

Adventures in memory, attachment, and riding the uncanny rails

A game for 3-4 players (plus optional GM)

Version 1.01









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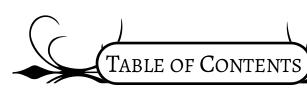
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Cerebos, The Crystal City is a tragicomic roleplaying game about exploration and self-actualization. It's also about riding the rails, visiting improbable cities, and experiencing uncommon vistas. It's about homesickness and lumpy beds and brand new stew and finding a satisfying coda for the broken song in your heart.

Cerebos is farther from the City by the Sea than the maps say. No roads lead there. Not from the sea. It is across the desert, past the common delights of glass and spice. In the City by the Sea, aged mothers by their hearths quarrel with the horn-knuckled fisherfolk on many particulars. In this they agree: there is no stopping those who search for Cerebos. They are pilgrims on an alchemical timetable. Only by testing themselves in the world's crucible can these desperate travelers transform their memories into something greater.

Each traveler carries physical touchstones, fleeting moments trapped within shards of eternity. Who pities the youth bound by the scent of an undying gardenia? What of the stranger chained to a pocketwatch promise? We can only watch as they drift further from humanity and disappear into the past. They travel in the only direction they're able: toward Cerebos, the Crystal City.

The journey begins at a railway terminus in the middle of the desert. The travelers are headed to the Crystal City, where they learn the truth about what drives them. Along the way, they experience flashbacks, overcome unexpected events, and disembark from the train to encounter surreal stops.

Over their journeys, the travelers confront their connections to the past. They learn who they were and who they wish to be.



The concept of "strange lands" (like that of "home ground") has some holes in it, presents new questions. Are "strange lands" an objective geographic reality, or a mental construct in constant flux?

Robert Bolaño, "Exiles"

Every journey to Cerebos takes a different route, but the underlying structure is similar. There is a desert. There are travelers. They may or may not get along. There is a train. The story ties these elements together, while the rules of the game drive the story. They promote change and provide a fate to challenge. And just as a train demands rails, a story demands a summary.

1. SETUP.

Determine who you are and where you've been. These steps can happen before the session begins. If you're planning an Adventure! or a Musical Journey Through Space, pre-planning helps prepare for the conductor's particular quirks.

- a. Determine if you're playing with a gamemaster (GM). The GM is the story's engineer: a player without a traveler of their own, who keeps the narrative going without railroading the other players.
- b. Select a conductor (p. 19). Discuss the story's scale, tone, and weirdness. Be sure to discuss goals and situations you want to include *and* avoid.
- Each player selects three touchstones for their character. Each of these objects begins with a single rank 1 Trait (p. 27). (e.g. Failed Novelist, Feared by Children, Military Surgeon)
- d. Name your character. This name is a temporary convenience that may change along with you. Many travelers prefer descriptions like the Duke of Maps, the nervous woman, or the Umbrella Dowager. Maybe another traveler selects one for you.
- e. All players receive a secret goal (p. 28) the reason their traveler left the City by the Sea from the player to their right. Display the goal on a folded piece of paper so all players except for the player whose traveler it describes can read it.
- f. Work with your group or ask the GM to create an Almanac and an Atlas (p. 50).

2. THE FIRST LEG.

The travelers meet at a train station after crossing an interminable desert. This phase ends after any traveler has three flashbacks. Reality is fluid here.

- Introduce your character and set the scene. Each player decides one or more set of details. Divide them up as evenly as possible.
 - What are the train and the station like? The Azure Line, the Zodiac Express 108, and the Desolation Line all serve different clientele and have different amenities.
 - ii. Which of the travelers have a chance encounter at the station? How does it start?
 - iii. Is there a price to ride? Maybe the travelers have prepaid tickets, but some lines only accept stranger fares. If a passenger is unwilling (or unable) to pay, going bindlestiff may be the only option.
 - iv. Does the train have any other passengers? What are they doing?
- b. The train departs. Roll for one Event (p. 38) to start with a bang.
- c. Players take turns selecting Train Actions (p. 30).
- d. At Stops, everyone gets one Stop Action (p. 40).
- e. Roll for an Event each time two travelers experience flashbacks (p. 34).

3. THE SECOND LEG.

One player becomes the Seeker (p. 53). Their story's momentum draws in the other players, who become Saints or Demons.

- a. After a traveler experiences three flashbacks, they become the Seeker.
- b. Everyone else determines whether they're a Saint or a Demon (p. 56).
- c. Players continue selecting Train Actions (p. 30).
- d. At Stops, everyone gets one Stop Action (p. 40).
- e. Roll for an Event after two travelers experience flashbacks (p. 34).
- f. Each Saint and Demon shares a Revelation (p. 57) or waives the chance.

4. FINAL STOP.

The train reaches the gates of Cerebos, where the travelers face one final danger (p. 60).

5. ENDGAME.

Make an epilogue roll (p. 61). Reflect on the journey and reveal the future.

GLOSSARY

Action

A move a player can make to interact with the numeric mechanics of Cerebos. Stop Actions take place while the train is at a Stop. Train Actions take place while the train is not at a Stop. See: Actions (p. 30), Train Actions (p. 31), Stop Actions (p. 41)

Almanac

The set of six Event tables used on a particular journey to Cerebos. See: Stops and Events (p. 50)

Atlas

The set of six Stop tables used on a particular journey to Cerebos. See: Stops and Events (p. 50)

Cerebos

The Crystal City. In the language of the hill people it is called Kerb; the stoic manta herders of Gar warn travelers, rather, of the delights of Cerra-Vu. But the zeitgeist decided the city's common moniker based on "seər ə bous, ə'hor", a popular jag of danger doggerel first spoken by the speed-poets of the Ancilium Line.

Contemplation

Fuel for transforming experience into growth. Gained by ridding yourself of touchstones with the Release Touchstone Action. It improves the quality of your epilogue. See: Touchstones and Traits (p. 27), Release Touchstone (Action) (p. 32), Endgame (p. 60)

Conductor

The train's public face. The conductor sets the journey's genre and modifies the rules of the trip. See: Conductors (p. 19)

46

A six-sided die. Most rolls are determined using two six-sided dice (2d6). If dice are unavailable, consider drawing lots or fishing for marked carp. *See:* Rolling Dice (p. 46)

Damage

The toll of the trail. A traveler who receives their fourth Damage before the Final Stop is unable to take Actions or enter Cerebos. See: Damage (p. 52)

Danger

The capacity for Events and Stops to negatively impact a traveler's journey. Danger ranges from 0-5 under normal circumstances, but modifiers can raise it even higher. See: Danger (p. 36)

Epilogue

The final roll of the game. Determines what's next for the travelers. See: Endgame (p. 60)

Event

Unexpected occurrences encountered by travelers while the train is in motion, such as weather or fellow passengers. Events are generated by rolling on the Almanac. See: Events (p. 38)

Final Stop

Cerebos, the Crystal City or its environs. The Final Stop is a Danger 2 Stop. The epilogue roll triggers after each traveler takes a Stop Action. See: Endgame (p. 60)

First Leg

The section of the journey between the travelers' initial meeting at the train station and one traveler experiencing three flashbacks. See: Summary (p. 10)

Flashback

A scene that gives insight on a traveler's life before they left the City by the Sea and the importance of their touchstones. Completing flashbacks reveals a new Trait on its key touchstone. See: Flashbacks (p. 34)

Gamemaster

An optional role taken by one player. The gamemaster (GM) is not responsible for a traveler of their own, instead handling extra game mechanics, scene narration, and story framing. The GM knows every traveler's goal from the start, so they have a unique perspective on the journey's secrets. See: Summary (p. 10), Goals (p. 28)

Goal

The reason why a traveler decided to ride the rails. It explains why the traveler was suffering in the City by the Sea and one solution that might be possible in Cerebos. Your own traveler's goal is chosen by the other players, and is initially unknown to you. See: Goals (p. 28)

Keepsake

A record of a memorable Stop or Event. Provides a one-time benefit. See: Keepsakes (p. 44)

Momentum

The accumulated force of the past. It convinces travelers that free will is an illusion or a conceit only enjoyed by others. Touchstones accumulate Momentum when travelers uncritically accept the path before them. Travelers with a lot of Momentum are unlikely to have a victorious epilogue. See: Trait Checks (p. 48), Releasing Touchstones (p. 51), Endgame (p. 60)

Revelation

Stops and Events created by Saints and Demons to influence the Seeker. See: Revelations (p. 57)

Saints and Demons

Travelers who guide the Seeker's journey. Saints encourage the Seeker to remain true to their past commitments, while Demons promote leaving the past behind. Saints and Demons are revealed in the Second Leg. See: Saints and Demons (p. 56)

Second Leg

The section of the journey when travelers determine whether they're Saints, Demons, or the Seeker. It begins with the selection of the Seeker and ends when each Saint and Demon has shared a Revelation or waived their opportunity. See: The Second Leg (p. 53)

Seeker

The first traveler to experience three flashbacks. The protagonist of the journey to Cerebos. Influenced by Saints and Demons starting in the Second Leg. See: The Seeker (p. 54)

Stop

Locations of interest where the train stops to refuel. Stops are generated by rolling on the Atlas. See: Stops (p. 38)

Touchstone

One of three objects carried by travelers that bind them to their pasts. Powerful totems of who the travelers were before they left the City by the Sea. Travelers who don't release their touchstones by the end of the line are unlikely to grow. See: Touchstones and Traits (p. 27)

Trait

An element of a traveler's personality that is demonstrated by a touchstone. It can be a skill, attitude, relationship, ideology, or any similar concept. Traits have ranks, which allow players to reroll dice during Trait checks. See: Touchstones and Traits (p. 27), Trait Checks (p. 48)

Traveler

Each player (except for the optional GM) is responsible for a traveler, who has left the City by the Sea in search of Cerebos. They aren't necessarily the train's only passengers, but they are the story's emotional core. See: Summary (p. 10), Goals (p. 28)



"All cities change," I said.

"None as fast as Tainaron," Longhorn replied. "For what Tainaron was yesterday it is no longer today. No one can have a grasp of Tainaron as a whole. Every map would lead its user astray."

Leena Krohn, "Tainaron: Mail From Another City"

What sort of story do you want to tell? How does this play into the story your group wants to tell? Talking about these elements before you begin ensures everyone contributes a guiding star to the constellations of your journey.

Consider how much weirdness, whimsy, or magic the world contains. Is the technology familiar or alien in a way that challenges your assumptions about a harsh, uncaring universe? Does your tale feature hijinks, shenanigans, and general tomfoolery, or will it be written in tears on a wind of ash and ghosts?

Every train has a conductor, who serves as a personification of the world. Your conductor and your group's hopes for the world inform your traveler and path that is yet to come.



FOR YOUR SAFETY

Although many aspects of *Cerebos* are intentionally abstract, flexible, or otherwise ill-defined, creating a welcome environment at the game table is non-negotiable. Mechanics like secret goals and keepsakes that allow the re-narration of another traveler's rolls provide more control over other players' characters than is found in many traditional roleplaying games. If abused, this control of the narrative can ruin the experience for everyone at the table. Be careful and don't be a jerk.

It's very easy to self-identify with a character, mixing bits of your personality or life experiences with their own. Actors, flaneurs, and gifted pug dogs do this all the time. It's part of what makes roleplaying so engaging, but it can also lead to surprising discoveries. If a scene becomes too real, too gross, or even just not fun in a strange way, let the other players know. You're all playing for a shared, positive experience.

For some groups, an informal discussion of what kind of stories they want to tell will suffice. The pre-game discussion about the choice of conductor and the tone of the game informs everything that follows: "Keep it PG-13", "I don't like playing villains", or "Romance is all right, but not with another traveler" are all valid.

Even if certain themes (say, child endangerment or casual alcohol use) are key features of your chosen genre, an individual may not want them to intrude on their character. Although many *Cerebos* games involve suffering and unpleasantness, this negativity should never spill over to injure the players. The travelers may be up to their eyeballs in misery, but it's the consensual sort.

Some groups prefer a formal system for ensuring everyone feels safe exploring the same narrative space. John Stavropoulos's X-Card (http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg), which involves stouching a card marked with an "X" to indicate an uncomfortable scene, is one popular method. Other groups use colored cards, much like rail signals. If a scene's getting dicey, simply tap the appropriate card to let everybody know:

- ♦ Green: Proceed. Things may be getting intense, but that's all right. Full steam ahead!
- **Yellow:** Warn of an impending stop. Something uncomfortable's about to happen, so proceed with caution.
- Red: Full stop. This is not a place of honor. Turn around, back off, reverse the clock if necessary, no shame.

If you're not sure if a specific topic is going to cause problems, ask. Finding out beforehand is preferable to learning several cities down the line. If a situation does show up that causes bad feelings, talk it out.

PACING

But the landscapes we dream are just shades of the landscapes we've seen, and the tedium of dreaming them is almost as great as the tedium of looking at the world.

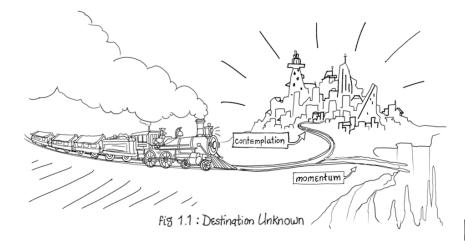
Fernando Pessoa, The Book of Disquiet

Cerebos typically lasts two sessions of 3–4 hours, but the pacing is ultimately up to the players. The Seeker appears quickly if travelers rush through flashbacks. Likewise, it's up to the Saints and Demons whether the Seeker has a relaxing Second Leg. For more about Saints, Demons, and Seekers, see The Second Leg (p. 53).

If time is of the essence, consider selecting the conductor, touchstones, and character goals before the day of the game.

For the most nuanced travelogue, each traveler should experience at least one solid flashback before the Second Leg begins. Learn a little about who you were to inform what Cerebos could be. Take time to develop a sense of place and breathe in stops. What sort of conversations do the travelers overhear? How does the stop's history shape its current events? What looks good on the menu today? Not every detail is important by road's end, but travelers often find meaning in the most unexpected detours. Take some risks and explore the possibilities with your fellow travelers.

As the story unfolds, it will probably settle around a single traveler or dynamic. That's where Seekers come from. However, don't be afraid to chase the song of a distant siren down a dodgy alley. What's the worst that could happen?





CONDUCTORS

O my neighbor, indeed we are strangers in this place, And every stranger to a stranger is kin.

Imru' al-Qays, Diwan Imri' al-Qays

Every train has a conductor. During your time riding the rails, the conductor may be a guide, chronicler, psychopomp, or agent of order – to say nothing of the dog. If you're playing with a GM, they're responsible for the conductor once the story begins.

The conductor sets the genre of the story. If the travelers are riding a train powered by gumdrops and stardust, the stops look different than if the engine is fired by human misery. In the first instance, a dream factory would most likely be a pleasant stop where the passengers could slide down rainbows and relive the clambakes of their youth. In a more dire setting, the same dream factory could be the site where nightmarish drones render whimsy and passion into mass-market commodities.

In the real world, the conductor is responsible for every part of the journey that doesn't involve actually operating the train: checking tickets, keeping the schedule, and interacting with the passengers and the cargo. The engineer handles the mechanical side of the operation, assisted by an engine crew of firemen (also known as stokers or coal shovelers). In the world of Cerebos, any or all of these jobs can be combined into a single conductor. However, travelers who prefer a larger number of travel companions may find solace in a larger crew.

The engineer and the conductor may be rivals with differing opinions on how to run a train, an annoyingly effective comedy duo, or even the source of trainbound intrigue.

In addition to setting the journey's genre, the conductor modifies the rules of the trip. Each conductor has four Conductor Powers. The first Power automatically influences the journey. The second and third Powers provide additional Train Actions. The final Power is a Stop Action. The conductor's Train and Stop Actions are available to all travelers. See Train Actions (p. 31) and Stop Actions (p. 41) for more details.

When selecting a conductor, it's a good idea to discuss what sort of story everyone wants to tell. Will it emphasize quiet, gentle moments of personal reflection or episodes of bombastic strangeness? What sort of violence and emotional distress are on the table, and how explicit will they be? You have control over other travelers' pasts, so make sure to play within the boundaries they've created.



[...] Come, my friends

'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.

Push off, and sitting well in order smite

The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds

To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths

Of all the western stars, until I die.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"

This conductor is a crook-smirked storyteller dressed in clothing unlike any worn by her passengers. Even among other seekers of uncomfortable truths, she finds herself welcome-but-apart. After all, she's just passing through this barren land of empty maps and unmarked junctions. To lead a train through it all takes a dedicated individual possessed of ambition, brass, and no small disregard for personal safety.

Her eyes smile, for she has traveled many paths and victories are to be celebrated. Her knife has three secret names. Her cabin is festooned with mementos from distant lands, all won in games of chance. Some passengers say these winnings include the train itself. Dinner is at 8, followed by a recitation of revenge psalms from the Smoke Hills.

Atlas Obscura (Automatic)

Before the journey begins, everyone works together to create a new Stop or Event table. It replaces one of the standard tables for this journey. Keep a copy of the table in a journal. Trade journals with other *Cerebos* players when the opportunity arises.

Every Port in a Storm (Train)

As the Stop the Train action, but roll twice on the Atlas. Pick the Stop of your choice. An unexpected peril deals one Damage to a randomly determined traveler.

Easy Confidence (Train)

Share a story about a previous Stop or one of the train's passengers with a fellow traveler. The next time you team up with this traveler to make a Trait check, receive a +1 bonus to your Trait check.

Naturalist's Pen (Stop)

Sketch a map or detail from the Stop in your journal. If anyone collects a keepsake from this Stop, remove one Momentum from two different touchstones that belong to you.

Psychogrit

The inhumanity of our ulterior, asocial, superficial world immediately finds its aesthetic form here, its ecstatic form. For the desert is simply that: an ecstatic critique of culture, an ecstatic form of disappearance.

Jean Baudrillard, America

A skeletal figure commands this train. Its features are obscured by a glass mask. From its constant lurking and low, sporadic moaning it would be easy to assume the conductor is cursed. The real curse is the human condition. Did you ever even leave the City by the Sea? All this hustle and toil could be a nocturnal quest to the heart of your cultural trauma or a game played on a board of ivory and horn. You may be an actor on a stage, held aloft by black-clad orphans while a statuesque assistant rattles a sheet of tin to create illusions of velocity and light.

But no. The dirt under your nails is real and so is the blood. This is a journey of existential alienation and rebirth. It is a clash of symbols, juxtaposing bleak reality with comic absurdity in a desperate search for meaning. Welcome to the desert of the real.

Desert of the Mind (Automatic)

Each touchstone can only have one skill-focused Trait. The rest must be attitudes, relationships, or ideologies.

Eye of the Desert (Train)

Encounter a symbol previously revealed in another traveler's flashback. It's an omen. Roll 1d6 and explain its meaning: 1-2, the next Stop has +1 Danger; 3-4, the next Stop has -1 Danger; 5-6, the other traveler loses 1 Momentum if they have any.

Dry Well (Train)

Clash with a traveler. Each of you takes one Damage. The traveler who initiated this action gains +2 to their next roll.

Waking Dream (Stop)

Experience a personal flashback that bleeds into the reality of the current Stop. See Flashbacks (p. 34) for more details.

All-Ages Fairy Tale

She attempted a smile. "Fairy tales always have a happy ending."

He leaned back in his chair. "That depends."

"On what?"

"On whether you are Rumplestiltskin or the Queen."

Jane Yolen, Briar Rose

Mr. Wumpus is an eggplant-shaped rabbit in a green velvet suit. When he's on the job—which seems like always—he tops his ensemble with a smart little conductor's cap so everyone knows who's in charge. With the help of his heavily annotated timetable and a flask of dandelion tea, the Director of Hoperations is the best there is at moving people from here and there to everywhere.

Although conducting such a strange train keeps Mr. Wumpus busy, he enjoys chatting with his passengers. Even if he doesn't have all the answers, he's always ready to lend a sympathetic ear or dash of folksy wisdom. At least until the springs in the trampoline car need oiling, then it's back to work with ol' Mr. Wumpus!

Happy Endings (Automatic)

After making an epilogue roll, each traveler can choose to take part in a scene that discusses the moral of the story. Anyone who does so may reroll one die. Travelers who offer mean-spirited morals are declared Grumpus Bumpuses by all.

Why Do You Even Have That Car? (Train)

Explore the train with at least one additional traveler. Discover a new car that serves an unexpected function or contains a unique passenger. The explorers share a keepsake that gives them a rank 1 Trait related to the car's contents. Either character can use this Trait in a Trait check. Sharing can be difficult!

Tea and Doughcakes (Train)

Each traveler gains a colorful d6, which can be kept or given to a fellow traveler who does something particularly entertaining. The holder of a die can spend it to reroll any one die. Mr. Wumpus restocks his tea and doughcakes after each Stop.

Friends Forever (Stop)

A different traveler heals two Damage. Change one of your lowest-ranked Traits so it relates to that traveler or your current Stop. If you don't have any Traits, that's all right.

Musical Journey Through Space

We're fumbling for a dream in the dark; there is nothing there, we just believe. We want a one-way ticket to the far ends of the universe. Wow!

Perfume, "Star Train'

The Starbright Express used to be a star... but so were black holes, darling. These days she's the top Arpeggio-class astroliner in her sector and 110% delighted to connect you with your distant dreams. What kind of future will you choo-choo-choose? Just climb aboard and you'll be on your way!

Music is the universal language of the Solar Frontier, where even a space train can be a virtual pop sensation. Although her fans are scattered like cosmic dust, Starla (as her friends call her) keeps on dancing. The sky hasn't been the limit in a long, long time.

Galactic Express (Automatic)

Forget everything you know about the desert. You're on an intergalactic space train riding the lepton rails. Adjust the Event and Stop descriptions for the blackness of space. Stops are planets, dust is cosmic dust, and eggs are space eggs. Every player contributes songs to a session playlist. The selected tracks may suggest directions for character growth.

Polyphonic Spree (Train)

Provoke a shared flashback (p. 31) in any number of travelers. The active traveler need not be involved in this flashback.

Soliloguy (Train)

Sing out your feelings to explain how another traveler complicates your goal. Has their success eclipsed you? Are they supernova? Give their player a colorful d6 or a sour glare. You receive the other. The d6 allows the reroll of any one die; the glare causes the traveler to reroll their next Success. This power can be used once for each flashback you've experienced.

Montage (Stop)

Contribute a song to the session's playlist. Share the song with the other players. One of your Traits, which must share a song lyric or title, gains +1 rank. This power can be used by a character once per flashback experienced.

I used to think sincerity was valuable... and that it was the one and only way to change the world. But sincerity by itself changes nothing. Without power, one finds oneself merely depending upon others to live. I've taken enough risks to buy the power to change the world. That's how the world works.

Akio Ohtori, Revolutionary Girl Utena

A tall and charismatic gentleman who moves with impeccable grace, Duke Akira cuts a dashing figure as he strides through his train. He's always eager to get to know each of his passengers – after all, he prides himself on meeting their every need over the course of the long ride to Cerebos. Many find his attention flattering, at first.

It's only as the journey wears on that most travelers realize nothing that happens on the duke's train is outside his control, and that he has a way of making sure his passengers' choices work out to benefit himself more than anyone else. The most perceptive among them may begin to suspect that Akira was once a traveler much like themselves – and that he represents a vision of maturity that they may or may not want to emulate.

Take My Revolution (Automatic)

At the gates of Cerebos, the Seeker must confront Duke Akira's machinations before making their decision. His involvement makes the journey's end more perilous, causing Cerebos to become a Danger (the Seeker's total Momentum + 2) Stop.

A Heart That Longs For Eternity (Train)

The duke says or does something that echoes a previous flashback. Was he actually there, or does he simply know too much? Either way, a traveler's understanding of the experience they remember is irrevocably altered. The players vote on a new rank 1 Trait to add to the key touchstone associated with that flashback.

Allegoriest (Train)

Narrate a scene delving into Akira's backstory. During the First Leg of the journey, a passenger arrives to discuss rumors they've heard about the duke; in the Second Leg, full flashbacks can shed light on how he became conductor. In either case, he should serve as a narrative foil for one of the travelers, wrestling with similar challenges. The traveler in question adds one rank to an existing Trait.

All According to Keikaku (Stop)

Take the role of Duke Akira for this Stop, manipulating or exploiting the other travelers as you go. Your traveler heads off to see the sights, heals 1 Damage, and modifies an existing Trait based what they learned from the Stop. No traveler can take this action a second time unless every traveler has already taken it once.

In the windows of the carriages pass a landscape, blurred into protean shapes. Jagged peaks thickening to walls, valleys fracturing into ravines, black pines melting into blasted plains. In the sky, the stars swarm, an infection of white, a thousand cataracted eyes. There is nothing human here, no vestige of man's influence. Only night, only blackness.

Cassandra Khaw, A Song for Quiet

Grimlight is a nightmare-shaped person, mud seeping from clumsy seams and ragged cuffs. One burning eye peers from the shadow of his wide-brimmed hat. His low voice tells stories no one was supposed to ever know. Little by little, he sheds his disguise — slips off his shoes to reveal gnarled feet; doffs his hat to scratch at a head made of burlap; pulls off his shirt to show a maze of woven reeds, and a rotting heart throbbing within.

Grimlight knows the secrets of this country, and he brings you to where the mundane is peeled back, revealing what slithers beneath.

Why Can't I Forget (Automatic)

One of your touchstones, which is tied to a terrible event in your past, is a Twisted Touchstone, and starts with 2 Momentum. When you roll a Partial Success using a trait attached to your Twisted Touchstone, you must choose to gain Momentum if you're able. This is accompanied by half-remembered flashes of the event, which get worse as the Touchstone's Momentum grows. The event can't fully be remembered until the Touchstone is released; some memories are better left behind.

Burn That Bridge (Train/Stop)

This replaces the Release Touchstone Action (p. 32) for Twisted Touchstones, and is similar in most respects. On a result of 10–12, you also lash out at a traveler of your choice – emotionally or physically, as you decide. The chosen traveler loses one rank in a Trait related to confidence, courage or fortitude, if they have one; the next time you team up with them to make a Trait check, take -1 to your roll.

I Heard a Story Once (Train)

Share a story you've been reminded of with another traveler. How does it go wrong? The traveler you share the story with gains it as a keepsake with the following effect: the next time they roll doubles, they take 1 Damage instead of gaining Momentum.

No No No (Stop)

The Stop's narrative loses coherency, becoming wild-eyed and terrifying. The traveler with the highest total Momentum chooses to bestow a fell boon on a random traveler, or else take 1 Damage and lose one Trait rank. The boon increases the recipient's highest Trait by two ranks, but twists it to be unsavory or monstrous.

Mythic Transgression

But now a strange disease affects me that I cannot withstand by courage, weapons or strength. Deep in my lungs a devouring fire wanders, feeding on my whole body. But Eurystheus, my enemy is well! Are there those then who can believe that the gods exist?

Ovid, Metamorphoses (translated by A. S. Kline)

Old Ko is a tangle of arms and masks covered by a resplendent cloak, which rings with the collected fares of the dead. She runs the Metempsychosis Express between the refineries of the Shadowlands and the verdant Orgus Delta, where the bridges of Cerebos straddle the Worldsoul. With each cargo of refined soulstuff, the wheel of life turns anew.

Several passengers are not godlings or divine agents. They are scoundrels who refuse to relinquish their identities and return to the Worldsoul. They intend to pass through Cerebos for a second chance at life, the selfish clods! Or... heroes? Ugh. The worst.

Final Destination (Automatic)

The Stops on this journey are home to dead spirits who haven't subsumed their identities into the Worldsoul. Each traveler's goal explains why they're unwilling to join the Worldsoul and what they will do on returning to the land of the living. All Events have +1 Danger and the Share a Meal Train Action (p. 32) is unavailable.

There You Are! (Train)

Old Ko tries to evict the travelers. Without conferring, each traveler secretly spends a number of Trait ranks. Reveal the results and decide as a group how everyone escapes. However, if the total number of ranks spent is less than 3, all travelers take 1 Damage. If the number of ranks spent is greater than 3, a random traveler loses 1 Momentum and the last sentence of the "Final Destination" Power doesn't apply for the next full round of Train Actions. If exactly 3 ranks are spent, there are no additional effects.

Never Look Back (Train)

Entice another traveler to boast of their intentions. This works as Provoke a Flashback (p. 31), except instead of taking place in the past it reveals a potential future the traveler will seize after returning to life. The target gains +2 Momentum to the key touchstone, but gains a copy of the next Keepsake encountered.

Psychopomp and Happenstance (Stop)

You convince a spirit to leave the Shadowlands, burning their nails in the Naglfar Engine and dissolving their essence in the soul tanks. Gain a new rank 1 Trait related to the Stop; this Trait is not connected to a touchstone. Roll 1d6: on a result of a 6, the spirit has last-minute doubts; spend a rank of a Trait or take Damage.

TOUCHSTONES AND TRAITS

Against all reason, you carry three touchstones. These objects define you and link you to your past. They may be ordinary or ornate, mass-produced or bespoke. No matter what your touchstone looks like or how it can be used, it's also a powerful totem. To lose this treasure is to lose yourself – at least for now.

- A human skull inside a leather case
- ♦ A smart orchestra-skin jacket
- ♦ A bottle holding two pills
- A Half of a delicate work of art
- ♦ A sealed locket
- ♦ A battered coffin
- A sack of seeds
- An old-fashioned key
- A single, ornate chess piece
- A comic magazine
- A stained religious icon
- An ordinary pocket knife
- ♦ An officer's boots
- A letter from a forgotten friend

- A large bag of money
- A flower that has only started to wilt
- An iron puzzle box
- A gun containing a single bullet
- The word "Corinth" on a paper scrap
- A fragment of lewd pottery
- A faded photograph of a man wearing a feathered hat
- ♦ A feathered hat
- ♦ An unidentifiable scale or feather
- A knife forged from a rail spike
- A knot of frog jasper
- A quiche recipe

Feel free to use strange sculptures or unexpected teeth you've discovered on your own journeys as inspiration.

Each of your three touchstones begins with a rank 1 Trait. A Trait is an element of your personality that is demonstrated by the touchstone. It can be a skill, attitude, relationship, ideology, or anything else that suggests how your traveler solves problems.

For more examples of touchstones and Traits, feel free to use rocks, sculptures, or teeth that have accumulated underneath your bed – or consult the Random Touchstones appendix (p. 74).

There is no conclusive list of Traits or Trait categories, since they are generated during play. Some rules refer to Trait categories like "skill-focused" Traits. These ad hoc descriptions differentiate Traits that refer to one element of a character (such as their skills) from another (such as their emotional connections).

Traits may gain and lose ranks during play. A trait that loses all its ranks still exists, but its narrative potential has been tapped. For more information on how Traits are used, see Trait Checks (p. 48).

GOALS

Joyous! How is one to tell about joy? How to describe the citizens of Omelas?

Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas"

A traveler's goal reveals why they were suffering in the City by the Sea and presents one active solution that may be possible in Cerebos. There are two ways to look at goals:

- 1. **Traveler Incentive**: They drive travelers to leave the familiarity of the City by the Sea for places unknown.
- Player Incentive: They provide a mystery to uncover and a desire for travelers to confront.

Before the First Leg of the journey, every player creates a goal for the traveler of the player sitting to their right. Display the goal on a folded piece of paper so all players except for the player whose traveler it describes can read it.

There's an excellent likelihood the history mentioned in this goal will return to haunt, challenge, or otherwise complicate their journey and that of the other travelers. Use this power wisely. If you're playing with an unfamiliar group, it's a good idea to specifically discuss your expectations regarding what's off-limits for secret goals. If a secret goal leads to discomfort during play, replace it with another one. Amnesia and unreliable narrators are part of every *Cerebos* game, so this kind of move is even supported by the fiction. Bonus!

One of the key experiences of *Cerebos* is discovering who your traveler was in the City by the Sea and how they use that knowledge to face their future. However, it can also be disorienting to learn the character you thought you were playing is actually someone vastly different. This vertiginous alienation isn't necessarily bad, but it's not for everyone. Be extra careful when considering a secret goal that invalidates aspects of a traveler that their player digs.

Consider a brave knight errant who discovers halfway to Cerebos they're an understudy at a medieval themed family restaurant. Some players enjoy that kind of reversal, while others would feel cheated: if they gave their character a broadsword, a tabard, and spiked pauldrons, they're going to be a knight errant, by gum! As above, so below: communication is key.

Goals are protected by literary amnesia. At the journey's start, no player knows why their traveler is riding the rails. The travelers may have forgotten as well, but may also be unwilling to admit the truth. After each flashback a traveler takes a step toward understanding their past.

Inevitably, character backgrounds contradict one another. For example, Saturnalia may have left the City by the Sea because it's fast-paced and drowning in technology, while the Bluebody Pierrot escaped from its clock-smashing luddites by the skin of her teeth. The two ideas are not impossible to reconcile. Both backgrounds are personal interpretations of a complicated city.

Moreover, Cerebos is a story, a rumor, and a hope. Until travelers reach its gates, there's no certainty the city can help anybody attain their goals. Many travelers have been forced to adapt after their promised land turns out different than expected.

Here are some sample goals:

- **She** She wants to fly, like everyone in Cerebos is able. She does whatever it takes.
- ♦ His son is dying and needs a miracle cure. Cerebos has cures, but the price is steep.
- Their family's corruption is poisoning the city. They seek redemption in Cerebos.
- He was banished by an angry mob for crimes against the clergy. He will have revenge.
- ♦ She was cursed with wanderlust. Someone in Cerebos has a cure for a price.
- **\Delta** They are writing an atlas to impress the University. Cerebos is one stop among many.
- She is sick of cafes, galleries, and fine wine. In Cerebos she can learn a new trade.
- **\Delta** He was banished for carrying the plague. He hopes to live with others like himself.
- They killed a man. Cerebos is the perfect place to tie up loose ends.





The price of the future is that you need to leave the past, never to return. The Utopias we encounter on these imaginary island cities are thus ones that could have been; maps of forfeited pasts, just as much as potential futures.

Darren Anderson, Imaginary Cities

Actions are the underlying physics of the world, but not its heart. Travelers can interact with the environment however they like without using an Action. However, these lesser actions don't add Momentum, reduce Damage, invoke flashbacks, or anything like that.

In other words, you don't need to be told, "Now is the part where you roleplay." Always be role-playing. Talk to your fellow travelers, engage with the local color, and let your quirks be known. When you want to end your turn or leave a lasting impact on the world, it's time to pick up the dice and declare an Action.

Each round is divided into one Action per traveler, but time is flexible in the desert. An Action may take seconds or days.

The first round, the humblest player takes the first action. Play continues clockwise, although more footloose and fancy-free groups can ignore this rigid hegemony. In the next round, the traveler who took the second action goes first. Continue this pattern until everyone has had a chance to go first, at which point the humblest player goes first again.

TRAIN ACTIONS

Stop the Train

A Stop is coming up in the distance. Roll on the Atlas. After this round ends, the train arrives at the Stop. The train stays there for one round of Stop Actions.

The Piebald Sorcerer is about to pontificate further on the uses of bees when the conductor enters your car. "We're coming up on the Yinthuul Frontier, folks. There's a nice little way station at the plateau's base. The engineer's brother runs a churro stand there, so we're stopping. Stretch your legs and grab a bite while you've got the chance."

Provoke a Flashback

Another character has a flashback. You select a touchstone with a single Trait. They unlock a new Trait on the touchstone at the end of the flashback. See Flashbacks (p. 34) for more details.

Snap. Crack. Snap. Crack. The floor around the Buckram Witch is littered with detritus. Nadia peers over her seat at the older woman. "Why are you shelling those nuts, grandma? You got no teeth." The Witch laughs at the stranger's cheek. "Help me out and I'll tell ya, little lady." As they work, the Witch is not shelling peanuts on a dilapidated train, but back on the farm preparing for winter.

Experience a Shared Flashback

You and another character experience a shared flashback. You select one of their touchstones with a single Trait, they select one of yours. Both of you unlock a new Trait on the touchstone at the end of the flashback. See Flashbacks (p. 34) for more details.

Since lunch, Temperance had been staring at the Hanged Man. Finally, she spoke. "Your jacket certainly is... unique." Despite the sun bleaching and patches, it was the unmistakable crimson of the republican guard. "Time was, I'd shoot a man for wearing it in my presence." She taps the bullet hanging from a chain around her neck. The Hanged Man flexed his lips in what was certainly not a smile. "I was wondering where that scar on my ass came from. What was it? Ten years ago? Twelve?"

Actions

Release Touchstone

Set a scene on the train where you confront the meaning of one of your touchstones. Roll (p. 46) to see how this affects you. See Releasing Touchstones (p. 51) for more details.

The Misconductor holds their unfinished opera out to the Stone Child. "The person who wrote this was angry. Although I share their name, we are not one and the same." The child reached tentatively for the work, which was the source of his curse. His cracked fingers touched paper for the barest second before velvet gloves snatched it back. "No," swore the Misconductor. "It is not yet time for the final curtain."

Share a Meal

Describe a meal shared by two or more travelers. Each participant gains a keepsake from the meal that provides a one-time reroll of a 1 or a 2 when making a Trait check. Until this keepsake is used, the traveler cannot gain another keepsake from this action. Once a traveler has benefited from this action, they cannot benefit from it again until after the next Stop.

Iskandar slurped his soup. Wherever they were headed next, he would be ready.

Use a Conductor Power

Pick one of the Conductor Powers and use it. The following example demonstrates "Every Port in a Storm" (p. 20).

"You would not tell from my worldly ways," said the conductor as he poured the tea, "But I grew up near here. Just past the Caverns of Cosmic Plenitude, there is a small town called Mbogo. It is known for its stone rosework. The clocktower is like a bouquet exploding from the earth."

"Once every year, the best sculptor climbs the tower with a stout lever and sends last year's carvings plummeting to the ground below. It is a bad time to visit unless you have a hard head." He laughs, showing the tops of his molars. "But we will stop there until your illness has passed. It is like I say, every port in a storm!"

Share a Revelation

Saints and Demons can each create a new Stop or Event during the Second Leg. For more information, see Revelations (p. 57).

"You look tense." Ming had followed the traveler since the pair escaped the City by the Sea, past the Coral Straits, far beyond the yurts of the mechanical dreamers. Even with a burning petard in each hand and her throat raw with vengeance, the traveler was in control. This should be no different.

"You think the dean would send his djinn this far, just to challenge your thesis? You must put the City and its scholars behind you!" She would comfort her friend, but the lie hurt. She had seen the djinn on the storm. She had heard the scraping of its knives.



Actions 33

FLASHBACKS

Objects and words also have hollow places in which a past sleeps, as in the everyday acts of walking, eating, going to bed, in which ancient revolutions slumber. A memory is only a Prince Charming who stays just long enough to awaken the Sleeping Beauties of our wordless stories.

Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City"

Flashbacks reveal travelers' lives from before they left the City by the Sea. Every traveler participating in a flashback is anchored by key touchstone. The key touchstone may no longer be in the traveler's possession, but the flashback should nevertheless reveal something about its importance to the traveler.

Each flashback is a short scene that guides a traveler toward discovering who they were and who they hoped to become on their journey to Cerebos. The first flash often hints at a traveler's ultimate goal; by the time the third flash arrives the traveler should know exactly who they were before they left the City by the Sea.

Flashbacks work best as conversations between several players and the GM (if applicable). Each player contributes characters, situations, or other details to the scene based on what they know about the travelers. Since the stars of the flashback are working with imperfect knowledge of their own pasts, they depend on the other players for context clues.

After the flashback is over, participants remember more about their pasts and establish forgotten Traits. Every player proposes a second Trait to add to the key touchstone(s). The player who called the flashback suggests last.

- At the end of each flashback, every player proposes a second Trait to add to the key touchstone(s). The player who called the flashback suggests last.
- Everybody votes on which Trait is most appropriate, with the GM or a 1d6 roll breaking ties.
- ♦ The new Trait starts at rank 2. The player also gains two points to distribute between the touchstone's Traits.
- If the touchstone has already been given away, reduce each of the touchstone's Traits by one.
- Remember to roll on the Almanac each time two travelers experience flashbacks.

Some groups prefer a more organic method of suggesting Traits. It's perfectly all right to have an unstructured conversation rather than a formal vote as long as everyone is having a good time.

Thursday's Child and the Grifflin have just emerged from the horizon car on the Mercury's Arrow. They had both narrowly avoided being sucked through the car's cracked dome, which would have sent them spinning through outer space.

"Lucky you brought that hammer," says Thursday's Child, using her Train Action to Provoke a Flashback. "I want to be a star, but I don't think I'm ready to be an entire constellation."

The Grifflin smiles, his hammer's weight and initial Trait – Everything Looks Like a Nail – reminding him of a time before all this business with trains, children, and talking rabbits.

Thursday's Child's player, Lucy, sets the scene. She looks at the Grifflin's goal: he wants to join the Top Dog Sky Pirates in Cerebos to impress his father: "You're in the City by the Sea, dressed as a kelp farmer. You're using that big ol' hammer to grind dried kelp and glowing lanternberries in a large mortar."

Dale, the Grifflin's player, continues: "Between batches of lanternberry jam, I'm helping my crew pull in the kelp nets. Janice, Mr. Elvis, and Kelpie Stu are giving it their best. They do most of the hauling though. I'm all about the hammer."

Audrey, whose traveler hasn't done much lately, jumps in: "While you're hauling, Kelpie Stu asks the question everyone has been afraid to ask. 'Hey, Boss. Why hang around with nobodies like us? Your old man being who he is, you could do anything!"

Dale takes a guess about what Kelpie Stu means. The Grifflin responds, "My father has his own ideas about the world. Me, I like farming the sea."

Lucy jumps in as Mr. Elvis: "Still, pirates don't go home every night lit up like a carnival. These lanternberry stains aren't ever coming out of my good hat." The Grifflin and Mr. Elvis joke about hats, pirates, and their comparative benefits.

Audrey enjoys the banter before returning to the Grifflin's goal: "The kelp farmers talk like this into the evening. Your work is almost done when you hear the rumble of engines from above. You'd know that sound anywhere. Air pirates!"

At the end of the flashback, Dale has learned more about the Grifflin's relationships with his father and his hammer. However, he doesn't know an upcoming flashback will put him on the path to air piracy.

Dale and Audrey each suggest a new trait for the Grifflin's hammer: "Not a Weapon" and "I'm Kelping!". Lucy suggests "Seaside Sommelier". Everybody votes, and "Not a Weapon" wins. Dale assigns "Not a Weapon" as a rank 2 Trait to his hammer and then splits the two additional points between its Traits.

Back on the Mercury's Arrow, the Grifflin responds to Thursday's Child: "Yes. Without this hammer, we certainly would have been in a jam."

DANGER

There is a moment of curiosity, even for those who have seen the play before, since in all probability they are about to view some newly arisen steel skeleton, some tower, or even some street which was not in yesterday's performance. And to one who had not been in the audience before—to some visitor from another land or another age—there could not fail to be at least a moment of wonder. What apocalypse is about to be revealed? What is its setting? And what will be the purport of this modern metropolitan drama?

Hugh Ferris, The Metropolis of Tomorrow

Danger is the capacity for Events (p. 38) and Stops (p. 40) to negatively impact a traveler's journey. Danger ranges from 0 to 5 under normal circumstances, but modifiers can raise it even higher. In general, a Danger level of 1 or 2 is only a potential problem, such as inconvenient weather, light malaise, or unwelcoming locals. A low-Danger Stop isn't actively hostile, but contains enough small annoyances to make things interesting. At Danger Level 2, travelers are unable to take the Rest Stop Action (p. 41).

Several low-Danger Events can combine to create uniquely uncomfortable circumstances. When the train reaches a Stop and the combined Danger level of all outstanding Events is greater than the number of travelers, increase the Stop's Danger by 2. The Events then resolve in whatever way makes narrative sense.

For example, the Absolution 405 megaliner is carrying three travelers across the sandworm hibernation grounds (Danger 1) while picking up satellite chatter from the Halcyon Days (Danger 1). To top it off, the air conditioning is on the fritz (Danger 2). As soon as the township of Lost July (a Danger 4 Stop) appears on the horizon, it's time for the travelers to reap the whirlwind. It turns out Lost July isn't just inhabited by dueling gangs of tech scavengers, it's also running low on water and satellite interference has just reactivated its long-dormant terraforming plant. Lost July is now at Danger level 6. Happy trails, pardners.

When travelers reduce an Event's Danger to 0, one of the travelers who interacted with the Danger level receives a keepsake (p. 44). Likewise, when travelers leave a Stop with Danger level 0, one traveler who interacted with the Danger level receives a keepsake. In both cases, randomly determine which eligble traveler receives the keepsake.

Danger starts to become serious at level 3. We're talking direct challenges to life and limb in deadlier settings, and even in gentler milieus you're gonna have a bad time. If the Danger is greater than 2 when leaving a Stop, each traveler must make a Trait check (p. 48) to leave the Stop without incident.





His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.

Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

Events are unexpected occurrences that add spice to the journey between Stops.

Roll on the Almanac each time two travelers experience flashbacks. Each traveler who flashes back counts as one instance. For example, if the Travesty and Goblin share a flashback to their days nicking copper wire in the City by the Sea it counts as two travelers. Likewise, if the Jamburglar has two flashbacks in a row it counts as two travelers. Anybody can make this roll. As a result, any traveler can influence the roll on Almanac with keepsakes or other powers.

Every Event has a Danger level and a keepsake, a reward for navigating the danger. The base Danger is determined by the Event's entry. If the travelers reduce an Event's Danger to 0, randomly determine which contributing traveler finds its keepsake.

When the train reaches a Stop, add together the Danger of all outstanding Events. If the total Danger is equal or greater than the number of travelers, increase the Stop's Danger by 2. The Events resolve in whatever way makes narrative sense and nobody receives the keepsake.

EVENT ACTIONS

The Engage Event Train Action is available whenever at least one Event is present.

Engage Event

You interact with the Event. An opportunity to make a Trait check to lower the Danger arises.

Trouble Hound stuck his head out the speeding train. Long strands of drool flapped from his mouth and spattered against the car's side. The rain from last night had transformed the desert into a jungle of verdant greens and fierce red fruits; the new colors streaming past were a shock after the endless brown-gray plain. He opened his mouth wider to welcome one of the fruits.



Events 39



Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places.

Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

The train needs to refuel and give travelers time to comport themselves. Some cities tax goods that move through their territories. Perhaps the train stops at an oasis in the desert. This may be a good chance to stretch your legs. Everyone gets to take one Stop action. Go around in a circle (or a stranger geometry) and resolve the scenes.

Every Stop has an initial Danger level that ranges from 0 to 5 – or possibly higher, in certain circumstances (p. 36). The Stop's Danger can be reduced by Trait checks made as part of Stop actions. If the travelers leave the Stop with a Danger of 0, a random traveler who interacted with the Danger receives a keepsake. A traveler doesn't need to succeed at raising or lowering the Danger to be eligible, but must have made an attempt.

If the Danger is greater than 2 after determining whether a traveler receives a keepsake, each traveler must make an additional Trait check to leave the Stop without incident. This roll is like a standard Trait check with two differences:

- ♦ This roll receives -1 to the result for every level of Danger above 2 (i.e., -1 for 3, -2 for 4, -3 for 5, etc.)
- A Success or an Inspired Success will still lower the Stop's Danger, which will have narrative consequences, but the chance to pick up a keepsake has passed. Onward!

The travelers get back on the train and continue their journey no matter what happens, but they may take some bruises or learn a bitter truth in the process.

STOP ACTIONS

Cause Trouble

Delay the trip to Cerebos, whether through action or desire. The train stays at the Stop for one additional round of Stop Actions. Roll 1d6: 1, remove one Momentum; 2, boost the Stop's Danger by 1; 3, boost the Stop's Danger by 2; 4, receive one Damage; 5, a randomly determined traveler receives 1 Damage; 6, remove one Momentum and a randomly determined traveler receives 1 Damage. This action can be taken at most once per Stop.

The view from inside the Cloud Organ was worth the climb. Gold Coin Spotted Leopard could see the settlement below. It had been constructed around a mountain of broken jars, as if its houses and people had spilled from the containers. Without their clay prisons, they grew wild and unchecked.

Wind rushed past him and up through the mountain's pipes. Above, the wind crystallized into music. It was almost like the convection ovens he once tended so fiercely. How had they fared since his escape? Ah, bother. Gold Coin Spotted Leopard set down his hammer and thought of home. He would catch up with the others later.

Rest

You experience a gentle scene. Do some tourism or experience wonder. Remove one Momentum. Not available if Danger is 2 or higher.

The Piper hadn't removed her shoes since the laces had fused back in the Hawuppus. Blade in hand, she considered her options. She could keep walking and let the leather mould to her feet, layer by painful layer, until it was fused with socks and flesh and damp. Or she could go for it.

With a decisive whoop, she sliced through the gordian tangle and vaulted into the pale pink water. Heat spread through her, concentrated on her emancipated feet. Crunched nerves uncoiled as pain gave way to relief. She wouldn't rest until reaching the gates of Cerebos, but a few minutes in the famed hot springs of Uco Tam were as vital to moving forward as boarding the train.

Stops 41

Seize Opportunity

You interact with the Stop. An opportunity to make a Trait check to lower the Danger arises.

Day 47. I have arrived in the city of Geddis, which must produce all the ceramic horses on the continent, if not in the world. Full-bodied stallions stare at me from every room unused for business or respite. Smaller, but no less fierce equine gargoyles crowd the cornices of every storehouse. Local custom holds the animals to be protectors. Anyone who enters the city may not afterwards leave except by the governor's seal, a rule that has been passed since the train last visited.

While our conductor argues in vain with his charters and logs, I have addressed the issue in my own way. With a small bag of coin, I have hired the best forgery artist in Geddis to procure a mark of passage. While I wait for news of his success, I avail myself of a plate of local cheeses and a mug of tonc, a mild beverage composed of mare's milk and fermented berries. It is an acquired taste, but is said to be exported as far as the great city of Zun, where the people have blue skin and drink cold silver from vessels of horn and bone. If my forgery artist has a betrayer's bones, I may be forced to improvise.

Release Touchstone

Set a scene at the Stop where you confront the meaning of one of your touchstones. Roll (p. 46) to see how this affects you. See Releasing Touchstones (p. 51) for more details.

The child swung once more at the caged star. Unlike the other revelers, her head was bare. Unprotected. Stellar flares scorched her face and she stumbled between each swing, half-blinded by the corona. Basket-headed uncles and cousins shouted boozy discouragement.

Earlier, when we had shared a flask of tea, she had told me of the festival. I laughed to think mortal nets could snare such a prize. Now, the only question was who would break it open to sup on its sweet goo.

I pushed through the crowd, unbuckling my mask as I went. It would do her more good than it had ever done me.

Use a Conductor Power

Pick one of the Conductor Powers and use it. "Montage" (p. 23) is one example.

The finifex of the Galactica Exchange wore a green tuxedo, gold boots, and a daring blue kerchief. She tapped her datapad in time with an uptempo remix from the Outside Era, buying and selling six planets in the time it took Mercury Nine to cross the foyer. Don't you want to be free?

"Hallo, Spaceboy. What brings you to these parts? We don't get many visitors to our humble moon during the offseason."

A montage of sights and sounds seared his neocortex, curling his toes in his space boots. His fingers beat a steady, nervous snare, grasping for an answer. The finifex's music seemed louder. This chaos is killing me. The Galactica Exchange could give him all the moondust he needed to power his Positronic Manifold. Moondust will cover you. All it would cost was his heart.



Stops

43



You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours.

Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

A keepsake is a record of a memorable Stop, Event, or meal. Unlike a touchstone, which is central to a traveler's sense of self, a keepsake is transitory and situational. Touchstones are always physical, but keepsakes are flexible. A smooth rock rescued from a gutter, a newfound respect for musicians, or the scent of saffron clinging to one's clothes are all examples of keepsakes. Keepsakes show how the traveler changed the world and was changed in turn.

A traveler can carry as many keepsakes as they like. It's easy to think a stranger has less going on than you, but after a little time together on the rails it's clear they contain multitudes.

There are as many types of keepsakes as there are people multiplied by places and dreams. Each Stop and Event provides a unique keepsake. Common keepsake powers include:

- The keepsake is grounding. It provides a one-time reroll of any die when making a Trait check or releasing a touchstone.
- The keepsake reveals the road to come. It allows a one-time reroll on the Atlas.
- The keepsake is proof that fate is not immutable. It allows a one-time reroll on the Almanac.
- The keepsake reveals a new facet of the traveler. It provides one rank in a specific type of Trait.
- The keepsake clears the ground for new memories. It reduces the traveler's Momentum by 1.
- ♦ The keepsake opens the traveler to new possibilities. They can re-narrate a single Trait check once. The traveler can change the narrative and mechanical results, but must stick to the rules for the original result's category (i.e., Setback, Partial Success, Success, or Inspired Success).
- The keepsake is bracing. It prevents the next point of Damage the traveler would take.
- The keepsake recontextualizes an old memory. The traveler avoids gaining Momentum the next time they roll doubles.

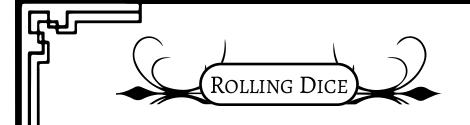
Keepsakes modify the rules of the road in a variety of ways. Unless otherwise specified, a traveler can only use a keepsake to reroll their own dice. Some keepsakes provide travelers with a Trait. These Traits are not attached to any touchstone, so they don't generate Momentum. If a traveler loses a keepsake, they're unable to use the attached Trait.

It may not always be clear how a keepsake helps a traveler in a given situation. This is an exercise best left to the players.

The 5:15 to Cerebos is being pursued by a gargantuan mole-creature with incisors that can shear steel. The travelers make their Trait checks to lower the Event's Danger. Matt, Tatterdemalion's player, fails the roll.

Tatterdemalion swings onto the locomotive, shoves the fireman aside, and starts shoveling coal for all he's worth. However, no amount of coal convinces the old engine to outpace the death mole's gnashing teeth. Matt chooses to take Damage from his failure: a blast of hot steam from a burst pipe. Luckily, Tatterdemalion has a newfound respect for infrastructure engineers — a keepsake — that prevents the next point of Damage. It turns out Tatterdemalion had been working with the fireman to maintain the locomotive's fittings ever since observing the topnotch plumbing of the Black Quartz Sphinx. The pipe didn't burst after all, and Tatterdemalion is safe... for now.





The population of the city came out to meet the members of our party, and on all sides greetings and questions were exchanged, but not a soul greeted me as no one there was known to me. I was so affected by my loneliness that I could not restrain my tears and wept bitterly, until one of the pilgrims realized the cause of my distress and coming up to me greeted me kindly and continued to entertain me with friendly talk until I entered the city.

Ibn Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354

Rolling dice makes numbers go up or down. No future is set in stone – and even if it were, stones are not incapable of change.

In many dice games, rolling two sixes on 2d6 is known as rolling boxcars. Rolling boxcars has no special effect in *Cerebos*, but any player in possession of a wooden train whistle is invited to toot it two or three times in observance of the rules of the rail.

The rules of the rail also pertain to dice stacking. Any player who stacks more than three dice atop one another enters the Compact of Babel. All entrants to the Compact are required under pain of dishonor to celebrate the tallest tower with compliments, good cheer, and a porringer of warm drink accorded to the tower's architect at the end of the game. However, if an entrant's tower falls, whether through hubris or maleficence, they are barred from another attempt until the next full moon.



TRAIT CHECKS

As invisible as all theatrical machinery, the locomotive organizes from afar all the echoes of its work. Even if it is discreet and indirect, its orchestra indicates what makes history, and, like a rumor, guarantees that there is still some history. There is also an accidental element in it. Jolts, brakings, surprises arise from this motor of the system.

It not only divides spectators and beings, but also connects them; it is a mobile symbol between them, a tireless shifter, producing changes in the relationships between immobile elements.

Michel de Certeau, "Railway Navigation and Incarceration"

When conflict occurs, roll 2d6 and consult the Trait Check table. You can permanently spend a rank in a Trait to reroll one die. As long as a Trait still has ranks, it can be drawn upon multiple times per Trait check. You can also draw on multiple different Traits to diversify your approach. If a Trait's rank is reduced to zero in this way, don't remove it. Traits without any ranks still exist. They're just resting their eyes.

2–5	Setback	You do not succeed. Take one Damage (p. 52).	
6–8 Partial Success		You're making progress, but there are complications. Maybe you're pushing too hard, maybe you're just unlucky. The Danger decreases by 1, but there's also a cost. Gain two Momentum or one Damage. It's your choice – but you can't choose to gain Momentum if the Trait is attached to a keepsake, if you've given away the related touchstone, or if you roll without using a Trait. The GM (or your group) may decide that narrative consequences, such as losing a fellow traveler's trust, replace the Damage or Momentum gain.	
9–10	Success	Nothing fancy here. You did it! The Danger decreases by 1.	
11–12	Inspired Success!		

Rolling doubles after using a Trait to reroll earns one Momentum on the attached touchstone. Drawing too heavily on who you were limits who you can become.

If you've already given away a touchstone, you can use its attached Traits with no risk of gaining further Momentum. Your memories blossom as you explore new applications for old talents

The player who rolls the dice narrates the results of their Trait check, but other players are welcome to make suggestions. Many groups prefer to have a GM narrate their Setbacks and Partial Successes to add an extra element of surprise to the story.

Working together is possible in a narrative sense, but there aren't any rules to govern team-ups. No matter how many friends you make on your journey, there's a point where you're going to be alone. This isn't necessarily the cold, unconnected loneliness of the miser in his tilted garret. It's also the unencumbered responsibility for one's actions.

Working together helps in some situations. Everyone may agree in a realistic game that one person, no matter how dedicated, cannot lift a sandstone obelisk. Two people trying the same task have a chance, but only one of them makes the Trait check.

The Lepidopterist and the Hapless Oaf have become separated from their travel companions while pursuing a limner's moth through a stained glass maze, a Stop with Danger 4. In the distance they hear the Flying Manta's return whistle. Jenn, the Lepidopterist's player, uses her Stop Action for an Opportunity to reduce the Stop's Danger.

Jenn rolls 2d6 and gets a 1 and a 2. A result of 3 means she's set herself up for a setback. That won't do! She spends one rank of Sensitive Antennae, a Trait of her brass headgear, to reroll the 1. Her new results are a 2 and a 2. That's still a setback. Worse, since she rolled doubles as part of a reroll, she gains a point of Momentum on her headgear. The Oaf has a laugh.

Jenn tries one more reroll. She spends one rank of Suffers Fools Poorly, a Trait of her butterfly machete. Bristling at the Hapless Oaf's crude jests, she rushes deeper into the maze. Her new results are a 2 and a 6, a partial success. She decides to succeed at reducing the Stop's Danger to 3, but also gain two Momentum on her machete. Old habits die hard, and the pair make their way back to the Flying Manta.

STOPS AND EVENTS

The catalog of forms is infinite. For as long as forms have yet to find their city, new cities will continue to be born. The end of the city begins at the point where forms exhaust their variety and come apart.

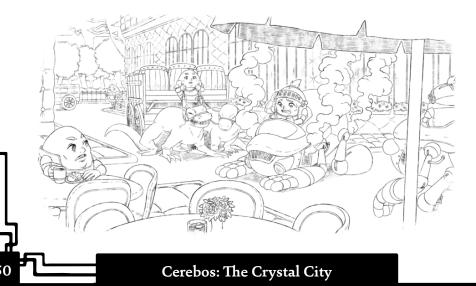
Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

You cannot step twice into the same desert. The wind fluctuates and travelers change. Like sands in the hourglass, so are the days of our lives. Make the most of them!

At the start of each journey, the players choose the contents of the Almanac and the Atlas to determine what's between them and Cerebos. The Almanac consists of six Event tables and the Atlas consists of six Stop Tables. The handout "The Almanac and the Atlas", distributed with this book, contains all sorts of options. The tables have different Danger levels and tones, so go with whatever feels the most appealing to the group.

Number the Stop and Event tables in your Almanac and Atlas from 1–6. On the journey, you will at times be directed to roll on the Almanac or Atlas. First, roll 1d6 to determine which table to roll. Next, roll another 1d6 to see which entry on that table you encounter.

For example, the Dreamline Express is coming up on a Stop. Jenn rolls on the Atlas. The group wanted to make a whistle-stop tour of unknown architecture, so their Atlas consists of Underground (1), Cities of Inspiration (2), Libraries and the Like (3), Lost Aviaries (4), Once-Sacred Spaces (5), and Relics and Reclamations (6). Jenn rolls 1d6 and gets a 1 – Underground. Next, she rolls another 1d6 and gets a 4. She consults entry #4 on the Underground table. Next stop, the Ophidian Exchange!



RELEASING TOUCHSTONES

If you ever drop your keys into a river of molten lava, let 'em go, because man, they're gone.

Jack Handy, Deeper Thoughts: All New, All Crispy

Sacrificing a touchstone is a moment of personal transformation. Giving up such an important talisman requires a roll, which cannot be affected by Traits. Every two points of Momentum on the item (round down) forces a reroll of the lowest die. Rerolling in this way does not reduce the touchstone's Momentum, though the roll's outcome might.

2–6	Change	You break the shackles of your past and do what needs to be done. Give the touchstone to someone who needs it or rid yourself of it in another way that brings closure. Gain one Contemplation, remove all Momentum from the touchstone, and reduce all attached Traits by one rank.	
7–9	Ugly Break	You get rid of the touchstone as above, but gain one Momentum on a different touchstone. If this is your final touchstone, get rid of it and take one Damage.	
10–12	Stasis	The path is prepared, but you are not ready. The touchstone gains one Momentum.	

This roll cannot be made until after a meaningful scene with the touchstone. This doesn't have to be anything as mechanical as a flashback, but there should be narrative weight behind the decision to huck that bust of your beloved off a cliff.

You can take one Damage to reroll one die, as long as another traveler steps in to help. This action doesn't need to be an act of kindness, as long as you're conflicted about giving up the item. Wrestling over a cursed amulet is fair game.

Rolling Dice

DAMAGE

How many travellers have I known? I cannot count.

How many corners of the earth? I cannot tell.

Now that my wanders east and west are done,

There is but one last corner left: my grave.

al-Humaydi, Landfalls (translated by Tim Mackintosh-Smith)

What happens if you fail at something during a Stop? What's the risk? Mainly, it's in your heart. Sure, the body can falter and fall apart, but you've already shown yourself to be an engine of willpower. You can keep it together long enough to get where you're headed.

A traveler who receives four Damage before the Final Stop decides whether to limp onward or end their journey immediately. Travelers who continue are unable to enter Cerebos or take Actions, but can otherwise take part in the story. If their journey has reached its end, you're welcome to step into the role of another passenger or member of the train's staff. However, as they are not travelers they are unable to take Actions.

A Seeker (p. 54) who takes four Damage wasn't the true Seeker. Narrative is an imprecise science, after all. Each player rolls 1d6 and adds the number of flashbacks they've experienced. The player who rolls highest experiences a flashback and becomes the Seeker. In the case of a tie, the traveler wearing the most distinctive clothing becomes the Seeker. Truly, the world works in mysterious ways.





The word desert conjures images of hostile foreboding environments – desiccated and scorching hot by day and freezing cold at night. But these images are not entirely correct. Deserts are areas of extreme topography, trivial seasonal precipitation, little animal life, and persistent wind [...] Asian deserts are a heterogeneous lot comprised of features varying from stony plains bisected by glaciated mountain ranges to great sand seas.

Mark Norell et al, Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World

During the Second Leg of the journey, one of the travelers becomes the Seeker. This apotheosis marks the Seeker as the story's central character, but don't let that hierarchy hold you back from learning more about the other travelers! Even though they become Saints and Demons, they're still traveling for their own purposes.

Saints and Demons are foils for the protagonist, but they're also drivers of new discoveries. Although the Seeker's reality exerts powerful pressure on the story, their ticket to the future is still blank. Remembering your secret goal is a different kettle of soup than knowing what to do about it.

Reality is less flexible in the Second Leg than the First Leg. Consider the Seeker's secret goal, past actions, and personal aesthetic when describing Stops and Events. Look for chances to reference characters or situations from the Seeker's past and test their convictions in new and exciting ways.

Travelers who enjoy tales of grief and woe are encouraged to use the Second Leg to twist the knife. Throw the Seeker into doubt as their newly discovered truths erode beneath them. Cozier travelers can use the Second Leg as an opportunity to develop interpersonal bonds. Now that everybody knows a little something about who they are, they can start developing closer relations.

THE SEEKER

Some wish to leave their venal native skies,

Some flee their birthplace, others change their ways,

Astrologers who've drowned in Beauty's eyes,

Tyrannic Circe with the scent that slays.

Not to be changed to beasts, they have their fling With space, and splendour, and the burning sky, The suns that bronze them and the frosts that sting Efface the mark of kisses by and by.

Charles Baudelaire, "The Voyage" (translated by Roy Campbell)

The first traveler to experience three flashbacks becomes the Seeker. If more than one traveler reaches lucky number three simultaneously, the most indecisive traveler takes the crown. This method may have some inherent flaws, so feel free to roll 1d6 to break any ties. The other travelers have been Saints or Demons all along! Saints aid the Seeker in remaining true to the past; this can lead to trouble. Demons aid the Seeker in leaving the past behind; this can also lead to trouble.

The Seeker can look at their secret goal. You know what you were intending to do when you set out, and you know why. Do you still feel that way? If so, swell. You've tested your will under sun and adversity. The path ahead may be physically perilous, but ideologically sound. If Cerebos isn't offering the goods, services, or social climate that you need, you might have to start tempering your expectations. On the other hand, if you're starting to rethink your original goal, breaking away may take a powerful act of will – or friendship.



SAINTS AND DEMONS

The monkey fiend was bold enough to rebel against Heaven,

But was subdued by the Tathagata's hand.

He endures the months and years, drinking molten copper for his thirst,

And blunts his hunger on iron pellets, serving his time.

Suffering the blows of Heaven, he undergoes torment,

Yet even in the bleakest time a happy fate awaits.

If some hero is ready to struggle for him,

One year he will go to the West in the service of the Buddha.

Wu Cheng'en, *Journey to the West* (translated by W. J. F. Jenner)

You will not find fulfillment in Cerebos. Maybe you're not ready to stop running; maybe the myth you set out to find was just that. Regardless, reaching your original goal just isn't in the cards for now. Doubt gnaws at you. It's even conceivable you're a metaphysical being intended to influence a decision of cosmic significance.

At this point your purpose (knowingly or not) is to guide the Seeker on their journey. If your assistance tips the scales, there may even be something in it for you – see Endgame (p. 60).

Travelers are free to determine whether they are a Saint or a Demon with the following restrictions:

- 1. The number of Saints and Demons is as even as possible.
- Travelers who helped the Seeker get rid of a touchstone or disposed of more than two of their own touchstones are Demons unless they convince the players otherwise.
- 3. Travelers who provoked more than one flashback to the Seeker or dealt the Seeker Damage are Saints unless they convince the players otherwise.
- 4. Travelers who enjoy bitter tastes are Demons unless they provide an alternate
- 5. Travelers who talk in their sleep are Saints unless they offer an alternate reason

REVELATIONS

Here in Um-Helat there is no hunger: not among the people, and not for the migrating birds and butterflies when they dip down for a taste of savory nectar. And so farmers are particularly celebrated on the Day of Good Birds.

N.K. Jemisin, "The Ones Who Stay and Fight"

Saints and Demons can create a new Stop or Event that isn't on any random table. This is called a Revelation. These occurrences reflect the guide's worldview or shed further light on the Seeker's journey. As a result, Saints and Demons have a lot of influence over Cerebos itself.

Revelations cost Momentum. In other words, a Revelation gives you a chance to spend all of the Momentum you picked up earlier in your journey.



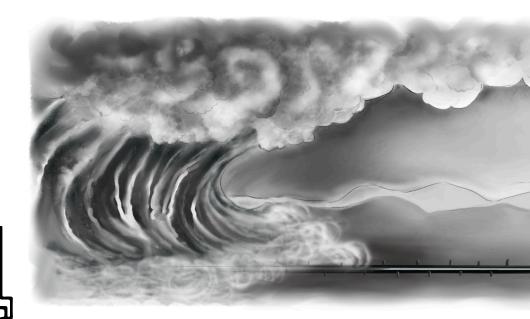
Demonic Revelation

Engine

Stop	After everyone's had their turn, the train reaches a Danger 3 Stop. You GM it!	0 Momentum
Event	You read the signs. A Danger 3 Event occurs. You GM it!	0 Momentum

Rolling Stock

Force Change	A specific Trait doesn't work against the Revelation	1 Momentum
Danger	Per point of increase or decrease	1 Momentum
Keepsake	Add a keepsake (p. 44)	1 Momentum
Saintbane	Exceptional Successes rolled by Saints against this Revelation become Successes	1 Momentum



Saintly Revelation

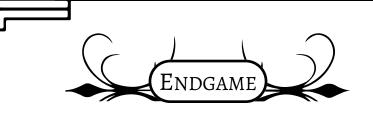
Engine

Stop	After everyone's had their turn, the train reaches a Danger 3 Stop. You GM it!	0 Momentum
Event	You read the signs. A danger 3 Event occurs. You GM it!	0 Momentum

Rolling Stock

Honor the Past	A specific Trait gains +1 immediately after encountering this Revelation	1 Momentum
Danger	Per point of increase or decrease	1 Momentum
Keepsake	Add a keepsake (p. 44)	1 Momentum
Demonbane	Exceptional Successes rolled by Demons against this Revelation become Successes	1 Momentum





He would think happily of his young brother Yilit taking his place in Marob and never go back and find out what had really happened. The two rivers were between him and the past. Alfeida would be between him and the past. He had been a traveler, but now he was coming to a stop. And it will be a happy place for him, thought Halla, but I—I have not come to a place where my traveling should stop. There is no reason here that I can find to keep me. And I am still myself, and what tricks at all did All-Father play on me?

Naomi Mitchison, Travel Light

After each guide has shared a Revelation or waived the opportunity, the train pulls into its final Stop: Cerebos, the Crystal City. Cerebos is a Danger 2 Stop. Its keepsake is the memories you made along the way.

If you're playing without a GM, the non-Seeker who has had the least to do during the game becomes a temporary GM for this Stop. This player may waive the honor. If you do have a GM, they've probably been plotting the truth about Cerebos for the past several hours. Either way, Saints and Demons can look at their secret goals. They will not find what they seek here.

It's the end of the line. The Seeker should have a strong sense whether Cerebos is their destination. Will they be able to fulfill their goal? Was it all a sham? Regardless, as soon as the final round of Stop Actions is complete, the Seeker must make a momentous choice: will they accomplish their goal in Cerebos and attain their heart's desire?

SAINTS AND DEMONS

You've guided the Seeker to the Crystal City, but what of your own story? Will it continue? It depends on the lessons you've learned and the influence you've had on the Seeker.

First, the Seeker decides which argument is the most persuasive: the Saint's path of steadfast stability or the Demon's uncertainty and change. Each traveler who argued for the Seeker's final choice receives a +1 bonus on their epilogue roll.

The epilogue roll starts with 2d6, but add 1d6 for each point of unspent Momentum. Add together the two lowest results. Each point of Contemplation adds 1 to the total. If the Seeker chose your path, add 1 to the total.

2–5	Despair	This is as far as you can go. You've imparted your wisdom to another: hopefully they fare better than you. Saints: Your body falls away. Your final breath floats up into the haze that surrounds the shining walls. Once a month, early in the morning, the haze flows through the streets in a thick river of mist. Children and the weak-willed are discouraged from breathing it in, while mystics and artists have made it an inspirational rite. Demons: All moisture escapes your body. Your meat is eaten by the crows. All that remains is a pillar of salt outside the city gates. Someday it will be part of a stone forest, a testament to Seekers who tried and failed. Later, during the Winter of Tightened Belts, it will season an apostate's lunch.
6–11	Walking Wounded	Your role as a guide has changed you. You gain a new goal, which modifies your previous one. Contentment is a ways away, but it can't be said that you haven't grown.
12+	Contentment	Huh! You're actually in a good place. That's not half bad. This journey was good for you. Next time, you'll be the hero for sure!

Endgame

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THE SEEKER

Whether your companions stood or fell, you've made it. After the Saints and Demons have handled their epilogues, it's time for the main event. Is Cerebos what you were looking for all along? Can you reconcile your inner voice with the wicked world? It's time to find out.

For the epilogue roll start with 2d6, but add 1d6 for each point of Momentum. Add together the two highest results. Subtract 2 from the final roll for each point of Contemplation.

7 or less	Self-Actualization	You're able to see your past for what it was and adapt based on the reality of the present. Whether you follow your original goal or choose a different path, you've gained vital knowledge from your journey and emerged from the crucible ready for the future.
8	Building Success	The you who left the City by the Sea remains, but continues along the path of lasting growth. A major element of your past continues to hinder you, but you can add a major twist. Maybe you delay a reckoning until you've mastered new knowledge, or you're able to share an unshakable burden with a new friend.
9+	Failure	You're unable to slip the yoke of memory. If you've decided to follow your original goal, one of your core assumptions is incorrect. Your fiction is unable to adapt to reality, and your journey leaves you worse than you began. If you've committed to abandoning your goal, it's only a brief remission. Some people, when they get on that train, aren't ever going to stop riding. The horizon remains in the distance, running onward, ever out of reach.

After a harrowing journey through the Shadowlands, the Naglfar Engine's four stowaways reach the gates of Cerebos. Wily Njall, the Seeker, intends to pass through Cerebos to return to the lands of the living. He seeks violent revenge against the poets who tarnished his eternal legacy with their craven jests.

Red Otara, a Demon and fellow traveler, hopes Wily Njall will halt his drive for blood and find nobility in an untroubled death. Her efforts have been aided by the Vengeful Shepherd, a Demon whose flocks were stolen by Njall and driven to the City by the Sea.

The Unclouded Zephyr, a Saint, hopes Wily Njall will succeed at his quest. The pair have sworn an oath of fellowship, so the one who escapes will seek justice for the other. This oath benefits the Unclouded Zephyr, who would sooner explore the eternal Shadowlands than live to challenge their father's unjust monarchy.

After the final round of Stop Actions at the gates of Cerebos – a Danger 2 Stop – Wily Njall ignores Red Otara's paens to the nobility of an untroubled death and avoids the Vengeful Shepherd's final attempt on his unlife. He chooses to proceed with his goal.

The Unclouded Zephyr has 2 unspent Momentum and 2 Contemplation. Their player, Matthew, rolls 4d6+3, thanks to the boost from Wily Njall, and selects the two lowest results: 3, 4, 6, 6. Onward to Walking Wounded! Matthew narrates the Unclouded Zephyr's grand tour of the Shadowlands. Along the way, they encounter many unhappy souls slain by their tyrannical father.

Red Otara has no unspent Momentum and 1 Contemplation. Her player, Amelia, rolls 2d6+1 for a total of 12: Contentment! Although she didn't achieve her goal of returning to life to finish her thesis, she learned a lot about being a psychopomp. She'll ride the rails a little longer and test this hypothesis.

The Vengeful Shepherd has 1 unspent Momentum and no Contemplation. He rolls 3d6, adds together the two lowest dice, and receives a 3: Despair. Jenn, the Shepherd's player, cheerfully narrates how Old Ko, the train's Conductor, catches up with him and delivers the stowaway's unspeakable punishment.

Finally, Wily Njall puts his plan into action. He coats himself in clay and disguises himself as a toothsome morsel beloved by Yur the Forever Bird, who flies the void between the Shadowlands and the lands of the living. He has 2 Momentum and 2 Contemplation, so he rolls 4d6-4 and selects the two highest dice: 3, 4, 6, 6. That's an 8: Building Success.

Wily Njall feels the warmth of sunlight on his skin, even through the golden feathers of Yur and his earthen disguise. He emerges triumphant from the Forever Bird's beak. No longer is he Wily Njall. He is Vengeance. Unfortunately, he is also deep in the mountains in a distant land. The poets who impugned his name are safe for now! Although he has braved the Shadowlands, cheated death, and remained true to his convictions, his legend continues.



Cerebos is inspired and informed by stories that have come before it. Here's a partial list of its inspirations and how they might inform your own games. For more information on any of these titles, whisper their names into a sack of imperfect pebbles. Leave the sack in a well along with your love, your anger, and all of your sorrow. Finally, consult your school library.

These titles cover a lot of genres and formats. They're a mix of lengthy epics, pleasant larks, and crunchy critical theory. Together they form a map of the territory. The number of markers next to each inspiration indicates the relative difficulty of the text.



GUIDING LIGHTS

Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino 🌣 🌣

As Kublai Khan's Mongol empire crumbles, Marco Polo regales the khan with stories of fantastic cities. They're hazy, beautiful places like Thekla, whose blueprints are the stars, or Clarice, which is made of fragments of great disasters. *Cerebos* is a chance to visit the book's cities-as-metaphor and have a meal with their residents.

Librarian Nancy Pearl uses four primary doors to recommend new books: character, place, plot, and words (language/ideas). If RPGs follow this model, their doors would be character, setting, plot, and atmosphere. *Cerebos* is a chance to celebrate Calvino's focus on place and ideas.

📕 III Kino's Journey—The Beautiful World— 🌣

Kino is a traveler who vows to spend no more than three days anywhere she goes. She observes the beauty and danger of each civilization before moving on, accompanied by a small armory and her talking motorcycle friend. Each city in the manga and anime series is a chance for a new story: Kino learns something new wherever she goes, but it's never as straightforward as the term "moral" suggests.

🖪 Galaxy Express 999 🌣

Each episode of this classic anime takes Tetsuro and Matel to a new planet on the Galaxy Express 999 space train. Tetsuro learns about humanity and himself as he travels across the Sea of Stars to the Planet Promethuem, which builds robotic bodies that solve everyone's problems.

📃 The Wizard of Oz by L Frank Baum 🌣

A classic narrative structure in a classic novel. Four travelers (and a little dog) travel from one fantastic location to another. Some GMs would call these locales "set pieces" or "Stops". The travelers learn about themselves, overcome adversity, and are changed by the journey.

TRAVEL

🖪 The Travels of Ibn Battuta by Ibn Battuta 🌣 🌣

Ibn Battuta traveled the medieval world from 1325 to 1354, ranging from Morocco to China. While many of the details of his accounts are thought to be compiled from contemporaries' reports, there's no doubt the man was a world-class traveler. The resulting work (A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling) is a masterpiece of travel literature that explores the people and places of northern Africa, the Middle East, and southern Asia.

The most exciting part of Ibn Battuta's journey is his scope. Visiting new lands consists of aches and paperwork, new cuisine and esteemed matters of state. Memorable road stories operate in many registers, often switching from the prosaic to the sublime without warning. The Picador edition of the travelogue, edited by Tim Mackintosh-Smith, is excellent for quick dips of inspiration or lengthier reading.

📕 Journey to the West by Wu Cheng'en 🌣 🌣

Cerebos stories benefit from short, episodic scenes and longer character arcs. Travelers demonstrate their growth during Stops and Events, but travel ever onward. Likewise, Tang Sanzang and his disciples are tested time and again on their pilgrimage, mixing high adventure with insights into Buddhist truths.

The Foreign Language Press edition translated by W J F Jenner isn't always the most spirited reading, but like Son Wukong's As-You-Will Gold-Banded Cudgel it's got weight and style.

🖪 Six-String Samurai 🌣

Pretty much just The Wizard of Oz with martial arts, dueling musicians, and Windmill People.

💆 Ribbon Drive 🌣

There is a comic created by Tumblr user stuffman about artists' habit of negatively comparing their creations to others' (e.g. *Cerebos: The Crystal City* and *Ribbon Drive*, Avery Alder's poignant road trip RPG). A sad stick figure compares a simple cake to a more elegant one and comments, "aw man that guy's cake is way better than mine". I hope the second panel also applies here: a member of the audience walks up to the cakes and excitedly exclaims, "HOLY SHIT! TWO CAKES!"

TRAINS

🖽 🛓 Starlight Express 🌣

A musical journey through space is going to be a flashy, melodramatic trip. Andrew Lloyd Webber's celebration of anthropomorphic racing trains may be the kick travelers need to realize they are the starlight. The show has gone through several iterations over the years, but the wild energy, earnest emotions, and stylized patchwork costumes are constant.

🖪 The Motion Demon by Stefan Grabinski 🌣 🌣

"The Motion Demon", "The Perpetual Passenger", and "The Siding" are standouts in this collection of train-based speculative fiction from an era when trains were *the* expression of high technology.

🖪 Railsea by China Mieville 🌣

Track down the UK edition for a look at what a session of *Cerebos* with the Adventure! conductor could be. A youth is perched atop an Art Deco locomotive, harpoon set for trouble. The train speeds away from an ivory mega-mole that's chewing the train's rear cars in its big ol' mouth. Bold reds and blues and yellows scream motion and light. Chapter two begins, "A meat island! The carcase loomed."

Even with a different cover, Railsea can be an excellent Cerebos inspiration. Much like Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette's Snowpiercer, Railsea takes place in an inhospitable wasteland where fast-moving trains are the surest path to survival. If your engine aesthetic leans toward rusty junkyards, endless plains of intersecting tracks, and the dangers of unfettered capitalism, this will be the trainbound postapocalypse for you.

🖪 Railhead by Philip Reeve 🌣

Space trains are an impractical fantasy. It's part of their appeal. In *Railhead* and its sequels, Reeve presents one vision of trains in space, predicated on jump gates and well-shielded rolling stock. As in *Cerebos*, strange vistas and character-driven shenanigans complicate and extol interplanetary travel.

Fans may also be interested in Reeve's *Hungry City Chronicles*, which feature mobile cities rolling around a post-apocalyptic landscape and chowing down on their weaker brethren. Traction cities work as Events harrying the train as well as Stops.

🖪 Infinity Train 🌣

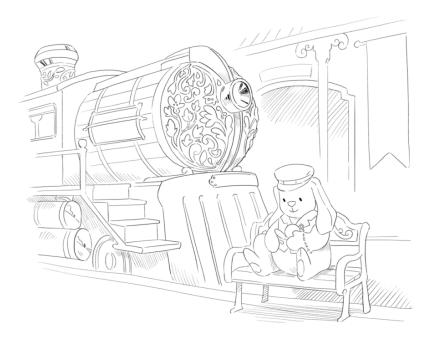
If *Cerebos* took place entirely on the train, it would be very similar to this show. Travelers on the Infinity Train pass through a seemingly endless series of whimsical and unsettling cars, each of which is a world of its own. Along the way they experience flashbacks, learn about life, and decode the mysteries of their glowing tattoos.

👱 Sunless Skies by Failbetter Games 🌣 🌣

The space trains of the High Wilderness are grittier than the ones that fly alongside the Starbright Express, but they get into some interesting scrapes. Look out for localized temporal anomalies, dying suns, and deep space claustrophobia. Each port is a self-contained story, but the influence they have on travelers is far-reaching.

Mhere the Water Tastes Like Wine 🌣

In Good Shepherd Entertainment's America, trains are the chariots of myth. They're a boon to the slow-walkin' traveler, who's submerged into the nation's psychogeography after a bum deal with a talking wolf. As the traveler shares their stories with flappers and pioneers, hippies, cowboys, and forgotten soldiers, they learn deeper, often contradictory truths about all they've observed.



CITIES

🗐 "Three Days in a Border Town" by Jeff Vandermeer 🌣

Many of the cities in *Cerebos* – and its inspirations – are monocultures designed for short, punchy visits. Real cities are far more complex: overlapping cultures and subcultures interact with one another, sometimes only sharing physical proximity. In this story, Vandermeer presents the city as a sinister agent of assimilation. There are, of course, other cities with different goals.

■ "Railway Navigation and Incarceration" by Michel de Certeau 🌣 🌣

Certeau views rail travel as a rational, regulated purgatory where travelers can only rest, reason, and dream. Obviously he never took the 25:15 to Mynamoaca or had to chase off a business of razor-fanged baggage toads with a cast-iron umbrella, but he has a point. Mass transit benefits from order, and there are worse forms of incarceration than a fully-stocked dining car. The push-and-pull between the order of the idealized railroad and the wildness of individual journeys is fertile ground for new life.

"Walking in the City" is Certeau's most influential essay and full of amazing phrases, but it's dense. English majors looking for a topic are welcome to contrast Certeau's view of behavioral and semantic poaching within his totalizing notion of "the city" with *Cerebos*'s Seeker. Consider: "These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen [...] The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility [...] The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other."

🖪 *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan 🌣

A migrant leaves his family and must make sense of an unfamiliar city. The surreal, disorienting illustrations communicate a touching blend of alienation and hope.

My Winnipeg

Winnipeg is a real place, but Maddin's documentary blends the fantastical with the mundane to lay bare the dreams of a city. This is the side of the city travelers wish to see.

■ Imaginary Cities by Darran Anderson 🌣 🌣

Anderson's catalog of urban dreams and architectural oddities are excellent inspiration for creating your own Stops and Events. It's a great book to explore at a leisurely pace, getting lost in ruminations on cities and the nature of travel.

Sunless Sea by Failbetter Games 🌣 🌣

Each port in the vast Unterzee is a Stop. They're little points of light surrounded by dangerous, lonely terrain. Refuel your ship, fill your hold with stories, and cast off once again into the darkness.

► Transverse City by Warren Zevon ❖

Zevon's 1989 concept album about a postmodern, possibly post-apocalyptic city. It's not a great soundtrack for many of *Cerebos*'s conductors, but it's excellent inspiration for cities of loneliness and alienation.

"Concerning the Unchecked Growth of Cities" by Angélica Gorodischer

Cities are not static, but fantastic city stories are filled with homogenizing monikers such as "The City Eternal", "The Land Where Everybody Wore White", or "The Living Machine". Sometimes these titles are political dreams, simplifying masks for complicated networks of culture and control. Other times they're a tempting shorthand. Look for ways to signify time's effect on each Stop's changing fortunes, shifting demographics, and community goals.

Signs of the Sojourner 🌣

This deck-building conversation quest by Echodog Games leads the player from city to city in a postcrash trade caravan. Each stop has a strong sense of place thanks to the buildings, landscape, and vignettes shared by talkative residents. As in Cerebos (and, you know, life), travelers are changed by who they meet.

ATMOSPHERE

🖪 Revolutionary Girl Utena 🌣

Students at the surreal Ohtori Academy place great value on their possessions and the memories they represent, but is that really such a good idea? This 39-episode anime covers a lot of ground, so it's worth watching the first few episodes before passing judgement.

🖪 Django 🌣

Keepsakes don't need to be as eye-catching as the coffin Django drags through the desert in this 1966 Western, but there's something to be said for making a bold statement. Is that all that's weighing him down? *Deep*.

► Tarkus by Emerson, Lake, and Palmer ❖

Much of *Cerebos* was written to Emerson, Lake, & Palmer, Blue Öyster Cult, and Tangerine Dream. Prog rock and early electronica don't own the patent on noodly meditations about self, mechanization, truth, control, and estrangement, but they fit pretty dang well.

Your endless journey across the desert of the unreal may not be scored by synths, but save a thought for Tarkus, the oppidan cyber-armadillo who was born from a volcano and fought across a wasteland of bones.

🖪 H.P. Lovecraft's Dream Cycle 🌣 🌣

Lovecraft's Dreamlands stories, including "The Quest of Iranon" and *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, often feature single-minded questers traveling to fantastical cities. Jason Bradley Thompson's *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath & Other Stories* captures many of the "indescribable" and "incomprehensible" denizens and vistas in evocative black and white.

The Dream Cycle isn't as racist as some of Lovecraft's other works, but does deal in pulpy orientalism. Kij Johnson's *The Dream-Quest of Vellitt Boe* is a more contemporary take on the Dreamlands. For a more overt refutation of Lovecraft's popular themes, and a celebration of cosmopolitan city life, check out N.K. Jemisin's *The City We Became*.

🔞 Piazza with Apollo and Ariadne by Giorgio de Chirico 🌣

De Chirico's visions of piazzas, mannikins, and stone heads all speak to the symbol-rich alienation of journey through the psychogrit desert. For other examples of this style, check out *The Red Tower*, *Piazza d'Italia*, and *The Disquieting Muses*. For more disquieting, whimsical works of visual inspiration check out De Chirco's Surrealist contemporaries, including Max Ernst (*Ubu Imperator*, *A Week of Kindness*) and Remedios Varo (*Embroidering the Earth's Mantle, Exploring the Sources of the Orinoco River*).

Ħ The Fall (2006) 🌣

While the movie is a crackling good yarn on its own merits, Roy's story-in-a-story speaks most directly to Cerebos scholars. The massive desert, towering architecture, and iconic character designs are strong hooks for symbolic meaning.

@MagicRealismBot

This Twitter account provides fully automated whimsy. The prompts it generates are fuel for travelers, Stops, and beautiful dreams.

🤦 Ryuutama 🌣 🌣

Travelers in the world of *Ryuutama* are protected by four dragons. Each dragon modifies the rules of play to favor a certain genre while giving the GM a fiction suit for inhabiting the story. Mr. Wumpus would make a good dragon!, now that I think about it...

Kotodama Heavy Industries' English-language edition of Okada Atsuhiro's tabletop RPG is chockablock full of inspirational art and advice on celebrating fictional travel as a unique experience.

🖪 Kaiba 🏟

Literary amnesia is a load-bearing conceit in Cerebos. In *Kaiba*, a 12-episode anime directed by Masaaki Yuasa, frequent amnesia is one of the consequences of the technological extraction of memories. When the inner self becomes externalized as shining blobs, a heist to steal them back becomes liberation. Alternatively, you can spin it postmodern and focus on how every being is a swirling intersection of a myriad competing memories.

We are, I am, you are by cowardice or courage the one who find our way back to this scene carrying a knife, a camera a book of myths in which our names do not appear.

Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck"

To select a random touchstone, roll d666 – that is, roll a d6 three times, reading the first roll as the "hundreds" place, the second roll as the "tens" place, and the final roll as the "ones" place. This generates a number from 111 to 666; read down the left-hand column of the following pages until you find that number, and that's your touchstone. Re-roll if you get a number that anyone (including yourself) has already rolled, the touchstone hints at themes that are unwelcome in your game, or you're feeling especially contrary.

Alternatively, you can decide on the general nature of the touchstones you want your traveler to have, then find a suitable sub-table and roll a single d6 to select one of its entries. For example, if your traveler must carry a hat, a musical instrument, and an improbably large object, you'd make one roll on each of sub-tables 32 – Hats, Fancy; 44 – Musical Instruments; and 34 – Improbably Large Objects. If you go this route, avoid choosing a sub-table that another player has already used.

Finally, each random touchstone comes with an example Trait (p. 27). Feel free to use the Trait as printed or as a springboard for your own ideas. Rationalizing an unlikely combination of touchstones and Traits can lead to some truly memorable characters.

Random Touchstones 11 – Animalia

111	A cardboard box filled with migratory seabird hatchlings	Friend to All Creatures
112	A backpack-mounted beehive dripping with jade honey	Full of Bees
113	A hibernating century armadillo	Lorekeeper
114	A turquoise-shelled desert tortoise	Steadfast
115	A long-suffering goldfish	Vehicle Maintenance
116	A cricket in a matchstick cage	Voice Like a Bell

Random Touchstones 12 - Antiquities

121	A weeping mirror	Just One of Those Faces
122	A lapis lazuli tablet of proto-law stored in a cedar box	Modern Problems, Classic Solutions
123	A silver mirror that doesn't reflect your eyes	Occult Insight
124	A marble tablet inscribed with gold hieroglyphs	Unearned Confidence
125	A heavy iron hammer inscribed "To the fairest"	Unstable
126	A monkey's paw preserved in amber	Walking, Talking Cautionary Tale

Random Touchstones 13 - Armor

131	A sandwich board advertising an apocalypse	Heretical Certitude
132	A mechanical turtle shell stocked with all the amenities	Loaded for Bear
133	A bulletproof vest that has seen better days	Protector
134	A bronze centurion's helmet with a red crest	The Art of War
135	A bright yellow hazmat suit	The Danger is Still Present
136	Professor Ponderous's Patented Force Field Belt	The Respect of Fools

Random Touchstones 14 - Art

141	A painting of three pheasants	Failed Novelist
142	A filigreed lantern containing a bird skeleton	Haruspicy
143	A portrait of a noble family painted in mold and verdigris	Morbid Inspiration
144	A miniature easel holding a mirror	My Greatest Creation
145	A bonsai lake with a small island in the center	Preternatural Calm
146	A bust of a grimacing woman with an unfinished nose	Unobserved Malice

Random Touchstones 15 – Bones & Ash

151	An urn filled with ashes, bones, and wildflower seeds	Better Done Than Perfect
152	The skull of a lizard that should not exist	Cryptozoology
153	Clothing made of white ash	Dancing Between the Flames
154	A swirl of ash and embers in your footsteps	Deferred Rage
155	A femur with a leather-wrapped grip	Impact!
156	A small duffle bag overflowing with reptile bones	Third-Generation Soapmaker

Random Touchstones 16 – Books

161	A parasitic yearbook	Forensics Club Survivor
162	A 600-page introduction to Humanetics: The Arisen Self	Library and Information Science
163	A heavily annotated travel guide in an unknown language	Linguist
164	A notebook filled with slant rhymes	Road Poet
165	A safe made from a hollowed-out prayer book	The Power of Love
166	A well-used copy of <i>The Sidereal Science of ESP</i>	Veteran of 1,000 Psychic Wars

Random Touchstones 21 - Clothing

211	A sturdy poncho with interior pockets	Body of Lies
212	A monogrammed silk ascot (cranberry and azure)	Fake It Till You Make It
213	Slick black sunglasses	Protective Sarcasm
214	A patchwork jacket	Steady Hands
215	A rumpled tan trenchcoat	Sufficient Snacks
216	A too-small, fashionable shirt with puffy sleeves	Swashbuckling

Random Touchstones 22 - Cooking Gear

221	A black steel cleaver with an wave-patterned edge	A Blade of Compassion
222	A pearl-handled oyster knife	Amphibious Lifestyle
223	An enamel stock pot containing 12th-generation stew	Approachable
224	A granite mortar and pestle that smell like chili and lime	Hearth Wisdom
225	A long-handled iron ladle that rings like a bell	Soup's On
226	An exclusive shrimp fork	Tastemaker

Random Touchstones 23 – Crafts

231	An unfinished knit sweater with three arms	Backup Plans
232	A raven quill pen	Bird Law
233	A lump of red clay wrapped in wet burlap	Clever Hands
234	A brightly colored wicker monster swallowing the sun	Leap of Faith
235	An architectural model of a utopian shopping mall	Meticulous Planning
236	A hollow beech penguin that rattles when shook	Untroubled Dreams

Random Touchstones 24 - Devices

241	An amphora that transforms raw materials into condiments	Classic Problems, Modern Solutions
242	A solar-powered jetpack	Looking for the Next Big Thing
243	A can containing a spring disguised as a snake	Pretty Funny, Actually
244	An old camera with four shots left on the roll	Storyteller
245	A tarnished music box topped with a nonchalant jester	Theoretical Engineering
246	A locked mechanical egg	Trivia Champ

Random Touchstones 25 – Eggs & Spheres

251	A red helium balloon	Ebullience
252	A smiling camphorwood orb	Feared by Children
253	An orbiting planet the size of a grapefruit	Mostly Harmless
254	A hinged saltstone sphere protecting a pristine sampo	Salty
255	A glass orb containing a crisp, clear leviathan eye	Taxidermy
256	An iron armillary sphere that vouchsafes a shadow moon	The Terrible Burden of Freedom

Random Touchstones 26 - Game Pieces

261	An unremarkable pawn	Collective Action
262	A polished cypress token from Casino Festiva	Demolitions
263	A pair of heliotrope dice marked with alchemical symbols	Earth, Wind, and Fire
264	The Eight of Hearts, slightly singed	Gamblin'
265	A worn pool cue in a snakeskin sling	Grifts and Hustles
266	A Badge of Courage from a child's board game	True Courage

Random Touchstones 31 – Good Rocks

311	A screaming agate	Action Geology
312	An ash wand topped with an uncut phosphophyllite crystal	An Eye for Ruin
313	A fordite dowsing pendant pointing toward something	Approximate Knowledge of Many Things
314	A paper sack filled with uncracked geodes	Immovable Object
315	A jagged, bleeding hunk of quartz	Red Right Hand
316	A rock hammer encrusted in oxidized bismuth	Taking Care of Bismuth

Random Touchstones 32 - Hats, Fancy

321	A conical hat decorated with a map of the cosmos	Advanced Mathematics
322	A wide-brimmed sun hat that casts an uncanny shadow	Heat-Resistant
323	A rough oaken mask with a single eyehole	No Mercy
324	A mascot costume's papier-mâché rabbit mask	Open-Minded
325	A functional space helmet with its own atmosphere	The Dead Do Not Feel Pain
326	A collapsible top hat with a green carnation in the band	Greatest Show on Earth

Random Touchstones 33 – Housewares

331	A chipped clay mug with a glass bottom	Common Sense
332	A cherrywood egg-hammer with machine-tooled silicone grip	Favors from the Prince of Ants
333	A green glass bowl holding an egg, an orange, and a skull	Intermediate Geomancy
334	A cut glass decanter filled with pure water	Junior Conductor
335	A clay roofing tile with a relief of a boar's face	Pigheaded
336	A 48-piece silver flatware set in a velvet-lined trunk	Savior Faire

Random Touchstones 34 – Improbably Large Objects

341	A harness of iron chains inscribed with sins against birds	Friend of Snakes
342	One end of a very long cable	Gormless Enthusiasm
343	A misspelled wedding cake	Just Murrayed
344	Cask of Amontillado sherry, never used	Masonry
345	A large foam finger marked with the faded letters "IDE"	Mob Boss
346	Two-handed ceremonial scissors	Pomp and Circumstance

Random Touchstones 35 – Jars

351	The last jar of glazier's pepper sauce	Agent of Chaos
352	Two nights of Dog King pomade in a squat clay jar	Effortless Intimidation
353	A smooth glass jar filled with green slime	Poison's in My Bloodstream
354	A pickle jar containing a preserved, tattooed heart	Strong Grip
355	A jam jar filled with medicinal brandy and three plums	Unconventional Medicine
356	A tall glass jar with a metal spigot containing sun tea	Unstoppable Force

Random Touchstones 36 – Jewelry

361	A necklace of coral, pearls, and fish hooks	Beachcomber
362	Half of a silver heart pendant marked "BEST"	Good Listener
363	A teardrop pendant that contains a swirling nebula	Light Fingers
364	A barbed wire bracelet tangled with bones and bird skulls	Martyr Complex
365	A moldavite frog pendant topped with a crystal pyramid	Obviously Distressed
366	A hammered gold ring resembling a snake with topaz eyes	Sorry, Not Sorry

Random Touchstones 41 – Maps

411	An architectural portfolio of flying cities	Aeronaut
412	A mandala comparing the Ten Sanctuaries to a human body	Blood of the Revelator
413	Schematics to a revolutionary tunneling machine	Civil Engineering
414	A leather-and-cellophane map to the Aeronaut's Heart	Faith of the Heart
415	An educational placemat with questionable misprints	Former Child Prodigy
416	Half of a torn treasure map leading to the Golden River	Weaponized Greed

Random Touchstones 42 – Medical Devices

421	A glass eye with a serpentine pupil	Contortionist
422	An etched tin ear trumpet	Eyes in the Dark
423	A 5X anatomical model of a human ear, lightly modified	Quick Sketch Artist
424	A solid mahogany cane with an amber knob	Big Enough
425	Triangular spectacles	Three Sides to Every Story
426	A rose-tinted monocle	Toxic Positivity

Random Touchstones 43 - Miscellaneous

431	Someone else's eyebrows	Beautician
432	A snow globe containing a resin-cast hermit crab city	Born on a Train
433	A candy tin full of loose change and spare teeth	Collector
434	A small promotional towel	Healthy Glow
435	Curdled moonlight sealed in a wax-stoppered soda bottle	Treasure Hunter
436	A tornado sealed in an acrylic glass cube	Wind Farmer

Random Touchstones 44 - Musical Instruments

441	A 1957 six-string hollowbody guitar pierced by an arrow	Busker
442	A ribcage xylophone	Glib Nihilism
443	The world's tiniest violin, stored in a matchbook	Insult Comedy
444	A bleached sea horn reinforced with copper and red coral	Military Tradition
445	An obstructed French horn	Perfect Posture
446	A silver-plated harmonica	Tragically Handsome

Random Touchstones 45 – Paper Ephemera

451	A heavily redacted personnel file	[REDACTED]
452	A pawn shop receipt for a ribcage xylophone	An Eye for Quality
453	An oily punch card	Big Cheese at the Cracker Plant
454	A photo of yourself with an unknown tattoo	High-Pressure Acrobatics
455	Two tickets to "The Death of an Admiral"	Media Literacy
456	A political leaflet that's been folded into a star	Spycraft

Random Touchstones 46 - Plants & Fungus

461	A decoupage makeup case filled with mushrooms	A Growing Fad
462	A dandelion seed parachute	Carried by the Wind
463	A musty gardenia boutonnière	Casual Grace
464	A marrow-tinted glass skull filled with sourdough starter	Generous to a Fault
465	A dying albatross elm sapling	Gentle Touch
466	A numbing Saturnalia cactus thorn, embedded in your thumb	Photosynthesis

Random Touchstones 51 – Postal Supplies

511	An unread, clove-scented letter addressed to you	Cowering, Mainly
512	A pack of unsent postcards detailing an unexamined life	Lollygagging
513	A book of limited edition railway stamps	Philatelist
514	A muted post horn covered in travel stickers	Prophet of the World to Come
515	A lumpy package addressed to the Red Cerebos Society	Sudden, Unexpected Acts of Bravery
516	A postal satchel filled with undelivered mail	Trainspotting

Random Touchstones 52 – Puzzles

521	An incomplete crossword puzzle filled out in ink	95% Lyrics, 5% Life Skills
522	The key to a mechanical egg	Close-Up Magic
523	A silver monkey containing a terrible secret	Idol Chatter
524	A glass sliding puzzle full of morning light	Initiate of the Emerald Band
525	A puzzle box modeled after Modron, the Cubic City	Perfect Timing
526	The last piece of the jigsaw puzzle	Really Quite Rubbish

Random Touchstones 53 – Religious Objects

531	A purple cloth temple charm attached to a bell	Applied Hermitry
532	A back-mounted shrine laden with small gods	Beyond Belief
533	A brass thurible of myrrh	Breathes a Life of Gathering Gloom
534	Baby tooth prayer beads	Heretical Insight
535	A portable confessional	Honest Face
536	The skull of a saint, glorified with painted gauze	Tomb Raider

Random Touchstones 54 - Scents

541	A cedarwood mask with a customs form of dubious legality	Better Living Through Bureaucracy
542	A fake beard that smells like straw and cinnamon	Common Scents
543	A black bandana and the fragrance of dark coffee	Gallows Humor
544	An ingot of jerky that smells of salt, smoke, and flesh	Surly Swagger
545	An orchestra of odors, sacred and profane	Party Animal
546	An amaranthine gardenia pinned to your breast	Phantom Thief

Random Touchstones 55 - Tea Time

551	An small iron teapot that resembles a well-fed quail	Calming Presence
552	A sunset-colored carnival glass teacup	Gentle Adolescence
553	A fermented tea cake with notes of chestnut and glory	My Teacher's Voice
554	A bamboo whisk that smells like grass and wet earth	Small Talk
555	A tin of Auric Glade oolong	Time for Tea
556	A battered sugar bowl	Travelling Light

Random Touchstones 56 – Time Pieces

561	A water clock that resembles a bell tower	Amateur Historian
562	A pocket orloj dedicated to the maladies of comets	Guided by the Stars
563	An hourglass half-filled with sluggish red sand	Too Much Time on Your Hands
564	A railroad chronometer with a bas relief locomotive	Train Time
565	A tear-off cartoon calendar that's the same every day	Unflappable
566	A bejeweled pocket watch with a corroded mainspring	Unmistakably Royal

Random Touchstones 61 - Tools

611	A scorched baseball bat	Eventually, We'll All Be Dead
612	A scrimshaw pipe that looks like a volcano	Genial Mumbling
613	A jade trowel covered in yellow pollen	Green Thumb
614	A bamboo umbrella painted with pine trees	In Search of a Rival
615	Auguries and Antipodes pocket soothsayer	Occult Curiosity
616	An honest shovel	Prepared to Dig Two Graves

Random Touchstones 62 - Toys

621	A plush hippopotamus puppet	Cartooning
622	A realistic water pistol with five notches in the grip	Deadeye
623	A souvenir boomerang	It's All in the Reflexes
624	A model train crewed by miniature angry hogs	Miniaturist
625	A ceramic doll dressed in the style of its owner	Polish and Poise
626	A satirical marionette of the mayor's useless brother	Rabble-Rousing

Random Touchstones 63 - Travel Supplies

631	A smoked ham branded with three mountains	Butcher
632	A well-chewed passport	Can't Stop, Won't Stop
633	A clay jar of tasty figs	I've Got Snacks
634	A torch that burns without consuming fuel	Lightbringer
635	A driftwood walking stick	Sea Legs
636	50' silk rope	Traditionalist

Random Touchstones 64 – Uncomfortably Heavy Objects

641	A small anvil, chained to your ankle	Chain Tricks
642	A wheelless wheelbarrow	Deconstruction Worker
643	A black coffin filled with dried roses	Faded Glory
644	A department store mannequin wearing a sharp suit	Fashionable
645	A boulder marked with patches of luminescent moss	Revenge
646	A rusted metal anchor	Yell Even Louder

Random Touchstones 65 - Wealth

651	A gold doubloon pierced by a nail	Barratry
652	A gilded leather belt	Champion of the Beach
653	A mayoral sash	Embroidery
654	A locked briefcase, handcuffed to your wrist	In Pursuit
655	A teak chest filled with coins and yellow dirt	Internal Compass
656	A silver coin with your laughing face on it	Too Dumb to Live, Too Great to Die

Random Touchstones 66 - Weapons

661	A switchblade comb with a hidden blade	Double Agent
662	A handmade flintlock musket with a pittance of silver bullets	Just the Right Bullets
663	A twisted harpoon made of horn and ivory	Killing
664	A rock crystal knife with a bone handle	Go for the Throat
665	A lion-headed sabre hilt in an ornate, but empty, scabbard	Studied the Blade
666	A big, round bomb with a slowly burning fuse	Volunteer Fire Department

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

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Though we wander about, find no honey of flowers in this waste, is our task the less sweet— who recall the old splendour, await the new beauty of cities?

H.D. "Cities"

Cerebos exists due to the financial and moral support of many people. These bold explorers of the unknown may rest easy knowing their encouragement has kept this project on the rails and driven it further than it could have ever gone on its own.

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A Ghost Named Schaefer A sentient hat Aaron Griffin Aaron Rhoads Aarosa Abel Teo ABlueJane Adam Beckwith Adam Waggoner Adelle Singer

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Amelia Gorman AmeLumineux Ami Clayton Amme Grace

amobt Amy Maleiß Amy Tanguay Amy Wall Anderson Todd

André Colabelli André Watson Andrew Mauney Andrew O'Hanlon Andrew Peregrine Andrew Perkins Andrew Robertson

Andrew Robertson Andrew Ryan-Waldo Andrew S

Andy_ES Angela Walker Angus Abranson Anna Franger Anna Keeley Anna Smith Anne Cooper Anton Grigoryev

Anne Cooper Anton Grigoryev Antti Luukkonen Apurva Desai Arcady M Ari H. Ash Clark Ashe Addams Ashleigh L

Ashley Jess Aster Seamus Aubrey Aura * V

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Ava Sadler-Gordon	C. Fili	Danielle Crozier
Ava T.	Cadfael Pugh	Danika Wahlin
Avalon Warner-Gonzales	Calliope Quessenberry	Darin Rebertus
Aya Shameimaru	Callum Fowler	Darrel378
Ayukata Taka'aki	Camilla Zamboni	Daryl Li
ayzenigma	Carmen Maria Marin	Dave Agnew
B.H.	Caro Asercion	Dave Brookshaw
Bailey Boone	Caroline Dunford	David Batson
Bailey, Deven, and Jack –	Carrie Emmerich	David Beaudoin
Band Nerd Polycule	Cassidy Godsdottir	David Connell Olsher
Barnacle the Real	Chance R.	David Harris
BE Holt	Charlotte G Legendre	David Hayes
Ben "Damocles" Walker	Charly Olson	David Paul
Ben Deering	Charm Saber	Deb Ames
Ben K. Rosenbloom	Chi	Debbie H
Ben T-Moore	chitinoir	DeJean Denman
Ben Verschell	Chris "Glacialis" Brinkley	Demirath
Benita K.	Chris and Sora Battey	Denis Gaty, MSW
Bill Rutherford	Chris Chambers	Derek Boudreaux
birdsnores	Chris Magnifico	Derek Guder
Blackjack the Unlucky		Derek W.
Blair Riddle	Chris Maloney Chris Michael Jahn	
		Di Schempp Diana Hazelhill
Blue Davis	Chris Preston	
Bluleys	Chris Walter Christian Roese	Dionysus Giving
Bodri Takonyweaver		Disardor
Bookwormbeth	Christine Farrar	Dmitry Aveliate
Brandon "Neko Asakami"	Christopher "Shay" Rydberg	Doc Calamity
Allen	Christopher Grey	Don't Forget Your Tow
Brandon Wolff	Christy	Podcast
brazil808	Cin	Dorian Hadgraft
Breanna S.	Claudius	Doug G
Brendan Allison	Clay and Susan	Douglass Barre
Brendan McLeod	Clay Gardner	Doyce Testerman
Brett Volz	clericbob	Dragonlover
Brian A	Clint Slocum	Drew
Brian Foster	Cody N	Drew Powell
Brian Johnson	Cole	Drew Wendorf
Brian Nowosatka	Collin 'Ridayah' O'Connor	Durango Mendoza
Briar Chappell	CoopDeVille	Duraznito
Briceson Tollison	Cougar Draven	Duykha Vu
Bridh Blanchard	Crame	E. Contesse
Brigid Nemeton	Creepieprowlie	E.L. Winberry
Brit Cole	CrossroadsDog	Ed Matuskey
Diff Cole		
	Cynthia So	Lgg
Brooklyn Grundeman Brooks Moses	Cynthia So Dakeyras	Egg El
Brooklyn Grundeman Brooks Moses	Cynthia So Dakeyras Dal S'ta	El
Brooklyn Grundeman Brooks Moses Broumpristoche	Dakeyras Dal S'ta	El Eleanor Hingley
Brooklyn Grundeman Brooks Moses	Dakeyras	El

Hannah Cheatham Elisabetta Colombo Ienn Welhouse Hannah McPherson Jennifer Adcock Ella J Bishop Ellie Reinstatler Hans Chun Iennifer Bean **Emily Burt** Hans Guévin Jennifer Donahoe **Emily Curtis** Hector Miller-Bakewell Iennifer Erixon Emily Haulman Helen Geisler Jensen Bruns Emma Hough Helen Pauline Dunne ienwa Henry McNeil Emma Landon Jeppe Bernhard Obel Ennybunny Hobbes LeGault Jeremy Francuz Eric D. Holly C Jeremy Tyler Eric Stewart Hreóchor **Jess Bonham** Eric Vasile Jess Caruana Iacobus Eric Wilkinson Iesse Burneko Ian MacDubhghall Erich Paddock Ian Matthew Michael Burg **Jessica** Erik Ingersen Ian S Cunningham Jessica Helm Erik Mogan Ian Seamans Jessica Talley Erika Hoagland Ignis Matthews Jim Brinkman Erika Ward il Giova della Locanda Iim Clunie Erin Harker Shakespiriana per Jin Ying Li Erin McGlashen Moschettieri Joanna KW Erinovauch Inappropriate Joe McReynolds Evan G Orbeck John "Chaoseed" Evans Indigo Clardmond Evie Shih Io Ainsel John "Shadowcat" Ickes Evil Midnight Lurker Isabel John B Polkowske Federico Di Gioia Ivan Milovanov (Akasha John M. Portley Felicia DesIardins Boon) Jonas Oliver FelTK Jonathan "Buddha" Davis J Fryerwood Ionathan "SteelSeraph" Steele Fenris Jack Kelly Fewture Jackalgirl Jonathan Aders Jackson Wolfe Fiona Liath Jonathan Jernigan Fotis Papadogeorgopoulos **Iacob Foster** Jonathan Korman Frances Maples Jacob Toews Ionathan Raeder Gabriel Birke Ionathan Visminas Jacopo Veronese Gabriella Frick Jais H. Jonathan White Jamal L Wilkins Jonathan Woodward Galaxy Gene **James Cruise** Iordan Bowman James meredith Jordan C. Davis Getty Ritter Ghost James Folkerth Jorden "Zin" Varjassy GirlDressedInBlack Josh Clucas James Munger Gord Sellar James White Josh Eberle Gordon Jana Lajdová Josh Hittie Gordon Brown Jana Schierwater Joshua Hudner Gordon Milner Jason Corley Jubby Song Gozer Games Jason RB Morton Jude Purrington Grahame 'TheInstaGrahame' Jason Schindler Juliet Youngren Turner Jaxson Wolfgang Degas Julius Steding Grimmok Justin Lance Gwendolyn Young Jay Palmer Justin Scott Hal Boden JeiMage Justin Stabley

Leandro Pondoc K Brand Matthew Plank Kagehana Tsukio Lee Gendron Max Wearing Kaira Murphy Lee Sellars Max Woerner Chase Karalee Leon Aloia Mazie O'Connor Karl Nowak Leraika Megan "NezuNeko" Grieve Kate Lindstrom Lester Ward Melanie York Kate Luginbuhl LettuceKitteh Melody Kathleen A Lex van der Raadt Mendel Schmiedekamp Kathrina Avery Liam Astlev Meredith Katz Liana Ambrosetti Meridith Okal Kathryn Case Katie C. librarypotato Michael B. Lisa Padol Michael Cronin Katie McGillicuddy Liz K Michael Forbes Katie Quesnel Katrina Lehto Locke Amiss Michael Fowler Keith Grffith Lofwyr Michael Kanaris Keith Stanley Logan Hart Michael M. Kroeker Loki Carbis Michael Nason Keith Stetson Lucille Nual Kelly & Laura Digges Michael Quilligan Luke McCarthy Michael Schwartz Ken Luong Kenco Lupin Chevalier Michael Tree Kenneth Lowe Luthorne Michelle Dobson Mack the Knife But a Jellyfish Kersten Kõrge Michelle Freneaux Kevin "Wolf" Patti Mackenzie Grover Mickie & Chrissy Kevin Rudd Madelancholv Miguel Maria Duran Khimeric Mike Farr Madison Stuart Kieron Gillen Madison Tinsley Mike Kostruba Mike Reed Kilrov Mae Blair Malchitos Williams Mike Saulnier Kiri J McClure Kisa Gryphon Mara "Ares" Marzocchi Miles Gaborit Kit Bruce Marc Lummis Miriam Sexton Kit Kinetic Marie Oak Morgan Carlington Klara Mazurak Marina Konrad Morgan McEvoy Klil H. Neori Morgan W Marinussssssssssssssss Fishv Mosezekiel Kneumatic Pnight Mark Green kris Motoi Kito Kristi Foxx Mark Redacted Mya Shishido Marlene Wild Kristi Gulick Namashe Yellowglove Kristóf Kovács Marsh I. Lvnx Natalie Rodriguez Kyle Currie Martin Rollins Natasha Ence Kyle Elizabeth Huck Marty Chodorek Nathan Nolan Kyle Latino Matsci Nathan Weyenberg Kyle Wist Matt Dorbin Nathaniel Grotemeyer Neal Tanner Kvra S. Matt F. Lachlan Fergusson Matt Roberts Neil Smith Landon C. Matt Townsend Nemo LarsHuluk Matthew @ProudNerdery Nicholas de Vry Laura Picou (KeiriVixon) Matthew Cramsie Nicholas Grendel Laurelleaf9 Matthew Edwards Rabinowicz Lauren Matthew Nielsen Nicholas Muehlenweg

RandomWalker Nick Duff Seth Hartley Nick Hopkins Raph D'Amico Seth Peacock Nicola Patti Raphael Bressel Seth Wenger Nicola Went Raven ShakeSharp Nigel Tangelo Rax Green Shannon M. Nikatnight82 Ray Shannon Mulloy NinjaDuckie Ray Rodriguez Shedvin Rebecca Whitehead Nolan Chappell Sheila Rae Norman Shih Rev Wilson Silver Pagsanjan Richard "Vidiian" Greene Silvio Herrera Gea NovaGargoyle Rick Wilson Simon Brake Nyessa Riot Fae Dice Olivia Falk Simon G. Olivia Montoya Risa Moreno Skye Lowell Olna Jenn Smith Risk Berry Skyler Stewart P.K. Robert Carnel Slang Century Paige Larsen Robert Lee Snag Delume Roberto - Raw Bear Toes Paige Lisko Sneaky Git Pan Narrans Games Spencer Everhart Paolo Busi Robin Denham SpitefulFox Paolo Spaziosi Robinson Taylor Stan ToddSlayer Kranc Parker Hogan ron beck Starling Partners of Adventure Roscoe! Stephanie "Chaotic" Pat M Ruth Rios Jamgochian Pat Murphy Rvlai Stephen Bowers Rylen Dreskin Steven Barrett Patrice Mermoud Patrick Knowles & Tyler S. Jazz Mattson Steven Collins Lominack S. Kenji Steven Schrag Paul Arezina S.A. Hannon Stina Schwebke Paul Mitchener S.D.C. Stringer Stuart Chaplin pencilears Sabina Walter Susan Haarman Sadie Lowry Suzan Bator Campbell penwing Pete Petrusha Sam Haden Suzmister Peter Abeln Svend Andersen Sam Hönning Peter Hollinghurst Sam MacKinnon Tadd McDaniel Sam Zeitlin Peter Larsen Tadhg Peter Truckenmiller Sara Rose Swan TAGM Sara Wisdom Tam the Actual Philip W Rogers Jr Sarah & Andrew Gordon Tartan "Tatters" Collier Phillip W. Phoebe Doros Sarah Travasos Tate Melito Saul Dudley Tavlor Bleir Pip Pippin Lionsmane Scott H Taylor Eubanks Prashant and Nicole Rushi Scott Tyrell Cruz The Mysterious GX Scott Vandervalk The Russenault Estate professororange Quill Smith Sean Foley The Townsends Ouote The Zandermoores Sean Lyons R. A. Manz Sean P. Hassan Theo Luiggi-Gørrissen R. Shatford Seb Pines TheRightHandofDoom

Sergey Kochergan

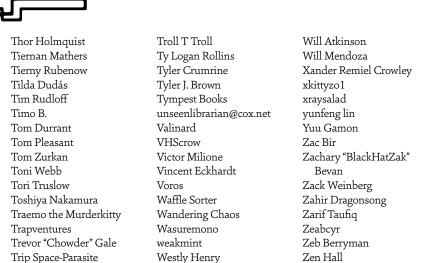
Seth A. Nahk

Rachel Bryant

Rainen

TheyAreFatherTime

Thimo Gallas



Triss

WhimsyWanda Zephaniah Strand Bensaid

