yank you out of the way of danger and sustain long periods of flight without using a sustained miraculous action, you can upgrade the Treasure Gift to level 4 or the Domain Gift to automatic without changing their final cost.

## Glorious [2 CP]

You can inspire an incredible passion in other people. You turn on an aura or change your appearance and *bam* — suddenly you are so beautiful no one would ever hurt you, so terrifying you could rout an army, or so subtly amazing that even the Excrucians and the Angels will give you the honor you think your due.

This common Gift is a *Major Creation of Emotion*.

**Example:** Helen of Troy had this.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
7 (Domain)	Simple	Local	One trick	Yes	
7 CPs	-1	-1	-3		2 CPs

## Immutable (aka Practically Eternal) [1 CP]

This is the weaker form of the **Eternal** Gift. You cope with environmental and physical conditions *really well*, and you age really slowly, and you don't need much food or water or sleep, but you can't endure forever.

This common Gift is a *Lesser Preservation of the Self*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
3 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Comprehensive	Yes	
3 CPs	+1	-3	-1		1 CP



## Shapeshifter [1-3 CP]

If your Avatar is based on werewolves or vampires or a dragon or something, you may want to have one or two alternate shapes. This is based on a *Lesser Enchantment of the Wolf* or some other Estate appropriate to the form or set of forms you can take. If you want to be able to turn into almost anything this Gift will cost double — triple if you literally *can* make yourself into anything. By default you can do incomplete shapeshifting with this Gift, adding some quality of (e.g.) the Wolf to yourself instead of changing forms completely. This Gift is purchased as “automatic” to allow reflexive invocation during other actions.

**Example:** many Powers have a “spirit animal” that they like to turn into from time to time.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Persona)	Automatic	Self only	Limited	Yes	
4 CPs	+1	-3	-2		1 CP (x1, x2, or x3)

If you focus this Gift on your own Estate, it’s called the “Elemental” Gift. For example, the Power of Magnetism could use *Lesser Enchantment of Magnetism* to transform themselves into a field of magnetic force.

**Example:** the Power of Mt. St. Helens uses *Lesser Enchantment of the Volcano* (self-only) to transform into a lava dragon.

## The Sovereign’s Gift [1 CP]

A large number of Powers have low Domain but the ability to animate and control the motion of their Estate. This costs them 1 MP, which is, presumably, less than it otherwise would.

This common Gift is a *Lesser Animation of (your Estate)*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Domain)	Normal	Global	Limited	Yes	
4 CPs	-2	+1	-2		1 CP

*There once was a lie that took human form—for lies can do that, if one does not watch them close. He became a man glorious and golden, and along the course of his life, he earned many a woman’s love. All of them he left shattered, for lies are feckless and unfaithful and untrue. There was one, though — the eighteenth? The twentieth?— who kindled a genuine love in his heart; a love that made him ache, that made him mad, that filled his ears with the sound of bells. He could have been happy with her, he thought, but it could never be; for if he told her that he loved her, as he had told the others, the truth of his words would overcome him; and in that moment he would cease to be.*

—from *Conceptual Zoology*, by Keiko Takemori



# Uncommon Gifts

## Active Immortality (aka Immortal) [6 CP]

*The panther sprang. Arikel didn't bother to move; it thudded into his shoulder and rolled off to the side. Its claws had made no dent in his flesh. Arikel, lost in meditation, was unperturbed. The panther, conversely, was clearly thrown. It regarded him with an expression I can only describe as intense puzzlement.*

—from the Thought-Record of Cassius Quirinius

You can survive anything. You don't need air. You probably don't even *care* whether you have air. You don't need food or water. You can handle being thrown in a giant blender. Maybe the blades break on your legs, maybe you reflexively turn into protoplasm and reform, maybe you emerge on the other side with a torn sleeve and a dramatic nick on your cheek. It's just being thrown in a giant blender, so, you know, whatever. There's no point stabbing you. There's no point nuking you. If someone throws you out of an airplane without a parachute you are going to be upset about possibly missing your connecting flight. You can't be banished or made to disappear, and so you can't be permanently imprisoned either. Whatever the world throws at you, you defend yourself from it and just keep going.

This uncommon Gift is a *Major Preservation of the Self*.

**Example:** Arikel is half-Angel and half-Nightmare. One time Ms. Atsuko Ikada blew him up with a mix of C4 and Serpent venom, but it turned out it was all a dream. He cleared his throat while standing behind her and then cut her head off when she turned around. Events continued in this vein until Ms. Ikada concluded she had no option but to apologize.

† Pyradons are lizards that can breathe fire around corners etc. The ordinary world usually prevents people from seeing pyradons and vice versa and explains away the fires they start as "arson."



Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
6 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	Full flexibility	No	
6 CPs	+1	-3	+1	+1	6 CPs



## Amphibious [1 CP]

You're equally competent in water and on land — or maybe on land and in some other kind of environment of your choice!

This uncommon Gift is a *Lesser Preservation of the Self*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
3 (Domain)	Automatic	Self only	One Trick	No	
3 CPs	+1	-3	-3	+1	1 CP

## Bardic Music [5 CP]

You can play heart-wrenchingly beautiful music — the kind of thing that can enthrall an Excrucian or get the wind to dance. That's not to say that it *will*, but it's definitely *good enough* to do so.

This uncommon Gift is an *Aspect 7 miracle of Skill: Musician*.

**Example:** Melanie Tumbarius, Power of Music, once parted the Atlantic by blowing on her pipes. It didn't want to part for her, but it couldn't let her drown!

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
7 (Aspect)	Simple	Local	Comprehensive	No	
7 CPs	-1	-1	-1	+1	5 CP

## Fire-Breathing [1 CP]

You create a burst of flame. Maybe it clings around your body like phoenix fire. Maybe it's just a gout of flame like a dragon's. Maybe it's more like a pyradon's fire, and you can breathe it around a corner, make giant shields of flame, or do precision wood burning with it<sup>†</sup>. The choice is yours!

This uncommon Gift is a *Lesser Creation of Fire*.



*The music drew me from my bed; it called me to the balcony, where I stood in my night garments and the cold. And still the 'Devil played.*

*Darkness closed.*

*"We agreed some time ago," he said, "upon a price. And I call you forth now for fulfillment."*

*"Raucously," I said.*

*He glanced down.*

*"I had thought," I said, "that there would be infinite dark melody — strange harmonies — a profound disquieting power in the music —"*

*Snarling, he cast the instrument aside. "It is not my fault!" he said. "It's a recalcitrant violin!"*

— from *The Saint's Bones*, by Madeline Bacall

**Example:** Emily Martenson, the Power of Sunday, can summon pillars of fire from her hands. She uses them as weapons in her martial arts.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Domain)	Simple	Local	Limited	No	
4 CPs	-1	-1	-2	+1	1 CP

XLVIII



This is the Power of Gates. He will try to recruit you to help assault Excrucian sanctums; it's his duty, he explains, to organize such offensives on a regular basis and he can always use expendable shock troops. If you take him up on this prepare to have your life casually thrown away, albeit in a good cause; if you survive, unlikely as that is, you will receive a substantial reward. Rick's **Gatemaker** Gift helps in such campaigns.

**RICK O' SUMMER**

## Gatemaker [1-6 CP]

If you're near the entrance to a Chancel or other secret place, you can make a large gate that leads inside. A small army can pass through this portal, and it opens on a reasonably central place within. Gates made with this Gift typically last either one scene or one night and one day.

This is a *Lesser Creation of Passageways*.

Since the boundary of a Chancel is represented by an Auctoritas (as discussed on pg. 246), we're going to recommend that you buy permanent Strike for this Gift. We will not, however, recommend an amount — that depends on how willing you will be to spend MP opening the gate and how relevant you expect your Bonds to be.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Domain) + 0-5 Strike	Simple	Local	Limited	No	
4-9 CPs	-1	-1	-2	+1	1-6 CPs

## Helpful Estate [5-9 CP]

With this Gift, your Estate automatically and reflexively performs some kind of miracle whenever it has the notion that doing so will help you out. Your Estate isn't super-smart in this and can face decision paralysis if there are a billion possible things that could be helpful — for instance, if you're the Power of Motion, you'll have to make it fairly clear what kind of motion would be nice. Also remember that it wants to be helpful, not to "obey commands" — although you could purchase this Gift as some sort of command-based thing instead, if you would like!

*I noticed that as Sharon walked in the woods, rose petals blew down from the wind to land before her feet. How many miles they must have come! I thought, for there were no rose trees in these woods. I marveled at her charms.*

—from *Earth Stories*, compiled by Édouard Guy



Here are the standard forms of Helpful Estate —

- ☛ **5 points:** reflexive ghost miracles
- ☛ **6 points:** reflexive conversation (things of your Estate tell you what they think you should know, and do little things they think you would like.)
- ☛ **7 points:** reflexive lesser preservations (your Estate is strong when you would want it to be)
- ☛ **8 points:** reflexive lesser creations, summonings, and animations (your Estate appears and moves when you'd want it to)
- ☛ **9 points:** reflexive lesser destructions (your Estate vanishes when it's in your way)
- ☛ **9 points:** reflexive major divinations (your Estate as a whole talks to you about things you might want to know, and gives prophetic hints).

You don't strictly *have* to pick your own Estate for this Gift, but I've never heard of a Power with this level of reflexive control over any Estate *but* their own.

**Example:** Opposing the Power of Fear is scary. That's his reflexive lesser creations at work!

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
1-5 (Domain)	Automatic	Global	Full flexibility	No	
1-5 CPs	+1	+1	+1	+1	5-9 CPs

## Invisibility [1 CP]

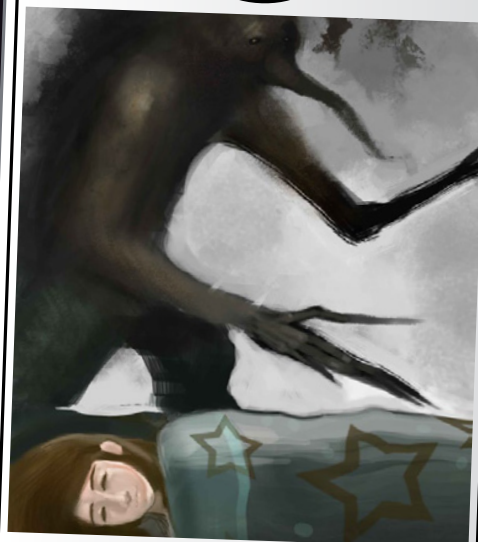
You can turn visible or invisible at will. Having a bad hair day? People criticizing your work in public? Bam! Invisible! But wait! There's someone who would love you forever if only they could see your face? Bam! You can be visible again.

This uncommon Gift is a *Lesser Destruction of Visual Images*.

**Example:** Frederick Bogey's a voyeur and a bogeyman; you never know when he's around and he likes it that way.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
5 (Domain)	Simple	Self only	One trick	No	
5 CPs	-1	-3	-3	+1	1 CP

IL



This Power is a voyeur and a bogeyman with the **Invisibility** Gift. He has a preternatural dramatic timing and a keen interest in references to himself, so there's a good chance he's watching you right now. Say his name, and he might put his hand on your shoulder, or run a fingernail down your side — or not, of course. You can never really know whether he's there or not, and he likes it that way.

**FREDERICK BOGEY**



, Melanie learned to see the world with twice the clarity. How she marveled: so many details had eluded her attention, when her sight adhered to the human norm! She found that she could scarcely live without this new knowledge. She would judge her coffee's heat by the patterns of steam that poured from the cup, and drink faster as they dwindled. She would take her cues in human interaction from subtle details of the expressive face that she had never seen before. She said, "Truly, it is a wonder that I survived my years of human vision!"

Soon, she doubled her vision's clarity again, and began to watch people around corners by the subtle play of shadow; and again, so that she could walk around allergens; and again, so that she had no need to turn her television on to watch her favorite shows. And each time, she said, "How could I ever have lived before?"

It was a blind girl who answered her question for her, when Melanie's eyes could pierce the quantum veil and were about to break great Heisenberg's distinction. "You do not have what you need," she answered Melanie. "You need what you have."

—from *Void Stories*, compiled by Édouard Guy

## Keen Sight [3 CP]

You have shockingly keen eyes — when you're paying attention, you can make out a bee's eyelash from miles away, by starlight.

This uncommon Gift is an *Aspect 6 miracle of Skill: Scout*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
6 (Aspect)	Simple	Local	Limited	No	
6 CPs	-1	-1	-2	+1	3 CP

## Luck [1 CP]

You can spend a single Persona MP to invoke good fortune for yourself. You may choose the general nature of this good fortune, but you cannot define the details — at that point, it's not luck but dictation!

This uncommon Gift is a *Major Enchantment of Good Fortune*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
7 (Persona)	Normal	Self-Only	Limited	No	
7 CPs	-2	-3	-2	+1	1 CP

## Magical Symbol [1 CP]

A magical symbol worked into the palm of your hand blesses those who see it with improved health, luck, and joie de vivre. Didrika 7 and Gordon Ostler have this exact Gift; dozens of other Powers have some variation on this basic idea.

You could buy this uncommon Gift as a Persona-based *Blessing* (as shown below) or as some sort of Treasure.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
1 (Persona)	Automatic	One Person	One trick	No	
1 CPs	+1	-2	-3	+1	1 CP



## Mysterious [5 CP]

You're really hard to figure out — there's a veil of mystery over you and everything you do. Anyone trying to investigate you finds ambiguous evidence at best and mocking notes at worst. Records and even memories alter themselves to keep you safe.

This uncommon Gift is a *Lesser Creation of Mystery*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Domain)	Automatic	Global	Limited	No	
4 CPs	+1	+1	-2	+1	5 CP

## Natural Weapon [1 CP]

You have a poisonous bite or you can spit acid or you have a nasty horn. This is usually purchased as a wondrous Focus —

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
3 (Treasure)	Automatic	One Person	One trick	No	
3 CPs	+1	-2	-3	+1	1 CP

But you can also purchase it as a *Lesser Creation of Poison/Acid/Nasty Wounds* —

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Domain)	Simple	Local	One trick	No	
4 CPs	-1	-1	-3	+1	1 CP

This latter variation is local in case you need to spray acid over multiple targets or something of that sort.

**Example:** Nephele Nikolaidhis has, I am assured, a paralytic bite.

## Perfect Timing [8 CP]

Take this Gift and transcend causality! Forget about Aspect 3 and its dramatic perfection: with true Perfect Timing, you can arrive on time

*The Babel hat of Maxwell Mann will pierce the subtle veils of the world. Its weight will settle comfortably upon Mann's brow. The hooked tooth at the top will bite a hand in Heaven. Maxwell Mann's third eye will open and he will look upwards towards his God. But he will find that the God he served has long forsaken Heaven.*

*Ah! what blind and hundred-handed beast is this that he sees then?*

*It crawls, it skirls, it scurries through the endless land of Heaven. It hunts as it has hunted for the Earth and its life below. And seeing it, Maxwell Mann will howl; and bitten by his hat, the creature too! It will writhe in its pain and it will smile its most secret, terrible smile. Then in one great skitter, like a centipede of angels, it will descend the long arc of his hat, and if Mann could toss the hat aside, then it would fall, and all thereafter would be well ...*

*But he will not. Oh, he will not; and that is how the world will end.*

—from 24 Finales, by Rannen Yedidiah

*Lord Ananda moved that precedents from cases not yet tried be allowed as evidence in the Locust Court. This was voted down two to one, with Lord Entropy abstaining.*

—from the minutes of the Locust Court, as taken by Martin Cravitt

even when it's literally impossible for you to do so. You can't intersect your own timeline and interfere with events and outcomes that you know already happened, but you can break the calendars of the world and get from Wednesday to the previous Monday if you needs must.

This uncommon Gift is a *Major Movement of Time*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
9 (Domain)	Automatic	Local	Limited	No	
9 CPs	+1	-1	-2	+1	8 CPs

## Petrify [1 CP]

You can turn some set of things to stone, most likely by looking at them.

This uncommon Gift is a *Lesser Enchantment of the Stone*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Persona)	Simple	One person	One trick	No	
4 CPs	-1	-2	-3	+1	1 CP

## Purify [1 CP]

You can purify something, casting out all poisons. Or (for an extra point, changing "One Trick" to "Limited Use") casting out all poisons, diseases and demonic influences.

This uncommon Gift is a *Lesser Destruction of Corrupting Influences*.

**Example:** Jason Sangrieve is like a unicorn; he can cleanse anything with a touch. He visited a Nobiliser fanfic BBS and all the porn dissolved away!

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
5 (Domain)	Simple	Local	One Trick	No	
5 CPs	-1	-1	-3	+1	1 CP

This is one of the three Gorgons, an intensely beautiful immortal Power. If she focuses her attention on you and sees you clearly, you will turn to stone. Fortunately she is nearsighted, so you are safe unless she puts her glasses on or squints.



STHENO

*When you have scoured the greed from a man, and the treachery, and the folly, and the ignorance, what you have left is pure.*

—Neriahan saying



## Unblemished Guise

### [1 CP]

You can shroud your miraculous nature, appearing to be human.

This uncommon Gift is a *Lesser Creation of Illusion*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Domain)	Simple	Local	One trick	No	
4 CPs	-1	-1	-3	+1	1 CP

## Wayfinder

### [1 CP]

You can tell when you're near a Chancel, and when you're getting closer to or farther from its entrances, and — with a bit of Strike — how the Chancel is laid out inside. You get a feel for what kind of place it is, a sense of, e.g., “disturbing” or “beautiful” or “strange,” as soon as you're close enough to sense it.

This uncommon Gift is a *Lesser Divination of Hidden Places*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
2 (Domain)	Automatic	Local	One trick	No	
2 CPs	+1	-1	-3	+1	1 CP

## Worldwalker

### [1-6 CP]

This Gift is usually taken only in conjunction with Wayfinder. When you're near a Chancel, you don't need a path to get in — you can just step through the twisted space and into the Chancel's world.

This uncommon Gift is a *Lesser Movement of the Self*.

As with Gatemaker, we're going to recommend that you buy permanent Strike to accompany this Gift; it will have to pierce the Auctoritas of a Chancel, after all.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
6 (Domain) + 0-5 Strike	Simple	Self only	Limited	No	
6-11 CPs	-1	-3	-2	+1	1-6 CP

*The nightmare world had been waiting for seven years, hidden in a flake of paint high on the office wall. No one touched it. No one knew about it. Then Sophia fell against that flake one day, and the nightmare drew her in.*

—from *Azurifolia*, by Asper Smith

# Monstrous Gifts

*The nimblejack waited outside the Church walls.*

*I did not think that the Church had power to repel it. Demonic though the creature was, its power did not come from Hell, nor did the walls derive their strength from Heaven.*

*This was the kind of game it liked. I could look at it through the doors, and it would make faces at me. I could go to the windows, and it would move like lightning to stare in through those. If I made a move to leave the Church—tomorrow or ten years from now—it would break my head off with its clever claws. And one day, when I resigned myself to an eternity within these bland walls, it would walk through the doors and poke its hand into my guts.*

—from the Thought-Record of Jori Hullis

**T**HESE GIFTS ARE included for use by allies and antagonists, but a Power could take them as well.

## Lightning Quickness [5 CP]

You are faster than the wind. You are faster than the rain. You are faster than you could possibly be fast: you taunt your enemy, they move away, and there you are, standing before them once again.

This rare Gift is an *Aspect 7 miracle of Skill: Stalker*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
7 (Aspect)	Simple	Local	Comprehensive	No	
7 CPs	-1	-1	-1	+1	5 CP

## Paramount Sense [2 CP]

One of your senses is supernaturally acute — for instance, you can smell well enough to operate normally in total darkness.

This uncommon Gift is an *Aspect 4 miracle of Skill: Tracker*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Aspect)	Simple	Local	Comprehensive	No	
4 CPs	-1	-1	-1	+1	2 CP



## Paramount Strength [1 CP]

You are astonishingly strong — particularly given a generally low Aspect level.

This uncommon Gift is an *Aspect 4 miracle of Skill: Killer*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
4 (Aspect)	Simple	One target	Comprehensive	No	
4 CPs	-1	-2	-1	+1	1 CP

## Soul-Carving Sword [1 CP]

Spending an MP and cutting a miracle with your sword, you damage the miracle-user's underlying Gift or Attribute. This action opposes the miracle and all other uses of the relevant Trait as long as you sustain the miraculous action that “cut” that Trait.

This rare Gift is a level 6 miracle of Treasure.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
6 (Treasure)	Normal	One target	Limited	No	
6 CPs	-2	-2	-2	+1	1 CP

## World-Breaker's Hand [15 CP]

Excrucian Strategists can destroy practically anything with a wave of their hand — even ideas, emotions, and events.

This rare Gift is a *Lesser Destruction of Any Estate*.

Miracle Level	Invocation	Range	Utility	Common?	Total
5 (Domain)	Simple	Local	Full	No	
5 CPs	-1	-1	+1	+1	5*3=15 CPs

*We did not like Mother Catherine.*

*We were playing, the first day, when she arrived. We did not want to stop playing and greet the new governess. Mother Catherine asked us once to stop, politely. She asked a second time, with a burning red anger in her cheeks. The third time, she snatched Brian from the floor and very economically garroted him.*

*“Today you begin your lessons,” she said, in the suddenly quiet room. “The first lesson is this: I can strike at any time.”*

*We did not like Mother Catherine.*

*She was too much stronger than were we.*

—from *Young Meredith*, by Emily Chen







# Your Chancel, Revisited

*In the abandoned Chancel of Ebrôt Aggaka, the last remnants of a criminal justice system have long since dissolved. The only mechanism of social control is taste.*

**D**URING, BEFORE, OR after character creation, each group of players should design their Avatars' **Chancel** — the secret temple-world of their Emperor.

Each Chancel is a pocket dimension with its own rules.

It starts as a place on Earth — usually a city or city-sized region, but potentially as small as a building or as large as a subcontinent. This place gets wrapped up in the Emperor's magic, estranged from the Earth, forgotten by it, and transformed into the kind of world the

## Banes

The world doesn't really like having Chancels ripped out of it. This sometimes results in *Banes* — horrors that haunt the Chancel, making trouble for its Powers and Emperor, and returning to life if they are ever killed. Banes usually have 3-10 points of Afflictions, the Durant and Elusive Gifts, and a handful of Passions and Skills.

Players might find it worthwhile to define a Bane or two during Chancel creation — to make them part of the *story* of the place, as with "King" Lot on pg. 67. Trouble's certain to visit your Chancel sooner or later, so why not help to choose its form?

### The Cost of a Chancel

An Emperor must speak the miracle of Chancel creation for 100 days before it forms. For this there is a cost. Typically that cost is one human life on each of those 100 days. Emperors can also spend from their own vitality or drain power from Actuals (pg. 297) in various unholy ways.

It is pretty awful.

It is the pretty awful part.

Imperator dreams up. The paths in and out become fairy paths, difficult to travel unless you know exactly how they work. The people and places of the Chancel warp. They often, but not always, forget who and what they used to be.

## Theme

Start by deciding what kind of world it is.

Now, you can pretty much make any kind of Chancel world that you like. Do you want wizards and dragons? That's fine. Robots? Zap guns? Nanomachine swarms? That's all fine too. Do you think there should be three suns in the sky? Do you think drowned pirates should carouse freely in the Bay? Do you want passels of flying jellyfish to drift through the sunset sky? You can have that.

It's even possible, if the players totally can't agree, to divide the Chancel into regions that behave differently. A light world and a shadow world, a northern realm of retro-future punk and a southern realm of magic realism, floating cities over an abyss of awful horrors, whatever kind of division works and lets everyone be happy. But you need to think of *something*.

## Properties

You can stop here and make a bullet-pointed list of 3-7 "rules" for the Chancel.

These are in the same vein as Estate Properties or the properties of the Border Mythic, Ordinary World, Evil World, Heaven, or Hell. They're things that express the Chancel's metaphysical essence.

These should be considered tentative for the first few sessions, so if you like you can skip formalizing them at all until later in the game.



# Entrances and Exits

Decide how you get in and out!

Chancels may ...

- ☛ have a small set of hidden entrances and exits in a single geographical area on Earth;
- ☛ have paths that open to many different places on Earth — a tactical drawback and a practical convenience;
- ☛ have hundreds, thousands, or even millions of entrances and exits across the Earth;
- ☛ have a mobile entrance or exit — for instance, the Chancel entrance is in a Dragon Foundation truck;
- ☛ have a mystical Gate to some other Chancel, some other time, or some other world on the Ash, in addition to the normal entrance; *or* they may even
- ☛ have a contiguous, normal border with the outside world.

Many of a Chancel's entrances and exits are “mythic,” that is, they require behavior or understanding more than they require following a visible and obvious road.

It is also worth thinking about transportation in general —

How do you get around?

Most Chancels with the technology will have a small private airfield and an aerial path so that the Powers can fly directly from the Chancel to destinations around the world. However, if the Chancel is more of a chariots-and-cobblestones kind of place, you may need to arrange for large bank accounts and a fleet of Earth-parked vehicles for your transportation needs.

*The Chancel of Dorian Griffith has a sea of parts—living parts—ears, eyes, arms, legs, feet, hands, even a few unmentionable organs. When Dorian is hurt, the sea roils; the parts perk up. Listening to the sound of some hidden song, they sort the best part from the vasty sea and cast it out across the world to replace the wounded segment of his flesh.*

—from *A Tourist's Guide to Creation*,  
by Jasprite Sherrard

## The Erus

An “Erus” is a kind of half-Power, a Noble whose abilities only function inside the Chancel. They have no Estate, but may have a pseudo-Estate of “things of the Chancel” for use with Domain miracles.

If you want an Erus in your Chancel, you can have one at no cost. They're helpful, sure, but only when the Chancel is threatened — and, since they only have power inside the Chancel, they tend to compensate by stepping on other Powers' interests therein.

LII

*In the abandoned Chancel of Ebrôt Appèkà, the last remnants of a criminal justice system have long since dissolved. The only mechanism of social control is taste. Specifically, when society judges a person distasteful, the unsainly bat-winged monsters of the Chancel flock down upon them and carry them away.*

—from *A Tourist's Guide to Creation*, by Jasprite Sherrard

## Cool Stuff

Important places of power and cool local servitors are generally obtained through the Treasure Attribute. That said, if you want some neat things to be around that you aren't explicitly buying as Anchors, feel free — you can fill up a Chancel with all kinds of cool toys, people, pets, and places. In general these have a modestly understated *dharma*; that is, if you ever find yourself wondering why your covey of mad scientists isn't out fixing the Chancel's problems, or why your endless hordes of mythical monsters can't seem to keep your enemies out, or why your incredibly experienced heroes mostly hang out tending bar and guarding shops, it's because their ability to cause effectual results is minimal without the will of a Power or Imperator tangling up inside them.

## Miracles and the Chancel

In your Chancel, you receive a 3 MP discount on miracles (to a minimum cost of 0 MP.) Your Imperator receives a similar benefit.

This is not cumulative with other such discounts unless so stated.

If you want to be extremely competent in your Chancel, we recommend that you take a small amount of Secondary Domain in the pseudo-Estate “things of my Chancel,” even one or two points, combined with the discount above, will offer you a large array of potent options in play.

## Chancel Boundaries

Decide how powerful the border of your Chancel is.

Most Chancels have a boundary that counts as a level 1-5 Auctoritas (pg. 109-110). It stops miracles from acting across that boundary.

The stronger this Auctoritas, the harder it is for enemies to strike into the Chancel, but the harder it will also be for *you* to act on the outside world from inside the Chancel or on the Chancel from the outside world.

You can choose whatever level of Auctoritas you like, or default to “2” if you can't agree or don't want to think about it.



Aaron's Serpent

sensualist

**Your Imperator,  
Revisited**

Aaron's Serpents





## Imperator Creation

During, before, or after character creation, each group of players should design their Avatars' Imperator.

Start by coming to a consensus on the Imperator type.

Write this down in the big circle in the center of the Imperator character sheet (pg. 368). This'll be

- ☛ Angel
- ☛ Devil / Fallen Angel
- ☛ Magister of the Light
- ☛ Magister of the Dark
- ☛ Magister of the Wild
- ☛ True God *or*
- ☛ Aaron's Serpent





Then each player talks a little bit about what they think that Imperator would be like and what they want their Avatar's relationship with the Imperator to be like. The HG also talks a bit about what kind of Imperator would be fun for the HG to play through. The HG takes a phrase or sentence from each player's discussion, including their own, and puts it in a neighboring bubble.

For example, a three-player game might wind up with:

- ☛ Devil
- ☛ gives some sort of power
- ☛ kind of metal
- ☛ like "the Devil went down to Georgia"
- ☛ a red-head, of course.

It's up to the HG what to pick, but the idea is that it's an anchor between the Imperator and the discussion — that there's a link between each player's views and desires and the truth.

## Angels

Under "Angel" in that central bubble write —

- ☛ awesome
- ☛ demanding

Your Angel can always show up where you are.

In general this is most likely to happen when you're tempted, when you are at risk of breaking your own principles. They won't really have much to say or do about it. If you're willing to embarrass yourself before the eyes of Heaven, you can ignore the Angel and do the wrong thing and they won't stop you. But they'll be there to see it and to remind you of the right.

Winning their respect is really hard. You'll probably have to spend a fair bit of relevant Destiny (pg. 341) before they'll approve of you at all.

## Devils

Under "Devil" in that central bubble write —

- ☛ wounded
- ☛ always with you

*Their numbers are countless. There are trillions of them. They are roaches. They are the eyes of God. From the pipes, from the shadows, from behind the refrigerator, they watch. They judge. They are shielded by the glory of the lord. It takes great force to kill them. Yet humans manage, snuffing several roaches every second; and with each roach that dies, a star goes out.*

—from *The Eyes of God*, by Rannen Yedidiah



If you look around to see if your Devil is there, they will be. They might be just a voice in your head, if you're in a crowd, or they might walk right up and sit down next to you, if you're alone and need someone to talk to.

Just look and there they'll be.

Your Devil will mostly just listen to you. They won't say much, and what they do say will mostly be to keep you talking or acknowledge what they've heard.



It's not that they don't want to talk. They're just not really very good at it.

If they let themselves do too much of the talking, see, they're likely to get bitter and morose about their eternal torment in Hell, or figure out just the right thing to say to make your heart break in two and say it before they can stop themselves, or start hurting people inattentively as part of demonstrating abstract points. So they don't let themselves talk much. But they'll be *there*.

They are broken, twisted, suffering creatures, and it'd take a Project (pg. 341) to help with that at all.

## Magisters of the Light

Under "Magister of the Light" in that central bubble write —

- ☛ idealistic
- ☛ soulless

Your Magister of the Light will always give you an audience. It may also schedule times to check in with you, visiting you on midsummer's eve, or every day at noontime, or on an erratic schedule arranged when it gave you your most recent assignment.

This is not as useful as it could have been.

They look away from you. They speak, but their words are not on point. They apprehend facts and dangers, but not the subtler meanings of the world; a private vision consumes them, and keeps them from connecting with *what is*.

Still, their plans are deep, subtle, and more practical than you might credit. If you have hard data for them, you might hear them muse upon it; and from that musing, learn more than they would tell you otherwise about the world, their plans, and your place in them.

The only thing that can break through their shell and make them aware of the limitations of their perspective is Destiny (pg. 341) — spent, or accumulated, on a Project to reach them or transform yourself.

## Magisters of the Dark

Under "Magister of the Dark" in that central bubble write —

- ☛ choices
- ☛ hungers



Your Magister of the Dark tempts you. It pushes you. It challenges you. It is unpredictable, a mad experience arising from nothingness, driving you to trouble, then fading randomly away.

It likes to make things interesting. It likes it when things are out of control, wild, chaotic, mad. It's a trickster, a pusher, a drunkard, and a rogue.

Your Magister of the Dark can be awesomely kind. You have to understand that about them. If you are being crushed by the weight of others' choices, and not given a chance to share your own — if you're being controlled, manipulated, imprisoned, or abused — a Magister of the Dark will help you, and there won't be any kind of catch. They shatter prisons, free slaves, and throw open the doors of psych wards, and they don't care about the *human* justice or injustice of these acts.

They can be awesomely kind, when they're not making trouble for you. But they're not really any better at listening to you than the Light.

They'd *like* to be, they really would. But in the end the world is too distracting, and it's too hard to remember that people are making *meaning* with the awesome noises of their lives. Just as with the Light, the only way to get through to them about the limitations of their perspective is Destiny (pg. 341).





## Magisters of the Wild

Under “Magister of the Wild” in that central bubble write —

☛ absolute egocentricity

☛ justice

Your Magister of the Wild hovers near you. It is constantly visiting you. It is constantly watching you. It leaves, but it is constantly returning to you. It will touch you if you allow it. It will run its hands across your face like a blind person trying to understand you. It will push against you like it cannot understand how something so close to its soul is not a part of its body.

On this it will relent, if asked.

It understands that some pieces of itself need space to breathe and live and grow. But it will always be visiting you, always be watching you, always helping you in little ways that may or may not make sense to you, always telling you what it has learned about itself from you and yourself from it. It will be pleading with you. It will want you to agree with it. It will be like a numinous, transcendent, thundering infinity of puppy, desperately hoping that you will approve.

*Is this correct?* its attitude will ask you, as it shyly transforms the buildings on your street to a floating mandala in the air. *Is this the way that I should be?*

It is possible that you can reach it.

It is not deaf and blind to you in the manner of the Light, nor as distractible as the Dark. It is possible that your Magister of the Wild can understand you. It is possible — but your starting points are so very far away! It is a creature of magical geometry and unfolding law. It is born into the world like a flower that blooms in nothingness, unfolds in symmetry, curls back on itself to become its own beginning. It is mad as the fundamental laws are always mad. It is a living creature but its life and mind are being are like toys to it, things to be tossed about and chewed on and considered, rather than made clear.

Thus you will need to bridge the gap between you and the Wild with a Project (pg. 341) before there is any hope.

## True Gods

Under “True God” in that central bubble write —

☛ primordial

☛ intertwined with other things

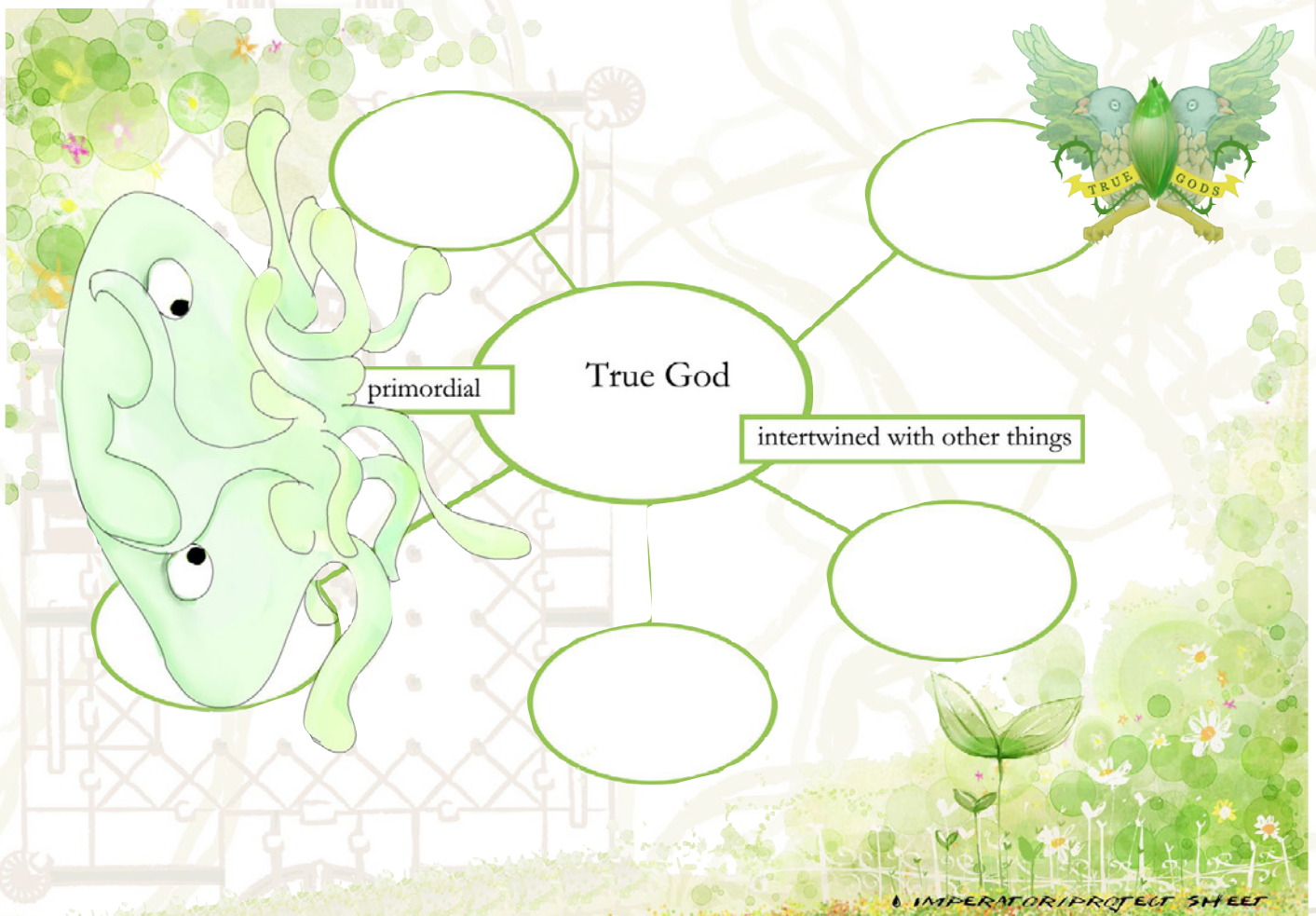
Your True God is deep below you.

It is connected to you — there are strands of it wrapped like filaments around your soul — but to speak to it you must go deep below the surface of things. You must descend, you must estrange yourself from the appearances of things around you, and fall down, down, down into the mandalas of the world.

It is more likely to communicate with you through impressions and sensations than words.

This varies.

There are some among the True Gods that have a nature that is talkative. They are primordial but they are primordial *deities*, and so we may fairly say that there is no human capacity that they cannot have and in fact exceed. They are inclined to speak in the whispering movement of tendrils and hanging branches, but they can make a better speech than a human President. They are inclined to devour great spirits for their sustenance, and not even digest them but integrate them into





their own substance, but that doesn't mean they *can't* cook better than a French chef in the kitchens of the world.

But for the most part they are primal creatures, creatures of bodily impressions and sensations. For the most part you will get only a gentle tugging on your perceptions, a sense of rightness or wrongness, and in terms that are unequivocally opinion.

*This is the way that is harmonious with the flow  
of the moods of your True God.*

Or

**here, I sense there is an incongruity.**

There is no real hope of making this better. They are not people in that sense to you. They are able to affect to personhood, if they care to, but they are gods of the most ancient forms of life.

The only thing you can do to grow in your relationship with a True God is to take over more of their body with the nodules of spirit that are your own. The only thing you can do is learn to ride them, as you'd ride a dragon, as you'd ride history, as a genius demagogue rides the public, as the ancient wizards rode the storms. You may learn to master the complex systems of your God, with Destiny (pg. 341), but you will never make it your lover or your friend.

(Though, watch, I bet a little after publication Ianthe will plop down in a nearby chair and say, "You'll never guess what I heard about True God X ...")

## Aaron's Serpents

Under "Aaron's Serpent" in that central bubble write —

☛ sensualist

☛ peaceful

Your Aaron's Serpent isn't really terribly concerned with anything. It just wants to live in the world, to explore what there is to explore, to see what there is to be seen. They don't really think of their job as fighting the Excrucians, or helping you out, or, really, doing anything at all. They're in the world to be and to let be.

If you have an Aaron's Serpent for your Imperator, it'll show you cool things — all the wonders of the world. It'll help you find hope and things to love. It'll open your mind.

*Some say that history loves the historian. They point to the great Istoriads, the massive wormlike spirits of history that the Bookkeepers are fond of riding when recording mortal events. "Surely," they say, "the Istoriads would not tolerate such use if they did not feel some connection to those scholars who observe them?" The occasional incident where a Bookkeeper falls from their mount and, before they can rise again, is crushed underneath and lathed for hours by its terrible passage—these they omit as a meaningless manifestation of misfortune. I note this only to explain, perhaps indirectly, why I shall focus on the living society as it stands today, rather than the details of its evolution, in the remainder of this work.*

—from *The Society of Flowers*,  
by Heather Williams

It'll teach you the beauty of the stars.

It'll show you the World Ash — mother and father to the Aaron's Serpents, their original source — and maybe all the worlds upon it.

It'd be nice if it would fight. There are relatively few fights where a 25 trillion ton snake wouldn't come in handy. But it won't, not unless something's threatening the World Ash directly, and even then, only if the snake gets mad.

## New Family

If you add a new player to the game, or if a player is really unhappy with their Estate and needs a new one, you can redesign the Emperor and add new Powers to the Familia Caelestis as you do.

You don't need to do this if someone makes a new Avatar with the same Estate as their old one.

That's just continuity.

You'll only need to change things up if you're making the Familia itself into something new. At that point you'll want to redo the basic Emperor design, like so.

The players of established Powers talk about the Emperor and what their relationship to the Emperor has been like. The player of the newly added Power, on the other hand, talks about the relationship they want. The HG updates the original bubbles as appropriate and then places a phrase or sentence from the player of the new Power in a new bubble off the Emperor's own.

What does remaking the Familia mean within the world?

In practice, it means "we're bending the rules a bit for player convenience." This is something that *can* happen, in the world, but it's absurdly rare. Maybe the Emperor has held Estates in reserve until just the right Power came along; or developed an unexpected quality; or *changed*, dramatically, and just as a person may change; or initiated the Power of a dead Emperor into their own mysteries, taking in the shard of their lost peer in the same way a human might graft a dead friend's arm onto their back; or, particularly for a True God, swapped Estates with some other Emperor through sex.

It's really rare, like we've said, but it *does* happen, so you don't have to worry about breaking the game thereby.

### A Sovereign's Survival Guide: How to Handle Emperors

There are nine rules for successfully managing your Emperor. If you abide by these, health, wealth and happiness are sure to follow.

- ☛ **Rule 1.** Remember what your Emperor says. There will be a test.
- ☛ **Rule 2.** Surprise parties are verboten. Important guests may be vaporized.
- ☛ **Rule 3.** Never tell an Emperor about a problem you can fix, or you'll have to.
- ☛ **Rule 4.** Never tell an Emperor about a problem you *can't* fix, or you'll have to.
- ☛ **Rule 5.** Never ask your Emperor why they aren't doing more to help you. They think they are.

*What do you talk to your Emperor about when (s)he accosts you in the hall?*

- ☛ **Rule 6.** Sex, food, and sleep are safe subjects. You're *supposed* to be mortal.
- ☛ **Rule 7.** When your Emperor's eyes glaze over, it's safe to stop talking.

*If your Emperor is still paying attention after such a discussion, something is gravely wrong.*

- ☛ **Rule 8.** Never ask your Emperor what's wrong. You're supposed to know.
- ☛ **Rule 9.** When in doubt, *sneeze*. They don't understand sneezing. It confuses them.



# The Emperors

**I**MPERATORS ARE NOT creatures of action. They are creatures of presence. They *pervade*.

This is the reason they prefer to face the Excrucians in the numinous and subtle realms. There their actions may build up in washes and layers in the world and make up in depth and resonance what they lack in pace.

If you expect an Emperor to throw in with you in a miraculous combat, or throw down *against* you for that matter, you shall be disappointed. They are slow and subtle creatures. If you expect them to be practical sources of advice, you will again be mistaken. Their perspectives are all askew.

What they *can* do is work **Imperial miracles**.

## Imperial Miracles

Imperial miracles are *a ya pumani* — they are pure abstractions, and the world must give them being. They are stones of restless desire anchoring the map of the world.

It is said in the annals of the Powers that an Emperor may punish a Power by riving them from the world, causing them to be nailed to the sky, and thereupon assaulting them with heat and wind and rain, but it is a better understanding to say, the flex of Imperial will caused a transformation in the world and the Power knew no other way to live with that burden than to rip themselves from the world and pin themselves against the sky.

In such a fashion, on one occasion, did the impossible burden of Imperial displeasure express itself through the Power's body and circumstances. It could have happened another way entirely.

*It seemed fairly clear to the clerk, who had never heard of Incarnation, that the billowing divine fire with its spheres and its wings and its faces and its horns, like a bull's, could not be the Jake Jordan referred to on the Visa. Yet to ask IT for identification—*

*Torn between fear of chaos and fear of immanence, he hesitated; he sweated; his hands wrung like a weasel's, or a teenager considering asking his social superior for a date.*

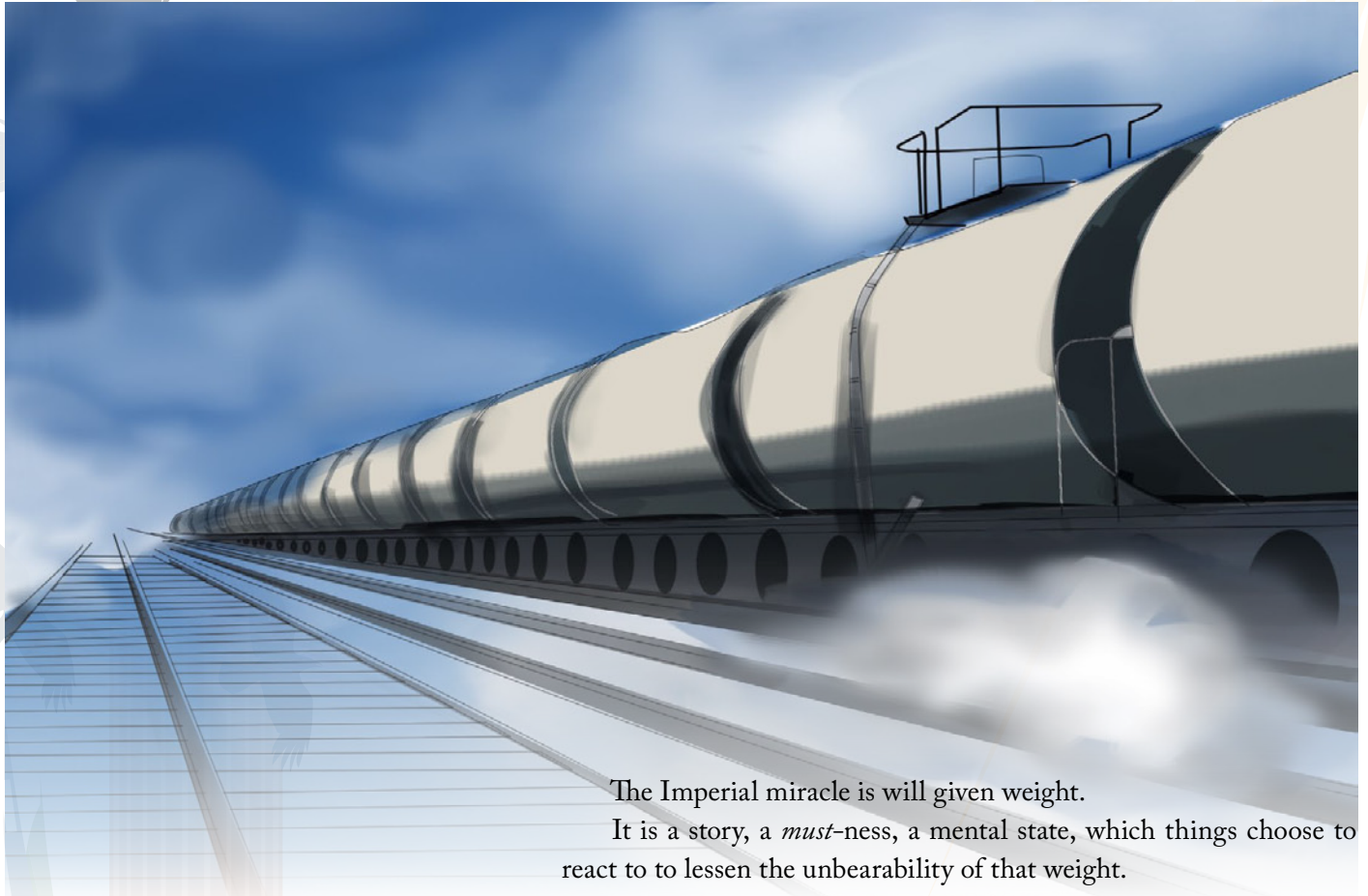
—from *Doorknobs*, by Emily Chen

*There is a woman who has carved a stone; and no more beautiful sculpture exists on this or any other world. It captures the quintessence of her art. It captures the soul. Yet it is flawed—fatally, terribly flawed. It would take her only an hour to fix it—to make a final statement that would close the book on sculpture, transform her own existence, and justify this Creation.*

*She does not fix the flaw. She cannot. She had a dream, on the last day of work. An angel came to her in that dream and said: "With the creation of perfection comes the death of this world."*

*Perhaps the angel was simply jealous, and did not want such beauty outside of Heaven. Perhaps it told the truth. She does not know.*

—from *The Army of Imperfection*, by Alexander De Vriend



The Imperial miracle is will given weight.

It is a story, a *must*-ness, a mental state, which things choose to react to to lessen the unbearability of that weight.

## The Cause of an Imperial Miracle

Each Imperator has a set of causal forces within it — a set of stories.

Those bubbles on *your* Imperator's character sheet? That's basically them.

From one of the Imperator's stories a new tale breathes. It is an emotion, a will, a retelling of the situation the Imperator finds itself in and how it reacts to it. It is a chaunt, a poem, a theory, an exhalation, a principle, a narrative and a mood. It isn't really any one thing or any other. But it's told as a story is told.

It's a *burden* told into the world, a demand, a stringency, a necessity, a need.

It is always a narrative; it is never a thing with clear purpose-in-itself, never a thing that is specific and obvious in its demands. It is always a thing that flows-from, a continuation or retelling or expression or branch off of one of the stories already in the Imperator's set.

It takes time to speak an Imperial miracle — a scene, many scenes, often as much as a full story. If it takes anything less than a scene it means that the Imperator has prepared or practiced for it.

Once spoken, it is a thing the target, or the world, must respond to.

*They bound me to the tree, far from the world, and turned to leave.*

*"Wait," I asked them. Then him. "Wait, Daniel."*

*He stood very still for a moment, my love did, but then he shook his head. "This is right," he said. "This is the thing that we must do."*

—from *The Wood Nguema, and What Took Place*

*There*, by K.C. Danine



## Resolving Imperial Miracles

The Imperial miracle creates a weight of sustained effect, lain against a target — which can be anything from a single person to the entirety of the world. It demands expression or expiation. The target(s) may use their action to name a consequence of this (loosely, something they do or something that happens to them). If the HG agrees that the consequence moves towards expiating the weight of the miracle, the thing simply *happens*. This usually costs no MP and overrides any miracles or mundane actions that might directly oppose it, with the following provisos —

*The city of Shenu Tawny displeased the lord of the Janni, when he traveled there in a beggar's guise, by turning him away. For this reason, he made a mark of his will upon its outer wall. The next day, a Janni merchant came to Shenu Tawny, and, when he left, he took away a stone from one of the buildings there. One by one they came, merchants, entertainers, wanderers, and envoys, and each took a small piece of Shenu Tawny away with them when they left. In a hundred years, only a lone and mournful woman remained where Shenu Tawny stood; she alone remembered the glory that was. Then came a dashing Janni prince, who pressed a suit upon her, and when her heart had melted, he carried her away to wed.*

—from *Bowling for Magic Rings*,  
by Keiko Takemori



*“Once upon a time,” the old man said, “the Devil came up onto the Earth, and appeared right in the middle of a villager’s barn, scaring all the animals no end. Hearing the honking, and the hooting, and the growling, and the hissing, and the baying, and the snorfling, and the roaring, and the trumpeting, and the scuffling of feet on hay, and the ultrasonic screams —”*

*“Go on, already.”*

*“Maggie came rushing in with a broom in her hand to scare this stranger off. But he didn’t pay any attention, even when she beat him all around the head with the broom’s end. ‘Ah,’ he said, ‘my hostess has arrived. Fetch me a drink,’ that’s what the Devil said.*

*“‘An’ who do you think you are?’ Maggie asked, brandishing her broom, ‘coming into my barn and scaring my animals as if you own the place?’*

*“‘I own everywhere,’ the Devil said. ‘Some places just don’t realize it yet.’”*

— from *Don’t Go There*, by Martin Elliott

☛ if you use this to attack (inflict an unwanted effect) on someone else, you have to use your own abilities. You do, however, receive a 3-MP or 3-Will discount on such an attack, to a minimum cost of 0 MP/Will; this is not cumulative with any other MP discounts.

☛ you can only penetrate Auctorita if you provide the necessary Strike.

Eventually the power of the Imperial miracle will fade.

You want to work with the Imperial miracle — as a character, because doing anything else is an abhorrent blasphemy even the Excrucians are uneasy with, and as a player, because doing so earns you Destiny (pg. 348-349). However, it’s *possible* to just ignore the miracle, to face the wind of the Emperor’s will and not be moved. In such a case — where you decide to just wave off the miracle — you will lose strength as your dharma dissolves under the burden of the Imperial miracle. Typically it wounds both of your Divine Health levels (pg. 321) to totally reject an Imperial miracle, placing you under the burden of a temporary Affliction that begins unraveling you and your various precious accomplishments and connections in the world. It is possible for an Elusive or Immortal character to recover from this in a very short time frame; that may or may not be fast enough to keep their life from falling into ruin.

## Other Imperial Resources

An Emperor typically has Active Immortality, 3-7 Divine Health levels, 2 Tough Health levels, and 3 Normal Health levels (see pg. 321-333). Most have only a handful of Afflictions, Bonds, Gifts, and MP to allow them to operate on the mortal time scale — they are deadly vulnerable on the mortal plane to a materialized Excrucian with a Soul-Carving Sword, even if they can crush most other threats. The most active Emperors have up to 15 Character Points of Traits and a few points of Passions and Skills, making them almost as competent as a Power in a fast-paced battle; they may also have 1-3 points of Miraculous Edge that are always in effect.

For Emperors who will use Persona or Domain miracles, pick one Estate as their primary and designate their other Estates as secondary. Unlike Powers, Emperors may have Secondary Domain or Secondary Persona at level 0; this costs (of course) 0 points, and allows them to use their DMP and PMP on Domain and Persona miracles of any of their Estates.



# Orders and Nobilis

The Powers of Earth grew a bonsai world ash  
and built a proactive orrery thereupon;  
Misenchronic Engine.

The orbits of its spheres are the movements  
of a sacred covenant, a promise and contract  
— a *res*, as the Powers call it — binding on  
more than 600 Noble signatories.





*Why is a stranger's death less important  
than your own?*

*The web of Khedeb Neret.*

*Why does love hold it high and holy to  
kill?*

*The web of Khedeb Neret.*

*What tangles around the heart, to mis-  
lead the bright pure dreamers so?*

*The web of Khedeb Neret, in Gasher-  
brum,  
Where Khedeb Neret fishes your per-  
spective from the sky.*

—a traditional lay

The web of Khedeb Neret hangs in the sky above Gasherbrum, burning with red corruption. It is part of the Machinery of the Accords — the alchemical and miraculous servitor devices of the Orders, slaved to Misenchronic Engine, helping to form the structure of powers and services on which the Orders depend.



Those Powers who find themselves so corrupted, so compromised, or so wounded that their ability to serve Creation is in doubt may join the Order of the Falling Stars.

They make a pilgrimage to one of the hidden places in the world that births the Sigils of the Falling Stars.

They take up a Sigil.

They pledge themselves to Misenchronic Engine; to the Order of the Falling Stars; to the Web of Khedeb Neret, that binds the Falling Stars together. And through the intervention of these forces, they may find a cleansing and slow peace.

It is the nature of the Web to keep them whole when they ought to fade away.

It is the nature of the Web to make right what cannot be made right; to make good the irredeemable; to justify through service to Creation what cannot otherwise be forgiven. The price of this is that service.

The Falling Stars are the strike force of the Nobilis.

They may be called upon by the Order of Hidden Balances or by any Power willing to buy their services from the Orders as a whole. They are there when Creation needs disposable troops to crush an Excrucian offensive, or to ensure the survival of a thing that must survive. There are 51 of them as of this writing. 38 are properly alive. 13 are pale revenants sustained only by the Web.

They are bound against harming one another.

They are given, by custom, access to the Loathsome Armory, where weapons that ought never have been made are stored.

It is their right, on their death, to raise a standard that calls to the Falling Stars — calling out the Order to finish what they started, avenge them on some foe.

*You can never go back. You are not human. You cannot know a human save as the fire knows the wood, as the storm knows the sky, as the wolf knows the deer. Even when your heart screams for humanity, you will not find it.*

*The Nobilis are your only tribe.*

—from *Principles of the Dark*,  
by Merriweather James

*When the Age turned, Jan ben Jan spat out a Stone; green in color, and having a virtue of healing, it became the HeartStone of the World.*



*It is natural for any tribal culture—which, in many ways, the Nobilis remain—to sort its members into interlocking hierarchies, from families to kin-communities to tribes. It should surprise no one, therefore, that many Nobilis build “families of families,” stable groups of peers serving as their primary social group outside the Familia Caelestis; nor that, at the fringes, these communities blend with others of their kind, forming higher-order structures yet. The surprise is not that the society of flowers is highly structured, but rather that that structure is not stronger than it is.*

—from *The Society of Flowers*, by Heather Williams

The Sigils of the Green Snake Order are found in the deep places of the world.

They are, like the Falling Stars, a penitentiary Order; to take service in the Green Snake Order is to wrap oneself in the Web of Khedeb Neret, to bind to Misenchronic Engine, to throw one’s life away even as the Falling Stars must do. But the Green Snakes are bound to a further power that the Falling Stars are not: to the pure green essence, to that virtue of healing that is named the Heartstone of the World.

Their duty is not to fight.

Rather they are called on to heal those Powers who are broken — who have fallen into madness, who have turned quisling to the world, who have become self-destructive or unable to bear the burden of their lives. They are called upon, in short, to intervene unasked-for in the business of the least stable of the Powers; required to perform the impossible task of redeeming them; and bound to do no harm to them while they try.

It is the assumption of society that they will succeed in two, perhaps three cases before some Power they seek to save drags them down.



*In the Chancel of Lorelle Clark, one may always choose to sacrifice one’s life to save another’s. This is not magic. This is not a miracle. It is the law of the world.*

*Lorelle dueled the Warmain Hesychia Symeonius in the center of her court. Hesychia’s blade hungered for Lorelle’s life, but could not take it; each time it plunged into her heart, or chopped away her side, or ripped through her spine, one of the silently watching courtiers stood up and took that death in her place. The Warmain was snarling, hateful, angry, and realizing with horror that it was possible to lose. As for Lorelle, I have never seen a woman look so radiant or so beautiful. She was lost in the rapture of it, for Lorelle is a Power of the Dark.*

—from *On Serving the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis



One hundred and eighty of the Powers — of the scarcely 2000 on this Earth — have offered some service to the world and joined the Gray Order of the Functionaries.

They are bound to Misenchronic Engine.

They have a schedule of services. They earn strange payments. And it is likely that whatever it is that you would want them to do, there is not a one of them that does it.

Breck Ainston, the Power of Lizards, will carve you a lizard mask, of course, and if it is a Tuesday. NAL 19 would be happy to send you 38 seconds back in time, if you are so inclined. Stone Cold Eeyore has the phone books of the world written in her mind; she'll save you a trip to the Internet or a call to 411 if you can track her down.

And sometimes such a favor is the very substance of your dreams. Sometimes a lizard mask, on Tuesday, is exactly what you need. And other times, if you are lucky, you'll find a Functionary who'll do something else that suits the exigencies of the day. They'll help defend you before the Locust Court, for instance. That could be handy. They'll open gates, sometimes, between the worlds. There's three of them — Fayola Osiagobare, Merriweather James, and Erkengota Harald — who are willing to help new Powers figure out the ropes of their new world.

The Sigils of the Functionaries are things foretold — legends first, anticipatory dreams. They are born from a story, from a promise, from a need, from a sense that *something must be done, and someone must be found to do it*. They take form in the fullness of time as things of the Estate of Records, and a Power may find and claim them and bind themselves to the contract therein.

Those who claim the Sigils of the Order are bound as their peers are not; they do not write their own contracts, but rather accede to them. Such Sigils are nevertheless treasures of great price: they give access to the sprawling Machinery of the Accords, to the weight of power amongst all the sanctums and devices consecrated to the Orders of the Nobilis; in simplest form, they yield a bounty of miraculous energy, which I shall estimate at up to 8 MP per story and 2 MP per scene, while the Power is at least modestly diligent in the performance of their office.

There are 70 Powers so bound; and they are named the Functionaries Magister.



*This is how Bao Way-ming punishes the worst offenders brought before his court. He strips them of their memories and replaces them with his own. Thus, the shameful creature remembers themselves as the exalted Way-ming — but finds themselves suddenly human, suddenly a branded criminal, and suddenly powerless, unworthy to so much as pledge themselves to Way-ming's glorious Estate or Code. He does not let them commit suicide; they must live out their lives with the horrible pain of that loss, and most go mad.*

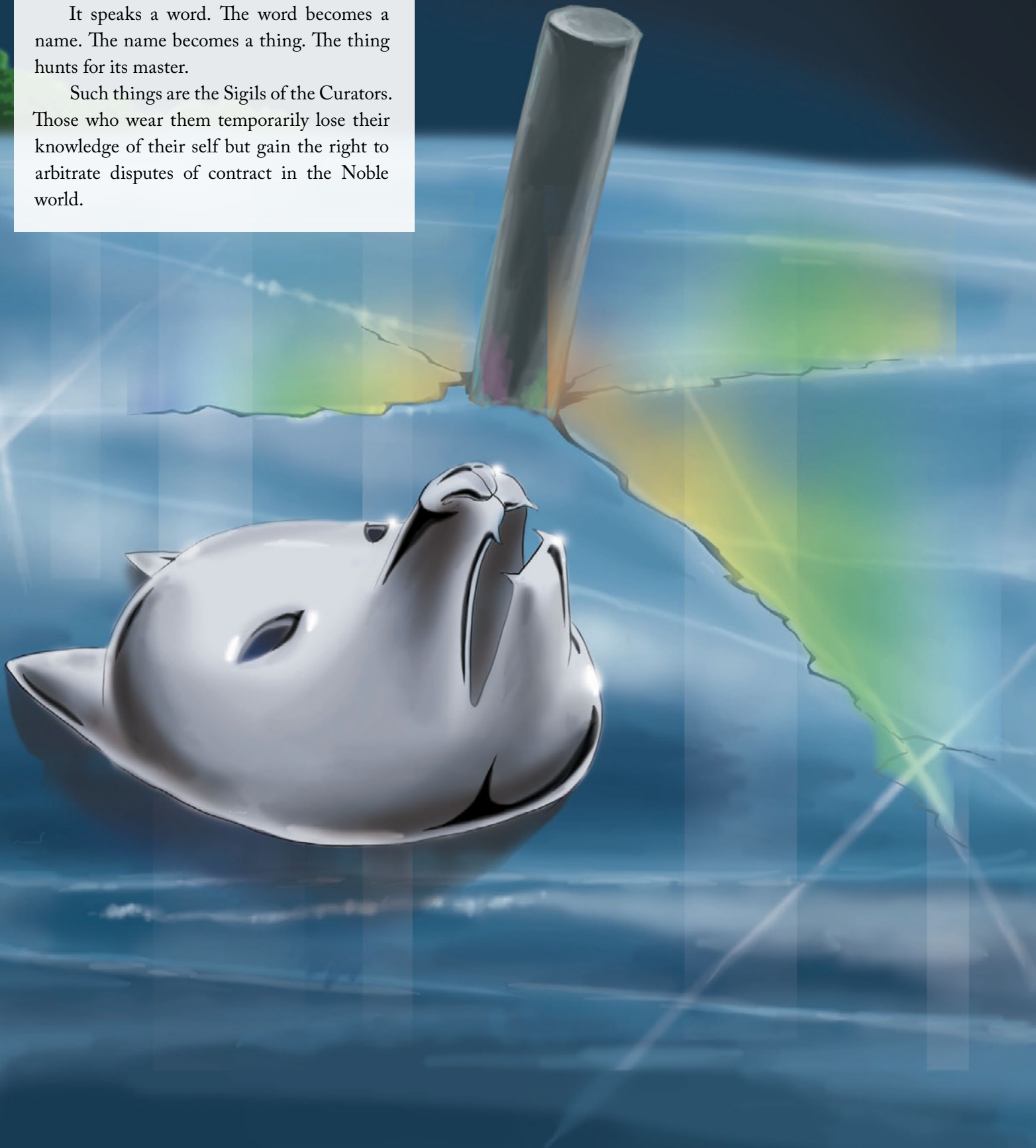
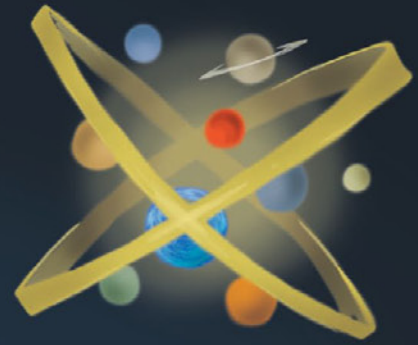
—from *Chamomile Book*, by Chien Shan-lee

A weight falls on the world. It bears down on Misenchronic Engine. The orrery turns. The rivulets of Lancaire begin to sweat with power.

The Mask of Surolam opens its mouth.

It speaks a word. The word becomes a name. The name becomes a thing. The thing hunts for its master.

Such things are the Sigils of the Curators. Those who wear them temporarily lose their knowledge of their self but gain the right to arbitrate disputes of contract in the Noble world.







Mortal wealth is as nothing to the Nobilis; for exchange amongst themselves they need currency not easily obtained by bankrupting the nations of the world.

For these purposes they use the following currencies —

- ☛ The *udi*, pinned against the value of a dream;
- ☛ The *izikel*, pinned against the value of destroying one's enemies (strictly, a bushel of one's enemies—no more, no less);
- ☛ The *ur-um*, a stable currency measured against the bond between Familia members;
- ☛ The *buddhitanka*, pinned to the value of awareness of the world;
- ☛ The *takkarash*, proportional to the cost of a nasty bump on the head;
- ☛ Currency burned to honor ancestors, which does not help in Lucifer's Hell but is briskly traded among ghosts and horrors in the haunted regions;
- ☛ The *OTC*, Trade Currency of the mercantile world Ofeili;



☛ *Merit*, a formal sense of social credit, tracked and made integral not by the Nobilis but by the living spirit of Noble society and the conventions of the treaty *The Accords at Babylon*; and

☛ *Legend*, a similarly formalized sense of social credit bound up in objects rather than the Powers themselves.

These currencies naturally interact in different ways with time—the *udi* is a deflationary currency, with tomorrow's dreams generally worth more than yesterday's. The *izikel* is minimally inflationary, suggesting that it is better to have a bushel of your enemies already dead than to destroy them at some later occasion. The *buddhitanka* inflates strongly. Ancestor money wobbles.

Even the Powers find second-guessing Ofeili Trade Currency a dangerous game.

The relative value of these currencies is established by the appropriate market, as of course it must be. While the Powers themselves rarely play at currency trading, speculation on the value of abstract coin forms an idle activity on the part of Cammora members, artificial intelligences in technologically advanced Chancels, various associates of the Powers, fabulous monsters, and the ghosts of the bankrupt dead. The actual coinage is sometimes minted by miracle, according to the whims of numismatist Powers; the exact ability to trade the coins for anything, or use them more directly to acquire dreams, vengeance, or a bump on the head depends on the artistry and interests of the Power in question. Minted *udi*, *izikel*, *ur-um*, *buddhitanka*, and *takkarash* that do not exchange for the intended experiential value are named "debased," although this may be a characteristic of circumstance and not the coin itself.



The Noble Cleave named the Cult of the Stars is building the train *Fierabras*, wound around the planet Saturn, which they claim will have the power to take them away from the Ash and up into the stars.





The swords of the Byzantine society are  
riddles, innuendoes, interactions, arguments,  
and even entire social contexts forged to steel.





The Ravens' Order takes its power from six great secrets, each taking form in the world as spheres of marble, two meters on a side, and etched in an inexplicable pattern. Five of them are known to have meaning; they are the answers to questions, or the substance of questions, or, at least, something to do with questions that have become a matter of public record —

- ☛ What sleeps beneath Hell?
- ☛ What name do the Excrucians give the metaphysical substance of deception?
- ☛ What happens when you take the corpse of an enemy to the fields of Illura'Len, that are beyond Creation, and how does this differ from what would happen should you take to that place the corpse of a good friend?
- ☛ What is Misenchronic Engine's fate?
- ☛ Where is the key to the sixth of the Ravens' secrets, and what question does it hold?

The answers are unknown and possibly indefinite. It is from the tension between question and answer, knowledge and uncertainty, and truth and the ambiguous that the secrets derive their power.

To take up a Ravens' Sigil one must only ask a Raven.

The Sigils are costly to make, but the construction is not difficult.

They are elusive things — they will form far from you, when created, in a thing of the Ravens' Estate, a bird or raven or bird-like thing, and they will travel through the world — but if you know one has been created, you can most likely track it down.

To claim it is to become a Raven in name.

To become a Raven in truth, to activate the Power of the Sigil, one must follow the Sigil's *dharma* on a journey that — if one is a proper Raven at heart — may eventually lead one to an understanding of the secrets of the Order.

Learn two of them and your membership becomes provisional.

Whenever any Power makes a gift to the Orders — of treasure, knowledge, or promised service — it is the Ravens, including the provisional members, who assign it a value.

Learn five secrets and your Sigil becomes a key to every secret, every fact, every bit of information or thought ever submitted to the Orders, though you or someone must pay or have paid for that

*She stood in a distant place and looked at the sword that was hidden there.*

*"Claim it and ten thousand thousands will die," said her conscience, currently incarnate as a thick white wasp that clung to her shoulder.*

*"My highest duty is not to life," she answered, and crushed her conscience with her thumb.*

—from *Void Stories*, compiled by Édouard Guy

*So the Devil is smooth, you have to give him that.*

*"I'll just be taking your soul," he said.*

*"Hey!" I said.*

*"What?"*

*"I'm a virtuous monk!"*

*"Oh," he said. He hesitated. "Three quarters?"*

*And before you know it, I'd said, "One third," and there you go.*

*It's not the same as losing all my soul, you understand, but I'd been hoping to save it for micropayments.*

— from *Daniel, the Devil, and Me*,  
by Keiko Takemori



*The Sigils of the Curators are wonders: those who find them find, inevitably, that they are beautiful, save only for those like the Powers of the Dark, despising beauty, who instead discover Sigils “luxuriant in vice.” Yet it is obvious that they are not manifest from the Estate of Beauty. They have few traits in common: one cannot reliably name them Burdens, despite their association with the Stolid Center, or Masks (though they are often masks), or parcel out some consistent color and call them Green things, or Heavy things, or Light. They are, therefore, typically presumed to manifest something such as Freedom or the Unpredictable: an Estate that one could pin down, yes, with sufficient hedging about with data, but not with the limited palate of opportunities that we have had so far, with so few Powers, and fewer Curators, and the world, in general, so young.*

— from *In the Right Circles*, by Jasprite Sherrard

information according to the schedule of value that the Ravens have set. You become an information broker to the Noble world.

Within the Ravens there exists the Robbers’ Order — those bound to obtain the wealth of the Powers, by hook or by crook, and generalize its use. This they do by donating it at one of the twelve great temples of the Robbers’ Order, where it vanishes into the æther until ripped forth by an overriding miracle or called out through a Robbers’ Sigil. The donating Robber is deeded a portion of its value in the Orders’ books.

The Robbers are a strange breed — at times they are bankers, at other times tax-collectors and at other times yet they are as thieves. The rules for their Sigils are not as those for the Ravens’: they form naturally from the Estate of Thorns, roughly one for every 50 Powers in the world; to claim one, there is no need to understand strange secrets, but one must successfully keep the Sigil out of others’ hands for seventy-and-seven days. Once you have done so, you become a Robber and Raven. You may vote with the Ravens in assessing the value of donated wealth and use your Sigil to call forth the treasures that the Robbers have donated — for, of course, an appropriate payment.





*In Locus Imsety, there is an Oracle named Rainfall. Her full name is "Rain falling in the jungle, heavy drops struggling down through the leaves, and the knowledge of your lover's death." She can answer almost any question, if moved to answer at all, and has occasionally unraveled mysteries that no other Power can touch. Rainfall had a deep and desperate love for knowledge, and gave herself over to it; and one day, there came a point when the facts, mysteries, and wisdom in her mind began to crowd out her thoughts, feelings, and desires. "I do not care," decided Rainfall. "I wish to know." Thus she made her choice, and now she feels nothing, thinks nothing, desires nothing, and knows all things that are.*

*—from *A Tourist's Guide to Creation*, by Jasprite Sherrard*





Those Powers that follow the creed of Samsi Mandaru make themselves difficult for the Excrucians, Powers, and even the Imperators to sway. They make a ritual of her rationalist methodology, using alchemy and custom to cleanse themselves of folly, error, trivial passions, and small dreams. These alien creatures — for the cult of ritual rationality is insane by rational and irrational standards alike — are named *the pure*. They are holy outcasts in themselves, but the leaders and sects of the Nobilis crave their good offices, as their presence and willful support protects against subtle Excrucian corruption.



New Powers eventually face the decision of whether to become signatory to the *Accords at Babylon*, a miraculous document that serves as the basic treaty or truce governing the society of the Nobilis. It's essentially a toolkit for contracts and social climbing: signing on isn't so much making a commitment as making a show of respect for *how things are done*.

To sign is to agree that Powers should honor the formal covenants — the *res* — that they make with other Powers. That they should think and act on a grander scale than humanity. That they should learn and honor — that *you* will learn and honor — the legends and symbols and customs and modes of address and sacred days and taboos that make a society live and breathe.

And not just on principle, though these are fine principles, but because they are *mos maiorum* — tradition.

To sign to the *Accords* means recognizing the *Accords* and the *res* and the *mos maiorum* as legitimate elements of society. It means that you don't plan on climbing the ranks of society without first studying its ways. It means that you're not planning on taking over the mechanisms of society without first learning to use the *res* to their fullest potential — as miraculous devices, access keys to deep wells of social credit, knowledge, pledged services, and treasure.

It means that if you plan to be one of the foremost Powers of the world, you're going to do it through the structures that are there.

Once you have signed to the *Accords* you gain access to the Noble societies and sects that are under its aegis — the Orders; the social clubs like the Martial College (gathering together the Powers of war and battle) and the Byzantine Society; and such private cults or “Cleaves” as the historian Bookkeepers, the compassionate Architects, and the degenerate (by their own declaration) Fellowship of Apelles. You may also learn to wield the magic of the *res* to formalize contracts among the Nobilis.

Or you may refuse to sign, and say: *I stand alone*.

## The Res

The sacred covenants of the Nobilis take physical form in mundane things. For instance, a Noble could make a piano, book, human, or chicken into the receptacle for a *res*. Such covenants then acquire the following afflictions:

- ☛ **Affliction (5):** I can't die or be hurt while there is a Power bound by my terms.
- ☛ **Affliction (3):** I sicken when the covenant is broken, by my interpretation of what would break it.
- ☛ **Affliction (2):** the more I think about things that are not related to the contract, the more insane I become.

Binding oneself to a *res* requires that the Noble be signatory to the *Accords at Babylon*. Creating a proper *res* requires substantial study of these Accords — you must either have a Bond tying you to Noble society or you must earn at least 15 Destiny for a relevant project.

# The Excrucians





They are the children of Harumaph — whatever or whomever Harumaph might be.

They are the reaction of the void against Creation.

They are the enemies of the world, the incarnation of our endings. The warriors that lead them wear the faces of our dead.

They are the failing of the safety of the world, they are the dissolution of existence. They are the thing that, because they exist, causes all existence to be tentative and unsure.

They are **Excrucians**.

They divide into four kinds: the Deceivers, the Warmains, the Mimics, and the Strategists. They ride pale horses. They wield strange and abhorrent weapons. They are the defining and creating terror of this, the Third Age of our Creation.

When they came to us the Second Age shattered.

Their swords rang against the gates of Heaven and the gates of Heaven broke.

They bent their will against the Seal of Time and the Age burst asunder. The Seal was split. The world cried out. Time rang like a brass gong. And the silver days of the Second Age were ones that we would never know again.

Thus far, they slew — no further.

The Angels held a bloody line in Heaven; broke their charge. And in the Seal of Time, as they went to cut down the last remaining Ages of our World, the Excrucians met Attaris, the Imperatrix of the Third Age, the Age that *is*. Attaris, who showed her face to them and turned them back, who threw off her shroud and stood revealed to them as Attaris Ebrôt Appêkâ, Magister of the Wild, tutelary spirit of the Age of Pain.

They dared not kill her, for she was the very War they waged. And in the bowers of Hell, the Fallen Angel who had worn the latter two portions of her name — who had held them for her in his being, Ebrôt Appêkâ — dissolved to dust and ash. And why this should happen, why it should be that Ebrôt Appêkâ died, or for that matter why he lived at all, I do not know.

In the First Age, we lived in harmony.

In the Second Age, we were at war.

It was not until this, the Third Age, the Age of Pain, the Age of the Excrucian War, that anyone seriously considered the possibility that the world itself could die; but now we know it likely will.

Though oh — if we should win! If only we should win, and at the end the world survives and it is *Ananda* who is the Age!

But listen, and I will tell you of our enemies, and how some of them I would not mind so much in their victory, while others I despise.

*Atlas is, of course, a myth. There is no Titan holding up the sky, but only a nine-year-old child, who has spent time beyond counting thinking only this: "I shall not break."*

*It is one theory, held by many scholars, that this resolution suffices. It is another that one day her will shall falter and her bones snap, and the sky plummet down, and all for the weakness of a child.*

—from *A Catalog of Modern Magic*, by Eric Optera

## Game Rules

Deceivers built as characters have 15-30 Character Points, plus the powers of their “Second Skin.” Their maximum Attribute rating is 7. Give them Bonds, Afflictions, Passions, and Skills to taste.

Deceivers have no Domain Attribute and do not have a proper Estate. However, they may define a pseudo-Estate for use with Persona miracles; this is normally something self-referential, such as “What you Remember about Me.” The HG may wish to define Properties for this pseudo-Estate.

Deceivers are often Immortal, Glorious Shapeshifters.

## The Deceivers

The Deceivers live outside the world; they think that we have built the world out of lies. They think the whole of Creation is a jungle of deceit that we have put up to keep from seeing ourselves the way we really are.

They love us but they love not that lie.

They come to unmake the world for us. They come to help you forget the Eyes and Ears and Nose, the Work and Home and School, the Trees and Wind and Laughter and Hearts and Hope.

They come because they think us marvelous, whatever it is they think we are — whatever thing they imagine, that we cannot imagine ourselves, lives behind these purported lies.

And because they see us as such, we may see ourselves as such, in them.

Their love is sneaky and dirty and beautiful and it makes us love ourselves. It is a gap of forgiveness and grace in the iron of the world. It is awful because they will not hesitate to hurt us, or lie to us, to open up that crack. They do not see the legitimacy of any of the things we believe in. They only see the soul.

In their eyes —

It is like looking into night, and seeing yourself on a field, in open space and cradled in the arms of the earth and sky; and the stars look down, and one by one begin to fall.

Sometimes that’s terrifying. Sometimes it’s loving, too. Sometimes it is a desecration of the sky and at other times a gift.

They are honest but they hate us in every particular; it is only the invisible essence that they love. They are the ones that tell us we need not judge ourselves forever for what we have done, but they are not approving of anything else that we may be.

## The Ritual of Two Skins

In a ritual that takes a day — dawn to dawn, dusk to dusk, or some incomprehensible equivalent in the Lands Beyond Creation — a Deceiver may tell themselves the story that they are someone *else*.

In this fashion they weave about themselves the power of someone real that they have met.

The result is not particularly obvious.

The person whose life they borrow most likely will not notice — will feel an apprehension, at the most, a shudder, as if someone had walked across their grave. Those who look at the Deceiver are unlikely to see the lie: they change their *spirit*, not their *body*.

*“You love me,” he said. His voice was very assured, and I realized at once that it must be so.*

—from *Jack*, by Keiko Takemori



But the Deceiver gains in the course of the ritual full access to everything that person *is*.

They gain their mortal skills. Their passions. Their loves and hates and needs. They gain their powers — for instance, and most importantly, the miraculous abilities a Power or Emperor has.

Thus you may meet a Deceiver with all the power of the Power of Fire, or Guns, or Waves, or Green or Greed. Or, worse, a Deceiver in the “skin” of an Emperor, immortal as Emperors are immortal, and capable of speaking Imperial miracles unto the world.

*“Why do you have a gun in your hand?” he asked.*

*“I have promised to kill the one I love.”*

*“You do not love me,” he said. His voice was very assured, and I realized at once that it must be so.*

—from *Jack*, by Keiko Takemori

## The Truth of the Name

Name the story — find whose power it is they have stolen — and you may control the Deceiver.

This is a limited power.

It can’t be used against them more than once every few hours and only by someone loyal to Creation. You get one order, one command that you can slip under their second skin.

They can defy that order, too, if they have to. It shatters their power — they lose the borrowed power, which makes them vulnerable, and they often take a wound — but they don’t *have* to obey.

The effects fade over time, too; it’s probably just three to seven days or so, until they can pretend they didn’t hear the order at all.

It’s not an insurmountable weakness, in other words, but it’s a pretty bad one. Name the Deceiver’s “second skin,” the source of their borrowed power, and you can compel them.

The Powers call this *the Truth of the Name*.



## Scelto of the Provenance

This Deceiver may be anyone or anywhere. Personal identity, Scelto tells us, is a lie. If you can see yourself in the mirror with both eyes shut, you are probably Scelto, and should stop whatever you're doing and get away from your loved ones as soon as you possibly can.

### Key Game Traits

- ♣ Persona 4 (Scelto of the Provenance)
- ♣ Keen Sight

## Iolithae Septimian

This Deceiver told the seas that they were salt; and they were thus; and strangled then the fish of all fresh waters that swam within. If you see her you must not allow her to speak. I do not know how you can possibly prevent it but even if it means your life *you must not allow Iolithae Septimian to speak.*

### Key Game Traits

- ♣ Persona 5 (The Lies of Iolithae Septimian)







## Coriander Hasp

This Deceiver wields Ritho, the unmatched rifle — the only rifle ever numbered among the Abhorrent Weapons of the Excrucians. Its bullets are incendiary charges that set the target afire, and anything those bullets hit will keep burning until it dies. Coriander will kill you with that fire, if you get in his way, and then he will tell your corpse, “*It was not so.*”

It was not so! You did not die!

It will be tempting, but you must not believe.

No good can come of getting up again once you’ve died at Coriander’s hands, particularly if you are still on fire.

### Key Game Traits

- ☛ Persona 2 (Those who Listen to Coriander Hasp)
- ☛ Treasure 5

## Phasael mery-Harumaph

This Deceiver is as charming as the sun. He burned the library of Hukkok the Angel; branded him with those flames; took Hukkok’s sigil and his seal and made great mischiefs with them — but Hukkok forgave him, as everyone else Phasael’s hurt has done. I cannot save you from being hurt by him, or from forgiving him, but I can tell you to forgive yourself for trusting or forgiving him when you ought not.

### Key Game Traits

- ☛ Persona 4 (The Adoration of Phasael)





## Tairté Ut-napishtim

This Deceiver teaches the Excrucian philosophy to anyone who will listen; Imperators let him operate in Creation, and let their Powers learn from him, that they may better oppose his kind. As a mortal, you're better served not listening to him at all.

### Key Game Traits

- ☛ Persona 4 (The Philosophy of Tairté Ut-napishtim)
- ☛ Miracle Catching —

Tairté has the peculiar power to catch and hold a miracle in the palm of his right hand. He can peel it open like an onion, and he a chef, showing piece by piece how there is no truth to a miracle, only the exemplification of the void. He then reassembles the miracle from nothing — even though he has no Estate to call his own — believing that he proves, by so doing, that no Estate is real.



## Generic Dace

Generic. Ah, Generic!

This is a Deceiver who helped compose this book. I love him for it and I hate him for it, but I cannot wish it were not so; and you cannot hope, on that account, that I shall give away his secrets.



# The Warmains

The Warmains wish to wrestle us.

They wish to *test* us, to make us fight them, to make us hate them. They cast electrons from their orbit to make the protons rage. They break the symmetry of planets. They spit Flynn Gannary on their blades to make his mother fight.

His mother! She wasn't even in the fandom! She was just some old lady who seemed more interesting to them than her son!

They tell us that the world is unworthy of unbeing; that only the *best* of us deserve to end at their hands. They tell us that the world is only truly *real* in its opposition to them — in what it is to the Warmains — and that it has no purpose save as their testing us creates. The world is not a lie but a hypothesis to them: **here is something that may show the Warmains worth.**

They are brutal and focused.

They are profoundly uninterested in your unwillingness to play their games of war. They do not accept the refusing of their challenges. You will lose, and then they will either leave you alone or break you; or you will win, and they will make it their mission that you should die.

And they will love that — you understand.

They will give you a smile that can break your *heart* before they put aside the game and go to kill you. They will not be lashing out in bitterness. They will be delighted and amazed that they have found another person worthy of this death. And they love nothing so much as that delight and that amazement. They love nothing so much as being impressed by you. They will not think that they are ending you. They'll talk about it as if they are lifting you up from existence, freeing you from it, making you a part of something infinitely more worthy — *them*. If you make a strong enough impression the Warmain will even take your face and personality and body type after you die. They will adapt themselves to the incidentals of your dharma, they will keep your fundamental nature alive by emulating you as they find new people to challenge, hurt, and kill, in honor of you. Because they decided that you were just that cool.

*Our stories of romance are also stories of conflict; in true love's bliss, or the mundane wedding of two families, nothing interesting is learned. It may be the reward or punishment of a soul—to discover the burning blessed unity with a beloved, or to find oneself trapped in a loveless environment in a family not one's own. But it is not the lesson. It is not the story, and it is not romance.*

*The stories we learn from, the loves worth the speaking of, are the loves where to love is to make war upon the world, or on the self. The love that divides, the love that shatters, the love that throws order into turmoil and brings tumult to the Estates of this Creation. In struggle we grow, in struggle we witness the echoes of our growing.*

*The first intimations that we had, of the wedding of fire and water, were tidal waves and storms; blazes raging across the city's heart; earthquakes as the world began its groaning.*

*That is how you may know*

*That this is a story, not of love, though love is there, but of romance.*

—from *The Wedding of Fire and Water*,  
by Jackie Robinson

## Game Rules

Warmains built as characters have 25-75 Character Points. Their maximum Attribute rating is 7. They are always under the effect of a level 2 Divine Mantle at no cost in MP. Give them Bonds, Afflictions, Passions, and Skills to taste.

Warmains have no Persona Attribute and do not have a proper Estate. However, they may define a pseudo-Estate for use with Domain miracles; this is normally the mechanism of their test. The HG may wish to define Properties for this pseudo-Estate.

Common Gifts include Active Immortality, Fire-breathing, Flight, Glorious, Natural Weapon, Unblemished Guise, and Worldwalker.

## Orderic Neustry

This is the Warmain who takes that thing you cling to, whatever it might be — that central, most important thing that allows you to live and hang on and fight for yourself and the world — away from you. And often he'll cut you from your gifts and your graces, too, all the best parts of you, and leave you floundering in the dark, fighting a Warmain when you have nothing to fight him *for* or *with*. He is the exhalation of the void, the center of a whorl of anti-nature, anti-existence, anti-being; and it is those who can remake themselves in the middle of that emptiness and find strength in their own weaknesses whom he embraces, kills, takes into himself, and removes from the world.

### Key Game Traits

- ☛ Domain 4 (Loss)
- ☛ Soul-Carving Sword



## Raginhart Tribunas

This is the Warmain who wields the test of pain. He is a creature of breaking you by agony unmastered and unmasterable. It is those who can fight and defeat him no matter how much it hurts that he has sworn that he will kill. Fight him, fight him hard, so that he knows you'll play his game, but let the pain defeat you in the end. Let him break you. He's the one torturer in all the world who'll leave you alone for good when that moment comes. Against Raginhart Tribunas, do not try to win.

Raginhart is a strangely neutral creature. He turns his tests of agony on other Excrucians as readily as on the creatures of the world. This is profoundly rare, even practically unheard of, and seems tied to some sort of authority he is given or forced to wield. I do not know or understand the details and I hope I never shall.

### Key Game Traits

- ☛ Domain 4 (Agony)







## Euphrasia Savinot

This is a Warmain with no interest in testing *you*. People are bland and banal to her. Even Powers are bland and banal to her. She holds her test against the world itself — she wields against the world a series of terrible blights, she washes away truths, she makes things treacherous to themselves and in general she seeks to bring the entirety of Creation into a crucible whose incidents she may judge. Each of her curses or blights has a “keystone” — some small, wrong object that serves as the focus for her curse. Finding that keystone and shattering it ends the power of her blight.

### Key Game Traits

☞ Domain 4 (Blight)



## Teja Heimerich

This Warmain is an anti-sylph, a creature biased against the element of air; she subverts the wind, twists reason against itself, corrupts flying creatures to her will, and wears the cool nothingness of vacuum snug against her skin. She is the test of surviving without air, without the subtle and basic continuum on which we have grown as beings to depend. Those who may live in that nothingness she is sworn to extinguish and make her own.

### Key Game Traits

☞ Domain 4 (Void)

## Marozia Carolin

This Warmain is a moral test. She'll make you an abomination to yourself. See if she won't! She can turn you into a very avatar of death for everything you care about, and see what happens then. Best hope she crushes your spirit with it; if you turn the tables on her, or somehow bear the burden, she will never let you live.

### Key Game Traits

♠ Domain 4 (Harmfulness)



LIV



This was the Mimic who seemed to rule Light, Health, Robots, Safety, and Stuffed Animals. It wasn't until she died that people finally understood that it wasn't *those things* she ruled, but a false conception we had about how those things were. And, to be honest, since nobody ever found a corpse, there's a small but real chance we don't understand them yet.

If you should see her, tell the world.

**DAHLIA THORN**

## The Mimics

The Mimics dwell among the Imperators.

They're like Imperators.

They have Estates. They can speak Imperial miracles. They can even have Chancels and Powers.

But at the heart of each Mimic is a horrible twisting secret blasphemy of the void. Genseric tells me that the Excrucians put it there — that the Mimics are the shoved-together pieces of dead Imperators, or sacrificed Estates. That the Excrucians couldn't fix everything the moment the Imperator died, so instead of “freeing [us] from that portion of the lie,” they made a Mimic.



There's nothing the Mimics fear more than letting someone see that secret blasphemy inside them.

Which is good, by the way, because knowing one of those secrets will probably cause your brain to spiral in on itself like a neural net at the edge of a singularity, and then when there's nothing but blank void in your head, your skull will crumple inwards like a crushed soda can and you'll wail out this endless susurrant of the secrets of the void and everyone will scream and try to cut your tongue out before you finally pop your heart and go away. That's not what happens to *everybody*, you understand, but it's how Györg Krusko and Javairia Al Sabah went and a couple others at the edge of the community, and nobody knows of any cases where it's actually ended *well*.

The Mimics are just like the Imperators, in short, only instead of being natural, they're unnatural; instead of being premised on something right and appropriate in Creation, every Mimic is Estates premised on something awful and unnaturally wrong. That is why they work against Creation, even though they seem to be *like* the things of Creation. It's like the Mimics and the rest of us are words in the same language, but used to a different intention.

## The Strategists

The Strategists say the world is *wrong*.

They armor themselves in the power of emptiness. They weave it into themselves. Then they come to our world to break it as a crime against the void.

Mostly.

They are sick — you understand — as those who wrestle with wrongness are always sick. They have splashed themselves, suffused themselves, or infused themselves with what they claim is our perversity.

They have gone wrong as people go wrong.

They have gone wrong as the world has gone wrong.

They aren't awesome like the Deceivers are and the Warmains can be. They are fucking twisted, and they pretend that that's our fault.

They're dying.

Every one of them is dying of something, every one of them is too far *wrong* to live, but when they do finally give up and die, they don't stay dead. They fade into unbeing instead. They flail outwards into the Not. They armor themselves there in the power of emptiness. They weave it into them and it restores their life. Then they come back into our world to break it, for our crime against the void.

*Creation is inherently finite. To lose the Excrucian War is to bring an end to history. To win the War is to end the Third Age, and move history one great step closer to its final conclusion. Our world is doomed; our only choice is a choice of endings.*

—from *A Philosophy of Treason*,  
by Augusta Valentina (suppressed)

### Game Rules

Mimics built as characters have 10-15 Character Points, plus Active Immortality. They have up to 2 points of natural Miraculous Edge. They have 3-4 Divine Health levels, 1 Tough Health level, and 2 Normal Health levels (see pg. 321-333). Give them Bonds, Afflictions, Passions, and Skills to taste. They can speak Imperial miracles into the world; one such miracle, their blasphemy, speaks itself automatically into the world when their last Divine Health level is lost.

For Mimics who will use Persona or Domain miracles, pick one of their Estates as their primary Estate and designate their other Estates as secondary. Like the Imperators, they may have Secondary Domain or Secondary Persona at level 0; this costs (of course) 0 points, and allows them to use their DMP and PMP on Domain and Persona miracles of any of their Estates.



*We hold ourselves to be sacred. But from the other side of the skin we are nothing more than profane.*

*This is reality.*

*No matter how cool it is, what we're working on; no matter how important our lives; no matter how much it matters, that is, that some process not stop, that some thing not die: everything is distorted by the imprint of patterns bigger than ourselves.*

*If you stopped time and stepped outside the world you'd see a knife, cutting this way, cutting that, all through the fabric of our lives.*

*The knife will take your hopes, if it cuts just right.*

*The knife will take your life.*

*The knife will cause your fortunes to corrode or bring an enemy tumbling down.*

*It's great to want things to sustain. It's great to want this or that to live forever. But there's only so much merit in the world and the knife's just plain more important than your dreams.*

—from *The Subway*, by Rannen Yedidyah

They're lethal too. Killing and destroying isn't *hard* for them. It's easier for them than for basically anybody else in the world because they don't have to *do* anything to make it happen. They can just wave their hands and wish and things will go away. They can just deny things right out of existence, cause things to fall apart like reality's unweaving, make anything — and not just physical things, but love, and greed, and waves, and words, and fate, and light, and understanding too — go away just by choosing that it ought.

Textrix the Deacon fought a Power for seven days, using that ability — what the Nobilis call **the World-Breaker's Hand** — as his principal weapon. The Dead Zone of Libya was the result. No plant grows there. No love lives there. The sun is never bright there, no nation claims it, no map shows it. The ground is arid. Sometimes it crumbles underfoot, opening onto the vastness of nothing underneath. No one of interest was ever born there. No wind ever blows there. Nobody goes there save by force; and even though you can break a person by chaining them there for a day or two, even though it'd be the kind of punishment any despot or cruel authority would love to inflict, it doesn't even get used for that very often, because the thing that places have that make them easy to remember is a thing the Dead Zone no longer has.

It was a place. It had qualities. It had *stuff*. It had *things*. They went away.

## Game Rules

Strategists built as characters have 25-75 Character Points. Their maximum Attribute rating is 7. Give them Bonds, Afflictions, Passions, and Skills to taste.

They do not have a proper Estate. They have neither Domain nor Persona save in the form of Gifts.

Strategists lose 1 MP for each health level lost, even a Normal level; when they run out of MP, even if they have health remaining, they “die” and leave Creation. Any MP they gain from Bonds and Afflictions fade at the end of the scene, and they cannot earn an MP refresh.

A Strategist receives the Gift **World-Breaker's Hand** for 0 Points.



## Textrix the Deacon

This is an Excrucian Strategist who is dying of lost faith; he cannot cling to the idea that there is any meaning in anything at all. When the miraculous power that sustains him fades, he stumbles from Creation in a kind of apathetic fugue. Textrix's vice is obscenity and blasphemy; he is an enemy to all sacred things, and the more real and true the love that powers them, the more it draws his wrath. Fortunately he is rarely sighted in the world.



## Lexiarchos Caducine

This is an Excrucian Strategist who is dying of old age; she spins youth into herself in the Lands Beyond Creation, but ages and eventually turns to dust as her miraculous power depletes. Unfortunately this does not end the matter. Lexiarchos is one of those who justifies the name of "Strategist;" she is always five steps ahead, like she's already seen what you're going to do and planned to make it come out wrong. She likes to infest the souls of your children, make them vipers in your nest, but leave enough of the original self that killing them's no kindness.



## Adhémar Hetairh

This is an Excrucian Strategist who swallowed fire and poison and is dying of it now. When he is slain, or when one of his shard-self copies is slain, the body detonates. Acid rains outwards, poison fountains from the neckhole, sheaves of fire tumble like wrestling cats across the ground. His vice is masochism, which wins him some not-so-terribly-evil points from *me* but unfortunately he's also a good soldier for the Excrucians who does many nasty things that are *not* his-vice-related.

## Malakai Mesmer

This is an Excrucian Strategist dying of lost empathy; when the emptiness of his miraculous power leaves him, he becomes a danger even to his allies, unable to value or even really recognize anything in the world that is not Mesmer. He is a sadist, with a particular interest in collecting victims — not so much hurting them, although he'll pin them to walls with long silver pins or leave them chained until they starve, as *having* them, and having them be unable to fight his will.





## The Excrucian War

All these forces, together, are “the Excrucians.”

They rode into the world at the beginning of the Age of Pain. They rode pale horses and carried these horrible weapons — these soul-cutting atrocities that can destroy even nominally immortal things. They broke down the gates of Heaven and slaughtered amongst the Angels before the Angels gathered and threw them back, and since that time, their assault has not relented, but rather only dispersed, with the Emperor-Excrucian War being waged at any given time on dozens of the endless worlds upon the Ash and occasionally slipping upwards to Heaven, downwards into Hell or sideways onto the trunk of the World Ash itself.

The War has shifted from the mortal world to ethereal realms of spirit. It is not on our mundane planet that the attention of Emperors and Excrucians is focused, but rather on a numinous spiritual battleground. There the souls of Emperors and the raging madness of the void contend; for this reason, the Emperors are distracted from their bodies, and need Powers and Chancels to defend them. We could live out our lives and never notice there was a war at all —

Save that war is a fluid, it respects no boundaries, and thus there are a handful of Excrucians deeply rooted in our mundane Earth, and others who strive constantly to break through. They sneak past the barricades and entrenchments that the Emperors use and enter the world in whole or in part — bringing their whole self through to assault Emperors and Estates in the mortal vulnerable physical Earth, or sending a tiny part of themselves, a “shard,” through to work some similar mischief.

The Excrucians are deadlier even than the Powers; their shards comparable, at least.

## The Weapons of their Host

The symbols and savage treasures of the Excrucians are named the **Abhorrent Weapons** — five hundred and seventy-two terrifying and unsettling standards scattered through their host. Each Abhorrent Weapon wears two names, one for itself and one to mock Creation. Seven of these Weapons are known from Heaven down to Hell, and in all the worlds between.

*It poured from his hand like a fire, sharp-edged, dancing, limned in white: the Not. What it touched, ceased to be.*

—from *Void Stories*, edited by Édouard Guy

### Shards

Excrucians may make a handful of shards to accompany and defend them. They may also send a few shards into our world when they can't get in themselves.

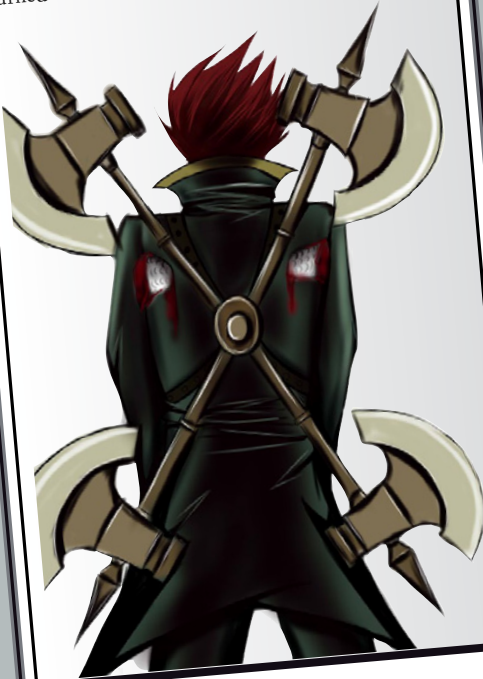
Excrucian-shards act a lot like Powers, right down to the independent streak and the individuality. They were never mortal, never anything other than a piece of their Excrucian, but they still manage to define themselves as *selves* somehow. If you kill them their Excrucian may or may not be able to reconstitute them later.

Strategist and Warmain “shards” are built on 20-35 Character Points, 0-13 Bond/Affliction Points, and as many Passion/Skill points as seem right. Mimic shards, too, I suppose, although Mimics usually just make Powers. Strategist, Mimic, and Warmain-shards have the same set of Attributes as their Excrucian-type. Strategist shards may buy the **World Breaker's Hand** Gift at a 10-point discount.

Deceiver-shards are very weak; they *can* have low levels of Aspect or Treasure but they're usually just mortals. However they have access to the Ritual of Two Skins, so they can borrow a Power or Emperor's abilities to make up for it.

LV

**Hatred**, which is named **Malambruno**: It was the first of the Abhorrent Weapons to fall into Imperial hands; it corrupted the Angel that claimed it and turned him traitor to the world.



HATRED

LVI

**Abomination**, which is named **Blunderbore**: Somewhere there is a world that chose to kill itself rather than fight the Excrucians any longer. It chose to die; its people, its plants, its very *things* gave up rather than continue to endure the presence of the Void. The dead world became, or gave rise to, Blunderbore.



ABOMINATION

LVII

**Atrocity**, which is named **Briareos**: With this sword the Excrucians slew Heaven's gatekeeper at the beginning of the Age of Pain. It is the substance of their declaration of War with all that Is. Before it became Atrocity, it passed through more than a hundred wielders' hands, each, Genseric tells me, more evil than the last.



ATROCITY



LIX

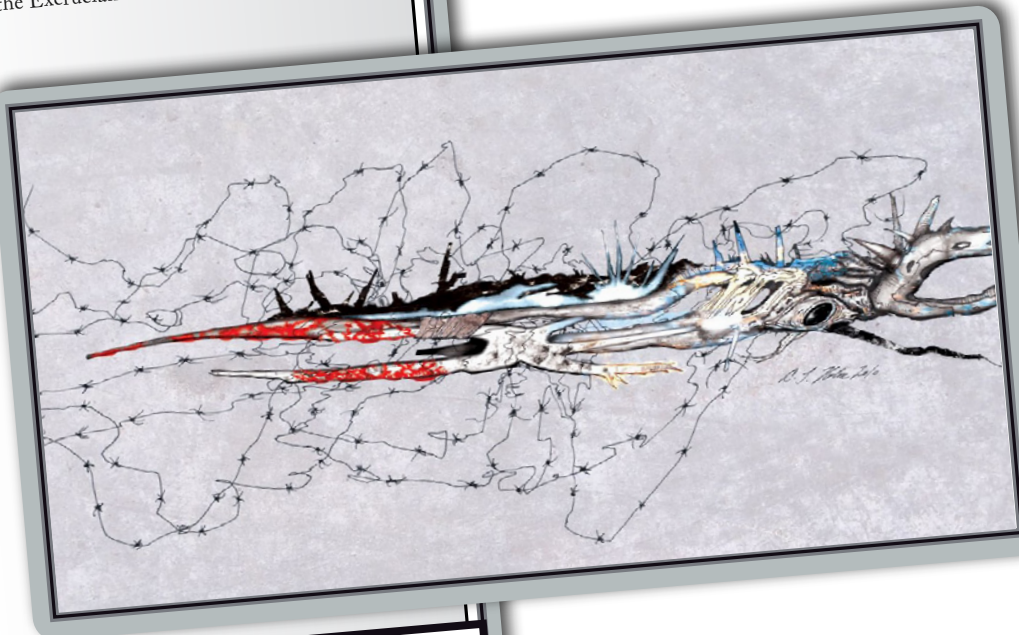
**Loathing**, also named **Gyges**: It is impossible for any Power to approach this Weapon, and Imperators who can do better are few and far between. It has a radiance that drives away any thing that serves Creation.



LOATHING

LVIII

**Horror**, which is Eurytos: It used to inspire joy in the eyes that saw it. Now it is a thing of shifting spines and mucilaginous poisons, difficult to look upon. Ianthe tells me that Eurytos hates itself because the Excrucians used it to kill its own creator.

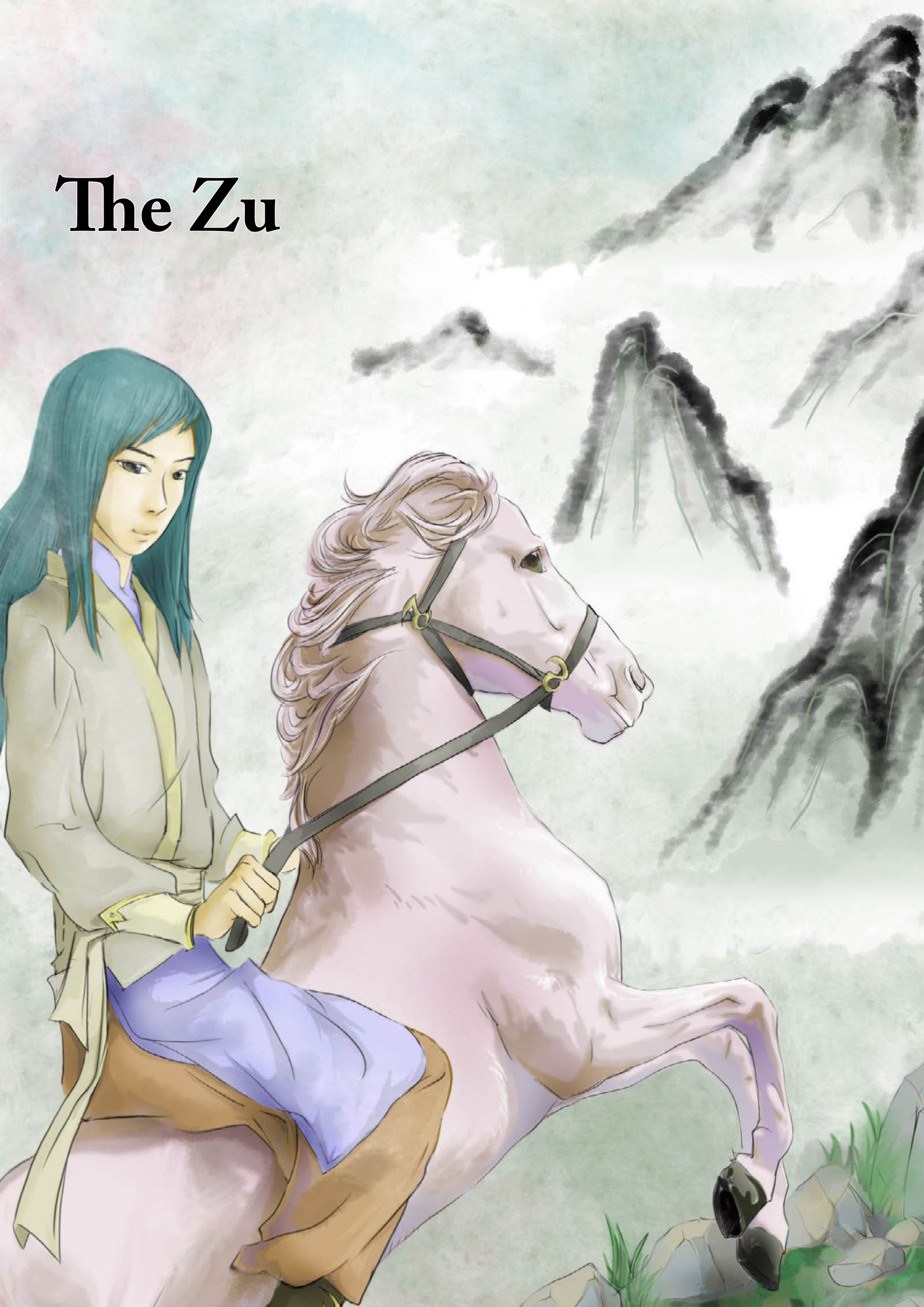


HORROR





# The Zu





*Lq came to Lq Mei-zhu in her dreams and gifted her with an understanding of Creation. She woke the next morning and made herself ready, and went to work, and worked, and came home, and began to read a book.*

*"Lq Mei-zhu," the Maker said, "why do you not act on the knowledge you possess?"*

*Mei-zhu stood, set her book down, and pulled a flower from a table's vase. "With nothing more than my understanding of this flower," she said, "I could reshape the world. But why should I? Contemplating the truth of a single petal gives me all the happiness I could ever want."*

—from *Legends of the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis

**T**HE MYSTERIOUS WARRIORS of the Zu Mountains wrap their territories in a barrier even the Emperors cannot break. Somewhere on the winding paths that lead into their temples, caverns, and sanctums, the puissance of Estates decays. A Power becomes severed from themselves, and an Emperor from the world.

Sheltered by this barrier from the Excrucians and the Emperors alike —

From the divine creatures and the unholy ones —

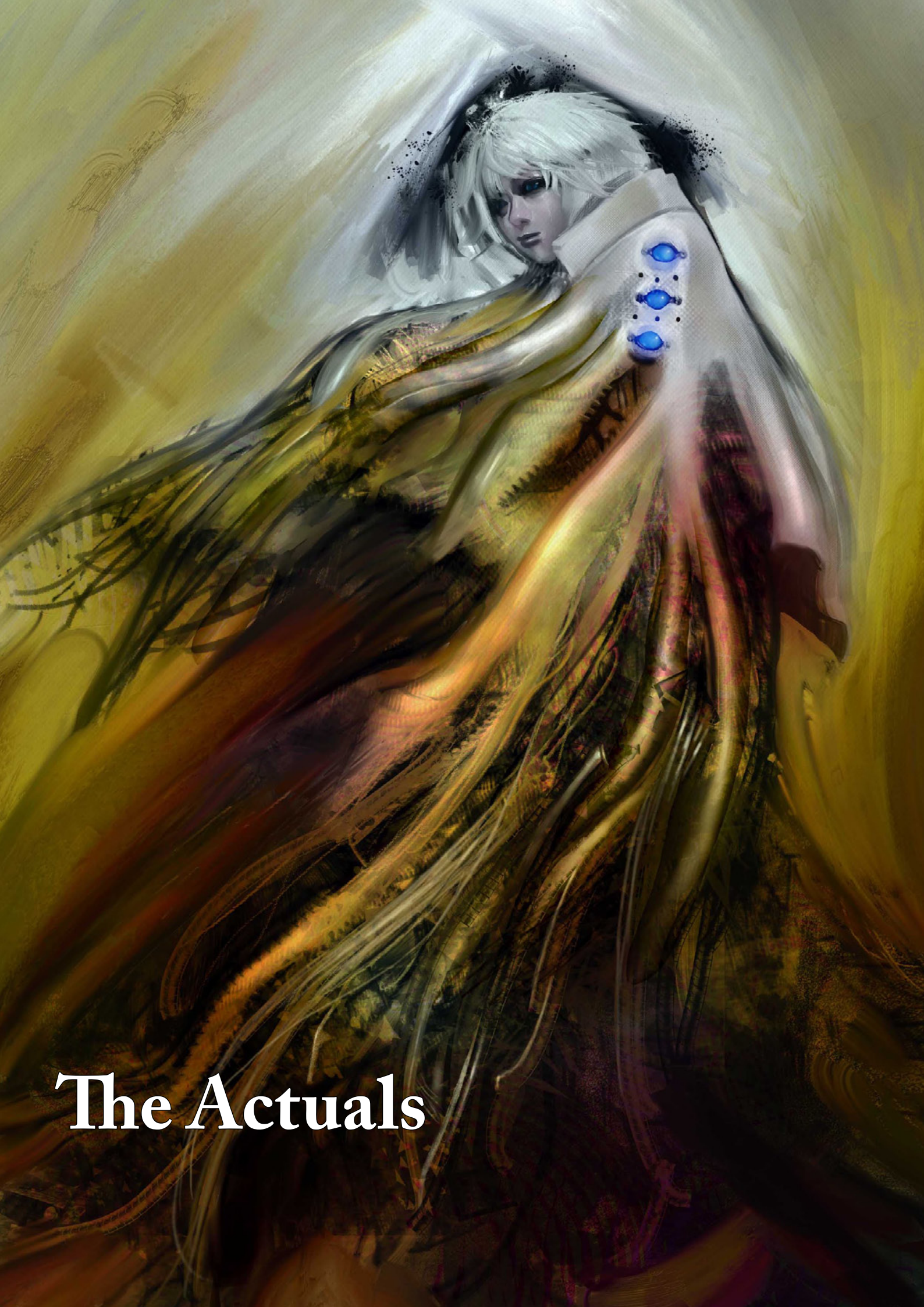
They seek some quixotic personal enlightenment; they train in the martial arts and in the secret disciplines of the Zu until they are no longer anything recognizable as mortal, but only coils of great slow magic in a person's shape. They are masters of the elements and spiritual visionaries. They wield unique weapons made apparently from their souls.

Some cosmic force powers them, Ianthe tells me — something transcendent, something pre-Imperial, something supreme and mindless and alien. She calls them ravens, says they cluster around the extrusions of that creature's force, gathering as birds will gather to feed upon a corpse.

Is this the truth?

She speaks with confidence but with no certainty; she claims the matter is uninteresting to her. She does not deign to be irresistibly persuasive to me on this point, and so we do not know.





# The Actuals



*The finch's star is a thing not of the Lord,  
nor yet opposed by Him. It stands outside  
the laws of the world.*

— from *Earth Stories*, compiled by Édouard Guy

LXII

This is a vast spherical spindle of brass and bone that surrounds the Moment of the End. A swarm of Actuals constantly press against it and one another, pushing to throw themselves into the Moment of the End; Attaris Ebrôt Appékā twists them around the sphere as they come to make them a portion of the very Seal of Time that holds them back.



THE SEAL OF TIME

UNDER THE SKIN of the world squirm the Actuals.

They are the bones and organs of the Spirit World. They are the biomechanical architecture of existence. They are the substrate of *being* that precedes form.

They are the soulless forerunners of the True Gods — the movement that is like life, before it learned to live; the thinking that is like personhood, before it learned to be people. They are the dead things that invented life.

They are born hollow; they are empty.

They have no capacity to bear witness to themselves.

If they were to find themselves alive, and meaningful, and in possession of a soul, they would not know that they had done so. They may long for life and self, but these are things they may not have.

They make such identity as they possess by binding things around them.

They organize things into matrices. They cause things to relate to them. They give rise to the space in which things exist, the time in which they dwell, the capacity to have spirit within the flesh.

Alone they were lifeless. They were as meaningless words spoken from nothing to nothing to no purpose. They were as models without the concept of referents. They were the dead that moved. Then fire kindled in Heaven and made Firstborn, Emperor of Meaning and Existence; and the Actuals became something more. They were still dead, empty and alone but also a medium competent to sustain a world.

The Actuals are creatures of straight white limbs, pillars of ivory; the writhing, wriggling presence of impossibility. The breath that isn't breath, membranes of clear substance and the jittering of



moments fit incompletely into Time. They are mechanical worms and insects that writhe together in the endless dark of their blindness, their deafness, their inability to touch or smell or taste or know. They strive a meaningless striving to consume, to grow, and most of all to *wake* — the last of which they cannot do, for to know themselves and thereby know the world is for an Actual both impossible and a sin.

They are content — inasmuch as the term applies — to remain in the subtle realms. They dwell in the Spirit World, distanced from all immanent things, living among the Imperators and the Excrucians at their war. They are the terrain there, and the camp followers; the weapons, the supply lines, the transports, and the dissolvers of the dead. They are the things that hold the matrix of being in which the others war.

Yet they may be brought into our world; and it is inevitably a tragedy when they are.

Here is the tale of it:

A miracle may make an impossible thing — a thing that *is*, but *is not itself*. A thing that has existence in the world, but which does not yet have its own nature.

This typically means a thing that cannot be itself —

That is *kept* from being itself by some limitation in miracles or sanity —

But which has nothing else to be.

Time travel can cause these impossibilities. To make a thing that *has* happened *never have happened* — or to declare that a thing that did not happen, now *did* — may leave a gap where a thing exists, but does not exist as itself. Paradox can make such a gap as well: when a Power seeks to embed Russell's paradox in the world, or capture a single instant with no duration at all inside a sphere, or open in their hand an eye that is not an eye that sees what it sees not, they make a thing that is but is not itself. When the creation or resurrection of a miraculous being is possible, it often passes through a stage where you have created or recreated a *thing*, with the capacity miraculous things have to resist you and be free of you and make their own path, but you have not yet reached the stage of making it *itself*.

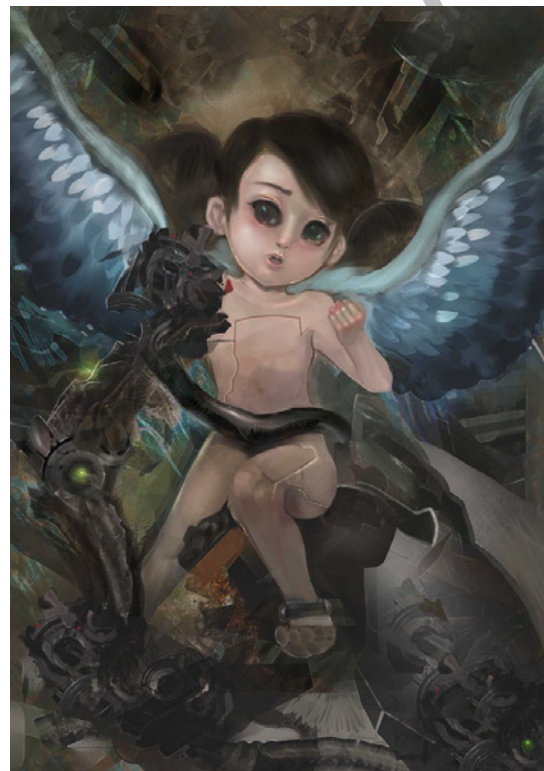
What is it?

In that moment, that question points towards a gap.

When there is a thing that is, but at the same time is not itself, hollowness exists: a void that demands the world to fill it.

And, most of the time, the world *does*.

Divine breath manifests itself. Time finds a natural order. The paradox finds a will to resolve, or to hold itself still in the moment before resolution. New or resurrected entities become properly themselves, borrowing from the powers of the relevant structures in the world.



*The Cardiff Actual (May 18, 2004)*

*The beginning of the universe, like its ending, constantly evolves.*

*I expect, by the end of the War, that it will have begun another way entirely.*

—Hazel, Angel of Disorder

*The Temple of Inessential Doubts contains two precious scrolls: the Primary Truth, that is, the truth that is the archetype for the very concept of veracity, and the Principal Lie, which is to say, the corresponding archetype of falsehood. (As-tute readers may recognize these matters from earlier discussion, and identify these scrolls as Earthly extensions of the Angels Firstborn and Lucifer.) For centuries after the Temple's construction, visitors came to admire these scrolls; then, sadly, they were stolen. The Temple's seven-story bounds rapidly brought the thief to heel, but the priests of the Temple found that—once having been rearranged—they could no longer tell the Primary Truth and the Principal Lie apart.*

—from *A Primer on the Loci Celatum*,  
by Holly Djurisić

Less frequently, the Not that is outside Creation answers the call instead.

This is tricky but not so terrible as you might imagine. The Not contains ambiguous and mildly benevolent entities as well as the malevolence of the Excrucians; it may be fairly said that while the Not is hostile towards existence, that hostility is already receiving close to its fullest natural expression. The worst case is that an Excrucian agent is embedded in the timeline, paradox or creation. The best case is that the gap is filled by something strange and quixotic, and more or less benign.

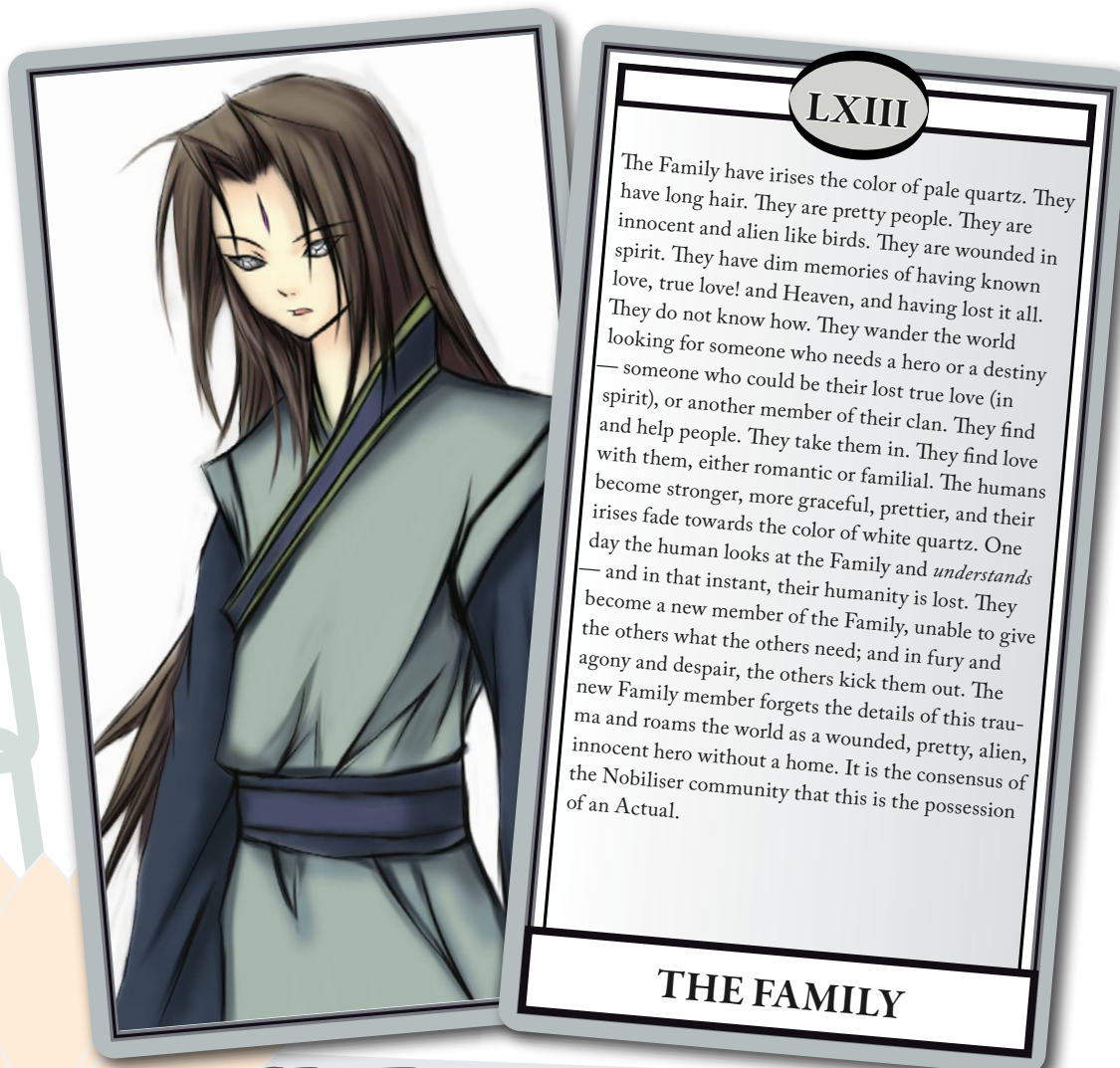
Or the void may open beneath an Actual, and it will fall into our world.

They are a bogeyman to Powers. This is a cautionary tale.

The Actuals may slumber inside created things like worms inside the spire. They may stir fitfully. Or they may wake.

When they wake they will hunger. When they wake they will grow, and grow unbounded.

Their bodies in our world are interpreted forms; they make no biological sense. Often they make some mythical sense — thornbush-creatures, or creatures of spreading blankets of needle-like spines, or





protoplasm, or creatures of endlessly branching wires — but they may also be pure mandalas of flesh.

The Actual locks onto the nature of the thing it dwells in. It merges with its attributes, its mind if it has one, its body if it has one, its continuum if it exists in time. It lives and grows within that thing. It drives it to consume other things: a hunger and a power of absorption that only sharpens, never fades.

The Actual, and the thing that has become an Actual, does not know itself.

It may only find itself by consuming — well, whatever it is it consumes. By *turning that thing into itself* so that it may see itself through that thing's eyes. That is the purpose of its consumption. That is the theory behind its actions. But it is a theory that fails. Over and over again it fails. The thing the Actual consumes becomes as blind and deaf and empty as the Actual in the moment of its conversion.

The shape of the Actual grows as it devours. Sometimes this is literal: the creature becomes an expanding protoplasmic blob. Sometimes it is divisive: the creature remains, but something grows through it, leaving it suspended in the midst of the mandala's expanse. Finally it may be ambiguous: the Actual may "spread," occupying more and more minds and bodies and places and times, without any single entity's participation in the growth.

The Actuals are infections, they are infestations, they are plagues. At best they have a terrifying power to eat things they oughtn't be able to eat, driven by an equally horrific appetite. At worst they have merely to touch you, or look at you, to bring you into the collective of themselves. They are primordial. They precede us. They are shrouded in Auctorita, and may not be interfered with save with Strike.

If the world is lucky the Actual will have a guiding mind that resists this growth. If it is unlucky it will have a guiding mind that colludes. More go that way than you would think. They give in, they go along. They agree to devour the world, and who could blame them? Their need is real and vital.

Even such monsters as the Actuals do not deserve the deprivation they endure. They deserve our help. They deserve a rescue. But there is nothing to be done.

They cannot have what they need.

They will never have what they need. It is not possible.

There is nothing to be done for them save to burn their hosts, to cut them back into the Spirit World, and to exile them piece by painful piece from world and sound.

*Once upon a time, we had strategy.*

*Those were the glory days when we were very certain in our uniforms and very certain of who we were.*

*Now we do not have strategy.*

*Now everything is scattered grasping in the dark.*

*I do not remember very much what strategy was like. I was just a soldier. I was never one of those responsible for it.*

*But I think that where now we are simply flesh, before, we arranged ourselves into "limbs" and "organs" and a "body".*

*Where now we are still, and wrestle with the worms, before we would— we would move, in these great and complex patterns, and all around us there would be vibrations, and the temperature would always change.*

*Now it is always dark.*

*Now it is always cold.*

*Now we are an insurgency. We are torn apart. We cannot remember the process by which we generated life.*

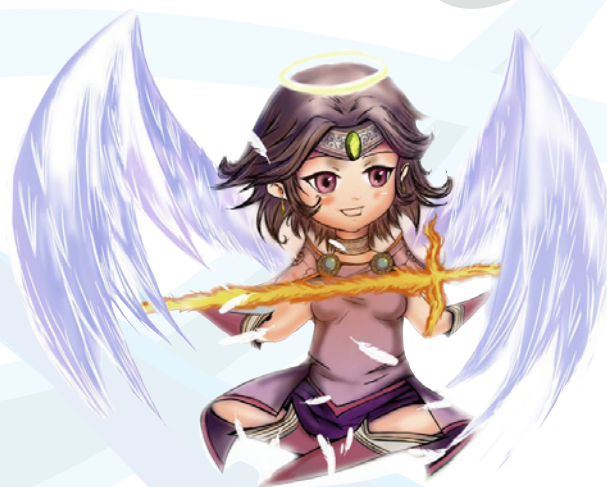
—from *The Corpse*, by Rannen Yedidiah



# Miraculous Action







**W***hat do you do?*

When you act, you may take one miraculous action, one mundane action, or one miraculous and one mundane action at a time.

Sometimes this limit will be more bitter than five-day-old tea to you.

Sometimes it literally won't matter to you at all. If nobody objects to your acting again a fraction of a second later, for instance, you might as well have used a pair of actions.

Still, even in that case, the limit is definitional.

You wield the power of your Estate. It flows into the world, it takes form as one specific action. You take that action. It can flow together with a new mundane course of action. It can be followed by other miracles after a longer or shorter span of time. But it is explicitly and formally disjoint from both the miracle that preceded it and the miracle that follows.

Sometimes your actions are atomic. They are single movements in the world.

Other times they are processes, and you can keep such process-actions going for a while.

Specifically you can maintain ("sustain") one action at a time with no ill effect. You can sustain two actions as long as you don't do anything else.

When you finish an action, or stop sustaining an action, its effects may or may not remain in the world. That's based on whether you were doing the kind of miracle where they *would*. They generally stop being *miracles*, though, the moment that you're done, and become part of the mundane, natural condition of the world instead. If there's some reason why that's bad — you're creating an inherently miraculous creature,

*The thing that came across the world had many mouths and thick brown fur, and many legs and thick black nails, and it stood miles at the shoulder, and what it did not crush it ate. It moved across the land like an army or a storm, until it came to Yi-xuan's yard, where Yi-xuan's mother stood; and her hands held a rake as if it were a wall, and her eyes were cold, and she said, "Come no further."*

—from *Genetic Visions*, edited by Emily Chen

*"It does get easier," Raphael said, "to do God's work."*

*"To forgive yourself afterwards?"*

*"No," Raphael admitted. "Not forgiving yourself. Just the, you know, the God's work part."*

—from *Genesis*, by Keiko Takemori

for example, and having it become mundane is strange — then the HG can waive this rule; but even then, that's entirely at the HG's discretion. Your miracle dissipates, it's *over*. The HG alone determines what remains.

## Reflexive Actions

Action limitations or no action limitations, you can throw in reflexive actions whenever.

They're cheaty hacks!

More precisely, a reflexive action is always treated either as an HG action or as a bonus feature on the action that you're already taking. So you can include in your action as many reflexive actions as the HG lets you get away with. You can even squeeze them into a flurry (pg. 311-312) along with your normal action.

For instance, it doesn't take an extra action to invoke a Bond and turn it into Strike. You just throw that in with whatever else you're doing. And if you're a shapeshifter, you can turn into a wolf or snake or whatever while using Aspect to attack!

## Gifts

Some Gifts are automatic. Either the HG activates them for you or you will activate them as reflexive actions. Other Gifts are miraculous actions that cost from 0-2 MP — you can't combine them with Aspect, Domain, Persona, or Treasure actions, and you can't combine them with similarly non-reflexive Gifts.

## Aspect Actions

You can do many things at once with an Aspect action.

Aspect makes you a martial artist and a dancer on top of everything else. Your whole body moves at once. There's a *pattern* to an Aspect action, a *flow*, more than a specific and easily distinguishable act.

You become a river of movement.

*Rafael moved like a flock of ravens. You could not see where his sword was one moment to the next, or his knife. There was only an explosion of motion, a confusing swirl of black and vigor, far too much for the eyes to follow.*

*With Shao-yan, conversely, I could scarcely see her move at all. I assume her sword met Rafael's dozens if not hundreds of times in every second; the ringing of metal proved it. But all I could see was its cold grey length extended in front of her, surrounded by the faintest blur to every side. It moved inexorably forward, and the flock of ravens back.*

*I had turned to run when the fight broke out, but Zéphyrin caught my arm. "Do not fear," he murmured. "Rafael is a man of many desires; they come and go like the storm. Shao-yan is a woman who burns with eternal passion. They are striving, not to kill, but rather to debate the relative supremacy of these philosophies."*

—from the Thought-Record of Oriane Feroulet



You can chew gum, walk and even talk all at the same time. You can roll through an army of your enemies in a single continuous wave of action. You can even ride a unicycle through a mine field, blasting away at targets with a shotgun held one-handed while reading *Thus Spake Zarathustra* with your free hand and your eyes — if you absolutely must.

And you can sustain an Aspect action in general, flowing, process terms — “I fight my way through them until they surrender or they leave,” or “I’m going up to my room and doing Science for a time.”

You should think of Aspect, particularly at the high levels, as making you like the wind, like the waves of the sea, like fire, like the greatest martial arts masters. You’re a blur of natural motion. You’re not just super-precise, you’re not just super-tough, you’re not just super-strong; you get the agility, speed, and flexibility of a superhero.

And for your mind it is the same.

Difficult concepts are a playground for you. You can wander the fields of higher math like a gift from God or an apocalypse. You can whisper four words to confound the greatest of philosophers. As a practical consideration, you only have your own tongue and the HG’s to *convey* these elemental insights to the group. So you and the other players may never know what those four words *are*. But your Avatar can *say* them.

## Aspect and the Other Attributes

If you’re sustaining a miraculous effect with some sort of physical focus or form, you can wield it with Aspect. For instance, you can use an animation miracle to turn a portion of your Estate into an extension of your body — to arm and armor yourself with it. While you’re doing this you can use Aspect miracles to do complicated things with that extension of yourself! Similarly you can sustain Treasure miracles to activate powerful features of your wondrous Anchors, and then use Aspect miracles to wield them in a complex fashion.

If you possess something using Treasure, you can wield your Aspect through its body. This draws on the natural limits of *that* body, however, rather than your own — if you’re possessing one of your hopes, for instance, you’re not going to be able to lift a great weight very easily because hope has no arms and legs. All you’ll be able to do is coil more tightly about your own heart, or shine in yourself with greater strength.

*He was mad, but also he was a scientist; and therefore, when sufficient evidence accumulated that his methodology and results were impossible, he faced that evidence head-on. “Something fills me with transcendent inspiration and gives me the power to scient by analogy,” he said. “I will shrink down and inject myself into my brain, there to seek the source.”*

*Sweet Hari! It was scarcely sooner said than done, and among the tangles of his neurons he found it — the speaking tube of the primal void, from which his inspirations came. Tracing it back, he found it disappeared into the ether; no sooner discovered than surmounted. “I will make an ethermobile,” he said, “and take my trusty hawk and shotgun with me into the other realms.”*

*Step by step he chased it down. Step by step he followed it; and in the end, he found a strange device, tucked into the corner of his lab. His own invention, sure enough, though he’d never understood quite what it could do.*

*“And now I know,” he said, and laughed; the burden of his science done, he did not worry over pettiness like “rational” and “possible” again.*

—from *The Grigori of Mars*,  
by Emily and Benjamin Chen

*Yip Xiao-mei, regrettably, lost half of her mind to an alchemical experiment gone awry. She still thinks perfectly well, of course, and this has proved no practical impediment to her success, but she admits quite explicitly that she cannot think half of the thoughts she might otherwise have been capable of.*

—from *In the Right Circles*, by Jasprite Sherrard

*The bodhisattva carved a bow from the Rose Apple tree, and said, "This weapon shall end suffering."*

*"Then it shall end all life," Maya told him.*

*The bodhisattva thought a moment. "So it shall," he admitted, and carved "Life's Ending" on its slave.*

—from *Legends of the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis

## Domain and Persona Actions

Domain and Persona actions are generally straightforward. They're one movement of the will — one command, "*do this*" or "*be thus*," directed at the world.

It is an artistic command.

It's visual. It's conceptual. It's flavored and nuanced. You're not using the natural, human language that you're probably using at the gaming table — not to give orders to your Estate. So it's possible that it'll take you a bit of detailed description to *translate* the miracle into terms that the other players can understand. But the basic effect should be a single movement of *thusness* in your head. Lesser miracles are very simple and straightforward in what they *do*. Even greater miracles, which have more scope for detailed design, are single, atomic expressions of your will.

You can generally add features of lower-level miracles to the higher-level ones.

For instance, when you're creating something with Domain, you can also toss a preservation effect on it. "Be! And be strong!" isn't two miracles so much as one miracle, *fortissimo*. In destroying a thing, you can transfer its strength to something else (preservation) or create a replacement (creation).

But with Domain and Persona you can't do two *unrelated* things at once.

## Treasure Actions

Treasure miracles split the difference between the simplicity of Domain and Persona miracles and the potential complexity of Aspect-based actions. The Treasure miracle itself is a single *push* — a single moment, a single pulse of will. You bend your Anchor's powers towards one specific goal. You wield power to accomplish *this*, for some appropriate value of "this."

But your Anchors can have complicated, weird, and elaborate abilities. The way in which you, or your Anchor, brings those abilities to bear — that *matters*. It can be complicated and crucial. What begins, what must begin, as a single thought can become a tangled, insidious agenda when it is expressed within the world.

And that's okay.

*It lies within the capacity of the Noble soul to rearrange its own essence. Reach within yourself and know the tainted inferno of your passions; feel it rise and flicker and dance as you think of lust objects, anger objects, hate objects, and the objects of your adoration. Teach it to rise. Teach it to fall. You must learn to draw the pollution around you into that fire, until it roars larger than the world. You must learn to extinguish it in a moment, until even its embers are black, leaving only the clear blaze of eternal passion in your immortal soul. Without this power, you cannot master the pure arts.*

—from *The Book of Purity*, by Samsi Mandaru



## Movements of the Soul

In all of these miracles the most important limitation is this:

The blueprint for a miracle is not in the Power's mind but in their heart and soul. It is not possible for them to plan out miracles of absurd elaboration; rather, they make what is elemental in them, what is aesthetic to them, what is *right* to them. Their miracles are complete. They are things of incredible complexity and detail, for all things existing in the world are things of incredible complexity and detail. They are *marvels*, for to exist is to be a marvel.

But they are works of art and not design.

It is *difficult* to bring the structural and grammatical intellect into a miracle, to invoke the mechanical and architectural mind in it, to design layers of contingency and dozens of disconnected functions into these movements of the soul. The Powers of highly technical Estates, of course, may do so, but with arguably limited agency and effectively by feel. Everyone else, to wield a miracle that takes substantial technical detail to describe, must sustain that miracle while they polish it, edit it, and hold it up to their aesthetic and intellectual senses for review. This is a process taking them a good fraction of the time it would take an ordinary self.

*Weaving at the Loom named Yin-Feng has many desirable effects. Powers have tested Yin-Feng's potency against the Excrucians, pitting the shuttling of the loom against the edge of the Abhorrent Weapon Rivalry (that is also Caligorant); Yin-Feng came away the victor. Yet Powers rarely sit to weave from this loom. Yin-Feng produces no fabric save destiny, and those who use its powers for too long turn to molten silver and trickle away.*

—from *A Tourist's Guide to Creation*,  
by Jasprite Sherrard

## Hubris, and Acts of Wonder

Miracles may touch the Imperial or Excrucian soul. They can give birth to wonders. They can shatter the patterns of causality and make a twisting out of time.

They can change *you* — can improve you, can make you better, and stronger, and transcendent.

They can do crazy stuff, and even — most particularly miracles in the form of Gifts — can play havoc with even the basic tenets of these rules.

But the powers that you have are finite, and they cannot give you ease.

The **Hubris Rule** sets these four limits on what miracles may do, to ensure that the HG can continue to challenge the Avatars and add trouble to their lives:

- ☛ You can't remove or banish all the conflict from your life with miracles;

*I had always wanted beauty; and milord knew this, and when he chose to grant me a gift, that was the one he chose. "It is artificial," he told me, "and has no meaning to Heaven; but your desire is a righteous one."*

*In this fashion, I have learned what it means to be touched by a miracle; and I record it, that others may understand. I look in the mirror, and I do not see myself: only the miracle. Others look at me, and they do not see me: only the wonder milord crafted. For a very long time, my friends did not recognize me, so greatly hung the miracle about my brow.*

*I tell them: I am still myself! But some of them do not hear it, to this day.*

—from *Life in Ladislau's House*, by Irina Pangratiu

- ☛ You can't give yourself a dharma of peace, safety, or ease;
- ☛ You can't use description to dodge the conflict systems by phrasing a miracle such that the target can't or won't choose to resist it; *and*
- ☛ Paradox and acts of hubris — herein defined as miracles that create, destroy, or reshape miraculous power equal or superior to your own — can form a void within the world that attracts Actual (pg. 297-301) or Excrucian possession. Not every paradox and not every act of hubris will do so, but it's up to the HG to decide whether it's common, uncommon, or rare.

*It is a problematic feature of magic, as with life, that its mastery is self-extinguishing. No sooner does one really grasp a truth than one begins the process of learning the magic beyond that truth—the first rule of which is, oh, by the way, that thing which you just learned is not just incomplete but false.*

—from *A Catalog of Modern Magic*, by Eric Optera

If you're going to change yourself into something else, or make an Emperor factory, or shatter Hell, or catch in glass Cneph the Maker, creator of all things — perhaps you can, and perhaps you can't, but be aware that it is a principle of the world that what succeeds, has consequents.



*Beetle from the Reykjavik Actual. Date unknown (or, more specifically, infested). Picture taken several days before Scybale's attempted planting of a new World Ash.*





# Miraculous Conflict

**S**OMETIMES CHARACTERS WILL get into fights. Sometimes they'll get into non-combat free-for-alls to decide the fate of someone or something in the world.

For cases like this, you need these **conflict rules**.

## Acting in the Moment

When you act you usually go with the flow of what's going on.

*Cneph did not come to Creation empty-handed. In the void where its world would be there struggled three forces.*

*N̄mosnikttiel, the fire that swallows worlds, raged in the emptiness. Its faces chanted words of destruction. The creatures of the void trembled in its heat. Yet the Creator caught N̄mosnikttiel in his net and shaped the angels from its flesh.*

*Azbogah, the radiance that destroys the unrighteous, shone with fell beauty. Its raiment was the jewel named Structure. Its scepter was the staff called Strength. Yet the Creator caught Azbogah in his hand and planted the World Ash in its heart.*

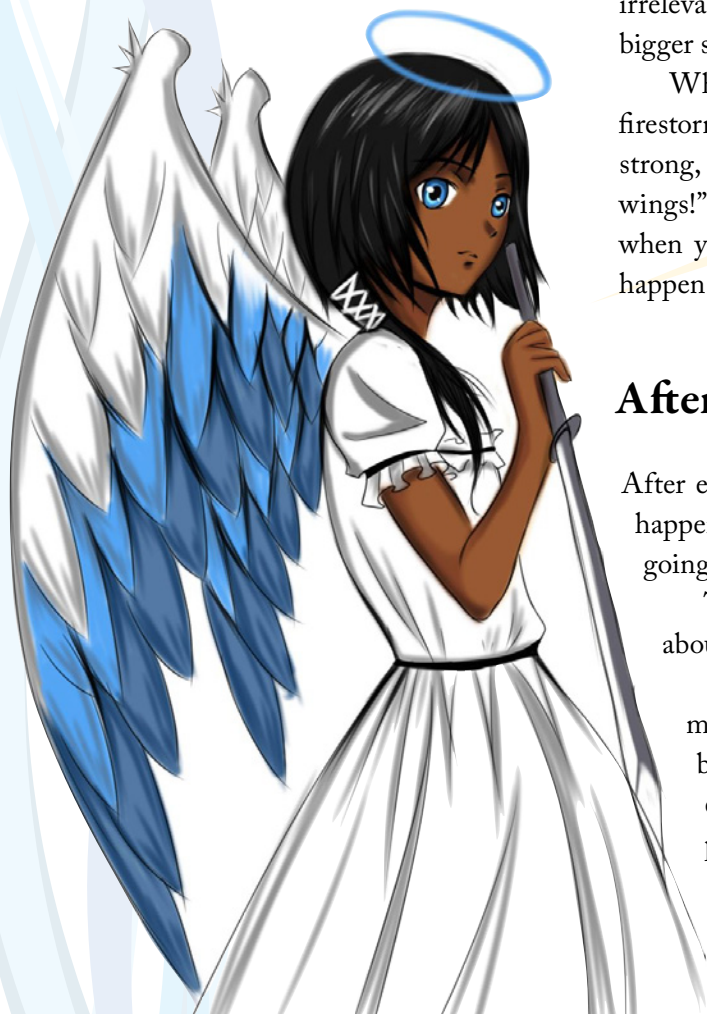
*N̄arsinha, the lightning that dances on the surface of the abyss, fled the Creator; yet Cneph stood at the end of its every path. N̄arsinha's face was a mask of hatred. Its hands were twisted claws. It spat naked fury. Yet Cneph tamed its heart and wrapped it about Creation to form the Weirding Wall.*

*That is how the universe came to be.*

—from *Legends of the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis

*Quantum theory tears down the classical divide between the mundane and the miraculous. When probabilities rather than certainties define the world, the hand of God—from outside the universe—no longer manifests as a distinct and absolute perturbation of natural law. The clean division between an act of God and an act of the universe vanishes. The work of the divine diffuses into a quantum halo. A given action of the Holy Spirit may be 3 parts per billion miraculous; 5 parts per billion; or even, in the presence of a saint, as much as one and a half percent pure miracle.*

—from a sermon by Bishop Julius Dow, 03/25/00



That means that stuff is happening — the other players are doing stuff, and the HG's described some of what's going on. That's your *context for action*. You are pitting your actions against that background and against whatever anyone else does later to try to stop or affect you.

In a direct head-to-head conflict the higher miracle level wins.

But that doesn't mean that your lower-level miracles are useless in the presence of higher-level effects. Lower-level miracles are still *miracles*. They act upon the world. They just can't take more powerful miracles on head-on and defeat them or wipe them from existence. If there's anything else left for them to do, they still do that.

It's like fighting an undertow. A weak swimmer will *lose*, but they still get to *swim*.

So sometimes you don't even have to worry about the number-vs.-number part of a conflict. An Aspect 2 miracle gives you Aspect 2 effectiveness. A Domain 4 miracle creates, summons, or animates some of your Estate. A Treasure 3 miracle activates some cool function of a wondrous Anchor. Unless you're about to be swept away by the kind of tidal wave of miraculous power that makes actions like that irrelevant, all that stuff still *happens*, and it still *matters*, even if even bigger stuff is happening around you.

When you grow wings and soar out of the way of an incoming firestorm, you aren't thinking, "It's too bad that my wings are not as strong, on an absolute scale, as that firestorm." You're thinking, "Yay wings!" Or you ought to be, at least! The firestorm was already coming when you decided to act; your miracle changed what was going to happen — in this case, by getting you out of its way!

## After the Action

After each action you take, the HG acts. They talk about what just happened. They talk about what NPCs do. They talk about what's going on in the world.

Then either somebody else acts; or you act; or time passes, in about that order of precedence.

When they're done responding to your turn, the HG will take a moment to check whether anyone wants to act — either explicitly or by waiting a few seconds to see if anyone jumps in. Then, if nobody's eager to act, the HG will describe more stuff that happens, as time passes, until either somebody *does* want to act or the HG gets tired of describing stuff and demands that somebody else do something.

HGs really like to talk. Oh, they *do* go on! But they also really like to listen, and to have players do cool actions. So just what happens here *exactly* is a little unpredictable.



Sometimes the HG will describe miraculous things happening — usually as the result of a miraculous creature’s action, but sometimes as part of the natural process of the world, or as leftover energy in somebody’s expired miracle. **The HG can assign any miracle level they like to the miracles they describe into being.** They can also choose whether to tell you these miracle levels, hint at them, or keep them a secret, on a case-by-case basis.

## Flurries of Action

You sweep together with someone, exchange hundreds of blows, and then *bam* —

One definitive action.

You play out a hundred thousand tactical possibilities in your head. They’re doing the same. But you’re just a little better. *You hope* and then you *move*.

Or maybe there’s no tactics and no back-and-forth in it. Maybe it all comes down to speed. Maybe it’ll all be decided by a single act —

And you lunge for your enemy’s throat just as they lunge for yours. Sometimes taking turns doesn’t work.

Instead, you call as a player for a **flurry of action** — something that waives the whole concept of “going first” and “going second,” and instead recognizes that everybody’s doing everything at once.

You still choose your action. The HG still describes what happens. But everyone else who wants to throw their hat in the ring gets to act in the flurry, too. And if you’re not happy with the way things stand, after one of their actions or after an HG description, you can go back and change your action. You can make small changes. You can add a few little details and complexities that don’t increase the miracle level. Or, if you want to, you sacrifice any MP already spent, toss out your old action entirely, and pick a new action for the flurry.

Then the HG resolves everything at once.

This can hit a deadlock pretty easily. You can skulk in the back of the flurry, not wanting to act until you know what other people are doing. And maybe they do that to you. And then the flurry of blows looks a lot like an iaijutsu duel or a Mexican standoff in which absolutely nothing happens.

Or you can change your action, and then someone else changes theirs. So you change your action back. So they change theirs. You preempt them. They preempt your preemption. You change tactics. So do they. You let them get caught up in the tactical interplay, then lunge

*It was more graceful than a dance, the alchemist and the nimblejack: one blessed with dexterity by something greater than a god, and one whose shoes — high-heeled, no less — gave her the terrible speed of a hurricane wind. I think that after the first ten seconds — that must have been an eternity to them — the nature of their battle changed. The nimblejack set aside its will to claw out her eyes and pull her liver free, and she surrendered her desire for life. Hunger did not exist. Life did not exist. There was only the motion and the speed.*

*It ended all too predictably. The beauty of the encounter reached and moved the nimblejack’s stone heart and the creature died at once.*

— from the Memoirs of Alice Mendel,  
Lady of the Thunder

*The blade spun about her; it severed swords, arrows, and even the bursts of venom and fire that came at her from the alchemical cannons, so that they fell harmless at her feet. It stunned me; I could not imagine a mortal developing such prowess.*

*It seems that Zéphyrin heard my thoughts; for he glanced my way. “She is good,” he admitted. “Perhaps the best human I have ever seen. But she has survived this long because she carries Jotun-forged steel.”*

—from the Thought-Record of Oriane Feroulet

*The Scarab among the Stars, most praised and most reviled! called forth a messiah from His flesh to speak the glories of His name. The five-armed sengeri, exhaling paeans, pulled the messiah before Him that He might regard His creation. The Scarab, most blessed and most cursed! set His burning gaze upon the huddled beast, and spoke: "It satisfies Me not." And the messiah was taken therewith away. They brought before Him shapes and saviors in the form of girl and man and vine, spinefish and firebird, unicorn and mud; but with each He found flaw, and cast away the substance of His progeny. It is for this reason that we have never heard the scripture of the Scarab, most beautiful and most vile!—though His children are infinite in virtue, He knows ever that better can be made.*

—from *Variations on a Russian Fable*,  
by Michael Kay

*A hundred demons clutched at me, shouting, as I passed towards the great iron gates. One shoved its misshapen face in mine, crying, "Torment! I can issue more agonizing torments in less time than any demon here!"*

*The gondola paused in its progress. "Why should I wish an exceptionally agonizing torment?" I asked, being new to Hell.*

*It tapped its nose knowingly. "You can't avoid the pain," it said, "but at least you can have quality."*

—from *Progression and Regression*, by Michael Kay

for their eyes. They block and sweep your leg. You catch yourself and follow up with an attack. The tactical contest resumes. If neither of you is spending MP you can keep this up, well, not *forever*, really, but for longer than your players' voices can hold out, at least.

But that's okay.

If you hit a deadlock, you have two easy ways to fix it. The first is to say, "We're in a deadlock. We do this back and forth hundreds of times, OK?"

And everyone agrees, and then the HG resolves based on *that*.

Or you do the same thing and then add, "Let's all decide on our final actions before we take them, and give them secretly to the HG, so we stop skulking or circling around." The HG decides what any NPCs in the fight do. They read or listen to your secret actions.

And bam. Flurries can burn through huge amounts of MP and time to no practical effect, so make sure that you're doing fun and thematic stuff during them. There's nothing more wasteful than playing out dozens of exchanges in a single second, and then realizing that they bored you. That's like writing the Great American Novel and then discovering that you don't even like literature!

## Pace

You can ask the HG to set a "pace" for combat, or to revise that pace based on events.

When events start happening much faster than that pace, you know that you should go into a flurry instead of using ordinary actions. Conversely, when they're much slower than that pace, you know that you should attempt *not* to flurry.

## Not Wanting to Flurry

If you're not in a flurry but multiple players want to do stuff at more or less the same time, you should figure out a way to take turns. If you can't figure this out — presumably because your Avatars are fighting one another, or at least have *very* different ideas about what should be done — then surprise! You're in a flurry after all!

## Oh No You Don't

Sometimes you need to *stop* something from happening.



It was about to happen; a player did it, or the HG described it, it was *happening*. And you realized that this thing that was happening was a very bad thing. Like, they are cutting your nose off and you need your nose for sneezing with, or they're going to blow up the world, and that's also bad for a variety of reasons.

If you want to wait until they're in the middle of their action and then take your own action to stop it, that works pretty well. But sometimes their action is atomic — one thing, that happens, and in the instant that it happens it is done. And other times their action is *practically* instant, even if it does take a measurable amount of time in the world, so that dissecting that action to act inside it would drop you well below the pace.

So we're going to say that if you're fast enough, you can stop something that was already happening. You are just that cool.

You say "Oh no you don't!" or "I'd like to interrupt that," or something of that kind.

And the HG unwinds that action or event, giving back any MP that were already spent on it, and instead starts a flurry of actions. The setting for that flurry is the moment just before that action or event. An interrupted Avatar gets to go in the flurry (if they want to), but usually shouldn't just reiterate their action if they do. You *have* to go in the flurry, since you're trying to interrupt. And afterwards, if you win your will in the flurry, you either defend against their action or somehow stop them from taking it.

You can't interrupt flurries, only actions! One interrupt deep is as far as this game goes.

## Stopping Actions

Suppose that it's not enough to squeeze in a viable defense against an action. You need to stop them from *taking* it.

How does this work?

You'll want to implement one of four preventative approaches.

First, you could start sustaining an action that mitigates their actions or keeps them under control. This would let them break free by using a more powerful action, but it can lock them down for at least a *moment*. Second, you could "wound" them (pg. 321-333) with an effect that gives them a temporary Bond or Affliction that forces them not to act right then. Obviously they can circumvent a Bond or Affliction if they must. Third, you could change the environment in some fashion that obviates their intended action, forcing them to deal with your meddling in some fashion before they can proceed.

Even this won't hold a sufficiently determined enemy back for long.

*The demagogue locked in the cell required constant watch. She raved and ranted, nonsense mostly. Our lady had broken her mind. Occasionally, she would recover some focus. Then the words that poured from her mouth could cut manacles and hammer through the walls. We drugged her from afar, when she broke loose, using all manner of subtle poisons. We could not approach her. Mere earplugs could not protect a body from falling under her spell.*

—from *On the Beat*, by Keiko Takemori

*The Nobles have a gesture—a twist and flattening of the hand—that means "I Have Achieved." They use it sometimes to celebrate victory or triumph. More often, it is used before a victory becomes apparent—a symbol that their victory is already written, already paid for, and already earned, and that protest is now futile.*

*The night I came to understand this went poorly for the Prince of Knots. He sought to wrench the Powers of the Light from the glorious Tegos Tsendenbal. He had his audience in the palm of his hand, but then a mousy woman with hooked teeth stood up in the back. She began to argue against his points. She transformed his case slowly from indisputable fact to arguable hypothesis. He sought to stop her, but every time he opened his mouth she made the gesture "I Have Achieved," and, sputtering, he would fall silent for several minutes at a time.*

—from *On Serving the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis

*The lord Erroman sleeps. In the morning, we lift him from his bed and bathe him; then we dress him, and attend to his teeth and hair, and take him to the audience chamber. For all the judgments brought before him, he does not wake, and his eyes shift behind their lids in the dance of eternal dreams. He has shamed his rivals and fought the legions of Unbeing without stirring from his rest. In the morning, when we open the curtain before his bed, we cannot help but look upon his face in dread and fear, and know relief when we see it unchanged; for we are told that if he should ever open his eyes, the greatest of all disasters shall be upon us.*

—from *Seventy Kings and Seven*,  
by Alexander De Vriend

*A forbidden thought nags at the corner of my mind. I do not need to think it; this is the Tempest's blessing upon my kind. I need never know what blasphemous, foul, or arrogant idea waits for me there. But I have a choice, and I make it, and think what I ought not.*

*I recognize the creature that falls from the sky, with its whip of nettles and its face of masks. It, in turn, recognizes me; and pauses. "Tellerio," it says, "why do you insist upon this repetition of pain? You are beginning to nag upon my conscience."*

*"Humans are creators," I said, "and the fabric of that creation is our thoughts."*

*It viewed me through many eyes. "A fair assessment," it conceded. "But such works as yours leave scars on their creator."*

—from *Apocryphal Thought-Records*,  
by Kiumars Ghatary

The only way to *definitively* hold back an enemy with the Bonds or MP they'd need to push against the artificial boundaries you impose is the fourth approach: kill them. If you kill someone they almost certainly won't cut off your nose after or blow up the world. And if they do, you are within your rights to complain loudly to every remaining relevant authority.

## Not So Fast!

Someone does something really quick. Something does something really subtle. Someone tries to pull a fast one while your Avatar is asleep, or paralyzed, or trapped in an ice cubicle orbiting one of the moons of Mars.

So they're totally reasonable in thinking that you can't do anything about it! It just happens, right? But — *not so fast!*

You have an idea. Maybe you have a way to be just as quick. Maybe you're even subtler. Maybe you have a way to act at a distance, or while you're asleep. Maybe there *is* something you can do.

So here's the rule:

It's quite probable that there will be cases where something happens in play and your Avatar can't do anything about it. You should accept that and bear that in mind. But *you as a player* always have the opportunity to use the action system to do something about anything that happens in play. Right up to the moment of death, or its equivalent (pg. 328), there's no such thing as an event that happens in play that you as a player can't respond to with either an interrupt, a miracle, or a request for a flurry.

The answer to "Can you do it? Can you do something about this?"

Is always:

*You can try!*

## Miracles and the Environment

You're trying to map an ordinary building that someone has rendered non-Euclidian. You're trying to kill some of Lord Entropy's tame



nimblejacks, and you've lured them into the Cityback. You stand in the light of Heaven and try to bind a demon to its service. And you demand something like:

☛ "The particulars of the ordinary world are measurable."

☛ "Tame things in the Cityback should die." or

☛ "The beauty of Heaven demands service."

Such words are in harmony with the world you're in; the world flows with you.

The Properties of the world you're in can be used as level 2 Bonds. You can gain 2 free Strike when you invoke them. You can gain 1-2 MP when they actively get you in trouble ("and I would have gotten away with it, too, if the particulars of the world weren't so measurable!"). You might take a small spiritual wound if you decide you've broken such a rule. You can even survive off them, as you can with your other Bonds, if you are diligent in your focus on them. However, doing so will taint you slowly with the nature of that world. This manifests in game terms as a wound (see pg. 321-333); if you live too long off of the substances of Heaven or Hell, for instance, you will become a creature entirely enslaved to them.



*The guides who lead travelers across Semane Menheneott Pass firmly insist on a party size no less than six. To cross that Pass, one must turn left thrice, then right twice, along the path; then straight at the bend; and finally, on the hairpin turn high above the world, one must push one of one's traveling companions over the edge. Those who do not follow this simple prescription remain lost in the mountains forever. Novice travelers are often heart-broken by this practice, which the guides do not explain in advance; experienced wayfarers know to recruit an ignorant "patron" from the city below.*

—from *Earth Stories*, compiled by Édouard Guy

# Tools for Miraculous Conflict

*Once, the world ended, and the Ash caught fire; but there is no fire that surpasses the blaze of the Ash's spirit. The Ash subsumed the flames and grew strong; and the world was forced to recreate itself.*

—from *Legends of the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis

## The Divine Mantle

You're under siege. Your every miracle glances off your enemy's defenses and they're tearing through your own. But you won't give in, you won't *lose*.

You invoke **the Divine Mantle** — the glory, the roaring fire, the flaming aura of raw power available to Powers with high Domain. Suddenly your every action burns with the truth and divine breath of your Estate. For the rest of the scene, and at least the next four hours, your every action has Miraculous Edge.

## Miraculous Edge

**Miraculous Edge** is the Noble equivalent of mundane Edge. Each point of Miraculous Edge comes with one point of mundane Edge unless otherwise stated, to a maximum total mundane Edge of 5.

But that's not the cool thing about it.

The cool thing is that Miraculous Edge helps your miracle win conflicts with other miracles. It gives you an edge when the HG is deciding which miracle is stronger. Specifically, when deciding which miracle wins a direct conflict or acts with greater force in an indirect



conflict, you reduce your opponent's effective miracle level by [the higher of your Miraculous Edge or your miracle's Strike,] down to a minimum of 0.

So if you put up a Divine Mantle, you're effectively gaining that much of an edge against every hostile miracle you oppose. To whatever extent an opponent's miraculous action or strategy depends on overpowering yours, their miracle becomes more difficult; to whatever extent it does *not* depend on overpowering your miracle, it is unaffected. Thus, if you are smashing a city with a tidal wave, the Divine Mantle makes it harder for your enemies to turn the wave to stone or otherwise stop the wave from smashing the city. It explicitly *doesn't* make it any harder to surf the wave or shelter a single city block from your attack.

## Invoking the Mantle

You can invoke the Divine Mantle by spending up to your Domain rating in MP; this is a reflexive action. Each point adds to the rating of your Divine Mantle. You can spend MP of any type. You can spend additional MP at a later time, adding to the MP already spent, but your Divine Mantle is capped at your Domain.

While under the Mantle, you have **Miraculous Edge** equal to the Mantle rating.

People can see your Divine Mantle, and they can tell when you spend MP on it, but they can't see your Mantle's exact numeric strength. Nor can you see the exact strength of the Divine Mantle of others. It wraps you in a divine aura of your Estate which even mortals can recognize, but not even Powers (with a few possible exceptions like the Power of Digitization) can precisely define. If for some reason you absolutely *must* go incognito, you can shrug off the Mantle at any time by spending an additional MP.

The Divine Mantle is a reflexive miraculous action but it is not properly speaking a miracle; neither other miracles nor Auctorita can prevent it from functioning.

## The Auctoritas Magister

You are the calm in the center of the storm. You are the thing that power cannot touch, cannot grasp, cannot compel. You take the worst that your enemies can throw at you and you are not moved.

*Three children walked in the wake of the Theocrat Daniels. As he gestured benediction to his flock, they sang, "Holy, holy, holy."*

*He woke in the morning to that song. As he lowered his head to bless the food he ate, he heard that song. He walked and laughed and cried to that refrain. Nor did he find this unusual, for the Theocrat Daniels belonged to the gods, and his every breath was graced.*

*It came to pass that the Theocrat Daniels fell in love, and with none less than the Queen of the Land. He and the King spoke, in private chambers, and their words grew hot. In a paroxysm of rage, the Theocrat snatched the royal scepter from its place beside the King and thrust its tapered point into his liege lord's side. And as the King's blood spread, the children sang, "Holy, holy, holy."*

*The Theocrat Daniels belonged to the gods, and even his darkest deeds were blessed.*

—from *Parables for Our Modern Age*, by Jackie Robinson, writing on the topic of the Divine

Mantle

*The storm raged fiercely; but around St.  
Romanus, the air was clear and calm.*

—from *Failures of Light*, by Emily Chen

You are a miraculous creature.

If you have Persona, you may also be a breaker of miracles.

If you need to shield against hostile effects, you may spend up to your Persona rating in MP to invoke **the Auctoritas Magister**. This is a miraculous action. Each point that you spend adds to the rating of your Auctoritas Magister. You can spend MP of any type. You can spend additional MP at a later time, strengthening an active Auctoritas by adding to the MP already spent, but your Auctoritas Magister is capped at your Persona.

You must invoke this effect instead of a more typical miracle — **the Auctoritas Magister is not reflexive, and sustaining it requires a sustained action**. You need a new action every time you strengthen your Auctoritas, although you only have to sustain one of them. This does mean that you can't maintain your Auctoritas *and* strengthen it while doing anything else at all, but once you've strengthened it, you can move on to other things.

The Auctoritas Magister is an Auctoritas that protects

☛ you

☛ your mundane actions

While you have it up miracles can only affect you with your consent, and (with or without your consent) they can't oppose your mundane actions at all. If your mundane action is something like "protect" or "defend" the area around you, you can shield everything within five feet of your body from any sort of miracle at all.

Miracles opposed by an Auctoritas Magister do not *cease* — for instance, if someone summons up a rainstorm, the rain will continue to *fall* even if you walk beneath it sheltering the area around you with mundane actions and an umbrella. But your Auctoritas Magister suspends the *effects* of miracles, as if they'd never been used at all. For instance, your umbrella would keep the ground dry within 5 feet of you, as if the rain had never fallen; if you walked 10 feet away, the ground would instantly dry in your new location and become sodden (as if rained on for some time) where you were. You can even drive calmly along streets that a miraculous earthquake is buckling; the road will reconstruct in front of your car to permit your driving action to continue, then twist back into brokenness behind you. However, once the controlling Power stops sustaining a miracle, its effects usually cease to be miraculous; after a small grace period (equal to the *pace* of the conflict, as per pg. 312) the Auctoritas Magister loses its relevance to that effect.

Your Auctoritas is essentially invisible, except in its effects, but other characters can see you spend MP to invoke it: a kind of stillness



settles or deepens in around you. Nobody can see the exact number of MP you spend in-character, nor can they precisely identify the final Auctoritas rating except by testing it against various levels of Strike.

The Auctoritas Magister is a miraculous action but not *per se* a miracle; Auctoritas do not deactivate each other.

## Protecting Others

You can raise an Auctoritas Magister to protect something else instead of yourself — a person, group, or place that is the active focus of your attention. You must sustain this effect or it goes away.

## Strike

You're facing someone with an Affliction of invincibility. Or an Auctoritas Magister. Or a massive Divine Mantle that's crushing your miracles. Or just someone throwing around a higher-level miracle than you want to use to prevent it.

So you put all your heart and drive behind a single miracle. You infuse it; you make it a spear of thought, a pure and blazing breath, an incomparable expression of your heart and soul.

You can buy **Strike** for your miracles by spending one or more MP of any sort. This is a reflexive action. Each MP spent buys one point of Strike. **This adds to the Strike you get from Bonds and other sources.**

Miracles with Strike ignore the Auctoritas up to the level of the Strike.

For the purpose of deciding who wins a miraculous conflict with you, you also reduce your opponent's effective miracle level by [the higher of your Miraculous Edge or your miracle's Strike] down to a minimum of 0.

*Our enemies cannot help but kill us.*

*If they did not come at us with their blades and their malice, so we could hate them, we would have to love them. There is nothing in between, not for creatures of such majesty. We would have to love them; and, in loving, die; not like Romeo died, or Juliet, but like the night dies that loves the sun, or the fire dies that loves the sea. In embracing the alien, in striving to grasp that which lies forever beyond us, we would extinguish ourselves.*

—from *A Philosophy of Treason*,  
by Augusta Valentina (suppressed)

Wounds





**S**OMETHING BAD HAPPENS to you. Someone uses a miraculous effect on you. You take a *wound*.

Let's pause here and look at your health when you're not wounded. You have —

- ☛ 2 Divine Health levels; *and*
- ☛ 1 Tough Health level; *and*
- ☛ 2 Normal Health levels

Your Divine Health levels are your ability to keep going and stay in control over yourself even when people are hitting you with nuclear weaponry, major miracles, and other extremely dangerous effects. Your Tough level is for handling gunfire, low-end miracles, and suchlike things. Finally you have Normal Health levels to absorb trivial effects like smoke inhalation, influenza, and being stabbed with two giant needles.

These estimates assume that you are doing absolutely nothing to protect yourself.

Most of the time, in practice, lesser miracles won't even touch you — or they'll take one of your Normal Health levels, at worst. This is because if someone tries to turn you into a newt or ignite a fire in your lungs your natural reflex is to defend yourself. Most of the time, *in practice*, you'll be pretty hard to kill, even when someone unleashes massive firepower, because it's hard to do even *one* deadly wound to a Noble who is defending themselves.

But if you're too busy holding up the sky or something to properly defend yourself, then even weaker miracles are dangerous, and level 4 becomes the natural boundary for deadly<sup>†</sup>.

The HG decides when something wounds you. The HG also decides whether you take minor, serious, or deadly damage from it.

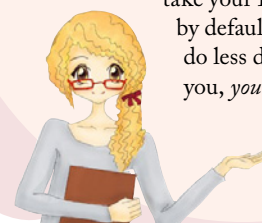
*He had nine heads and he breathed a terrible radioactive fire and the tendrils of him sank into the street and the cars and then ripped out of them as he rippled his way along; but still, he took the time to salute us as he passed, and brush away the rocks that pinned us down.*

*Once a Marine, always a Marine, they said; the man may mutate, but the Corps in him lives on.*

—from *The Ends of the Earth*, by K.C. Danine

<sup>†</sup> You can technically lose even your Divine Health level to a level 3 action, a level 2 action, a level 0-1 action, or, heck, to an unarmed mundane action. But your attacker has to sell the HG on something like that and that oughtn't be easy!

Conversely, if you don't defend against it, and you aren't Durant or anything, a level 4 miracle will take your Divine Health level by default. If you want it to do less damage than that to you, *you'll* have to sell your HG on *that*!





*Miraculous Defense*

There are four basic tiers of damage in **Nobilis**:

- ☛ Surface Wounds — cosmetic damage, such as can cost you a Normal Health level;
- ☛ Serious Wounds — meaningful damage or setbacks, such as can cost you a Tough Health level;
- ☛ Deadly Wounds — terrible damage, such as can cost you a Divine Health level; *and*
- ☛ Defeat, when you wind up with no Health Levels left.

Effects like Durant (and Active Immortality, and preservations in general) change how hard something has to hit you to cause deadly damage, serious damage or any damage at all.

Damage in **Nobilis** does scale down — if something would take a Divine Health level, and you don't have any, it wounds a Tough Health level instead. If something would take a Tough Health level, and you're out of *those*, you take a Normal Health level instead.



When you run out of Normal Health levels, you become temporarily immune to minor damage and minor effects; there's nothing left for them to *do* to you.

When you lose your Tough Health level, your Normal Health levels heal — minor effects and cosmetic damage fade away to make room for new effects. But when they're gone again, and you're out of both Tough and Normal Health levels, you're temporarily immune to even serious, meaningful effects.

When you lose your Divine Health levels, your Tough Health level heals<sup>†</sup>.

You might think that losing all your health levels would make you immune to damage completely, and to a certain extent that's true. However, when you lose all your health levels, your character stops being an Avatar. If they're still alive, it's possible that the HG will describe them as taking further damage, or describe them as perversely invincible in the moment of their defeat — but that's just HG description of the world. It's not part of the game rules!

You should think of most humans as having a single Normal Health level. Tough soldiers might have two Normal Health levels, or even a Tough and a Normal Health level, instead.

<sup>†</sup> You actually get *all* your Tough Health levels back, but unless you're playing something really weird, that happens to always be exactly one.



"You're temporarily immune to lesser wounds!"



*Surface Wounds*

*"You're alive," said Smithsonian Jack.  
 "Didn't they order your execution?"  
 "They did," admitted Benedict Aguerie.  
 "Eight times. 'Spec' I'll be dead any minute  
 now."*

—from *Guarantees of Privacy*, by Emily Chen

**Surface Wounds** inflict a temporary Bond.

Something happened to you.

It did!

But *you* decide, as a player, how much of an effect it actually has. You get MP if you play along to your detriment, but the degree of participation, and implicitly the actual seriousness of the wound, is up to you.

Further the nastier effects — say, turning you into a squash — don't take very well. You don't actually treat it as "my Avatar is now a squash." It's more like "now my Avatar is under an enchantment that is *trying* to turn them into a squash."

For raw physical wounds at this level, it's really up to you how bad they are. You can have strategically torn clothing and a bit of red blood-like coloring on your arm. Or you can be staggering through a gray-white haze void of pain. You should either define the actual wound yourself or act on a basic description that the HG gives you; the more trouble it causes you, either way, the better your chance to gain MP from the wound, but it's totally OK to assume that it's a trivial and meaningless effect instead of trying for that MP.



The Bond level is generally 2 for a wound from a lesser miracle and 4 for a wound from a greater miracle. The HG has the option to assign Bond levels of 1, 3, and 5 to particularly strong or weak miracles and to assign Bond levels for damage from Aspect miracles and mundane effects and weaponry to taste.

When you heal the Surface Wound — naturally, or using a miracle, or by losing your Tough Health level — the Bond fades away. If you were really enjoying playing out the Bond you can, with HG permission, add it to your list of Bonds. You'll then have to shuffle your Bond and Affliction points around at the end of the story to get back down to [13 + your Treasure] in total.

### ***Example Surface Wound Bonds:***

- ☛ I've been shot!
- ☛ scary paper cut
- ☛ green hair
- ☛ troubled by these circumstances

**Serious Wounds** inflict a temporary 1-point Affliction.

Serious wounds can be pretty nasty. Someone can sabotage your luck, or set your nose permanently on fire, or turn you into a lizard, or stop the function of your will. Or they can fire a shotgun point-blank into your face. They can ruin your whole day, or for that matter, your whole life.

*However*, even if the effect would normally do so, even if it winds up *worded* to do so, a serious wound never takes away your control over your character and your character's miraculous actions. The Hubris Rule runs both ways!

That means that even if someone, say, stops the function of your will, you can overcome this effect with any miracle that has at least 1 point of Strike. You don't have to explain how you muster the will to accomplish this: the effect demonstrates and supports itself. Even if someone takes your senses from you and casts you into a timeless void, you can continue to participate in play, using a miracle with (again) at least 1 Strike; the divine fire of that Strike lights a path out from the void. You can even ignore a typical Serious Wound entirely if you sustain some sort of contrary or mitigating effect (with, of course, at least 1 Strike.) Doing so is totally normal and okay; even Deadly Wounds can be overcome and you're actively *expected* to fight off Serious Wounds.

When you heal the Serious Wound, the Affliction fades away. Again, with HG permission, you *can* keep it if you'd rather, and as per the rules above.

### ***Example Serious Wound Afflictions:***

- ☛ severed arm
- ☛ broken will

*A wind blew from the southwest, and on that wind came the Magister Ngoutha, and in his hand he held a sword, and the hilt of the sword was red. His face was calm and his eyes were closed as he descended upon the gevir. As it reared back its seven heads and hissed, he took off every head with a single stroke, then turned and left as quietly as he came. Why he came and why he killed, we do not know; save that the gevir came from beyond Creation, and could return there, and perhaps this offended that most honorable lord.*

—from the Thought-Record of Sa'adi Nirumand

☛ compelled to speak the truth

☛ wings

☛ poisoned with Greed

**Deadly Wounds** also inflict a temporary Affliction. Its strength ranges from 1-5, though a level 1 Deadly Wound is an unusual case; level 2 is typical when a lesser miracle inflicted the wound, and level 4 when a greater miracle was its origin. It's also common for a Deadly Wound to make a pre-existing Affliction more severe, either numerically or in effect, as when multiple such wounds derive from the same source.

Deadly Wounds are only marginally nastier than Serious Wounds. Bear in mind that an Avatar has two to four of them running by the time they're finally defeated, so if you play up the drama of a Deadly Wound too much, four of them will verge on slapstick.

What Deadly Wounds *are*, however, is much more difficult to overcome with the casual use of MP and Bonds. A Power can fight past the pain of a Serious Wound to protect even the weakest of their



*A Serious Wound*



*A Deadly Wound*

Bonds; to overcome and negate a Deadly Wound is much more likely to require a meaningful outlay of MP.

When you heal a Deadly Wound, the Affliction fades away. Again, with HG permission, you *can* keep it if you'd rather, and as per the rules above.

***Example Deadly Wound Afflictions:***

- ☛ body dissolving post-nuke
- ☛ banished into the spirit realm
- ☛ inducted into the ant colony
- ☛ incredibly lucky
- ☛ bisected
- ☛ falling into darkness

*It sounded like a pretty good deal. The terms tasted sweet. The pay felt magnetic. So I asked what the job was. He looked me in the eye. I want you to die, he explained very solemnly, so I don't have to.*

—from *Parables for our Modern Age*,  
by Jackie Robinson

*Abdalonimus achieved an enlightenment peculiar to himself, and preached truths that had no place in any other mind. For this reason, the men of his city drove swords into his stomach; but Abdalonimus accepted the swords as part of himself, and wept more when they withdrew than when they cut. The men of his city then cast him into a fire, but Abdalonimus accepted the fire as a part of himself, and thus could not be burned. Poison they tried, and suspending him from hooks, and crushing him with great stones; but the poison turned to wine within his mouth, and the hooks let him gently down, and the great stones rumbled and twisted and finally erupted to form four pillars that flanked Abdalonimus on every side.*

*They had no choice; the men of his city cast Abdalonimus off the edge of the world, into the void that lay beyond it. Surely, they reasoned, Abdalonimus could not make the void a part of himself; and if he did, how could he swallow all of it? Surely, they agreed, the strange truths of Abdalonimus would not return to the world.*

—from *Popular Theories on the Origin of the Excrucians*, by Kip Narekatski

**Defeat** is when you lose your last Health level and you don't have any left.

This is always a Normal Health level. When you lose your last Divine level, your Tough level heals instantly. When you lose your Tough level, your Normal levels heal instantly. It's not until that last Normal Health level fades that you are finally defeated.

When you're defeated, your character stops being an Avatar.

It doesn't matter in this regard what the actual effect is. Someone can use a miracle to give you cute cat ears. If it takes your last Normal Health level, you are defeated. You're done. Kaput.

That fundamental thing in your character that lets them define themselves is lost. They exist, but they are no longer themselves. They're dead, or unconscious, or under someone else's control, or just broken, made plastic, lost in a suddenly unconquerable world.

You don't have to keep playing them in this state. In fact you're *not allowed* to keep playing them. It's not your job any longer! It's the HG's. You lose the ability to take actions.

Once the immediate conflict ends, or at any suitable lull in play, talk to the HG about how to bring your character back into the game, or how to replace them with a new character if you can't. Some characters may return from the dead or reassert control despite being monstrously enchanted; other times, you may have to make a new Power.

If you *do* get to bring your character back into play, you control their actions again. That means that the malign influences that destroyed you only linger to the degree you decide they shall. It's reasonably common for the HG to propose some consequence that should or ought to remain, but that's the kind of thing you both have to agree on; playing out that consequence, after all, will be up to you.





*Defeat*



*The poison from a wood-witch sting is typically debilitating within 72 hours and fatal within a week; however, cheerful woodland creatures will cluster about you and help you with both your chores and finding love (until you die.)*

Wounds in general are defined to cover any effect on your Avatar that you, as a player, don't want.

They're *loosely* associated with the health levels that you lost.

When you lose your Tough level, and heal your Normal Health levels, for instance, you'll usually heal the specific wounds that were associated with those levels. The same applies when you lose your Divine Health levels and heal your Tough level back — you'll usually ditch the exact wound that was associated with your Tough level, if you'd lose it.

That said, if you get confused about this, it's OK to be confused, and just remove the wound or wounds most appropriate to remove.

Wounds, or at least wounds that miraculous creatures suffer, retain a certain miraculous quality. Your system struggles with them, keeping them from becoming absolute mundane truth, right up until you lose your last Health Level. Thus they are ongoing miraculous



effects, but nobody has to sustain them — they just linger on their own. For example, if somebody nukes you and you don't die, the wound isn't that you have some radiation scars — it's that you are *in the process of fighting off nuclear annihilation* until such a time as you have healed.

## Assessing Damage

Here's a chart that you can look at when trying to figure out how deadly your miracles are, and that the HG can look at when trying to decide how much damage a given miracle inflicts. Just remember that Powers will mitigate most effects — even ones that get through to them! If you use a Major Creation of Loyalty to enthrall a Power, they might cut the miracle with their magical sword. Even if your miracle proves stronger than the sword, the sword could still blunt enough of the effect to bring it down to Tough or even Normal damage, and then your target is in a solid tactical position to ignore it and strike back.

If an effect *isn't* mitigated, here's what raw damage looks like in these rules:

Attack Would	Typical Miracle Levels	Typical Mundane Weapons	Damage to Immortal Power	Damage to Durant Power	Damage to Undefended Power
Inflict pain on a human	0	Fist or foot	None	None	Annoyance (Bruises, Scratches)
Hurt a human	0-1	Knife or animal claw	None	Annoyance (Bruises, Scratches)	Surface wound
Seriously injure a human	2-3	Gun or monster claw	None	Surface wound	Serious wound
Probably kill a human	4-5	Semi-automatic weapons, fire	Annoyance (Bruises, Rashes)	Serious wound	Deadly wound
Kill and terribly mangle a human	6+	Tank shell, avalanche	Surface or Serious wound (borderline)	Deadly wound	Deadly wound
Massive overkill	7+	Nuclear explosion	Deadly wound	Deadly wound	Deadly wound

These are normative examples. Some miracles of a given level are deadlier than others, and the damage of most mundane weaponry is heavily dependent on circumstance.

*I close my eyes to the darkness that comes. I close my heart to the knowledge of despair. If I am the last thing, standing in an empty Creation with all the Dark Horsemen around me, I shall say, "You cannot kill me. Only the corrupt can die."*

—from the oath of Emeludt Poppo

## Non-Physical Damage

Against effects that try to *transform* or *enthrall* you, Elusive is the equivalent of Durant.

Against effects that try to *overwhelm* you, *drain* you, or *run you out of resources*, Immutable is the equivalent of Durant and Eternal is just as good as Immortal. (Immortal is still awesome.)

Otherwise, just use the resolution system normally!



*Turning into a frog discomfited Chamorin at first but, in the long run, proved invigorating to his previously moribund social life.*



# Healing Damage

It's up to the HG how fast your wounds heal, but the typical rate is given below:

Level of Resistance	Surface Wound Recovery	Serious Wound Recovery	Deadly Wound Recovery
Normal	1 day	1 week	1 month
Durant (or Immutable/Elusive as appropriate)	1 hour	1 day	1 week
Immortal (or Eternal as appropriate)	1 minute	1 hour	1 day
	Almost instant	Almost instant	Almost instant

Using an appropriate sort of active miracle to heal moves you one step down the chart. Using a very powerful miracle, at the HG's discretion, moves you two steps down the chart.

Always recover weaker health levels first — Normal before Tough, and Tough before Divine.

Always remove the quickest-healing wounds first, even if that means healing the “wrong” wound for the health level you recover. Among wounds equally quick to heal, you should usually heal the oldest wound, but the choice of wound to heal is up to you.

Characters recover from defeat — normally regaining some selection of their wound levels as they do so — at the HG's discretion.

*One day, I stubbed my toe. When I told Marilyn about it, she said she understood completely how that felt. I said, I'm so glad, and she smiled, and she cut the toe off. It was amazing; the pain was gone! So I was sure to tell her about it when I had a cold the very next week and my nose was running. What do you want me to do? she asked, and I said, I'm afraid that if I cut it off it will bleed. She said she completely understood, and she chopped my nose right off. It stopped running at once! But now I don't know what to do, because I have a headache, but I keep thinking, What if I need it for something later?*

—from *Parables for Our Modern Age*,  
by Jackie Robinson

*It hurts to become a god—hurts like stretching limbs too long asleep, like taking responsibility for shameful mistakes, like realizing you knew an answer your friends had been groping for in darkness all along. It's the pain of good things, the pain of liberation, the pain of opening the old wounds in yourself and letting the fresh air in.*

*It's like when you rip off a scab for the first time, and suddenly you're consumed by it, desperate to find more scabs you can rip open, and at the same time terrified by the blood.*

—from *Becoming Noble*, by Fayola Osiagobare

# Words of Command

When you spend 8 MP on a miracle, you also take a terrible wound — the raw miraculous energy that flows through you burns body and soul. This will take your highest health level, bypassing even an Immortal Power's defense, and it won't heal until both the story has ended and at least a month and a day have passed.

You get to define the Affliction associated with the wound. It's usually crippling but it can be beneficial; the only requirement is that it reflects and in some fashion fits with the miracle that you used. Even if

it's beneficial, however, note that you are substantially closer to death; you won't be able to get one of your Divine Health levels back for quite some time.

## Unobjectionable Effects

Not everything that *could* be an objectionable effect is.

For instance, your enemy glares daggers at you. You knock them aside. Then he turns you into a cat!

To this outcome many Powers would object. You, instead, say: "Cool! Now I'm a cat! Miao!"

Perhaps they are nonplussed and lose the initiative to your unexpected choice. Or perhaps they will be distressed; it may emerge, in play, that they *conceived* their miracle as hostile, as destroying the higher functions of your mind. You laugh at their silly notions. Cats are sinister intelligences; this the Internet has shown! Their player blinks, perplexed. Laboriously they explain — OOC — that it was nevertheless the *intention* behind their miracle to defang you, and that they would not have chosen it if they had not intended feliforming as an aggressive efficacious act.

At this point you have a choice.

You may retroactively take a health level in damage, burning that level to soak up the effect. You may work out with the HG some middling effect — perhaps it destroys your *mundane* mind, making your Skills temporarily inaccessible, but leaves your Passions and miraculous actions intact. (And this makes sense, of course, as mundane cats are not noted for their calculus or their conversation but the cats of the Mythic World are cunning, sly, and wise.) Or you may plead with your opponent to accept the vicissitudes of fate; and, succeeding, proceed as you would have, or failing, choose one of the earlier options above.

## Damage, Secrets and Lies

Characters may defend normally against divination effects — against people using miracles or even serious mundane investigation to learn their secrets. In a casual game, you can even specify your miraculous defense retroactively — that is, you can wait until someone is, e.g., interrogating your shadow to formally declare that you have bolstered

*She was laughing and splashing in the swarm of flies; and I dragged her out again, and there were flies in her hair and crawling insects in her eyes and her fingers were black and purple with their juice.*

*She held one up.*

*"Look, look," she said. It was one of the amethyst flies, cut straight from the gemstone, still twitching its filthy little limbs.*

*"Don't play in that," I said. "It's a swarm of flies."*

*"There's cool stuff everywhere," she said. "Everywhere and everywhere. I want to roll in it all until it's dripping from my skin."*

*I tried to figure out how to explain.*

*"You'll get infested with parasites and hostile microscopic life forms," I said.*

*Her eyes were round.*

*"It's gross!" I tried. "And ... and they're boring hostile microscopic life forms!"*

*Her face sank; she looked reformed; but guilt at the lie twisted in my heart. As horrid as that last stomach flu had been, with both ends bubbling, I'd rather enjoyed my last bout of syphilitic script-sneezing, and it had gotten me into Hollywood.*

— from *Everywhere and Everything to Love*,  
by Keiko Takemori

*The Duke protested that the matter was infamous and therefore impossible; his steward wondered how it was then that infamous deeds were ever done. This rendered the Duke speechless with confusion; he stammered, worked through the proof several times without insight, and finally settled on, "through the mysterious grace of God," an answer which left nobody any happier by the exchange.*

—from *The World Made Flesh*, by Emily Chen



your shadow's loyalty to you with miracles. If you enacted this defense during the current story, treat it as an action, spending MP, choosing an action level, and taking a wound if you used a Word of Command; if you enacted this defense in a previous story, treat your description of this defense as an entertaining anecdote you're offering to the HG in the hopes that it will affect the course of play.

In four cases, a character who fails to defend against a divination effect — so that it “should” discover accurate information about them — can take wounds to prevent such information from getting out:

- ☛ when the character has some way to know that they're being investigated;
- ☛ when the character has taken relevant precautions against specific information getting out;
- ☛ when the HG offers the player the opportunity to take a wound to guard their secret; *or*
- ☛ when the information in question is subjective enough, or rooted enough in Avatar background, that a player and not the HG is the canonical source for that information.

In each of these cases, the character may take a suitable wound — or potentially no wound at all, if they defeat the effect, don't object to the effect, or have used up the relevant Health levels — and describe what their opponent learns. The effect of the wound, if taken, is that the character must live as if the description given were so. Such a wound either represents a reflexive act of spiritual camouflage or a false face that your character has worn for quite some time.

For instance, someone conducts a cursory mundane investigation of your affairs. They might discover the love letters you wrote to an Anchor. You can't stop them — you're out beyond the Weirding Wall, politicking with Excrucians — but you as a player are the only one who knows how damning the letters actually are. So the HG asks, “Just what do they find? How bad is it?”

And you say, “It's not love. That's not love, there. There's just a pose to win that mortal's heart.”

And that becomes a Surface Wound, compelling you to act as if it were so. That doesn't mean it *is* so — just that you work hard to pretend. That something in your soul and your Estate is telling the world, “Of course that's just a pose.” Or, if you don't have any Normal Health levels left, you don't even have to worry about that; just note that you *would* have been wounded in that way, and then move on.

In a similar fashion, if someone reads your thoughts, you can declare that you're thinking nothing but a joyous paean to the universe; the cost is a wound that pushes you to behave as if that claim were so.

## Damage Immunity

It may be productive to have your allies enchant you with various effects — to fill up your Tough and Normal levels with awkward but overall beneficial conditions.

This after all gives you new Bonds and Afflictions to play with and keeps you from taking unpleasant serious and surface wounds.

This is something that the Nobilis *do*, in fact — in a weird way, the curses of friends can act as a kind of armor.

But it's not something they do very *often*, and it's not a perfectly effective defense.

So we're going to say that if you're immune to an effect because you don't have any wound levels low enough to take it — because you're out of Normal, or Normal and Tough, Health levels — the HG has the *option* of bumping a friend- or ally-given wound to make room for the new effect. It isn't something that will necessarily happen, but it could take place.

*Brendan Cormail authored Erato's the-  
nes' Dissent, arguing that "the desire to  
live is the foundation of all accomplish-  
ments." Many consider him one of the  
great philosophers of the Third Age, but  
society as a whole does not accept his argu-  
ments. Rather, the Nobilis presume that  
his beliefs are tainted by an overabun-  
dance of the aquatic essence in his soul.  
Therefore, Brendan Cormail is implicitly  
a philosopher to pariahs and the sage of a  
corrupted wisdom.*

—from *The Society of Flowers*, by Heather Williams



# The Simple Rites

**T**HERE'S A BUNCH of weird abilities that the Nobilis have. They don't really know exactly how they work themselves. Some of them are probably just rumors.

So I'm going to say that if the HG hears about something that the Nobilis can do, and wants to let your Avatars do it, that's fine. Or, heck, if there's something that they just think Powers ought to be able to do, that's fine. And in the meantime, they should let you do some variant on the various well-documented tricks below.

## The Servant's Rite

This one's totally weird but it shows up over and over again on the boards.

If a Noble really loves or hates you, they can put blood, sweat, or tears, or, well, you know, other stuff like that into a mortal's body in order to make them an Anchor (pg. 208-210). And then the mortal gets all enthusiastic about the Estate, like they're loyal to *it* even if they hate their Power's guts, and acquires something like the **Elusive** Gift against other Powers' actions.

**Tuning:** the HG can let you guide or possess an ordinary mortal Anchor without sustaining the action, if you love or hate them.

*For all my childhood, it haunted me. I hated it, but I had no way to fight it. It stalked me on spider's legs, its face a pale mask of skin stretched tight over bone. For twelve years, I slept only when my body could take alertness no longer, and even then the brush of fur against my arm would wake me shivering when a few hours passed.*

*Now, I am a Power, and I face it, and these are its words: "You should forgive me, master. It is I who made you strong."*

*Its words are just, and my actions must so be. "Open your mouth," I say, and break my skin, and let my fingers drip with blood.*

—from the Thought-Record of Jagmohan Ji

## Hiding in the Flowers

Nobilis can mess up divination on them by using flowers, Tarot cards, or other symbols.

Basically, they start with an Auctoritas — either the Auctoritas Magister (pg. 317-319) or the Auctoritas on some sort of controllable, invokable Affliction — and use mundane actions to ritually associate the symbol with it. Then when someone tries to divine what the Power did or is doing while under the influence of that Auctoritas, they have to beat the Auctoritas with their Strike *or* they just get a metaphorical face full of flowers.

**Tuning:** The HG can make divining past this effect impossible — even with Strike — or harder, or leave it as is but make the past an inherently non-miraculous country that is easily rewritten or concealed by illusion, or give Miraculous Edge to every miracle that protects you from divination. Or, conversely, waive most of this effect and make your every action vulnerable to exposure.

## Rite of the Last Trump

We know that Nobilis can shift their power around — drawing it from their miraculous devices, trading it between their body and their Estate, and shifting their mode or mood from Domain- to Persona-style effects. We're going to let them trade between Attributes at a rate of 3 for 1 as a reflexive action, or spend 1 MP of any type and a few hours in meditation in order to reassign the rest howsoever they like.

**Tuning:** The HG can change this to 2 for 1 to make Nobilis a bit more flexible in play.

## The Gift of Tongues

Powers speak flawless Russian. Not just Powers that would reasonably know Russian but random surfer dude Powers and





chunks of animated dirt who really have no reason to care. They speak flawless Russian as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

And Portuguese.

And Latin, and Urdu. Oh, and Layaklan. Almost *nobody* speaks Layaklan, not at the time of this writing, anyway<sup>†</sup>, but Powers do. They speak fluent Hong Kong pidgin. They read Martian hieroglyphics. They grok Navajo. French. LISP. Famously, they can speak the “twin language” of the Bowens. And that’s just what I have easily accessible references for from this *table*.

As far as I can tell they can speak, understand, read, and write every language flawlessly from the moment of Commencement, including every mortal language and the “True Tongue” of Heaven.

**Tuning:** It’s possible that they just learn the True Tongue of Heaven, and that removes the need to know any other language, even reading- and writing-wise. That’s really disturbing as a linguistic conceit, but it’s possible! Alternately you could dismiss the whole Gift of Tongues idea as an exaggeration based on the language-learning ability that Powers get for free with their Aspect — the only Power I *know* can speak every language in the world is also notionally perfect, so she’s not a typical case.

## Guising

Powers can adapt themselves to crazy hostile environments. They turn into fishes when they fall into the sea. They become weird space people when floating in weird space Chancels. They blur, distort, stretch, and become vast when visiting people’s dreams. They can hang out among bird-people and chow down casually on bird-people-food even when it’s wriggling.

I *think* this is actually mostly a combination of power, moxie, and the ability to feed off their Bonds. That said, there’s a couple of definites: even the weirdest inhuman Powers can wear a human Guise when they walk in the ordinary world, and every Power can shift their human features to fit in with the local population.

**Tuning:** You can let Powers customize this some, or even look a little different to everyone they see; you can have Guising cost 1 Persona MP; you can let Powers get a limited free adaptation to any environment at all, though be sure to let people know so they don’t spend character points on Immutable; you can let Powers adapt to fit in with the local population in a Chancel or an alien world.



<sup>†</sup> Sometimes I feel like if I don’t use qualifiers like this people reading this in like 2257 or something will point back at me and laugh.

11	28	7	20	3
9	12	25	8	
17	5	13		
10	18	1		
23	6	14	2	



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*Flowers are vital. They sing with the energies of Creation. Each cries to reality, "I am thus! I am this! I am what I am!" The cherry blossom shouts, **Spiritual Beauty**. The trumpet-flower bugles, **Fame**. They stun me. I never saw this in them... I was so blind.*

*But now I am dead.*

*Now I can see.*

*They come and lay them on my grave. The song of each flower seeps down, like roots, and digs into my soul. Each flower my beloved husband sets upon my grave steals a little bit more of my self. Each bloom my daughter leaves behind tears me apart a little further at the seams. Soon, I will be gone. There will be no soul left within my embalmed flesh. Just the songs of rotted flowers.*

—from 36, by Rannen Yedidyah

## Tracing a Miracle

Powers do *something* to narrow in on people using miracles to hurt them from a long way away. They find the Excrucian or Power or Imperator that was hurting them, and either fight back from afar or hunt their attacker down.

We're going to say that this is just something you can do with the Sight — that if you have the Sight on, it's always *possible* to find someone affecting your location from far away. They can hide, forcing you to use miracles to find them and their link, but they can't ever come up with a trick that makes locating them genuinely impossible.

**Tuning:** You can make this automatic, immediately telling any Power who performed any miracle they witnessed, and, if it was performed through a mystic link, what that link might be.

## The Nettle Rite

As the Excrucians know, breaking the world is a source of power. The Nobilis are legendary for going out of their way to mess one another up, as a way of counting coup and most importantly as a substitute for no-holds-barred battle.

If you use a Bond or Affliction to get someone into trouble, force someone into breaking a Bond or break it for them, or break one of their Afflictions, you can get MP.

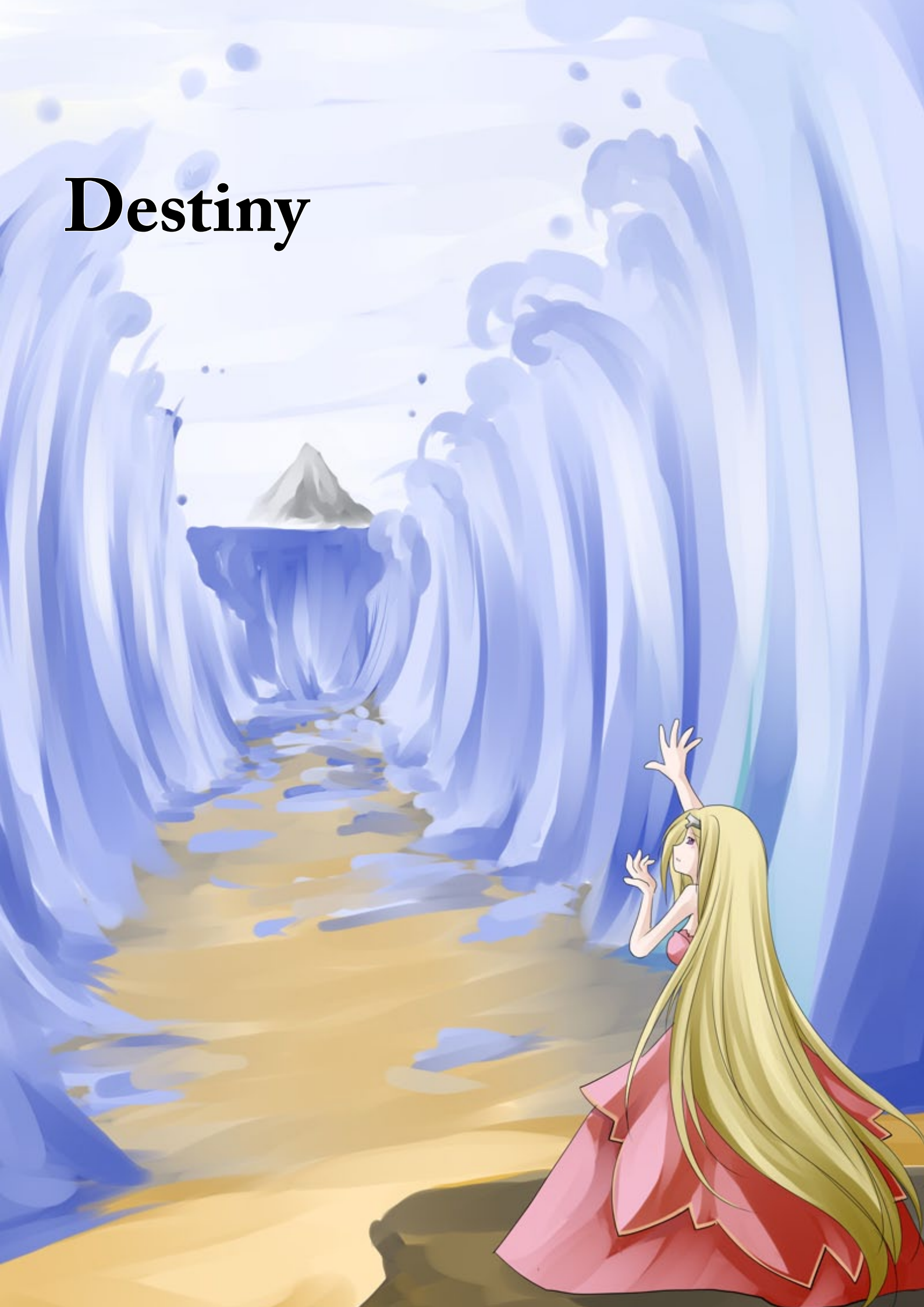
Crush a handful of nettles<sup>†</sup>. Let them fall. Capture the pain of their broken or troublesome Bond or Affliction with a force of will and you'll get the same number of MP they do!

<sup>†</sup> **ProTip:** wear gloves!





# Destiny



OVER THE COURSE of each story the characters may earn **Destiny**.

It comes from opposition — from uncomfortable, unwanted truths and opinions. It comes always from the direction of greatest fear, greatest struggle, greatest strife. Destiny lies in the impossible and the unwanted things.

Destiny is what changes you. It lives in the things that change you. To live without challenge is to no longer grow.

## Projects

A “Project” is a story. It is told again each time the Power earns or spends Destiny for it.

Sometimes the story is written into the Project.

Sometimes it is told the same way each time. Sometimes it is wildly different. But it is always a story.

It is something like:

- ☛ *how I labored to save the souls that burn in Hell;*
- ☛ *how I moved the heart of Lexiarchos Caducine to love;*
- ☛ *how I grew from Pawn to Baroness of my Estate; or*
- ☛ *how I built a zoo of the rarest creatures from all Creation, and the Lands Beyond.*

A Project is built as Imperators are built — one circle in the center to hold the story’s name and meaning. Other circles around it, to hold the ideas of other players, the HG, and new twists on the story that evolve in play. It’s up to the HG how much to emulate the formal Imperator-creation process and how much to just borrow an Imperator-style design.

Not everything is a Project.

Something becomes a Project when you want it to change your character’s story, or to be a story that someone will tell of your character long after they are gone. Something becomes a Project when it is your desire with it to construct a myth — to build one with the force of Destiny, acting as your Avatar or as the movement of their destiny within them. Something becomes a Project when it’s impossible, or at least unlikely, something impressive and scary even for a Power in this world.

Projects can pool the efforts of many characters, but every Project has one character *most* responsible for it — one character who can make the final decision over in which direction the Project moves.

*“I have a story,” he said. “I will trade it for my life.”*

*“Don’t like stories.”*

*“It’s got lots of crunching bones and tasty flesh in it.”*

*“So do you.”*

*“Please,” he said. “Kill me, then. But hear it first. So it doesn’t die.”*

—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood



## Revelation

A revelation changes the meaning of what the characters are doing. It adds risk, or quandary, or simply scope. For the Projects mentioned above, it might be something like:

- ☛ the suffering of the souls in Hell is the food for the Ash;
- ☛ Lexiarchos Caducine was a human once;
- ☛ the last Power to master an Estate like yours went mad;
- ☛ caged in the zoo you find an unconscious copy of yourself.

When the HG unveils a shocking truth like this about the Project — something with the potential to change everything — the Project earns **10 Destiny** and each heavily involved Avatar earns 0-5 MP.

This revelation is a surprise and a difficulty but it is also Destiny, or, put another way, a force of change. It is a moving-forward.

The HG writes something reflecting the revelation, and a number (10) in one of the Project circles. This moves the Project — arguably — towards success.

## Failure

The characters struggle. They hope to achieve some victory. But they are balked; and when they are balked, when they fail after a worthy struggle, the Project earns **5 Destiny** and each heavily involved Avatar earns 0-3 MP.

The players write something reflecting that failure, and a number (5) in one of the Project circles.

For the Projects mentioned above, it might be something like:

- ☛ failed to sway Lucifer to our cause;
- ☛ failed to show Lexiarchos Caducine the beauty of creation;
- ☛ failed to bind the great spirits of my Estate;
- ☛ failed to capture an Actual for the zoo.

This too is a moving-forward; for in every reversal is the seed of a success.

*When Marsaili came to Deorsa Magnus, she killed every person therein, but this did not suffice. She ground the buildings into dust, but this did not suffice. She polluted the harvest with traitor's blood, but this did not suffice. She did not stop until a crater withered where once a lush city grew.*

—from *Goblins Run the Internet*,  
by Keiko Takemori

## Victory

The characters struggle, and win; and by winning they earn the right to say something about the Project.

It's not the victory itself that earns Destiny.

It's the power that that victory gives you to say, or prove, or define something about the Project. It's when you can say that part of the Project was —

- ♪ swayed Lucifer to our cause;
- ♪ showed Lexiarchos the beauty of Creation;
- ♪ humbled and bound the great spirits of my Estate;
- ♪ captured an Actual for the zoo





— that you give a bit more shape to what it *is*. The Project gains **3 Destiny** and every Avatar closely involved with it gains 0-1 MP.

Write what you've learned about the Project, and a number (3) in one of the Project circles.

## Trivial Victory or Failure

When you have a serious plan for moving forward on a Project, but the HG doesn't want to play it out, the HG can award the Project **2 Destiny** instead. The HG writes something to represent that automatic failure or success, and the number (2), in one of the Project circles, e.g.

- ☛ you can't just ask Hell to let them go (2)
- ☛ chocolate does not win her heart (2)
- ☛ practicing Domain miracles is helpful but not sufficient (2) *or*
- ☛ fine, your zoo has an elephant (2)

## Moving Projects Forward

When one of the circles in a Project holds 15 Destiny, the Power responsible for that Project can move it forward.

They invoke the weight of Destiny in that Project as if it were an Imperial miracle.

The Power cites their heart and the story of the Project. They speak of the meanings and happenings of the thing. They tell of their labors and the revelations. They say what has *happened*, and then they say one more thing.

It is, by rule, ambiguous. You have to leave wiggle room for the HG. You can't say that you win, or that things go down a certain way. Like Imperial miracles, Destiny leaves the world more than a little space for interpretation.

But the thing that happens is something that matters. It says something real. Like:

- ☛ and as the elixir runs across the flames of Hell, the blood-soaked fire begins to burn clear, and blue, and brilliant with hope.
- ☛ that night, Lexiarchos Caducine dreams of me; fervent, transformative dreams.

*Jacotte Berthomieu woke up on Friday morning without a face.*

*She did not frown, for she had no mouth. She did not speak, for she had no voice. Nor did she look around, for she had no eyes.*

*She could, however, see—for the fire of life burned brightly in her. It cast a clear unwavering light over the room, stark and hot, that her mind could see with; and she saw the gremlin in its corner. Her face hung in its claws like a rubber mask.*

*It looked up. Twice. "You can't have me back," the face said. "You don't have the power to fight for me. And you don't have anything valuable enough to buy me with."*

*Jacotte reached inside her and scooped out the fire of her life, and proffered it to the gremlin like a waiter unveiling a meal.*

*"That might be enough," Jacotte's face concurred, "But what good is a face without a life?"*

*Jacotte did not answer, for she could not speak. She only held the life burning in her hands.*

—from *Berthomieu Manor*, by Keiko Takemori

- ☛ for the first time, as I stand there before the Errant Gates, my movement and the movements of my Estate become as one; and we are, for just a moment, a thing unstoppable, immeasurable, and unimaginably vast.
- ☛ I come back from my hunt, laughing in glee, and behind me is a Thing — capitalized Thing — the likes of which you can barely imagine, even staring it in the eye. It is laden with meaning. It is impossible. It is, my dears, and for my zoo, a *prize*.

As ambiguous as you have to leave it, still, it moves the world.

Place a mark in that Project circle — we'll call this a "stone," like a pebble falling into a lake.

The stone means *movement*, or *change*, or *I will accomplish*. Connect that mark to a new circle.

Write a phrase in that new circle — enough to remember what was going on in the game, or through your mind, when you spoke Destiny into the world. If there was more than 15 Destiny in the old circle, move the leftover Destiny to the new phrase.

And change will begin.

It may not be clear what you have done. It oughtn't be, perhaps. But nothing in the world — not Hell, not Heaven, not even the Excrucians or the Ash, can face that force of Destiny and choose to be unmoved. Faced by the force of Destiny, they must wrestle with it, bend to it either as a willow or a serf, allow it to shape them, allow there to be a movement towards appropriate ends. It may take more than one effort to win the final prize.

It is the power of earned Destiny to compel movement, not victory; it ends one chapter of a Project and begins another, it causes the world to bend but not to break, it guarantees a tangible step closer but does not seek to end the story all at once. For a thing that is worth spending Destiny to achieve is often worth spending a whole game working at.

Still, let movement be movement: not even the greatest challenges ought to be more than 8 steps away. That is 7 circles, and many sessions, to learn the weight of a thing and strive to define its meaning before it becomes truth.

Using Destiny in this fashion "finishes" the old circle; remove the numbers for any Destiny in it. You should probably avoid dealing with that circle again. Its place in the story of the Project is complete.

The Avatar responsible for a Project may let another involved Avatar speak Destiny, and move the Project forward, if the players like.

*The Keep of Lady Mugain floats serenely above the ocean on a stone as sharp as a razor's edge. For many years, she thought herself safe from intrusion; then a Power swam out through the eel-infested waters and yoked himself to an even hundred flying fish. When the Lady grew hungry, she whispered to the waters; and impelled by her will, the fish leapt into the sky; and the Power landed neatly at her Chancel's edge, nary the worse for wear. This he did not for power nor for gain, but because it is said that Mugain is more beautiful than the sun.*

—from *Legends of the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis



# Personal Destiny

Characters may earn Destiny for themselves — not bound to any Project, but rather usable at any point to push a Project forward. You can spend personal Destiny to add to whatever Destiny is already in a Project circle to reach a total of 15.

You can use your Avatar's Destiny to move any Project forward, or to advance personal Projects that are too bland or solitary to be a major focus in the game. You earn it by facing difficult things, and change.

## Change

The world speaks to you, and you must change. The old way of being is gone away. You are made new by the thing you hear, or see, or become.

- ☛ you have a child.
- ☛ you fall in love.
- ☛ you become an Excrucian agent.
- ☛ you release an ancient grief.
- ☛ you change your loyalty to Heaven.
- ☛ you give up your humanity.

Often this is the work of an Imperial miracle. The weight of it falls on you and you realize that you must change everything. Other times it's as simple as listening to someone, or making a choice.

*When you face such a change, tell the HG.*

*They will frame for you a couple of the key questions this raises — “How does [some element of who you are] fit into your new life?”*

Answering those questions brings you **10 Destiny** and 0-5 MP.

*It took no more than an instant. A single event: a single moment: when eyes met for the first time across a crowded court. In that glance, Jamelle Goodwin understood the most important thing in her life: that the Angel Hukkok was her enemy. That understanding changed everything.*

—from *Legends of the Nobilis*, by Luc Ginneis

## Struggle

*It is best to make lemonade of what lemons life gives you. Pain teaches, poverty enlightens, and once the zombies have been spun, scoured, and carded, weaving them into delightful cardigans is not difficult at all.*

— from *The Sayings of Marchessa Myriam Brébeuf*,  
compiled by Godelieve Bonnefroy

The world speaks to you. It presents you with a difficulty. It *tasks* you.

It is a problem.

It is a problem, a problem the HG either proposes as or agrees is something you must struggle with. It's not a *practical* difficulty, it's not an obstacle. It's a moral or philosophical problem unto you.

It's something that's *wrong*. That you know is wrong. That you know can't be so, that you can't or won't or shouldn't just accept. Something that you'd have to change, somehow, to accept.

But something you can't just let go of either. It's something you accept at least to the point of overtly wrestling with it over the course of multiple scenes, until you can finally express a way of living with it.

***When you find such a problem, tell the HG.***

***Then spend time testing it — pushing against the limits on both sides, using Noble resources to prove or disprove the rightness or wrongness of a thing, debating the matter with others, talking about it, or at minimum carrying the problem with you in an obvious and overt way — until you find a way to change or cope.***

For instance, uncertain whether something is reasonable for your Estate or your morality, test it against the Properties of the same. Try to force a contradiction; try to force a consanguinity. Face and challenge the burden of life as few save the Powers can.

When you've found a solution, or at least a way to cope, you earn **5 Destiny** and 0-3 MP.

## Futile Struggle

If you never find an answer, but you spend a reasonable amount of time wrestling with it, you'll earn **3 Destiny** at the end of the story.

You can pick the issue up again next story.

## Denial

If you acknowledge the question as meaningful and troublesome, but decide not to deal with it, you get an immediate **2 Destiny** and the problem goes away. It may come back, but if it does so, it does so as a

*"I shall tell you the mystery of Chenevix Wood," said Andrea's father. "In the end, pursuing that mystery will kill you, as it will kill me; as it killed all of our family before us."*

*"Wait," Andrea interrupted. "Why pursue it, then? Why not leave it lie?"*

*"Because we are Mathesons," said Andrea's father. "This is what Mathesons do."*

*"And yet we never solve the mystery?"*

*"I believe that many of our ancestors came close—but they shied away. They chose to die, instead, and pass on their burden. Andrea," he said, his voice deepening with truth, "I do not condone this cowardice, but I understand it. Better to quest and die than to lose your purpose and live."*

—from *Unseemly Tales*, by Eleanor K.



new problem, a different problem, with a subtly different face. We can never step twice into the same river, after all.

## Rejected Struggle

If you try to wrestle with something, but after a bit you decide that it isn't actually a problem for you, you gain no Destiny at all. That's not a punishment, and you shouldn't hesitate to dismiss possible struggles out of hand if they're not actual problems for your character. Sometimes what the HG thinks will challenge you just doesn't, and you're better off letting them know that than trying to squeeze Destiny out of the chance. Sometimes even things *you* thought would challenge you, things you brought into the game to wrestle with, fall flat.

That's okay.

Not everything that looks like an opportunity to change and grow *is* such an opportunity, after all. If this one isn't, then it's not!

## Struggle and Imperial Miracles

The burden of an Imperial miracle spoken against you is often a very tangible form of struggle. It drives you to expiate the will embodied in its words. But how are you going to survive as yourself while doing so?

Rejecting an imperial miracle is basically calling the whole thing invalid — saying that you're not its real target, or that it's demanding something you've already done. Denying it tends to cost you health levels. Failing the struggle with it — which is *like* denial but involves grappling with the effects for a while first — can save you serious harm, as long as you explicitly shelve the issue rather than rejecting or denying it.

## Training

A Power may use a Project to gain an additional Trait — wings, additional Trait levels, immortality, or awesome unique Gifts. This usually takes between 15 and 75 Destiny, and the Power won't know immediately that they've succeeded — it takes exploration, experimentation, and labor to determine that you have in fact changed yourself enough to add something new to your character sheet. There's no strict conversion between Character Points and Destiny, save that the HG should be as generous as possible and make sure that characters have a chance to see the fruits of their labor; we're proposing the 75-Destiny upper limit, even for high-Character-Point-cost Traits

*We do not know Cneph the Maker's motives. He might mean us the most terrible of harm. We do not serve him because we know. We do not serve him because we believe. We serve him because we can.*

—attributed to Hazael, Angel of Disorder,  
Insanity, and Time

*Two ruled the city of Adalais. Two fought for its destiny. A Queen sat on its throne and sought to guide it with wisdom and virtue. A Nihilist held court in its alleys and sought to bring the city down. The two, in their opposition, held taut the strands of the city's fate.*

—from *The Fall of Adalais*, author unknown

like Immortality, because one revelation, one major life change, four serious moral dilemmas, four failures, and five victories is a long time to work on self-improvement before seeing the result.

A Power may also use a Project to change their existing Traits. The player and the HG must both agree, and you shouldn't do this very often, but it's possible to lose, reallocate, or redesign your Traits over the course of a Project — and not just as part of moving a Project forward, but potentially even as the unexpected fruit of an appropriate revelation, change, victory/failure, or struggle.

## Changing the Heart

A Power may draw a Project for themselves, or their Estate, or borrow the character sheet for their Emperor. This is something that may be changed through the work of Destiny.

They speak new stories there. They act into the heart of their Emperor, or the nature of their Estate, or the weaknesses within themselves. And change becomes.

*This text is only the beginning. Its words do not define the game of Nobilis. They are the threads of the tapestry of fate, not the pattern. They are the binding, the pages, the fonts, and the ink of the book of the world.*

*You who shall write the stories in that book, begin.*



# At the Shore

**U**NDER THE CLIFFS, near the rotted logs, at the edge between sand and water, something impossible happens. A man appears, standing, on top of the sea. His face is impossibly pure. His eyes are closed. Nevertheless he looks at me.

"I wish to make you afraid," he says. His hand closes. Trenches and pits gape open in the sand. The beach beneath me shakes and settles.

The scent of the sea vanishes. The waves crash against the shore, but their sound dies out.

I want to run. I don't dare. I want to tell him that I'm just an ordinary person.

"I wish you to understand that we can bring pain to you any time we please."

My tongue dissolves. Blood flows into my throat.

"If I have time, I will kill you."

Then something changes.

A miracle sweeps across me like rushing water and I fall to my knees. For a moment, I can sense nothing else; apprehend nothing else; think of nothing else. I can only feel the tides of change wash through my soul.

I could not have understood the wonder of it before this moment. It makes the joys and sorrows of my life seem transparent and hollow. It rings louder than any bell and burns brighter than the sun. It is as beautiful as the sea, and far more greedy.

My hands come down on sand, tar, and seashells. My mind flashes back and forth, one moment contemplating the prodigy that moves within me, one moment struggling away. I fear that it could swallow me, pull me in like the undertow, turn me inside out and leave me caught within the miracle for the rest of my life.

Then it rises and touches the last remnants of my unchanged self.



My body is sick, vomiting out seawater. There are pieces of kelp in it. The man walks towards it, and now he holds a gun in his hand. I have no idea why he needs it. I think that I would like to live, but I find it hard to focus.

All across the world, people talk. Cars honk. Things make noise, cast their vibrations in the air. I cannot hear them, but I know them. I know each and every one of them as it rises and falls. I know the roar of the sea and the lapping waters of every lake.

My arms are too weak to hold me up. My toes are cold. I have a headache.

I do not need my arms or my toes or my head. I need only look within my soul and I have endless bodies. I can ride on the thunder and dance on the strains of a fugue. Every wave that washes across this world is mine; and the miracle does not end there. They are *me*.

I cherish that for a moment. I have become — I have no name for it. I have become the essence and pith and spirit of the wave. I can imagine no greater domain; I should not prefer to rule Time, or Love, or the cosmos itself. Every wave that washes across this world is mine.

The gun fires.

I live for a moment on the notes of a young man's flute, each a unique vibration of its own. Behind those notes, I begin to hear a deeper music.

I marvel. All these years, the universe has sung out its secrets and its truths to me, and I simply failed to listen. I do not try to claim this music; it transcends what I have become. I only open up my spirit and hear.

Five strains, in harmony and dissonance. From the sky rains down the truth of Heaven. I hear the angels sing of justice and of beauty. Their song has no answer to a bullet, nor does it desire one. "You must have the strength to find your own answer to this," it says, "for if you cannot create justice in the world, what worth have you?"

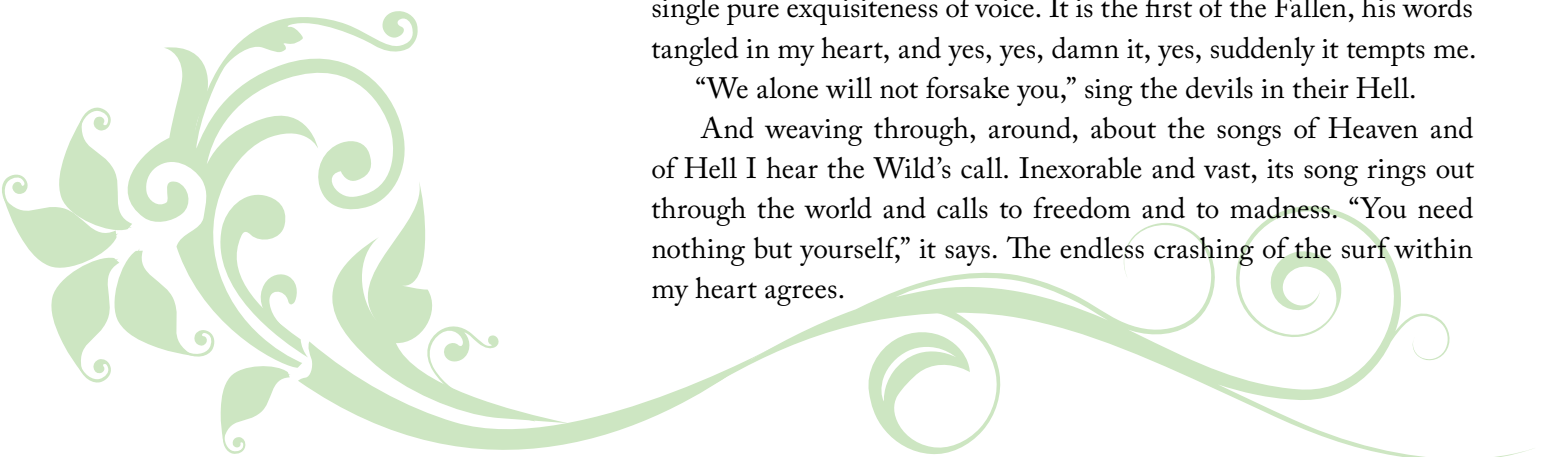
And quietly in my heart, from the smallest pieces of myself, I hear the song of Hell arise; and it promises me the flames, and the embrace of suffering, and an endlessness of torment, and I think:

"Is this to tempt me?"

But then there is entwining with the screaming and the flames a single pure exquisiteness of voice. It is the first of the Fallen, his words tangled in my heart, and yes, yes, damn it, yes, suddenly it tempts me.

"We alone will not forsake you," sing the devils in their Hell.

And weaving through, around, about the songs of Heaven and of Hell I hear the Wild's call. Inexorable and vast, its song rings out through the world and calls to freedom and to madness. "You need nothing but yourself," it says. The endless crashing of the surf within my heart agrees.





Two strains rise from the humans around me: one light and one dark, one preaching the salvation of humanity and another calling it to suicide. I ignore them. I have found my truth.

The bullet hits my head.

For a moment, I feel a blinding pain. Then the surf rises up and swallows it. I pull myself to my feet.

"What are you?" I ask him. He fires again; this time, I move, rolling gently out of the way. "What am I?"

"I stand outside the things of the world," he says. "I am Omega: the termination of your existence. Of everything's existence. I need only reach out my hand, and it is so."

A wave crests, rising to pound against the beach. It dissolves in an instant into still water. I feel its death viscerally, horribly, with a flutter in my stomach. The wave after that dies, and the next, like falling dominoes. The sea twists, uncomfortably, writhing against the limits of his reach.

"I wish you to know this in the marrow of your bones. I wish you to understand that you cannot oppose us. For this reason, I come, and bring you pain."

For a long moment I believe him.

"I have a tongue again," I say, "and your bullet did not kill."

His eyes open, black like night. A star falls through them. "It is strange," he says, "how humans need but a taste of power to grow arrogant. You walk in a world of things greater than you can imagine, and you speak defiance."

I nod.

He puts away his gun. "You have many things that you love," he says. "Remember, when it comes time to face us, that they are not immortal."

I think of all the things I love. They call to me, though softer than the waves. I submerge that love, drown it in my heart, and still it bobs to the surface: friends, family, my homeland, and my art.

"I will do what I must," I assure him. I do not know, quite, what that is, only that threats cannot deter me.

His expression sours, and he departs.

I look out again at the ocean. A film lifts from my eyes, or falls over it; I cannot say which. I see the great and mighty spirits of the waters, and the bright truths within the seagulls' hearts. I hear the senseless mumblings of the endless grains of sand, and I see each wave's exalted face as it breaks against the shore.

I reach out and capture one, a young and brilliant wave formed seconds ago by the patterns of the sea. I hold it in my hand, and the little wave stills, waiting for my wish.

I tell it, realizing as I speak that this is the most wonderful thing imaginable, "I know your *name*."

*And past, and past, and beyond the wardrobe's back, a gallery of things and endless halls, and the clinking of glass and the swirling of dancers, and faceless creatures wearing masks, and walking bears, and elves, and the merrows from the sea; and all through the great long echoing halls there blew the wind, and above everything there arched the mountains, the forests, and the sun.*

*"Why," said Susan, "what is this? What is this, I have stumbled on?"*

*And they turned to her, on her debutante day, and they dragged her off, to live among the fashionable strangers.*

—from *The Wardrobe*, by Emily Chen



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**Art Credits, CQ** (with post-production changes): “Mud Falls” (pg. 12), “The Cityback” (pg. 35), “Agricord” (pg.



37), “Krypton” (pg. 38), “The Ombudsmen of Ananda” (pg. 39), “Brontagora” (pg. 40), “Tetrimmenos” (pg. 41), “The Evil World” (pg. 44)

**Art Credits**, 葛红: “Harkány Ordina” (pg. 230), “Stheno” (pg. 238)

**Art Credits**, Heed: “Your Chancel, Revisited” (pg. 243), “Chibi-Zu” (pg. 296)

**Art Credits**, 陳昶辰: “Augusta Valentina” (pg. 16), “Lord Chibi-Entropy” (pg. 18), “43<sup>rd</sup> Street” (pg. 71), “The Light Makes Gardens in Empty Places” (pg. 87), “Dark Magister among Inhuman Things” (pg. 88), “Light Magister” (pg. 89), “Chibi-Light Magister” (pg. 90), “The Path of a Dark Magister” (pg. 91), “Where the Light sets up its Temples” (pg. 91), “I am the Light; or, I am the Dark” (pg. 92), “Dark Chibi-Magister” (pg. 93), “Tumbleoak” (pg. 96), “Anacaona’s Mistake” (pg. 99), “Female Noble and Chibis” (pg. 177), “Superstes Annabelle Zupay” (pg. 229), “Ms. Atsuko Ikada” (pg. 231), “The Chancel of Ebrôt Appêkâ” (pg. 246), “Always With You [foreground]” (pg. 250), “The Truth of the Name” (pg. 279), “Miraculous Action” (pg. 302), “The Chancel-Finding Rite” (pg. 338), “To Move the World” (pg. 341), “Meditation” (pg. 344)

**Art Credits**, Oliver Vulliamy: “St. Angela of the Flail” (pg. 163); page backgrounds and decorations

**Art Credits**, Snow: Devil Sheet (as seen on pg. 250), True Gods Sheet (as seen on pg. 254), Emperor/Project Sheet (pg. 368)

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**Art Credits,** 鍾孟舜: “7 Gods” (ppg. 24-25)





# NOBILIS

## CHARACTER SHEET

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

KEY #1

ESTATES

KEY #2

LEVEL

MIRACLE POINTS

ESTATE PROPERTIES

ASPECT ○○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○

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DOMAIN ○○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○

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PERSONA ○○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○

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TREASURE ○○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○

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PASSIONS, SKILLS AND SUPERIOR ATTRIBUTES

BONDS AND AFFLICTIONS

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GIFTS

MIRACLE LEVEL

ATTRIBUTE

INVOCATION

AREA

FLEXIBILITY

COMMON

FINAL COSTV

WOUNDS

WOUND LEVELS

DESTINY

DEADLY

--	--

SERIOUS

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SURFACE

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PERMISSION IS GRANTED TO REPRODUCE FOR PERSONAL USE

# NOBILIS

DOMAIN MIRACLE DIFFICULTY CHART

0 ESTATE DRIVEN DIVINATIONS

1 GHOST MIRACLES

2 LESSER DIVINATIONS

CONVERSATION

3 LESSER PRESERVATION

LESSER CREATION, SUMMONING OR ANIMATION

4

5 LESSER DESTRUCTION

GREATER DIVINATION

6 LESSER MOTION

GREATER PRESERVATION

7 GREATER CREATION, SUMMONING OR ANIMATION

8 GREATER DESTRUCTION

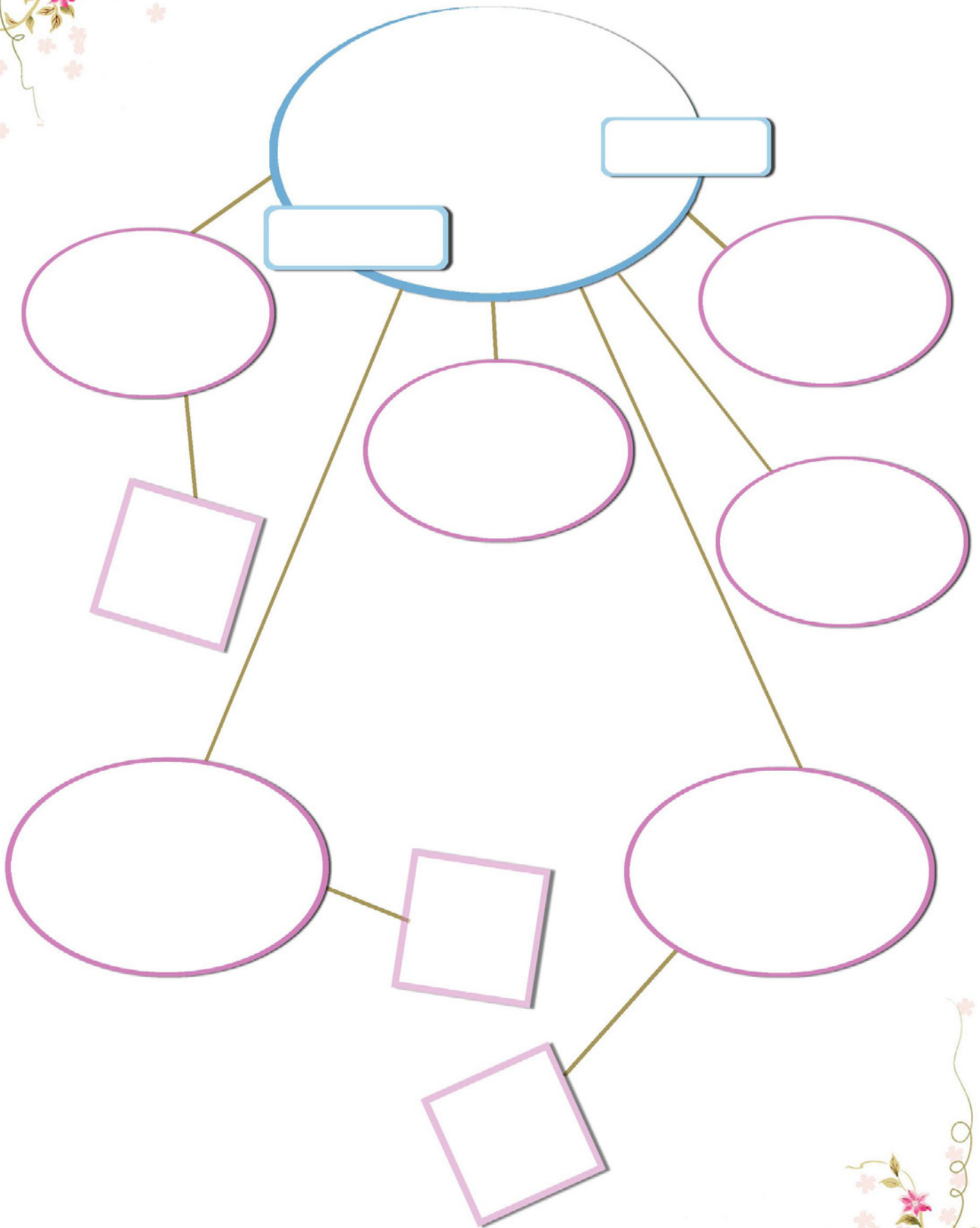
9 GREATER MOTION



# Nobilis

PERSONA MIRACLE DIFFICULTY CHART

0	THE SIGHT
	BLESSING
1	CURSE
2	LESSER INCARNATION
3	LESSER EMULATION
	LESSER ENCHANTMENT
4	
5	LESSER SACRIFICE
	GREATER INCARNATION
6	LESSER BINDING
	GREATER EMULATION
7	GREATER ENCHANTMENT
8	GREATER SACRIFICE
9	GREATER BINDING





There is a hidden world of  
spirit that surrounds us.

Within that world  
dwell the Nobilis.

They are creatures half-human and  
half-god. Each holds dominion  
over a single concept in the world.

You have heard the stories  
and rumors of the Nobilis.

You have heard of the fates of  
those who encounter them.

Herein you will find a guide  
to dealing with these Powers  
and their attendant spirits.

Herein you will find the  
third edition of the Nobilis  
RPG — a diceless roleplaying  
game, completely updated and  
rewritten for modern sensibilities,  
that you may use to tell new  
stories of the Nobilis' lives.

私達の周りには目に見えない精霊の世界が広がっている。  
その世界に「ノビリス」は存在している。  
彼らは半神半人。この世に存在する全ての事象ひとつひとつに宿る精霊である。  
あなたも「ノビリス」の話を聞いたことがあるだろう。  
彼らに遭遇した者達の運命のことも・・・  
この書は、「ノビリス」という「力」とその眷属に対峙する道標を与えるだろう。  
ダイス無しでプレイ可能な「ノビリス」RPGの第3版。大幅なアップデートと改筆を加え、新たな物語を紡ぐ！



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